

Crossing 81

Chapter 81: Initiate Disciples!

The night passed in silence. The next day, Ling Lan's group of four arrived at the combat hall bright and early. At this time there were even less students in the combat hall, with more teachers present instead. Their objective in coming here now was to adopt one or two outstanding children for personal instruction — this was also one of their responsibilities as an instructor.

For the record, any child who could remain till the final day was most certainly an exceptional seedling that had managed to weather the beating of waves and the erosion of sand — a buildable talent, certainly good enough to satisfy their conditions for taking on a personal student. Of course, whether or not a match was made still depended on compatibility.

Mind you, for some of the stronger instructors, taking on an apprentice not only depended on talent, but a large part also depended on affinity at first glance.

The tournament soon started, and first up were the fights for the advancement of the top 13 into the top 7. This round, the one to receive a bye was no longer Ling Lan but the Class-A first-rank Li Yingjie.

Ling Lan saw this notification within the communicator and couldn't help but wonder if the academy arranged byes according to a student's strength? If the next to receive a bye was Wu Jiong or Qi Long, then this assumption would pretty much be verified. In Ling Lan's eyes, Li Yingjie, Wu Jiong, and Qi Long were of the same level.

Ling Lan's opponent was the Class-A ninth-rank Qin Yi. She had seen Qin Yi's combat style before — he was an intelligence-type fighter, who liked to first figure out the opponent's true strength before countering, so almost every fight of his started with him dancing around the opponent.

Ling Lan had never encountered this type of combat opponent before. In the learning space, Instructor Number One upheld the principle of sure kills in one blow, and was definitely a pure suppression-type attacker. Instructor Number Nine held fast to the most orthodox combat ideal — if soldiers come, send a general to defend; if the waters rise, build a dam. This principle advocated the combat style of countering a move with a move, exchanging one blow for another. Instructor Number Five's combat style was even nastier than his character — as long as he could obtain victory, he would do anything. Recalling some of Instructor Number Five's methods, Ling Lan couldn't suppress her shudders. Even now, she still felt the chills running through her body. The training of that time had almost destroyed her 'three outlooks' ¹.

Qi Long, Luo Lang and Han Jijyun, who were Ling Lan's regular sparring partners, were also not this type of opponent. Qi Long liked to start with a bang and end with a bang — fighting with him made for the wildest and the most intense battles, not requiring much thought. Because Qi Long wouldn't give you the time to strategize and think of your next move — you could only pull up your sleeves and throw yourself into the fight if you wanted to keep up with his wild attacks which pelted at you like rain.

Luo Lang's combat style was of the same stream as Instructor Number Nine's, however, the difference in their abilities were like heaven and earth. For Ling Lan, handling Luo Lang was the easiest and most thoughtless thing, because Ling Lan was just too familiar with Luo Lang's style of attack.

Meanwhile, Han Jijun was the weakest among the four of them. Aware of his own weakness, he liked to experiment with strange moves when fighting them. Every time he fought he would use a different combat style — who knows where he collected that many combat styles from — but unfortunately, due to the difference in strength, he had never been able to achieve very good results in the end. Only a few times, when Luo Lang had not adjusted in time, had Han Jijun managed to wrest victory from his hands. But against the much stronger Qi Long and Ling Lan, Han Jijun had not won even once. This also proved that when there was enough distance between strength levels, all schemes and plots, and all the strange moves in the world, were useless.

Therefore, Ling Lan was particularly alert in facing this upcoming match with Qin Yi. Of course, it wasn't that Ling Lan was worried that Qin Yi would give her any trouble in advancing, but rather, she wanted to be ready to process any insights she might obtain from fighting an opponent with a different style, which could enrich her battle experience.

Meanwhile, Qi Long was up against the 7th-rank of their class, Xu Zhizhi. Coincidentally, Xu Zhizhi's combat style was almost the same as Qi Long's, so this match between them was definitely going to be bursting with passion and energy.

Luo Lang was relatively unlucky. He, who had been plagued with horrendous luck over the last few days, had actually been matched up with the 3rd-rank of Class-A, Ye Xu. Any child who made it into the top 3 of Class-A was definitely some supreme genius, and would most certainly have outstanding combat abilities ... this was obviously going to be another tough fight for Luo Lang.

When Luo Lang saw his opponent's name, his entire face collapsed, and he could almost cry. This was undoubtedly a tough bone that would be extremely hard on the teeth. Even if he managed to win this match by luck, he would probably be unable to continue fighting due to his depleted stamina, which would mean that he could only stop here, fated not to see the next match. It should be known that the matches for the top 7 to advance into the top 4 would follow right after — would he have any hope of winning without having any time to recover his energy?

The answer was that he most definitely would not ... how could he not be depressed?

Helplessly, Ling Lan patted Luo Lang's shoulder, consoling him weakly, "Luo Lang, just do your best!" She just couldn't bear to see Luo Lang's sorrowful eyes anymore, this pitiful child ... why was he oh so unlucky?

Qi Long rubbed his chin, and said to Luo Lang with a serious look on his face, "Luo Lang, don't do any more bad things from now on."

Luo Lang was taken aback by these words, unsure what Qi Long meant.

Qi Long donned a look that said 'this child is unteachable', and shook his head saying, "Didn't Boss say this before? Too many evils done will damage your RP²."

“Qi Long, I’m going to kill you.” Only then did Luo Lang figure out that Qi Long was messing with him. He leapt up and lunged at Qi Long. Qi Long saw Luo Lang coming at him, and perked up joyfully. And so the two of them started throwing punches and kicks in a noisy clatter, completely ignoring everyone else around them, not at all bothered at being the centre of attention.

Oh, these two insensitive children ... Ling Lan rolled her eyes dramatically, and dodged to one side with Han Jiyun. The two of them tacitly started whispering to one another, pretending as if they were just members of the audience.

Yup, they would definitely, definitely never admit that they knew those two big idiots who had absolutely no concept of upholding appearances.

Qi Long and Luo Lang’s fierce battle drew the attention of everyone in the combat hall. Among them, two instructors, who had initially had a trace of boredom and impatience on their faces, became much more energetic when they saw Qi Long and Luo Lang’s spirited exchange of blows as they fought.

“Not bad, not bad, the old dean really didn’t lie to us. The little brats from this year’s first grade really do have some chops,” said one of the instructors, chuckling.

The other person remained stern, observing intently as Qi Long and Luo Lang continued to exchange moves, before responding, “Hn, the foundations of these two brats are pretty good.”

Qi Long and Luo Lang had trailed Ling Lan for this half a year; though it was hard to say if there was any improvement in other aspects, their foundations in combat were definitely much sounder than they had been at the start of the school year. This was because the learning space had always emphasized that the basics were the most important — Ling Lan naturally brought this principle to Qi Long and the others during their regular practice sessions.

After watching for a moment, the grinning instructor suddenly sighed. “Tai, don’t you find this scene familiar?”

The serious-faced instructor looked at the other, uncomprehending.

“Thinking back, when I met you, it was also at the scout academy. Back then, we also fought like this.” The smiling instructor’s face was filled with nostalgia.

Hearing this, the stern instructor couldn’t help but huff mockingly, and say, “The silly grin you had on your face all day back then annoyed me whenever I saw it.” That said, he side-eyed his good friend coldly, and continued, “Your face right now is still like that, still annoying.”

“Dammit, well, aren’t you still wearing that coffin-face of yours around scaring people?” The smiley instructor became disgruntled. Still, even so, his face continued to bear a smile — looks like he was naturally born with a smiling face.

“Want a fight?” Coffin-face stared narrowly at Smiley-face, fighting spirit thick in his eyes.

Smiley-face blinked in realisation, and said sullenly, “F*ck, almost fell for your plot. I’m not going to fight you — so troublesome.” How had he forgotten that his friend was a natural battle freak? His hands would itch if he didn’t get to fight at all in a day. Moreover, whenever he actually fought, if he didn’t

fight till both the skies and the land were dark, and till both his body and energy were exhausted, he wouldn't stop. Nope, he wasn't going to inflict this self-torture on himself.

Coffin-face saw that his taunts weren't going to work, and his face was full of regret. This year, it was the turn of their batch of operators to teach at the scout academy for one year. Having just left the battlefield, they were still really unused to this sort of civilian lifestyle — they naturally belonged to the battlefield.

"Which child do you favour?" asked Smiley-face, brimming with curiosity.

"That one with the crew cut." Coffin-face was referring to Qi Long.

"Yep, the crew cut brat should have the better strength. However, that pretty boy's physical characteristics are really not bad, a real trainable talent." Smiley-face seemed to like Luo Lang better.

Hearing Smiley-face's words, Coffin-face's already stern face became even sterner. He peered intently at Smiley-face and said, "You want to take him on as a student? An initiate? Have you thought it through?"

The military world really placed a lot of importance on the master-disciple relationship. Regardless of whether it's taking on an 'initiate disciple' or the final 'true disciple', once their relationship was confirmed, they wouldn't be able to get away from this connection for the rest of their lives. For instance, if Smiley-face wanted to take on Luo Lang, even just as an initiate disciple, it would be equivalent to Smiley-face acknowledging Luo Lang as a disciple of his branch. From then on, Luo Lang would receive the protection and cultivation of Smiley-face's branch — in other words, whether Luo Lang was good or bad in the future, Smiley-face would have a hand in it.

"Yeah, just as an initiate disciple though." Smiley-face continued smiling widely, utterly unconcerned.

"Precisely because it's just as an initiate disciple, that's why I need you to be more serious about it." Coffin-face was a little angry now. If Smiley-face was taking the boy on as a true disciple, then he would have nothing to worry about, because in that case, both the instructor and the disciple would already be grasshoppers tied together on the same string — both would have to be equally responsible, and that relationship would be akin to that of a father and son.

But an initiate disciple was different. That relationship did not require anything from the student, but had requirements for the instructor. In other words, taking on an initiate disciple meant a unidirectional relationship where the instructor provided painstaking care and effort. If the initiate disciple decided not to become the instructor's true disciple in the end, all the invested effort of the instructor previously would be wasted with no avenue for recourse, because all of it was out of the instructor's self-will.

"It's rare to find one that I like. It's worth it to take a little risk." Smiley-face seemed to have made up his mind.

Coffin-face knew that once his good friend made a decision, he would not change his mind. He could only sigh to himself, and said nothing more.

"Angry?" asked Smiley-face, prodding at Coffin-face's shoulder. Smiley-face felt that his willfulness may have been a little disrespectful in the face of his good friend's concern, so he couldn't help but seek reassurance.

“No. I’ve just made a decision,” said Coffin-face placidly.

“What decision?” Smiley-face was very curious.

Coffin-face peered at Smiley-face for a moment, then said, “I have decided to take on that crew cut boy as my initiate disciple.”

Chapter 82: Ling Lan vs Qin Yi

“Ah ...” Smiley-face finally could not maintain his smile any longer — the shock was clear on his face — but he very quickly collected his wits, and said exasperatedly, “Have you gone mad? This is an initiate disciple we’re talking about, *initiate* — if the elders in your family find out, you’ll be in deep sh*t.”

“I’m optimistic about that crew cut boy’s future.” Coffin-face’s expression was very calm, as if telling Smiley-face that he was worrying for nothing. “Besides, didn’t you say those two brats are just like we used to be?”

He was still the one who understood Smiley-face the most. Qi Long and Luo Lang’s fight had reminded Smiley-face of when they had first met, bringing up feelings of nostalgia. On top of that, in terms of both looks and character, Luo Lang closely resembled Smiley-face, which was why Smiley-face had been moved to take Luo Lang on as an initiate disciple. Of course, another reason was that Luo Lang’s personal qualities were also very exceptional — otherwise, no matter how similar they were, without any cultivation value, the thought of taking him on would never have crossed Smiley-face’s mind.

Coffin-face’s words left Smiley-face unable to continue to try and dissuade him. Smiley-face’s lips flapped soundlessly for a moment, but he finally settled on saying, “Perhaps they can inherit our dreams.”

“I hope so.” Coffin-face looked towards Qi Long’s direction, and when Smiley-face wasn’t looking, a subtle smile silently appeared on his lips, instantly gentling Coffin-face’s typically austere look considerably.

The arena matches for the advancement of the top 13 into the top 7 were all held simultaneously, so after Ling Lan and the other two of her group exchanged encouragements, they all went to their respective stages.

The matches officially began, and most of the crowd had gathered around the stage where the Ling Lan vs Qin Yi match was being held. Some of the Class-A students who had already been eliminated came personally to the combat hall just to watch this match.

Of course, the feelings of the Class-A students were complicated, unsure whether they wanted Ling Lan to continue her one-move advancement streak or wished for someone to break it so that Ling Lan would return from that untouchable distance to a more manageable distance before them.

However, regardless of what the students thought, Ling Lan and Qin Yi appeared to be extremely calm. When the referee called out the start of the match, Qin Yi first dashed to one side of the stage, while Ling Lan remained standing in the middle of the arena, facing the other from a distance.

Just like that, the two of them froze. Time slipped by slowly — an unknown number of minutes passed — and the audience themselves couldn't help but become impatient.

At then, one of the two finally moved.

