

First Order 171

Chapter 171: There's no such place as Heaven in this world

"But this place isn't the Qing Consortium's territory." Xiaoyu said in worry, "Will approaching Luo Lan be useful?"

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and said, "He even had the power to help us get legal resident statuses in the stronghold, so it shouldn't be difficult for him to handle a small matter like this. I don't think it'll be an issue at all."

"What if he doesn't come over?" Xiaoyu asked.

Yan Liuyuan, who was close by, said, "Don't worry, Dong Funan is still in our hands."

As he finished speaking, he heard the sound of a vehicle approaching in the street. Ren Xiaosu turned his head and had a look. Wasn't that Luo Lan sitting in the passenger seat and looking all cocky?

When the car came to a stop in front of the shop, Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Lan. "You've gotten yourself another new car?"

Apparently, Luo Lan was really rich. Xiaoyu had mentioned she had gone to a car dealership to ask about the prices. But whether the cars were branded or not, all of them were being sold at astronomical prices.

Meanwhile, Luo Lan had changed cars several times over the span of a few days.

But Ren Xiaosu did not know that these cars that were sold at "astronomical prices" were just like toys when it came to the financial might of an organization.

Luo Lan jumped out of the car and chuckled, "Why are you all standing at the door?"

"Wang Fugui has been arrested by the Public Order Division." Ren Xiaosu got straight to the point.

Luo Lan was taken aback. "What happened?"

After Ren Xiaosu explained the situation, Luo Lan frowned. "It seems like some people have set their eyes on your black medicine, probably because it's so effective. As a result, it made some of the people in this stronghold want to monopolize it for themselves. I've seen a lot of such schemes before. First, they'll resort to all kinds of ways to stop you from selling it before getting someone to approach you with an offer to acquire the formula."

"Acquire the formula?" Ren Xiaosu asked sullenly. Whoever was capable of getting the black medicine's formula from him hadn't been born yet, right? After all, even he himself did not know the formula.

"This is definitely not over." Luo Lan said, "There'll be even more trouble coming your way. Even if you can handle one of them, others will keep coming. They'll make you to land in dire straits and try to buy the black medicine's formula off you for a very low price."

“Let’s not talk about what might happen.” Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Lan and asked, “Do you have someone from the Qing Consortium in the Public Order Division?”

Luo Lan said, “Yeah, two of our men were arrested and put in there two days ago...”

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. He was so angry he almost laughed. “Damn you, that’s not what I was asking.”

“Hahaha, I’m just joking with you.” Luo Lan chuckled.

“So even people from the Qing Consortium have been arrested?” Ren Xiaosu said in a speechless manner. He had been thinking of using Luo Lan to help him get Wang Fugui out of the Public Order Division, but to his surprise, the Qing Consortium also had some of their people arrested.

“You’ve misunderstood.” Luo Lan replied, “I’ll go and talk to Lu Yuan about this. Wang Fugui will be released tonight.”

“Why aren’t you getting your own people out first?” Ren Xiaosu was puzzled.

A little embarrassed, Luo Lan said, “They can’t reveal their identities yet.”

When he said that, Ren Xiaosu immediately understood that both of Luo Lan’s men who had been arrested must have been carrying out illicit activities under Luo Lan’s orders. Therefore, Luo Lan could not show up as of yet to bail them out of trouble. However, he could still help with Wang Fugui.

But before he finished talking to Luo Lan, he saw Wang Fugui entering the shop from outside. Ren Xiaosu was astounded. “Old Wang, didn’t you get arrested by the Public Order Division?”

“Oh.” Wang Fugui explained, “As soon as I got to the Public Order Division, they apparently received some orders from their superiors. After that, they sent me back here.”

“Who did they get their orders from?” Ren Xiaosu wondered. “Did they do anything to you?”

“No, no. Someone told me that it was the stronghold overseer, Lu Yuan, who ordered them to release me,” Wang Fugui said with a smile as though nothing had happened.

Next to them, Luo Lan started getting cocky. “So what do you think? They still have to respect me. That Lu Yuan is really sensible.”

However, Ren Xiaosu felt that something was off. No matter how much Lu Yuan respected Luo Lan, they could not possibly have released Wang Fugui when Luo Lan had not even looked for him yet. Could there be any other reason for this? But Ren Xiaosu did not know what kind of relationship Lu Yuan had with the Qing Consortium. As such, he was unable to make a judgment on this.

In any case, it was good that Wang Fugui had been released.

“Alright, you two continue chatting. I’ll go and talk to Dong Funan.” Luo Lan said with a smile, “There’ll definitely still be problems, but I’ll handle them for you if you come to me.”

“Will those people still continue to pester us now that Lu Yuan has intervened?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“People are motivated by money.” Luo Lan explained, “As the saying goes, the lower ranked they are, the harder it is to get past them. Moreover, Lu Yuan is not the true authority of Stronghold 109. Who knows if it’s the Li Consortium that’s set their eyes on your black medicine? Or it could even be someone who has links with them. Such people can cause you a lot of misery just by constantly harassing you.”

Ren Xiaosu fell silent. This was his first time facing such nasty people in the stronghold. If people in the wilderness mugged others with a knife, people in the stronghold did so with a blunt knife.

But ultimately, weren’t they all still robberies however you looked at it?

Wearing a suit would not change the nature of these bandits.

Ren Xiaosu said, “Thanks in advance. If something else happens, I’ll look for you immediately.”

Luo Lan said with a smile, “Now that you’re in the stronghold, you’ll have to adapt to the stronghold’s environment. You can’t just rely on fighting and killing all the time. Tang Zhou, give them the phone number to our place.”

Ren Xiaosu suddenly wondered, “But aren’t you the one who’s been doing all the fighting and killing recently?”

“Hahahaha, is that so? Luo Lan smiled in embarrassment and said, “That’s also a strategy of mine!”

“And what strategy is that?” Ren Xiaosu asked, curious.

“You see, the Li Consortium guarded their research results like they were treasure and used all of their military might to protect it.” Luo Lan said proudly, “But as you can see, they can’t sit idle with so many incidents happening. They’ve been forced to split up their manpower. As a result, won’t their defense forces at the university get weakened?”

Ren Xiaosu said in surprise, “You even have the brains for that? Why do I get the feeling that you’re just making up a reason?”

Luo Lan said unhappily, “Who are you looking down on? I can’t be bothered to talk with you anymore. What a waste of my affection!”

After Luo Lan walked into the backyard, Ren Xiaosu told Wang Fugui and the others, “It’s better to be more careful for the time being.”

“Isn’t there a more direct way to solve this problem?” This was also Wang Fugui’s first time encountering something like this. “What kind of people are these? Such disgusting behavior is not seen even in the wilderness.”

Ren Xiaosu said with a sigh, "We used to think that the stronghold was a place that all refugees wanted so badly to get into. But it's only after we got here that I realized there isn't such a place as Heaven in this world."

Chapter 172: Rules of the wilderness!

Just as Luo Lan had predicted, the people who coveted the black medicine Ren Xiaosu's controlled did not give up easily just because of Lu Yuan's intervention.

As news of the black medicine's effect circulated through the stronghold, a constant stream of people started coming to the shop to ask about it each day. If it were just for the intended effect of the black medicine, that would have been fine as people would not be as crazy as they were now. But it became magical when news spread that it could treat infertility.

Although Wang Fugui never admitted that the medicine had such an effect, those who came to their shop sought it for this purpose.

Nobody knew if it was an aftereffect of The Cataclysm, but infertility in humans had become increasingly common in recent times. That was where the market for the black medicine came in.

If it were only one stronghold, the market size would be considered relatively small. But many of the medium-sized companies in this stronghold had already gained the ability to sell medical drugs to the other strongholds. At the very least, it would not be a problem to export them to the dozen or so strongholds controlled by the Li Consortium.

If they could seize the formula of this black medicine, their pharmaceutical companies would possess a cash cow that would provide them with a steady stream of income.

Who would ever think they had earned enough money?

Ren Xiaosu headed to school early in the morning to continue taking his exams. Meanwhile, Wang Fugui thought that since it was not yet time to sell the week's allocated dose of the black medicine, he'd go out to check the bicycle market. Since Ren Xiaosu had told him to purchase some bicycles, he'd have to take a look around.

Since the boss had spoken, the shopkeeper would definitely get down to it.

Xiaoyu also told Chen Wudi to watch over the shop before she went out to buy some groceries. She was planning to cook some pork rib soup for Ren Xiaosu and the others in the evening. After all, many members of the family were still growing, so she wanted to make some nutritious food for them.

But in the morning, several people wearing red uniforms suddenly came down to the shop. When they walked in, they saw Chen Wudi sitting with his legs crossed. "Who is Wang Fugui?"

Chen Wudi glanced at them and asked, "What are you looking for him for?"

