

Chapter 111: Liu Bu's elder brother

Several thousand of the escaping stronghold residents had been looted by several hundred refugees of their watches, jewelry, cash, and food, leaving nothing for them at all.

The food they were carrying was already scarce. When the disaster struck, none of them were ready for it, so who would think to go and grab food? Or to put it better, the important people from the stronghold did not have a concept of what to do in a time like this. That was because the majority of them had never had to suffer from hunger before. So even those who did take some food with them had only grabbed a few snacks at most.

Of course, there were also some people who didn't get robbed. For example, those who were standing in the radius of five meters around Ren Xiaosu were spared from the looting.

It was just that the refugee aggressors did not dare to hang around Ren Xiaosu for a second longer. They were all afraid that if they stood near him for a few seconds, Ren Xiaosu would spot something that he liked on them.

Ren Xiaosu was checking out the new watches they received with Wang Fugui and the others, unaware of the looks the people around were giving him.

Especially that female teacher standing behind him. The look on her face while gazing at him could only be described as complicated.

The escaping stronghold residents around Ren Xiaosu could all see that the refugees were afraid of this young man! They were terrified of him!

Actually, Ren Xiaosu did not kill people indiscriminately back in town. He had only killed those people because he was forced to do so. But somehow, the refugees always had an instinctive fear whenever they faced Ren Xiaosu.

This world was destined to work in a food web. The fearful were afraid of the vicious, while the vicious were afraid of those who murdered in cold blood.

After the group of refugees were done with the body searches and looting, they went back to report to Wang Yiheng. Someone whispered some words into his ear, causing Wang Yiheng to turn to look in Ren Xiaosu's direction.

Right at this moment, Ren Xiaosu had a feeling that someone was looking at him. So he turned around and locked eyes with Wang Yiheng.

However, there was a placid look in Ren Xiaosu's eyes. It was as though he had no fear at all. Wang Yiheng had a sullen expression while he remained silent. After a long while, he suddenly said to the

refugee beside him, "Ignore Ren Xiaosu for now. If he tries anything else funny, we can always teach him a lesson."

When Ren Xiaosu saw Wang Yiheng's gaze turning elsewhere, he sneered. Wang Yiheng was just someone who picked on the weak. Although he didn't have any dealings with Wang Yiheng before, their town wasn't that large, and there were only so many factory managers around. As such, he had heard of him.

Wang Fugui said softly, "This Wang Yiheng has a godmother who resides in the stronghold, and it was because of her that he got the position of manager at the sand factory."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "Just ignore him."

Because of Wang Yiheng's ransack of the stronghold residents, it delayed the entire group's escape attempt. Right now, everyone was weary and thought they might as well sit down and rest. In just a short while, numerous people were lying all over the ground.

It was way too tiring, so tiring that everyone unknowingly dozed off.

Ren Xiaosu instructed, "Y'all go and get some rest first. I'll keep watch for the first half of the night. Liuyuan, Old Wang, you guys take the second half."

Yan Liuyuan and he couldn't both be asleep at the same time. This was because he and Yan Liuyuan were the only ones who had a gun on them in their group, so one of them would have to remain in an alert alert at all times.

Within their group, Wang Fugui, Xiaoyu, and Wang Dalong all had no reason to harm him. First of all, Ren Xiaosu had not revealed to them the gold he had stored away in his palace. Second, none of them could make it to Stronghold 109 alive without Ren Xiaosu's help.

In this chaotic mob, the five of them had formed a small unit. No one else would be allowed into their group, nor would Ren Xiaosu trust any other person.

Yan Liuyuan said, "Bro, why don't you sleep first and I'll keep watch for the first half? You should be tired after everything you've been through today."

"No." Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, "Go and sleep like I told you to. Don't waste any more time."

"OK." Yan Liuyuan nodded obediently.

Wang Fugui gave a mental sigh. Seeing how well-behaved Yan Liuyuan was in front of Ren Xiaosu, who could have imagined this kid had just shot and killed several criminals a few days ago? These two kids were cut from the same cloth.

When everyone was asleep, Ren Xiaosu started thinking about what they should do. If they could get into Stronghold 109, that would be for the best. The gold he had and those medicinal supplies Old Wang brought along should be enough for them to live on. But if they could not get in, they would have to make do with living in the town outside Stronghold 109.

That earthquake should have affected Stronghold 109 as well, but it wouldn't have been instantly destroyed like Stronghold 113 had.

All of a sudden, a middle-aged man stood up and walked over to Ren Xiaosu. Ren Xiaosu looked up at him. "Don't come any closer, or you'll die."

Rather embarrassed, the middle-aged man said, "I was a supervisor at our Stronghold 113's Logistics Division. My name is Liu Hai."

This time, it was Ren Xiaosu's turn to be stunned. He remembered that Luo Xinyu had told him Liu Bu's elder brother was a supervisor at the Logistics Division. Surely that wasn't referring to this person in front of him, right?!

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu felt unhappy. At that time, Ren Xiaosu had wanted to kill Liu Bu. But he, Xu Xianchu, and Yang Xiaojin were not cold-blooded people, after all, so they didn't end up killing Liu Bu.

But didn't Liu Bu still betray all of them?

With the attitude Liu Bu had, would his brother be any better than him?

Liu Hai looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, "It's actually like this: I was wondering if I could join your group? When we get to Stronghold 109, I'll immediately have my contacts help arrange for a good place to settle down inside the stronghold. If you want money, I have that too. But it's all kept in the Qing Consortium Bank!"

Ren Xiaosu gave him a cold stare. It was yet another person making empty promises. "I doubt even your division chief can do what you had just claimed, right? If you were really that capable, you wouldn't just be a supervisor. Get lost."

Liu Hai paled as he remained silent for a long time.

A lot of nearby people got awoken by the commotion. However, they did not make a sound and just quietly listened to the exchange between Liu Hai and Ren Xiaosu. In fact, many of these people had similar thoughts to Liu Hai's. It was very obvious that Wang Yiheng and the other refugees did not quite dare to mess with Ren Xiaosu. And Ren Xiaosu also seemed a little more approachable than Wang Yiheng's group. In that case, wouldn't it be good if they could get Ren Xiaosu to take care of them?

They assumed Ren Xiaosu was a kind person since the group he was taking care of consisted of the old, young, and women. However, they did not know the things Wang Fugui and Xiaoyu had done for Ren Xiaosu.

The students from Stronghold 113 No. 2 Senior High School were spread out and lying on the ground. They didn't care if it was dirty or not anymore as everyone was exhausted. Only that female teacher was still forcing herself to stay standing. When she saw people approaching Ren Xiaosu for help, her eyes lit up. But to her surprise, Ren Xiaosu dismissed all of those thoughts. She was a little disappointed, but there was nothing she could do. She also started dozing off. It had been a taxing day for this female teacher as she led her students in their escape.

In the middle of the night, Yan Liuyuan woke up. "Bro, it's your turn to sleep."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded. He glanced at Xiaoyu, Wang Fugui, and Wang Dalong, who were all fast asleep. Thinking, he said with a sigh, "Let them rest well today. It's fine for just you and me to keep watch for the night."

Chapter 112: Wild vegetables

The next morning, Ren Xiaosu woke up very early. He did not understand why, but since he became a supernatural being, he felt more energetic than ever. It was like there was a fire burning nonstop inside his body. He had only slept for four hours last night. But after waking up, he could feel himself back at his best.

Wang Fugui took out his food and handed it to everyone. They were now sharing their food. No one hid anything from the others.

Seeing how the thousands of escapees were all going hungry without food, the escapees who were beside Ren Xiaosu's group swallowed hard when they saw them eating.

But they could only watch them eat. None of these people dared to approach Ren Xiaosu to ask for food. They were not dumb. They knew no one would possibly share their food at a time like this. Instead of being rejected, they might as well not ask.

Over at Wang Yiheng's side, they had looted a lot of food. But the problem for them was that most of those refugees had not brought any food with them either. And the number of these refugees on Wang Yiheng's side numbered over 600. In the end, only Wang Yiheng and a few dozen of his most trusted refugees managed to get anything to eat. The rest had to go hungry.

"We have to continue moving." Wang Yiheng said with a sullen face, "Those of you who haven't had anything to eat yet, don't worry. I believe there'll be food further ahead. From today onwards, we'll all eat wild vegetables and tree bark if we have to!"

The refugees who didn't have anything to eat yet were all complaining in their heads, 'Yeah, right, you're claiming you'll pick wild vegetables with us after eating a full meal? Where were you earlier?' However, they did not dare to speak out even if they were angry.

In reality, this group of refugees was not united. Just as Ren Xiaosu had described, they were just a mob.

Wang Yiheng led the refugees on a march. The thousands of stronghold residents making their escape followed them and started moving as well.

