

### **Chapter 131: Inside the stronghold!**

Finally, after an indefinite amount of time, the stronghold's gate opened slowly. The heavy gate was pulled up by a rope hidden within the walls as the huge machinery behind it made loud, grinding noises.

Ren Xiaosu immediately turned around and looked inside the gate. This was the first time he so strongly desired to have a clear look at the inside world.

Stronghold 113's gate would often open as well, but Ren Xiaosu had always restrained himself from looking at what was inside. That was because there were good days and bad days in these times, and he was afraid he would end up constantly thinking about it if he saw what it was like on the other side.

Yan Liuyuan had wanted to sneak a look inside, but he was stopped by Ren Xiaosu. At that time, Ren Xiaosu said he would definitely take Yan Liuyuan to live inside the stronghold in the future, but he didn't actually believe that himself.

And now, they were going to be part of that world soon.

When a large group of people came out of the stronghold, a handsome, middle-aged man strode forward. He smiled at Luo Lan in greeting. "A warm welcome to you, Boss Luo. Sorry for not welcoming you at the gate!"

However, Luo Lan's face darkened. "Is an apology enough for making me wait out here for so long?"

Lu Yuan smiled and repeatedly apologized. "I immediately sent someone out to pick you up after receiving Boss Qing Zhen's instructions. However, I lost contact with them as well. Otherwise, I would've been waiting out here for you for a long time."

Luo Lan did not say anything else and walked into Stronghold 109. He waved the truck in. "Drive in!"

All of a sudden, Lu Yuan said loudly, "Wait a minute, who are those people in the truck? Shouldn't they get out for inspection?"

Not a second later, Luo Lan turned around and landed a loud slap on Lu Yuan's face. "Don't overstep your boundaries! How dare you try to conduct a spot check on our Qing Consortium's truck!"

Everyone was stunned! This was Lu Yuan, the overseer of Stronghold 109!

Ren Xiaosu was a little surprised. He didn't expect Luo Lan to have such a violent outburst. It wasn't until this moment that Luo Lan finally had the bearing of an organization's "big shot" like he had imagined. But in reality, he knew this was not Luo Lan's nature after spending some time with him on their way here.

Rather, Luo Lan was just trying to protect himself with that appearance. He needed others to be afraid of him. It was no wonder that people in Stronghold 113 so revered Luo Lan when they heard his name.

In reality, Ren Xiaosu did not know that the fate of Stronghold 113's overseer, Old Liu, had been decided by a word from Qing Zhen. He had already died on the way to Stronghold 178 after being exiled there.

But Ren Xiaosu suddenly found Luo Lan to be quite interesting as he was only doing this so they could get into the stronghold. There was nothing in the truck besides Ren Xiaosu's group of six, as well as Jiang Wu and her 28 students.

The middle-aged man who was slapped in the face stood there for a long while without saying a word. Luo Lan smiled ambiguously at him and said, "What's the matter, Lu Yuan? Have you forgotten your place?"

Lu Yuan lowered his head. "No, I didn't forget. Boss Luo, please enter."

He didn't even ask Luo Lan why the people he sent out did not come back with them. But that was not actually important to him.

Ren Xiaosu sat in the truck and watched quietly. So this was the authority and power of an organization.

At this moment, another few people came out of the stronghold and said respectfully to Luo Lan, "Boss Qing Zhen ordered us to wait here for you."

Luo Lan raised his eyebrows. "You're my younger brother's men?"

"Yes, sir."

Luo Lan beamed. "Alright, lead the way." After that, he turned to Lu Yuan and said, "Carry on with whatever you were busy with. I'll get someone to send you the ID information this evening. Print around 40 stronghold ID cards and send them over to us."

"Alright, I understand," Lu Yuan said politely.

Luo Lan then got into the off-road vehicle that had been sent to pick him up. Ren Xiaosu watched from the shadows in the back of the truck as it slowly drove into the stronghold. Lu Yuan looked like he was thinking about something as he quietly stood outside the stronghold.

When the vehicles got into the stronghold, Yan Liuyuan leaned out of the back of the truck and sighed. "Bro, the streets inside the stronghold are so clean!

"Bro, the buildings inside the stronghold are so tall!"

There were only one-story houses and no tall buildings in the town, but they could see buildings with two or three stories everywhere in here. Some of the taller buildings even had five or six stories.

However, Ren Xiaosu wanted to tell Yan Liuyuan he had seen even taller skyscrapers in the abandoned city inside the Jing Mountains. They were so tall they looked like swords poking the sky.

Having witnessed that sight, Ren Xiaosu realized the high-rise buildings in the stronghold didn't exactly seem that tall anymore. After all, human civilization had regressed a lot.

Jiang Wu quietly looked at Yan Liuyuan as he got dazzled by the sights. But she did not find anything humor in this. She only felt that the life they were used to was way too different from what the refugees knew.

“Bro, there are a lot of plants here inside the stronghold, and they can also be seen on both sides of the roads. Wait a minute, there’s even a large meadow over there!” Yan Liuyuan exclaimed.

“That’s a park.” Jiang Wu explained to Yan Liuyuan, “The stronghold’s residents can stroll there after dinner, and there are even some aunties who go dancing there at night. In this era, tape recorders are considered rare. So if any auntie has a cassette and a tape recorder to play music with, she becomes the most dazzling person on the dance team.”

Yan Liuyuan nodded. “Bro, look at that father and daughter sitting on the lawn. They’re feeding each other food. What a loving scene.... Wait, why have they started kissing?”

Jiang Wu said with a odd expression on her face, “They aren’t father and daughter....”

At this moment, a strange car sped past the truck. As it passed by, the engine made loud roaring sounds. A balding, middle-aged man was sitting in the car.

Ren Xiaosu asked Jiang Wu, “Why doesn’t that car have a roof?”

Jiang Wu thought for a moment before answering, “That’s what we call a convertible. It’s a car that only the rich can drive and is also a status symbol inside the stronghold.”

Ren Xiaosu lamented, “How nice it is to be rich. Even their head is a convertible.”

Jiang Wu was stunned. She simply did not know how to respond!

Ren Xiaosu finally understood that it was no wonder celebrities like Luo Xinyu existed inside the stronghold. So it was because the stronghold’s residents were leading a much more luxurious life than them!

These people neither had to face wild animals nor get drenched in sweat carrying buckets of coal out of the mine. They only needed to work decent jobs within the stronghold in order to earn their pay.

The refugees outside the stronghold were like worker ants supporting over a 100,000 queen ants.

Ren Xiaosu had heard from Zhang Jinglin before that the refugees outside Stronghold 113 were considered few in number. In some other places, a large number of refugees would gather together to grow crops and work in manufacturing industries. There were even large human colonies entirely made up of refugees.

Naturally, those large human colonies were also controlled by the organizations.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu saw several rail lines laid within the ground. “What are these things?”

“Those are trolley tracks.” Jiang Wu said, “The residents can take the streetcar to work and back home every day.”

### **Chapter 132: Going to school!**

As the truck drove forward, everything in the stronghold seemed new and interesting to Ren Xiaosu’s group, although some things still felt odd to them.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu sometimes thought that the wilderness was getting more dangerous these days. Although Stronghold 109 was not as affected as Stronghold 113 by the terrible earthquake, what if something happened here as well someday?

But the residents of the stronghold had never considered the fact that a disaster might happen and they would be left to fend for themselves. It seemed that all these problems had nothing to do with them and were only for the consortium to worry about.

If something really happened, these stronghold residents would not survive in the wilderness.

As the truck advanced, Yan Liuyuan kept looking out. However, some pedestrians in the stronghold had a kind of curious and sympathetic look in their eyes when they saw his dirty appearance.

It was either a look of loathing or sympathy as they silently assumed this child was a poor thing.

When Yan Liuyuan came into contact with these stares, the excitement in his eyes slowly faded away. Then he retreated into the back of the truck.

He and Ren Xiaosu had never needed anyone’s pity before since they didn’t feel like they led a miserable life.

“Bro, why don’t we go back to the town?” Yan Liuyuan was rapidly starting to get uncomfortable here.

“Oh, come off it,” Ren Xiaosu said. Pausing, he added, “If we really can’t get used to living in the stronghold, I’ll find a way to go with you to live outside the stronghold.”

“OK.” Yan Liuyuan nodded happily.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at Jiang Wu and her students. “What plans do y’all have for the future?”

Ren Xiaosu’s group did not have to worry about his group’s livelihoods for the time being. After all, he had a lot of gold in his possession, and Old Wang also brought along a lot of medicinal supplies as hard currency. They probably wouldn’t starve to death in the stronghold in the short term. Moreover, they even took over a shop from the Qing Consortium, which had also settled their living arrangements.