Ling Lan was the one who moved. Not because her patience was worse than Qin Yi's, but because she felt that continuing to wait like this was just a waste of time. Qin Yi's stance was defensive, so it was obvious that he didn't intend to strike first.

Qin Yi had taken such an approach because after studying Ling Lan's previous battles, he had found that those students who had been defeated in one move by Ling Lan had all attacked first. Although he didn't know if defending and counter-attacking would be effective, Qin Yi was hopeful. He settled on the strategy of waiting for Ling Lan to attack first.

Qin Yi still had confidence in himself. He believed that if he put his full attention on tracking the opponent's movements, he should be able to see the other's attacking style, and perhaps would be able to stop the opponent's attack.

Ling Lan knew what her opponent was thinking, and so decided not to waste any time; this time, she initiated the attack.

Ling Lan charged forward, her right hand forming a fist and striking out at Qin Yi. Her punch actually emitted a loud explosion of air — you could just see how terrifying its speed and power was.

This time, the teacher in charge of refereeing their match was no longer the one from Ling Lan's previous matches. However, when he saw this attack of Ling Lan's, his gaze revealed a trace of astonishment. This astonishment was not due to Ling Lan's speed or strength, but rather due to the move itself.

Ling Lan's consecutive advancements with just one move had piqued the curiosity of many teachers, who had then gone on to observe the recordings of Ling Lan's fights. This teacher referee was one of them, and Ling Lan's current attack move had been recognised by him.

This was an attack move of Ling Lan's first opponent in the ranking battles. Of course, when Ling Lan executed it, the attack speed and strength was much faster and much fiercer, and at the same time, the opening that appeared when she swung her fist was subtly fixed by crossing her left hand over her chest in preparation for a counter. In other words, the opening was no longer an opening, but a hidden trap.

This was the result of Ling Lan and Little Four's research. Ling Lan had lacked proper moves suited for arena-style fighting, which had given her no choice but to appropriate moves from the other students. Finally, she had managed to synthesize around ten moves from her research, and this was the first time she was using any of them in battle.

In contrast to the students' bewilderment, the experienced teacher had been able to tell the origins of this move with one look. This was the reason behind the astonishment in the teacher's eyes.

Qin Yi saw Ling Lan charging at him, and he reacted nimbly, dodging with a quick turn of his body. Ling Lan's attack missed, and before she could follow up with a second attack, Qin Yi had once again dashed away with a few quick steps, putting a distance of roughly 7 to 8 metres between him and Ling Lan.

“Wow, he’s being really cautious. But Boss, why did you decrease your speed and strength by 70%? If you had just attacked with your normal speed, he would never have been able to dodge.” The watching Little Four was very puzzled. It was obvious that one move would have been enough — why had Boss held back?

“No matter what, I must drag the fight till about 10 moves. I don’t want to see the teacher’s resentful eyes anymore.” Ling Lan was truly afraid of that and had decided to first take it easy for a bit.

Last night, she had trained in the learning space for the entire night — which had been prolonged to a duration of two months — and had finally settled that problematic after-effect of hers. Adding up all the time spent before and after, she had spent almost half a year’s time (in the learning space) to eradicate the problem. This was why Ling Lan could control her own speed and strength today, otherwise, even if Ling Lan planned to take it easy she would have been unable to.

Getting his answer, Little Four said nothing more. He still remembered Ling Lan’s warning to not make noise and disturb her unnecessarily when she was fighting. If the opponent hadn’t dodged far away, and Ling Lan hadn’t stopped pushing her attack, Little Four wouldn’t have voiced his question.

Ling Lan saw that Qin Yi had prepared himself once more, so she charged forwards again, and the moment she got within range, she threw out a side kick. In order to successfully drag out the fight to over 10 moves, Ling Lan had no choice but to be a bit careful, and pay close attention to Qin Yi’s condition. She didn’t wish to pull back her strength and speed only for the opponent to be defeated anyway because he wasn’t prepared to take her attack. That would undoubtedly be an extremely tragic thing.

Of course, the teacher who had studied Ling Lan before could tell that this side kick was also an attack move of one of Ling Lan’s previous opponents. However, Ling Lan had simplified this side kick. It no longer had the initial preparatory spin to accumulate strength.

Although that sort of strength-accumulation method could indeed increase this side kick’s power by 30%, this one spin not only decreased the attack speed, but also created a large weak point. During the spin, there would be a moment when one’s back would be to the opponent — if the opponent grabbed hold of this opportunity, not only could they easily break this move, but they may even counterattack to injure the user heavily instead. This was the reason why Ling Lan had been able to send the original user flying so easily in her previous match.

Thus, Ling Lan decisively discarded that one spin, choosing to throw the side kick right after a half turn. The motions had been simplified, but the strength boost was partially retained. According to Ling Lan’s estimations, even though the strength accumulation was weaker, there was still a 15% boost, and if the move was handled better, even 20% was possible. As such, only 10% of bonus strength was lost, but with this little loss, a large weak point could be fixed, and the attack speed would also go up. It was undoubtedly worth it.

Perhaps this kick came too forcefully, for although Qin Yi had already been mentally prepared, he was still frightened by this ferocious kick of Ling Lan’s. He abruptly realised why Ling Lan had been able to kick her opponents off the stage with one move — it was this strength, which was definitely of a horrific calibre. At that moment, Qin Yi was still oblivious that this was already the result of Ling Lan holding back 70% of her strength and speed.

Qin Yi's reaction time and speed once again proved that he was exceptional. Facing Ling Lan's powerful side kick, he again managed to evade.

At this time, the watching students began cheering for Qin Yi. Ling Lan's performance in her previous matches had been too unbelievable and aberrant, so the students couldn't help but view her as a common enemy. So, when they saw Qin Yi managing to last for two moves, they all started voicing out their encouragement, hoping that he would end Ling Lan's legendary winning streak.

Under the students' cheers, Qin Yi's initially tense spirits relaxed. He felt that his initial strategy wasn't wrong. Ling Lan must definitely be someone who was good at finding his opponent's weaknesses; he had been able to catch hold of his opponents' weaknesses when they attacked first in his previous matches, which was why he had been able to defeat them in one move. However, when Ling Lan was the attacker, the roles were switched around, so Ling Lan was no longer as invincible as they had thought him to be.

Very quickly, Ling Lan had launched several more consecutive attacks. If Qi Long, Luo Lang, and Han Jijun had been here, they may have been shocked and puzzled, because these few moves of Ling Lan would have been both familiar yet strange to them at the same time. That's right, these moves had all been appropriated by Ling Lan when she had fought them. However, these moves, under the combined study of Little Four and herself, had undergone a certain degree of modification. This is not to say that Qi Long's and the others' moves had any problems, but Ling Lan had modified these moves to better suit her own physical capabilities.

"Ah, Boss, it's the 10th move now." Little Four wasn't just a simple observer; he was seriously helping Ling Lan to count the moves being exchanged.

"Now? Finally I can let loose." Holding back her strength and her speed, as well as keeping track of the opponent's reactions — these ten moves had been extremely frustrating for Ling Lan. Hearing Little Four say that her imposed 10-move limit was up, her mood brightened immensely.

At this time, Qin Yi had already gotten used to Ling Lan's attack speed and strength. He felt that he was able to handle Ling Lan's attacks now, and had begun thinking of ways to counterattack. After all, he would never win by purely defending. Although he was very wary of Ling Lan's strong ability in catching an opponent's weakness, he believed that even if he was caught by Ling Lan, he would be able to handle the situation with his speed and reflexes.

So, he decided to make a tentative attack, and his choice of attack was one of the moves from his family-inherited martial arts, one that was best suited for spontaneous adaptation.

"He's attacking," Little Four called out. Qin Yi's constant dodging, slippery as an eel in water, had annoyed Little Four immensely. Now, seeing the opponent finally planning to attack, he was understandably thrilled.

"An attack that isn't an attack, a defence that isn't a defence ... there must be something more." Qin Yi thought that his speed was very fast and that the changes in his move were very subtle, but in Ling Lan's eyes, his speed was rather slow, and some of the changes were obvious at a glance. Moreover, her senses had already pinpointed a defensive blind spot in his move's defences.

Chapter 83: Extreme Talent!

This was Ling Lan's innate talent. When her mental focus reached a certain boundary point, a miraculous ability would emerge. Ling Lan herself wasn't sure what it was, but she felt that it was very useful. As long as she could see the opponent's move clearly, she would be able to find the opponent's weakest point.

Ling Lan may be uncertain, but Number One in the learning space knew what it was. It was precisely because of this that Number One had unsealed Number Five, with the goal of cultivating an extraordinary Ling Lan. It couldn't be helped; this innate talent was just too rare. Even in Number One's country with its highly advanced civilization, children with this innate talent were extremely limited, almost one of a kind. It was the most precious special combat talent — Profound Insight, the perfect innate talent for mecha operators.

A notion flitted through Ling Lan's mind: to attack the weak point, or let the opponent continue his probe and see?

In the blink of an eye, Ling Lan made her decision. She decided to first take a look at the opponent's move. Ling Lan was confident — she believed that even if she gave the opponent one more move, the final outcome would not change. This wasn't blind confidence, but a belief backed up by strength.

Besides, she was really kind of curious — what would the final form of Qin Yi's move be like?

Having made her decision, Ling Lan reacted just as Qin Yi would have hoped. She balled up her right hand into a fist, and held an attack pose, meeting the opponent's attack head on.

A dark gleam flashed through Qin Yi's eyes, and with a shake of his wrist, his entire arm actually moved like a snake, twisting and turning, twining swiftly up Ling Lan's right arm to grab onto it securely.

He caught him! At that moment, Qin Yi's gaze revealed a trace of pleasant surprise, a little shocked that he had actually managed to succeed in one move.

Qin Yi believed that as long as he managed to control Ling Lan, he had obtained the key to winning.

But was that truly the case? Qin Yi's pleasant surprise had yet to fade, and his follow up move had yet to be executed, when he suddenly felt a sharp pain at his shoulder as a large force slammed into it. At the same time, there was a sudden change in his vision. In his sight, Ling Lan suddenly became the unscalable rooftop of the colossal combat hall, and his hand that had been gripping onto Ling Lan's right arm suddenly felt as if it was holding onto a slippery eel, which slipped out of his hand in a flash ...

A loud "Bam", and Qin Yi's body was roughly thrown to the floor of the combat hall. The intense pain coming from all over his body confused him — he struggled to push his upper body up, and saw Ling Lan standing high above him on the edge of the arena stage, looking down on him with a cold expression ...

Looking down? Qin Yi abruptly woke up, realising that he had already fallen off the stage. In other words, he had already lost this match. According to the tournament's rules, when a fighter had been thrown out of the range of the arena, it was an immediate loss.

What in the world happened? *He* was the one who had grabbed Ling Lan, and *he* was the one who had been just about to win ... then why was he the one who had been flung out of the arena in the end? This

match — he was truly baffled how he had lost. Qin Yi pounded his fists against the ground in frustration, unable to accept his loss.

Seeing Qin Yi's dark mood, the teacher referee sighed softly. There had just been too much difference between Qin Yi's and Ling Lan's strength, which was why Qin Yi just couldn't understand how he had lost to Ling Lan.

However, this wasn't the time to explain things to Qin Yi. The referee declared loudly, "This match, Ling Lan wins, successfully advancing to the top 7."

Perhaps the other children had seen the match as if through fog and mist, but the observing teachers had all seen very clearly. At the time when Qin Yi had successfully grabbed hold of Ling Lan's right arm, just as his hand closed around it, Ling Lan's right hand, which had initially been fisted, had opened up, and the extended fingers had been just the right length to make contact with Qin Yi's shoulder.

Of course, this little bit of contact should not have been enough to send Qin Yi flying, but the teachers were all experienced fighters, with the experienced eyes of the strong. They saw that, in the moment when Ling Lan's fingers touched Qin Yi, his fingers had fluttered a few times. This led the teachers to quickly come to the conclusion that Ling Lan had employed some technique, something along the lines of a secondary One-Inch Punch, which had the effect of stacking strength.

However, because the teachers had not fought with Ling Lan themselves, they could not tell for certain the power of this secret technique, and so were unsure how much Ling Lan's strength had been stacked by it. Still, this force must not be small, otherwise Qin Yi would not have been so easily knocked off the stage.

Ling Lan's impressive performance made all the teachers' eyes light up; they were all nodding in approval, expressions filled with pleasant surprise. Some of them were even eager to pounce, wishing they could just take on Ling Lan as an initiate disciple right now. However, when they saw the other teachers around, who all had their sights set on Ling Lan on the stage, these teachers could only halt their steps, sighing internally. This matter wasn't going to be that simple — there were just too many competitors.

In the academy, teachers could freely choose their initiate disciples, and there was no limit to this number. Likewise, students also had the right to choose the initiate teacher they wanted, but each student could only choose one teacher. In other words, for these teachers to become Ling Lan's initiate teacher, they would have to get Ling Lan to choose them willingly, and this was undoubtedly going to be very difficult. All of the teachers within the academy had their own advantages, so no one knew who Ling Lan would pick.