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. If it were he who had been robbed, he wouldn't follow Wang Yiheng and those refugees even if it meant death. But these escaping stronghold residents were different in that they still had to follow the refugees even if they were robbed by them.

"Let's go." Ren Xiaosu said to Xiaoyu and the others, "It's still a long way from Stronghold 109. We can't afford to relax."

“Mhm.” Xiaoyu nodded. The majority of the townspeople were mentally stronger than those who lived in the stronghold. Whatever suffering they were going through, they experienced it long ago.

The students behind Ren Xiaosu stood up as well. Their teacher was groaning in pain and even fell back onto the ground. Ren Xiaosu turned around to look and saw some of the female students wanting to help their teacher up. In the end, the female teacher slowly got up by herself. She said to her students, “Your teacher is fine. You don’t have to worry about me. We must not lose sight of the main group.”

A student said softly, “Ms. Jiang Wu, I’m so hungry.”

They hadn’t eaten for a full day, and after making such a lengthy escape, how could they not be hungry? Some of the students were even experiencing dizziness.

The female teacher named Jiang Wu was put into a difficult situation. She consoled, “Let’s keep moving forward. Who knows if we might find some food along the way. And there might be people from Stronghold 109 sent over to rescue us. If none of that works out, your teacher will pick some wild vegetables for us to eat.”

“Teacher, what do wild vegetables look like?” a female student asked.

Ren Xiaosu glanced at that female student and saw she was still wearing a gold bracelet. If their group hadn’t been standing close to Ren Xiaosu last night, that gold bracelet would probably have been taken by the refugees.

These children had grown up in a world under the protection of the consortium all their lives. They did not even get the slightest whiff of the difficult environment the people living outside the stronghold had to go through, so of course they wouldn’t know what wild vegetables looked like.

But this question stumped Jiang Wu as well. She had only heard the people around them saying they could pick wild vegetables to eat, but she did not have the know-how to identify what wild vegetables were. This was not something they had learned in the stronghold before.

But Jiang Wu was not stupid. She surreptitiously pointed at Ren Xiaosu and his group, then whispered to her students, “See those people in front? You can see at a glance they’re more capable than the others. Whatever plants they pick, we’ll follow along and pick the same ones as them.”

Ren Xiaosu had yet not realized that this teacher named Jiang Wu had already identified him as the most capable person of the entire escaping crowd.

A student said, “Why don’t we just ask him to help us?”

Jiang Wu shook her head. “Now that the stronghold has been destroyed, you guys must understand something: No one owes us any help; we can only depend on ourselves.”

After setting off again, Xiaoyu, Wang Fugui, Yan Liuyuan, and Wang Dalong were clearly back to a better state of mind. Xiaoyu turned around to look at Jiang Wu and her students, then said softly to Ren Xiaosu in a happy voice, "There are quite a few pretty girls in that group of stronghold students, and they're even around the same age as you. How about it? Who caught your eye? Wanna let Big Sis go and speak to them on your behalf? They would absolutely be willing to follow you if you can take care of their meals."

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. "Big Sister Xiaoyu, you don't have to worry about this. Getting to Stronghold 109 is our main priority."

"Alright, alright." Xiaoyu smirked. "But if you change your mind, you can let me know at any time. Big Sis will care for your future children."

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up when he noticed the plants growing beside the road. He walked over and pulled the entire root out of the ground.

When Jiang Wu saw this, she hurriedly whispered her students, "Go, go and search for the same plants he's picked!"

The students who had been hungry for some time rushed over to the side of the road.

Right then, Ren Xiaosu told Wang Fugui, "These plants absolutely must not be eaten. After I had some of it two years ago, I had diarrhea for three straight days."

When Jiang Wu and her students heard that, they were speechless. One by one, they threw away the plants they had just plucked out of the ground.

Now, Ren Xiaosu realized the students were learning from him. After some thought, he told Wang Fugui, "That small bunch of plants next to your feet is known as pillow grass, AKA shepard's purse 1 . It's an edible plant that if eaten raw will taste bitter due to its alkaline nature. But compared to surviving, what's a little bitterness?"

Wang Fugui was confused about why he was being schooled on something like this. 'My family always makes shepard's purse dumplings, so I know this.'

However, Ren Xiaosu did not say this for his sake. Jiang Wu gave Ren Xiaosu a look because she had been observing him all this time and knew why he had suddenly said this. He was saying it for her.

Jiang Wu glanced at Ren Xiaosu before turning back to her students and saying, "Everyone, go and pick the shepard's purse."

After she said that, she turned to look at Ren Xiaosu again and discovered he had already left with his group.

Laughing next to Ren Xiaosu, Yan Liuyuan said, "Bro, are you interested in that female teacher? She's quite pretty."

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "I'm only hoping that teacher will survive a while more by doing that, that's all."

Jiang Wu must have suffered quite a bit after bringing her students out and escaping from the stronghold. In a time like this, who had the time to care about whether others lived or died?

Ren Xiaosu was a selfish person, but this didn't prevent him from admiring Jiang Wu a bit.

Chapter 113: A balanced state of mind

As the several thousand-strong group made their way forward, most of them did so in extreme hunger. Especially since it was the beginning of winter, those who didn't eat were extremely cold.

At this time of year, the wild vegetables were beginning to shrivel up. Even a plant as tough as the shepard's purse had started withering.

The escaping masses scoured the roadside as they advanced, looking for anything from plants, to tree bark, and tree roots to eat.

At the beginning, the people from the stronghold still held on to their dignity. But now that they were this hungry, they dropped whatever they had left.

Instead, it was Ren Xiaosu and company who did not feel any stress. They had been eating such things all along.

When wild vegetables were eaten raw, they tasted bitter. They would leave an astringent aftertaste. Some people vomited after eating them as their bodies couldn't handle such foods.

However, some people were even more unfortunate. They ended up dropping to the ground and started foaming at their mouths after eating some unknown food they found.

No one cared about these people who had fallen to the ground. Everyone walked by them indifferently and continued advancing, as though they were a group of soulless bodies.

Only Ren Xiaosu stopped in his tracks. He looked at someone who had fallen and said to Yan Liuyuan, "These are the symptoms of eating pulsatilla root 1, which I usually call wild celery or poison ginseng. The leaves of this plant look exactly like that of celery's. If it mistakenly gets eaten, the person will show signs of nausea, vomiting, cold hands and feet, and paralysis of the limbs. In serious cases, it can even cause death."

Jiang Wu, who was following quietly, took note of what he said. Afterwards, she warned her students not to pick any plants with leaves that looked like celery's. The students said in bewilderment, "But what do celery leaves look like?"

These students used to live in the stronghold, so it was only natural that their parents took care of all their basic needs. So who could have possibly learned what celery leaves looked like?

After the several thousand escapees passed by, the path they took looked as though it had been swarmed by locusts. All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu saw an off-road vehicle ahead of them. Wasn't that Luo Lan's vehicle? Why was it left there all by itself?

Everyone went over to have a look and was astonished to see that the vehicle frame was broken beyond repair.

The dirt road in this wilderness was extremely bumpy, so even if an off-road vehicle was well-suited for such conditions, it still couldn't hold up to the abuse.

Perhaps not even Luo Lan could have expected that he would get into an accident. As a result, they had to abandon the vehicle.

A crowd of escapees were frantically opening the vehicle doors to search for anything inside that could be eaten, but they were all disappointed as the inside of the vehicle was cleaned out. Even the seats' leather had been stripped off.

Not only that, some of the easier to carry parts were stripped off as well. Ren Xiaosu concluded that those parts must have been taken away to use as spares in case the other vehicles malfunctioned. As for this vehicle, it was totaled.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if Luo Lan was trying his hardest to hurry to Stronghold 109. Logically, Luo Lan might even have arrived at Stronghold 109 by now.

Today, many of the escapees were discussing whether they would be allowed into the stronghold when they got there. On what basis could Stronghold 109 reject them from entering? They were, after all, legal residents of a stronghold.

Although there was a big division between the various strongholds, with the organizations the true controllers of each stronghold, they were all supposed to be on the same battlefield.

Some of these people were also saying they would probably not be allowed in. They were from Stronghold 113, controlled by the Qing Consortium. But Stronghold 109, which they were heading to, was controlled by the Li Consortium. If they refused to let them in, there was really nothing they could complain about.

Ren Xiaosu thought important people from the consortiums such as Luo Lan would probably not have to think about whether they would be allowed into the stronghold. After all, the Li Consortium would still have to give some face to the Qing Consortium.

But for everyone else, it would be difficult to say where they would end up.

They kept moving. But not long after, Ren Xiaosu saw yet another military transport truck parked alone on the road.

Yet another vehicle had broken down? Everyone walked closer and realized it had a flat tire.

"Did they not have any spare tires?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

When the military transport truck passed Ren Xiaosu, he saw that it was full of soldiers. Clearly, they had overloaded the truck with too many people.