“My name is Chen Bohan. We’re from the stronghold’s Legal Division. Someone accused Wang Fugui of unfair business practices, so we’re here to issue him a subpoena,” a man in red said.

Chen Wudi was stunned. “What do you mean by unfair business practices?”

“You’ll know when you attend court at our Legal Division.” Chen Bohan looked at Chen Wudi and said, “You aren’t Wang Fugui, right? You can also sign on his behalf, but this subpoena has to be signed by an adult member of his immediate family. Are you his immediate family?”

“Yes, I am,” Chen Wudi answered.

“Oh, then you can sign it.” Chen Bohan handed a pen to Chen Wudi and asked, “What’s your relationship with the defendant?”

Chen Wudi said, “I’m his Senior Apprentice Brother.”

Chen Bohan was confused. Immediately, he snatched the subpoena back and said, “How does a senior apprentice brother count as immediate family? Are you trying to mess with us?”

Chen Wudi was not happy to hear that. “What do you mean I’m mess with you? Our master and us three fellow disciples are like family, so how am I not his immediate family?”

Chen Bohan from the Legal Division was left speechless for a while. Then he explained, “The meaning of immediate family is not what you defined. Wang Dalong is the immediate family of Wang Fugui. You are not.”

Chen Wudi thought for a while and got even more confused. “What’s the difference? Wang Dalong is our Third Junior Brother. So if Third Junior Brother is his immediate family, why wouldn’t I, as Senior Apprentice Brother, be considered his immediate family?”

Chen Bohan did not know how to react. What sort of nonsensical crap was this?!

Chen Bohan was so frustrated by him that he straight-up turned around and left. He felt he could not communicate with Chen Wudi at all.

When Ren Xiaosu came back in the evening, he frowned after hearing about the event. All of a sudden, he felt he could not fit in with this prosperous stronghold.

When they just arrived in the stronghold, the people on the streetcar got off when they realized that they were refugees.

When he started attending school, the students’ parents wanted him to transfer away because he was a refugee.

Now that their shop was just starting to get popular, people wanted to enforce the laws in the stronghold to deal with them and force them to hand over the black medicine’s formula. If they didn’t do so, they would be imprisoned and their family torn apart.

Ren Xiaosu had yearned to live in the stronghold, but at this moment, he also started having thoughts of leaving like Yan Liuyuan.

The longer he stayed in the stronghold, the more he felt that it was not as comfortable as living in the wilderness.

Sometimes, Ren Xiaosu wondered, 'Is it possible to create a home I truly belong to?'

No, he still did not have that power.

But Ren Xiaosu had never been one to run away in the face of problems. Since he knew nothing about the rules of the stronghold, he could only resort to applying his own rules to solve the problem.

Ren Xiaosu said to Wang Fugui, "If they come to deliver the subpoena again, receive it. After that, go to the Legal Division to find out exactly what's going on and who's behind it. I'll handle the rest from there."

"Nothing will happen right?" Wang Fugui asked worriedly.

"No." Ren Xiaosu laughed and said, "Didn't Luo Lan mention that the Li Consortium has no time to worry about these small matters at the moment?"

In the eyes of the rich, Wang Fugui, Ren Xiaosu, and the others from this shop were just a group of refugees who had recently arrived in the stronghold. Although they had the backing of Lu Yuan and Luo Lan, this was their Li Consortium's home turf!

But what they did not know was that the person who massacred the Midnight team last night was the owner of this shop.

Right now, news of the Midnight team's massacre was causing a stir at the highest levels of the Li Consortium. The field survey showed there were only two people who battled against Midnight at night, and one of them had taken on three members of Midnight alone.

Even though Midnight itself was already pretty well-known, there was a supernatural being who could crush them single-handedly? But more importantly, everyone was still in the dark as to who this person was.

Currently, the Demon Whisperer, Li Shentan, was eating noodles in a small shop with Si Liren. Some people around them were discussing what had happened last night.

The Public Order Division did not keep this matter a secret, so the news spread extremely quickly. In the past, the public was still a little unfamiliar with supernatural beings. But after tonight, that gap seemed to have closed by quite a bit.

An uncle sitting next to them was drinking and saying mysteriously, "I told you they don't know who did it. There were no traces of the murderer."

"It's way too cruel. So many of them got killed just like that," someone said with a sigh.

“Don’t talk like you know anything. Those people from the Pyro Company are not good either,” the uncle scorned. “A friend of mine told me they were the ones who caused the explosion some time ago.”

Li Shentan smiled and said to the girl, “It’s probably that Ren Xiaosu.”

“How do you know it’s him?” Si Liren asked as she blinked.

“There are only so many supernatural beings in this stronghold, and he’s the only one I have no idea of what kind of superpower he has.” When Li Shentan smiled, he looked warm and inviting. No one would guess that he was the Demon Whisperer who was making the organizations feel a little on edge. He continued, “I told you, I knew he’s really powerful.”

“Is it because you weren’t able to hypnotize him?” Si Liren asked curiously.

“No, no, no, I haven’t tried to hypnotize him,” Li Shentan said with a smile, “because my intuition tells me that if I try to hypnotize him, I could end up being hypnotized instead. Of course, that’s just my intuition.”

“Do you want me to kill him?” Si Liren asked. There didn’t seem to be any trace of good or evil in her innocent tone. The malicious words of murder were a huge contrast to her lovely little face.

Li Shentan shook his head. “Why would we kill him? Have you forgotten? We just became friends with him.”

“Oh, right.” Si Liren nodded. “We’re friends now.”

“Besides, you might not be his match either.” Li Shentan sighed.

Chapter 173: The disappearing Experimentals

Stronghold 113 had been reduced to a huge pile of ruins. The prosperous city that once represented human civilization had been destroyed. Rats, feral dogs, and feral cats could be seen lingering around as they searched for food in the ruins. In just a matter of weeks, weeds had already appeared out of the cracks in the concrete ground.

But the rats, dogs, and cats still had to move around cautiously. It was as though they were avoiding something terrible yet unknown.

Suddenly, a platoon of the Qing Consortium’s combat troops wearing their black uniforms appeared out of a small pathway. They were on high alert and were heavily armed in addition to the firearms in their hands.

The huge feral cats and dogs ran away in a hurry when they spotted them. When the platoon leader made a tactical hand signal, two members of the platoon rushed forward to check out the situation behind a huge obstacle up ahead.

That obstacle was a collapsed building.

Their operation was being carried out stealthily. The two pointmen signaled to the advance party: No target spotted.

The platoon pushed forward once again. If someone looked down on them from above, the 30-man platoon would be seen snaking up bit by bit as they moved forward on the battlefield.

After they passed the obstacle, groups of full-strength platoons would immediately fill their positions from behind. Some of the platoons were even armed with a large number of heavy weapons, while others were responsible for building defensive bunkers whenever it was called for.

There were many other similar formations infiltrating in this manner at the northwest of the stronghold. This was the 1st Combat Brigade led by Qing Yun of the Qing Consortium, and the remaining troops from the 7th Combat Brigade that was previously led by Qing Huai had been incorporated by him.

Qing Huai was dead from the previous ambush by the Experimentals. Currently, the 7th Combat Brigade existed in name only. Qing Yun was planning to take full control over this brigade to expand his strength.

As long as this operation was successful, he would be able to replace Qing Zhen's previous place in the hearts of the Board.

The reason why a large organization never gave in to an individual was because the organization itself had a strong ability to nurture talents. The Board believed the influence of an individual in the entire organization was as good as negligible. If such a large community with shared interests wanted to survive in the long run, it had to believe in the power of the organization, not that of individuals.

Qing Yun was staring coldly at a screen in the command vehicle that was on the furthest end of the ORBAT. At this moment, the dozen-odd screens in the vehicle were each displaying the operational progress of the dozen-odd platoons.

Right now, everything was proceeding smoothly, but Qing Yun couldn't help but feel a little strange. It was too quiet in the stronghold ruins.

Qing Yun looked at a middle-aged man beside him. "Adjutant Li, was this where you guys were ambushed?"

"That's right." Adjutant Li nodded and said, "The Experimentals suddenly cut the infiltrating ORBAT right through the middle and split the entire battlefield in two. They're very familiar with the terrain here, and their combat prowess is shocking. Ordinary bullets can't deal fatal damage even when they get hit in vital areas. You must be extremely careful to avoid getting ambushed by them again."

Qing Yun nodded. "Don't worry, I'm not Qing Huai. I'll be waiting right here for them to come out."

However, as the large ORBAT advanced, they did not see any signs of the Experimentals. The city was so quiet that it felt a little eerie.

Human remains could frequently be seen littered along on either side of the road. It was obvious just how much damage the disaster had caused here.

The face bugs were no longer around after their attack in the aftermath of the disaster. Based on the Qing Consortium's intel, this place had become the Experimentals' territory.

