

First Order 181

Chapter 181: Wait for me

But Li Shentan suddenly smiled and said, "I know something very terrifying is making its way towards Stronghold 109 as we speak. The main defensive forces of the stronghold supposedly made up of the Li Consortium's combat troops are now holed up in a university because of you people. When those terrifying things arrive, who will defend the city? Guess how many people will die to the hands of those things. And who is going to take responsibility for that?"

"The Saboteurs, the Qing Consortium, the Yang Consortium, or the Pyro Company?" Li Shentan questioned, "Which of you are qualified to throw stones at me?"

Luo Xinyu stayed silent.

"We're all sinners," Li Shentan lamented.

"Since you've already gotten your revenge, isn't it time to reel it in?" Luo Xinyu said, "You have to trust that even though justice may be delayed, it won't be denied."

Li Shentan reacted like he had heard a hilarious joke. "That isn't the original version of the saying. The original goes like this: 'Justice delayed is justice denied.'"

Luo Xinyu suddenly asked, "What do you think is the essence behind turning supernatural?"

"Isn't it already summed up in the mission statement of your Saboteurs organization?" Li Shentan chuckled. "When a disaster comes, mental strength becomes the best weapon humanity has in the face of danger. But my understanding of mental strength is based on... furthering the development of the brain."

Luo Xinyu calmly said, "But studies about furthering the development of the brain have been refuted since before The Cataclysm."

"Anything that hasn't been rigorously argued over can only be taken as rumors. Even now, humanity still hasn't fully discovered which part of the brain corresponds with the human emotion, so how dare they say they've completely understood it?" Li Shentan said in seriousness, "But I still can't be sure if supernatural beings have unlocked a new area in their brains or whether they've just achieved an increase of their brain's potential to a 100%. I guess it's better to just call it something like mental strength for now."

"Then according to your logic," Luo Xinyu said, "does it mean that the more powerful a supernatural being is, the closer they are to destroying themselves?"

"Theoretically, yes." Li Shentan said, "The moment the brain's potential reaches a 100% capability, humanity might evolve a will that's equivalent to that of a god. Their bodies could also disintegrate as a result of not being able to handle this extremely vast will. This might even start happening once the brain reaches 70% capability."

Li Shentan was suddenly reminded of a youth he knew and seemed a little unsure as he said, "But I think there are also exceptions to that. So whatever we're discussing right now is pointless. It's only when humans evolve to that level that we'll know the answer." Li Shentan then ignored Luo Xinyu. He continued walking with Si Liren towards the university to see for himself the destruction of Stronghold 109's Li Consortium troops.

Luo Xinyu did not bother questioning him any further as she had something more important to handle. Time was running out.

Even for an organization as powerful and well-connected as the Saboteurs, they couldn't gain access to all the secrets of this world. Whatever had been discussed here today, Luo Xinyu would have to write up a report detailing every single word that was said so the others in the organization could readjust their research direction.

But at this moment, the other districts of the stronghold that had been peaceful burst into an uproar. It was as though something extremely alarming had happened. Those who were in the know shuddered in their hearts as they knew the Experimentals must have arrived in advance!

Luo Xinyu ignored this and just stood outside the university. She closed the Shadow Door she had opened up next to Li Shentan. When she opened the Shadow Door again, she walked right through it.

Step by step, she went from where she was to an enclosed research laboratory that looked very technologically advanced. Luo Xinyu examined her environment.

Whatever she was looking for was in here.

Luo Xinyu held a gun in her hand and kept her guard up in case any security personnel inside the lab became a threat. However, no one seemed to be in the lab anymore. It looked like everyone might have already escaped due to the unrest that was happening outside.

The entire lab was empty.

At this moment, she noticed a portable hard drive that was locked inside a bulletproof glass case. Luo Xinyu raised her gun and fired continuously at the glass to break it open. She then got ready to take the hard drive out and leave through the Shadow Door.

But a second later, the lab's ceiling lit up brightly. The entire interior of the lab turned bright as day. There were no blind spots where the light could not reach!

Luo Xinyu attempted to open the Shadow Door to leave, but it could not be formed in this place where no shadows could be cast. The Shadow Door she tried to conjure up materialized as a dull shadow that quickly dissipated after swaying a couple times.

This lab was actually fitted with anti-theft measures specific to her ability!

Luo Xinyu frowned as she decided to go and open the lab's door instead. However, she discovered she did not even know how to open the steel door several centimeters thick.