Leaving Qin Yi's gloom aside, Ling Lan had left the stage immediately after hearing the referee teacher's announcement. Qin Yi's move had sparked her curiosity — she had never expected someone's arm to be able to twist into the shape of a fried dough twist. It looked like her previous foundational physical skills training had already pushed the limits of human flexibility, but at least it had still been within the realm

of possibility for humans. It wasn't like what Qin Yi just did ... seeing his arm twine around her arm like a snake, Ling Lan had felt an ache in her teeth, involuntarily drawing in a cold breath.

Goddammit, she just hated those kind of legless creepy crawly creatures. Even though she had touched, killed, and even eaten quite a few, hate was hate — this deeply rooted mentality wasn't something that could be swept away just by killing them.

Ling Lan hadn't stepped off the stage for long when the Class-A 2nd-place Wu Jiong also came off his stage. His opponent had been the weakest of the group, the original 14th-rank of Class-A.

Wu Jiong's strength was clearly much stronger than the other by a significant margin, and on top of that, Wu Jiong was an extraordinarily quick attacker. Once his opponent had been drawn into his rhythm, the opponent had been unable to keep up and had missed blocking one of Wu Jiong's punches in the end. With that, he had been sent flying out of the arena and declared defeated. Though Wu Jiong had only been slightly behind Ling Lan in getting off the stage, because the rally of attacks had been unusually quick, over 40 moves had already passed in his match.

Subsequently, several more students got off their respective stages one after another. Qi Long was the fourth person of the first grade Class-A to advance into the top 7. Seeing Qi Long's animated expression, Ling Lan just knew that Qi Long must have had a great time in his fight, otherwise he wouldn't be looking so satisfied.

"Fighting an opponent with a similar style, how was it?" Ling Lan couldn't help but ask curiously.

Qi Long's mouth split open in a wide smile. "It was beyond awesome! If I get bored in future, I'll go find that punk for a fight." His match had truly been a passionate and energetic one, exceptionally lively, allowing Qi Long to fully release all the pent up energy within his body.

Hearing this, Ling Lan mentally spared a moment of grief for Xu Zhizhi. Being fixated on by this battle maniac, it could be foreseen that Xu Zhizhi's coming days would be filled with tragic beatings.

"You ... don't go overboard," said Ling Lan weakly. Since they were lucky enough to be classmates, she had to try and salvage a bit of Xu Zhizhi's future.

"Relax, Boss, I'll watch myself. I won't injure him." Qi Long sent a mournful look at Ling Lan, and added, "If Boss was willing to fight with me, then I wouldn't have to go look for him. Fighting with you, Boss, is still more exciting."

Every time he sparred with Ling Lan, although he was always the one being pummelled, he would always feel that he had gotten a bit stronger after it. So, he sincerely wished to fight Ling Lan more, but unfortunately, Ling Lan had refused to fight for a long while previously, greatly depressing him.

Hearing Qi Long's words, Ling Lan shuddered violently, and replied immediately, "Xu Zhizhi's skills are pretty good, he's a good opponent. Qi Long, you have good taste." Better you than me, Xu Zhizhi — sacrifice yourself as tribute! Ling Lan resolutely cast aside the little remaining sympathy she had for her classmate into the far reaches of outer space.

Hells, if Qi Long really fixated on her instead, she would have to really spend all day and night embroiled in the world of combat. That would truly be unbearable.

Ling Lan's words made Qi Long nod affirmatively. He too believed that his choice wasn't bad — for him, who liked to fight, being pummelled by Ling Lan was unavoidable, and when fighting with Luo Lang and Han Jijyun, he found himself unable to truly let himself go, so fighting them was unsatisfying. Now that he had found Xu Zhizhi who fought with the same blunt and wild style as he did, he could fight without worry, so his mood was extraordinarily good.

Qi Long had already thought it through early on — if Boss Lan was free, then he would look for Boss Lan to fight (torment himself), but if Boss Lan wasn't free, then he would seek out Xu Zhizhi to fight (torment the other), and when Xu Zhizhi ran out of energy, he would go fight with Luo Lang and Han Jijyun ...

There was no helping it. Qi Long's stamina was truly so good that it was abnormal, which was why he had no choice but to keep fighting to expend all that excess energy.

"There isn't any problem with your stamina right now, right?" Ling Lan was a little worried that Qi Long might have gone overboard in his glee at finding new prey.

When Qi Long heard this, he hurriedly shook his head. He would never make such a mistake. He gave his arms several forceful shakes, showing Ling Lan that his energy was still abundant.

Although Qi Long looked as if he was all brawn with little brain, he definitely wasn't a reckless person, but was more the type who seemed foolish in his great wisdom. He had a clear bottom-line in his heart, knowing that play was play, but there was a limit to that. Advancing from the top 13 into the top 7 was not the end point; the following top 7 to top 4 advancement matches were directly after. If he really fooled around too much and used up most of his energy, if he then happened to lose, even if he could forgive himself, he believed that his boss Ling Lan would never let it go, and would definitely kill him personally.

After half a year of interaction, Qi Long knew very well what Ling Lan's creed was. Ling Lan only upheld one principle — a battle that could be won should never be lost. If victory was uncertain, then efforts should be made to win; if loss was certain, then avoid if possible, if it was unavoidable ... then create all the conditions necessary to win and win it.

In other words, Ling Lan was someone who hated, abhorred, *loathed* failing. This was a compulsion that Ling Lan had brought with her from her previous life, because back then, failure for Ling Lan would be at the cost of her life, so Ling Lan could not afford to lose.

Therefore, Qi Long, as Ling Lan's follower, couldn't speak of losing so easily. Qi Long just couldn't drop the ball at this critical juncture, unless he no longer wanted to call Ling Lan Boss ...

Chapter 84: The Top 4 Emerges!

For the advancement of the top 13 to the top 7, the final match to end was Luo Lang and Ye Xu's. The two of them were equally matched, and a winner had only been determined right at the very end when they had both been utterly worn out. Ye Xu had collapsed a second later than Luo Lang, and thus gained the victory, successfully advancing.

Han Jijun and the others felt sorry for Luo Lang. If Luo Lang hadn't had to expend so much energy yesterday, causing fatigue to remain in his body which held him back today, then perhaps the result would be different. But regardless, Luo Lang's match was officially over.

However, Luo Lang's defeat didn't lower his standing in the eyes of the Class-A students, because in this match, he had proven that his strength was roughly equivalent with that of Ye Xu's. In other words, Luo Lang's strength was on par with the Class-A top 3 ranks.

The gazes of all the Class-A students were now gathered upon Ling Lan and Qi Long. If Luo Lang's strength was already on par with the top 3 of Class-A, then how strong were Ling Lan and Qi Long really? It should be known that Luo Lang was considered the weakest among the three of them.

However, they believed that as the matches progressed, Ling Lan's and Qi Long's true strength will be displayed before them. Then, they would be able to know once and for all just how much depth there really was to Ling Lan and Qi Long.

In short order, about half an hour later, the advancement battles for the top 7 into top 4 began. Although Ye Xu really hoped he would get a bye once so that he would be able to have more time to recover his strength, unfortunately, the academy did not wish for Ye Xu to be that lucky. The bye for this round was given to Qi Long.

When the name list for the assignment of byes came out, Ling Lan could pretty much confirm the academy's bye-allocation strategy. They had chosen the strongest few — in other words, the academy was intentionally precluding the element of luck in this.

For the top 7 to top 4 battles, due to Qi Long's bye, there were only three matches. Ling Lan's luck was not much weaker than Qi Long's, actually being matched up with the already worn out Ye Xu who no longer had the ability to put up a good fight. Meanwhile, Li Yingjie had been matched with the original rank-5 of Class-A, Jiang Yuan, while Wu Jiong had been paired with the 4th-rank, Zhou Jirong — both matches a meeting of the strong.

The moment Ye Xu saw the match-up name list, his face fell. His opponent was actually going to be that Ling Lan — this luck of his was just too terrible.

Originally, he had thought of at least trying to fight, but against such an opponent like Ling Lan, he wasn't sure he could win even if he had been full of strength, let alone in this current dire situation ... Ye Xu had no choice but to consider the other ranking battles he would have to fight if he lost. It should be noted that the ranking battles to determine the rankings of 13th-8th and 7th-5th would be held at the same time — if he used up the rest of his strength here, it was very likely that he might not even be able to hold onto 5th place.

It had to be said that the stronger the child, the stronger their judgment and acceptance. Knowing when to give up was also a form of courage.

The moment the referee teacher on stage said start, Ye Xu, who had already thought things through, resolutely raised his hand to surrender. So, just like that, Ling Lan once again advanced easily,

successfully becoming the quickest to advance among the three people, excluding Qi Long's advancement via the bye.

Meanwhile, Li Yingjie's and Wu Jiong's respective matches were both very intense. Although Li Yingjie and Wu Jiong were the top 2 of Class-A, their strength was not yet at the level where they would suppress all opposition, being just a little stronger than their opponents. As such, it was really hard to say who would win in the end, for of course the opponents also had their eye on advancing, and had drawn up their full strength to fight it out with their opponent.

However, the two of them proved to have substantial roots in the end. Li Yingjie was the direct descendant of the top elite family of the Federation — all the combat arts he learned had been through the tests of time, with only the best foundational arts being kept, and as such he had a head start over other people. Meanwhile, Wu Jiong was also the descendant of a fourth-generation military family — a set of military combat arts was enough for him to dominate over most of the other kids. In the end, the two of them relied on their solid foundations to defeat their opponents and advanced successfully into the top 4.

The advancement of these four students was accepted full-heartedly by the Class-A students, with no objections whatsoever.

The morning's battles didn't end there; following right on its heels were the 13th-8th and 7th-5th place final ranking battles. This time, Ye Xu's luck returned, receiving the only bye slot for the 7th-5th place ranking fights. This gave him the time to continue resting in the recovery pod, taking advantage of every second to recover his energy.

Luo Lang's luck was also not bad. For the first round, he fought against a weaker student, gaining a hard-earned victory. Then he received a bye for the next round, and had to wait for the winner of the other group to be done so they could fight for the 8th rank. Of course, he also took the chance to rest in a recovery pod to regain his strength. In the end, having recovered enough energy, both Ye Xu and Luo Lang defeated their respective opponents. And so, Luo Lang obtained 8th place, while Ye Xu obtained 5th place.

On the rankings, Ye Xu's ranking had dropped compared to when school just started, but his status was not at all lowered in the minds of the students. Ye Xu's strength was definitely exceptional — it was just that no one had expected two aberrant oddballs such as Ling Lan and Qi Long to appear in Class-A. Qi Long was more the oddball, while Ling Lan was more the aberrant.

Meanwhile, Luo Lang's rank had risen considerably, obtaining the 8th position. Everyone felt that it was well-deserved, with some students even thinking that Luo Lang's true rank should be one or two ranks higher. After all, he and Ye Xu had been neck and neck during their battle, so it would be reasonable for him to be the 6th rank. However, there wasn't much difference in strength among the top 10 of Class-A anyway, so there was no need to be too caught up in the details of the rankings.

Finally, only the exact ranking of the top 4 was left unsettled. What were the final match-ups going to be? However, the semi-finals and the finals had been scheduled for the afternoon, so the Class-A students could only suppress their curiosity, and go have their lunch at the canteen first.

While eating, Han Jijyun voiced his concern over the possibility of Ling Lan going up against Qi Long, but Qi Long wasn't worried about it at all. Rather, he was excited at the prospect, thinking that that would be the perfect opportunity for him to fight all out with Boss Lan.

Hearing this, although her expression retained its usual calm, Ling Lan prayed in her heart for the academy's A.I. to be wise, and assign the troublesome Qi Long to be someone else's responsibility.

Talking and laughing, the few of them finished their lunch, and then went back together to the combat hall, to wait for the notification of the final match-ups.

The time finally arrived, and the battle name list was revealed. Seeing it, Han Jijyun and Luo Lang leapt up in excitement, while Wu Jiong frowned slightly, his expression turning grim.

That's right, his opponent for the coming match was the one he feared the most — Ling Lan. If possible, he really had not wanted to meet him during the semi-finals, hoping that he would be able to advance to the finals in his best condition.

However, Wu Jiong quickly regained his equilibrium. As a descendant of a military family, he wasn't one to shy away from tough challenges. Wu Jiong was actually very prepared. Ever since Ling Lan had first advanced in one move, he had already been paying attention to him, considering Ling Lan as his greatest rival within Class-A.

Indeed, in Wu Jiong's eyes, that arrogant punk Li Yingjie was not worthy of being his rival. Although Li Yingjie was a match for him now, he believed that in three to five years time, he would definitely leave Li Yingjie in the dust as one of his stepping stones.

From Wu Jiong's observations, he found that Ling Lan's current strength was certainly one level higher than them, so it would be extremely difficult to defeat him. Still, he wouldn't give up just because of this. He had contacted his father, detailing Ling Lan's combat movements to him, in hopes that his father would be able to provide some guidance.

It wasn't that Wu Jiong didn't want to let his father see a recording of Ling Lan's fights, but unfortunately, the Central Scout Academy kept a very strict guard on the videos of their students. It was impossible to send out the data from within the school — the moment one left the school grounds, any data saved within any communicators, as long as it was a video file downloaded from the school servers, would be automatically deleted via formatting, so even a top expert in A.I. would be unable to restore it.

This was one of the ways the academy protected its students, forbidding video images of its students from being leaked to the outside world, though of course verbal descriptions were not included under this coverage.

