

Chapter 1061 - A Different Perspective

"Would this kid be kind enough to specially buy a copy of the newspapers for us to read?" The martyred spirits did not believe it. But with the newspaper placed in front of them, Ren Xiaosu's innocent smile made him look like a good person.

It had been a long time since they had properly read a newspaper. The proficiency in dividing up their reading as though they were fighting a battle could finally take a step back today.

Thinking of this, the martyred spirits were actually a little touched.

But before they could start reading, they heard Ren Xiaosu kneel and point at the newspaper on the ground. "Look at this article from Hope Media. The guardian angel of Luoyang City in the report refers to me. That battle was really earth-shattering. It was like the entire city was filled with enemies...

"And look at this one. It reports that I led the 6th Combat Brigade of the Northwest Army in battle against the northern barbarians at Mt. Zuoyun. That battle was also very tough. We used 6,000 people to hold back 72,000 of the enemy's troops. Of course, my wise leadership definitely can't be discounted in that...

"Now, take a look at this interrogation report. It mentions how I avenged someone and upheld justice for them..."

As the martyred spirits read on, they realized that something was off. The news articles were not from today at all. Instead, they had been compiled from many different days of newspapers and put into one copy.

And the common point linking these news articles was that they were all praising Ren Xiaosu!

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Everyone, read up on these newspapers, and you'll understand how reliable I am. Y'all should've also heard of Hope Media before. They're very fair and their reporting can't be wrong. If you follow a wise and mighty commander of the Northwest like me, I guarantee that I'll bring y'all to a place outside the Northwest to wipe out the Magi!"

The martyred spirits nearly vomited when they heard that. "You're not even the Northwest's commander yet. And even if you were, you can forget about trying to dupe us into becoming your private army!"

"Kid, how shameless and narcissistic are you to compile all these news articles praising you?"

"Just give up already!"

"Hurry up and hand over today's newspaper!"

Ren Xiaosu sighed. Why were these spirits so difficult to convince?

Honestly speaking, he was really tempted by the sight of all these martyred spirits. There were simply too many of them. If he had them in his Martyr's Palace, what could possibly stop him?

What was the point of waiting for the Magi to attack Fortress 178? He would probably be able to flatten them all by himself!

What did it mean to have over 200,000 mobile machine gunners that could not be taken down? Not even a god would be a match for him, to say nothing of a sorcerer.

But in the face of this group of martyred spirits, Ren Xiaosu's charm was indeed not enough to convince them.

If it were the soldiers of the 6th Combat Brigade, they would probably have already followed Ren Xiaosu. But the key point was that these spirits had never fought alongside Ren Xiaosu before, so there was no foundation for them to trust him.

"Forget it, I can't force y'all." Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "Do y'all want to read today's newspaper?"

The martyred spirits hooted, "Kid, cut the crap and hand over the newspaper."

"Alright." With that, Ren Xiaosu took out today's newspaper and tore it in half. He took one half with him and left the other half for them to read.

He had torn the newspaper horizontally, so the martyred spirits could only read half of every news article.

"You asshole, get back here!"

"Fuck!"

"How did our Northwest Army get involved with such an asshole..."

As it was still daytime, it was not convenient for Ren Xiaosu to stay too long at the memorial square. After all, it would be quite strange if the residents saw him talking to himself down here.

So he only came here for a while every day to quarrel with the martyred spirits before leaving "half" a copy of the day's newspaper for them and going off.

The martyred spirits were totally speechless. Although they were finally able to enjoy reading the newspapers every day, they might as well not fucking read anything at all!

Moreover, talk of Ren Xiaosu coming to the memorial square every day with newspapers was gradually spreading.

As they passed by the memorial square, the residents would occasionally start discussing, "Ever since the future commander came to Fortress 178, he's been coming here every day to honor the pioneers. It seems like he truly respects the elders a lot."

"That's right, our Northwest's future commander is skilled in combat, is a moral and upright character, and is also sentimental. It's really a blessing to our Northwest that we have him!"

"If the martyrs knew about this in the afterlife, they would definitely be very happy!"

But when the martyred spirits heard the words of these passersby, they felt a stab in their hearts. They roared, "That kid isn't here to honor us at all!"

"He's just trying to spite us!"

"Open your eyes. Y'all need to see his true colors!"

But no matter how hard they roared, the residents of Fortress 178 were destined not to hear their complaints.

Of course, when there was no one around at midnight, the martyred spirits would occasionally talk about other things as well. Commander Li suddenly asked, "Y'all've also read the news articles regarding that kid. How about everyone share their views?"

"The news articles did not specifically mention his military leadership ability, so it shouldn't be that great. However, the report about the Battle of Mt. Zuoyun mentioned that he has someone who's a genius at military leadership. That genius should be his trusted aide."

"Holding back 70,000 enemies for a fortnight with just 6,000 troops, I don't think many commanders in the past could do that either."

"Disregarding other things, just reading that interrogation report shows that kid's combat strength is really impressive. He can be considered the ceiling in our Northwest Army's history."

"That's true. With a commander like that, there won't be any fear of him getting assassinated during a war."

All of a sudden, one of the martyred spirits said, "Have y'all ever thought about what it would be like if he were to die in battle one day and his molar was brought to the memorial square and we couldn't defeat him..."

When he said that, all of the martyred spirits gasped. They had not considered this problem from this perspective before.

Right now, they were all criticizing Ren Xiaosu for being a bad person. When it was his turn to be buried in the memorial square as well, would there be a day of peace for them with how mean he was? That situation was simply unimaginable!

"Although I'm a little indignant about this, I wish that kid a long life and that he dies of natural causes. He had better not die on the battlefield and be memorialized as a martyr."

Under normal circumstances, those who did not die on the battlefield would not have their molars brought here to be buried.

Commander Li asked again, "What do y'all think of his suggestion?"

"Commander Li, are you referring to joining him to go wipe out the Magi?"

"That's right," Commander Li said.

"How does Commander feel?"

Commander Li said, "Although I also want to seek revenge on those sorcerers and let the people in the Northwest live in peace, I think it's better to watch and wait a little longer. After all, once we accept his summons, we'll become his own private army. If he gets too arrogant someday and wants to expand his territory, it won't be in line with the beliefs that our Northwest has always stood for."

"We'll listen to Commander Li's wishes. Let's ignore him for now!"

"Yes, let's keep watching and waiting!"

#### Chapter 1062 - Reading Newspapers Aloud

To the martyred spirits, even though they had quarreled with Ren Xiaosu and were angry with him, they still acknowledged he was the future commander of the Northwest Army. They never denied he represented the future of the Northwest.

So after everyone calmed down from their anger, they seriously considered Ren Xiaosu's suggestion.

But just as Commander Li had said, it would be really difficult to say where the future of the Northwest lay if these more than 200,000-strong martyred army were to become a single person's private army.

Therefore, no one would make such an important decision so hastily.

In the following days, Ren Xiaosu continued coming to the memorial square daily to tear up newspapers. Meanwhile, the martyred spirits continued cursing him angrily as usual.

Many of the stronghold residents were touched by Ren Xiaosu's persistence in honoring the departed spirits. Gradually, some people even followed Ren Xiaosu's example and came to the memorial square every day.

Of course, it was basically just the elderly who had enough free time to do so.

At the beginning, the martyred spirits scolded Ren Xiaosu for being shameless. But later, they realized that as more and more people came to pay their respects each day, their willpower started becoming stronger.

As a matter of fact, they were only able to remain in the world because the Northwesterners held them in their memories. This showed they were directly affected when ordinary people came to pay their respects and commemorate them.

It had only been a short time, so they could tell what the effects were. However, it should at least be an improvement.

Just as Ren Xiaosu was about to continue leading this leisurely life, Xu Xianchu suddenly came to inform Ren Xiaosu that Commander Zhang's matter was handled and that they would set off for the outposts tomorrow.

Ren Xiaosu regretted it a little that he still did not manage to "abduct" the 200,000-odd martyred spirits in the end.

At 6 o'clock the next morning, Zhang Jinglin was waiting for him at the memorial square. Zhang Jinglin had changed into his military uniform and was carrying a field pack as he stood in the thin fog of the morning.

Ren Xiaosu went up to him and said with a smile, "I've never seen Mr. Zhang dressed like this before. What are you carrying in the field pack?"

"Our tour on foot will go on for two months, so I packed some clothes and food for the journey," Zhang Jinglin answered. "You didn't bring anything with you?"

"Don't worry." Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Heading out into the wilderness is no different from going home for me."

"Alright," Zhang Jinglin said with a nod.