If any more of their vehicles broke down, Ren Xiaosu thought it would probably be incredibly difficult for Luo Lan to get to Stronghold 109.

But everyone was overjoyed at the sight of these impaired vehicles. When Luo Lan and his people drove by like the wind, the escapees were all thinking about what gave them the right to travel in vehicles while everyone else had to walk.

But it was all good now. Their state of mind had been brought back into balance.

On this night, everyone settled down next to the abandoned military transport truck to get some rest. It couldn't even be called a "campsite," as it was purely a mass of people huddling together on the ground in the wilderness to sleep.

The ground was freezing, and lying down on it would cause the cold temperature of the ground to seep into their bodies.

A lot of these people wanted to start a campfire, but the problem was they had nothing to start a fire with!

After Ren Xiaosu found a place for Yan Liuyuan and the others, he went to pick some firewood. The accursed weather was getting colder, so the firewood would have to last through the night. Otherwise, everyone could easily catch a cold when they woke up the next morning.

Even though Wang Fugui was carrying medicinal supplies, who in the right mind would choose to get sick for no good reason?

At this time of year, it was pretty easy to find firewood. When Ren Xiaosu came back carrying a large pile, he spotted Jiang Wu crouching on the ground as she attempted to start a campfire. This female teacher had organized her students and got them to gather back a lot of firewood. Then she tried her hardest to drill wood to start a fire.

Ren Xiaosu silently shook his head, thinking that this delicate female teacher had probably never done such tough work before. Normal people who wanted to start a fire this way might not even be able to start one after blistering their hands from drilling the wood.

Jiang Wu thought she might as well stubbornly hand drill to start a fire.

A male student said, "Teacher, why don't you let me do it instead?"

Jiang Wu shook her head. "You're students. There's no need to do such menial and hard work. Go and get some rest."

She glanced to Ren Xiaosu's side, hoping to learn from watching how he drilled the wood to make a fire. In the end, she saw Ren Xiaosu taking out a box of matches.

Why was this person always so prepared? Jiang Wu covered her mouth in astonishment. All of them were clearly fellow escapees, but why did she feel that Ren Xiaosu's group had it so much easier than the others?

When Ren Xiaosu got the fire started, it added a warm color to the darkness of the campsite. The previously cold moonlight was also given a touch of warmth.

Of course, it wasn't only Ren Xiaosu who had managed to start a fire in the campsite. Some smokers had also brought along matches. But when a few women went over to them to ask to borrow their fire, presumptuous requests were made of them. How long had it been since they'd escaped from the disaster? So who would possibly give themselves up just to start a campfire?

Jiang Wu hesitated for a long while before walking over to Ren Xiaosu's area. Xiaoyu and the others were chatting when she saw Jiang Wu stop to look at her.

"Can I..." Jiang Wu asked discreetly, "Can I borrow your fire? I can offer you firewood in exchange."

"Sure," Xiaoyu said with a smile. "There's no need to give us any firewood. We have enough."

"Thank you." Jiang Wu said rather excitedly, "Thank you so much!"

She ran back to her area and carried some firewood over. Then she used Ren Xiaosu's campfire to light it. The students were all watching like an eager flock of fledglings waiting to be fed.

Chapter 114: The Great Sage Equal to Heaven

When Jiang Wu started their campfire, all of the students gathered around for warmth. Their bodies had gotten so cold their fingers and toes were freezing!

All of a sudden, two middle-aged men stood up and walked over to Ren Xiaosu's group. But before they could get near them, Xiaoyu had already given them a cold "no" in response.

The two middle-aged men resentfully returned to where they came from, wondering why there was such a great difference in their attitude towards men and women.

"Big Sister Xiaoyu is quite assertive," Yan Liuyuan said with a smile. He mimicked Big Sister Xiaoyu's tone and said coldly, "No!"

"What do you know?" Xiaoyu smiled and rolled her eyes at him. "That teacher named Jiang Wu seems rather nice and is a good person. The two men had the cheek to wait for a woman to set an example for them before they came forward to ask for help? They're such failures as men. Besides, Jiang Wu had been trying for so long to start a fire by hand drilling wood. She only came to borrow our fire when she was left with no choice. As for the others, they only know to receive the fruits of our labor and don't even want to put in any effort for their survival!"

When Xiaoyu said this, she purposely raised her voice. The group of men around her were incredibly embarrassed. Then she smiled at Ren Xiaosu and said, "I only dared to speak louder because you're around. So, what do you think of that girl?"

Ren Xiaosu was mystified. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Stop playing dumb." Xiaoyu giggled. "Although she looks a little older than you, a mature wife ensures a joyful life. As long as she's a good person, that's good enough."

"Alright, alright, Big Sister Xiaoyu." Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. "Just eat already." currently, Jiang Wu was sitting around the campfire with her students. She comforted them, "Everyone, sleep tight tonight. I have a hairpin you guys can use to burst the blisters on your feet before you sleep."

All of the students fell silent. A female student lowered her head and said, "Thank you, Teacher. Actually, you don't have to do all these things for us. We're no longer at school."

"What are you saying?" Jiang Wu interrupted. "I'm your teacher, so I have to safely lead you guys to the stronghold."

"Teacher, I miss home...."

"I miss my parents so much, I wonder where they are now...."

The students began crying as they continued. It wasn't until this moment that their grief from the disaster was finally let out.

When someone starts crying, the people around them also start crying. It's contagious.

The people who had escaped from the stronghold were all crying, and everyone could not help but feel sad. They had really lost everything.

Only Ren Xiaosu and company were sitting among the crowd of crying people with dumbfounded looks on their faces.

"Bro, should we be crying too?" Yan Liuyuan asked meekly as he looked around him.

"It's alright, we don't have to cry," Ren Xiaosu said in a speechless manner.

Suddenly, footsteps and some voices came from the way that they had come from.

They heard someone over there shout, "Look, there's the glow of fire. There must be survivors!"

Ren Xiaosu turned around and was surprised to see a young man running towards them with several dozen people. The young man shouted excitedly, "See, what did I tell y'all? I said I would bring all of you to the others, didn't I?"

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. This group of people must also have escaped from the stronghold, right? Why had they only just caught up?

When the young man came to the larger group, someone asked, "Did you guys escape from the stronghold as well? I remember that those behind us had been prevented from escaping by those strange bugs, right?"

A person answered, "It was all thanks to Chen Wudi. He was the one who helped open a path so we could escape. Oh yeah, he's a supernatural being!"

The young man whose name was Chen Wudi said happily, "That was something I should do. The Great Sage Equal to Heaven shall subdue all demons and monsters to protect the people!"

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself, 'What the hell!' He took a better look and felt Chen Wudi's attire looked a little strange. There were some words written on the chest area of the blue and white striped clothing he was wearing: Stronghold 113 No. 3 Psychiatric Hospital.

'What? This person is a mental patient?'

Ren Xiaosu had heard of the title "Great Sage Equal to Heaven" before.

There used to be a set of books at the school called Journey to the West that students could borrow. There was also a bar that operated before alcohol was prohibited. The storyteller in the bar loved telling stories of Zhao Zilong of the Three Kingdoms, who charged through Cao Cao's army seven times at the Battle of Changban 1, and also of the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, Sun Wukong, who wreaked havoc in the Heavenly Palace.

Zhang Jinglin had said they were part of the Four Great Classical Novels and were treasures of mankind. There were also two novels named Dream of the Red Chamber and Water Margin. But the storyteller had never once narrated Dream of the Red Chamber.

Someone once asked the storyteller why he never narrated Dream of the Red Chamber. The storyteller smiled and said it was because he didn't find it exciting enough to tell the story.

Some years back, Ren Xiaosu liked to bring Yan Liuyuan along to listen to the stories. But when alcohol became prohibited, life became more difficult as well. As they did not know where the storyteller had gone, they could not listen to the stories anymore.

At this moment, someone whispered to a person standing beside Chen Wudi, "Did he escape from the asylum? Isn't he one of those people the Qing Consortium captured some time ago?"

The man beside Chen Wudi whispered, "I'm afraid that it might be the case. He's a supernatural being who can materialize a staff in his hand. In fact, he's really powerful too. But he keeps insisting that he is the reincarnation of the Great Sage. We don't know whether that is true or not."

Honestly, they would have regarded Chen Wudi as just a patient with a paranoia if he wasn't a supernatural being. But it was different now as some people, in their daze, actually started to believe a little of what Chen Wudi was saying. But of course, they were also skeptical.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Chen Wudi with curiosity as he was now extremely interested in everything related to supernatural beings. But as Chen Wudi's gaze swept through the crowd, his expression changed when he saw Ren Xiaosu. His eyes seemed to overflow with exhilaration!

"Make way! Make way!" Chen Wudi squeezed through the crowd as he walked over to Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu got an ominous feeling about this. Yan Liuyuan asked in a whisper, "Bro, do you know him?"