After Wu Jiong's father had heard his descriptions, he had waited a beat before telling him to just hold on and wait for an opportunity. If he could hold on till after the opponent's tenth move, then perhaps he would be able to find a way to win.

The greatest reason for this was just that Ling Lan made too few moves, so there was no way to see where his weaknesses lay. Wu Jiong had naturally taken his father's words to heart, and based on the top 13 to top 7 advancement match, his father's words were proven to be accurate.

Qin Yi had just been a little too impatient, moving recklessly before he had figured out Ling Lan's true strength. Wu Jiong mentally warned himself to be patient — no matter how fierce Ling Lan's attacks were, even if there were many openings, if he wasn't sure of success, he should just continue to hold back.

Very quickly, the two matches officially kicked off. After some hesitation, Han Jijyun had decided to go watch Qi Long and Li Yingjie's battle. Meanwhile, Luo Lang had chosen to go watch Ling Lan's fight, because he wanted to see Ling Lan's true combat skills.

Speaking of which, it was rather sad that after following Ling Lan for half a year and fighting him several times during that time, they had still never seen Ling Lan use any proper systematic combat arts. Because, when Ling Lan fought with them, he basically didn't use any formal moves at all. He only attacked based on instinct with direct moves, clear to see and understand.

Precisely because of this point, Han Jijyun and the others had never been able to pin down Ling Lan's true background. Although Han Jijyun had tried beating around the bush, Ling Lan had just smiled but kept silent. Was there really a secret behind it all, or was there really no secret at all? They just had no way to know.

If Ling Lan had known that Qi Long and the others were so concerned about her background, she would probably laugh her head off. At this moment, Ling Lan still wasn't clear about her father's true status in this world, thinking that she was just an ordinary inconspicuous descendant of a small elite family — a child with a widowed mother who had broken ties with the small elite family at that.

It had to be said that Ling Lan was a little careless in this respect. Of course, Little Four was also partly to blame here, never reminding Ling Lan to go learn more about Ling Xiao, so Ling Lan only knew that her father was an unremarkable major general in some random regiment (the Federation had so many major generals they were like hairs on the backs of cows), who had then carelessly gotten a GAME OVER when he went off to fight on the battlefield.

The matches finally started, and Wu Jiong chose to do the same as Qin Yi, dodging to one side, and putting up a cautious defence. This caused Ling Lan's head to ache.

Meanwhile, on Qi Long's side, the fight was intense from the very beginning. Qi Long had always been a child who fought based on personal instinct, so when he heard the referee teacher say start, he charged forwards immediately ...

Chapter 85: Qi Long vs Li Yingjie

Initially, Li Yingjie had wanted to launch a test attack once to probe Qi Long's depths, but the thought had barely crossed his mind when the other's right fist had appeared unexpectedly before his eyes. It was coming at him fast and furious, the wind blasted towards him by the punch causing a mild ache in his cheeks.

Li Yingjie reacted quickly. He leaned backwards to put as much distance as he could between the two of them, and crossed his arms in front of him to block the punch ...

A soft “bam!” — the sound of a fist striking flesh. Li Yingjie was sent stumbling back three steps before the force behind Qi Long’s punch dissipated. But with this retreat, he had lost the initiative.

Taking advantage of the opponent’s inability to attack, Qi Long rained a heavy barrage of combo attacks on Li Yingjie. This was Qi Long’s favoured style of attack to begin with, so he was truly fighting just as he liked. In the few advancement matches at the beginning, his opponents had all been thoroughly defeated by these wild attacks of Qi Long. Mind you, it wasn’t easy for opponents who were slow to rev up and get their head into the game to get used to Qi Long’s unreasonable attacks.

Qi Long’s fierce attacks in this match led all the watching teachers to nod repeatedly in approval, all of them thinking that he was good at timing his attacks, and had good instincts — a true natural-born fighter.

When Coffin-face, who was intently watching Qi Long fight from the side, saw this, his expression became heavy, as if thinking of something.

Seeing this, Smiley-face couldn’t hold back his curiosity. “You noticed something?”

“Just keep watching, if it really is what I think it is ... Yun Ye, maybe, I’ve hit the jackpot.” Coffin-face’s eyes, which were originally as calm as still water, were actually shining with an unusual light; it was clear to see just how turbulent his emotions were.

Smiley-face understood his good friend very well, and knew that his friend would not talk about things he wasn’t sure of, and so he did not continue to question, but instead turned to put his full attention on watching Qi Long and Li Yingjie’s match. Perhaps he would be able to see something, for Smiley-face knew very well who his good friend was excited about.

Although Li Yingjie was so cocky and arrogant that he invited dislike, it could not be denied that his abilities were really not bad and that he had really solid foundations. Even though he had been taken off guard by Qi Long’s fierce attack right out of the gate, it wasn’t long before he gradually managed to hold his ground. Although he was still more on the passive side, he still managed to find several opportunities to fight back. This performance of his also gained the acknowledgement of quite a number of the teachers in attendance.

Of course, this was not to say that Li Yingjie had turned the tables around and was fighting Qi Long on even ground. Truth was that Qi Long still had the advantage; it was pretty much impossible for Li Yingjie to wrest control back within 100 moves.

Li Yingjie also understood that this situation was bad for him, and as this was also the first time he was disadvantaged in a fight, he couldn’t help but become a little anxious and impatient. Since he had first entered the Central Scout Academy, his father had already told him that the first ranking tournament was very important. Its importance did not lie in the treatment one would receive after having their ranking confirmed, but rather in its function as a test to highlight the cream of the crop, so that the most exceptional students could receive the cultivation of the most exceptional instructors under the Initiate Program, which was unique to the Central Scout Academy.

However, very few children would have the chance to experience it, for the Initiate Program was extremely covert, and its education system was on a one-on-one basis — other than the children who

had been selected to participate in the program, the majority of children would never get to know of its existence.

Of course, with regards to some of the older elite families, those upper-ranking individuals with power and authority, this secret was no secret at all. Thus, they would remind their children to pay special attention to the first ranking tournament, which was how Li Yingjie knew of this as well.

Frankly, the Central Scout Academy was also aware of this 'leak', so the concealment of this program was actually only targeted at the commoners. However, the academy was not at all concerned, because those children who emerged with great potential and exceptional abilities were typically all from these elite families and high-ranking upper class. After all, these people possessed excellent genetics, so the quality of their descendants was guaranteed to a certain extent.

Although Li Yingjie was a little irritable and impatient, under the solid foundational teachings of the Li family, he still managed to hold himself back, exchanging up to 100 moves with Qi Long. He had originally thought that the situation would slowly get better, but after 100 moves, he found that his passive state in the match was still unchanged. At that moment, his heart started to become agitated, and the way he fought became more and more impatient.

Seeing this, Smiley-face lifted an eyebrow and said, "Tai, looks like the outcome is set."

Coffin-face nodded. "Crew cut boy's opponent's patience is lacking. This is a good chance, but whether or not he can take hold of it, still depends on what the crew cut boy's going to do." If it really was as he thought, the boy could not lose ...

Li Yingjie decided that he could not afford to continue dragging things out with Qi Long — he needed to regain the initiative and quickly end this match and advance. Only then could he get the opportunity to train under the strongest instructor.

Just by coming to that mental decision, Li Yingjie's entire aura changed. His initial bit of impatience disappeared in a split second and a cold air started emanating from his entire body.

The students in the audience may not have been able to sense this sort of change in aura, but the eyes of the watching teachers all turned serious. Smiley-face and Coffin-face were not excluded, especially Coffin-face, who surreptitiously prepared a Federation coin in his hand, just in case.

At this moment, Qi Long seemed to have sensed the difference in Li Yingjie, but did not stop attacking with his hands and legs, instead increasing the intensity of his attacks.

Coffin-face's eyes were coldly focused, and his expression became even grimmer. Could it be that Qi Long had sensed the danger and so was attacking with all his might?

Li Yingjie parried attack after attack as he systematically retreated one foot after another. Meanwhile, his gaze became exceptionally cool and analytical, and there was even a trace of not too subtle killing intent.

No matter how berserk Qi Long was, his attacks would always have a moment of pause, and Li Yingjie was just waiting for that moment. He wanted to defeat Qi Long in one strike, so he needed to put enough distance between them, otherwise he would be too busy handling Qi Long's relentless attacks to even unleash his trump card.

That's right, Li Yingjie was so confident because he still had a powerful trump card. His father had cautioned him not to use this trump card frivolously, because this was a killing art of the Li family, and was one of the true combat arts that had been passed down the Li family over thousands of years.

There was enough distance now — Li Yingjie finally got into the stance of the Li family's sure-kill technique ...

When Coffin-face saw this, his expression changed subtly. His fingers flipped, and the coin held in his palm was now poised between his index finger and his middle finger. If Qi Long charged forwards to attack, he would immediately launch the coin to send Qi Long flying out of his opponent's attack range.

Just when everyone thought that Qi Long would continue rushing forwards to attack Li Yingjie, Qi Long did something which stunned all the spectators. As if suddenly sensing something, Qi Long, who had been preparing to attack, frowned and actually stopped moving forwards. Not only that, he also retreated swiftly, putting a considerable distance between him and Li Yingjie.

When Qi Long stopped once more, his pose had already changed from its original attack stance to a defensive stance, expression cautious, seemingly very concerned about Li Yingjie's change.

Seeing this, Coffin-face's emotionless face suddenly became animated. Retrieving the coin between his fingers to envelop it once more in his palm, he muttered to himself, "That's right, this is it, this is it."

"Tai, what exactly is *it*?" After watching for so long, Smiley-face found that he was still clueless, and so couldn't resist opening his mouth to ask again.

"Don't rush, Yun Ye, once the results are out, I'll explain." Right then, Coffin-face just had no thought to spare for explaining things to his good friend. His spirited eyes were fixed squarely on Qi Long, a deep yearning in his gaze. Initially, he had only wanted to take on Qi Long as an initiate disciple because of Smiley-face, but now, he truly wanted to do so from the bottom of his heart.

The spectating Han Jijyun's expression also became grim — although he couldn't sense it as accurately as the instructors, he could still tell that something wasn't right with the change in Li Yingjie's aura. Along with Li Yingjie's strange pose, Han Jijyun knew that this was going to be trouble. The clever Han Jijyun deduced instantly that Li Yingjie must have brought out his deeply hidden trump card, for this somewhat fear-inducing pose had not been seen in any of his previous matches.

At that moment, Han Jijyun couldn't help but muse to himself — no wonder the top of the rankings had been monopolized by the old elite families for many years; their roots were indeed deep. It should be noted that for them, who were from middle-class families within a militaristic system, being able to learn a high-level military basic art was already considered extraordinarily lucky. But for those old elite families, they had more than one set of this sort of combat arts, and the types were varied, some even including real hereditary combat arts, such as the case of the Li family.

Just like that, Qi Long and Li Yingjie faced off, and this time, Qi Long displayed his rare patience, holding back instead of charging forwards recklessly to attack.

Li Yingjie couldn't help but swear internally — why was this Qi Long so d*mn lucky?! Right now, the stance he was holding was the Li family's strongest defensive counterattack move. As long as Qi Long

launched an attack, he could instantly take advantage of the opponent's fatal weakness during his attack, and achieve a one-hit-kill effect. Unfortunately, Qi Long suddenly refused to attack ...

Li Yingjie did consider that perhaps Qi Long had seen through his stance, but the moment this notion popped up, it was ruthlessly quashed by him. His father had said before that all opponents who saw the Li family death combat arts were dead — Qi Long definitely couldn't know what he was thinking.

In the end, the one who lost in terms of patience was still Li Yingjie. Li Yingjie decided not to wait any longer because this one killing move wasn't all he had; he still had many killing moves which required him to take the initiative.

So, Li Yingjie changed his stance. He rushed towards Qi Long, reaching Qi Long's side in a flash, and two fingers of his left hand headed straight for Qi Long's right arm, while his right hand splayed open vertically like a blade ...

Seeing this, Qi Long was startled, and then without even thinking about it, his right fist hurtled toward the other's left fingers.

In Coffin-face's low hanging right hand, that little coin once again appeared between his fingers.

Another "bam!" of bodily impact, and two figures were sent flying in separate directions.

Then there was a loud "Ah!", which was quickly followed by two bodies violently crashing onto the ground. Both combatants had been unable to withstand the force behind the other's blow and had crashed heavily to the ground.

One of the figures smashed onto the floor of the arena stage, continued to roll over and then bounced off the edge, directly tumbling off the stage to fall below the arena.

Meanwhile, the other person smashed onto the stage as well, and actually made deep scratches on the arena floor as he slid towards the edge of the arena. Just as it looked like he would fall off the stage, that person swung out his left hand in a claw and resolutely struck out with all his might at the arena floor.

His fingers sunk into the ground with a resounding noise, but even so, score marks roughly 3 centimetres long were left on the surface of the arena floor. However, because of this force, the person managed to halt his falling body, and then with a somersault, he was once again standing firmly on the edge of the stage, clearly telling everyone that he was the winner of this match.

The referee teacher stood at the edge of the arena, glanced down at the figure lying below the stage, and then looked at the student who was already standing securely beside him. His expression was incredulous. Looks like the first grade Class-A was really going to riot.