"But Mr. Zhang, shouldn't you be bringing some bodyguards with you?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "Aren't you afraid that you'll encounter danger when we head out of the Northwest's territory?"

Zhang Jinglin said calmly, "With the Stronghold Destroyer by my side, what's there to be afraid of?"

"True," Ren Xiaosu said.

The two of them set off from the memorial square. There was no one to see them off, nor did anyone bear witness to all of this.

Only Ren Xiaosu knew the 200,000-odd martyred spirits were staring intently at them as they watched them leave the square.

"By the way," Zhang Jinglin said, "I heard you've been coming to honor the Northwest Army's pioneers at the copper bell every day recently? Why's that?"

Ren Xiaosu turned around and gazed at the memorial square behind him. Then he said in seriousness, "Because I admire the spirit of the pioneers who sacrificed themselves for the Northwest. Mr. Zhang, you also know that I'm a rather selfish person. So I couldn't help but be moved when I heard about their glorious deeds. During this period, I've been coming to talk to them every day. I feel as though they are protecting me by my side. I've had a very fulfilling time and feel really safe knowing what they've done."

Zhang Jinglin was stunned. He did not expect Ren Xiaosu to answer this way. In his impression, Ren Xiaosu did not seem like someone who would be moved by the mention of glorious deeds.

However, he believed this was a good thing. Ever since Ren Xiaosu returned to the Northwest this time, he constantly managed to surprise him.



Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, "How thoughtful of you."

But as Zhang Jinglin was feeling gratified, the entire square was filled with voices inaudible to normal people.

"Ptui!"

"Ptui, ptui, ptui!"

"That kid doesn't even blush when saying something like that in front of us!"

"How shameless!"

"Zhang Jinglin, open your eyes and take a good look. That kid is not a good person at all! He's absolutely evil!"

The martyred spirits suddenly experienced the emotion they felt when listening to storytellers' tales in the past. For example, hearing a story about a treacherous minister pretending to be a loyal servant and trying to plot against the good, the audience all knew the man was a bad guy. However, the protagonist did not. As such, they really wanted to plunge straight into the story and warn the protagonist to get a clear look at the treacherous minister.

As Zhang Jinglin and Ren Xiaosu walked farther and farther away, the martyred spirits became dejected. "Do y'all think that if we get summoned to the Martyr's Palace by that kid we'll be able to beat him up physically? If that's the case, I'm willing to accept his summon!"

"Me too!"

...

The sun rose from the east and shone brightly across the entire Northwest.

When the sun started setting, the afterglow of the evening cast a golden glow over the memorial square like golden feathers carpeting the ground.

At 7 PM, a 13-year-old boy suddenly came to the square with a newspaper in hand. Then he found a place to sit down and started reading the newspaper word for word.

"May 28th: The Wang Consortium's army broke through the Zhou Consortium's northern defensive line and successfully took Stronghold 71, which was abandoned by the Zhou Consortium. Around five PM, the Wang Consortium's army advanced south again, and it is estimated they will arrive at Stronghold 73 by the following day..."

"The reforms introduced in the Northwest have brought about a prosperous scene in the territory. In the past, no one was willing to farm. But now, the lands there have become a treasure trove of resources, and the people are living in peace and contentment..."

The martyred spirits under the copper bell found it a little strange. Why was this little boy suddenly reading a newspaper in the square? What was going on?

But they had no time to think too much about it. Since someone was reading the news to them, they just had to listen.

Surely this was better than all of them rushing to read the newspaper like they were at war, right?

For the next seven days, the little boy came to the memorial square every day. It wasn't until he finished reading the newspaper that he left. The martyred spirits started looking forward to 7 o'clock every evening. In their eyes, the normal-looking little boy was even starting to look very cute.

In the opinion of the martyred spirits, the child was probably the cutest person in the entire Northwest.

But they were all very curious as to why a child would suddenly come and read newspapers to them. Could it be that he was practicing public speaking?

On the seventh day, a middle-aged woman suddenly came to the square. When she saw the child, she asked curiously, "Son, what are you doing here?"

When the little boy saw that his mother had come over, he seemed a little flustered. "N-Nothing much."

"What're you holding in your hand?" The middle-aged woman snatched the newspaper from the child and asked him suspiciously, "Why are you carrying today's newspaper? Where did you get it from? Did you pick it up?"

A copy of Hope Media's newspaper cost two yuan, but the child's monthly allowance was only ten yuan. Therefore, she did not believe her son had bought it himself.

The child hesitated for a moment before replying, "I bought it."

"You bought it? Where'd you get the money from?" The middle-aged woman was stunned.

"The future commander gave me the money." The child explained, "He said that as long as I come over and read aloud the newspaper every day, he'll give me 300 yuan in pocket money each month. If I can persevere every day, he'll give me an additional 1,000 yuan after a year! However, he had some conditions. I can't come over during class time, so I have to wait until school is over and come in the evening. He also requested that I score over 90% in every subject in school. I'll only get that additional 1,000 yuan if I can satisfy his conditions."

The middle-aged woman was stunned. Her house was located right next to the guest house. She owned a small laundry shop there, so the future commander would send his clothes over to be washed every day. During this period, he and her son had gotten acquainted.

But she did not expect the future commander to make this sort of deal with her son before setting off.

The middle-aged woman was stunned for a while. "I was wondering why you've been coming home so late these past few days. I thought you were outside playing. Did the future commander say why he made you do this?"

The child answered, "I also asked him why he wanted me to read newspapers aloud in the memorial square. He said that the martyrs had died to protect our homes, so they have the right to know how prosperous it has become now. He said it was what they deserved."

The middle-aged woman thought for a moment before patting her son's head with a smile. "You could've just told us. Would your father and I have stopped you if that was true? From now on, you can return home for dinner after you finish reading the newspaper every day.. I'll start making dinner an hour later than usual."

#### Chapter 1063 - 178 Outposts

Before this, Ren Xiaosu had never gone anywhere farther west of Fortress 178.

The territory beyond the fortress was not as desolate as he had imagined. As Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin walked through the wilderness, they even saw a lot of people from the Northwest farming and herding.

Zhang Jinglin explained, "The factories all fall within the protection zone of the fortress. When you traveled here from Stronghold 144, you should've noticed those factories. But farming and herding are still more suitable to be done farther out in the Northwest. The purpose of the outposts' placement is not only to inform the fortress in advance to prepare for battle but also to buy time for these laborers to evacuate."

Ren Xiaosu nodded silently. Fortress 178 was built in a unique environment where there were very few places to farm and raise livestock. Therefore, they had to make full use of whatever land they had to carry out these activities.

He suddenly asked, "When did it become the practice for those who were chosen as the next fortress commander to travel to all the outposts?"

"Since a long, long time ago," Zhang Jinglin said peacefully. "It's very tough at the outposts. Some of the soldiers have lived there for many years. In the summer, they get exposed to the sweltering sun, and in the winter, the roads get blocked and resources become scarce. There can be five or six people at the more important outposts, so it doesn't get too lonely there. But there's also some outposts that are only manned by two people, so they have to endure the loneliness while on duty."

Zhang Jinglin continued, "Meanwhile, the fortress commander will, of course, remain comfortable behind the fortress walls. But you need to understand that the 178 outposts bear the most dangerous responsibility in war and the experiences they go through. Just as I had posted you to the Razor Sharp Company, it's only by going to the most dangerous places that you can understand the significance of every decision you'll make. Only those who have risked their lives with everyone else are qualified to be the fortress commander."

As a matter of fact, the reason why Fortress 178 was able to attract Ren Xiaosu's attention was probably because of this humanist culture.

Zhang Jinglin said with a smile, "Moreover, this has a psychological effect. I don't know if you can understand, but hardworking people will subconsciously have a disdain for lazy people. If a fortress commander has been in the Razor Sharp Company and visited all the outposts before, he'll despise the cowardly and lazy bureaucrats from the bottom of his heart. I didn't recognize it at the beginning, but later, I realized if I discovered any commanders who shirked from their duties, I would instinctively say, 'Think about the soldiers at the outposts suffering from loneliness and then think about our comrades who risk their lives on the front lines. Aren't you ashamed of yourself acting this way?'"

"All in all, this is a tradition to make the fortress commander understand what the responsibility of leadership is," Zhang Jinglin said.

Touring the outposts and joining the Razor Sharp Company was a unique inauguration ceremony.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu did not quite understand at the beginning either. Since he was a candidate for the fortress commander's position, what if he had actually died while he was serving in the Razor Sharp Company? After all, in a battle order like the Razor Sharp Company, it would be quite normal if less than 10% of the company survived.