The question put Jiang Wu in a dilemma, because there was no place for them to go.

Tang Zhou smiled and said, "You don't have to worry about this. We'll arrange for you guys to be admitted to school once you've received this stronghold's ID cards. Teacher Jiang Wu can still be a teacher, and the students can continue attending school. If you live in the school's dorm, you can even qualify for subsidies. You guys don't have to worry about anything regarding your livelihoods."

"Are y'all that kind?" Ren Xiaosu said in surprise.

"This isn't about being kind." Tang Zhou said, "Since we went through a near-death experience, we're comrades. Our Qing Consortium isn't so petty that we would not help with such small favors."

"But isn't this stronghold controlled by the Li Consortium? Does your word carry any weight in here?" Wang Fugui asked.

"The Li Consortium wouldn't sacrifice their ties with us over such a trivial matter." Tang Zhou said with a smile, "The matters between the corporations are sometimes very complicated and sometimes very simple. When there's no conflict of interest, everyone will remain on friendly terms with each other."

Ren Xiaosu immediately understood that it was just a triviality for an organization to send several people to school. They weren't even worried about it.

"Um... ahem, how much are the subsidies the school gives out to their students worth?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"900 yuan per month?" Tang Zhou wasn't too sure. "Every stronghold is different. As long as the funds cover a student's monthly expenses, it's sufficient."

"Yan Liuyuan and I will attend school as well then!" Ren Xiaosu said righteously, "It's not about the money. We're just thirsty for knowledge!"

Dumbfounded, Tang Zhou stared at Ren Xiaosu.

"No, wait." Ren Xiaosu suddenly said, "It's not just the two of us. Including Wang Fugui, Wang Dalong, Big Sister Xiaoyu and Chen Wudi, all six of us are looking forward to attending school!"

Tang Zhou looked at Wang Fugui in bewilderment. 'Isn't this man almost 50? You're saying he also wants to attend school? Can you really be any more shameless than that?!

Wang Fugui was even bewildered by what Ren Xiaosu had said, let alone Tang Zhou.

"I think we can forget about the others." Tang Zhou said in a hollow voice, "We can make arrangements for you and Yan Liuyuan to attend school."

Yan Liuyuan nearly cried. "But I don't want to attend school either!"

"Do you think you have a say in this matter?" Ren Xiaosu glared at him. But at this moment, he saw a familiar figure outside the truck in his peripheral vision. When he turned to get a better look, he discovered the figure had vanished.

Was it an illusion or did he really see something? Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled.

The familiarity struck him like a flash of lightning, coming and going just as fast.

“But don’t be too happy yet.” Tang Zhou said to Ren Xiaosu, “Since our Qing Consortium and you don’t owe each other anything else, this is an addition to our deal. So if you want us to help you with your enrollment to school, you’ll have to give us something in exchange.”

With a smack, Ren Xiaosu slapped two small vials into Tang Zhou’s hands as though he already knew. “I know Fatty Luo wants this, so take these to him.”

Tang Zhou was speechless. ‘You think you can address him as Fatty Luo?!’

There were only two people in this world who could address Luo Lan as “Fatty Luo” and get away with it. One of them was Qing Zhen; the other was Zhang Jinglin.

But Tang Zhou suddenly felt Ren Xiaosu might turn out to be the third such person.

As the truck slowly rolled to a stop, Luo Lan’s voice came from outside. “Disembark.”

When Ren Xiaosu jumped out of the truck, Luo Lan told him, “The shop on the left is what I’ve promised you. As this place is a prime location, you won’t be making a loss if you start a business here.”

Looking around, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to find the street was full of shops and had a high volume of foot traffic.

While Ren Xiaosu was looking around, the passersby were looking curiously at him. However, everyone recognized the ginkgo leaf logo on the truck and knew he was one of Qing Consortium’s people.

“What do you think?” Ren Xiaosu looked to Wang Fugui for his opinion. It was not like Ren Xiaosu knew if this location was good.

“It’s not bad.” Wang Fugui nodded to indicate to Ren Xiaosu to accept the offer. He knew Luo Lan wasn’t lying to them. There really was a lot of foot traffic as well as shops on this stretch of road. When it came to doing business, getting people in the door would mean making money!

“There’s also a yard and several rooms in the back that’s enough for you all to live in. The original business operation here was very similar to what you did, so I guess you got lucky.” Luo Lan said nonchalantly, “From now on, I, Luo Lan, don’t owe you anything.” As soon as he finished, he got into the vehicle with a very smug look on his face and left, leaving the six of them behind.

After that, Tang Zhou said to Ren Xiaosu and the others, “Don’t worry, I’ll send someone to deliver you your stronghold ID cards and school admission applications this evening.”

Yan Liuyuan had already rushed into the shop in excitement. It was clear this shop used to be a traditional Chinese medicine clinic. Before Ren Xiaosu’s group arrived, it was being run normally. After the Qing Consortium’s people pulled out from running this shop, they did not take anything away. The place was already fully furnished with tables, chairs, benches, and a good supply of traditional Chinese medicine.

Luo Lan had given this shop to them because he knew Ren Xiaosu had been the only doctor in town. So he thought Ren Xiaosu might want to reopen his clinic here.

But Ren Xiaosu felt sad. As if he knew shit about medicine.

### **Chapter 133: Where has Senior Apprentice Brother gone?**

The shop given to Ren Xiaosu by the Qing Consortium was called the Hall of Chinese Medicine. On the same day, Wang Fugui said he wanted to custom build a new signboard for the shop, but Ren Xiaosu rejected his suggestion. After all, a new, custom-made sign required money, so they should discuss it together before doing it.

At the back of this shop were five rooms; a kitchen, three bedrooms, and a toilet.

After arriving at this stronghold, Ren Xiaosu didn't even know how to use the toilet when he saw one. The toilets in town were all pit latrines, while they could flush water directly into the sewers in the stronghold.

Everyone finally learned how to use the toilet after trying it for a long time.

There was a tap in the bathroom that nobody knew what it did at first. But the moment it was turned on, they could see clear water flowing out.

Ren Xiaosu and the others were very surprised. They had never seen anything so magical before!

It seemed the original owner of the shop used this tap as the source of their daily water consumption. Ren Xiaosu said, "It's no wonder the stronghold's residents are so clean. It's because they don't have to ration their water usage in the stronghold."

In town, each person was allocated a fixed amount of water each day. No one could change that rule.

Originally, there were still some wells in town. But those were sealed up by the stronghold for the reasons of preventing water theft and wasting of water.

The three bedrooms were allocated as followed: Xiaoyu would have one room for herself, Wang Dalong and Wang Fugui would be in another room, while Chen Wudi, Yan Liuyuan, and Ren Xiaosu would take the remaining room. With this arrangement, everything was set.

Although it seemed crowded for six people to live in, it was comfortable enough for Ren Xiaosu and the others. What kind of place did they used to live in? This was incomparable to that!

The six of them carried small stools out into the backyard and sat down, with the first shareholder meeting being held in this simple a place.

Wang Fugui spoke first. "While we were tidying up the house, a few patients came to the shop and wanted to see the doctor, not knowing the shop changed owners. It seems the original shop's business was excellent and had a rather good reputation as well. Why don't we continue to operate the shop as is?"

"But which of us knows medicine?" Ren Xiaosu snapped. "I don't, anyway. All I have is the black medicine."

The refugees of Stronghold 113's town had suffered so much. For the past few years, there had only been two doctors in town, and they didn't even have any medical skills to speak of.

But Ren Xiaosu felt he was better than that quack doctor, Yu Tong. At least his black medicine was really able to treat wounds! Actually, he could learn some medical knowledge for real since he had something as wonderfully magical as the palace. There had to be a proper hospital and doctors here in the stronghold. So Ren Xiaosu could use the Skill Duplication Scrolls on an actual doctor this time. The previous situation would definitely not repeat itself again.

But Ren Xiaosu was also wondering about something. Was it really necessary for him to waste a precious Skill Duplication Scroll on medical skills? In fact, he felt deeply that his Skill Duplication Scrolls were not enough after getting acquainted with Yang Xiaojin and the others! Right now, he wanted nothing more than to gain another dozen or so Skill Duplication Scrolls so he could learn all of the useful skills from Yang Xiaojin in one go when he saw her again.

Besides, he had only wanted to learn medicine for the gratitude tokens. Later on, he realized the doctor-patient relationship had gotten too tense these days. He couldn't get many gratitude tokens by treating and saving the lives of people. It was too slow a process!