But where were the Experimentals?

Suddenly, someone said on the comms channel, "A huge crevasse has been discovered in the ground, and there are signs indicating Experimental activity around here. It's suspected that they might be hiding underground."

"Send two platoons in to have a look," Qing Yun said.

The frontline commander hesitated for a moment before saying on the comms channel, "I'm afraid no one will survive if they encounter any Experimentals belowground."

Qing Yun frowned. "You don't need to question orders. All you have to do is to execute my commands."

"Roger." The voice on the other end seemed to have calmed down.

Next to him, Adjutant Li did not dare speak out. He wondered who would be the unfortunate ones to get sent down into the crevasse.

All he knew was that he would get summoned to be court-martialed when he returned to Stronghold 111. Instead of sympathizing with others, he might as well sympathize with himself. It was either that or try to make amends in this operation. If Qing Yun could speak up for him when they returned to the stronghold, Adjutant Li would have a chance to push all responsibility onto the dead Qing Huai.

At first, everyone thought they would hear the screams of the troops and gunfire reverberating from inside the crevasse. However, there wasn't any commotion at all as it remained peaceful throughout.

Suddenly, someone on the front lines spoke on the comms channel. "This likely used to be the Experimentals' lair. A huge cave has been dug out in here by force. However, there are no signs of Experimentals down here!"

Qing Yun frowned. Where had those Experimentals gone to?!

Right after, someone said on the comms channel, "There's some sort of a mini research lab in here. It looks like the Experimentals shifted some lab equipment into this place. There's even used syringes lying on the ground!"

All who heard this were stunned. Based on everyone's knowledge, the Experimentals were just like wild beasts. No one would associate the Experimentals with performing experiments.

Qing Yun said coldly, "Everyone, retreat. There are probably no more Experimentals left here. Bring all the syringes and lab equipment back to Stronghold 111 for sampling and research. I want to know what on earth they were injecting themselves with!" He then disconnected from the comms channel and picked up the satellite phone to report the situation to the Board located far away in Stronghold 111. Now that Stronghold 113 had become an empty city, no one knew where the thousands of Experimentals had disappeared to.

However, when the soldiers heard the Experimentals could conduct their own research and experiments, as well as inject themselves with drugs, they were shocked and alarmed.

The Board was also lost in thought after receiving the news. They had no idea what it meant.

Then a secretary walked into the conference room and said, "Qing Zhen has gone missing. A convoy was spotted leaving the stronghold just a moment ago. We suspect Qing Zhen is in that convoy."

A member of the Board frowned and reprimanded, "You can't even watch over Qing Zhen?!"

Someone else said, "We must thoroughly investigate how Qing Zhen managed to escape the surveillance we put on him. There must be someone helping him in secret. How else could he have escaped from the stronghold without getting detected?"

"It looks like Qing Zhen hasn't been idle either," someone sighed.

The elder asked calmly, "Which direction is the convoy headed?"

"They're heading in the direction of Stronghold 109," the secretary replied.

"Isn't that stronghold under the control of the Li Consortium? Is Qing Zhen planning to defect?" someone wondered. "I suggest we chase after him immediately. Qing Zhen knows too many of our consortium's secrets. If he defects to the Li Consortium, it will likely cause us enormous losses."

Chapter 174: Qing Zhen's defection

Defection?

The board of directors in the conference room fell silent. That was a grave crime.

There used to be defections from the Qing Consortium, but it had become a much rarer occurrence in recent years. That was because the price to pay for defection was simply too great, and the organization never let any defectors off.

Someone asked the secretary, "Did Qing Zhen leave any information behind?"

"He left a letter on the table in his villa." The secretary said, "He said he was going out to take a break from things."

Everyone in the conference room was stunned. Did Qing Zhen treat the Board's decision as a game? He was ordered not to take a single step out of his villa, yet he just left the stronghold!

The elder thought for a moment and said, "He wouldn't go so far as to defect to the Li Consortium. I suspect he must have received news of the disappearing Experimentals from someone. There should be some connection between these two matters. Otherwise, there wouldn't be such a coincidence."

Someone wondered, "Are you saying that Qing Zhen left the stronghold because he received news that the Experimentals have disappeared?"

“It seems like it,” the elder said with a sullen face.

When the board of directors in the conference room heard that, they got a little confused. “But what does the news of the Experimentals disappearing have anything to do with Qing Zhen? Why did he have to escape?”

“It seems that Qing Zhen has concluded that the large number of Experimentals have probably started heading towards Stronghold 109.” The elder said, “Qing Zhen went to Stronghold 109 because he wants to save his older brother, Luo Lan.”

It was no secret that Luo Lan was at Stronghold 109. The consortium did not order him to return only because they could not be bothered with an illegitimate son of the family.

Everyone knew that Qing Zhen and Luo Lan had a great relationship. However, they did not expect that Qing Zhen would be willing to risk being branded a defector to escape from Stronghold 111 for Luo Lan’s sake.

“But what’s the use of Qing Zhen going to Stronghold 111 by himself?” someone wondered. “He no longer has anyone under him.”

Someone asked the secretary, “Have there been any movements from the soldiers recently assigned to the other troops?”

“No, they’re all very obedient. Everyone is still holding at their respective military bases,” the secretary said.

With that, everyone went quiet. Based on Qing Zhen’s character, how could he possibly have gone to Stronghold 109 without bringing some people with him?

In that case, there could only be one explanation left. Qing Zhen still had some secret troops under his control that even the Board did not know about.

Actually, wasn’t this exactly the reason the Board had seized Qing Zhen’s power back from him? The most famous Shadow in the organization was about to get out of control.

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Ren Xiaosu kept feeling like something was off for the past few days. The entire stronghold seemed to have suddenly become peaceful.

No one was stirring up any trouble, and there were no more fights breaking out. It was as though all the different major powers had tried so hard to get into Stronghold 109 just to enter and sightsee.

Ren Xiaosu did not see Yang Xiaojin at the end-of-the-year ceremony after finals finished. According to tradition, students would have homework assigned to them over break during the ceremony, and the exam results would be announced as well. The teachers would also take the opportunity to go over the tests with the students.

However, Yang Xiaojin seemed to have disappeared.

The only thing Ren Xiaosu was not surprised about was that Yang Xiaojin had scored exactly 140 points for each subject in the final exams.

When Jiang Wu was handing back tests to the students, she asked which set of tests belonged to Monitor Ren Xiaosu and which one belonged to Councilor Ren Xiaosu. As a result, Ren Xiaosu took advantage of Yang Xiaojin's absence and shamelessly claimed the papers with the higher score.

Jiang Wu was a little puzzled as she said to Ren Xiaosu, "The handwriting on that set of tests is very elegant and doesn't look like yours at all."

However, she suddenly noticed that the name written on the paper was "Ren Xiaosu, monitor of Class 12-7." Jiang Wu heaved a sigh of relief. "It's really your exam. I didn't expect you to achieve such a high score on the exams."

Now it was Ren Xiaosu who did not know what to.

Rumor had it that a girl from another 12th grade class had come to look for Ren Xiaosu in the afternoon. She had gathered her classmates to beat him up, but when the large group of them arrived at the door of Ren Xiaosu's class, they were stopped by his classmates.

The students from the other class were a little puzzled. This class might be wholly united, but could they guarantee he would never be left alone?

However, Ren Xiaosu's classmates earnestly said to them, "We're actually protecting you by stopping you here, understand?"

Li Mo was having none of it. "Ren Xiaosu is clearly witless, yet he deliberately allowed me to copy his papers and caused me to score only 40 points total throughout all the subjects. How can someone do something like that?"

Ren Xiaosu was not in the class at this time. His classmates looked at each other and exclaimed, "Did you get it wrong? Ren Xiaosu scored 560 points on his exam!"

Li Mo was confused. Surely this was not something someone could do, right?!

At present, Ren Xiaosu was not in the mood to go to school, nor did he pay any attention to what was happening in school.

That was because he knew that something major was going to happen over the next few days. The present was the calm before the storm.

After he became a supernatural being, he was destined to have a different way of thinking from other students. Those students were still thinking about how to spend their vacation, but Ren Xiaosu had already started thinking about how to survive through the coming chaos.

After he completed the quest in which he'd let Li Mo copy his test, Ren Xiaosu was rewarded with a 1.0 Dexterity increase. As of now, Ren Xiaosu's Strength was 8.5 and his Dexterity was 6.1. But this small increase in dexterity would probably not make a big difference for the coming crisis.

What Ren Xiaosu was really looking forward to was the reward the palace would give him after completing the quest related to Dong Funan. The reward for the previous side quest was a black saber. So to Ren Xiaosu, the side quest represented a chance of getting a high-quality reward.

