

Crossing to the Future, it's Not Easy to Be a Man

Chapter 26: The Exam Begins

It was evident that the physical endurance of the bodies of children in this time period was very high. No matter how angry Luo Lang was, his stance was still tall and steady. The only sign of his building anger was the stormy expression on his face.

Seeing Luo Lang's expression, Ling Lan felt a little bad. After all, she was already over 30 years old if you counted the span of both her lives, which meant she could already be considered a weird auntie of sorts — how could she bully a young child like this?

A little remorsefully, Ling Lan smiled at Luo Lang and said, "I was just joking. Please don't be mad."

Ling Lan's smile startled Luo Lang, and her sudden submissive attitude also threw him for a loop. He stood there gaping, nonplussed, and the other children burst out laughing once again. There was no helping it really, for his bewildered look was just too adorable — even his sister had started giggling softly. She quickly stifled it, however, and lowered her head bashfully, chastising herself mentally for her actions. How could she laugh at her brother who had always watched out for her?

Meanwhile, Ling Lan was having a headache over her reflexive smile. It was so troublesome. After she had accidentally revealed her 'seductive' smile once again, Little Four had gone ballistic, and she now had her hands full trying to calm him down.

Leaving Ling Lan aside, who was busy with the ballistic Little Four, Luo Lang had been shaken out of his stupor by the others' laughter. When he found that he had once again embarrassed himself, two splotches of red flushed over his ivory skin, spreading all the way to the roots of his ears.

Then, he channelled his embarrassment into anger and lunged at Ling ... uh, Ling Lan's side where Qi Long was standing, and pushed him to the ground. Just like that, the two of them began to wrestle as they rolled around on the field.

Qi Long and Luo Lang were all tangled up with one another — Qi Long's friend Han Jiyun did not try to help, only pulling Ling Lan and Han Xuya aside to watch as they fought. Meanwhile, Luo Lang's sister had also silently retreated a few steps out of the way, but she continued to watch her brother with worried eyes.

With some difficulty, Ling Lan finally managed to calm Little Four, only to return to awareness to find that no one was trying to stop the fight. This baffled Ling Lan. In her past world, if any children started to fight, they would be pulled apart as soon as

possible to resolve their problems peacefully. But here, although there were staff members on the field not far from them, they just continued with what they were doing as if nothing was happening — what exactly was going on? Ling Lan felt that her world view was being challenged by this new world's order.

Ling Lan was not someone who could suppress her curiosity. She immediately turned to ask Han Jijyun about the situation, earning yet another appraising gaze from him. However, when he saw that Ling Lan really did not understand what was going on, he was rather stunned. This was pretty basic general knowledge that should have been taught by a father. Had Ling Lan's father not told him about it?

Even though Han Jijyun had his doubts, he still explained to Ling Lan, "This is a habit we've learned since we were little. If we need to resolve a problem with someone, fighting is permitted. However, no matter who wins or loses, the matter is considered closed after the fight."

What a strange way of educating their children ... are they not afraid of encouraging violence? Once again Ling Lan was struck by how different the values and principles of her previous education were compared to the survival of the fittest mentality of this world. For example, no matter the origins of a child – whether he was a commoner, an elite, or a noble – the first ambition of all the children here was to join the military. The second ambition was also to join the military, and the third ambition ... was still to join the military. Because strength was might, and military men were the strongest, especially if they managed to become a mecha operator. Only those whose bodies did not meet the requirements would give up on this dream of the military and reluctantly choose another profession.

Since young, the education Ling Lan received was geared towards preparing her to become a mecha operator, the strongest of the strong. Everything she learned worked towards this goal, while her mum and Chamberlain Ling Qin had never even thought to ask her whether she wanted to be one.

Honestly, she was rather apathetic towards the idea of becoming a mecha operator. She was a girl, after all, with very little interest in fighting. She could never have guessed that she would travel to this warring world where the people were militarised, and, even more unexpectedly, that she would have a mecha learning device as a contracted follower ...

