

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

### Chapter 29: The Final Lap

The superintendent suppressed his surging emotions, putting his full focus on the performance of the ten children on the screen. Finally, he smiled with satisfaction and said, "End their test and let them out."

The officer in charge of monitoring Ling Lan's group wavered, and asked, "Then how shall we score them?"

The superintendent glared. "Do you need me to teach you something so simple? How much time did they take to complete the course? And how is their condition now?"

The officer's eyes brightened. "Understood, Sir."

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Meanwhile, on Ling Lan's end, the group of ten had been holding out for another few rounds. By now, even the indomitable Qi Long and Luo Lang were starting to tire. Running with another person on your back was worlds apart from running on your own — after just a few rounds, they had begun to feel the doubled strain on their bodies. Initially, they had thought that they would be able to persist for another ten to twenty rounds, but now they weren't so sure about that.

Among the ten children, Ling Lan was definitely the one in the best condition. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she was never tired — because from the moment they had started running, Ling Lan had been circulating her Qi.

Ever since she had tasted its fruits in the strength test, Ling Lan had harboured suspicions that the Qi exercises still had secrets for her to uncover. So, she decided to apply it once again during the running test. Clearly, her decision was a wise one — after running for so long, she was still brimming with energy, and her vital stats remained at the same levels as when she was at rest.

These numbers were all supplied by Little Four. While Ling Lan was marvelling at her discovery, Little Four had shuffled over ... To put it nicely, he wanted to help Ling Lan research the Qi exercises and fulfil his role as a contracted assistant ... but in truth, Little Four was just bored because he had no access to the internet here.

Still, with Little Four's help, Ling Lan very quickly understood the secrets of the Qi exercises. Apparently, circulating Qi could replenish the body's energy as it was being

expended, as well as repair any damage affecting the body's functions, allowing the body to maintain peak condition over long periods of time.

Of course, Little Four also noted that the current situation, where her body was maintaining a stasis between expenditure and recovery, was only possible because Ling Lan was not using much energy right now. If Ling Lan were to carry someone and run, like Qi Long or Luo Lang, full equilibrium would probably be impossible — some energy would still be expended. That said, Little Four encouraged Ling Lan by adding that the amount of energy recovered by the Qi exercises would increase the more she trained and circulated her Qi, to the point that eventually, she may possibly never have to worry about her energy levels ever again. (Of course, this was only a possibility after several decades of training ... but Little Four decided that Ling Lan didn't really need to know that.)

Ling Lan, who was still as sprightly as ever, looked at the sweat streaming from Qi Long and Luo Lang's foreheads as their steps started to slow. She could tell that their stamina was starting to fail, and that they might soon be unable to go on. Ling Lan was unsure whether she should offer to take over and help them — she wanted to, but she was also afraid that she would stand out too much by doing that. If only there was a way for her to help without being noticed ...

Currently, under Little Four's regulation, Ling Lan's outward condition appeared to be similar to that of Han Jijyun's. Both of them were panting hard, and the backs of their shirts were drenched with sweat. After all, she had been helping the weakest boy in their group all this time — although she wasn't piggybacking the boy like Qi Long, carrying part of another's weight was still naturally more tiring than running solo.

A devil and an angel were fighting in Ling Lan's mind as she pondered this dilemma. But before one of them could overpower the other, the outside world had already made Ling Lan's decision for her.

Luo Lang cheered as he pointed towards one side, "I see a sign! One more lap left!"

Luo Lang's words were like a shot of adrenaline to the heart. Some of the children who were on the brink of giving up rallied themselves for a final push.

Ling Lan looked towards where Luo Lang was pointing at, and saw an examiner lifting a display screen, which only had a number one written on it in Arabic numerals. This clearly indicated that they only had one more lap left to go.

Seeing this, Han Jijyun encouraged the group onwards, "Just one more lap left. We need to hold on no matter what. Make sure no one is left behind!"

"Okay!" all the other nine members of the group shouted in response, Ling Lan included. They would get through this final round no matter what.

Han Xuya suddenly inhaled sharply, and yelled, “Qi Long, put me down.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Qi Long in surprise.

“The last round. I can do it.” It was impossible for Han Xuya not to have noticed Qi Long’s fatigue, and she didn’t want Qi Long’s results to be affected because of her. Qi Long was meant for the Special A-class. For this final round, she would run on her own, even if she fainted before she could finish ... she didn’t want to burden Qi Long any longer.

On the other side, Luo Chao was also trying to convince Luo Lang to put her down for mostly the same reason. She didn’t want her brother’s results to be dragged down because of her. The two girls wanted Qi Long and Luo Lang to run at full speed for this final lap so that they could battle it out for the best time.

Han Jijyun stepped in to dissuade them, “It’s already the final lap. If we don’t all make it to the end, then what we’ve been doing so far will all be for nothing. Besides, you all should know what true soldiers do — they never leave a comrade behind!”