"I declare, the winner of the advancement fight is — Qi Long!"

Chapter 86: Sixth Sense?

Following this declaration, Li Yingjie, who was below the stage, stood up with a face full of shock as if he could not conceive that this would be the outcome.

“How — you knew that was my only weak point?” Seeing Qi Long preparing to walk off the stage, Li Yingjie couldn’t help but call out. It was the greatest killing move, but it also had the greatest weakness. An average person would never choose to fight in a way where both parties would take damage, not when there were other options available, but Qi Long had chosen to attack that spot out of all spots — this was something he just could not comprehend.

Qi Long scratched his head, and thought hard for a while before replying, “I didn’t know. It’s just my instincts were telling me that it should be that way, and so my fist went there.”

Of course, he didn’t say that he had once almost lost his life under a similar move made by Ling Lan. He had asked Ling Lan then whether there was a way to break the move, and Ling Lan, guilty at accidentally injuring Qi Long just then, had deconstructed the move for him, as well as taught him that the spot which looked the strongest was most often the weakest in moves like this. In choosing to dodge it, you would fall right into the opponent’s trap.

However, when fighting, Qi Long didn’t have the chance to think that much. He only remembered one point — the more dangerous it was, the more he should not dodge. Thus, even as he blanked out, he decided to listen to his heart and attacked the spot it pointed out as attackable. Reality proved that his heart had not lied to him.

However, Qi Long’s answer made Li Yingjie’s face flush red. He felt that this answer was an excuse Qi Long had thought up because he was unwilling to tell him the real reason. At that moment, a swell of rage crested in his heart, and he hated the fact that he couldn’t rip apart the hateful Qi Long before his eyes.

However, a trace of worry rose in his heart at the same time. He wondered if the Li family top-secret killing moves had been leaked — if that was really the case, it would be a devastating blow to the Li family. Mind you, for the Li family to be so firmly rooted in the Federation, with a lineage spanning thousands of years, a large part of it could be credited to this set of highly lethal combat arts. Li Yingjie decided that once the ranking battles were over, he must immediately relay this news to his father so that he could investigate and find out who was it that had betrayed the Li family ...

It wasn’t just Li Yingjie who didn’t believe Qi Long’s words, for even the other spectators were sceptical. Of course, as Qi Long sworn brother, Han Jijyun knew that Qi Long was really speaking the truth, because he knew very well just how powerful Qi Long’s animal instinct was.

There was still one more person who believed Qi Long’s words — the quietly observing Coffin-face. The matter-of-fact look on his face only made Smiley-face, who was standing beside him, even more confused. He was just about to question the other, when Coffin-face suddenly tugged at his clothes, signalling for him to walk away with him.

After answering Li Yingjie, Qi Long then slowly walked off the stage towards the waiting Han Jijyun. Before he could call out a greeting, he saw two youths dressed in instructor apparel, with a clearly militaristic air about them, walking towards him from the corner of his eye, and couldn’t help but stop in surprise.

The tall man with a cold expression started by saying, “You there, student. Excuse me, how should I address you?”

At this moment, several instructors who had been thinking of taking action saw the two men's approach, and abruptly stopped their steps with bitter smiles on their faces. They knew then that things were just not fated to be with that boy who was so wild in combat — they wouldn't dare to fight over an initiate disciple with those two tough customers.

Qi Long was a little puzzled, unsure why the man had come up to him, but he still answered politely, "Hello Teacher, I'm called Qi Long."

Han Jijyun sensed someone behind him and quickly turned his head around to look. When he saw who it was, his expression tightened, and he immediately bent low in a bow, saying respectfully, "Good day, Teachers."

Seeing Qi Long still standing with a bewildered face, he hurriedly nudged him, signalling for him to follow his example.

Although Qi Long was a little lost, unsure why Han Jijyun wanted him to be so respectful to the other party, he would never go against Han Jijyun's will in small matters like this, and so Qi Long mimicked Han Jijyun and gave a respectful bow as well.

Coffin-face and Smiley-face exchanged a look, and Smiley-face took a closer look at Han Jijyun, a trace of interest in his eyes. This little fellow wasn't simple at all, actually managing to sense something within that split second ...

The two men indicated for Qi Long and Han Jijyun to follow them, so Han Jijyun decisively tugged on Qi Long, pulling him along behind the teachers. Although Qi Long really wanted to go see Ling Lan's match, he still acceded to Han Jijyun's decision, and together they came to a secluded corner in the combat hall.

Smiley-face took a look around, and only after confirming that there was no one within range to hear their conversation, did he nod to Coffin-face to proceed.

"Qi Long, I would like to take you on as my initiate disciple, are you willing?" Coffin-face's expression was as frigid as usual, not at all concerned that his cold demeanour would scare away this student he had his eye on.

"Initiate disciple?!" Qi Long was at first taken aback, but then he recalled something and came to an abrupt realisation.

Seeing this, Coffin-face let out an internal breath of relief — looks like this child already knew of this secret, so he wouldn't have to waste words explaining. This sort of explaining task was what he feared the most.

Han Jijyun glanced at Qi Long with a face full of envy. About the matter of initiate disciples, his own father had already informed him about it when he had been accepted into the academy. This was also why he had been so respectful back when the teachers had approached Qi Long; he had figured it out instantly.

"Of course I'm willing." Becoming an initiate disciple was not like becoming an instructor's official disciple — there were no responsibilities associated with it on the student's end, only benefits. Of course Qi Long would not turn down this opportunity to become strong quickly which had fallen into his lap with no strings attached. Without even having to think about it, he agreed.

However, Qi Long was not someone who would forget his friends. He pulled Han Jijyun closer to his side and said, "This is my good friend, called Han Jijyun, IQ 260, definitely smarter than me. Teacher, could you also accept him as an initiate disciple?"

Hearing this, Han Jijyun's face paled dramatically and he hurried to stop him, yelling, "Qi Long!"

Many children would be disliked and discarded by a teacher because of greed, and lose the chance to become an initiate disciple in the end. Seeing Qi Long so reckless, Han Jijyun was so anxious that his forehead was beaded with sweat. In his heart, he was blaming Qi Long — why did he have to be so wilful? Didn't he know this was his chance to become strong quickly?

Seeing Han Jijyun so anxious for Qi Long, while Qi Long remained determined to obtain this privilege for his good friend, Smiley-face's smile deepened, and even the lines on Coffin-face's face gentled noticeably.

The two of them shared a glance, and then Smiley-face looked once more at Han Jijyun to say, "Han Jijyun, if you're not against it, then be my initiate disciple."

In awed surprise, Han Jijyun raised his head to say, "Can I?"

Smiley-face was all smiles as he nodded, and Han Jijyun said emotionally, "Thank you Teacher, I'm willing, I'm willing."

Seeing this result, Qi Long grinned widely in satisfaction.

But Coffin-face frowned slightly as he said, "Didn't you have your eye on the other boy?" Taking on one more disciple meant that he would have to expend double the effort — Coffin-face didn't wish for Smiley-face to become too tired.

Smiley-face remained smiling as he said, "Taking on one more is no big deal. We'll have plenty of time this coming year ahead." That said, he removed two flat and rectangular copper plates from his pocket, both of which had an orchid blossom carved on it, and handed them to Han Jijyun, saying, "One's for you, while the other is for the other initiate disciple I've got my eye on. He should also be one of your companions, hm, that boy who was fighting with Qi Long in the morning."

Hearing this, Qi Long and Han Jijyun looked at each other in pleasant surprise, and said in unison, "Luo Lang."

Smiley-face smiled and said, "Should be him."

Han Jijyun did not hesitate, immediately contacting Luo Lang through his communicator, throwing down a brief 'get here', and hanging up before Luo Lang could answer.

Luo Lang, who had been in the midst of watching Ling Lan and Wu Jiong's match, came over, utterly confused. When Smiley-face repeated his intentions to take him on as an initiate disciple, Luo Lang likewise agreed without any hesitation, directly taking one of the copper plates from Han Jijyun's hands. This was a token representing the teacher's commitment — it could not be lost.

Meanwhile, Qi Long had received a silver dollar, but the image on it was that of a pine tree, hardy and strong, tasteful in its simplicity.

Having gained satisfactory initiate disciples, Coffin-face and Smiley-face no longer had any thought of remaining in the combat hall. Bidding farewell to Qi Long and the others, they left the combat hall after arranging a time and place for training.

On the road, Smiley-face finally asked the question he had held back for so long. “Tai, what exactly does that Qi Long have to cause you to be so excited, to even bring out that token which represents an official disciple?”

“If I had the authority to accept true disciples, I’d even be willing to give a gold dollar,” said Coffin-face seriously. “That boy Qi Long, if I’m not mistaken, has awakened the sixth sense.”

Coffin-face’s words shocked Smiley-face. “How can that be? Even we have only just touched on the edges of the sixth sense.”

“Perhaps, this is an innate talent he was born with.” Coffin-face could only explain it this way. The sixth sense was a miraculous ability, allowing one to sense danger and opportunity instinctually. Right now, the Federation already knew how to rely on extremely cruel torments to force trainees to gain this ability, but of course, the success rate was exceedingly low. Only those with resolute personalities who had been through countless battles could have the chance to obtain this, as they called it, ability from the realm of the gods. For instance, he and Smiley-face were part of the few lucky ones.

This was also the first time he had seen it in a child — that unpolished natural ability was even stronger than that which they’ve obtained through external forces ... perhaps this was their chance to cultivate an ultimate warrior for their sect.

Coffin-face had already decided that he would train Qi Long well; he would not allow such an extraordinary talent to be lost within the masses. He also considered that if he couldn’t teach Qi Long well enough, then he would entrust Qi Long to his honourable teacher for mentoring.

If Instructor Number One from the learning space were here, his face would be filled with disdain upon hearing what Coffin-face had said. This was no ‘sixth sense’. It was, in fact, an awakened sensory talent — proper name ‘Perception’, otherwise known as ‘Animal Instinct’ — and was one of the lower-average level talents. From this, we can see that the technology and its accompanying combat cultivation systems of the current world and the Mandora star system were light years apart, completely not of the same level.

Meanwhile, after collecting their thoughts and feelings, Qi Long, Han Jijyun, and Luo Lang hurried back to Ling Lan’s combat arena to watch her match. Ling Lan’s match was the complete opposite of Qi Long’s, no intensity in sight. The two combatants were battling it out in terms of patience, both sides testing the other.

Ling Lan knew very well where her problem lay — killing people was no problem; even if ten more Wu Jiong appeared, she would be able to KO ¹ them easily. However, to win without harming her opponent, or even just lightly wounding her opponent, was a great challenge for Ling Lan. After all, all the moves she had mastered were ultimate killing moves; the moves that she could take out for a formal match were just too limited.

Chapter 87: A New Upset Record

Of course, Ling Lan could also choose to fight by just reacting to the opponent's moves — however the opponent chose to fight, that'd be how she'd break the move. Unfortunately, Wu Jiong was unwilling to play along with this plan of hers. In other words, Wu Jiong was determined not to take the initiative and attack but wanted Ling Lan to start attacking.

As such, Ling Lan was currently having a headache. This was also why Qi Long's side had already exchanged over a hundred moves, but here on Ling Lan's end, only ten or so tentative moves had been exchanged. In other words, a majority of the time was wasted by the two fighters just circling each other.

However, whatever Ling Lan may lack, patience wasn't one of them. Even Instructor Number One had mentioned before that Ling Lan's patience was of an abnormal level, except when she herself did not wish to tolerate something. It could be predicted that this stalemate of theirs where they continued to circle around each other would continue indefinitely. This caused many of the spectating students to lose their patience, leaving in droves, while a majority of the teachers also shifted their gazes from Ling Lan to observe the situation at some of the other arenas.

Within the mindspace, Little Four had also become increasingly agitated at the current endless circling. *"Boss, aren't you dizzy at all?"* They've already circled for around fifty to sixty circles, right?

"I'm fine. No dizziness at all." Ling Lan replied, self-mockingly. She was rather helpless to do anything about the current situation. It should be noted that during several of her attacks, she had intentionally exposed some small openings, but unfortunately, Wu Jiong's patience and self-discipline were both excellent, actually managing to resist the temptation to attack.

"Boss, just KO him directly," urged Little Four. His boss could obviously finish this with just the tip of a finger, why did she have to make things so complicated? Little Four really didn't understand what Ling Lan was worrying about.

KO directly? If only it were that easy. Ling Lan threw an angry glare at Little Four, telling him to stop making this sort of useless suggestion.

Ling Lan's distrust made Little Four very angry. His little cheeks immediately puffed up in anger, and his lips were puckered tightly in a deep pout. Huffily, he said, *"Boss, why do you need to fight at his pace? Won't you be able to hit him if you just move faster?"* Little Four knew Ling Lan's abilities very well — her attack speed could go even higher, so if she just raised it by a notch, this detestable punk before her would definitely be unable to dodge.

Ling Lan was stunned for a moment, but then started chuckling wryly. She found that she had really wedged herself into a box — why did she have to target the opponent's weakness to attack? True, she possessed the ability to see the opponent's weakness with one look, allowing her to find the opponent's fatal weakness in the moment of the other's attack to defeat them. But that's not all she possessed. She still had her own strength, speed, and reflexes that were superior to the average person's. It was entirely possible for her to rely on these other things to steamroll her opponent ... this was the true display of strength.