So Ren Xiaosu would prioritize saving the Skill Duplication Scrolls instead of learning medical skills if he had them. He would only use them all at once if he met with another "skill bank" like Yang Xiaojin. At that time, he might even gain a lot of excellent skills, such as jumping rope, Nursery Rhymes Singing, marble throwing, and so on.

Even now, he was full of resentment whenever he was reminded about the jumping rope skill.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Let's sell the antibiotics you have for cash first. Those items have an expiration date, right?"

"Mhm." Wang Fugui nodded and said, "I think I have enough to sell for a while. Since it's getting late, I'll go and exchange the Qing Consortium's currency for some of the Li Consortium's currency tomorrow. We don't actually need money in the short term."

"Alright, you can continue plying your old grocery store trade if we really don't have enough money to get by," Ren Xiaosu said.

"But we'll need to have an excellent, long-term product to sell in the store. There are so many types of traditional Chinese medicine here. Do you think you can concoct the black medicine from it?" Wang

Fugui's eyes were shimmering as he could totally foresee how well-received the black medicine would be in the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu hesitated for a moment before saying, "Yeah, but we can't sell the black medicine in large quantities. Just sell one dosage per week."

"That'll do." Wang Fugui beamed and said, "A shop must have a unique product in its inventory. With something like this around, we won't have to worry about not having any customers!"

Ren Xiaosu didn't intend to exchange the black medicine for money. After all, he still had so much gold with him, so he preferred to unlock the intermediate form of the weapon over earning more money.

But since a single gratitude token could be exchanged for three small vials of black medicine, and one small vial could be further divided into five or six portions to sell, just one gratitude token would be enough to last Ren Xiaosu for several months. It was not a heavy price to pay at all.

Ren Xiaosu decided he would first walk around the stronghold tomorrow to see if he could sell the gold he had bit by bit.

All of a sudden, Yan Liuyuan asked, "Where's Chen Wudi? Have y'all seen him?"

Wang Fugui was taken aback. "Right, where has Senior Apprentice Brother... ptui. Where has Chen Wudi gone?"

...

At this moment, Chen Wudi was having a curious look around the streets of the stronghold. He had been sent to a psychiatric hospital in his childhood, and the gloomy and oppressive environment in there made him yearn for the outside world. He had also lived in a prosperous world, but that was a memory of a long time ago.

Everything here gave him a familiar and strange feeling. The dazzling shops and commodities even made him forget about the important matter of going to the Western Paradise to obtain the Buddhist scriptures.

As Chen Wudi slowly made his way to the park they had passed by during the day, he heard singing drift out from it.

Chen Wudi walked into the park and saw aunties dancing in a neat square formation on a wide plaza. This scene was so familiar yet so strange to him that he felt as though he had been transported back in time, distracting him a little.

The aunties stared at Chen Wudi as he walked with dignity to the front of their square formation. Before they could realize what was going on, they saw the young man staring at them with piercing eyes and shouting, "Children, start dancing!"

When Chen Wudi returned to the shop that night, his face was all bruised and swollen. When Ren Xiaosu saw him, he was shocked. Chen Wudi was someone who could even emerge unscathed after getting hit by a bullet. Who could be so godly to beat him up to such a state?!

Could there be someone extremely powerful inside this stronghold?

But no matter how Ren Xiaosu questioned Chen Wudi, Chen Wudi wouldn't tell him what had happened.

### **Chapter 134: Encountering Yang Xiaojin again!**

The Qing Consortium had sent Jiang Wu, Ren Xiaosu, Yan Liuyuan, Wang Dalong, and the students to a school known as 13th High. The full name was Stronghold 109 No. 13 High School 1 .

When Ren Xiaosu heard the name of the school, his first reaction was to think of how large the stronghold was to have 13 high schools. No, there should absolutely be more than that.

In the enrollment form given to him by the Qing Consortium, there were recommendation letters, stronghold ID cards, enrollment grade, and basic student registration information, etc., to be filled in. Tang Zhou said the school would officially add him to the school roster only after he had reported for school.

Yan Liuyuan and Wang Dalong would attend 9th grade while Ren Xiaosu would attend 12th grade. When Tang Zhou said this, he also asked for Ren Xiaosu's opinion on whether he would be able to keep up with the learning progress. After all, what could he have learned from the school in town? It would be embarrassing if he sat in class and not understand anything that was being taught.

However, Ren Xiaosu sneered at him. How could Tang Zhou possibly fathom a person as studious as him?

When Tang Zhou heard Ren Xiaosu say that, he did not say another word.

In reality, even though Ren Xiaosu and Luo Lan had grossed each other out, their short experience of teetering on the verge of death together brought them closer. Although everyone was saying they did not owe each other anything else, Tang Zhou was still very considerate of Ren Xiaosu and the others when doing things for them.

If not for Ren Xiaosu, Tang Zhou would have died in the wilderness.

According to Tang Zhou, there was also a university in Stronghold 109 that some students from other strongholds would try to qualify for.

However, Ren Xiaosu felt it was all in the past when the wilderness was still safe to go out into. Now, very few people dared to venture out of their strongholds.

When Ren Xiaosu mentioned this, Wang Fugui chuckled. He said that even though there were no large animals or the existence of wolves in the wilderness when he was young, there were still refugees who became bandits and killed others for gain. But even so, people would still risk their lives to travel through the wilderness to go between the strongholds.

Sometimes, he really could not understand what those people were thinking. Perhaps they were really brave or just stupid, but there had never been a lack of such people.

Ren Xiaosu was not in a rush to have Yan Liuyuan and Wang Dalong go through the school admission procedures. Instead, he decided he would take everyone on a tour of the stronghold the next morning after washing up. The six of them in their group were too unfamiliar with how things worked in the stronghold.

Rather than quickly getting down to making money, they wanted to see what this place they had been longing to see for so many years was really like.

The next morning, Yan Liuyuan suddenly shouted from the front yard, "Bro, come and take a look at this. There's a note here."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned before quickly walking over. He had had the feeling something was off since yesterday. First, he had briefly spotted a familiar figure in the streets, then sensed someone was staring at him the whole time. The feeling of being stared at instinctively made him shudder. And now, a note had appeared from nowhere. However, this might give him some answers to all that had been going on.

Ren Xiaosu took the note from Yan Liuyuan's hand and saw a line of small words written on it: Don't overstay your welcome in this eventful place.

"Bro, what do the words on the note mean?" Yan Liuyuan asked, "Who wrote it?"

"Where did you discover this note?" Ren Xiaosu asked back.

Yan Liuyuan pointed to the entrance and said, "It came from underneath the gap under the door. I think someone slotted it in last night. Could they be playing a prank on us?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head as he was certain this was not a prank. Because... he recognized the handwriting on the note.

On his way back to the stronghold from the Jing Mountains, he had seen another line of small, beautiful words appear in the cave. At the time, Ren Xiaosu knew these words were left there by Yang Xiaojin.

And it was clear the handwriting on this note was almost identical to the one in the cave.

Together with the familiar figure he had spotted yesterday, Ren Xiaosu could finally confirm that Yang Xiaojin was also here in Stronghold 109. Furthermore, she left this note for him.

Was some kind of major incident going to happen in Stronghold 109? That actually made her persuade him to leave?

Ren Xiaosu was certain Yang Xiaojin was backed by a powerful organization that was supporting her actions. She had to know something and had come here with a specific goal in mind.

Was she going to assassinate Luo Lan? After all, Yang Xiaojin had attempted to assassinate Qing Zhen, so it was understandable if she wanted to assassinate Luo Lan as well. But it didn't make sense. Currently, Luo Lan did not have that many soldiers or someone really powerful around him. It didn't seem like it would be a difficult task to kill him. If Luo Lan were really her target, Fatty Luo would probably have died yesterday.

Ren Xiaosu wondered why Yang Xiaojin had come to warn him. When Yang Xiaojin left him, she even stole her dagger back from him. He didn't believe Yang Xiaojin would be so kind. But Yang Xiaojin probably did not know Ren Xiaosu had returned to that cave. So she would also not know the note she had secretly slipped in had exposed her.

Everything that happened in this world was just this coincidental.

But where could he go if he left this place? Ren Xiaosu was a little aggrieved. Having just been allowed into the stronghold, he had to leave again before he could even find out the name of the street he lived on?

But more importantly, he couldn't get out of this place!

Ren Xiaosu thought Luo Xinyu's ability might be able to disregard the presence of the stronghold's walls. In that way, she could come inside with Yang Xiaojin.