Ling Lan couldn't help but rub her jaw thoughtfully. Could it be that this was fate? Was everything that had happened trying to tell her that she was destined to walk the path of a mecha operator?

Qi Long and Luo Lang were still fighting neck and neck — although Qi Long was actually slightly better in terms of fighting power, Luo Lang had stubborn determination on his side. So, although Luo Lang was slightly disadvantaged, he was still managing to hold his own against Qi Long.

Ling Lan really wanted to know the outcome of their fight, but when she saw that the staff member in charge of calling out the test groups was getting closer and closer to their numbers, she knew that there was no chance the fight would end in time. With some regret, she called out, "It looks like it'll be our turn soon. Are you guys sure it's alright to continue fighting like this?"

The two boys froze at the same time, but Luo Lang reacted faster than Qi Long. He shoved Qi Long aside and scrambled off the ground, and started to fix his clothing and appearance. Although he could no longer revert to his initial pristine princely presence no matter how hard he tried, his proper upbringing would not allow him to face the examiner in such a dishevelled state.

Qi Long was caught unprepared and was sent tumbling twice over by Luo Lang's push. He quickly clambered up as well and said huffily, "Wait till the test is over, let's continue our fight then." He was utterly unconcerned with his mussed up appearance, only swiping at his forehead twice to get rid of some sweat before letting it be.

Naturally, Luo Lang refused to back down as well, so the two agreed that they would determine the true winner after the testing ended.

Oh, such spirited and competitive young children! Ling Lan felt old, for she could not find any sense in their random fight. By this time, Ling Lan had forgotten that she was actually the culprit who instigated Luo Lang's fight with Qi Long.

The testing proceeded rapidly — Qi Long and Luo Lang had barely caught their breath when their group was already being called up by the staff member. The ten people in Ling Lan's party dared not dawdle and quickly ran over.

The ten of them stood on the race track and made their final preparations. Then, an examiner walked over to explain how the testing would go. He asked them to get ready to run from the start line, and explained that they would have to safely arrive at the end line to complete this test. As for scoring, that would depend on how much time they took to complete the course.

As Ling Lan got ready, she did not forget to keep an eye on the group of testees before them. This was a habit she had developed after multiple encounters with Number One — every time Number One appeared, his every action could be a test, so Ling Lan always had to be on her toes, making sure she caught every little hint in his actions and his words. This strict caution had become a part of her basic instincts.

Ling Lan saw the previous group speed off at the examiner's command, and soon she could no longer see their silhouettes ...

"Do you see it?" Han Jijun leaned close and whispered to her. He had also noticed something strange.

“Hn, even though the sun is shining brightly in the sky, there is fog on the track ...” Ling Lan pointed out the problem, which explained why the group before them had disappeared so quickly before their eyes.

“Looks like the track here is under some area-of-effect illusion technology — this test is not as straightforward as it seems.” Han Jijyun was an intelligent boy who had a deep understanding of advanced technology which other kids (like Ling Lan) may not have.

Han Jijyun’s warning made Ling Lan secretly raise her guard.

Very soon, the examiner at the starting line called Ling Lan’s group over. Once he had confirmed they were ready, he gave the command, and they were off.

Qi Long immediately rushed forward at the head of the group, with Luo Lang close on his heels. It seemed like the two of them were determined to make a competition out of this as well.

Ling Lan was third, and Han Jijyun was right behind Ling Lan. This strategic child had the same idea as Ling Lan — they were planning to follow behind Qi Long for now as they observed their surroundings. Meanwhile, the other kids were all following at various paces behind Han Jijyun.

Chapter 27: The True Intention of the Test

They hadn’t run for long when the sunny skies above them turned dark and foreboding. Storm clouds gathered, and thunder rumbled ominously. Right at the front, Qi Long cursed, “Damn our luck! Why did it only start to rain when it’s our turn? Hurry up, everyone, or else it’ll be even harder to run once it really starts raining, and our results will definitely be affected.”