“Little Four, you’re really my good little brother. Thanks!” Ling Lan, who had resolved her dilemma, bestowed a wide smile upon Little Four, warm like the sun in winter, so warm that Little Four’s little heart began pounding wildly, as he basked in this warmth that made people never want to leave.

Little Four felt as if his entire being was suffused with warmth — his puffed up little cheeks deflated, and the corner of his lips twitched upwards involuntarily.

Her problem solved, Ling Lan did not hesitate to go out at full speed, and with a quick stomp of her feet, she used the force of the spring to dash towards Wu Jiong on the opposite side. At the same time, her fisted right hand punched out fiercely at the opponent.

Wu Jiong was startled by this series of actions, but it was just a momentary lapse. He quickly raised up both his hands into a blocking stance, preparing himself to block this powerful hit of Ling Lan’s.

Internally, Wu Jiong was very surprised and confused, because this attack sequence had already been used by Ling Lan at the start of the match, and he had blocked it perfectly then. An attack method that had already proven to be useless ... why did Ling Lan want to use it again?

Wu Jiong couldn’t figure it out, but he very quickly found out why. The same block, the same stance, the same speed ... expecting that he would be able to block it perfectly the same way, Wu Jiong was shocked to find that the fist heading straight for him suddenly — just when it was about 30 centimetres from his face — disappeared.

Yes, the fist that had clearly been right in front of his eyes a moment ago, vanished from sight just like that.

Absurdity! What in the world happened? Even as his mind struggled to comprehend what had happened, Wu Jiong knew that he was in trouble.

The thought had barely surfaced in his mind when he felt his left shoulder being struck by a heavy force. This force sent his body flying backwards uncontrollably, where he then started falling rapidly towards the ground.

“Not good, I’m hit!” The intense pain radiating from his left shoulder made Wu Jiong suck in a cold breath, however, he did not give up. Holding back the pain, he forced himself to twist in mid-air, discharging the force with a somersault to land firmly on the floor. He pressed his right hand to his left shoulder, swiftly checking on his injury.

“Okay, it’s just a muscle injury!” Wu Jiong was relieved. The force behind Ling Lan’s blow hadn’t been too strong, just inflicting a light surface wound, which wouldn’t affect him in his following fights.

However, Wu Jiong only had time to rejoice for a moment — right after he confirmed that he had only received a light wound, Ling Lan’s next attack had arrived.

“This time, I must be able to see the attack!” Wu Jiong was not convinced by that last strike. He thought that his miss was because he had let down his guard a little; after all, he had managed to defend perfectly against that attack several times in the ten moves or so before it. He did not believe that he would make the same mistake again this time with his full focus engaged.

But reality stunned Wu Jiong — this time, he not only did not see Ling Lan's attack movement, even Ling Lan himself disappeared from his sight.

He saw it well — at about a distance of 3 metres away from him, Ling Lan's entire body suddenly disappeared.

Goddammit, could it be that Ling Lan could also turn invisible? Wu Jiong couldn't help but curse internally. Of course, he knew this was impossible, and the reality was that Ling Lan's speed was too fast for his eyes to keep up with. Was this really possible?

The few students who were still watching Ling Lan and Wu Jiong's match couldn't help but also yell out in shock at this time. Because, just like with Wu Jiong, Ling Lan had disappeared from their view. Of course, they could see much better — the split second after Ling Lan disappeared, he reappeared right in front of Wu Jiong, but because he was in a crouch, Wu Jiong did not see Ling Lan below him.

Qi Long was so excited that his entire body was trembling. He clutched at Han Jijyun's hand and said, "Heavens, Boss has become stronger again. This speed ... it's just too goddamn cool."

Hearing this, Luo Lang could only nod vigorously beside him. Both his eyes were trained on the match, unwilling to be distracted, afraid that he would miss an even more spectacular motion.

"Become stronger again?" Han Jijyun was the only one who was doubtful. Ling Lan's performance didn't seem like he had suddenly become stronger, but was more like his strength had been unsealed.

With a "Pow!", Wu Jiong once again flew through the air with a muffled grunt.

"Ling Lan!" Everyone couldn't help but shout, for the crouching Ling Lan had directly thrown an upper kick to send the unprepared Wu Jiong straight up into the sky.

The explosive strength from the legs was much stronger than strength from the arms, and this time, Wu Jiong was hit on his right shoulder. This time, it was no longer just a surface injury — after the initial sharp pain, Wu Jiong could only feel an expanse of numbness in his right shoulder; he could not feel his entire right arm anymore.

Cold sweat broke out over his entire body. What was the condition of his right shoulder? Had his bones been shattered by the kick? Although the Federation had developed regenerative healing fluid, which could speed up the recovery process of wounds, shattered bones were not so easily fixed. An injury like that in the wrong place could affect him for life.

This kick of Ling Lan had looked fierce, but she had actually controlled her strength so that she would not cause long-lasting damage to Wu Jiong. Although she couldn't be certain that there wouldn't be any fractures in the bones, there would definitely be no serious injury such as breaks or shattering of the bones.

"Pow! Pow! Pow!" Ling Lan's attack didn't stop there. Three consecutive meetings between fist and flesh — the airborne Ling Lan no longer gave Wu Jiong any chance of retaliating, directly striking him out of the arena perimeters to fall below the stage. Then, she landed firmly on the arena stage, gaze impassive as she waited for the referee's final declaration.

Perhaps Ling Lan's attack speed had been too quick, or perhaps Ling Lan and Wu Jiong had dithered for too long in the early stages of the fight — whatever the case, the referee teacher responsible for the match actually froze in shock for a full 30 seconds.

The scene was still and silent. No one dared to say a word in the face of Ling Lan's ferocity. His performance before and after were just too different that everyone was in disbelief. Just before, the two combatants were still circling each other endlessly, and now, within the blink of an eye, the outcome was determined? That second-rank was so easily KO-ed? Was Ling Lan just playing around all this while?

Everyone was speechless, unsure how they were supposed to face Ling Lan after this. They bemoaned in their hearts — why did such an aberrant existence like Ling Lan have to appear in their grade this year? He was so strong that they could not even imagine defeating him anymore.

The teacher suddenly woke up and hurried to declare, "This match, Ling Lan advances. Congratulations to Ling Lan for entering the finals!"

The referee teacher's declaration caused Qi Long and the other two to cheer. And then, scattered applause could be heard until the entire arena was filled with the sound of applause. Even some of the upper grade seniors watching the match were also clapping.

Ling Lan was just too strong. After a brief bout of despondency, the first grade children were all convinced by Ling Lan's strength — the ideology of 'survival of the fittest' made them acknowledge Ling Lan's supremacy.

The applause from the upper grade seniors wasn't out of acknowledgement for Ling Lan, but more in admiration of Ling Lan's success in achieving an upset. The probability for a lower-ranking student to win all this way and advance into the finals was actually very, very low, and though it wasn't unheard of in the history of the scout academy, such occurrences were fewer than few. But this year, people were shocked. Because two people managed to achieve upsets at the same time to advance into the finals. Undoubtedly, both Ling Lan and Qi Long had established a new record, a new history, at the Central Scout Academy.

In the dean's office, two people were currently observing the match.

"Old Xu, what do you think?" Smiling, the dean pointed at the cool-faced Ling Lan left standing on the stage.

"Not bad, Ling Xiao truly has a worthy successor now." The man called Old Xu was dressed in a trim military uniform, and the stars on his shoulders and the insignia on his chest told the world that he was a lieutenant general.

Lieutenant General Xu asked pressingly, "Have you arranged an initiate teacher for the child? If you don't have a suitable candidate, I can arrange something."

Chapter 88: Ling Xiao's Legacy?

With a half-smile, the dean looked at Lieutenant General Xu. The teasing glint in his good friend's eyes caused Lieutenant General Xu's face to burn slightly, and he said embarrassedly, "Aren't I just concerned about Ling Xiao's child? So much that I've forgotten this is your territory ... how could you not have made arrangements? I've worried for nothing."

"Being concerned for Ling Xiao's child is a good thing. How about this, why don't you pass me the thing that Ling Xiao left in your care?" The dean's smile was even deeper than before.

Lieutenant General Xu didn't even have to think about it, refusing immediately. "No way. The item that Ling Xiao left with me before he was deployed may very well be the secret behind his ascension to god-class operator. It belongs to the Federation, and to our military."

The dean's smile disappeared. "Ling Xiao left me a message that that item is to be left for his child. Old Xu, don't cross the line. Ling Xiao sacrificed his life for the Federation — we cannot wrong him, and wrong his child."

Lieutenant General Xu's expression turned a little ugly, and he said heavily, "That's why I've been spending so much effort to protect this child, even raising his secrecy level, and finally sending him into your care. Besides, not giving him Ling Xiao's relic is also for his own safety. The legacy of a god-class operator ... is something everyone would go crazy over. That child would not be able to protect it."

"Xu Tingzhu! You goddamn bastard!" The dean slammed his hands on the desk and stood up, no longer able to maintain his composure.

"Ye Yifan, calm down." Lieutenant General Xu glared back just as fiercely. Over this matter, every time they met, they would leave on bad terms.

"Calm down? I am already calm enough, tolerating you for six years. Right now is the time when this child needs guidance for initiation, and which instructor could be better than a god-class operator? That is Ling Xiao's legacy!" said the dean seriously. "This is the right of Ling Xiao's son. He has the right to inherit everything of his father's."

"I did not say that I wouldn't let the child inherit. Once we have deciphered it, we will reproduce a copy for him. He will still be able to obtain everything of Ling Xiao's." Lieutenant General Xu was very angry at his old friend's misunderstanding. He wasn't planning to rob Ling Lan of his rights, but only wished that Ling Xiao's legacy could be circulated around the military, perhaps even becoming standardized. It could be imagined how impactful that would be — the Federation's combat power would certainly get a swift boost, perhaps even becoming a terrifying force powerful enough to be a deterrent for the bordering enemy nations. It should be known that Ling Xiao had been the youngest god-class operator of the Federation who had advanced the fastest.

The dean said mockingly, "It's been six years. Has your military department cracked any bit of it?"

Lieutenant General Xu was silent. After 10 seconds, he replied solemnly, "I believe that, after another few years, we will definitely be able to decode it and obtain Ling Xiao's legacy."

"Stop lying to yourself. You all have no idea what to do with that thing." Although the dean was just the dean of the Central Scout Academy, that didn't mean he was ignorant of all the news and secrets of the internal military.

Having the truth thrown into his face by his old friend, Lieutenant General Xu's expression was a little awkward.

The dean pretended not to notice Lieutenant General Xu's awkwardness and continued to say, "This proves that some activation condition must have been set on that thing by Ling Xiao. Perhaps only his successor can activate it."

Lieutenant General smiled bitterly at these words. In truth, he also knew that it was highly probable that that was the case, but he just couldn't let it go and wanted to try for a little longer. "I'm also doing this for the future of the Federation. If we could just decrypt that thing, even if it doesn't result in another god-class operator for the Federation, it could still help the Federation cultivate a countless number of high-level operators. If our luck is a bit better, even imperial operators are possible."

The dean's tone gentled. "That's why, I have given you six years. If you all had cracked it, I would make a copy for Ling Lan, and consider Ling Xiao's will done. However, you all still have not cracked it, and Ling Xiao's child has now officially entered this academy. At the start of the next six months, he will have the right to enter the virtual world and accept initiate instruction. I have to pass on Ling Xiao's relic to that child so that he is not held back."

Lieutenant General Xu was still noncommittal. "Passing it on to that child, how far can he go? None of the children of a god-class operator have been able to break past their limits to become a high-level operator. Even if we use agents to heavily cultivate them, advancement to ace operator level has already been considered a grand feat. But if the item remains with the military, once it's decrypted, there will be countless aces, even imperials! Old Ye, no matter how you look at it, it's more beneficial in my hands, just give me a little more time, alright?"

With effort, the dean held back the rage within his chest, and said, "This is all based on the assumption that you all will be able to crack it. What if you all cannot crack it within your lifetimes? Or perhaps Ling Xiao has set it so that if it's not his successor, it's impossible to obtain his legacy? Forcefully trying to crack it might trigger it to self-erase via formatting; that way, we won't be able to get anything at all. Not just that, we would also have caused Ling Xiao's child to lose out on obtaining his legacy. We cannot be that selfish."

Lieutenant General Xu was a very tenacious person. Once he had decided on something, he typically would not change his mind easily. Even if everything the dean said was true, he still didn't want to accept the dean's words.

The dean felt rather helpless. He also understood his good friend's personality — more susceptible to persuasion than coercion — so he thought of a compromise. He said, "Old Xu, let's try a different method. Since your military department hasn't been able to crack it so far, then let's put it in the virtual world of the Central Scout Academy. We can allow all the children free access to it, and let the children challenge it. Perhaps then, we might be able to obtain some unexpected rewards. You should know, the way children think is very imaginative and unrestrained, completely beyond what we adults can do.

"Also, hiding this thing among all the other open missions — I believe no one would imagine that this would be Ling Xiao's legacy. Even if Ling Xiao's child really obtains the legacy, there shouldn't be any danger."