"No!" Ren Xiaosu said in puzzlement.

Chen Wudi was approaching Ren Xiaosu. Finally, he stopped when he came before Ren Xiaosu and looked at him with piercing eyes.

"Master!" Chen Wudi surprisingly said.

Ren Xiaosu had no response. 'What the hell?!'

Chen Wudi turned around and shouted to those who were with him, "I found my master. Y'all take care of yourselves! I'll be escorting him to the Western Paradise on a pilgrimage to obtain the Buddhist scriptures!"

Everyone watching was speechless.

Wang Fugui was next to them and started laughing like mad. Even though he could not understand what was going on, he felt an inexplicable joy when he saw Ren Xiaosu's shocked expression.

But at this moment, Chen Wudi turned his head to Wang Fugui and said, "Piggy, what are you laughing at?"

Wang Fugui stopped laughing.

Chen Wudi ignored him and went on to look at Wang Dalong. Then he said with a smile, "Friar Sand, you're here too? That's great!"

Wang Dalong was confused and suddenly felt that his relationship with his father seemed to have changed. Originally, they were father and son. But it had turned into a relationship of fellow disciples.

"What the hell?" Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little melancholic. Did he really have to go to the Western Paradise to obtain the Buddhist scriptures?!

The turning points in life were always unexpected.

Chapter 115: It's you

Ren Xiaosu stared at Chen Wudi in dismay. "I have to explain that I'm not your master, and I won't go to the Western Paradise on a pilgrimage to obtain Buddhist scriptures."

"That can't be right." Chen Wudi shook his head. "Master, which direction are you heading?"

“Southwest?” Ren Xiaosu was a little stunned. “Stronghold 109 is to the southwest.”

Chen Wudi said solemnly, “The Western Paradise is also in the southwest. Perhaps Master hasn’t realized it yet, but you’re already on your pilgrimage.”

What the hell! This was the first time Ren Xiaosu was so confused by someone. “I’ll repeat myself: I’m really not your master, Old Wang is not Pigsy, and the person next to him is Wang Dalong, not Friar Sand!”

Chen Wudi gave a wave of his hand. “That isn’t important!”

Ren Xiaosu and Wang Fugui were dumbfounded. What did he mean by it wasn’t important? It was very important, alright!

Beside them, Yan Liuyuan was trying to hold back his laughter as he was afraid he would attract Chen Wudi’s attention. Xiaoyu was hiding behind Yan Liuyuan, and the two of them were laughing so hard their bodies began to tremble!

At this moment, someone asked, “What did you guys encounter during the escape?”

Those who had just joined the larger group were still in a state of shock. “Those bugs with human faces on their backs were terrifying. Last night, we even heard wolves howling. We were so frightened we did not dare to sleep for the entire night. But fortunately, Chen Wudi—”

“Call me the Great Sage,” Chen Wudi corrected.

“OK. Fortunately, the Great Sage helped us drive away all the bugs. They seemed to be quite afraid of him.” The person speaking was exhausted as he had been in constant fear for the past two days. Now that they had joined thousands of others, they finally felt a sense of security.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was starting to think about how to get along with this Chen Wudi.

This guy claimed to be the reincarnation of the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, but Ren Xiaosu did not believe his claims. He presumed this fellow had heard too much of the story of the Monkey King when he was young, so he ended up fantasizing himself to be said hero.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu realized after reading Journey to the West that the unyielding heroic image of the Great Sage who subdued evil was purely the imagination of the people. They only exaggerated his image because they needed a hero to look up to.

At this moment, Wang Yiheng and the others came over. He deliberately avoided Ren Xiaosu and said to the group of people who had just arrived, “Hand over all your valuables!”

He still had his eyes on Ren Xiaosu as he spoke. Wang Yiheng’s strategy was very simple: First, I won’t provoke you and your people. But when I’m bullying the others, you had better not interfere either. We’re both wielding guns, so mind your own business!

However, he was stunned when his gaze fell on Ren Xiaosu's side where he saw Chen Wudi materializing a black and gold metal staff out of thin air. Ren Xiaosu was also shocked. The metal staff had a gold band on each end, with the middle section being black!

Isn't this the Golden-Hooped Rod from Journey to the West?

When Wang Yiheng turned his head to Chen Wudi, he saw Chen Wudi pointing the Golden-Hooped Rod at him and saying, "It's you, Xiaozuanfeng 1!"

Wang Yiheng was confused 'Who the hell is Xiaozuanfeng?!' Wang Yiheng thought that even if this guy had a mental illness, surely he should be called the Black Mountain Old Demon, Yellow-robed Monster or something of that level, right? 'By calling me Xiaozuanfeng, aren't you looking down on me a little too much?!

But before Wang Yiheng could react, he saw Chen Wudi swinging the staff at him. Chen Wudi roared, "You're not allowed to bully the folks here!"

Ren Xiaosu had Yan Liuyuan and the others take a few steps back. He was afraid someone would accidentally get injured by the battle. Wang Yiheng still possessed a gun.

When Wang Yiheng saw the Golden-Hooped Rod being swung at him, he reflexively backed off and drew his gun in a hurry. Chen Wudi's staff brushed past the tip of Wang Yiheng's nose before slamming into the ground, stirring up a cloud of dust as the ground trembled.

In his surprise, Ren Xiaosu wondered whether Chen Wudi's staff really weighed more than 13,500 catties 1. No, it shouldn't be that heavy!

With a loud bang, a muzzle flash appeared from Wang Yiheng's gun. But everyone was stunned. No one knew when Chen Wudi had placed his staff horizontally in front of his chest. He laughed and said, "No bullets can penetrate my Golden-Hooped Rod!"

Nearby, Yan Liuyuan curiously said, "But the bullet didn't hit your Golden-Hooped Rod. Your chest is bleeding."

Chen Wudi looked down at his chest, then took a deep breath and said, "Fuck..." After that, the veins on Chen Wudi's neck pulsated, and the bullet that went into his chest was squeezed out of his body with brute force!

In fact, Ren Xiaosu noticed the bullet itself did not penetrate his skin. He could still see part of the brass bullet exposed on the surface of Chen Wudi's skin.

According to the story, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven was so strong he was basically invulnerable. But what kind of muscle strength would it take to stop bullets from penetrating?

Ren Xiaosu was absolutely sure he couldn't do the same.

Wang Yiheng clenched his teeth and attempted to fire off another shot. But in the blink of an eye, Chen Wudi vanished from view.

A moment later, the heavy Golden-Hooped Rod appeared on Wang Yiheng's left, vibrating as it swooshed through the air. It almost felt like the air around it was resonating.

As the refugees around Wang Yiheng fled from the scene of battle, the Golden-Hooped Rod smashed ruthlessly into Wang Yiheng's waist.

With an audible crack, Wang Yiheng's body was twisted in an irregular fashion from his waist. This strike had broken his spine!

In that instant, Wang Yiheng was sent flying away. He could feel his whole body paralyzed as he lay on the ground!

Chen Wudi plunged the Golden-Hooped Rod hard onto the ground with a loud thud. Holding the staff upright, he looked majestic.

Chen Wudi turned around and looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Master, am I cool?"

"I'm really..." Ren Xiaosu was dumbfounded and did not know how to continue the conversation.

The refugees quickly distanced themselves from Wang Yiheng. They were all afraid of getting implicated by Wang Yiheng, who was wailing in agony on the ground, while other escapees' eyes were filled with joy. They had long hated Wang Yiheng and knew he would only get more and more difficult to satisfy.

Someone said to Chen Wudi, "Thank you!"

"Why are you thanking me?" Chen Wudi waved his hand without a care. "You should thank my master instead!"

A few people were stunned as they turned around and looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Thank you!"

Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up, because he had received more than ten gratitude tokens with almost no effort!

He had been worrying about how to collect more gratitude tokens. He did not expect Chen Wudi would help him get so many of them without him needing to do anything.

Yan Liuyuan looked at Ren Xiaosu. He wanted to ask him what they should do next. However, he saw Ren Xiaosu walking eagerly towards Chen Wudi. "Disciple, does your injury still hurt? Master has an excellent medicine here that can treat wounds!"

Yan Liuyuan was confused

Wang Fugui was confused

Everyone watching was confused.

Did they really have to head to the Western Paradise to obtain the Buddhist scriptures?!

Chapter 116: 72 Transformations

Just a moment ago, Ren Xiaosu was still trying his best to deny that he was Chen Wudi's so-called master. But now the two were putting on a show of how deep their teacher-disciple relationship was?

Yan Liuyuan, Wang Fugui, and the others stared blankly at Ren Xiaosu as he took out a vial. Wang Fugui gasped as Ren Xiaosu had always treated this medicine like a treasure. Back then, Ren Xiaosu was not even willing to make it cheaper for him no matter how much he tried to persuade him! But now, Ren Xiaosu was willing to take it out and give it to Chen Wudi for free! Was this still Ren Xiaosu?