After he finished speaking, Qi Long was just about to speed up when Han Jijyun called out from behind, “Long, don’t speed up. Just keep your current pace.”

Qi Long was confused. He didn’t understand why Han Jijyun wanted to stop him from speeding up; if it really started to rain, they would have to expend much more energy running through the rain, and the rain would affect their speed as well ... Their score in this test was based on how quickly they could arrive at the end point, so shouldn’t they try to cover more ground now before it rained?

Although Qi Long’s mind was full of doubts, one of his strengths was self-awareness. He knew that his blood-sworn brother Han Jijyun was much smarter than him, so much smarter that he could only look on in envy. Since his sworn brother had said so, there

must be something that he missed — it had been proven enough times in the past that it was never wrong to listen to Han Jijyun, so he would put his faith in his brother.

And so Qi Long decisively dismissed his worries, and kept running at his original pace. It had to be said that none of the children in Ling Lan's group were particularly competitive in nature, other than Luo Lang. And although Luo Lang was prideful, he was also an intelligent boy, so when he heard Han Jijyun's advice to Qi Long, he also decided not to speed up, merely keeping pace behind Qi Long.

Among their peers, Han Jijyun's intelligence was publicly acknowledged. Even Luo Lang admired Han Jijyun for his intelligence, but unfortunately, Han Jijyun had befriended that idiot Qi Long before he could get to know him. He was full of regret that he had moved too slowly and felt that it was such a waste — if he had managed to get to Han Jijyun first, Qi Long would never have had a chance.

The other kids also maintained their original pace, keeping close to the group so that they weren't left behind. Anyone who could attend the enrolment tests of the Central Scout Academy of Doha was no idiot — Qi Long and Luo Lang's fight had shown them that the two were much stronger than them, so if the two of them weren't afraid of wasting time, why should they be afraid?

Han Jijyun quickened his steps to catch up to Ling Lan, and jogged by her side. In low tones, he asked, "Ling Lan, what do you think?" Han Jijyun's gut just told him that Ling Lan knew something.

"Didn't you already notice it yourself?" asked back Ling Lan with a wounded gaze. Dammit, this was truly what was meant by heaven-blessed. Han Jijyun was only six years old, but he was already observant enough to discover something wrong with the situation — she felt pitiful in comparison.

She had only noticed the problem thanks to her experience of two lifetimes, as well as the intensive training and trials provided the learning mind-space. This year especially, Ling Lan had been free of any specific training menu or missions, but had been tormented by Number One via all sorts of methods, causing her to view everything with suspicion now. Looking deeper into everything by at least several layers had become her default reaction.

Han Jijyun was oblivious of Ling Lan's hurt little soul, continuing in a stern manner, "Hn, it won't matter whether we speed up or not, what will come will come. Perhaps they want to see how we react under pressure."

"The examiner did not set a clear path for us, I suspect that ... this test might not have a typical finish line," admitted Ling Lan. Han Jijyun's intelligence allowed Ling Lan to speak freely without worry.

She could finally throw off her sheepskin of a child! Hanging out with such a talented child meant that her own talents would seem less freakish as well. Ling Lan was so happy she could cry — these six years of playing a kid hadn't been easy.

Han Jijyun turned thoughtful at Ling Lan's words. After a while, he responded, "Possibly, the test had already begun the moment we stepped onto the field."

"What do you mean?"

"Is this really a field?" Han Jijyun's words jolted Ling Lan into awareness. She thought back to when she first entered the field — that entrance had not at all been like a regular entrance to a field.

"Wait and watch," said Ling Lan and Han Jijyun in almost perfect unison as their eyes met. Since they had already been caught up in the illusion, all they could do was continue and take things as they came.

After that, they had only run a little bit further when it started raining cats and dogs. Ling Lan's party of ten were quickly soaked to the bone, and the rain obscured their vision while turning the earth beneath their feet into mud. The clothes on their body became heavy with rainwater and clung to their bodies, dragging them down. Under these conditions, having run for several thousand metres, lethargy started settling in. The two girls were hit especially hard and had already started to pant.