Actually, it was not only Yang Xiaojin who had suddenly disappeared. Luo Lan had also not been to the shop for many days. The number of LI Consortium troops on the street had decreased little by little. Eventually, only the private troops and the Public Order Division remained.

Everything felt unusual, bizarre, yet the atmosphere became even more peaceful than normal.

Ren Xiaosu stood at the entrance to the shop and watched pedestrians walk past. Suddenly, a man passed by and stuffed a manila envelope into his hands.

After going back into the shop and opening the envelope, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see a faded yellow ginkgo leaf inside accompanied by a short letter. Was this information sent to him by Luo Lan? Why was there a need to be so mysterious about it?

Ren Xiaosu opened it up and read the letter: "A large number of Experimentals have disappeared from Stronghold 113. It's suspected that they're on their way to Stronghold 109. Find a way to leave the stronghold within three days."

The letter did not mention how they were supposed to leave, but it was kind enough of Luo Lan to issue him a timely reminder. After all, their friendship was not as deep as everyone had imagined.

But what gave Ren Xiaosu a frown was the information that was contained in the letter. It seemed like the Qing Consortium was not very optimistic about the situation of the Experimentals arriving.

Had the Experimentals gone mad? Why were they suddenly attacking Stronghold 109?

No matter what, there were probably going to be major changes in the stronghold within three days. The people who coveted the research results would definitely make a move within these three days.

None of them had any time to waste. The only question was who would be the first to make a move and unveil the curtain to the chaos.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and said to Wang Fugui, Xiaoyu, and the others, "It's time to leave. Start packing."

Wang Fugui touched the counter he had cleaned earlier and said with some regret, "This is such a nice shop. I never expected we would have to flee again."

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Why? Can't bear to leave this place?"

"Not really." Wang Fugui said with a wry smile, "Xiaosu, have you realized that even though these hundreds of strongholds have stood intact in these wastelands for so many decades, or even centuries now, successive incidents have happened in this one year alone? This isn't just some random occurrence. It's real chaos that's starting to make a comeback."

Chapter 175: A new item in the palace!

None of the residents in the stronghold seemed to have heard the news that the Experimentals had disappeared from Stronghold 113. Everyone behaved no differently on the streets from before, as they continued heading out to work, did grocery shopping, or attended plaza dancing as they used to do.

At night, Ren Xiaosu delegated tasks to Wang Fugui and the others. An unexpected incident had happened this morning. A black off-road vehicle stopped outside the shop's entrance, and out came two young men who said to Ren Xiaosu, "We're here to take away the goods. Yang Xiaojin said she already mentioned it to you."

The goods these two people were referring to was probably Dong Funan. Ren Xiaosu did not suspect them since only Yang Xiaojin and he knew of this matter.

Curious, he asked, "Are you two Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu's colleagues?"

The two young men gave each other a look and laughed. "We're not qualified. There's no need to ask further questions."

What was with that? Ren Xiaosu was starting to wonder about the structure of Yang Xiaojin's organization and how many ranks there were.

But it wasn't time yet. The palace had still not informed Ren Xiaosu about the completion of the quest. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was still about half an hour before the full seven days would be up.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the two young men and said, "You can't bring her away yet. You'll have to wait a while."

Suspicious, the two young men asked, "Why do we have to wait? Is there still something important you need to do?"

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself, 'It's not like I can tell you two that my quest hasn't been completed yet.' He gave it some thought before saying, "Yes, there's still something important that I need to do. You two can go and wait in the backyard while I speak to her about something."

Less than five minutes later, the two youths saw Dong Funan whose swelling had already started going down sitting on a small bench obediently in the backyard. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was speaking in a serious tone in front of her, "I believe you've recognized your mistakes after your hard labor reform? So, I'm going to hand you over to someone else today, so I hope you can be a good person when you get there. Be someone who contributes to society, be a supernatural being who contributes to society..."

His talk with her went on for over half an hour.

The two young men from the Saboteurs were shocked. How the heck was this a while?!

They had thought Ren Xiaosu was only going to say a few words, but little did they expect he could go on for so long.

What atrocities had this Dong Funan committed that she would need such a lengthy ideological reeducation?

When Ren Xiaosu noticed Dong Funan gradually breaking down, he finally heard the palace say, "Side quest complete. A new product has been unlocked for purchase in the vending machine!"

Ren Xiaosu heaved a sigh of relief. He managed to delay the handover of Dong Funan until now. When Dong Funan saw that Ren Xiaosu had finally stopped talking, she nearly burst into tears. Previously, she still had some disbelief when Chen Wudi mentioned that his master was Ren Xiaosu. But to her surprise, Ren Xiaosu truly turned out to be as naggy as Tripitaka! 1

Ren Xiaosu happily said to the two young men, "Alright, you can take her away now."

The two young men looked at the anticipatory expression on Dong Funan's face and thought they might not even have to carry out any further reforms on her. They felt that as long as they could get Dong Funan away from Ren Xiaosu, she would be more than touched by their actions.

Ren Xiaosu finally had the opportunity to have a look at the vending machine inside his mind palace after Dong Funan was taken away. He saw a new transparent window slot had appeared in it.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the item inside the window and felt a little confused. It looked like a set of poker cards? 'After going through so much trouble to complete the quest, what is the meaning of giving me a set of poker cards? Do you intend to have me play "Fight the Landlord" 1 with Wang Fugui, Yan Liuyuan, and the others?'

As poker was also a form of entertainment in this era, Ren Xiaosu was a little confused when he saw the new vending machine item had turned out to be a deck of cards. Though there was a title written at the bottom of the slot: Explosive Poker!

Ren Xiaosu gave it a try by slotting in a gratitude token. As a result, the vending machine dispensed a "three of clubs" card.

Wait, but there was nothing special about this card when he held it in his hand. 'What's so explosive about this? And people sell cards by the deck, yet you're fucking selling one card per gratitude token?!'

Ren Xiaosu did not believe it and proceeded to put another gratitude token in. This time, out came a "five of diamonds." He looked up and shot that vending machine a look of surprise.

Having thought of something, apparently, he quickly slotted in over a dozen gratitude tokens in a row. Even more cards were dispensed.

Ren Xiaosu had a look at the words “Explosive Poker” written above the vending machine slot, then had a look at the four “threes” he had just gotten his hands on and sank deep into thought.

...

The next day, Ren Xiaosu and Wang Fugui headed out separately for their tasks. There were two gates in Stronghold 109, one in the east, the other in the west.

Stronghold 113 was located northeast of Stronghold 109. If the Experimentals were to arrive here, they would definitely reach the west gate first. Ren Xiaosu had Wang Fugui rent a courtyard house at the east gate. They would move over there tonight.

This way, if anything happened, they could at least escape easily from the east gate.

Now, all there was left to do was to purchase supplies!

Knowing in advance that a disaster was coming, Ren Xiaosu definitely wouldn't be unprepared for an escape like the previous time. This time, they could not leave anything out as they prepared supplies for their journey.

But before that, what they needed to prepare most of all was... cash.

In fact, nobody had much money on them. The black medicine had not been sold for long, and there was also no time to trade in Old Wang's anti-inflammatory medicine for cash either. Therefore, the most urgent task that Ren Xiaosu had to get done was to sell the gold for money!

He had been worried he would reveal his identity and get investigated by the Public Order Division if he went to cash in the gold. So he kept delaying it.

After all, what would he do if Luo Lan started suspecting him?

But Ren Xiaosu did not have to worry anymore. Since he was going to leave this stronghold, what was there to worry about?

Besides, Xu Xianchu had shown up at this stronghold as well. So wouldn't it be expected that he would trade the gold for cash in Stronghold 109?

In the span of a day, Ren Xiaosu wore a baseball cap and went around visiting over a dozen gold shops. The gold he sold at each shop was in the form of a gold bar that weighed about a 100 grams. Based on the gold prices in the stronghold, that would amount to roughly 40,000 yuan.

One gold bar weighing about a 100 grams was not exactly much to the gold shops and shouldn't attract much attention either.

But such unbranded gold bars would definitely stand out. Who would have the free time to smelt gold to make them into gold bars? Most people who came to sell their gold would just sell it in its jewelry form.

But what other choice did Ren Xiaosu have? If he didn't smelt the gold into gold bars, the oxidized jewelry would be even more eye-catching than this.

So when he left the shops, some of the gold shop owners immediately reported him to the Public Order Division. When the last gold shop owner that Ren Xiaosu visited saw the gold bars, he got a little hesitant. "You're... Xu Xianchu?!"

Ren Xiaosu acted shocked. "How did you know!" Then he turned around and ran out of the gold shop, looking disconcerted and flustered.

Chapter 176: Getting ready to flee

When Ren Xiaosu finished visiting the dozen-odd gold shops, the cash he had on hand reached 430,000 yuan. Honestly speaking, the money he had earned today was probably more than all of what he had earned in the 17 years of his life.