However, only Ren Xiaosu understood how a delusional person who liked subduing demons and monsters to uphold justice like Chen Wudi could end up becoming a divine weapon for him to gain heaps of gratitude tokens!

In fact, the thought of purely making use of Chen Wudi also crossed Ren Xiaosu's mind. But when he saw Chen Wudi's sincere gaze, he felt a little touched. He sighed and turned to look at Wang Fugui.

Before Wang Fugui could react from his shock, he heard Ren Xiaosu say to him, "Piggy, give some food to your senior apprentice brother."

Wang Fugui was dumbfounded. Had he gone crazy?! Wang Fugui felt as though the entire world had gone crazy! Although he had such thoughts, Wang Fugui still took out some cornbread and handed it to Chen Wudi.

"Thank you, Master!" Chen Wudi took the cornbread and stuffed it into his mouth. He was famished!

"Gratitude received from Chen Wudi, +1!" The palace's judgment could not be wrong. This was a sincere thank you.

When Ren Xiaosu looked at Chen Wudi gobbling down his food, he suddenly felt that this master-disciple relationship wasn't too bad.

Chen Wudi looked up and said, "Master, I'm still hungry."

Ren Xiaosu thought that not only could this disciple fight well, he was quite an eater too.

He thought for a moment and said, "Disciple, do you know what begging for alms is?"

"Yes!" Chen Wudi nodded.

"I'll point out a few people for you. Go up to them and ask them to spare you some vegetarian food." Ren Xiaosu then pointed out several refugees to Chen Wudi. They all used to be Wang Yiheng's trusted aides at the sand plant. Ren Xiaosu knew they must have hidden some of the food they had robbed from the escapees.

"OK, Master!" Chen Wudi carried the Golden-Hooped Rod and went to look for those refugees. The refugees nearly pissed their pants. Even now, Wang Yiheng was wailing in agony on the ground!

'You call this begging for alms? Even though everyone was committing robbery all the same, what makes ours a robbery, and yours begging for alms?!'

They glanced at Wang Yiheng and decided to take out whatever food they had on them. When Chen Wudi returned to Ren Xiaosu, he was holding a lot of food, such as chocolates and crackers. Chen Wudi looked at Ren Xiaosu as though he wanted to claim credit for it. "Master, these are for you."

Ren Xiaosu shook his head and said, "Since you're the one who earned it, you should save it for yourself to eat."

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu could not bear to eat any of Chen Wudi's food. He did not feel any pressure when he strongarmed the other refugees into giving him something. But for some reason, Ren Xiaosu kept feeling a sense of guilt whenever the thought of bullying the dimwitted Chen Wudi crossed his mind. Perhaps this was also one of Chen Wudi's talents.

Beside them, the girls from Stronghold 113 No. 2 Senior High School admired Chen Wudi. He looked rather handsome and even upheld justice for them. Other than his asylum clothes that looked rather unsightly, he looked quite suitable as a hero.

The girls stole glances at Chen Wudi. They were also at an age where they were starting to understand love. In this chaotic environment, people who could give them some sense of security would immediately give them a good impression.

Only Jiang Wu's gaze was still on Ren Xiaosu. She suddenly felt that Ren Xiaosu might not be a good person, but he was also definitely not a bad person.

After the events blew over, everyone returned to normal. They urgently needed some rest as they still had to continue on their way tomorrow.

Ren Xiaosu found it a little odd. Those refugees had also robbed many things from the stronghold's residents. Previously, it could be said that everyone had not dared to resist only because Wang Yiheng had a gun on him. That was understandable. But right now, Wang Yiheng, who was the backbone of the refugees, was dead, and the gun had fallen into Wang Fugui's hands. Logically, the stronghold's residents should be taking revenge and snatching back their belongings at this time. Unfortunately, Ren Xiaosu realized these people were still afraid of clashing with the refugees.

Initially, Ren Xiaosu's group consisted of five people surrounding the campfire. But now it had turned into six people.

Chen Wudi ate his food noisily. It looked like he had really been starving for the past two days.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "I heard that the Great Sage can perform 72 Transformations and can use his hair to create a bunch of monkeys. Since you're the Great Sage, do you know how to do that?"

"No." Chen Wudi admitted his failings. He said, "Perhaps it's because I've reincarnated recently. I haven't awakened my other skills yet."

"Have you tried it before?" Ren Xiaosu was curious.

“Yes, but it didn’t work,” Chen Wudi answered honestly.

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Chen Wudi’s head and noticed a small bald patch behind his right ear. It looked like he really had tried it before.

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu started to get the feeling that everyone’s superpowers were somehow related to their willpower.

For example, it was still a mystery as to what the value of his “mental fortitude” was.

For example, the combat strength of Xu Xianchu’s shadow clone was directly correlated to his mental strength.

But it was even more obvious for Chen Wudi. He had fantasized about being the Monkey King, and as a result, he materialized the Golden-Hooped Rod. Moreover, his physical fitness was also approaching a state that surpassed humans.

Ren Xiaosu wondered whether there were even more patients with delusions who had become supernatural beings like Chen Wudi. Wouldn’t those patients with “schizophrenia” be miserable then? They might end up killing themselves soon after becoming a supernatural being due to their own paranoia.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu felt this was quite unrealistic. Not all the mentally ill would have strong mental strength.

While he was pondering this, some female escapees walked over to Jiang Wu and asked, “Can you let us light a fire with your fire?”

Ren Xiaosu turned to look and saw that several women of different ages had approached Jiang Wu. They probably felt that being a female teacher, she would be easier to talk to about borrowing the fire as ignition than approaching Ren Xiaosu. Perhaps, they were worried Ren Xiaosu might make some indecent requests of them?

Ren Xiaosu was not happy about this. ‘What do you take me for? Am I such a desperate person? And woman, you’re already in your fifties, alright?! What’s with that wary look in your eyes while looking at me?!’

But Jiang Wu did not oblige their request. She looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, “I borrowed your fire to light mine. Would you agree if I let them use my fire to light theirs?”

“Go ahead.” Ren Xiaosu looked up at the women. He was not so petty as to scorn them. However, Jiang Wu’s reaction surprised him.

As the women repeatedly thanked Ren Xiaosu, they lit the firewood they were carrying and returned back to their spots. From this, Ren Xiaosu reaped yet another three gratitude tokens.

Chapter 117: You have to go!

Looking at the women bringing the firewood back to their location, Ren Xiaosu lamented that it truly was quite difficult for women to survive in this sort of environment.

At this moment, he heard someone snoring beside him. When Ren Xiaosu turned around to look, he saw that Chen Wudi had fallen asleep while eating.

Chen Wudi was probably exhausted from having to protect dozens of people all by himself en route.

Ren Xiaosu felt this world was a little ironic. Of the several thousand people here, only the crazy Chen Wudi and one woman named Jiang Wu were willing to be good people. As for those who felt they were smart and capable, they only had the thought of saving themselves. Even Ren Xiaosu was no exception. But Ren Xiaosu was not ashamed of that. He had never thought of being a good person.

“Bro, why don’t you sleep for a while?” Yan Liuyuan looked at Ren Xiaosu as he added more firewood to the campfire. “Uncle Fugui and I will keep watch for the first half of the night.”

“Yeah, I also have a gun now.” Wang Fugui smiled. He kept the gun close to him as though it gave him a sense of security while holding it.

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and said, “Alright then, I’ll get some sleep first. Liuyuan, teach Old Wang how to use the gun.”

Wang Yiheng, who had been struck in the waist by Chen Wudi, had died. Not only was his spine broken, his vital organs had also sustained various degrees of damage. With such injuries, no one could survive.

When Ren Xiaosu woke up in the middle of the night, he saw Chen Wudi staring at him with a piercing gaze. No one knew when he had woken up.

Yan Liuyuan and Wang Fugui had not slept yet as they were responsible for keeping watch during the night. Wang Fugui was holding his gun and guarding against outside threats while Yan Liuyuan guarded against Chen Wudi.

Although everyone knew that firearms would not be effective against Chen Wudi, they still had to keep their guards up around him.

To Ren Xiaosu and the others, no matter how much sincerity Chen Wudi had shown them, everyone had just gotten to know him. Who knew if he was just good at acting?

Of course, even if they felt that Chen Wudi had other reasons for approaching Ren Xiaosu, it did not seem like he had any motive for doing so either.

Right now, the Qing Consortium was probably the most interested in Ren Xiaosu. No, strictly speaking, the Qing Consortium was more interested in Xu Xianchu. So Chen Wudi was probably not sent by the Qing Consortium.

“Master, you’re finally awake!” Chen Wudi said.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "You've only slept for a while. Aren't you sleepy?"