"This is real water, not an illusion," Ling Lan concluded after paying close attention to the signals her body were sending her. It looked like the setting of this test was using a combination of illusions and real props. There was no doubt that in this space they were occupying, there were sprinklers equipped all over the ceiling overhead ...

Since they already knew that they were walking within a virtual environment within a room, Ling Lan decided to ignore what she could see as she tried to construct an image of the underlying room in her mind.

Admittedly, the virtual field presented to everyone had been nicely done — the racetrack of a field was just a large circular circuit, so even if those caught within the illusion ran multiple laps around the track, they would still never suspect that they were merely within an enclosed room.

Ling Lan's group ran another few thousand metres — although it felt like they had run countless circles around the track, not a single examiner came to inform them about how many laps they had left. This seemingly endless test began to cause the hearts of some of the weaker children to waver. In particular, the two girls' speed had dropped considerably, and they had fallen behind till they were at the very tail end of the group.

The two boys who were related to the girls, Luo Lang and Han Jijyun, merely turned a blind eye to this, however, continuing to run forward at a steady pace.

Seeing this, Ling Lan frowned. Shouldn't they try to help the girls?

Han Jijyun seemed to notice Ling Lan's hesitation, and quickly explained, "To become a proper soldier, one has to rely on one's own strength. Helping her would be harming her instead. On the battlefield, you can't rely on others to survive."

Han Jijyun's words made a lot of sense, and Ling Lan was not a saint who would insist on helping. She was just about to ignore the girls when a thought flashed through her mind, causing her to pause in consideration.

Was this truly just a test of stamina and speed? If that was the case, the objective could just as easily be achieved on a regular field — was it really necessary to use such precious illusion technology to create this virtual environment? Furthermore, why split them into so many groups?

She recalled the marathons she had seen in her previous life, where tens of thousands of people could run together at the same time. Ling Lan had taken note of the width of the race track — it was about 50 metres wide. Even if not everyone could run at the same time, the track could still easily handle up to several hundreds or thousands of people. Wouldn't doing so speed up the testing process and save time?

Perhaps, the test was meant to test something else as well — what was the true intention of the test? Ling Lan knew that the answer to this question was probably the key to this test. If she could figure it out, then she would know how to pass the test.

What other hints had there been in the examiner's speech? Sensing Ling Lan's thoughts, Little Four helpfully provided a replay of what the examiner had said.

Tsk, only revealing what he wanted you to know, while keeping everything else a mystery — as expected of special examiners handpicked from the military forces ...

Wait a minute. Handpicked from the military forces? Military forces? Realisation sparked in Ling Lan's mind — she got it! Since all their examiners were from the military forces, was this in itself a hint? Moreover, a group of ten men was precisely the smallest possible military unit in the military forces!

Chapter 28: The Data of the Ten Children

Ling Lan reigned in her elation, turning to ask Han Jijyun quietly, "What are the requirements to be a qualified soldier?"

Han Jijyun was very surprised by Ling Lan's random question, but still answered seriously, "Passion and loyalty in service of our beloved Chinese Federation, and to

respect, trust, and care for our fellow warriors with a pure heart ...” Han Jijyun recited the oath all soldiers had to swear under the flag of their country when they qualified to become a soldier and put on their uniforms; the oath already included all the qualities required of a soldier.

As she listened to Han Jijyun’s recitation, Ling Lan’s eyes grew brighter and brighter. She then continued asking, “And what are scout academies?”

“Nurseries for future soldiers,” said Han Jijyun without any hesitation or doubt.

The smile on Ling Lan’s lips became even more noticeable. “Then, we shouldn’t lose our pure hearts to respect, trust, and care for our fellow warriors.”

Han Jijyun abruptly came to a realisation, and his eyes brightened up. He finally understood what Ling Lan was hinting at.

“Qi Long, Luo Lang, go help Han Xuya and Luo Chao,” shouted Han Jijyun to the two running at the front.