Frankly, Luo Xinyu felt a little powerless now. This was the first time she had encountered a measure that was specially tailored to her!

However, she was not worried for herself but Yang Xiaojin, who was currently waiting for her on the rooftop of the high-rise building.

...

Ren Xiaosu carried his bicycle and ran ahead of the group. Along the way, they saw several residents who had been hypnotized by Li Shentan sprinting past them. None of those residents gave them a second look.

When the students saw the crazy looks on those people, they felt a little scared. Ren Xiaosu tried to comfort them. "Don't be afraid, the entire Western District has become like this. They won't attack us."

When the students heard what the entire Western District had become, they got even more frightened.

Within two minutes, Ren Xiaosu and the group arrived at the stronghold's gate. Right now, alarms were going off everywhere inside the stronghold, as if to say that something terrifying was coming to attack the stronghold.

Or rather, those terrifying things had arrived a while ago. However, they only started a full-scale attack after the chaos broke out.

The Experimentals had broken into the stronghold through the sewer system. However, they were not in a hurry to attack and had chosen to set up an ambush instead.

And now, they felt it was time.

Luo Lan should count himself lucky that he had only gone a short distance underground today. Otherwise, he might have gotten a nasty surprise if he bumped into the large group of Experimentals.

At this point, the private army's soldiers that were assigned to guard the stronghold's gate had also rushed over to the university upon hearing the alarm. This place was now void of people.

Yan Liuyuan frowned and said, "Bro, how do we open the gate?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "It's fine, I have bombs."

Yan Liuyuan and the others looked at Ren Xiaosu with anticipation. Then their eyes grew wide when they saw him taking out four poker cards with the number three.

Wang Fugui, Wang Dalong, and Chen Wudi were confused.

Were these the legendary bombs he was talking about? How the hell could they possibly blow the gate up with that?

What? Are you going to throw out four threes 1 at the gate, then let it say "pass" before opening up the gate for you?!

Yan Liuyuan's face darkened. "Bro, can you be a little more serious at a time like this?"

"Don't panic, it's not a big problem!" Ren Xiaosu said as he waved for everyone to step back. Then he stuck the four cards onto the gate and also ran far away to take cover.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu said in his mind, "Detonate!"

Suddenly, those four poker cards stuck on the gate exploded with a shocking amount of power and a fiery glow. Afterwards, there was a lot of dust and smoke around where the gate used to be.

After the blast, the powerful explosion lifted a large cloud of dust and smoke in the opposite direction. Debris from the remnants of the gate scattered everywhere while Yan Liuyuan and the others all felt the ground tremble below them!

Ren Xiaosu looked over to check. "It's done!"

The gate had a huge hole blown through it!

Wang Fugui was shocked. So it was actually that dangerous to play "Fight the Landlord"?!

"Everyone, get out of the city. We're going to head north." Ren Xiaosu was planning on leading the way. As for whatever was happening in the stronghold, it really had nothing to do with him anymore.

But when he turned around to have another look at the stronghold, he saw Yang Xiaojin standing on top of that building far off in the distance. There were over a dozen Experimentals crawling up towards her like spiders. Ren Xiaosu froze for a moment. Why hadn't Luo Xinyu gone to fetch Yang Xiaojin yet?!

This wasn't how he had imagined it would be. Based on past experience, Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu should have made the most comfortable retreat of all.

But as it stood, Yang Xiaojin was still ten stories high on that building's rooftop. She was a lone boat in the dark ocean. She could capsize at any moment.

Ren Xiaosu only hesitated for a moment before he turned to Wang Fugui and the others and said, "You guys, leave first. I need to make a trip back to the stronghold! Chen Wudi, make sure you protect everyone!"

Wang Fugui panicked. "Xiaosu, no one's gonna survive in that stronghold."

Ren Xiaosu looked at them and said firmly, "Head north, and don't turn back! I'll catch up to y'all!" Ren Xiaosu then turned around and headed back to the city that had now turned into a hell.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu was unsure why he had chosen to turn around. Perhaps it was because of the familiarity of facing those wild beasts that led him wanting to be among them again. Or perhaps it was because he liked the night sky in this city that he wanted to take in more of the scenery here. Or even perhaps he had forgotten to grab his wallet?

Well, alright! Ren Xiaosu knew all those were poor excuses for turning back. Perhaps it was only because he didn't want that girl to die here.