"Not at all." Chen Wudi shook his head and said, "Ever since I realized that I'm the reincarnation of the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, I'm fine with just three to four hours of sleep per night. It's as good as sleeping for an entire night like I used to."

"Alright then." Ren Xiaosu nodded. It was about the same for him. Now, he could just sleep three to four hours every day and it would be sufficient rest for him. "Liuyuan, Old Wang, both of you can go and sleep now. I'll take over."

"Master, why don't you sleep for a little while more?" Chen Wudi said, "I'll keep watch for you!"

"You don't have to." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "How old are you?"

"Several thousand years old?" Chen Wudi wasn't too sure of it himself. "After all, I don't know how long I lived in the past."

"I'm talking about this current life!" Ren Xiaosu snapped. He realized he actually had to phrase his words carefully when communicating with Chen Wudi.

"Oh, I'm 22," Chen Wudi said.

As Ren Xiaosu felt it was rather strange that someone who was five years older than him had suddenly become his disciple, he asked, "Were you arrested and brought to the asylum by the private army?"

When Zhang Baogen got arrested, Wang Fugui received news that three arrested supernatural beings had been sent to the newly established psychiatric hospital by the private army on that same night. They even transported a lot of medical devices to the hospital at the time.

"No." Chen Wudi shook his head and said, "I was already in an asylum a few years ago. I told them that I was the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, but they didn't believe me. Some time ago, they transferred me to a new hospital for some reason. They even drew my blood and did some tests on me."

"Then do you know Zhang Baogen?" Ren Xiaosu was curious.

"The one who blows bubbles?" Chen Wudi's eyes lit up. "Yes, he was in the ward next to mine. There was also another patient, but I don't know where he went."

From those words, Ren Xiaosu confirmed that Chen Wudi was really from the psychiatric hospital and had been in there with Zhang Baogen at the same time.

He had thought Zhang Baogen and the others who had been arrested would get dissected after they got sent into the stronghold. However, they only had their blood drawn? No, according to Chen Wudi, there were originally three supernatural beings locked together, but one of them went missing.

The one who went missing... probably died, right?!

"What plans do you have?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

“I’ll accompany Master to obtain the Buddhist scriptures from the Western Paradise,” Chen Wudi answered matter-of-factly.

Ren Xiaosu felt uncomfortable and upset whenever he heard this. He thought for a while and said, “What if I’m not seeking the scriptures?”

Chen Wudi was stumped. If they were not going to the Western Paradise on a pilgrimage to obtain the Buddhist scriptures, what else could he do? For the past few years, he had been thinking every day about looking for his master so they could go to the Western Paradise on a pilgrimage to obtain the Buddhist scriptures. Along the way, he would subdue demons and monsters and bring justice to the innocent. However, his master was saying he didn’t want to go to the Western Paradise?!

Chen Wudi considered it for a long time before saying, “No, you have to go!”

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. ‘What do you mean by I have to go? I first have to know where the Western Paradise is, right? It’s not like Zhang Jinglin talked about this before!’

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, “Do you know where the Western Paradise is?”

Chen Wudi was stunned once again. “Nope.”

Well, this would be easy to handle.

In reality, Ren Xiaosu had realized Chen Wudi had not read the original text of Journey to the West. He only knew about it from hearsay, so it led to him having a heroic dream like this. Those who had read the original text knew that Sun Wukong’s image was not that great.

Hence, Chen Wudi would not know where the Western Paradise was and probably did not even know what could be found there. He could only remember that the Great Sage Equal to Heaven was a very powerful hero and that he must escort his master to obtain the Buddhist scriptures in the Western Paradise. Even if his master did not wish to do so, he had to escort him.

Ren Xiaosu thought that it was better that Chen Wudi did not know what Sun Wukong was like in the novel. Sometimes the world needed a hero like him.

Even Ren Xiaosu preferred the storyteller’s version more. In that version, Sun Wukong treaded on rainbow clouds, wore golden armor, and was an unrivaled god.

Ren Xiaosu looked around and saw several thousand people sleeping on the ground with only a few campfires burning. The sky was shrouded in darkness, and the early winter wind got even colder.

After the escapees experienced massive setbacks and went on a distant and arduous journey for two days, they still had to endure their hunger. They were feeble to the point of collapsing. When the cold wind blew tonight, a lot of these people were likely not going to get up again the next morning.

Fever, diarrhea, the flu, and heart and lung failure were all common symptoms for those who suffered from the winter weather.

In this wilderness, humans not only faced the hardships of wild animals. There were also prevalent diseases all around them.

With so many people fleeing for their lives, it would be impressive if half of them could reach Stronghold 109.

The numbers would be fewer if they encountered the Experimentals and wolves along the way. In fact, they could be wiped out if that happened!

Chapter 118: Epidemic

The next morning, a lot of people were feeling weak all over, and their bodies were aching as they got up from the ground. It was just as Ren Xiaosu had predicted.

The effects of being on a long and arduous journey and being affected by the cold weather had emerged. The healthier and stronger people could endure it, but a minority could not stand up to it at all.

Ren Xiaosu realized the stronghold's residents did not have developed muscles. At least, they were not like the refugees in town where even a woman like Xiaoyu was slightly stronger than them.

At this moment, the difference in the circumstances of those who had a campfire to warm themselves last night and those who didn't could clearly be seen. Even the students led by Jiang Wu appeared to be doing fine.

"Let's hurry up and leave." Ren Xiaosu got up and looked at the people around them. "This area has become ground zero for an epidemic. If we don't leave quickly, we might get infected as well."

No one could save those people anymore.

"Master, there's greater merit in saving a life than building a seven-story pagoda!" Chen Wudi said, "We can't just leave these people behind!"

"The Western Paradise is just up ahead." Ren Xiaosu said as he walked, "I'm going there to obtain the scriptures. You can stay behind if you wish."

Chen Wudi was stunned. After considering it for a long while, he finally caught up. It seemed that escorting his master to the Western Paradise to obtain the Buddhist scriptures was top priority for him.

Seeing Chen Wudi catch up, Ren Xiaosu heaved a sigh of relief. He was worried Chen Wudi would foolishly try to save those several hundred people who had fallen sick.

How could they save them?

Wang Fugui still had some antibiotics on him, but how much could the medicine that one person carried do in this situation? Besides, that was all of Wang Fugui's life savings, so why would he selflessly give it up to those people?

When they were about to leave the place, Jiang Wu gathered her students to follow close behind. In any case, Jiang Wu would have her students do whatever Ren Xiaosu was doing.

As everyone looked at the sick people around them, it was inevitable they would feel a little gloomy. But what could they do?

Some of the kinder students said to Jiang Wu, "Teacher, why don't we stay behind and help them?"

Jiang Wu clenched her teeth in a dilemma. She decided, "No, we need to learn to save ourselves first. Perhaps I'm teaching you the wrong things right now, but you guys must leave with me straight away."

This world had forced such a gentle and kind teacher into a corner, but she did not regret it.

"Stay close and don't fall behind, everyone. Do you still remember the wild vegetables we ate yesterday? Pick them if you spot any by the road," Jiang Wu said.

"But those wild vegetables taste horrible," a student muttered with his head lowered.

"Even if it tastes horrible, you still have to eat it," Jiang Wu said firmly.

With Ren Xiaosu getting up to leave, the escapees who could still move tagged along. They felt aimless and only knew how to follow whoever took the lead.

In the end, only the sick people were left lying on the ground.

Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. He knew the wolves had been following them all this while, but they had not come out to attack the group. Why was that? It was clear these people were no threat to them, so could it be the wolves were deterred by the number of people in the group?

What about the Experimentals? Ren Xiaosu was hoping that they had gone northwards from the Jing Mountains with the Qing Consortium's people. That way, he would not have to worry too much about their threat.

Of course, if the Experimentals perished in that volcanic eruption, it would even be better....

Ren Xiaosu still couldn't determine how many Experimentals there were or who had created them. He only understood that this world was not as simple as he had thought it was.

At this moment, the escapees were mostly avoiding Ren Xiaosu and company as they made their way along.

Ren Xiaosu had deliberately refrained from showing his superpower to the escapees because they still had to go to Stronghold 109. Who knew what they did to supernatural beings over there? What if they started arresting such people when they saw them just like what had happened in Stronghold 113?

As Chen Wudi had already exposed himself as a supernatural being, this could end up becoming troublesome for them. Ren Xiaosu felt a bit uncertain, but they could only take it one step at a time.

Ren Xiaosu found it quite funny when he saw another stationary off-road vehicle up ahead. He remembered there were three off-road vehicles and two military transport trucks when the Qing Consortium drove past them. But now, more than half of them had broken down.

While making their escape yesterday, they had seen an off-road vehicle and a military transport truck parked on the side of the road. And now, yet another vehicle was dumped midway. Ren Xiaosu thought that if they hurried up, they might just catch up to the Qing Consortium's people.