But what ability did Ren Xiaosu have that would allow him to phase through the stronghold's walls?

"Let's not worry about this for now." Ren Xiaosu told Yan Liuyuan, "Don't tell Old Wang and Big Sister Xiaoyu about it yet in case they get more worried."

"OK." Yan Liuyuan nodded.

"Do you need to catch up on sleep?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Nah." Yan Liuyuan shook his head. "I've gotten enough sleep."

Even though they were in the stronghold now, Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan still kept up with their habit of keeping watch last night.

It wasn't because they thought there was any hidden danger around but that they were used to this routine.

If the stronghold's residents learned about this, they would probably laugh at them for not knowing things. There were indeed some thieves in the stronghold, and some people would even occasionally stake out remote places in the middle of the night to rob others, but even that was exceedingly rare. There was no need for people to keep a night watch.

Living in a stronghold and living in the wilderness was different.

In the morning, Wang Fugui first went out to exchange the Qing Consortium's currency they had. He inquired at the foreign exchange counter of the Li Consortium's bank. But when he asked about it, he realized there was a transaction fee of 23% on the total amount exchanged!

Ren Xiaosu advised him not to exchange too much of the money. If they ended up having to go to another stronghold someday, wouldn't the transaction fee all go to waste?

When Wang Fugui heard this, he felt a little nervous. "Xiaosu, you mentioned that we might end up having to go to another stronghold later? Where will we be going?"

"I didn't say that we'll definitely have to leave here." Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "But for now, we don't really need much money. Just exchange it for some pocket money and save the rest for later."

Ren Xiaosu already felt that they might really have to leave this place someday to travel to the next unfamiliar stronghold. But right now, he was more curious about why Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu had come to Stronghold 109.

He wondered if he would get another chance to copy Yang Xiaojin's skills.

### **Chapter 135: Contamination**

The streetcar rattled along the track inside the stronghold. It wasn't that Ren Xiaosu had not been in one before, but that this was his first time seeing this mode of "public transportation."

When anyone boarded the streetcar, they just needed to drop 20 cents into a box at the entrance and they could ride to places far away. It wouldn't even be a problem to ride from the origin station to the terminal station.

Wang Fugui had heard of streetcars long ago. After all, there would always be mention of new and quirky stuff in the stronghold whenever he interacted with the stronghold's residents.

So when Ren Xiaosu mentioned he wanted to tour the stronghold, Wang Fugui said that taking the streetcar would be the easiest and most economic mode of transportation.

"Bro," Yan Liuyuan said while leaning on the windowsill, "the stronghold's residents will definitely not have anything to worry about. It's so safe and convenient to live inside here. They can enjoy a life that is hundreds of times better than the refugees by just working an easy job in the stronghold."

"How can people not have any worries?" Ren Xiaosu sat beside him and said with a smile, "Even Luo Lan will have things to worry about. Something like that does not decrease with the increase of material gains."

"That's true." Yan Liuyuan nodded. "Then do you think there is anyone in the world who does not have anything to worry about?"

Ren Xiaosu said, "Yeah, the dead."

Yan Liuyuan slowly turned around and looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Bro, do you think it's suitable to say something like that on such a happy occasion...."

“Even a fool like Chen Wudi has his own worries.” Ren Xiaosu let out a sigh. Chen Wudi was sitting in the last row with his face still swollen. No one knew where this fellow had gone to yesterday and who had given him such a beating.

On either side of the street in this stronghold city, people were selling all sorts of things, like soup dumplings, tofu brains, and other breakfast foods. Some shops also sold all kinds of hardware products and groceries.

Pedestrians were walking on sidewalks, and cyclists would occasionally speed past them.

Ren Xiaosu asked, “How much does a bicycle cost in the stronghold? I feel like it’s quite convenient to travel around on one instead of having to walk.”

Once, an “esquire” in town bought a bicycle that had circulated out of the stronghold, but it was stolen on that very same night by someone else. To escape the pursuit of the esquire, the thief rode the bicycle all the way to another stronghold.

A bicycle was a luxury item in town. It was something you couldn’t buy even if you wanted to.

“I’ll go ask around this afternoon.” Wang Fugui said, “It shouldn’t be cheap. After all, resources are so scarce these days. You can see that those riding bicycles are wearing clothes of relatively better quality. It seems that they’re considered quite well-off in the stronghold.”

“I should’ve found out more from Jiang Wu on our way here to the stronghold,” regretted Ren Xiaosu. They had never been in a stronghold before, but Jiang Wu grew up in one.

But by now, Jiang Wu had reported to the school to continue working as a teacher. She was probably also going to be teaching at 13th High.

...

On the way, Ren Xiaosu heard some people around him talking. “Have you heard? Stronghold 113 has been given up on. It’s said the recent earthquake collapsed Stronghold 113. Even the Qing Consortium’s people have fled here to our stronghold.”

“For real?” someone said in surprise. “It wasn’t mentioned on the radio.”

“They definitely wouldn’t tell you anything about it on the radio,” the first person said with a smile. “But I have a friend who has a working relationship with the Qing Consortium, and he told me that the big shots from the Qing Consortium arrived at our stronghold. They even brought in dozens of refugees with them.”

“Refugees?” The other person said in surprise, “Shouldn’t the refugees be obediently working outside the stronghold? Why did they come in?”

Ren Xiaosu gave them a look but did not say anything. He heard someone else say, "Who knows? I wonder if they brought in any diseases, germs, or contamination from the outside."

"Shh, look at those people behind us. I think they might be those refugees!" someone said in shock.

With this reminder, the others on the streetcar also turned around and looked at them. The more they looked at them, the more they felt that Ren Xiaosu and company might really be refugees.

Yan Liuyuan was surprised when he saw all of these people disembarking at the next stop.

After just one stop, they were the only ones left on the streetcar. If the driver weren't required to operate the streetcar, Yan Liuyuan sensed he would also have gotten out!

Ren Xiaosu scrutinized the six of themselves. Today, all of them had put on their newly washed clothes, and everyone had taken a hot water bath too, so their faces and bodies were no longer dirty.

But the fashion of clothing the refugees could buy and their tanned skin contrasted too greatly from those of the stronghold residents.

"Bro," Yan Liuyuan whispered, "I feel like the stronghold's residents aren't too friendly."

The residents in the stronghold did not even come over to check with them and just avoided them as though they were the plague after guessing they might be refugees.

All because they could be carrying germs from the outside, and because the stronghold had spread word that refugees were not allowed on the inside due to their "contamination."

Ren Xiaosu did not reply to him. He calmly said, "Big Sister Xiaoyu, buy two new sets of clothes for each one of us tomorrow. Everyone will start wearing their new clothes so that we can blend in with the residents of the stronghold."

"I'm not going to wear them," Yan Liuyuan protested softly. It would feel like he was bowing down to the stronghold's residents if he wore the new clothes.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Whether we're living in the wilderness or the stronghold, you must blend in with and understand your surroundings to survive. Only then will you have the ability to resist. When you can't change the environment, you must first learn how to disguise yourself."

Wang Fugui was stunned to hear this. He didn't expect Ren Xiaosu would apply his wilderness survival principles to living in the stronghold. So was he also treating the stronghold like a place in the wilderness?

They heard Ren Xiaosu add, "We might still have to leave the stronghold someday, so let's be prepared for that."

Yan Liuyuan's eyes lit up. As someone who knew Ren Xiaosu best, he could tell that Ren Xiaosu had already made up his mind about leaving!

But Wang Fugui smiled and said, "Why don't we leave tomorrow then? For some reason, I always felt more comfortable living in town."

"There's no hurry." Ren Xiaosu shook his head and said, "And we can't go outside anyway. Let's talk about it when I find a chance."

At this moment, the streetcar reached the terminal station. Ren Xiaosu and the others had planned to stay on the streetcar for the return trip at first. However, they saw many residential houses further out from where the terminal station was, and they even came with yards!

From a distance, it looked like this area was rather large, but it was also much more secluded when compared with other places.

Ren Xiaosu tapped on the streetcar operator and asked, "What is that place?"

"That's an affluent neighborhood in our stronghold." The driver said, "Only the rich and powerful live here. There's no trolley tracks going there since everyone who lives there has their own car." As the driver spoke, he kept inching back as he was afraid of getting too close to Ren Xiaosu.

### **Chapter 136: Xu Xianchu is here!**

The driver had wanted to reprimand Ren Xiaosu to get him to stand further away. But for some reason, he was terrified when he met Ren Xiaosu's eyes.

"Oh, thank you." Ren Xiaosu nodded as he looked at the affluent neighborhood. So it turned out there were also both poor and rich neighborhoods inside the stronghold? It seemed like the difference between the rich and poor was just as obvious within this stronghold.