It was the first time he felt so wealthy. This sum of money was probably what the majority of the households in this stronghold would have saved up, or perhaps they wouldn't even have as much as what he had now?

Suddenly, the voice from the palace said, "It has been detected that the host is carrying an amount of money exceeding what is required to unlock further storage rights. Confirm unlock?"

Ren Xiaosu froze. He had already unlocked storage rights once when he was in the Jing Mountains. At that time, he used 20,000 yuan in exchange for one cubic meter of storage space.

Back then, Ren Xiaosu already knew more storage space could be unlocked. However, as he did not know how much it would cost to unlock the next tier of storage rights, he could only wait until the palace informed him the next time.

Now it finally happened.

No matter how much Ren Xiaosu loved money, he still understood that having storage space was more important than having money.

Furthermore, they were planning to flee from the stronghold, so he could easily store more supplies and clean water if he had a bigger storage space. If he somehow stumbled upon another ruined city, he could start searching for more gold there.

But what Ren Xiaosu could not figure out was why the palace would accept any kind of currency, be it the Qing Consortium's currency or the Li Consortium's currency. 'What would you as a palace even want money for?!

"Can you tell me what you want the money for?" Ren Xiaosu asked in his mind.

The voice from the palace answered, "Unauthorized to answer."

"You're just jealous that I have money, right?" Ren Xiaosu asked in curiosity.

The voice from the palace said, "...Unauthorized to answer."

Ren Xiaosu mulled over it for some time. "Then do you accept spirit money? 1 "

This time, the palace chose not to answer at all.

"Hehe." Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "So money issued by the Underworld's bank is not considered currency? Aren't you looking down on the Underworld?"

He wondered if he would have hit the highest tier of storage rights if the palace accepted spirit money.

What a pity...

Ren Xiaosu hesitated no more as he said in his mind, "Unlock!"

A moment later, he saw the original one cubic meter of storage space spread outward on the wall. Afterwards, Ren Xiaosu saw his 430,000 yuan turn into just 150,000 yuan!

Wait! Ren Xiaosu was shocked. 'Why did my money drop by so much?!'

He scrutinized the storage space and estimated it had expanded 15 times.

Making a mental calculation, Ren Xiaosu now understood that the relationship between the amount of storage space and cost was basically equivalent.

Unlocking one cubic meter of storage space: 20,000 yuan.

Unlocking two cubic meters of storage space: 40,000 yuan.

Unlocking four cubic meters of storage space: 80,000 yuan.

Unlocking eight cubic meters of storage space: 160,000 yuan.

Therefore, having spent 280,00 yuan this time, Ren Xiaosu's storage space had expanded to a total of 15 cubic meters!

Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips in satisfaction. Not bad!

As of now, he still had 150,000 yuan on him. Ren Xiaosu felt that if he only had to stock up on supplies for their escape, it would be more than enough!

...

They were extremely prepared this time for the journey. If a person wanted to survive in the wilderness, what would they need?

Ren Xiaosu went into a grocery store and bought several dozen bags of salt all at once. The remaining supplies of sugar, hardtack, and other items he bought were also countless. When the shop owner saw this, he was overjoyed to have such a big spender.

The shop owner smiled and said, "Why are you buying so much salt, sugar, and food? Most people don't buy that many of these items."

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "There's no harm in being prepared."

The shop owner was amused. "Some years ago, there were some people who were just like you. They kept saying it wasn't safe anymore in the stronghold and that it was necessary to stock up on supplies to be prepared. In the end, all of the items went bad, and still, nothing happened to the stronghold. Can't you see? It's been decades and the stronghold is still doing well, isn't it?"

"I'm just preparing for danger in times of safety." Ren Xiaosu gave the shop owner a look.

"Boy, I'm seriously advising you not to buy too many of these supplies," the shop owner advised. "What will you do if they turn bad at home?"

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that this shop owner must be really kind. Instead of trying to get people to buy more, he was persuading them not to? However, Ren Xiaosu could not possibly tell him that something was going to happen to the stronghold in the next few days, right? They would have to believe it in the first place.

When the shop owner saw that Ren Xiaosu was still as determined, he did not keep trying. After Ren Xiaosu paid the bill and left, the shop owner said to his shop assistant with a laugh, "I guess that boy is crazy. Just watch, nothing will happen to the stronghold even after he keeps those supplies at home for decades."

Such a scene did not only take place in the grocery store. It happened when Ren Xiaosu went to the pharmacy to buy medicine as well. The shopkeeper could not understand when he saw Ren Xiaosu buying so many medicinal supplies.

The medicine Ren Xiaosu bought was actually specific to their needs. There was definitely no need for any anti-inflammatory medicine, but antivirals like ribavirin were definitely going to be useful. The same went for antifungals like ketoconazole and antidiarrheal agents like diosmectite, which were considered necessities when heading into the wilderness.

Antidiarrheal remedies were especially important. If you didn't pay close enough attention to your dietary intake, you might get the runs up to 20 times a day and could even die from it.

The remaining items he needed to get were tools such as hammers, saws, shovels, pliers, ropes, plastic buckets, toilet paper, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap...

And several backpacks, several dozen matchboxes, compasses, and blankets.

Ren Xiaosu spent the entire day shopping for supplies that only a wilderness survivalist would know to get. If a person had never lived in the wilderness before, the only things they would think of bringing

with them would be food, water, knives, and some other very general items. Once they got to the wilderness, they would descend into panic.

In just this one day, Ren Xiaosu experienced a lot of suspiciousness from others due to the large quantity of purchases he made. However, he did explain himself once.

He did not return to their own shop, instead taking the streetcar straight to the courtyard house located in the most western part of the stronghold. Yan Liuyuan and the others were already waiting there.

While taking the streetcar, he even overheard a young man talking about a small music festival that would be taking place in a few days. According to him, a certain Prince Charming and a certain goddess would be coming to perform.

Someone else was gossiping about celebrities in whispers. They were talking about a female celebrity named Cicada and how she liked cooking, and how another female celebrity named Fang Yujing used to study Chinese medicine.

As the streetcar trundled down the track toward the sunset, yellow light pillars on the horizon projected into the sky and through the gaps in the clouds and back down. Ren Xiaosu suddenly started feeling somewhat out of place when he heard words like “music festival” and the likes.

The bustle and peace that was taking place was about to get destroyed before his eyes.

Ren Xiaosu wasn't someone who passed his days without an awareness of his surroundings. He knew the Experimentals were coming, and he knew the various major powers that had gathered here would be declaring war on the Li Consortium within the next three days. So he made preparations.

The entire stronghold might plunge into an abyss of misery at that time, but Ren Xiaosu was confident he would have an advantage over others.

But thinking about how so many people would die, Ren Xiaosu realized this was probably not something to be happy about.

After all, this era was already tinted with the color of sorrow.

When he arrived at the rented courtyard house, Ren Xiaosu froze, because Jiang Wu was also here.

Yan Liuyuan whispered to Ren Xiaosu, “I brought Ms. Jiang Wu here. We can ignore other people, but we had to warn Ms. Jiang and her students, right?”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu ruffled Yan Liuyuan's hair. “You weren't wrong in doing so.”

Chapter 177: New neighbor, Yang Xiaojin

Actually, even if Yan Liuyuan had not gone to warn Jiang Wu, Ren Xiaosu would still have done so the next day.

However, he had to make it clear to Jiang Wu. “Ms. Jiang, I’m afraid that the stronghold is no longer a safe place. We rented a courtyard house here to facilitate our escape.”

Jiang Wu tucked her hair behind her ear and said gently, “Mhm, I understand.”

“Don’t you have any questions for me?” Ren Xiaosu was curious. “Like what kind of danger is coming, and why it’s so important that we have to escape?”

Jiang Wu smiled and said, “You must have your reasons for doing so. Back then, we only managed to survive because we followed you. Since you judge that it’s getting dangerous, there isn’t any reason for us to distrust you.”

Ren Xiaosu had been doubted the entire day while he was running errands. Now that someone believed him, he was rather surprised. “Ms. Jiang, you can bring your students here to the courtyard house to live temporarily. But lemme tell you beforehand, there isn’t enough space inside the house, so y’all’ll have to make do and sleep out here in the courtyard. Furthermore, we won’t be providing y’all with any food while we’re making our escape. We’ll each flee separately.”

“Mhm, I understand.” Jiang Wu nodded.

Although Ren Xiaosu would have liked to help Jiang Wu out of the goodness of his heart, he was absolutely not going to risk having anyone hold back the speed of their escape.

If the Experimentals could even cause Luo Lan to prepare to flee, they must be extremely terrifying. Ren Xiaosu wondered if there might be a lot more Experimentals than they had previously imagined.