Meanwhile, it would usually take up to two months to tour all the outposts, and the future commander even had to be accompanied by the current commander when doing so. Wouldn't there be a fear that something could go wrong during this time?

But now he realized Fortress 178's tradition was to choose a capable candidate from the most difficult path to shoulder the fate of the entire Northwest.

While Ren Xiaosu was "abducting" the refugees for the Prosperous Northwest 2.0 plan, the Great Hoodwinker had told him about his days when he was serving in an outpost.

The Great Hoodwinker said that when he was stationed at the outpost, his job after waking up was not to stay at the outpost but to bear arms and go out on patrol.

In winter, he would carry a gun as he trekked along the mountain paths for the entire day. He would set off before dawn, and by the time he returned to the outpost, it would already be dark.

His snot would get frozen on his face, and his shoes would get covered with a thin layer of ice. Even his cheeks would turn red from the cold.

While keeping warm in the outpost at night, he did not dare to stay too close to the fireplace as he was afraid his body would bloat if he suddenly warmed himself too quickly.

On the patrol route, his only opportunity to communicate with the outside world was to walk up to a mountain named Tiger Ridge at noon and wave to the sentry on another mountain.

The patrols of the two outposts' guards did not overlap with one another, and the nearest they could meet up at was on these two mountains.

Everyone had a tacit understanding that they would arrive at the peak at noon every day. After that, they would wave their hands at each other and continue on their respective patrol routes.

Regardless of whether it was windy, raining, or snowing, the two patrolling sentries would rush to the peak at noon. Only when they saw the other party was also there would they feel some comfort.

It was not that they had too much time but that they were too lonely.

If the current sentry guard at an outpost was ready to post out at the end of their military service, they would definitely remind the new incoming sentry repeatedly, "You must reach Tiger Ridge at noon every day and wave to your comrade on the other side of the mountain. Because they're waiting for you."

Over the past hundred years, 178 outposts had been built since the establishment of Fortress 178. The 178 outposts were like solitary stars and torches burning bright in the wilderness.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Back then, Mr. Zhang probably did not understand my strength either, right? Weren't you afraid that I would die when you posted me to the Razor Sharp Company?"

Zhang Jinglin said calmly, "I'm only in my early forties, which is still considered quite young for a fortress commander. So even if you had truly died in that war, I should've still had enough time to select the next candidate. Some of the former fortress commanders only found suitable candidates when they were already in their seventies, so I'm quite fortunate."

Ren Xiaosu's eyebrows twitched. "Is it too late for me to run away now?"

"Of course it's too late." Zhang Jinglin laughed and said, "Didn't I say you're not allowed to turn back?"

A lot of people thought Zhang Jinglin was a serious and straightedge person. But Ren Xiaosu had seen what Zhang Jinglin was like while he was living in Stronghold 113's town. He knew the man could become the commander of Fortress 178 because he was also a rogue deep down inside.

...

The first outpost was 80 kilometers northwest of Fortress 178. Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin had estimated they would arrive there in the evening after setting off in the morning.

However, Zhang Jinglin realized that while he was already thoroughly exhausted, Ren Xiaosu was still completely fine.

The practice of touring all the outposts was established to hone the minds of all the fortress commanders. That was why it had to be done on foot.

But the old commander who had set this rule in the past had probably not expected a supernatural being with beastly strength would appear as a candidate for the role of commander. The "honing of the mind" was utterly useless in this case.

Based on Zhang Jinglin's plan, Ren Xiaosu had gone through so many battles in the past few years and killed a lot of people, so he hoped Ren Xiaosu would learn to cool off on this trip and give him a chance to settle his mind.

In the end, Ren Xiaosu seemed totally unaffected, and this hike felt more like a form of training for Zhang Jinglin himself.

By the afternoon, when Zhang Jinglin saw Ren Xiaosu was still full of energy, he could not help but say, "Go and carry a rock!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. "There wasn't a rule like that before, right?"

"There is now," Zhang Jinglin said in seriousness.



"You're obviously annoyed because this seems so easy for me." Ren Xiaosu said with a dark expression, "How can the commander of the Northwest be so petty about things?"

Zhang Jinglin said matter-of-factly, "I'm not being petty. Since this tour on foot is meant to hone the mind of the commander-to-be, it's only natural that you should go through the same hardships the sentries here experience. Think about it. They're not supernatural beings, so do you know how tough it gets for them each day? If I don't make it harder for you, can you really experience what it's like for them?"

Zhang Jinglin continued, "And if you don't experience that, how will you know how tough it is for the sentries here? I'm not asking you to carry a heavier load than you can, I just want you to experience what it's like to live as a normal person again."

"As expected of the fortress commander. You're really good at logic." Ren Xiaosu pursed his lips. "Tell me, which rock do you want me to carry?"

"How much weight can you carry now?" Zhang Jinglin asked.

"50 kilograms?" Ren Xiaosu said.

"Speak the truth!" Zhang Jinglin snapped.

"But I've never tested it out before." After that, Ren Xiaosu went to the side and found a rock about the size of a winter melon before putting it onto his shoulder. "Is this OK?"

"No, you don't look like you're struggling at all!" Zhang Jinglin looked around for a while before he finally found a boulder that was half the height of a person. "This one."

Ren Xiaosu walked over to the boulder and placed it on his back. It wasn't until Zhang Jinglin saw him struggling that he said in satisfaction, "Alright, let's keep advancing!"

But after walking for another two hours, Zhang Jinglin felt like his knees were about to give way. But when he turned around to look at Ren Xiaosu, there was not even a drop of sweat on his forehead.

It was already the beginning of summer, and the days in the Northwest were hot while the nights were cold. Carrying such a large boulder under the hot afternoon sun, how could Ren Xiaosu possibly not sweat if he were truly tired?

Zhang Jinglin asked suspiciously, "Aren't you tired?"

Ren Xiaosu said in agony, "Of course! I'm dead tired!"

"Are you sure?" Zhang Jinglin asked.

"Of course I'm sure!" Ren Xiaosu roared, "Why don't you try carrying a large boulder like this one? If you were the one carrying it, you would be tired as well!"

Zhang Jinglin sighed and said, "Disregarding everything else, I've really got to commend you on your acting."

"What gave it away?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

As soon as Ren Xiaosu was done speaking, he saw Zhang Jinglin climb onto his back.

As such, it turned into a situation where Ren Xiaosu carried the boulder with Zhang Jinglin sitting leisurely on top of it. Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "As the Northwest's commander, why are you always finding ways to slack off like that?"

"This tour is to train you, not me." Zhang Jinglin said nonchalantly, "I'm already quite lenient. My previous commander said his old commander drove while making him walk to all of the outposts."

Ren Xiaosu ranted, "In what way are you more lenient than him? I'd rather you drive!"

Zhang Jinglin glanced at his watch. "Enough, there's only about an hour left until our estimated arrival time. Let's keep going!"

Thus, the two of them resumed their journey with Zhang Jinglin sitting on the boulder and enjoying the scenery. On the undulating hills in the distance, there were sheep grazing, and Zhang Jinglin even saw some occasional yaks passing by a short distance away.

Zhang Jinglin suddenly said, "I've never felt so relaxed when traveling out to places beyond the fortress. I haven't had time to enjoy the scenery like this. But when I think about how this place would be covered in corpses if war breaks out again one day, it really ruins the scenery here for me."

"Haven't you thought of launching an attack on those sorcerers first?" Ren Xiaosu asked. "Wouldn't that solve the problem once and for all?"

"Yes, I've thought about it before." Zhang Jinglin said, "But the enemy's power is too mysterious, so we have some apprehensions about it. Before we understand the strength of our enemy, we can't just gamble with the lives of the Northwest's people we're protecting."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. It was similar to the war between the Pyro Company and the expeditionary army. If they had rashly pursued and launched a counterattack against the barbarians without fully knowing how many troops they had, it would have led to failure on their end.

"I heard from the Great Hoodwinker that they've sent agents to infiltrate their society. Did it work out?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"No," Zhang Jinglin said and shook his head.

"Was it because of the language barrier or because they look different?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"No." Zhang Jinglin said, "They'd already abducted a large number of our compatriots over the past 200 years. In fact, 80% of the people there look no different from us, and they speak the same language as us too. I reckon that when the first group of sorcerers abducted our people to help with their nation's development, they did not expect this to happen either. Of course, we also need to stay vigilant. This situation not only makes it easy for our people to infiltrate their society, but it also means they can do the same to us."