When Ren Xiaosu thanked him for the information, the streetcar operator was stunned. He had already regarded Ren Xiaosu and his group as dreadful monsters, so he didn't expect Ren Xiaosu would thank him so politely.

Before the driver could react, Ren Xiaosu was asking him again, "When does this streetcar turn around?"

The driver said haltingly, "Why don't you take the next streetcar? It'll arrive in 20 minutes."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the driver. "Your suggestion is very irrational."

"...All passengers, please sit tight and hold onto the handrails."

...

On the way back, Ren Xiaosu disembarked from the streetcar a stop early, not far from their shop, because he had spotted a jewelry shop.

After confirming that no one was tailing him, he pretended to walk in as normally as he could. But as soon as he got in, he noticed a wanted poster put up on the walls of the jewelry shop.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned when he saw the wanted poster. Wasn't this Xu Xianchu's photo?! He was shown smartly dressed in a private army uniform that was probably taken when he was working for the stronghold.

"Manager, who's on the wanted poster?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"I don't know. Someone from the stronghold's Public Order Division came to put this up today." The owner of the jewelry shop said, "They only mentioned that if anyone saw this person, they should immediately report it to them. There's even a reward for doing so."

"I haven't seen this anywhere else, so why was it only put up in the jewelry shop?" Ren Xiaosu was getting worried.

"I heard it's because someone stole some gold from the Qing Consortium. I don't know the exact details, but the Public Order Division is conducting strict checks on all unknown supplies of gold. As long as the gold shows any signs of oxidization or doesn't have a consortium's logo imprinted on it, we are to report it to the Public Order Division when we come across it." The owner of the jewelry store asked, "So, is there anything I can help you with?"

"Oh, it's nothing..." Ren Xiaosu immediately walked back out of the jewelry shop.

Ren Xiaosu was despondent. He realized the Qing Consortium had likely detected he had taken a lot of gold with him.

Although he had left behind some of the gold he'd wrapped up in the jacket, someone from the Qing Consortium had to have realized the amount did not add up upon checking the jewelry shop's display counters. In fact, the check would reveal that a large quantity of gold had gone missing! That was because a lot of dust had settled on the gold items that had been placed on the counter. After the gold was taken away, the signs pointing to it would be painfully obvious.

Ren Xiaosu did not want to take any chances. He knew that if the Qing Consortium had specifically put up the photo of a wanted man in a jewelry shop, they must have found out something. They clearly intended to seek him out at the point of sale when he tried to dispose of the stolen goods.

No, they should be seeking out Xu Xianchu.

Xu Xianchu had just arrived at the town outside Stronghold 111. After being on the run for many days, he finally made it here before he starved to death.

Along the way, Xu Xianchu would use his shadow clone to run as long as he was in a good frame of mind. Although it saved him a lot of energy when using the shadow clone to carry himself forward, he was on the verge of vomiting due to the bumpy ride when being piggybacked by the shadow clone.

But more importantly, he could not find much food to eat in the wilderness after parting ways with Ren Xiaosu and could only make do with some wild vegetables he found. During this time, he even suffered from diarrhea for an entire day. Fortunately for him, he was a supernatural being. Now that he had excellent physical fitness, eating some poisonous wild vegetables would not be enough to kill him.

At this moment, Xu Xianchu was looking forward to getting back to human civilization so that he could get something to eat. Every time he came across a rock these past two days, he would think it was an unfilled steamed bun that could be eaten!

But when he arrived at the entrance of the town, he had a feeling that several people staring were at him.

Xu Xianchu went over to a shack and said, "Hello, do you have anything I can eat? I'll pay you for it."

Xu Xianchu swallowed hard when he saw some cornbread inside the shack.

The man of the family came out and sized up Xu Xianchu. "You're not from our town, right? You don't look familiar at all."

"Ahem, I'm just passing by," Xu Xianchu explained. He was thinking that other people should not recognize him since his face was so dirty now.

But as the refugee sized up Xu Xianchu, he suddenly noticed something. He shouted, "Xu Xianchu! Xu Xianchu is here! Everyone, grab him!"

Xu Xianchu was confused.

On his way here to Stronghold 111, Xu Xianchu actually felt very hesitant. After all, Stronghold 111 was where the Qing Consortium's headquarters were. But he felt that it wouldn't be a problem if he just stayed in town for a short while, right? But at this moment, Xu Xianchu realized he was wrong to have thought that way!

The Qing Consortium should have issued an order to arrest him. Otherwise, these refugees would not be trying to catch him like they were all soldiers.

But he hadn't done anything at all. When he was still in the Jing Mountains, he did not even manage to get past the lockdown perimeter the Qing Consortium had set up. So why were they wasting so much effort to try to catch him?!

Of course, Xu Xianchu was also a little worried for Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. If there were already so many people going after someone who had not even breached the perimeter, he could easily imagine how massive the turnout would be when it came to arresting Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu.

In that instant, Xu Xianchu did not hesitate any further. He summoned his shadow clone to kick aside the refugee in front of him. Simultaneously, he rushed into the shack and grabbed several black cornbreads into his arms before running away!

He could not stay here anymore. It seemed he had to head elsewhere. It would be best if he could go somewhere not under the control of the Qing Consortium!

After much consideration, Xu Xianchu suddenly felt that Stronghold 109, which was controlled by the Li Consortium, was his best choice!

At this moment, the engines of a huge convoy of vehicles roared in the distance. Xu Xianchu had already mounted the back of the shadow clone before the refugees could catch up to him. The buff shadow clone immediately accelerated into the depths of the wilderness!

When the refugees saw this, they stopped in their tracks. This was most likely the first time they had ever seen a supernatural being with their own eyes!

When the convoy arrived in town after driving back from far in the wilderness, it started slowing down. Inside one of the vehicles, Qing Zhen was dirty and covered in dirt. If it weren't for the consortium's people picking him up from outside the Jing Mountains, who knows when he would have gotten back to Stronghold 111.

Qing Zhen frowned when he saw the disturbance in town. "Xu Man, go and find out what's happening."

They didn't manage to see what had happened because they were too far away.

Xu Man rolled down the window and looked at one of the refugees. "What happened here?"

The refugee walked over and said in a respectful tone, "We discovered Xu Xianchu just now."

Qing Zhen, who was seated in the back, immediately sat straight. "Xu Xianchu? Where is he?"

The refugee pointed in the direction Xu Xianchu had fled and said, "He ran out into the wilderness."

"...Get someone to catch him." Qing Zhen said, "Let the Spec Ops soldiers do it. They're much more experienced in the wilderness than Xu Xianchu is."

"Boss," Xu Man said awkwardly, "you're about to start your house arrest."

Qing Zhen asked, "...Where does that path lead?"

Xu Man gave it some thought. "Boss, it should be Stronghold 109 over there."

"Call Luo Lan." Qing Zhen clenched his teeth and said, "If Xu Xianchu shows up in the vicinity of Stronghold 109, I want him arrested!"

### **Chapter 137: Obsessed with fame and fortune**

Qing Zhen had not expected he would miss Xu Xianchu by such a narrow window, having just returned later by a moment.

However, he was not someone to dwell on such matters. Since he had missed his chance to get him, there was no point in regretting it.

“Let’s enter the stronghold,” Qing Zhen said calmly. Actually, what he should be most concerned about was not Xu Xianchu, but how the old fogeys from the Qing Consortium were going to punish him. Or rather, how they were intending to usurp his authority.

A lot of people in the outside world thought the Qing Consortium was helmed by Qing Zhen. But in actual fact, he only controlled a portion of the military.

Because the consortium’s external affairs were mainly handled by Qing Zhen, outsiders thought that Qing Zhen was very influential within the Qing Consortium.

Only Qing Zhen himself knew that the old fogeys in the consortium never trusted him. With batches and batches of the organization’s Shadows constantly getting replaced, the “face” of the Qing Consortium was the only thing that mattered to the old fogeys.

A saying that had circulated from the Qing Consortium went: “Violence is only a means to maintain order; it can never be order itself.”

In short, a Shadow should stay hidden instead of coming into the open.

With Qing Zhen stealing all the limelight after his confrontation with the Pyro Company, and the old fogeys of the consortium long wanting to suppress his arrogance, they turned to placing him under house arrest and relieving him of all his authority.

Xu Man whispered, “Boss, we’re going to report to the War Department tomorrow. All of our men will probably get separated and assigned to the other forces.”

“OK.” Qing Zhen nodded nonchalantly. “Go ahead.”