Hiding in plain sight, was it? Lieutenant General Xu considered the plan, weighing the potential costs and benefits. Seeing that Lieutenant General Xu was a little persuaded, the dean decided to add more fuel to the fire. He patted Lieutenant General Xu's shoulder and said, "Old Xu, don't forget, these children are truly the future of the Federation. No matter who obtains Ling Xiao's legacy, our Federation will have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

Lieutenant General Xu was finally convinced, but he put forward a request, "That item has to remain under our monitoring."

This way, no matter who obtained the legacy, they would be able to receive the inheritor's information immediately, so that they would be able to seek him out to get him to divulge the contents of the legacy, giving the Federation the means to become stronger.

The dean thought for a moment, and then agreed, but suggested that before anyone managed to crack it, the monitoring staff may not have private contact with the world outside the academy. In other words, before there was any change, they would have to stay put within the academy as instructors and wash their hands of any messy and improper conduct.

Lieutenant General Xu agreed to that in turn. After all, when their monitoring staff entered the Central Scout Academy, it was only reasonable to play by their host's rules.

The two of them agreed on a time to transfer Ling Xiao's legacy, and then Lieutenant General Xu bid farewell and left.

Seeing Lieutenant General Xu get onto a mecha and leave, the dean exhaled a shallow breath, and said softly, "Ling Xiao my boy, this is all I can do. Whether or not he can obtain your legacy will be all up to your son now."

Ling Lan, who had just ended her match, could not know that in the dean's office just a few kilometres away, for the sake of her rights, two old men had gone through a spirited debate. Some parts of it were even laden with the stench of gunpowder ¹, but the dean had managed to win her the chance to obtain the legacy in the end.

Ling Lan got off the arena stage and was immediately surrounded by Qi Long and the other two. Qi Long in fact had just pounced, but was kicked away by the conservative Ling Lan. She was still a virgin maiden, okay? How could she just let any man hug her so easily?

As Wu Jiong's injury was a little severe, he had to lie down in a recovery healing pod for a length of time, so the 3rd and 4th rank determination battle would be delayed by half an hour. Meanwhile, Ling Lan and Qi Long's match would be held after Wu Jiong and Li Yingjie's match.

Ling Lan's group of four was just about to go to the side to rest when, after taking just a few steps, Ling Lan felt that familiar tyrannical suction coming from the learning space.

D*mmmit, here we go again. Cold sweat poured from Ling Lan's forehead as she fought desperately against that suction force.

Right now, she was a little confused — why would this awareness-sucking phenomenon of the learning space appear randomly in the light of day? Previously, it had always only happened when she was about to go to bed at night.

Ling Lan knew she couldn't hold on for too long, so she tugged on Qi Long's arm and said, "Qi Long, I'm not feeling so well. Quick, help me to a recovery pod."

Due to her strong resistance against the suction, Ling Lan's face was extremely pale, causing Qi Long and the others to become very worried.

Han Jijyun indicated for Qi Long to hurry up and help Ling Lan to the recovery pods, and asked concernedly, "Boss Lan, has the acceleration you did earlier caused damage to your body?"

Ling Lan was just cracking her head trying to think of an excuse for her strange condition when Han Jijyun unexpectedly delivered up this perfect excuse to her. She nodded and said, "Yes, that acceleration movement draws on the body's energy, which is why I don't use it normally. But as long as the draw isn't too much, there isn't really a problem. I just need to lie down in a recovery pod for a while to recover."

Ling Lan's reply reassured Qi Long and the others. Qi Long abruptly thought of something most important, and quickly opened his mouth to ask, "Then, for the match with me later, can you make it in time, Boss?"

Ling Lan smiled wryly. She herself had no clue how long those few instructors within the learning space would hold her for this time — it might just be for a few minutes, but it could also be for a day, or even for several days and nights. Unable to say for certain, Ling Lan could only say ambiguously, "This depends on how much energy I have used up this time. If it's just a bit, then I'll be fine after a few minutes, but if it's more, I may not be able to make it to the final match."

Ling Lan's words made Qi Long deflate instantly. He had really been looking forward to fighting a great match with Boss Ling Lan.

Seeing this, Ling Lan said sternly, "Qi Long, regardless of what happens, you must persevere. You must not make our grade one Class-A lose face."

Hearing this, Qi Long was taken aback, unsure what Ling Lan was talking about.

Han Jijyun understood however, and seeing Qi Long's face perplexed face, he hurried to explain, "Boss Lan means that if, in the end, you are the one to represent grade one Class-A to challenge the upper grades, you must not disgrace our Class-A."

Qi Long understood then, and he nodded solemnly to show that he understood. "Don't worry, I'm like a roachie² that can't be killed!"

Although Qi Long wasn't sure what the 'roachie' Ling Lan had mentioned before meant, he really liked how it was described as impossible to beat to death, thinking that the description fit him very well.

Ling Lan couldn't help but laugh, though of course she kept her reason for laughing to herself. However, she hadn't laughed for long before her face paled even more. The force trying to suck Ling Lan's

awareness into the learning space was gradually increasing in intensity, and Ling Lan almost didn't manage to resist it, almost fainting right then.

Seeing Ling Lan's face becoming even paler, Qi Long and the others no longer dared to talk to Ling Lan and affect him even more. Soon, they had rushed to the recovery pods which had been supplied by the combat hall for the students.

Luo Lang hurriedly opened one of the recovery pods, and Qi Long and Han Jijun supported Ling Lan to lie down in it. Ling Lan only had enough time to say a breathy 'thanks', and then she could no longer resist the yet stronger pull and fainted on the spot.

Qi Long saw Ling Lan close his eyes and enter a deep sleep, and then they slowly closed the recovery pod. Seeing the healing fluid envelop Ling Lan, their faces were writ with worry, but for now, all they could do was watch over him. There was nothing they could do to help Ling Lan but wait for him to recover. They only hoped that this time would go by faster.

However, in the end, Ling Lan did not wake up in time, and so was absent for the final match. This was equal to a loss by forfeit.

Qi Long became the grade one Class-A 1st-rank, and also received the right to challenge the upper grade Class-A top rank. This was the cross-grade challenge tournament that all the students were excited about.

The cross-grade challenge tournament would begin tomorrow. Within the combat hall, there would be only one arena. The lowest grade would keep challenging upwards until he lost. Of course, he could also keep winning until he reached the final match, successfully claiming the peak to become the true scout academy number 1.

Still, all the children of grade one Class-A knew that Ling Lan was the true top rank, the undisputed king of grade one Class-A. On this point, even Qi Long himself had no doubts.

Chapter 89: The Mysterious Murals!

When Ling Lan, who had had her consciousness forcefully extracted, opened her eyes once more, she found that she wasn't in any particular instructor's training space, nor was she in the main hall of the learning space where Little Four was at. Instead, she was in an extremely dark and gloomy tunnel.

Ling Lan couldn't help but frown. She wasn't a stranger to tunnels in the mind-space — once, one of Instructor Number Five's twisted experiments had been held in this sort of setting. Of course, that experience definitely could not be called pleasant, so Ling Lan was not a big fan of this sort of surroundings.

Still, Ling Lan was also very clear on the fact that whether she liked it or not, she would have to stay put here. The learning space had never put anything up for negotiation.

Ling Lan waited for a good long while, but no instructor presented themselves. The furrow of her brows deepened — what exactly was going on?

“Hello, is anybody there? Instructor Number One? Instructor Number Five? Instructor Number Nine?” yelled out Ling Lan. She did not want to waste time here on this sort of endless waiting. Remember, on the outside, Qi Long was still waiting to fight a match with her, and she really didn’t want to be a no-show.

The only response Ling Lan received was a gradually fading echo from the tunnel; there was no human response. After some thought, Ling Lan raised her hand to rub at her forehead and said with a helpless tone, “Little Four, stop playing, come out now.”

She thought that this could be a prank by Little Four, but unfortunately, silence was still the only response Ling Lan received. And so Ling Lan was stumped. Could it be that she had guessed wrongly?

Ling Lan’s brows were scrunched up tightly as her gaze swept over her surroundings in hopes of being able to find some clue — if this was a test, the learning space would definitely provide some sort of hint.

The lighting in the tunnel wasn’t very good — she could only see for a distance of about 10 metres. All around her was a thick darkness, just like a black hole capable of devouring everything, so still and quiet that she felt suffocated.

Ling Lan took several slow steps forwards, and it suddenly got even darker. Ling Lan squinted her eyes, trying to get her eyes adapted quicker to the meagre light that was almost darkness. Ling Lan thought that it would be dark all along the tunnel, but unexpectedly, it got subtly brighter right in front of her as she shuffled along, and then she found that two metres ahead, on the wall on her right-hand side, there was a small platform jutting out, with a small oil lamp sitting on it. The lamp was emitting a feeble light, lighting up the area around it for several metres.

“How stingy. Couldn’t they have put out a bigger one? A brighter one?” Ling Lan was a bit disgruntled. As a girl, she really hated the dark.

Ling Lan’s grumbles had just faded when her face went slack in surprise. She had noticed that she was surrounded by thick darkness once again, not a trace of light visible.

“Seems like, this tunnel has a curve to it.” Only that could explain why her sight could be obscured, preventing her from seeing the light of the next oil lamp.

Ling Lan continued to move forwards. When she once again entered the place where the light was the darkest, she saw something from the corner of her eye which made her let out an involuntary cry of surprise. She felt as if the wall at that section was not the same as what she saw earlier — an even flat sheet — but instead had highs and lows as if marked with something.

Could it be that the wall contained some secret? Or perhaps the information of the test? Ling Lan felt a surge of excitement. She quickly retreated back to where the oil lamp was, and with a leap through the air, she plucked down the oil lamp from its platform.

“Looks like there was a reason for setting out oil lamps that can be removed. I actually overlooked that. Luckily my sight is amazing, letting me see things that most people can’t, so I didn’t miss it in the end.” Even as Ling Lan congratulated herself, she became even more cautious. She had sensed that the test set by the learning space this time was not easy — no instructions from the instructors, and also no hints from the system. She even suspected that, if she hadn’t discovered the key point hidden on the

walls, she might very well have gone around in never-ending circles in the tunnel, until she managed to find it — or perhaps, if she never managed to find it, she would be here until she died ...

Ling Lan shook her head vigorously, telling herself to stop scaring herself. She lifted the oil lamp and continued onwards with a hand on the wall. Finally, the uneven section of wall she had noticed revealed itself before her ... it turned out to be a realistic lifelike mural.

Ling Lan lifted the oil lamp high, and rays of light shone over the mural to display it in its entirety before her eyes.

And then, Ling Lan felt a rush of killing intent assault her senses, making her draw in a cold breath. On the mural, corpses littered a wild plain. Their bodies were broken and battered, and on those corpses whose faces were still distinguishable, one expression was vividly portrayed —— terror, a profound terror born from extreme despair.

And in the centre of this plain piled with corpses, a person stood tall. He was looking at everything surrounding him with a smile on his face, as if in admiration, but also as if he were enjoying this lavish feast of bloody carnage before his eyes. At the same time, gripped in his hands, was the head of an infant still in its swaddling clothes. His fingers had already sunk into the infant's flesh, causing countless rivulets of fresh blood to flow down and obscure the infant's face ...

Ling Lan felt a chill penetrate her heart. She could clearly sense the emotions of the ruthless killer in the image. There was no frenzy, nor was there any distortion in his rationality — instead, there was a sort of extreme calm. He was thoroughly enjoying all of this — killing people was just another game — there was no semblance of humanity within him.

Could this person still be considered human? Ling Lan held back her discomfort and continued to walk. After another 10 metres or so, another mural appeared. It was completely different from the previous one. This time, the image was packed with a horde of live people. They were prostrated on the ground, with quite a few of them looking up towards somewhere high above. Although the expressions on their slanted faces were all different, there was one point they all had in common — their eyes were all filled with a zealous reverence. And their focus was at the highest point of the mural. A human being, fashioned like a deity, was holding onto a staff, smiling benevolently down at all of his believers at his feet.

Unsure why, Ling Lan, who should have felt warmed and calmed by this picture, again felt a chill run through her. She couldn't help but feel that that deity's smile carried a type of mockery and contempt; as if within his eyes, all he saw were a multitude of ants.

Ling Lan's brows drew even closer together. What were these murals trying to tell her? Ling Lan knew that the learning space would not give out useless images. If there was no meaning to them, the two walls of the tunnel would be smooth and unblemished, not to mention how concealed the murals were.

Ling Lan was not someone to think herself into knots. Since she couldn't figure it out now, then she would just continue moving onwards to find the answer.

Subsequently, more murals appeared one after another, bringing Ling Lan through demonic realms, fantasy dreamscapes, spiritual planes, and also bestial wildernesses ... all kinds of strange and fascinating worlds presented themselves before Ling Lan one by one. Even as Ling Lan was awed and

stunned by all of them, her confusion grew — what exactly were all these seemingly unrelated murals driving at?

Just like that, Ling Lan skimmed over all these murals one by one. After approximately half an hour, when the countless murals were starting to make Ling Lan's eyes cross and head spin, yet another new mural appeared.