“Ah ...!” Qi Long almost tripped over his own feet in surprise. Why did they have to help those two girls who were holding them back?

“I’ll explain once the test is over.” Although Han Jijyun agreed with Ling Lan’s assessment, he didn’t want to waste time arguing and so decided not to give Qi Long and Luo Lang an explanation right now.

Naturally, Qi Long listened to Han Jijyun. He gradually lowered his speed, dropping from first place to the last. Seeing this, Luo Lang hesitated for just a moment before following suit. Remember, one of the two girls who needed help was his own biological sister — in contrast, Qi Long had no direct relation to either girl.

Also, while it was true that Luo Lang wanted to beat Qi Long once, he didn’t want to win in this way. The prideful Luo Lang wouldn’t accept this sort of shameful victory.

Undeniably, Qi Long and Luo Lang had the best physical fitness among the ten children. (Ling Lan didn’t count due to her being touched by the gods.) Even though they each took on the burden of another person, their speed was not reduced by much. In no time at all, the two of them had barrelled forward again, once more taking up their positions at the front of the group.

In a particular observation room, the officer who just happened to switch his screen to view room 72 let out a surprised shout. Each officer in the room was in charge of monitoring ten rooms. The officers would switch their individual screens between rooms

every one minute, going through all ten rooms in ten-minute intervals, and this officer had just happened to start viewing the feed from room number 72.

The officer seated right beside him had been focused on his own screen, but couldn't help looking up in surprise at his colleagues' shout. He took a glance at his friend's screen out of curiosity, and when he saw what was happening, he also started to exclaim, "Oh, how interesting!"

Their cries attracted the attention of the superintendent, who walked over with a frigid expression on his face. "What's going on? Why did you both break the command to maintain silence?"

"Sir! We've noticed some promising recruits," hurriedly reported the two officers, saluting the superintendent. There was no chagrin at all in their voices, instead, their tone was matter-of-fact. They knew that they were in the right because there was an overriding command in the military — the discovery of any promising recruits was to be reported immediately ... and that was precisely what they were doing now.

Upon hearing this, the superintendent's expression thawed. He looked at the screen, and with just one glance, his demeanour changed. What he saw on the screen had truly shocked him.

The two officers glanced at each other feeling proud of themselves, but also relieved that the children were still performing brilliantly at this bloody important moment.

Sadly, the screen wasn't cooperative; the superintendent had only observed for a few seconds when the feed switched over to that of another room.

"Wu, switch the feedback to the previous room," ordered the superintendent.

"Yes, Sir!" Officer Wu was the one who was in charge of monitoring Ling Lan's group. He quickly adjusted the feed so that the screen was fixed on the room Ling Lan's group was in.

From the screen, they could see that the two girls, Han Xuya and Luo Chao, who were originally being dragged around by Qi Long and Luo Lang's brutal pace, had now been piggybacked by the two boys. From the looks of it, the two girls had completely depleted their energy and could no longer run on their own.

Meanwhile, behind them, the six remaining children, including Ling Lan, had started running in a rotation, making sure to assist the two children with the weakest stamina. Of course, they also helped each other, giving each other a push or a supporting shoulder when necessary as they ran, so nobody had been left behind.

This current situation was a direct result of Ling Lan and Han Jijyun's decisive actions. If they hadn't reached out first to help the weakest two of their teammates, there would have probably been a few less people in the group by now.

Their actions had sparked some realisation in the other teammates, whom they didn't know as well, so when those teammates saw that they were growing tired, they had actually stepped up and offered to take over and help. Thus, the current situation came to be as seen on the screen.

"Give me the data of these ten children." Even as he marvelled at the sight, the superintendent's brows furrowed. A seed of doubt grew in his heart. This team was altogether too coordinated, causing him to suspect that someone may have abused their authority to manipulate things so that these children had been put into one group on purpose.

Soon enough, the data of Ling Lan's group of ten had been retrieved.