Han Jijyun’s words were like a ray of light. Several of the quick-witted children had immediately figured out what he was saying. Han Xuya and Luo Chao, who had initially still wanted to protest, also changed their minds at Han Jijyun’s words. Instead, Han Xuya urged, “Qi Long, pull me quickly, let’s move faster.” Since they had already decided to finish together, then they couldn’t afford to waste even one more second.

And so, the strong pulled the weak in Ling Lan’s group, and just like that, they supported each other as they hastened towards the finish line. At this time, Ling Lan took charge of pulling along the weakest two boys, leaving Han Jijyun free to run on his own. Han Jijyun threw a grateful glance in her direction — Ling Lan’s help was much appreciated. His stamina was almost completely gone; if he still had to pull along another person, he was uncertain if he could actually finish this final lap.

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Outside the virtual environment testing room was an open-air café where more than a few of the examiners were seated, drinking tea and chatting with one another. This test was a long one which would last for at least three to four hours. Naturally, the examiners would not just sit outside the testing room and wait the whole time — most of them would typically order a cup of tea or coffee here to pass the time, and perhaps find a few familiar friends to chat with.

Similarly, the on-site examiner responsible for room 72 was talking to a few close friends. He was just getting comfortable when the communication device on his wrist started beeping.

He tapped the accept button on the device, and with a silver flash, a holographic screen appeared before him. Simultaneously, the image of the officer in charge of monitoring room 72 appeared on the screen.

“Notice, the testees in room 72 are about to complete the test. Please make the necessary preparations.”

The examiner was bewildered. “Complete the test? In less than two hours? Really?” He really could not be blamed for his disbelief, for there had never been a record of this test being completed in less than two hours in all the history of the scout academy tests. The only exceptions were the children who had to be removed early from the room when they fainted out of exhaustion.

However, there was no such notification from his communication device, which was tracking the status of the ten children he was responsible for. None of the dots representing the ten children were red, which indicated unconsciousness, or even yellow, which meant their body had given out on them. All the dots were still green, indicating that they were all still conscious and that their bodies were still capable of going on.

The invigilator of room 72 observed the incredulous face of the on-site examiner, and couldn't help but laugh. He kindly reminded him, “You should hurry, otherwise you won't make it in time. Also, the kids in that group are great kids. You won't be disappointed.”

Without giving the examiner any chance to ask any further questions, the invigilator of room 72 ended the video call. He grinned to himself as he recalled the shocked face of the examiner — coming here to monitor these kids had not been so boring after all.

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The examiner stared blankly at the dark screen before him, speechless. This blasted invigilator — couldn't he have explained more clearly?

The rest of the on-site examiners had also heard their conversation, all of whom were now looking at him in shock. Of course, there were also those who were burning with curiosity, and were just waiting to find out more so they could gossip.

“I've got it. Let me find out what's going on, then I'll come back and tell you guys. I need to go work now.” Pensively, the examiner stood up, calmly grabbing his military cap from the table and putting it on before slowly ambling over to room 72.

Dammit, those children in there had better not disappoint him! The examiner tried to suppress his anticipation ... ha, his previous calm had actually been completely faked.

## Chapter 30: I Order You All To Attack Me!

The café was connected by just one tunnel to a pearly-white, awe-inspiring building of epic proportions right across from it. Its walls, which stretched on endlessly, appeared to be seamless, but they actually contained countless electronic doors hidden from the naked eye. The main door to this virtual reality construct was accessible from this tunnel, and it was open to the professional soldiers of the Federation for virtual simulation training and sparring.

On the other hand, the entrance Ling Lan and the other children had entered from was actually the backdoor of this virtual reality construct. It was connected to the scout academy and appeared to be just a regular field from the outside. This was also why Ling Lan had been so easily fooled — who'd have thought that a scout academy would have access to such advanced virtual technology? From this, one could see how much importance the Federation placed on cultivating talent among the young.

Of course, the convenient access bestowed upon the scout academy was not purely for testing purposes. In the future, the assistance of virtual technology would be invaluable in elevating all the stats of the children.

The examiner walked along the pearly-white wall for a distance. Frankly speaking, without using the signal he had pre-set with his communication device, the examiner himself wouldn't have a clue where room 72 was. Once these electronic doors merged into this endless wall, they could no longer be seen from the surface; as if they had become one with the wall.

The examiner was walking down yet another length of the wall when suddenly, the communication device on his wrist vibrated. He immediately stopped, a smile appearing on his face. It looked like he had found the room.

Almost randomly, he brushed his fingers over the section of wall right in front of where he stood, though it was really with focused intent. Soon enough, his fingertips told him that he had found the correct spot, and he pressed down lightly three times.

The wall reacted rapidly — the spot where the examiner had pressed lit up, and a palm-sized screen emerged from the wall. The screen displayed a password page, with an input keyboard consisting only of the ten Arabic numerals, 0 to 9.

The examiner smiled as his fingers flew across the keyboard. His speed was astounding — his fingers moved so quickly that they appeared to leave blurry trails in the air. It was impossible for any observer to see which numbers he was pressing ... and then there was a loud click, like the sound of a sealed door unlocking. Within the blink of an eye, a doorway had appeared to the left of the examiner.