"Then why were we unable to infiltrate their society?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Because we have no way of creating sorcerers." Zhang Jinglin explained, "The Magi's power structure reigns above all in that nation. Moreover, their hierarchy is extremely secretive. As long as you're not a sorcerer, you can't truly understand what powers they wield."

"We still can't figure out their exact numbers, hierarchy, and the source of their powers, nor do we know how to deal with them," Zhang Jinglin continued. "This situation might change if one of our people emerges as a sorcerer, but it's not like we know how they can become one."

"Didn't you find any clues regarding the source of their powers? Do they awaken their powers like us?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"No." Zhang Jinglin said firmly, "Their power comprises an entire set of inheritance which is quite different from relying on luck to awaken one's superpower. Moreover, the sorcerers appeared before the events of The Cataclysm. Actually, they don't have any prejudice against us. It's just that when civilizations rise, there will definitely be a degree of rivalry with other civilizations around them. Furthermore, an advancing society will have great demands for resources. We believe there'll be another war between Fortress 178 and the sorcerer nation sooner or later, because the land they're living on is not as rich as ours."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly turned his head and looked towards the hill in the distance. Zhang Jinglin asked, "What's the matter?"

Ren Xiaosu looked at the two sheep on the hill and said, "I keep getting the feeling that those two sheep are looking at us."

Zhang Jinglin squeezed his shoulder and said with a smile, "It's only two sheep. C'mon, let's keep moving. The soldiers at the outposts are still waiting for our arrival."

"Mhm, I probably thought too much." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "After setting out from the Northwest, I keep getting the feeling that the enemy might be nearby, so I got a little tense."

When their figures disappeared over the horizon, the two sheep grazing on the hill turned around and ran off. No one knew where they were heading.

When a sheepdog saw the two sheep separating from the herd, it wanted to stop them.. But just as the sheepdog was about to move towards them, it retreated as though it saw something terrifying.

## Chapter 1065 - Shepherd

As night fell, the two sheep that had separated from the herd trotted tirelessly even farther northwest.

There would be two sentries manning the outposts, with one guard on duty during the day while the other took over at night. As such, there was no time gap in the patrolling schedule.

However, who would take notice of two sheep in the wilderness?

The two sheep traveled through the night, and it wasn't until early the next morning that they finally made their way past the farthest outpost of the Northwest's territory and arrived at the back of a hill.

A man in a gray cotton robe was waiting there. He stood there quietly and waited. His expression was shrouded under his hood. It seemed as though he were meditating with his eyes closed.

The two sheep looked at him in anticipation. Then, the gray-robed person opened his eyes. He took out a white stone from his loose sleeve and held it in his hand.

He recited a strange incantation, and the two sheep suddenly started morphing into the prone forms of two humanoids. They had black hair and yellow skin, making them look no different from the Central Plains people.

"Speak, what have you discovered?" Gray Robe's voice was deep and husky, and it sounded somewhat rhythmic too.

The two young men said, "I think we encountered someone important from Fortress 178. Although we don't know who he is, he has a personal attendant at his side. Moreover, that servant is extremely strong."

"What makes you say that?" Gray Robe said calmly, "Explain in detail."

As he spoke, Gray Robe held the stone firmly in his hand. It seemed like it had an extraordinary significance to him.

The two men in front of him said, "That servant could carry a large boulder on his back and move around with his master sitting on top."

"A large boulder?"

"About half the height of a person." The two servants looked at the stone in the sorcerer's hand in fear, seemingly in awe of it.

The sorcerer wondered, "Why was he carrying a boulder on his back?"

"We're not sure. We didn't dare approach too close. That servant seemed like he was really sharp. We nearly got discovered when we took another glance at him," one of the servants explained. "We guess he might have been made to carry the boulder by his master as punishment."

"That's possible." The sorcerer nodded. "But they can't be that important since they aren't followed by any other subordinates, so they won't be worth my effort. Y'all can go back now. Remember not to expose yourselves."

However, one of the servants hurriedly said, "My lord, we've already been here for two years. It's really not easy to spot a person of interest coming out of that fortress. Please don't miss this opportunity. We can guarantee you'll find what you're seeking!"

As a matter of fact, these two servants were really miserable. Never mind that they had been sent here undercover, assuming the form of sheep for two years, they even got sheared multiple times for their wool while they were blending in among the herdsman's livestock.

If they were only humiliated and had their wool sheared, that would have been fine. What made it even harder was that there was the risk of getting slaughtered.

What were sheep raised for? To be eaten, of course.

Now that the sorcerer wanted them to go back undercover, how could they possibly take it?

It seemed like the sorcerer had noticed what they were thinking. He smiled ambiguously at them and said, "When the two of you wanted to become my apprentices, I would've rejected you both if you hadn't been so persistent. An apprentice should behave like one. It's too late to regret things now."

One of the servants hurriedly said, "We have no intention of backing out. My lord, think about it. Even if you turn us into sheep again, we can't get anywhere near the Alliance of Strongholds. You also said the thing you're looking for is in a place several hundred kilometers southeast of Fortress 178. Even if we get turned back into sheep, we can't get there. You might as well capture that important figure and question him instead. Who knows, he might just know something about it."

The other servant said, "And even if they don't know where that thing you're looking for is, that servant is blessed with great strength. If you take him in as a gladiator, you'll definitely stand out at the extravaganza next year."

The sorcerer closed his eyes and pondered. Looking for that thing was as good as searching for a needle in a haystack. Actually, he had not harbored much hope of finding it.

However, the sorcerer was very tempted by the mention of the gladiator possibility.

A servant blessed with great strength? Being a sorcerer who was physically weak, he could really do with an assistant like him.

After a long silence, the sorcerer said, "You two may go back now and help me find them. After the issue here is dealt with, I'll allow the two of you to enter my Sorcerer's Tower to start your apprenticeship."

With that, the two young men in front of him were turned back into sheep. And the violet sigil on the white stone pulsed.

The two sheep looked at each other and ran back towards Fortress 178, bearing down on the morning sun.

...

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin had already woken up. Rather than sleeping in, they personally began to make breakfast for the two sentries at Outpost No. 7.

Zhang Jinglin put on an apron and a pair of protective sleeves with a sense of familiarity while Ren Xiaosu started cutting the vegetables. However, there were not many varieties of vegetables at the outpost other than radish and cabbage.

The two sentries stood outside the kitchen and said uneasily, "Commander Zhang, Future Commander, why don't you let us make breakfast instead? How can we let the two of you cook for us?"

There was a telephone at the outpost, so they had already received the notification yesterday afternoon that the fortress commander and future commander were coming.

But they did not expect the future commander and fortress commander to actually make breakfast for them as soon as they woke up. This left them a little flustered.

Zhang Jinglin comforted them with a smile, "What are you two so nervous about? You two have been stationed here all this time, so it's no big deal for the two of us who've remained comfortable behind the



fortress walls to cook you a meal. It's been hard on you guys. You've only been getting radishes and cabbages to eat in this harsh environment, so I feel like we can do something better for you."

The two sentries hurriedly replied, "No, no, it's good enough to have fresh vegetables delivered to us regularly. Why don't you let us cook instead?"

"Why? Are you worried that our cooking sucks?" Zhang Jinglin joked. "Don't worry, our culinary skills are very good."

Ren Xiaosu skillfully washed, plucked, and prepared the vegetables. Then he revealed a pork hock in front of the sentries and Zhang Jinglin as though he were performing magic.

Zhang Jinglin had heard before that Ren Xiaosu possessed a mysterious power like this, but this was the first time he had seen it for himself.

"Don't look at me like that." Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "Ever since I knew I was coming to tour the outposts, I prepared some pork in advance for the sentries. I even brought along two pairs of thick socks for everyone as a gift."

Zhang Jinglin said with a smile, "Oh right, Yunsu is your business, and you're probably one of the richest people in the Northwest right now. But since you have so much money, why are you only giving out two pairs of socks? Isn't that a little stingy?"

Ren Xiaosu rolled his eyes. "You're the Northwest's commander. Surely you're not eyeing my small bit of money, right?"

While having breakfast, the two sentries' eyes reddened as they drank their porridge.

When they saw Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin turning to look at them, they quickly wiped away their tears. "Commander Zhang, we're fine. We're just very touched that the two of you came to visit us."

These sentries had been through the harshest training and had been stationed in the harshest environment for several years.. But actually, they were also just normal people, so they would also feel vulnerable and homesick sometimes.

#### Chapter 1066 - Fortress 178's Flag

The outpost was situated in the undulating mountains. Zhang Jinglin and Ren Xiaosu followed the sentry and walked along the patrol route. As they stood on a mountain peak along the way, they got a sense of magnificence.