At this moment, Jiang Wu looked to the many bicycles Ren Xiaosu and the others had parked in the yard. “Are you all planning on leaving on these bicycles?”

“Yes.” Ren Xiaosu nodded and said, “It’s so we’ll be faster when it’s time for us to go. Y’all might not be able to keep up with us.”

In this stronghold, bicycles cost at least several thousand yuan each. Anything made of metal these days was considered a luxury.

Although the school had already paid Jiang Wu her salary, and the students also received their subsidies for attending school, it was only going to be enough for them to buy some supplies for the journey and wouldn’t be enough to purchase a bicycle.

Jiang Wu hesitated for a long while. She had wanted to borrow some money but couldn’t bear to ask no matter how she thought about it. After all, what reason did she have that would make Ren Xiaosu want to lend her the money to buy bicycles?

Ren Xiaosu inadvertently mentioned, “Actually, there’s a bicycle shop just a few dozen meters down from where we are. You can always go and look for the owner to borrow his bicycles when trouble breaks out in the stronghold...”

Yan Liuyuan was taken aback. “Bro, are you sure you meant to say ‘borrow’? Do you even intend to return them?”

Ren Xiaosu did not reply. He knew this was wrong.

Jiang Wu shook her head. “That wouldn’t set a good example to the students.”

Ren Xiaosu did not say anything. He thought there was nothing wrong with Jiang Wu having such a sense of justice. After all, didn’t Ren Xiaosu help her previously because she had this “glow” to her?

But since this was the case, there was really nothing that Ren Xiaosu could do about it.

Jiang Wu said, “But I know there’s a place in the stronghold where we can rent bicycles from. It costs 90 yuan a month to rent one, and all we have to do is to submit our ID cards and 300 yuan as an initial deposit. I can just rent the bicycles for now.”

300 yuan was definitely not enough to cover the cost of a bicycle, but with the renter’s ID card withheld, there wouldn’t be any fear they would run off with the bicycles. After all, the stronghold was locked down at all times, so there wouldn’t be a chance for anyone to escape. And Jiang Wu’s students had received 600 yuan each for their education subsidy, so that would leave them with enough money to buy supplies for their escape after renting a bicycle.

Besides, their Stronghold 109 ID cards were going to be useless soon.

However, Ren Xiaosu asked out of curiosity, “What’s the difference between borrowing and renting the bicycles if that’s the case? We all know that those bicycles won’t be returned anyway.”

Jiang Wu said softly, “Surely we should at least compensate the shop a little, right?”

Ren Xiaosu was still curious, “But that will also set a bad example to the students, won’t it?”

Jiang Wu suddenly said determinedly, “Then I’ll just not tell them.”

Yan Liuyuan and Wang Fugui were speechless.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Jiang Wu and wondered whether she was sincere or hypocritical.

When this female teacher spoke, Ren Xiaosu could see the internal struggle she was going through.

Jiang Wu was someone who practiced what she preached. Back when they were escaping to Stronghold 109, her students would not have survived if she hadn’t been so hellbent on saving them.

But right now, Jiang Wu was bending her principles just so she could let her students gain a tool to facilitate their escape.

She couldn’t tell this to them, so she decided to bear the burden of the sin herself. She wanted her students to keep the correct fundamental values in life.

Ren Xiaosu found it very difficult to judge whether this behavior was mean or admirable, but he wasn’t qualified to do so.

Then a crisp laugh cut through the air. “Isn’t it just 20 or so bicycles? The Saboteurs are admirers of Ms. Jiang as a person, so we’ve decided that we’ll be sponsoring you guys with those bicycles!”

Ren Xiaosu was shocked as he turned his head to where the voice came from. The courtyard house they were in was not an independent structure but sat side by side with other courtyard houses. Therefore, there was another house’s backyard right next to the one that they were in.

Then Ren Xiaosu spotted Luo Xinyu leaning over the divider wall. She said, “Ren Xiaosu, aren’t you happy and surprised to see me?”

“Hah.” Ren Xiaosu’s expression darkened. What a fucking surprise, alright! This courtyard house they had rented was right next to Luo Xinyu and Yang Xiaojin’s place? How could it be so coincidental?

But Ren Xiaosu knew they must have moved in here first, because Old Wang had wanted to rent the place next door, but the landlord informed him that it had already been rented out a day earlier.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized this might not have been a coincidence at all. This was because most of the major powers present in this stronghold probably knew the Experimentals were headed here. That was why everyone had come here to where it was most convenient to escape from.

They were all thinking the same thing!

Ren Xiaosu asked, “Where’s Yang Xiaojin?”

“Hehe.” Luo Xinyu laughed but did not answer.

Her laugh made Ren Xiaosu nervous. ‘Why are you laughing so strangely!’ Ren Xiaosu asked, “How many others are staying in this area?”

“Luo Lan and his men are also staying nearby.” Luo Xinyu made a mental note and said, “Those from the Pyro Company have already been killed by you, so you won’t see them around anymore. As for the Yang Consortium, they’re all staying on the next street.”

As expected, everyone was here.

All of a sudden, Luo Xinyu asked, “Why didn’t you mention that you broke Dong Funan’s teeth off?”

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. “She tried to bite someone, but her teeth weren’t strong enough, so who can she blame? Why? Are they not going to grow out again?”

Luo Xinyu snapped, “Can your teeth still grow out after they’ve fallen out? She’ll have to be a vegetarian from now on!”

Vegetarian? Ren Xiaosu pondered it and said, “Vegetarian... do you mean she can only suck the blood of someone who’s in a vegetative state?”

Luo Xinyu raised her eyebrows. 'The fuck you mean by someone who's in a vegetative state!' "What I mean is, she can only consume blood that's been transfused out and not by biting someone."

"Oh." Ren Xiaosu really did not feel bad about it. He chuckled. "If that's how it is, she can even try out different flavors of blood by consuming cow's blood or pig's blood. If she consumes pig's blood, maybe she'll grow as strong as a pig!"

In fact, Luo Xinyu did not have much sympathy for Dong Funan before this. After all, Dong Funan was not exactly a good person to begin with. But with Ren Xiaosu saying that, she began to pity her a little.

Chapter 178: Li Shentan's present

Yang Xiaojin wasn't at home in the rented place, and only Luo Xinyu had free time to keep chatting with them in the backyard. Ren Xiaosu felt that Luo Xinyu was just killing time with them as she had nothing better to do.

Ren Xiaosu had thought Yang Xiaojin would return at night, but she was still nowhere to be seen even after it turned dark. Rather, it was Luo Xinyu who went out.

He felt that something was wrong. This must surely be a sign that trouble was about to begin.

Soon after, someone sent over the bicycles Luo Xinyu had promised them. Then Ren Xiaosu went out as well after informing the family about it. He suspected the various powers might start taking action against the Li Consortium tonight!

While Ren Xiaosu was heading out, he thought about where the action would take place if it was really going to happen. At the university?

Before it turned completely dark, he hurried off to where the university was. Someone had once described the university to Ren Xiaosu as a park with lots of greenery where the students could live and take strolls in. The university was like a utopia that felt peaceful and tranquil to be in.

But when Ren Xiaosu saw the university with his own eyes, he felt he had been deceived. He saw protruding anti-armor barricades set up outside the college's entrance, and countless bunkers and fortifications were being constructed on the campus grounds as well. The Li Consortium's combat troops were patrolling on the inside, and all of them were constantly looking warily around their surroundings with stern expressions.

How was this like a park? This was clearly more like a military base!

It was no wonder the Li Consortium did not bother with the antics Luo Lan had kicked up. So it was because all of their troops stationed in Stronghold 109 were concentrated here.

Just how important were research results that the Li Consortium wanted to protect them this much?

This university's campus was not located in a secluded place at all. There were still a lot of stronghold residents walking around the nearby streets, while it was business as usual for the street vendors.

But it was at this moment that a tough-looking man in plain clothes came up to Ren Xiaosu. Ren Xiaosu could see this man was concealing a gun with the side of his body.

The man seemed to have noticed Ren Xiaosu constantly looking at the campus, so he questioned, "Boy, what are you doing here?"

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that this person was probably someone from the Li Consortium. He never expected the defensive perimeter to be so tight. He explained himself, "So this is the university? I came here for research."

The man laughed. "Do you think you look like a university student in research?"

Ren Xiaosu was not happy. "I'm going there to get researched on. Is that not allowed? Who are you to look down on me!"

The man was surprised. Then he signaled to his surroundings. Out came several plainclothes personnel who gathered together.

But right at this moment, a pedestrian who happened to be passing by suddenly took out a hand grenade from his pocket and threw it at the school gate. After throwing it, he did not escape but fished out a pistol to fire at random around him. It was as though he were trying to create chaos.

Ren Xiaosu took advantage of the disturbance and quickly found a bunker to hide behind. He wondered who the fuck that was and why he was being so reckless!