Ling Lan: Son of Major General Ling Xiao, god-class operator of the IN mecha, vice commander of the Seventh Division of the Interstellar Forces. Inheritor of said major general's premium military benefits. Physical Fitness: [S] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-2, Potential: [S] rank.

Qi Long: Son of Colonel Qi Yaoyang, ace pilot of the MT mecha, lead pilot of the Third Division of the Interstellar Forces. Physical Fitness: [S] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-2, Potential: [S] rank.

Luo Lang: Son of Colonel Luo Qifeng, commander of the Third Fleet in the Ninth Division of the Interstellar Forces. Physical Fitness: [S] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-2, Potential: [S] rank.

Han Jijyun: Son of Colonel Han Rong, deputy director of the Federal Central Military Intelligence Agency. Physical Fitness: [A+] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-3, Potential: [S] rank.

Luo Chao: Daughter of Colonel Luo Qifeng, commander of the Third Fleet in the Ninth Division of the Interstellar Forces. Physical Fitness: [B] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-2, Potential: [A] rank.

Han Xuya: Daughter of Major Han Yushao, acting head of the Federal Logistics Base on the Planet of Qiyuan. Physical Fitness: [B] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-2, Potential: [A] rank.

Luo Shaoyun: Commoner. Nephew of Captain Luo Jiguang, commander of the Third Company of the mecha protective task force for mecha operators of the Thirteenth

Division of the Interstellar Forces. Inheritor of said captain's premium military benefits. Physical Fitness: [A] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-1, Potential: [A] rank.

Yuan Youyun: Descendant of the Yuan family of the Planet of Zhong Xing. Physical Fitness: [A] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-1, Potential: [A] rank.

Li Jinghong: Descendant of the Li family of the Planet of Doha. Physical Fitness: [B] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-1, Potential: [B+] rank.

He Chaoyang: Commoner. Adopted son of Captain He Shaoji, deputy captain of the Ninth Fleet Assault forces of the Seventeenth Division of the Interstellar Forces. Inheritor of said captain's premium military benefits. Physical Fitness: [B] rank, Spiritual Power: Tier-1, Potential: [B+] rank.

Taking in this data, the superintendent could clearly see that all the children came from different star systems, and had backgrounds from all walks of life, though over half came from traditional military families. Most importantly, however, even the weakest potential among the children was at [B+] rank. Even if that ranking might not qualify for the special classes, it was more than enough to ensure a spot in the regular classes.

The superintendent looked once more at the first line. Ling Lan's data, in particular, made a surge of emotion rise up within him. The god-class operator of the IN mecha Major General Ling Xiao ... that man was the role model of countless soldiers ... it was such a shame he had died in the death tunnel of a meteor field seven years ago. He could still remember what a shock it was when the news had first been received. The whole Federation had been shaken to its core, and all the military men had been greatly saddened by the tragedy.

For context, it should be noted that there were only 12 god-class IN mecha operators throughout the entire Federation. Each god-class operator was considered a national treasure, and was the representation of a country's might, acting as a deterrent to foreign enemies. And Major General Ling Xiao, in particular, had been the only operator to have ascended to god-class within the past ten years, and he had also been the youngest IN mecha operator.

Back then, everyone had been optimistic, anticipating that Major General Ling Xiao would be able to become the strongest god-class operator among the twelve, with youth as his greatest advantage. Sadly, the tree of his talent grew too high above the canopy 1 — it was toppled by the wind long before he could truly spread out his branches.

Later on, the Federation's investigation had uncovered that the magnetic turbulence within the death tunnel was most likely a sinister plot hatched by an enemy nation, specifically targeting Major General Ling Xiao. Unfortunately, the Federal Intelligence Agency hadn't discovered this in time, and the painful price of their oversight was

twofold — not only had the nation lost the potentially strongest god-class mecha operator of the future, but the two countries had also become bitter enemies, whereby the war between them would not stop till one side was annihilated.

The death of a god-class mecha operator would never be forgiven by the soldiers of the Federation!