The sentry said to the two of them, "Commander, Future Commander, I can only see you two off to here. Follow the mountain path that I pointed out for 30 kilometers, and you'll reach the next outpost."

Zhang Jinglin and Ren Xiaosu respectively shook hands with the sentry and said, "It's been tough on you."

The sentry smiled and said, "It's nothing."

Zhang Jinglin patted the young sentry on the shoulder and said, "How can it not be tough?"

After that, they parted ways.

When they reached the base of the mountain, Zhang Jinglin sighed and said to Ren Xiaosu, "If conditions allowed it, I would've liked to have spent a few more days with them. Y'know, every outpost here has a telephone line that connects back to the fortress headquarters. At the beginning, the soldiers at the outposts would always call back when it got too lonely. They would even purposely call back to report

that a sheep was lost. The sheep would go missing in the morning and be found by the afternoon, but they never got tired of reporting such incidents."

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. He knew some of the larger outposts here would rear a few cows and sheep. However, the livestock were not to be slaughtered and were considered the property of Fortress 178. The soldiers would only use them to get milk for consumption.

Zhang Jinglin continued, "Although this can dispel the sense of loneliness among the soldiers, we can't afford to be so casual in the face of war. If the landlines were kept occupied and intel was not delivered in time, it could end up becoming troublesome. So we requested they not make such calls anymore. After that, the fortress stipulated that if there were no signs of the enemy, each outpost could only make a call back to the fortress at a scheduled time each week. The soldiers at the outposts also constantly look forward to those days and take turns to make calls back to report.

"There's operators at the fortress who're in charge of answering calls from the outposts, and there's both men and women working among them. To the sentries, if they encounter a female operator, they count themselves really lucky. But it doesn't matter even if their calls are answered by a man. They can still chat for a full hour..."

Ren Xiaosu listened quietly. During this period, he had heard about many things from the Great Hoodwinker and Zhang Jinglin.

But what left the deepest impression on him was the loneliness these sentries felt.

Ren Xiaosu spun around and saw the sentry who had come to send them off was still standing at the mountain peak and saluting them. His posture was ramrod straight.

"They're the flags of Fortress 178. As long as they're still here, this northwestern territory will remain Fortress 178's land," Zhang Jinglin said.

"They're flying the flag of the Northwest by sacrificing the best times of their life?" Ren Xiaosu said.

Zhang Jinglin sighed and said, "They're all such great youths. If it weren't for the sake of protecting their homeland, who would be willing to come to a place like this?"

With that, Zhang Jinglin and Ren Xiaosu saluted back at the sentry before turning around and continuing on their way.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly said, "I have some ideas about the Prosperous Northwest 3.0 plan, but I haven't worked out the details yet. I'll let you know when I've thought of it."

"Sure." Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, "Your 1.0 and 2.0 plans were very surprising, so I'm looking forward to your 3.0 plan."

The scenery in the Northwest was different from that in the Central Plains, because every inch of land here exuded a vast and lofty aura.

Sometimes, dark clouds would drift by in the sky. The clouds would be very far away a minute prior, but a moment later, they would be floating overhead. Then a huge ray of light penetrated the dark clouds, making it look like a huge hole had appeared in the sky.

Sometimes, fiery crimson clouds that looked like fish scales appeared in the twilight sky, creating a magnificent oil painting. The colors were absolutely enchanting to see.

Such strange sights were rarely seen in the Central Plains.

Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin had not ventured too deep into the wilderness yet. Therefore, they could still occasionally see flocks of sheep raised by the herdsman. They could also see the herdsman riding on their horses galloping past in the distance.

Ren Xiaosu said, "The Great Hoodwinker told me a story that circulated in the Northwest Army. He said that there used to be a sentry who did not have anything to eat during one winter as the mountain got sealed off by a blizzard, making supplies impossible to transport in. As such, he traveled for over 40 kilometers on foot and found a herdsman's house to ask for some food. In the end, the herdsman's youngest daughter took a fancy to the sentry, and he said that he had to marry her before he would give him something to eat. As a result, the sentry had no choice but to comply."

Zhang Jinglin's lips curled upwards slightly. He probably had heard this story too.

Ren Xiaosu continued, "After the Great Hoodwinker heard that story, he volunteered to become a sentry. But when he arrived at the outpost, he realized that the fucking herdsmen were all male, and their families were all living in the fortress. That story was a lie!"

Zhang Jinglin belly laughed and said, "That story was fabricated by the old commander to get everyone to be sentries!"

"How evil!" Ren Xiaosu also started laughing. "But the Great Hoodwinker also said later that he regretted the five years after volunteering to be a sentry. But if it weren't for those five years, he would surely have regretted it for the rest of his life."

Ren Xiaosu seemed to be looking around for something when he saw a herd of sheep.

Zhang Jinglin asked, "What are you searching for?"

"I'm looking for those two sheep that I saw yesterday." Ren Xiaosu said, "I didn't see them following us again yesterday, but I somehow feel like there's something wrong with them."

However, Ren Xiaosu could not find them even after looking for a long time.

It was mainly because there were several hundred sheep scattered across the grassy slope. As the sheep all looked similar, it was very difficult to differentiate them.

Ren Xiaosu picked up the large boulder again, upon which Zhang Jinglin quickly sat again. Then he continued to admire the beautiful scenery leisurely.

After they disappeared over a small hill, two sheep suddenly broke away from the herd and chased after them.

The two sheep looked at each other with lingering fear in their hearts.

Earlier, they were trembling when Ren Xiaosu searched for them with his trenchant gaze. However, they could not figure out why that servant had such sharp perception.

The two sheep trotted along and continued keeping watch around them. Although their legs were short, they were able to run rather quickly.

But when they went over the hill Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin had disappeared over, they were immediately greeted by Ren Xiaosu staring down at them with a smile.

"Surprised? Shocked?" Ren Xiaosu chuckled.

The two sheep were shocked and immediately lowered their heads and started grazing. After eating a few mouthfuls of grass, they even raised their heads and bleated, giving a look of innocence to Ren Xiaosu.

But Ren Xiaosu did not care. He strode forward at lightning speed and grabbed one of the sheep's legs. The sheep that was caught struggled hard, but no matter how hard it tried to break away, it could not free itself.

When the other sheep saw the situation was not looking good, it turned around and ran away. Ren Xiaosu did not go after it. Instead, he smiled at the sheep he had caught and said, "You've walked right into our trap!"

Ren Xiaosu then punched the sheep in the head and knocked it unconscious.

Before the sheep fainted, it used its remaining consciousness to pray it had better not wake up in a pot.

Ren Xiaosu carried the sheep and walked towards the next outpost. Along the way, he said to Zhang Jinglin, "See, didn't I say that there was something strange about those two sheep? Would any honest sheep follow us around like that? Sheep that follow us around can't possibly be honest!"

Zhang Jinglin wondered, "Why does it sound a little wrong to me? Are you saying we're not honest people?"

"Ahem, no," Ren Xiaosu said.

Actually, the two of them had realized there was something off about the sheep last night. But at that time, Zhang Jinglin squeezed Ren Xiaosu's shoulder and signaled him not to be alarmed.

Then Zhang Jinglin had Fortress 178 inform the various outposts to watch out for any suspicious people appearing in their vicinity.

In the end, the outposts did not discover any suspicious people. Instead, they discovered two suspicious-looking sheep.

Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin speculated that these might be the spies of the Magi. Therefore, they planned to capture them for research.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not capture both sheep and allowed one to get away instead.

Zhang Jinglin asked, "Are you planning to lure the opponent out by letting one sheep escape?"

"Mr. Zhang is right." Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Since the other party is hiding outside the surveillance perimeter of our outposts, it's not easy for us to find them. In that case, let's see if we can get them to come and look for us instead."

The two of them headed straight for the nearest outpost. When the sentry saw that Ren Xiaosu had even brought a sheep, he was moved. "We're already very grateful that Future Commander and Fortress Commander came to visit us. There's no need to bring a sheep as well. What a large sheep! The two of us can't finish it."

Ren Xiaosu was amused. "You can't eat this, but I can still prepare some mutton for you two."

With that, Ren Xiaosu took out a few gold nuggets and handed them to the sentries. He told them to go and buy another sheep from the herdsmen nearby, even specifically emphasizing that it must be a ewe.

"Remember, from now on, don't address us as Commander Zhang and Future Commander anymore," Ren Xiaosu reminded them. "Just use Mr. Zhang and Ren Xiaosu when you're addressing us."