The gunfire intensified outside the school gate, sounding like a pot of ice-water boiling. The street vendors who were going about their business suddenly rushed up and shot all of those plainclothes personnel dead!

However, the chaos did not stop here. These killers briefly retreated after killing the plainclothes personnel before several cargo trucks turned the corner at the end of the street and headed straight for the school gate!

If it were just several cargo trucks alone, they would not have had much impact on the heavily fortified school gate. Ren Xiaosu leaped to his feet and turned and ran. He suspected the trucks were loaded full of explosives!

Several of the killers noticed Ren Xiaosu, and one of them happened to be where Ren Xiaosu was retreating towards. He raised his gun and took aim. However, just as he pulled the trigger, Ren Xiaosu shifted his weight as quickly as a ghost, making the bullet miss its target!

At the moment, every muscle fiber in Ren Xiaosu's body stretched to its extreme. A great amount of strength was spread across every inch of his body!

The killer was stunned. How could someone be so fast that they could even dodge a bullet?!

Before this killer could fire another shot, he suddenly saw Ren Xiaosu rocketing toward him with a punch!

This punch landed right on the killer's neck. He did not even have the chance to dodge it as he heard the bones in his neck crack!

With a single punch, Ren Xiaosu instantly killed one person!

When the killers nearby witnessed this scene and tried to shoot in response, they found themselves in a mist of blood that sprayed out of them after getting fired upon from an unknown position. They did not even manage to raise their guns.

The scent of blood filled the air. When the wind blew, mists of blood floated through in the air like a crimson cloud.

Only a sniper rifle would have such power.

Ren Xiaosu jerked his head up at a high-rise building in the distance. He saw a young woman holding a large sniper rifle and standing atop the building. The moon that had just risen was hanging right above the high-rise building and next to Yang Xiaojin.

The narrow and delicate crescent moon acted like a foil to her presence.

Suddenly, the ringing of the bell reverberated through the night from the center of the stronghold, gong after gong.

But Ren Xiaosu froze at the sound. This was because there shouldn't have been any sound coming from the bell after 6 PM!

...

Moments before the bell was sounded.

Li Shentan was standing in the street far away from the middle of the stronghold in a magician's costume. In front of him was a hat, and in the hat was some loose change.

He opened his mouth and said to the stronghold residents who had gathered around, "The magic of hypnotism lies in its ability to help everyone take control of their subconscious. Are there any of you who occasionally wake up from your sleep punctually at 3 AM even though you didn't set an alarm?"

"Have you heard of any seniors who can catch a child falling from seven stories up with their bare hands?"

Li Shentan paused for a moment before saying, "What is the subconscious? The human brain is made up of 14 billion brain cells and can actually store information amounting up to five billion books. Yet you've already forgotten whatever you remembered a moment ago."

"Someone is managing your body for you, yet you can't control that 'person.'" Li Shentan laughed and said, "How dangerous is that?"

Someone in the crowd suddenly asked, "So what's the point of managing one's subconscious?"

Li Shentan smiled and said, "Have you ever thought about how, when you gain control over your subconscious, you'll stand a chance of becoming a supernatural being? No, it's more like becoming a god!" Li Shentan then gently lifted a car on the side of the road. It was as though the car were made of paper!

When the spectators saw this, they were stunned. Someone started throwing money into Li Shentan's hat while others were checking if there was any trickery with the car.

It was at this moment that the bell rang in the night. Li Shentan smiled and said, "Let the games... begin."

When the soundwaves of the bell started reverberating outward, countless residents in the stronghold suddenly stood still in a trance. Then they began to slowly walk in the direction of the university like they were zombies.

At first, they walked very slowly. But gradually, they picked up speed to the point where everyone was sprinting!

Their speed even exceeded that of a normal human being's sprint record. All of these people who were sprinting even seemed like they were drawing energy directly from their life force.

A fat resident started to visibly get thinner as he sprinted, while those who were thin to begin with were now starting to look like skeletal figures of their former selves.

They kept sprinting without a care, as the instructions that Li Shentan left for them were all they cared about after the ringing of the bell acted as the trigger for the hypnosis. It was as though they were guided by a god.

Li Shentan bent over to pick up the magician's hat from off the ground and spilled the money in it all over the ground. But he didn't care about that.

This young man walked down the now silent street while his surroundings became an infernal hell.

Tonight, the abandoned son of the Li Consortium had presented it with a gift.

Chapter 179: The ratlike Qing Consortium

Ren Xiaosu hid at the entrance of the university and watched.

The entire Western District of Stronghold 109 had suddenly fallen into inexplicable madness due to the uncertainty that Li Shentan's appearance brought.

Yang Xiaojin, who was standing at the highest point, could clearly see the entire situation. During this early evening period, she saw nearly one-fifth of all the people in the district start rushing to the university. The people on the ground were like moths circling a light source, and all of them were swarming and sprinting. It was as though they were a group of uncontrolled, wild beasts.

In the past, she had said to Ren Xiaosu that if the Demon Whisperer were released, the fate of the stronghold would become unknown. No one could predict whether it would head in a good or bad direction.

And now, the outcome was without a doubt the worst of the speculations they had. In fact, many people could not imagine that the enemy could create such widespread chaos single-handedly.

This was the age where supernatural beings would rise, but many of the organizations were still ignoring the changes that supernatural beings could bring to the era.

On the other hand, Li Shentan took practical action to inform the major powers on all sides just how shockingly destructive supernatural beings could be.

Powerful individuals were gradually transcending the strength that groups of people had.

The people in the crowd ran even faster when they got closer to the university. Some of those whose physical fitness was worse fell to the ground when their bodies could no longer take the stress.

But the others behind them continued rushing forward as though they did not see the others drop to the ground before them.

At the university, the Li Consortium's combat troops who were in charge of defending the place were stunned by the sight. It wasn't that their mental fortitude was weak, but that they had never imagined they would witness such a hellish scene here on earth.

The commanding officer of the defensive forces was the first to react. He immediately issued a preliminary warning that they would fire at the crowd if they got any nearer.

As someone from the Li Consortium, he subconsciously chose to give a warning first instead of shooting to kill. This was because the people running amok were all residents of the Li Consortium's stronghold. If they were to mercilessly fire into them, he could end up getting severely blamed and criticized. At that time, when the Li Consortium faced the wrath of the residents, he would definitely be singled out and made the scapegoat for giving the order to shoot at them!

But more importantly, he thought that if he gave a warning before opening fire, the people would stop in their tracks in fear of their weapons.

Alas, he couldn't be more wrong!

The mindless residents had absolutely no sense of fear, having lost all control of themselves.

The "essence" of hypnotism was to let those who were hypnotized completely surrender their consciousness!

It was precisely because of this officer's wrong call that the Li Consortium's combat troops lost their best opportunity.

Actually, there wasn't anything wrong with this officer's decision. He was faced with a terrifying opponent he had never encountered before.

By the time they realized the warning had served no purpose and got ready to fire at the residents, the lunatics were only a few dozen meters away from the university's entrance.

"We can't wait any longer! Shoot to kill!"

Intense gunfire rang out as the soldiers from the Li Consortium pulled their triggers in fear.

But after killing the first wave of cannon fodder, those behind them stepped over the bodies of the fallen and rushed forward. They kept coming wave after wave without any fear!

In just one short minute, the seemingly heavy fortifications at the entrance of the university had been broken through. The rush of people flowing in swept aside the entire defensive line that had looked impenetrable at first glance and tore it to pieces.

Not only that, there were still plenty more residents who fearlessly climbed the electrified wire netting on the sides of the walls.

One of the walls fell!

When Ren Xiaosu saw that, he was terrified. Had these people gone mad?!

All of a sudden, the ground below his feet moved.

Ren Xiaosu looked down and discovered he was standing on top of a manhole cover.

It felt like someone was pushing the manhole cover aside from below, but whoever was doing so did not succeed in moving it even after a long time. Then Luo Lan's irritated voice sounded from underneath it. "Those bastard fuckers from the Li Consortium actually sealed the manholes? C'mon, let's go to a different spot and try again."

A strange look appeared on Ren Xiaosu's face. He walked a few dozen meters away and stood on top of yet another manhole cover. As a result, Luo Lan's voice sounded out again, "Fuck! This one has been sealed too!"

But before Ren Xiaosu could feel amused, he heard Fatty Luo shout below, "Fucking blast this manhole cover apart!"

This time, Ren Xiaosu hurriedly said, "Come on up. There's no need to blow up anything..."

After Ren Xiaosu stepped aside, the manhole cover quickly opened a little. Luo Lan's eyes locked on to Ren Xiaosu's eyes through the small seam that had opened up.