After all, they couldn't fit so many people into the remaining vehicles after three had broken down. Therefore, some of them must be traveling on foot.

Luo Lan would probably have his soldiers walk slowly to their destination while he went on ahead to Stronghold 109 in one of the remaining off-road vehicles or military transport trucks.

As the evening sun shone down on them, the escapees furthest up front raised a ruckus. Someone shouted, "Everyone, look!"

"It's the people from the Qing Consortium!" Someone shouted, "Let's get help from them!"

"We've finally met up with the troops!"

They did not even consider whether the combat brigade was willing to let them join their group and madly dashed up to the front. It was as though they were trying to grab onto a lifeline.

Ren Xiaosu looked up when he heard the commotion. He was surprised to see Luo Lan sitting in the scarlet sunset with several hundred of the Qing Consortium's combat troops. Why had this fatty only walked until here? Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu felt that Luo Lan's pants looked a little funny. Upon closer inspection, why did his pants seem like they were made from two leather seat covers stitched together?!

At this moment, Luo Lan was ordering the soldiers to set up their tents. But when he turned around, he nearly jumped out of his skin. There was a large, dense crowd of people closing on them!

He quickly said to the troops, "Quick, those carrying firearms, take them out and prevent the escapees from invading our campsite!"

As the Qing Consortium's troops were combat oriented, the sounds of weapons being cocked reverberated right after Luo Lan finished speaking.

When the escapees saw the guns pointing in their direction, everyone stopped in their tracks. They were at a loss.

A middle-aged man shouted from a distance, "Boss Luo, I'm Little Zhang from the Planning Division! You've met me before!"

Luo Lan hocked a loogie and shouted, "Aren't you embarrassed to be called Little Zhang at your age? All of you, move back. We'll open fire if you take another step forward!"

None of the escapees dared to move. The Qing Consortium did not care about who they were. As long as it were not one of their own, they would treat everyone as their enemies.

Ren Xiaosu was observing this scene while hiding behind the crowd. He had hoped the Qing Consortium would not interact with the escapees. After all, it was quite possible he was wanted by them. Of course, Ren Xiaosu felt that these people did not have the excess energy and time for that.

Seeing so many of the Qing Consortium's troops wrapped up in bandages, it looked like they had been injured while escaping from the stronghold.

But Ren Xiaosu was a little curious. Luo Lan had not abandoned the soldiers and run off by himself. This surprised him a great deal.

Chapter 119: Where is the Western Paradise?

The escapees and the Qing Consortium's combat brigade eventually reached a standoff. The escapees had no intention of attacking the combat brigade; they just couldn't accept the situation.

Everyone initially ran over in enthusiasm to seek "refuge" with the troops, but they backed off when the guns were pointed at them.

In reality, Ren Xiaosu felt there was nothing wrong with the actions the Qing Consortium took. If it were him, he would have done the same.

But the escapees felt that even though they could not get near the Qing Consortium, it would be good enough to follow them. So they decided to rest on the spot. When the Qing Consortium set off, they would quietly follow them.

At the very least, the Qing Consortium would know how to get to Stronghold 109, right?!

Besides, now that there was clearly no more space in the Qing Consortium's vehicles, the majority of those from the Qing Consortium had to travel on foot. As such, the escapees were not worried they would get shaken off by them.

"Xiaosu, will there be any danger if we stick so close to the Qing Consortium?" Wang Fugui asked in worry. After all, Ren Xiaosu had killed several of their people who were keeping watch at the school when the earthquake struck.

"It should be fine." Ren Xiaosu stole a glance at the Qing Consortium.

Currently, the Qing Consortium and the escapees were separated by an open area. It seemed like the Qing Consortium's people did not intend to make any contact with them.

It was better this way since the Qing Consortium would not know Ren Xiaosu was here.

“Y’all can stay here without worries.” Ren Xiaosu cautiously reminded them, “If the situation does not seem right, we’ll escape into the wilderness. Based on the current situation, it’s better to stay with everyone else for the time being. I’m a little worried the wolves will try to pick off vulnerable targets if we get separated from the group.”

The wolves did not dare to attack a group numbering several thousand people, but it would be hard to say what they’d do if Ren Xiaosu and company dropped out of the group.

Actually, Luo Lan was not thinking about capturing Ren Xiaosu at all costs.

When Qing Zhen was about to call him on the satellite phone and issue an arrest on Ren Xiaosu, the volcanic cloud happened to block out the signal. By the time Qing Zhen reached a spot where there was a signal, Stronghold 113 had already been destroyed. In his haste, Luo Lan did not take his satellite phone with him while making his escape. So they two of them couldn’t contact each other.

“Sure, whatever you say.” Wang Fugui nodded.

Ren Xiaosu went to gather for firewood as usual to start a fire and even brought Chen Wudi along with him. It was not that he wanted to order Chen Wudi around, but that he wanted to guard against him in case he really had other motives for joining their group.

In their group, only Ren Xiaosu could keep Chen Wudi in check. So it was better to keep him by his side. It was definitely a little tiring to keep guarding against someone, but Ren Xiaosu felt there was nothing wrong with being extra cautious. As they still had a long journey ahead, Ren Xiaosu would accept Chen Wudi if he later proved to have no other motives.

On their way to gather firewood, Ren Xiaosu found that the escapees had wisened up. They knew it would be very difficult to get to Stronghold 109 if they did not have a campfire to keep themselves warm. As such, a lot of people went to gather firewood and even shamelessly borrowed other people’s fire to start their own.

It was quite a spectacular sight seeing several thousand people gathering firewood together. Ren Xiaosu lamented he might have been too late in going out to collect the firewood. He mainly had not expected such a situation to occur. As he was late by a few minutes, Ren Xiaosu could not find any firewood even after walking around for a long time.

Beside him, Chen Wudi asked, “Master, didn’t you say that the Western Paradise was just ahead of us this morning? Why aren’t we there yet even after walking for a day?”

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. He thought for a while and said, “The Western Paradise... has shifted elsewhere...”

Chen Wudi said unhappily, “Master, do you think I’m dumb?”

Ren Xiaosu gave a mental sigh. Indeed, even a fool would not get deceived by such an answer.

“Wudi.” Ren Xiaosu earnestly tried to change the subject. “Do you have any other wishes besides accompanying me to obtain the Buddhist scriptures in the Western Paradise?”

Ren Xiaosu was thinking of chatting with Chen Wudi for a while longer. After all, loose lips sank ships. As long as Chen Wudi’s thoughts were impure, he would reveal something if he spoke enough.

But he realized Chen Wudi was behaving awkwardly. “Yeah, I have another wish.”

“What is it?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“I’m looking for a girl named Zixia.” Chen Wudi said in a serious tone, “I have two things that I must complete in this reincarnation of mine. One is to escort Master to obtain the scriptures, and the other is to find Zixia 1 !”

Ren Xiaosu turned to his side and stared blankly at Chen Wudi. Which version of Journey to the West did you read?

Even though he carefully recalled all the versions of Journey to the West he had read, he could not remember any woman named Zixia.

Suddenly, Jiang Wu came walking over from the opposite direction. She and her students were carrying a lot of firewood in their arms.

When Jiang Wu saw Ren Xiaosu, her eyes lit up. “You guys don’t have to collect any firewood. We’ve already helped you gather plenty.”

Strength in numbers, as they said. With Jiang Wu leading 28 students to collect the firewood, it was much faster than if Ren Xiaosu had collected it alone. Not only that, Ren Xiaosu estimated that the firewood they were carrying should be enough for four or five campfires.

Ren Xiaosu did not reject her and nodded. It was a good thing she intended to return the favor, and he did not mind her kind gesture.

He saw several female students looking at Chen Wudi in embarrassment. They walked over hesitantly and said to him, “You’re so handsome.”

Chen Wudi was stunned before replying, “Thank you, female almsgivers.”

The words “female almsgivers” were like buckets of cold water that immediately extinguished any romantic thoughts the young women had.

Ren Xiaosu ignored them as he walked to the front. He shouted as he walked, “Come, come, I’ve discovered some good things!”

Sometimes, nature is very generous in gifting. As long as you have a good pair of “seeking” eyes, you would definitely not starve to death.

Just as Ren Xiaosu was about to turn around, he suddenly saw that something was off about the patch of wild grass in front of him. Taking a closer look, he realized it was a sweet potato field!

He did not know how long this sweet potato field had been growing in the wilderness. Furthermore, this was the season sweet potatoes were the most delicious!

Ren Xiaosu turned around and said to Jiang Wu, "What are you still standing around for? Have your students start digging!"

"Oh, OK." Jiang Wu reacted immediately as she beckoned her students to start digging. Honestly, if not for Ren Xiaosu, she would not know there were so many sweet potatoes growing underground.