The sentries looked at each other but did not ask why. Meanwhile, Zhang Jinglin seemed to have figured out something. "Are you worried the sheep can transmit information?"

"That's right. Liuyuan also has a supernatural being by his side who can control birds of prey. That hawk can transmit what it sees and hears to the person wielding the power." Ren Xiaosu said, "After all, our statuses are a little sensitive. If a large number of sorcerers have already gathered outside the surveillance perimeter of our outposts and discovered our identities through these sheep, I'm afraid that they'll come at us very fiercely."

"Mhm, that makes sense." Zhang Jinglin nodded.

Zhang Jinglin was much more accomplished in terms of knowledge and military command. But when it came to skirmishes between supernatural beings and the sense of wariness in the wilderness, Zhang Jinglin was far inferior to Ren Xiaosu. This could be considered an expertise.

After all, if it weren't for Ren Xiaosu, they wouldn't have discovered that two sheep had been watching them for so long. Such a situation might even sound quite unbelievable if it were related to other people.

When the sentry returned with the ewe, Ren Xiaosu poured a basin of cold water over the captured sheep's head.



The sheep shuddered and let out a baa before continuing to play dead.

Ren Xiaosu chuckled. He said to the sentry at the side, "Scrub the cauldron in the kitchen. I think this sheep might've suffered from heat stroke. Let's cook and eat it."

When the sheep heard this, it immediately bleated and fainted. This time, it fainted for real.

Ten minutes later, it slowly regained consciousness again. At this moment, it could even hear the crackling of burning firewood in the kitchen.

It stood up and looked at Ren Xiaosu in fear.

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu was unsure of what this sheep was. Was it someone's superpower? Or could it be something else?

Meanwhile, the sheep was not sure if Ren Xiaosu had discovered its identity or if he just wanted to have some mutton. In any case, both parties were still at the probing stage.

The sheep saw Ren Xiaosu turn around and say to Zhang Jinglin, "Mr. Zhang, head into the room first and get some rest. I'll mentally prepare this sheep."

When the sheep heard that, it started panicking. Mental preparation? How civilized was this guy to mentally prepare it before slaughtering and eating it?

However, it heard Ren Xiaosu addressing Zhang Jinglin as Mr. Zhang and asking him to get some rest in the room. This was quite in line with its suspicions that the two people had a master-servant relationship.

Ren Xiaosu asked the sheep, "Just what are you really?"

"Baa?"

"This will be hard to overcome with a language barrier." Ren Xiaosu scratched his head.

Then the sheep saw Ren Xiaosu pull out a handful of grass from the side of the outpost. However, he did not feed it to the sheep directly. Instead, he took out a small vial of black medicine from his storage space and applied it on the grass before bringing it close to the sheep's mouth.

The sheep did not even know what that black substance on the grass was, so how could it eat it?

But before it could run away, Ren Xiaosu grabbed it by the neck and stuffed the grass into its mouth.

First of all, Ren Xiaosu was sure there was something odd about the sheep. Now, all he needed to find out was whether it was controlled by someone or if it was self-aware.

Ren Xiaosu locked the ram up with the ewe. He was starting to pant heavily, but he still kept his distance from the ewe.

The ram felt a fire burning within his body. Unknowingly, the way he looked at the ewe had changed. However, his rationality did not allow it to do such a terrifying thing.

But even as he tried to avoid that, the ewe still came closer to him upon sensing the breath coming out of his nostrils.

The sorcerer's servant was nearly driven to despair. He recalled the young servant's smile and wondered how this was something a fucking human could do.

At the last moment, just before the ewe closed in on the ram, Ren Xiaosu took him out and said to Zhang Jinglin, "Mr. Zhang, I would guess that this sheep is a human. He probably doesn't have a way to turn back into his human form."

Zhang Jinglin asked, "How do you know that?"

"I fed him some medicine. If he were a sheep to begin with, he would've already given in to his urges by now. It should be his willpower as a human that made him restrain himself." Ren Xiaosu chuckled.

Zhang Jinglin pondered this for a moment. Although Ren Xiaosu's deduction was a little crude and simple, it did make some sense.

But Ren Xiaosu suddenly frowned. He said to the two sentries, "You two, take Mr. Zhang and leave. Now!"

"What happened?" Zhang Jinglin wondered.

"I've discovered a strange, gray-robed man approaching us quickly. Didn't we say that we wanted to catch a big fish? It seems like we've caught it." Ren Xiaosu turned away from the sheep and said, "But y'all had better leave first in case you get injured by the battle. Y'all can come back again in eight hours. At that time, no matter who might come here, the battle will definitely be over."

Zhang Jinglin gazed deep into Ren Xiaosu's eyes before turning around to leave.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "Aren't you going to say 'stay safe' or something? You're gonna leave just like that?"

Zhang Jinglin said without turning around, "It's not like I can help much!"

The sheep thoughtfully watched Zhang Jinglin's figure recede.

Ren Xiaosu was able to discover the uninvited guest because he had already sent "Old Xu" out. Moreover, he realized the gray-robed person's counter reconnaissance measures were actually not that great. He did not discover Old Xu's presence even after being followed all the way here.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu would not underestimate him either. The moment he attacked, Ren Xiaosu would go all out against him.

The enemy was only 500 meters away from the outpost. When the sheep saw Zhang Jinglin retreating and leaving Ren Xiaosu behind to cover him, he roughly realized the sorcerer must have arrived.

He was no longer afraid. Instead, he started sizing up the young man in front of him with great interest.

The young man was not old and should only be around 18 to 19 years of age. Although his physique was not ridiculously muscular, he still possessed a great deal of strength.

When Ren Xiaosu grabbed him, he really did not have the strength to resist. The other party's hands and arms were as strong as steel.

However, he still wouldn't be a match for the sorcerer if all he had was strength.

Fortress 178 and the sorcerer nation still did not understand each other at the moment. If the sorcerers and their apprentices knew of Ren Xiaosu's existence, they could probably not remain as calm.

But the sheep apprentice was more concerned about something else right now. Like, when would the medicine's effect subside?

The human and the sheep stood at the outpost's entrance like everything was fine. Ren Xiaosu could already see the gray figure approaching quickly from the top of the mountain.

Based on Old Xu's observation, the other party did not rely on his physical strength to move at that speed. Instead, he depended on some kind of strange power to reduce his weight so he could levitate slightly above the ground and move forward.

Ren Xiaosu had to admit it was just as the Great Hoodwinker had told him. The methods the sorcerers employed were indeed very strange and varied.

He stood at the entrance of the outpost and quietly sized up the other party. Meanwhile, the other party was also quietly sizing him up from under his gray hood.

When the sorcerer got closer, Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt his body get heavier and heavier. It was as though the gravity around him had become stronger.

He looked calmly at the other party and saw the sorcerer was holding a white stone in his hand. From the gap between his thumb and index finger, Ren Xiaosu could make out... a glowing violet eye.

Wait, why did this violet eye look so familiar?

He checked out the third weapon in his mind palace. The violet eye on the black stone was clearly the same as the one in the other party's hands!

The gravitational force exerted on him by the sorcerer at this moment should be some kind of strange legacy power, and if the other party wanted to use this power, he had to rely on the stone in his hand!

Otherwise, the other party would not be holding a rock for no reason.

In just an instant, Ren Xiaosu figured out a lot of things. It was no wonder his third weapon was a rock. He had been wondering how a rock could be considered a weapon. He had wondered if it was to be used as a concealed weapon to attack others.

Only now did he realize the stone was a sorcerer's weapon.

Thus, other related clues also began to make sense. The Proficiency Stones in the palace's vending machine must also be related to the magi!

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu started to become excited. However, he could not think too deeply about this right now. As the pressure on him increased, Ren Xiaosu's expression turned grim.

However, Ren Xiaosu found it a little strange. The other party was only about ten meters away from him, and at this distance, Ren Xiaosu could supposedly kill him very easily.

Moreover, Old Xu had already climbed up the slope behind the other party and was lying in ambush there. With Old Xu's speed, it would probably not even take a second for it to stab the black saber into the back of this sorcerer.

Seeing that the other party was wide open, he clearly appeared to Ren Xiaosu to be a naïve fool. Wasn't he supposed to be a legendary sorcerer with impressive combat strength? Why was he so stupid then?

Wait, it had already been 17 years since the war between Fortress 178 and the nation of sorcerers. 17 years ago, there were no powerful individuals like superhumans. Although there were the Riders, they had never participated in the Northwest's wars.

Therefore, could it be that the other party's information was a little outdated and that he was unaware of the changes that had occurred in the Central Plains?