The examiner strode in, and the door closed behind him, silently blending into the pearly-white wall once again.

The moment the examiner entered room 72, a wide virtual race track came into view. Behind him, neither the door nor the wall could be seen anymore — only a race track, which extended as far as the eye could see, remained. The illusion was so realistic that it was hard to believe that a door and a wall had existed right there just moments ago.

The examiner did not wait for long before ten figures appeared on the distant horizon. Some were running while some were pulled along, some were dragging down others down while some supported others ... but still they staggered forward at a run — no, walk would be more accurate. It looked like the ten children were at the end of their ropes. In the past tests, the children would usually appear one at a time, unlike this group that still appeared organised and managed to arrive at the finish line without losing a single member.

The examiner found himself slightly impressed. Perhaps this was what the monitoring officer had been trying to tell him — they were truly great kids.

When the children saw him, they suddenly perked up and then, as if they had been injected with stimulants, they rapidly stormed towards the examiner like ferocious tigers.

The examiner smiled. The fact that the promise of victory could prompt such a reaction from these kids was a good sign — truly, they had potential. The examiner was very pleased, and his impression of Ling Lan's group improved yet again.

“I see the examiner ...” The exhausted Qi Long caught sight of the examiner when he lifted his head and the welcome sight made him call out in exhilaration. Hearing his call, the other nine children rallied, eyes turning bloodshot, their appearances just like rabid wolves ...

Ah woaaa! Eerily in sync, the ten children let out a ravenous howl and then, just as if they had seen a gourmet dish cross over into their territory, they abruptly exploded with energy, rushing toward the examiner standing in the distance.

They barrelled over the finish line but didn't slow down at all — instead, they actually sped up as they pounced on the waiting examiner.

The charge of the ten children was so aggressive that the examiner was taken aback, but who did they think he was? The examiner was a professional soldier who had lived through largescale galactic battles; he regained his composure within a split second.

“These little rascals!” Facing this sudden attack, the on-site examiner was rather speechless. With a stony expression, without even moving a single step, he slightly twisted his body to the side. And just like that, he completely evaded the children's desperate final attack.

“Darn it, we missed!” Qi Long stumbled face first into the ground and punched the ground in frustration.

Luo Lang, who was not far away from Qi Long, also slumped to the ground with a face full of dissatisfaction. The thing was, just as they were about to give up, Qi Long had suggested a plot that had boosted their waning energy ...

What Qi Long said was that they must take revenge upon the examiner by turning him into a human cushion. That’s right, they would push him to the ground and stack themselves on top of him. This would show the examiners that they were not to be easily bullied!

Alright, so this plot had fanned the festering hatred of the ten children to the max, actually managing to draw out unknown wells of energy from within them, which had allowed them to continue running all the way till the end.

Hatred truly was a formidable force.

As for Ling Lan, she hadn’t cooperated mainly out of hatred. Instead, her mind had drifted to strange places — just thinking about a group of bratty kids pushing down a mature and handsome examiner ... wasn’t this just like some trashy group student-teacher romance? Wasn’t it? Wasn’t it?

Fine, so Ling Lan was a corrupted soul. It was all the fault of her previous life, during which she had read all sorts of lowbrow novels without shame.

The examiner stood watching them with his arms folded before him. With a cold smile, he said, “Oho, I see you still have energy left. Not bad.” The frigid look on his face was like ice, but he was actually ecstatic inside. Hell, this group was just too much like those batches of new soldiers he trained — they had spirit, they had guts, and they could think for themselves. And yet they were only six years old ... how extraordinary. The examiner felt the itch to just grab these ten children straight into his boot camp for special training — they were sure to become great soldiers someday.

Qi Long raised his arms in surrender. “Sir, we are fully beat.”

The examiner scoffed, “If you all want to pass, get up.” Dammit, still being able to speak in such a loud voice when you’re out of energy? Who do you think you’re trying to fool?

Qi Long tsked, but pried himself off the ground anyway. Everyone had worked so hard to complete this test, if they failed simply because they couldn’t stand up at the end, how shameful would that be? Qi Long was deeply influenced by his father, who firmly believed that men should face death standing up.

Qi Long was the first to stand up, and Luo Lang was the second. Even though Luo Lang’s hands and legs were cramping due to exhaustion, he still couldn’t bear losing to

Qi Long. Seeing Qi Long stand, he pushed his body to stand out of sheer unwillingness to lose.

Ling Lan was next, followed by Han Jijyun, Luo Shaoyun, Li Jinghong, and He Chaoyang. They each stood up one by one, in sequence, until the final two, the girls Han Xuya and Luo Chao, were standing as well.

Although they stumbled and fell several times in the process, gracelessly, they all still managed to stand up straight in the end. In their eyes, all one could see was the stubborn persistence for success.

The examiner was pleased. "Not bad, you lot are certainly spirited. Now, I order you all to attack me."

All the children were stunned by this sudden turn of events.

Han Jijyun reacted the fastest. The CPU of his brain spun at high speeds, analysing the intent behind the examiner's words. His expression was serious and solemn as he asked, "Why?"