They had to hurry before the other escapees found out. Otherwise, there wouldn't be many sweet potatoes left for them.

There were simply too many escapees.

As Jiang Wu dug for the sweet potatoes with her students, she constantly stole glances at Ren Xiaosu. This young man was always full of surprises, which gradually turned into a strange kind of dependence for her. Jiang Wu felt that as long as they followed Ren Xiaosu, they would make it to Stronghold 109 alive.

Within a minute, all of the other escapees rushed over once they learned of the situation here.

No one dared to vie with Ren Xiaosu for the sweet potatoes. But as the field was huge, there were still many other spots for them to dig.

Ren Xiaosu did not care about the others. He and Chen Wudi dug up more than 30 sweet potatoes before they finally stopped. These sweet potatoes were shockingly large, so they wouldn't have to worry about their provisions for the next few days at least.

When he got up from the ground and looked around him, he was shocked to see that the entire sweet potato field had almost been stripped bare by the escapees.

Even a locust swarm was not that terrifying....

Chapter 120: House arrest

It didn't seem like tonight would be difficult to get through. Several thousand people had gathered around their campfires to keep themselves warm and thrown countless sweet potatoes into the fire to roast.

Eventually, the entire campsite was suffused with an enchantingly sweet aroma.

In the night, it seemed like countless lamps had been lit in the dark, and the desolate wasteland was flickering with yellow lights. Many people were watching with great anticipation as the sweet potatoes roasted in the campfires.

The sweet potatoes were each as large as a liquor bottle. When Chen Wudi ate three of them in one sitting, Ren Xiaosu was shocked. He suddenly felt that Chen Wudi had acknowledged him as his master probably so that he could scrounge all his food!

As Chen Wudi wiped his mouth clean, he looked at the people around him: Ren Xiaosu, Wang Fugui, Yan Liuyuan, Xiaoyu, and Wang Dalong.

“What are you looking at?” Ren Xiaosu gave him a look.

“Master, don’t you think that our group’s still missing something?” Chen Wudi asked.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. “What are we missing?”

Chen Wudi’s gaze kept wandering back and forth between Yan Liuyuan and Xiaoyu. “We’re still missing a White Dragon Horse 1 .”

Yan Liuyuan and Xiaoyu both felt sick. However, Chen Wudi had principles. He said, “You two don’t have to look at me like that. Neither of you is the White Dragon Horse. I won’t acknowledge just anyone.”

Wang Fugui and Wang Dalong felt uncomfortable again. Could this mean the two of them were really Pigsy and Friar Sand?!

Ren Xiaosu was speechless and a little melancholic. Their group had been quite normal, but why did the group become weird after Chen Wudi joined them?

But Ren Xiaosu was more surprised by the fact that Chen Wudi had a logic system he abided by even though he was insane. So why had he acknowledged Ren Xiaosu as his master?

He ignored Chen Wudi as he quietly estimated everyone’s food intake. Currently, the sweet potatoes they had should be enough for them to survive on for the next two days. Furthermore, food like sweet potatoes might not turn bad even if they were kept past winter. However, it would be a little tiring to carry them as they pushed on towards Stronghold 109. After all, sweet potatoes were rather heavy.

They were only about a 100 kilometers away from Stronghold 109. Calculating the distance the average person could travel in eight hours, it was about 40 kilometers a day. If the intensity were higher, it might be possible to walk 50 kilometers. However, Wang Fugui, Wang Dalong, and Xiaoyu probably couldn’t take it.

In the afternoon, Xiaoyu took a sewing needle and helped Yan Liuyuan pop the newly formed blisters on his feet by pricking them. As Yan Liuyuan quietly watched the profile of her face, he felt it was really good to have a sister like her.

By this time, the blisters on the escapees’ feet had burst and scabbed over and over again. Fleeing as far as they could was not simply a matter of “How many kilometers can they travel in a day?”

Therefore, Ren Xiaosu estimated it would take at least three days for them to get to Stronghold 109. They did not even have to go out to search for food again if they rationed their sweet potatoes properly.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu heard Jiang Wu speaking from a short distance behind him, "Everyone, let's hang in there a bit more. We'll reach Stronghold 109 very soon. Remember to bring along the sweet potatoes we dug up in the afternoon. Although it might get tiring as we travel, it's better than going hungry."

These sheltered students had already passed the stage of homesickness and vulnerability as they learned how to be strong. Someone suddenly asked, "Teacher, can we really get to Stronghold 109 safely?"

"Definitely." Jiang Wu said, "As long as we follow that young man, we'll definitely get there."

At this moment, some students winked and raised their eyebrows at Jiang Wu, telling her to look behind her. Jiang Wu happened to lock eyes with Ren Xiaosu the moment she turned around. She exclaimed and quickly turned away. Her cheeks glowed so red it looked like a campfire was illuminating them.

Jiang Wu lowered her voice and whispered to her students, "Why didn't you all tell me earlier!"

"Haha," the students laughed and said, "teacher is embarrassed."

When Ren Xiaosu watched this happen, he realized humans were probably the best at finding joy amid hardship among all living things. If they could see a little hope, they would want to keep living.

After a while, Jiang Wu's students started singing in soft voices of what sounded like schoolyard songs.

Ren Xiaosu fell into a trance as he listened to their singing. He had also wanted to live in a stronghold free from worries so that he could enjoy a comfortable life. But of course, life in the stronghold was probably no longer as comfortable.

At the Qing Consortium's campsite a distance away, Luo Lan could smell the roasted sweet potatoes. While eating the combat rations taken from the combat brigade's vehicle, he sighed, "These poor people really know how to live."

Beside him, Luo Lan's trusted aide asked, "Boss, do you think your brother will send someone to rescue you?"

"I don't know." Luo Lan was sad. "I'm worried about him instead. He was still in the Jing Mountains when things went wrong, and nobody knows whether he's dead or alive."

Luo Lan's trusted aide muttered, "I think Boss Qing Zhen will be fine. You can always count on him to get things done. He's that reliable."

"Reliable?" Luo Lan sighed. "Didn't an accident still happen all the same? But of course, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are natural disasters. They're unstoppable forces."

"Do you think the same thing happened to Stronghold 112?" his trusted aide asked. "After all, the distance of the two strongholds from the Jing Mountains is about the same. If our side could not stand up to the earthquake's destruction, it should be the same on their side as well."

“That’s right.” Luo Lan thought for a while and said, “I’m afraid Stronghold 112 might have collapsed as well. With the Qing Consortium suddenly losing two strongholds, Qing Zhen will probably get severely punished by the consortium.”

“But it’s not our fault either.” His trusted aide said softly, “It would still have collapsed no matter who was in charge.”

“Qing Zhen has too many enemies within the consortium itself.” Luo Lan said, “Furthermore, he recently killed a lot of the other consortium’s members. The consortium is probably worried it will become too difficult to keep him in check, so they might as well hang him out to dry. However, that’ll all be temporary since the Qing Consortium still needs him to do their work. Indeed, the others can’t perform as well as Qing Zhen can... rather, they are not as ruthless as he is.”

At this moment, Qing Zhen was still trekking on the paths within the Jing Mountains. His face had been blackened by the soot that had gushed out of the eruption, flushing his image down the drain.

Next to Qing Zhen, Xu Man said as he held the satellite phone, “Boss, the Board would like to speak with you.”

By this time, they had walked out of the cover of the volcanic ash cloud, and the satellite phone’s signal had been restored to normal.

“Tell them I don’t have free time,” Qing Zhen said, sounding peeved.

Xu Man felt conflicted but still conveyed the message exactly as it was said. After a few seconds, he looked at Qing Zhen. “They’re requesting you to immediately go to Stronghold 111 to be investigated once we get out of the Jing Mountains. Without their permission, you’re not to leave Stronghold 111. Stronghold 112 and Stronghold 113... have been destroyed...”

“Tell them I understand,” Qing Zhen said, uncaring.

Xu Man hung up after replying to the other party in the call, then said to Qing Zhen, “Are they planning to put you under house arrest?”

“It’s been a long while since we’ve gone to Stronghold 111.” Qing Zhen said, “Call Stronghold 109’s Lu Yuan and have him send someone to search for Luo Lan.”

Xu Man hesitated and said, “As a stronghold overseer, Lu Yuan might not have the authority to do much in a stronghold that’s controlled by the Li Consortium.”

“He should still have some authority when it comes to deploying a few private troops. Since Stronghold 109 is the closest to Stronghold 113, Luo Lan will definitely escape to Lu Yuan’s side if nothing happened to him.” Qing Zhen looked up at the gray skies behind him and said, “Tell him that if he can’t locate Luo Lan, death awaits him.”

Xu Man suddenly felt that Qing Zhen did not seem like someone who was going to be placed under house arrest and be investigated by the consortium. Moreover, the relationship between Qing Zhen and Luo Lan felt much better than what the rumors said.