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu suddenly pretended to struggle with all his might. However, he did not use too much strength as he could sense the other party's power. He was worried he would break free for real if he used a little more strength.

After all, it would be easier to make the enemy reveal the truth when victory looked to be within their grasp.

The sorcerer looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a laugh, "Stop trying to struggle. Not even the most powerful gladiator in the kingdom can break free from this Earth Bind spell."

Ren Xiaosu said coldly, "You're a sorcerer?"

The sorcerer said with a smile, "You can address me as Lord Melgor."

With that, the violet eye on the stone in the sorcerer's hand suddenly lit up. Ren Xiaosu was then surprised to see the sheep turn into a human.

The sorcerer was stunned when he saw his newly accepted apprentice. Then he frowned and said, "Filthy."

The apprentice looked down at his lower body and hastily said, "Lord Melgor, this kid drugged me!"

"I see." Melgor nodded. "Where are the others at this outpost?"

"I don't know how this kid found out that you were coming, but he had the sentries take his master away while he stayed behind to cover them," the apprentice said.

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, a strange expression appeared on his face. However, he struggled harder and put on an angry look to disguise his true thoughts.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if this sorcerer and his servant had misunderstood something. Wait a minute, could it be that the other party had misunderstood when he saw him carrying Zhang Jinglin earlier?

"With me around, don't even think about hurting Mr. Zhang!" Ren Xiaosu roared.

Melgor said with a laugh, "You're very loyal, but didn't your master still leave without you? He chose to abandon you."

Ren Xiaosu said ferociously, "What do you know? Protecting him is my bound duty!"

Ren Xiaosu seemingly struggled too hard and caused the formless Earth Bind spell to suddenly let out a crackling sound. When Ren Xiaosu realized this was happening, he quickly suppressed his strength before mentally thinking to himself that the Earth Bind spell the sorcerer had boasted about did not seem that great after all.

When Melgor saw this, his expression froze. He immediately gripped the stone and increased the intensity of the spell. Then he waited until Ren Xiaosu could no longer struggle before heaving a sigh of relief.

Melgor did not get angry. Instead, he became very interested in Ren Xiaosu. "You nearly broke free from the Earth Bind spell. You're even stronger than the strongest gladiators in the kingdom!"

Ren Xiaosu did not struggle anymore. Instead, he said with a grim expression, "You and your fancy tricks. I dare you to release your annoying shackles and duel me!"

"How simple-minded." Melgor chuckled. "Why don't we make a deal?"

"What deal?"

"If you become my servant, I won't go after your ex-master. Consider that my charity to you so you keep your promise to him. What do you say?" Melgor asked. "Of course, you can also not agree, but I believe your master has not gone far away yet.. I'll only need 30 minutes to carve his heart out and bring it to you."



Ren Xiaosu understood the deal Sorcerer Melgor was referring to was for him to become his servant in exchange for not killing Zhang Jinglin.

Disregarding everything else, this sorcerer was probably overestimating himself if he thought he could kill Zhang Jinglin. As the sorcerers had not fought any wars with Fortress 178 in a long time, their impression of the Central Plains people's combat strength was likely still stuck at the time when they were normal people.

The sorcerer had said that Ren Xiaosu was stronger than all the gladiators in the entire nation of sorcerers. Thus, Ren Xiaosu roughly estimated that the strongest people in the Kingdom of Sorcerers probably had physical fitness equivalent to that of a T4 combatant. Compared to the Central Plains, it was far inferior.

Of course, this was not the other party's fault. The appearance of superhumans had only occurred in the past ten years. During the early days, the number of superhumans, such as Zhou Qi, Wang Congyang, and some others, was still very low. Therefore, it was only normal that there was a time lag in their intel.

When Sorcerer Melgor saw Ren Xiaosu not saying anything, he said with a smile, "Since you're his loyal servant, shouldn't you exchange your life for his?"

Ren Xiaosu sneered, "You can try to kill him, but see if you can get past me first!"

With that, Ren Xiaosu started struggling violently again. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not break free from the Earth Bind spell cast by Sorcerer Melgor.

Within a short minute, Ren Xiaosu was sweating profusely from exhaustion. In the end, he gave up struggling.

After all, it was really quite tiring for him to act so realistically.

When Sorcerer Melgor saw Ren Xiaosu could no longer break free from his Earth Bind spell, he said with a laugh, "How can physical strength match the strength of willpower? I'll give you ten seconds to decide. If you still don't agree to become my servant, I'll go and kill your master."

Ren Xiaosu panted as he looked at Melgor. "Don't kill him!"

"So? Have we reached an agreement? Think about it carefully. When danger approached, he abandoned you and ran away by himself, yet you're willing to die for someone like that? Is it worth it?" Melgor said with a smile. His expression was shrouded under the hood of his gray robe, but his tone revealed the unbridled smugness he was feeling.

Ren Xiaosu stayed silent for half a minute before saying, "What is in it for me?"

"What's in it for you?" Sorcerer Melgor carefully sized up Ren Xiaosu. "In the nation of sorcerers, anyone who can follow me into the Sorcerer's Tower can consider themselves greatly honored. Even members of the secular world's royal family yearn to become a member of our magus order, the Eye of True Sight. You're actually asking me what's in it for you?"

"Without any benefits, why should I risk my life for you?" Ren Xiaosu said, "If you don't offer me anything that matters to me, why would I become your servant willingly?"

Melgor scrutinized Ren Xiaosu's stubborn look and became even keener on making him his servant.

Loyalty. Since this young man was willing to sacrifice himself to cover his master's retreat, there was no need to doubt his loyalty. If he could make the other party submit to him willingly, this young man would become his last line of protection in the future.

Capability. This young man was blessed with great strength even though he was still so young. With the potential to fight against the strongest gladiators in the nation of sorcerers, it would be wholly worth investing in him.

For some reason, the worse Ren Xiaosu's attitude was towards him, the more he wanted him as his servant.

This was probably a bad trait common among humans. The more they could not get something, the more they would want it.

Melgor thought for a moment and then said, "I can pay you a 100 gold coins every month. Furthermore, I'll appoint you as my steward, and you'll be allowed to move around freely in my Sorcerer's Tower. Within the Kingdom of Sorcerers, you'll receive the same equal status a prince does."

When Sorcerer Melgor said that, his servant next to him stared with wide eyes. He looked at Melgor, then at Ren Xiaosu. However, he could not understand how this captive young man's status had suddenly surpassed his.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. It seemed that being a steward was a higher rank than a servant.

Moreover, the status of the magi in the nation of sorcerers was way too high. Even their stewards were on par with a prince of the monarchy?

But then again, Ren Xiaosu wondered if he had infiltrated the magus order this way. Although he was still unable to determine what kind of organization the "Eye of True Sight" was, he should at least be able to find some clues by being at Melgor's side every day.

Didn't the Great Hoodwinker say that infiltrating their organization was extremely difficult? Why was it so easy for him then? Ren Xiaosu could not help but wonder if the Great Hoodwinker did not conduct his operations diligently!

Ren Xiaosu said to Melgor, "Alright, I'm willing to be your steward, but I have a condition."

Sorcerer Melgor said with a smile, "State your condition."

"Turn this guy back into a sheep again. I find him easier on the eyes as a sheep," Ren Xiaosu said.

The servant was confused. 'What the fuck does this have anything to do with me? Are you messing around?'

But before he could say anything, he saw the purple sigil on the stone in Sorcerer Melgor's hand glow. The servant was turned back into a sheep again.

Ren Xiaosu said, "I have another condition."

"Go ahead." Sorcerer Melgor gave a restrained smile.

"I'm very hungry right now. Make me a meal and I'll agree to be your steward," Ren Xiaosu said.

Sorcerer Melgor shook his head and said, "My patience has its limits. You're just trying to buy time for your master to escape."

With that, he dispelled the sheep enchantment on his servant and took out a set of black shackles from his sleeve. He threw it to his servant. "Cuff his wrists."

After that, he even smiled at Ren Xiaosu. "I already knew you wouldn't agree to be my steward so easily. But it's alright. You're just ignorant about the powers of us sorcerers. After you learn all about it, you'll naturally be subdued by this power that transcends the mundane." But Melgor would have to influence and reform him through goodwill as well.

Ren Xiaosu quietly watched as the servant shackled his wrists. These shackles were not much different from those in the Central Plains, but they seemed to be made of a different material.

However, regardless of what material the shackles were made of, Ren Xiaosu could definitely unlock them as long as there was a keyhole. Because he had the nanomachines.