This time, Ling Lan found her steps stopping as she exclaimed loudly in surprise because this mural was completely different from any of the others she had seen previously. It was not depicting the story of any gods or demons, but chronicled the life of a regular human being.

Indeed, it was a long mural split into six panels, and though the images on the six panels were different, they all featured the same protagonist.

In the first panel, he had a confident smile on his face, and his eyes danced with excitement. Carrying his own weapon, a bastard sword, slung over his back, he walked out of his own world. In the picture, behind the protagonist was a golden paddy field — it was harvest season, a peaceful refuge.

In the second panel, he came to a world buffeted by foul winds and bloody rain. He saw hell on earth, as a group of bandits raped and pillaged a random village. Young and filled with a sense of righteousness, he was enraged, drawing out the bastard sword from behind his back to clash with the bandits.

The story was picked up closely in the third panel. At his back, countless youths followed his lead, lifting all kinds of weapons to fight back, finally killing every single one of the bandits. And then, since the village had already been destroyed, the survivors all willingly decided to accompany him on his travels.

In the fourth panel, the group helped many other people who needed similar help. They lifted their weapons to defend themselves and to defend others, and here, the people gathered around the protagonist had increased.

In the fifth panel, two different camps of people were warring with each other. The protagonist was standing in the middle of one of the camps, his bastard sword lifted high above him, pointed at the enemy as he shouted to attack. Countless warriors followed his lead into battle, courageously charging at the enemy.

In the final panel, he had ascended the dragon's throne which represented the right to rule. He was smiling, while the warriors who had followed him faithfully by his side had their arms raised high as they cheered. Joy and excitement were written all over their faces, for they had managed to defeat all the enemies that had threatened them, and established the utopia they had dreamed of ...

"Achieving success and establishing a legacy?" Ling Lan wondered at this strange turn — after all, the previous murals had all depicted stories of spirituality, gods and demons — it was a bit hard to take this sudden lane-shift into a record of the struggles of a human. Ling Lan only paused for a moment; when she finished looking over the entire mural, she chose to continue moving forwards.

She had only taken a few steps when she abruptly stopped, and as if thinking of something, she quickly backtracked to return to that image on the first panel. In short order, she skipped to the sixth panel, and then Ling Lan's initially calm face turned grim in an instant.

“Is this image trying to tell me ... about the corruption of a human heart? Gaining power, but losing one’s true self in the process? Is it worth it or is it not worth it? Or perhaps there is yet some other deeper meaning?” Ling Lan’s brows became even more tightly furrowed. The smile of the protagonist in the first panel was sincere and enthusiastic, and very warm. But by the sixth panel, the same smile had already become fake and superficial, even cold.

Ling Lan stared closely at the protagonist’s smile on the sixth panel, and the more she stared the more strange and unsettled she felt. Perhaps Ling Lan had stared too long, for she felt as if the smile on the protagonist’s face was growing wider and wider, and at the same time, the chill emanating from the depths of his eyes seemed to become ever more palpable. It got to the point where Ling Lan could vaguely sense a surge of killing intent.

Ling Lan’s heart skipped a beat — but just as she thought to jump away from the mural, she found that her body could no longer move.

F*ck! What in the world was happening? Why couldn’t she move?

Right then, Ling Lan noticed that, within the mural, an odd streak of black had appeared on the protagonist’s originally grey-white eyes, and was rapidly expanding to encompass the entire mural. Soon, the mural had become a terrifying vortex of swirling darkness, and unsurprisingly, the immobilised Ling Lan was directly sucked into it.

Chapter 90: Evolution Mission!

Ling Lan could only feel herself tumbling and being tugged every which way within the black vortex, and then she was swiftly sucked into a bottomless black hole. She felt as if she was travelling through the black hole — perhaps it was for only one second, or perhaps a long time had passed, like maybe an hour, or even a day.

Ling Lan’s awareness became somewhat dulled and just as she was blanking out, light flashed before her eyes, and she was spat out from the black vortex.

Ling Lan felt herself falling rapidly. At this time, Ling Lan could see that she had arrived at an unknown small valley and was now hurtling down towards a small grassy hillside.

Ling Lan didn’t know if this patch of grass was potentially dangerous, so she took in a deep breath, and using her developed core strength, she swept her right foot down several times, sending several strong gusts of wind flying down towards the grass. These winds thoroughly ruffled the grass below, sending the wild hares hiding within scattering in fright, with even several ground rodents among them.

The possibility of there being a hidden swamp or traps — none! The possibility of concealed venomous insects and other dangerous pests — infinitely close to zero!

In that split second, Ling Lan determined that the spot she was about to land on was safe, and so she freely allowed her body to fall. Still, she remained cautious, for Ling Lan knew that in an unknown world, there would also be unknown dangers.

After landing safely, Ling Lan carefully observed the surroundings of her landing point. Seeing that there really was no danger, only then did she take the time to take a closer look at the beautiful valley before her.

The view in the valley was breathtaking. On the distant hillsides, countless trees grew — a patch of gold here, a patch of vibrant red there, and verdant greens were everywhere. At the foot of the hills, the thick grass was interspersed with wild flowers in a variety of colours, swaying gracefully in the wind.

There was also a small brook that weaved among the flowering meadow, concealed by the surroundings in some parts while clearly displayed in others. Like this, it had a sort of bashful beauty, a somewhat elusive quality about it. But nearer to her side, the brook suddenly widened considerably, becoming a small river which was neither too deep nor too shallow, and there were even some palm-sized fish frolicking within it.

On the river bank, clusters of multi-coloured wild flowers were scattered across the ground, and as the river water flowed over cobblestones of varying hues, the beauty of the flowers entwined with the radiance of the shimmering water, the splendour of each enhancing the other. Just like that, her eyes were treated to an idyllic portrait of a fairy-tale land, giving Ling Lan the mistaken impression that she had returned to the Earth of her previous life ...

Although back then she had only seen such beautiful scenery online, she still remembered how enchanting those images were.

Now, in this current world, it was already impossible to see this sort of beautiful natural scenery. The more advanced technology was, the more damage was done to the environment. Even though the Federation now had countless inhabitable planets which resembled Earth, it was impossible to find scenery as beautiful as that which had once existed on Earth.

By the brook there was also a small footpath, meandering off into the distance in two directions. This proved that this valley was not uninhabited, otherwise there would not be such a path.

Seeing this, Ling Lan was undoubtedly glad, because this meant that she would be able to find out quickly where she was, or perhaps find out what she was supposed to do next.

Although Ling Lan's entry method this time was rather strange, she had already determined that she must have entered one of the specially designated missions of the learning space. Only when she completed the mission would she be able to return once more to the great hall of the learning space, or perhaps to one of the instructors' training spaces.

In fact, Ling Lan was very suspicious. This hint-less setup, where one had to rely solely on one's own ability in a wild goose chase, was very much like something the insane Instructor Number Five would cook up. Only he would do such an irresponsible thing — throwing her into the mission realm without any notice. If it were Number One or Number Nine, they would definitely meet up with her first to give her some guidelines.

Of course, this was all just Ling Lan's speculation and could not be confirmed. She would have to first finish this mission and return before she could find out for sure. So, the first thing Ling Lan needed to do was find out what her mission was this time, otherwise she wouldn't be able to take the next step. This was currently Ling Lan's biggest problem. It wasn't like before, when the instructors would explain the

mission, or when the system would announce the parameters. This time, it was clear that she had to rely on her own investigation and judgement.

Were those murals a hint for part of the mission? For some reason, Ling Lan just could not put those murals out of her mind — there was just something about them that made her think that they were a key point, but in what way exactly, Ling Lan just could not say.

Since she couldn't glean anything from the murals right now, she would just look for some new clues in this place first.

Her mind made up, Ling Lan started moving. She first looked at the direction of the river flow, and then started walking along the footpath, heading in the direction of the source of the brook. Ling Lan really liked to start from the beginning. That way, she believed that regardless of whether she wanted to search or to solve a problem, the order would be systematic, and it wouldn't be as easy to miss anything.

Just like that, Ling Lan slowly followed the path to wind up those little slopes. She ascended step by step, and after about 30 minutes, when Ling Lan turned a corner along the footpath, she saw a large mountain in the near distance. At a glance, she could see that the path would end abruptly before that mountain.

This way should be a dead end! If she wanted to save time, Ling Lan should just turn back now, and search for clues in the other direction. Brows furrowed, Ling Lan looked towards the mountain, considering whether she should just turn back here.

"Ling Lan, you must remember, there is no such thing as 'almost' in the study of physical skills, and there are definitely no shortcuts. Through hard training, knowing means mastering everything — if not everything is mastered then it means you do not know. There are only these two categories, no other." Instructor Number Nine's clear voice suddenly rang out in Ling Lan's mind in recollection.

Back then, when she was still learning the foundational physical skills, Instructor Number Nine had asked her whether she knew them yet. Being cautious, Ling Lan had replied by saying that she 'almost' knew them.

This answer caused Instructor Number Nine to give her a good long lecture, warning her that she should make sure everything she does is really at 100% before thinking of her next step.

100% confirmation, is it? Ling Lan scratched her head and released a quiet sigh, giving up on the notion of heading back. There shouldn't be a time limit for this mission. In that case, she might as well run to the end and see. Ling Lan knew that if she didn't take the effort to make sure, she would not be at ease.

Ling Lan continued onwards towards the towering mountain, and after approximately half an hour, Ling Lan finally arrived at the base of the mountain.

This mountain had a curve to it, curving inwards and causing an oval plot of flat ground to appear before it. On the plot of land were many trees of varying heights and sizes. Some of the trees were incomparably thick, having already grown here for who knows how many centuries, perhaps even millenniums.

Meanwhile, it had only taken one glance for Ling Lan's eyes to light up, because she had noticed an almost imperceptibly small path winding into the forest. This was all thanks to Number One who had previously made her stay in a primordial deep forest for several months, leading her to learn how to find those very well-hidden yet safe paths, no matter if they were created by wild beasts or herself.

The corners of Ling Lan's lips quirked up into a smile. So it was true that 100% confirmation was needed for anything, otherwise too many chances would have easily slipped by unnoticed.

With a light heart, Ling Lan stepped into the woods. Following that concealed pathway, she walked past this short 30 metres of forested land, and what met her sight was a tiny fissure, so small that it could have been missed, right at the bottom section of the mountain.

This fissure was so thin and narrow that it would have been unnoticeable from a distance. Even at a closer distance, without going through those tall, imposing trees blocking her line of sight, it would have been impossible to see it.

A strand of sky¹, was it?

It truly was extremely concealed — the trick with the line of sight, along with the trap of habitual thinking, would easily cause most people to overlook it. Ling Lan herself had almost given up halfway through, but luckily she had remembered Instructor Number Nine's teachings, which had made her persist in her efforts.

Ling Lan's felt a stirring of emotion; perhaps the hint she needed would be inside this place? Or perhaps the answer?

Ling Lan slowly approached the fissure. Sure enough, it was a strand of sky — the fissure would only allow a person of average build to pass through it. If someone a little plumper would like to go through, they would probably have to make some special preparations before they could do so.

Of course, for Ling Lan, there was no problem at all. Ling Lan's spiritual appearance was currently that of a six year old child. At the very beginning when Ling Lan had first entered the learning space, Ling Lan's spiritual self had yet to merge completely with her current body, so her spiritual avatar had looked like her old self from the previous world for a period of time. But after that, as she grew older and the merge completed successfully, Ling Lan's spiritual avatar had slowly matched up with her outer appearance, so she now looked exactly the same inside the learning space as she did in the outside world.

Ling Lan successfully went through the strand of sky, and unexpectedly, there was another valley within the valley. The first thing she saw was a large lake — it was likely that this lake was the source of the little stream she had followed along the way here, while the water source for the lake must be the snow melt coming from the surrounding mountains reaching up to the sky.

Ling Lan skirted the edges of the lake, which was emitting wisps of cold air, and continued following the path. After walking for another two to three minutes, an expanse of glinting gold came into view, causing Ling Lan to squint involuntarily.

This was a large paddy field, which could be described as stretching as far as the eye could see. When the wind of the valley swept by, a golden wave would roll through the field. Right now was the harvest

season of the valley, and Ling Lan had the sudden urge to rush into the fields and gather up all that bountiful grain ...

Erm, the commoner mentality of her previous world was acting up again, influencing her thoughts and emotions. Ling Lan couldn't help but chuckle at herself.

Just as Ling Lan was about to continue moving on, a thought flashed through her mind. She recalled the mural that had caused her to be sucked into the black hole — in the first panel of that mural, wasn't there a paddy field just like this?

Could it be that she was now within the world on that mural?

This was actually highly probable! Since she had been sucked in by that mural, then it would make complete sense for her to have entered its world. If this deduction was correct, Ling Lan would have to think — what exactly did the learning space want her to do by sending her into this world?

Thinking back on the protagonist's smile in that first panel and in the final panel, about how the two smiles appeared so similar yet conveyed such different meaning, Ling Lan felt as if she were on the edge of an epiphany. Did her mission have something to do with those smiles?

Ling Lan had just thought of this when a mechanical voice rang out from the skies of the valley above her, "Congratulations, you have identified the vital clue. Now assigning the learning space's exclusive mission — seek out your correct evolution pathway!"