"So it's you, kid," Luo Lan snapped as he climbed out from below. His rotund body would have gotten stuck in the manhole if not for the people below him pushing him out.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Were you born in the year of the rat? Why do you keep scuttling around in the sewers?"

"What do you know?" Luo Lan said disdainfully, "We're just prescient. Back when they were constructing this stronghold, our people infiltrated their architectural design team. There are no Li Consortium strongholds we're not familiar with. Don't you think that it's awesome to be able to navigate around the place from below and not get discovered by anyone?"

"Sure is." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "Except it's also a little stinky."

Then he saw the Qing Consortium's troops crawling out of the sewers one after another, until over a 100 people had come out. They were all in full battle gear, with one soldier even carrying an RPG!

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "Are y'all getting ready to attack the university campus too?"

"But of course. For something so precious to the Li Consortium, we'd definitely like to know what it is," Luo Lan said.

"Say, why are y'all getting so excited over something that you don't even know about?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"We have an idea of what it might be." Luo Lan said, "It could be nanomachines."

Ren Xiaosu's face darkened. "Can you sound surer?"

Luo Lan said unhappily, "The Li Consortium has done a very good job of keeping it a secret. Everyone else is also just guessing at what it might be. But the thing is, the Li Consortium is at the forefront of the nanorobotics field. We are still stuck in the experimentation phase, but their nanomachines have already been put into use in medicine."

Fatty Luo continued, "In the early years, the nanomachines they created from DNA could already clear blood clots and other things like that. Back then, some of the executives from the other organizations would even go to the Li Consortium's hospitals to get their illnesses treated when they got older. The Li Consortium even have nanozymes 1 that are used to treat hepatitis C. All of these are the main research fields the Li Consortium led."

Ren Xiaosu pondered the mention of the hepatitis virus. "What, is the Qing Consortium thinking of venturing into the medical industry?"

Chapter 180: They're all guilty

"No." Luo Lan shook his head. "We're only guessing what it might be. In the past, nanomachines could only perform extremely simple and basic operations as it was too difficult for the Li Consortium to implement complex programming into them. So we paid no further attention to this matter after that. But it seems like they might have had a breakthrough in the field."

Initially, Ren Xiaosu thought it was some extraordinary result from the research of supernatural beings. In the end, it turned out to be something about some nano thingy. When he heard that, his first thought was to leave.

Such scientific research results might be useful to the large organizations, but it wasn't worth a hoot to Ren Xiaosu. A hopeless student like him had not even fucking heard of nanomachines before, much less knew what they were.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu also had his own understanding of science. But whatever he did not hear of before would get treated as superstition.

Moreover, if people like Luo Lan were still just guessing and could not even be sure of what it was after so much guessing, all the more Ren Xiaosu would not waste his time on something so uncertain.

Luo Lan said, "How about this? You'll help me to steal the research, and I'll pay you for it."

"Since y'all like guessing so much, why don't you guess if I will help you?" Ren Xiaosu said with a chuckle.

"My guess is that you will!" Luo Lan said excitedly.

"Guess again!"

Luo Lan was silent, then said, "Look here, I was the one who told you the Experimentals were coming."

"Thank you," Ren Xiaosu said sincerely.

"Forget it." Luo Lan waved his hand in frustration. "It's fine if you don't wanna help. I might as well tell you something else. There could be the existence of an intelligent being among the Experimentals, as we found out they've actually been performing experiments on themselves. Can you imagine how scary that is?"

Ren Xiaosu was a little taken aback. "What else are the Experimentals supposed to do if they don't perform experiments?"

Now it was Luo Lan's turn to be taken aback. "That's quite logical."

Ren Xiaosu ignored Luo Lan and planned to return to their rented courtyard house immediately. Currently, Yan Liuyuan, Wang Fugui, and the others were waiting there for him.

When he left, Ren Xiaosu even turned back to have a look. He realized Yang Xiaojin was still on top of that building. It was as though she were providing cover for someone.

Then he suddenly saw a familiar face appear in the distance. It turned out to be the Stronghold 109 overseer!

He saw Lu Yuan coming over. Anyone who attempted to stop him ended up with a mist of blood spraying out of their bodies. So... Lu Yuan was actually a member of the Saboteurs?!

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu felt that many of the questions that had puzzled him just got answered.

No wonder Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu had gotten their stronghold resident statuses so easily. No wonder Yang Xiaojin could enroll in school so easily. No wonder that when Old Wang got arrested by the Public Order Division, Lu Yuan immediately called them to have him released. No wonder Yang Xiaojin had wanted to make things difficult for Luo Lan. It was because Luo Lan had slapped Lu Yuan, and Yang Xiaojin wanted to get back at him for her colleague.

When Lu Yuan saw Ren Xiaosu, he smiled and waved to him. Lu Yuan appeared much more cheerful than before. He looked to be much happier after shedding the false identity.

But what Ren Xiaosu could not figure out was that his school enrollment should also have been handled by Lu Yuan, while Yang Xiaojin had enrolled for school two days earlier than him, so wouldn't that mean she already knew he would be attending school as well? And she even knew which school he would be going to?!

Ren Xiaosu had always been suspicious of Yang Xiaojin as she did not really have any reason for attending school. Why was she going to school? As it turned out, he was actually the target the entire time! Was it so she could observe him at a closer distance, or were there other reasons?

Ren Xiaosu suddenly wondered if these people were thinking of recruiting him into the Saboteurs as well. But Ren Xiaosu had no time to wonder about these things. He immediately turned and left.

The courtyard house Old Wang had rented was not far from the university. So Yan Liuyuan and the others had also heard the gunfire. When Ren Xiaosu pushed open the door and entered, everyone heaved sighs of relief.

The entire courtyard was filled with people. The students, Jiang Wu, and a whole lot of bicycles were all there.

Xiaoyu asked, "Xiaosu, what was with the gunfire? Are you alright?"

"I'm OK." Ren Xiaosu said, "Everyone, get on your bikes. We've gotta leave right away!"

No matter what was about to happen in this stronghold, Ren Xiaosu's top priority would be to lead everyone to safety, not to try to get his hands on something!

With so many lives at stake, Ren Xiaosu could not be selfish.

When the group saw Ren Xiaosu rushing out the door, everyone wore their backpacks that were filled with their personal supplies.

After everyone got on their bicycles, Yan Liuyuan hesitated before asking, "Bro, why are you carrying your bike?"

Ren Xiaosu snapped, "I'm afraid that I'll damage the bike. Enough nonsense, hurry to the stronghold's gate!"

...

Li Shentan was walking the streets of the Western District. The people in the other districts were likely still unaware of what had happened here. The little girl whose name was Si Liren suddenly floated over from behind him. Neither of her feet were touching the ground.

“I was afraid the bell wasn’t loud enough, so I struck it a few more times,” the little girl said with a smile.

“Well done.” Li Shentan smiled dotingly and said, “That should be enough of a surprise for the Li Consortium’s people.”

“But why did we do that?” Si Liren asked curiously.

Li Shentan stood still and looked at both sides of the street. It all looked familiar yet strange to him. He said, “My mother married into the Li Consortium a long time ago to counteract my ill father’s bad luck. At the beginning, his sickness did improve. But it didn’t last long before he passed away a few years later.

“My mother brought me up in the Li Consortium. When she fell in love with a young teacher later on and wanted to marry him...” Li Shentan sighed. “Actually, all that is human nature. However, the Li Consortium believes that any woman who married into the Li Consortium belongs to the organization for life. If my mother married someone else, they would see it as disgracing the Li Consortium.”

Si Liren quietly listened. “What happened afterwards?”

“Afterwards?” Li Shentan thought for a moment before saying, “Afterwards, the Li Consortium dragged her out of the stronghold on this very street we’re treading on and buried her alive. I don’t even know where she was buried.”

All of a sudden, a Shadow Door appeared not far behind Li Shentan. Luo Xinyu asked from behind the Shadow Door, “Then what are the other residents in this stronghold guilty of?”

Li Shentan looked at the Shadow Door and said with a laugh, “Why are you hiding behind the door? Aren’t you gonna come out and say hi to your friend?”

Luo Xinyu snapped, “I know you can hypnotize people with just a look, so don’t try that with me. You still haven’t answered the question I posed to you.”

Li Shentan laughed and said, “On that day, I cowardly hid on the side of the street and watched as the vehicle escorting my mother passed by. On that day, the entire population of the Western District came to watch. There were people who made fun of her and jeered at her, but none stepped forward to plead for her life. Therefore, they’re all guilty.”

After that, Li Shentan went crazy and was sent to the psychiatric hospital.

While in the psychiatric hospital, he briefly lost his identity before becoming a legendary Demon Whisperer. It was as if he had become the representative of the Underworld on earth.

It was no wonder no one could find out the identity of Li Shentan. It seemed like the Li Consortium had also thought of him as a disgrace and decided to erase all traces of mother and son.