Almost everyone in the Central Plains knew that the future commander of the Northwest, also known as the Stronghold Destroyer, was famous for wearing armor composed of nanomachines. However, they only knew it could be used in combat; they did not know it was actually the most powerful skeleton key in the world.

Although, Ren Xiaosu had never used it this way before. Any locks in the face of the black saber would just end up getting shattered anyway.

At this moment, Sorcerer Melgor was feeling very proud of himself. If Ren Xiaosu had agreed to become his steward so willingly, he would not feel at ease.

Melgor was not angry with Ren Xiaosu for repeatedly trying to help his people stall for time. As there were still long days ahead, he would have plenty of time to reform this young man he caught from the Central Plains.

"Let's go." Melgor smiled proudly and said, "Although we didn't find what we were looking for, we've reaped an unexpected harvest instead. That's good enough."

Actually, Melgor was not considered part of the highest-ranking sorcerers in the Eye of True Sight. Just like how there were different ranks in the secular world, there would also be a hierarchy within the magi.

With Melgor's power, he was actually considered to be at the bottom rung of sorcerers in the Eye of True Sight. That was why he had been sent here to observe the movements of Fortress 178 more than two years ago.

At the end of his two-year term, Melgor, who was preparing to return to the nation of sorcerers, suddenly sensed a similar source of power as his emerging in the Central Plains. This was an extraordinary situation, and the intensity of that power was very high level!

Therefore, Melgor stayed behind for another month to see if he could find any clues regarding this phenomenon.

But he had given up on searching. Fortress 178 was not a place where a sorcerer of his level could barge into, so he thought it would be better to pass the information back to the Eye of True Sight.. There would be a reward of equal value waiting for him if he did that.

Shoved by the sorcerer's servant, Ren Xiaosu embarked on a journey to the west. Speaking of which, it was quite a coincidence. That disciple of his had wanted to escort him to obtain scriptures from the Western Paradise.

Actually, it never crossed Ren Xiaosu's mind that he would have a chance to go to such a faraway country in his lifetime.

He did not know where he would end up, nor did he know if he could complete the infiltration mission.

Ren Xiaosu only knew this moment was probably the highlight of Melgor's life. If Melgor went to the Central Plains and told everyone he had the Stronghold Destroyer in his captivity, he probably would instantly become the most dazzling celebrity in the entire Alliance of Strongholds.

At this moment, Melgor led his servant and Ren Xiaosu quickly away from the outposts' surveillance perimeter under the cover of night.

Ren Xiaosu realized Melgor seemed to know the outposts' patrol routes and timings like the back of his hand as they did not encounter a single sentry along the way.

This made Ren Xiaosu breathe a sigh of relief. After all, if they encountered any sentries while leaving, the guards would definitely intercept them.

If the sentries attacked, Melgor would surely retaliate.

If Melgor retaliated, then Ren Xiaosu would be forced to kill him.

In that case, wouldn't the infiltration plan go up in smoke?

Therefore, Ren Xiaosu was truly glad for Melgor.

Before dawn, they had already passed through the surveillance perimeter of all the outposts. Only at this moment did Sorcerer Melgor finally heave a sigh of relief.

Ren Xiaosu sat on the ground in a relaxed manner with his shackles on. Then he said to the sorcerer's servant, "Hey, sheep, find me some water to drink."

The sorcerer's servant was shocked. "Who the fuck are you calling a sheep?"

Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "Since you can turn into a sheep, aren't you a sheep?"

"My name is Li Chengguo!" Li Chengguo, the sorcerer's servant, said, "You are just a captive of Lord Melgor, so show some respect!"

Ren Xiaosu turned to Melgor and said, "You should just turn him back into a sheep. If you do that, I'll agree to be your steward."

Li Chengguo was confused.

However, Melgor no longer went along with his request. Instead, he signaled to Li Chengguo with his eyes. "Go and find some water. I'm thirsty too. Go look for Liu Ting while you're at it too. He should be nearby."

Liu Ting was the other sheep that had escaped. Melgor did not bring him along to capture Ren Xiaosu as he needed to move quickly.

Ren Xiaosu pondered about how these two sheeple had retained the naming conventions of the Central Plains natives. It seemed like it was really as the Great Hoodwinker had said. Too many people had been abducted from the Central Plains in the past. As a result, it introduced some weird cultural changes in the nation of sorcerers.

He wondered if this organization known as the Eye of True Sight regretted abducting so many people from the Central Plains and getting assimilated.

Of course, all the sorcerers in the Eye of True Sight should have retained their own culture and language to showcase their status.

When Melgor saw Ren Xiaosu in a trance, he suddenly asked, "What are you thinking about?"

"Oh." Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "I'm just a little homesick."

He was speaking the truth. Even though Ren Xiaosu used to live in Stronghold 113 a long time ago, he had never thought of that place as home.

Later, he traveled to the Yang Consortium, the Li Consortium, the Qing Consortium, the Zhou Consortium, the Kong Consortium, and the Wang Consortium, but none of those places made him feel a sense of belonging.

It wasn't until he came to the Northwest that he and Yang Xiaojin had their first "home" in Stronghold 144.

Melgor smiled and said, "A home is a very illogical concept. Humans should not be impeded by such secular things."

Ren Xiaosu snapped, "What do you know?!"

Melgor was left choking with anger at Ren Xiaosu's response. 'I want to reform him! I want to reform him! I can't get mad at him!'

...

At this moment, the eight-hour duration Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin had agreed on had passed.

By the time Zhang Jinglin returned to the outpost, it was not only him and the other two sentries who had come back. Even Wang Fengyuan, the Great Hoodwinker, and other powerful figures were here as



well. When they received news that their commander and future commander had been attacked, they immediately drove over. They were afraid the two core leaders of the Northwest would perish here.

When they got to the vicinity of the outpost, dawn was almost breaking. However, the Great Hoodwinker realized only Zhang Jinglin was at the agreed-upon rendezvous point.

The Great Hoodwinker immediately said in a sobbing tone, "Commander, where's Future Commander?"

Zhang Jinglin waved him off disdainfully. "Enough already, he's not here. Stop acting."

The Great Hoodwinker stopped crying and said, "Oh, where did he go?"

"He's still at the outpost." Zhang Jinglin took a look at his watch. "He told me to head back to the outpost in eight hours. Although I don't know what he's up to, we should do as he says. Alright, there's only 15 minutes until the agreed time. We should get there on time if we set off now."

When they arrived at the outpost, it was empty.

Wang Fengyuan knelt down on the ground and carefully checked for every clue. "Based on the tracks, other than Future Commander, the two sentries, and Commander Zhang's footprints, there's also traces of two other strangers. One of them should be a sorcerer. The footprints that he left changed from light to heavy over a distance. He probably used their so-called levitation and rushed here, dispelling it after he reached the outpost."

They did not know what the spell used by the sorcerer was called, but they had seen it before during the war, so it was recorded and categorized under a label to be saved into the files.

Wang Fengyuan followed the footprints and analyzed them. "Future Commander seems to have been restrained, so he started struggling very hard on the spot. We've all seen this spell before too. It should be a binding spell. After that, Future Commander was shoved along by someone. The footprints on the ground show he staggered for a moment here."

Wang Fengyuan was also an extremely outstanding intelligence agent. Just by analyzing the footprints, he could already guess that Ren Xiaosu had been shoved around by the sorcerer's servant here. He was simply too sharp!

The Great Hoodwinker said in surprise, "With Future Commander's strength, even a sorcerer should not be able to take him away that easily, right? What on earth happened?"

"I'm not sure." Wang Fengyuan frowned and shook his head.

The Great Hoodwinker said to Zhang Jinglin, "Commander, I'll lead some people to go save Future Commander. It seems like that sorcerer was acting alone. We can't let him abduct Future Commander just like that!"

But at this moment, Wang Fengyuan, who was kneeling on the ground and searching for clues, suddenly shouted, "Come over and have a look. When Future Commander left, he etched a number on the ground with his foot."

Zhang Jinglin and the Great Hoodwinker looked over in surprise. There really was a number "3" marked out on the ground on the mountain path!

"This is the information Future Commander wants to relay to us. It's just that I can't determine what it represents at this moment," Wang Fengyuan said.

Then Wang Fengyuan heard Zhang Jinglin laugh heartily. "Commander, why are you laughing?"

"I know what this number means," Zhang Jinglin said.

The Great Hoodwinker asked, "What does it mean?"

Zhang Jinglin recalled what Ren Xiaosu had told him. Then he said to Wang Fengyuan and the Great Hoodwinker, "The Prosperous Northwest 3..0 plan has begun."