“Do you have any words you want me to tell the others?” Xu Man asked, “Why don’t you step out of the car to say a few words to the men? Or we can go with you to wander the wilderness? There are so many of us, and we even have guns too, so we can do anything that we want.”

Qing Zhen chuckled and shook his head. “Many of them are waiting to be reunited with their wives and children back home. But you want to tell them to go back to the wilderness and try to survive there instead?”

“They’d be willing,” Xu Man said.

Qing Zhen opened the car door. The moment he came out, all the soldiers inside the military transport trucks behind him also alighted from their vehicles. The town was suddenly overcrowded with several thousand soldiers, resulting in all of the refugees running away in panic.

“Gentlemen,” Qing Zhen said calmly as he looked at the soldiers in front of him, “after you get assigned to other forces, perform your best and don’t embarrass me.”

Once Qing Zhen finished, several thousand soldiers straightened their backs and answered in unison, “Yes, sir!”

The soldiers understood the fate awaiting them.

“Back into the vehicles!” Qing Zhen then got into his car nonchalantly.

The garrison standing on the ramparts was a little startled after witnessing this scene. It seemed like none of the Qing Consortium’s troop commanders were anywhere near as influential as Qing Zhen.

After entering the stronghold, Qing Zhen returned to his residential villa. He took a shower and then put on a new white suit. He had someone burn his old suit.

As soon as Qing Zhen’s group entered the stronghold, some of the Qing Consortium’s big shots eagerly took over his operational command. The several thousand-strong troops were divided up as they got assigned to the forces under the different big shots based on a list. The soldiers under Qing Zhen’s command were all brave veterans. Now that the big shots had a chance to take command of a portion of these troops, no one was willing to let this chance slip away.

But it seemed that Qing Zhen did not mind at all.

After his shower, Qing Zhen came out of the villa’s front door. His personal car that had been parked at the door was gone. He smiled. “They even took the car away.”

He headed outside. But the two soldiers on guard duty looked at him awkwardly and said, “Boss Qing Zhen, you can’t leave the house. Please don’t make it difficult for us.”

Qing Zhen raised his eyebrows. “The old fogeys only said that I’m not allowed out of Stronghold 111. When did they say that I can’t even step out of the house? Is someone making things up? Don’t worry, I’m just going out to listen to some singing. Who in Stronghold 111 doesn’t know that I like listening to singing?”

The two soldiers looked at each other. How could he be in the mood to listen to singing at a time like this? Could it be that the renowned Boss Qing Zhen wasn’t worried about his own situation? But the soldiers still did not step aside for him.

Qing Zhen did not say anything. Then, a bullet came from nowhere and hit the flagstone pavement in front of the two soldiers. There was a hidden sniper nearby protecting Qing Zhen!

The two soldiers knew the sniper had shown them mercy. Even if the sniper had shot them dead, the Board would not impose a heavier punishment on Qing Zhen over such a small matter.

No one would want to cause any more trouble during the handing over of command of the combat troops!

Qing Zhen was still looking calmly at the two soldiers when they decided to step back. “Thank you, Boss Qing Zhen, for showing mercy to us.”

“Alright, don’t worry, no one will make things difficult for you two.” Qing Zhen chuckled and walked out.

The two soldiers couldn't help wondering about this as Qing Zhen left them. Everyone had heard he kept a lot of trump cards around him, but no one expected it to be true.

But didn't the Board usurp Qing Zhen's authority? How could anyone still be willing to follow someone who had fallen out of favor with the consortium?

They heard Qing Zhen humming happily as he headed towards the prosperous part of the city. One of the soldiers asked as Qing Zhen walked away, "What is Boss Qing Zhen singing?"

"I don't know. We don't even have the money to go and listen to concerts." The other soldier was unsure about what song it was.

In the evening, Qing Zhen sat down alone inside a theater. Everyone else had left the place as they feared he was poison. Only Qing Zhen was watching the performances as the performers on stage rotated.

He leaned his head against one of his hands. The more alcohol he drank, the clearer his vision became.

In this theater, there was only a sweet and sorrowful voice drifting up to the neon lights.

"A posthouse, a crossroads, how many officials go north and south every day?"

"Promotion brings untold joy; demotion sends one home in silence."

"Fame and fortune have always been fleeting. Life keeps flowing and growing..."

At this moment, someone walked up from behind him and said, "Qing Zhen, the Board has something to discuss with you. They're requesting you attend the meeting."

Qing Zhen smiled. "Tell them I'm not going."

...

On his way back from the jewelry shop, Ren Xiaosu thought about his future plans. Now that he couldn't sell the gold in his possession and might even get targeted by others at any moment, he was starting to worry that he couldn't exchange them for cash.

Initially, Ren Xiaosu was not enthusiastic about opening the shop because he still had gold. But now, he had to reconsider opening the shop to do business again. He couldn't possibly expect to live on the subsidies given by the school to students, right?

Should he sell the black medicine? Ren Xiaosu didn't want to do that. After all, it was more difficult to earn gratitude tokens than money.

As he walked, he suddenly realized he was back at the shop when he finally looked up. But the moment he came into the shop, he saw Wang Fugui acting suspiciously as he promoted something to a man.

When Ren Xiaosu got closer, he was surprised to see it was the black medicine being promoted.

From Wang Fugui's expression, it was obvious he was not explaining the proper use of the black medicine. Moreover, the middle-aged man had an indecent look about him.

Ren Xiaosu felt sad. Was he destined to be a drug dealer forever?!

### **Chapter 138: Pyro**

"That drug dealer"—this was often a label that came up during discussions surrounding questionable behavior.

Ren Xiaosu couldn't accept this. How could a young and promising supernatural being like him be labeled with such an unworthy title?

Just as he had said before, his social standing would plummet if he became known as "the drug dealer."

At this moment, a man walked in and said, "Doctor, can you take a look at what's wrong with me? My stomach constantly hurts."

Without even thinking, Ren Xiaosu rejected him. "We won't be treating any more patients from now on."

However, the man became unhappy. He said, "You're running a clinic, so how can you refuse to treat patients? Do you know who I am?"

Ren Xiaosu was also getting unhappy. What was with the residents' behavior in this stronghold? Why did they all like to boast so much about who they were the moment they opened their mouths? It was as though they were living based on their social statuses. He stared at that man. "And who are you?"

"I'm Yan Linfeng from the Western District! Just go around and ask who I am!" the man said disdainfully.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu heard the long-awaited voice from the palace say, "Quest: Treat a patient."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Linfeng with a broad grin. "Come, come, tell me about your symptoms."

Yan Linfeng was stupefied. Was his name really that effective? He had only wanted to throw a tantrum to vent his anger but that quickly subsided. "My stomach doesn't feel good. It hurts a little."

"Old Wang, prescribe three antibiotic pills for this patient." Ren Xiaosu said nicely, "You have gastritis, but you'll be fine after taking some medicine."

"Really?" Yan Linfeng said skeptically.

"Yes!" Ren Xiaosu said firmly. 'Like I care whether it's real. Completing the quest is more important.'

The palace had not assigned him any quests for a dozen days. This was a good start to the day.

The moment that man took the medicine from him, the voice from the palace said, "Quest complete. Awarded Basic Skill Duplication Scroll!"

Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. The quest was complete!

When Yan Linfeng took the medicine and paid for it, he asked, "Is there any food I should avoid?"

"Don't eat bitter melon," Ren Xiaosu said absentmindedly as he started thinking about the scroll in the palace.

"Why shouldn't I eat bitter melon?" Yan Linfeng was taken aback.

Ren Xiaosu replied, "Because it doesn't taste good."

Yan Linfeng was confused.

Wang Fugui sent Yan Linfeng away. Ren Xiaosu looked up and asked, "Did we only get two customers today?"

"Well, not really, but we don't know how to treat patients, so we just asked them to leave," Wang Fugui said with a smile. Then he slid out a piece of red paper from underneath the counter. "By the way, someone sent us a pamphlet. Have a look."

"What is it?" Ren Xiaosu was uncertain as he took it from him. But he was stunned when he saw it, because the logo of the Pyro Company was printed at the top of the pamphlet.

The Pyro Company's logo was that of a small flame which seemed to represent the survival of civilization as it passed on from generation to generation.

Ren Xiaosu turned serious. Did the Pyro Company have business here in Stronghold 109 as well? Ever since he got out of the Jing Mountains, the Pyro Company was one of the organizations Ren Xiaosu was most curious about.

Until now, he could only speculate on the company based on a few words Yang Xiaojin had said. For some reason, Ren Xiaosu kept a constant wariness for the company.

Maybe it was because Yang Xiaojin had a hostile attitude when she was describing the Pyro Company, and he got influenced.

"Effective from today, supernatural beings can drop by our company and get paid for donating your blood. Your blood will be used for our company's future research and also contribute to humanity's progress. Furthermore, you will receive 1,000,000 yuan in exchange for just 200 mL of your blood. Our company will keep your personal information confidential and offer you protection. For further information, please contact..."

There was a series of numbers at the bottom.

According to Yang Xiaojin, the Pyro Company controlled a place similar to the Jing Mountains. Furthermore, there were no volcanoes there, and it was preserved in pristine condition.

Currently, all of the strongholds held a mostly hostile view of supernatural beings. However, not only had the Pyro Company started purchasing the blood of supernatural beings, they even openly offered them protection!

Wang Fugui looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a smile, "Well, do you want to give it a try?"

Yan Liuyuan walked next to them and glanced at the pamphlet. "Uncle Fugui, something is off about this company. My brother must not go there."

"True." Wang Fugui immediately understood. They had witnessed the tragic cases of Zhang Baogen and Chen Wudi for themselves. Who could guarantee that this Pyro Company was acting with good intentions?

Even if the Pyro Company meant well, who could guarantee they could keep the information confidential? So they would rather not earn this money if it meant Ren Xiaosu had to risk his life for it.

However, Wang Fugui realized from this just how aware Yan Liuyuan was of his surroundings.

Holding the pamphlet in his hand, Ren Xiaosu tried to figure out what other tricks the company might be playing. In reality, Wang Fugui and Yan Liuyuan still did not understand this world well enough.

Just citing those terrifying Experimentals as an example, did those subjects all willingly become Experimentals? Probably not.

If the Pyro Company were trying to obtain the blood samples of supernatural beings, they were definitely thinking of obtaining the genetic information. This company was so ambitious that it actually sought to collect the blood of all supernatural beings in the world for research.

But Ren Xiaosu did not think this was a good thing. He called Chen Wudi over and instructed him not to use his superpowers without his permission. For this reason, Ren Xiaosu even had to threaten Chen Wudi with the headache spell before Chen Wudi was willing to promise he would not do so.

"I never expected that the headache spell would be that useful," Ren Xiaosu lamented.

Wang Fugui said with some regret, "But it's quite a pity to give up on such a huge reward."

Making money was a lifetime business to him. It was really difficult not to feel tempted when faced with the promise of so much money for the first time. Of course, he knew his priorities.

All of a sudden, Yan Liuyuan's eyes lit up. "Since this Pyro Company is so rich, why don't we pull a heist on them!"

Ren Xiaosu kicked Yan Liuyuan's buttocks. "Get lost. Pack up and get ready to go with me to school tomorrow!"

"OK..." Yan Liuyuan responded.

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Yan Liuyuan. As this kid had grown up in an environment as harsh as the town, someone would have to teach him from time to time about right and wrong.

Ren Xiaosu noticed the series of numbers at the bottom of the pamphlet. "What do these numbers represent? Is it a code?"

"That should be a telephone number." Wang Fugui smiled and said, "I've heard before that every stronghold has a telephone network. A person can chat with another person even though they're dozens of kilometers away from each other. We have a landline in our shop too, but we haven't figured out how to use it yet."

After this group of refugees arrived, they had to explore everything by themselves. Ren Xiaosu was wondering if he should ask Jiang Wu to come over to give them a lesson about living in the stronghold so they would all get a better understanding of how things worked here.

"Why don't we try using the phone?" Yan Liuyuan said excitedly. He was at an age where he was interested in all kinds of new things.

### **Chapter 139: Leaving an escape route**

A group of people gathered around the magical landline. Even Xiaoyu joined in on the fun.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "How do we use this thing?" He saw a bunch of numeric buttons on the phone, but there was no operating manual for it.

"Look at the series of numbers on the Pyro Company's pamphlet." Wang Fugui said as he pointed at it, "Do we just dial them in sequential order?"

"I guess so. Let's try it." Ren Xiaosu said, "Liuyuan, you give it a try."

Everyone was quite curious about this new device, but Ren Xiaosu still took care of Yan Liuyuan and decided to let him have fun with it first.

Under the gaze of everyone's anticipation, Yan Liuyuan dialed the series of numbers. They definitely would not use the Pyro Company's numbers to test it out, so it ended up with numbers being punched in randomly.

But after dialing the number, nothing happened!

Yan Liuyuan looked up at Ren Xiaosu and said, "Bro, there's no response."

"Let me think." Ren Xiaosu said, "We probably made a mistake operating it. You can see that it's an eight-digit number on the Pyro Company's leaflet. So we should be dialing an eight-digit number as well."

Chen Wudi came in from the backyard and saw the whole lot of them crowded together. He asked, "Master, what are all of you doing?"

Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. "Come, come, my disciple, see if you know how to operate this thing."

Although Chen Wudi used to live in a psychiatric hospital, he should still understand some basic functions of things, right? Maybe there was such a thing as a telephone in the psychiatric hospital?

“Let me see.” Chen Wudi glanced at it and said, “This is a telephone.”

Chen Wudi then picked up the handset on the telephone. Ren Xiaosu and the others finally understood they had to pick it up first before using it.

They saw Chen Wudi punch in a series of numbers. After several rings, a voice sounded from the receiver. “Who is it?”

Chen Wudi said in an imposing manner, “I’m the Great Sage!”

“You’re crazy!”

With a click, the person on the other end hung up.

Ren Xiaosu grinned. This phone thingy was amazing! The person on the other end could even accurately identify Chen Wudi’s nature through it.

Chen Wudi got so angry he wanted to call back to scold that person. However, he had already forgotten what number he dialed.

“Come, Liuyuan, give it a try as well,” Ren Xiaosu said with a smile.

Yan Liuyuan dialed the numbers in anticipation. After two rings, someone picked up the phone, and the voice of a middle-aged man could be heard saying, “Who is this?”

Yan Liuyuan felt as though he had opened up a door to a new world. He said politely, “Hello, uncle.”

The person on the other end was stunned. “Who are you? Is there anything you’re calling me for?”

“It’s nothing, I was just trying to make a call,” Yan Liuyuan said honestly. “I just learned how to use the telephone. I’m sorry for disturbing you.”

“Um, it’s alright.” The person on the other end hung up.

Yan Liuyuan looked up and said to Ren Xiaosu with the receiver in his hand, “Bro, this phone thingy is amazing. The other person on the phone feels like he’s right across from me.”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu nodded. “Don’t test it anymore. It’s not good to disturb others.”

But suddenly, the phone rang. Ren Xiaosu was stunned before picking it up. “Hello?”

The person on the other end said, “Do you need a small loan...”

The person prattled on and said a lot of things, but Ren Xiaosu and the others were stunned. They just could not understand what the person was saying. Ren Xiaosu hesitated before saying, "I don't understand what you mean."

That person stayed silent for a couple seconds. "It just means that we can lend you money."

"How much is the interest?" Ren Xiaosu asked after a short pause.

"3% 1," the person in the call said.

Ren Xiaosu laughed, "Isn't that loansharking?"

The person in the call shouted to someone, "Boss, someone says that we're loan sharks."

Someone else came to the phone and said, "Young man, don't you spout nonsense. We aren't loan sharks."

Ren Xiaosu laughed his ass off. "Isn't charging 3% interest loansharking? Of all the businesspeople out there, you're the ones without a conscience."

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu thought that everyone in the stronghold lived and worked in a prosperous environment. But it seemed that there were also some shady businesses.

The man spoke in a low voice, "Do you know who I am?"

Immediately, Ren Xiaosu wondered why the voice sounded so familiar. Didn't he hear this voice somewhere before? He asked him back, "Do you know who I am?"

The man was stunned. "Who are you?"

Ren Xiaosu said, "I'm Yan Linfeng from the Western District!"

After a brief silence, the man replied, "Fuck, I'm also the Yan Linfeng from Western District..."

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

So it turned out it was not everyone who liked introducing themselves, but that he was always encountering those who did. And they were always fucking called Yan Linfeng too. It was no wonder the voice sounded so familiar!

With a click, Ren Xiaosu hung up the phone. When Yan Linfeng came to see the doctor, Ren Xiaosu was already a little unhappy with him. He was thinking that if he used this name over the phone, he could let those people fight among themselves. But he never expected to encounter the same person.

Yan Linfeng probably did not know who he was calling, right? Even if he knew who it was, Ren Xiaosu was not afraid of him. Ren Xiaosu already knew that guns were prohibited in the stronghold. In the entire stronghold, Ren Xiaosu was not afraid of anyone other than the Li Consortium's troops.

“Actually, we should work on our relationship with a local like him.” Wang Fugui said, “It seems that Yan Linfeng is involved in some shady business and has underlings working for him. I think it’s helpful to know such people no matter where we are.”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu nodded and said, “If he comes here to see the doctor again, you can have a longer chat with him.”

“Sure,” Wang Fugui agreed. “News of the effectiveness of our black medicine should start spreading after tonight. We won’t even have to promote it and can just rely on word of mouth to create a market!”

Ren Xiaosu felt somewhat uncomfortable. After tearing up the Pyro Company’s pamphlet, he said, “Everyone, don’t tell anyone that Chen Wudi and I are supernatural beings. Keep a close eye on Chen Wudi and don’t let him run around outside unnecessarily in the short term, in case he gets into trouble.”

He assumed Luo Lan would not disclose the fact that Chen Wudi was a supernatural being to the stronghold. However, there was no guarantee that Jiang Wu’s group of students could keep it a secret, so they should be prepared for all possible scenarios.

Ren Xiaosu remembered the small note left by Yang Xiaojin. It seemed she was right after all. The presence of the multiple powers had turned Stronghold 109 into a chaotic place. He didn’t know why or how many other powers were involved. So the best he could do was protect Yan Liuyuan and the others.

“Old Wang,” Ren Xiaosu ordered, “I’ll write a list for you. Go and see if you’re allowed to buy these items. Remember not to buy them together, but separately.”

Ren Xiaosu had to prepare an escape route. He would use it as a last resort.

Ren Xiaosu had stolen something very crucial from Yang Xiaojin while they were in the Jing Mountains: Advanced Bomb-making.

#### **Chapter 140: In the name of justice**

The items Ren Xiaosu needed Wang Fugui to prepare were actually not that difficult. Although a lot of them were everyday necessities, he would have to be careful if he bought them all at the same time. Because, by buying these items together, it might catch some people’s attention. After all, it was no secret that these items could be used to make a bomb.

The next morning, Wang Fugui went out. He did not ask Ren Xiaosu what he needed those items for. If Ren Xiaosu needed them, he had to go out and get them.

Currently, Wang Fugui saw himself as the shopkeeper of the group. All he needed to do was to perform his duty as required of him.

Ren Xiaosu had been afraid that Wang Fugui would mess up with this task. In the end, he realized Wang Fugui was even more careful than he had expected him to be.

Wang Fugui had spent the entire day taking the streetcar to the North, South, East, and West Districts, making four separate purchases in each of them in order to gather all of the items for Ren Xiaosu.

When he got home at night, Ren Xiaosu could see that he was wiped out.

Xiaoyu had already bought some new clothes for Ren Xiaosu and the others. Meanwhile, Yan Liuyuan, Ren Xiaosu, and Wang Dalong's school admission procedures had been processed. Furthermore, Xiaoyu helped them find out the schools in the stronghold had two intersession breaks each year. It was winter now, so the first semester of school was coming to an end. Ren Xiaosu and the others would not have to attend school for long before the semester break began.

Of course, this was in line with what Ren Xiaosu wanted. The beginning should be an adaptation phase, so having a vacation break would certainly take the pressure off a little.

But in the end, they would still have to go back to school. Ren Xiaosu was suddenly looking forward to it. He wondered if the stronghold's school taught similar things as what Mr. Zhang had taught them.

After dinner, Wang Fugui found Ren Xiaosu and said to him quietly, "When I was buying these items today, one of the shopkeepers mentioned something that's scared me even until now."

"What was it?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"The shopkeeper let slip his wondering about why everyone was buying these things." Wang Fugui said, "So I asked him who else was buying them? He then told me that a girl had gone to his shop yesterday to buy the same things, and that he had fortunately restocked the items today. Otherwise, he wouldn't have had anything for me to buy."

Ren Xiaosu frowned. Out of nowhere, he thought the girl might just be Yang Xiaojin!

Their two bomb-making skills were exactly the same. So when considering how to create a bomb, the items they would require were probably going to be the same as well.

Yang Xiaojin was probably not expecting Ren Xiaosu to be doing the same exact thing as her.

Just what was Yang Xiaojin planning? Surely this girl wouldn't be thinking of blowing up the stronghold, right?

Of course, it wasn't practical to blow up the stronghold with just a bomb of this magnitude. Ren Xiaosu felt that Yang Xiaojin's target might just turn out to be the Pyro Company's branch office in Stronghold 109. After all, he already felt Yang Xiaojin had some kind of feud with the Pyro Company.

The next morning, Ren Xiaosu and the others took the streetcar and hurried on their way to 13th High School. When they were on the streetcar, they noticed some other students on it as well. It was easy to recognize who were the students since they all wore blue and white uniforms.

When Tang Zhou handed over the application procedures to them, they were told the school uniforms would only be issued when they reached school since it was given out based on their measurements. Jiang Wu's students had already been issued theirs, so only Ren Xiaosu, Yan Liuyuan, and Wang Dalong were not wearing it.

Currently, Jiang Wu was living in the faculty dormitory with her students. From now on, these students had to work hard and depend on themselves since their parents were no longer around.

But what Ren Xiaosu didn't expect was that these students were exceptionally united. Having nearly died, and without any more family around, they instinctively started treating each other as family.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu heard the students at the front of the streetcar discussing, "Did anyone tell you guys yet? There are some refugees who came into the stronghold recently. I heard someone fell sick the moment they got home after taking the same streetcar as them. My mother said it's because refugees carry germs from the outside."

Another student said, "My dad told me to stay away from the refugees if I encounter them."

"It doesn't feel that serious to me," a female student said softly.

"Who knows? My mum said the germs brought in by the refugees to the stronghold several years ago infected a lot of people and killed dozens more. Why else do you think everyone does not want them inside the stronghold?"

When Ren Xiaosu heard that, he frowned. Why had the news spread so far in just one night? Honestly speaking, Ren Xiaosu had really not thought refugees would be ostracized so badly before coming into the stronghold. Besides, even if they had been ostracized before, it was more for reasons such as being poor.

He wouldn't have expected it to be over something like them being carriers of "germs."

It was not like the town was considered a quarantine zone. Ren Xiaosu was very disdainful of any talk of the refugees being germ carriers. He had been in contact with a lot of people from strongholds, such as Luo Lan, Tang Zhou, Yang Xiaojin, Luo Xinyu, Liu Bu, and the private troops who had gone on the expedition.

It wasn't like any of those people had died of an illness, right?

Who could have purposely said the refugees were spreading diseases in the stronghold? This was making Ren Xiaosu and the others seem like they were some kind of terrible disease carriers.

Wang Dalong was transfixed on a girl in the streetcar. It was as though the conversation the others were having was none of his business.

However, Yan Liuyuan was a tad more sensitive. He frowned and whispered, "Bro, are we really carrying germs on us?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head.

"Then why are they saying that? Shouldn't we be refuting them?" Yan Liuyuan's previously good mood after getting into the stronghold was spoiled by what was going on around them.

"It's no use refuting them," Ren Xiaosu answered.

“Why? They’re vilifying us.” Yan Liuyuan could not understand.

“Liuyuan, if ten people say we’re in the wrong, does that count as vilifying us?”

“Yes, why not?” Yan Liuyuan answered.

“Then if a 100 people say that we’re at fault, does that count as vilifying us?” Ren Xiaosu continued to ask.

“...I guess so.” Yan Liuyuan gave it some thought before answering.

“Then what if 10,000 people are saying something bad about us?” Ren Xiaosu said calmly, “That wouldn’t be vilification but justice.”

“Bro,” Yan Liuyuan said softly, “although I’m not as philosophical as you, if 10,000 people vilified us, I wouldn’t call it justice as long as I think it’s wrong.”

Ren Xiaosu smiled. “You’re right.”

These students on the streetcar had all been influenced by their parents. They’d been told not to foolishly stand up for others and to be more “street smart” when they were outside. Their parents would also tell them not to mix with certain people.

In reality, the students’ mindsets were basically an extension of their parents’ wills. Therefore, Ren Xiaosu understood that the majority of the stronghold’s residents did not welcome their arrival. But he wasn’t really sure whether this situation would get worse.

However, Ren Xiaosu had no time to care about this right now. When he learned Yang Xiaojin might also be purchasing large quantities of bomb-making material, he got even more curious about what she was planning to do.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu felt that if he had a chance, it would be best to find out exactly where Yang Xiaojin was going to plant the bomb. That would save him the trouble of getting bombed himself....