Ren Xiaosu started running faster and faster, with his clothes flapping loudly in the wind. He was a male lion on the hunt.

He looked at the top of the high-rise building, while the girl at the top also seemed to quietly look back at him.

The chaotic gunfire around him and the Experimentals that were choosing who to eat, all of those things made this world feel a little absurd right now.

The dark sky even felt like it was about to split apart in the middle.

But none of that was important.

Wait for me.

Chapter 182: Against the current

Wang Fugui and the others stood at the gate and watched as Ren Xiaosu headed back into the dangerous stronghold. Sometimes, Wang Fugui felt that Ren Xiaosu was way too brave. He just had to head back into a place everyone was trying their best to run away from.

Though, Wang Fugui felt he had made the wisest decision of his life when he chose to bring Wang Dalong with him and follow Ren Xiaosu in their escape. If it weren't for that, he would probably have perished in another disaster even if he were fortunate enough to survive the one that happened at Stronghold 113.

The world today was simply too dangerous a place.

The past couple days, Ren Xiaosu and Wang Fugui had both been doubted countless of times by the stores they bought their escape supplies from. It even caused Wang Fugui to sometimes feel that if it weren't an earthquake or some other natural disasters occurring, no harm would befall the stronghold.

But as the facts had proven, Ren Xiaosu was correct after all.

At this moment, Yan Liuyuan could only watch helplessly as Ren Xiaosu headed back in. Xiaoyu sighed and said, "Liuyuan, are you worried about your brother?"

Everyone knew how close these two brothers were, so it was only natural that Yan Liuyuan would be worried about Ren Xiaosu. However, Yan Liuyuan shook his head and said, "No, I'm just thinking if I should go over to remind him that he's still carrying his bike around."

Xiaoyu was surprised.

It was only at this moment that everyone realized in shock that Ren Xiaosu still was carrying his bicycle with him when he turned back to the stronghold.

But the earlier situation was simply too pressing, and with Ren Xiaosu's shocking decision to head back into the stronghold, they couldn't get a handle on the situation.

Wang Fugui felt that the mighty presence and image Ren Xiaosu had built up in their minds had all but poofed.

Yan Liuyuan got onto his bicycle and said, "Let's go! My brother naturally knows what he's doing if he dares to go back in there. We'll head north!"

Chen Wudi looked at the stronghold and said in a sad voice, "Master will probably elope with the ruler of Womanland 1 now. How can we go and seek the Buddhist scriptures from the Western Paradise?"

Yan Liuyuan consoled, "Don't worry, we'll just bring the ruler of Womanland with us."

Chen Wudi mulled over this for a long time before saying reluctantly, "Well, alright."

...

The high-rise building Yang Xiaojin was on was only about a kilometer away from the stronghold's gate. Ren Xiaosu glanced at the building, then sighed as he put the bicycle down by the road. How careless of him to have forgotten to hand it to Yan Liuyuan for safekeeping first.

The 15 cubic meters of storage space he had was already stuffed full of supplies. Actually, he could just take some of the supplies out and put the bicycle in, but there was no time to fiddle around with it now.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu saw many people in front of him fleeing toward the stronghold gate near him. Behind them, several Experimentals were frantically chasing after them.

The Experimentals were so terrifying that the stronghold residents cried with fear. Some people even lost their shoes as they ran, while others were fleeing wearing only a thin pair of pajamas. From the looks of it, they must have run straight out of their homes.

These stronghold residents who had recently been talking about music festivals and fashion trends finally understood just what the world outside the stronghold was like.

When Ren Xiaosu first came into the stronghold, he had a thought: Everything in the outside world seemed to be changing at an extremely rapid pace, but the strongholds remained the same throughout. These people were enjoying a false sense of peace and prosperity behind the stronghold walls that seemed to be protecting them but were actually shackling their progress.

Ren Xiaosu looked up at the high-rise building Yang Xiaojin was on. He saw an Experimental climb almost to the top. However, just as it was about to leap over onto the rooftop, it was greeted by the large muzzle of a gun.

The Experimentals were not afraid of bullets. Even bullets fired by an automatic rifle from 50 meters away would get lodged in the surface of their skins due to their tough muscles.

However, that did not include being fired upon by a sniper rifle.

Yang Xiaojin had such great strength that she was actually able to use the sniper rifle as a close-range artillery weapon. With a ringing shot, the Experimental that was the first to reach the rooftop had its entire head blown off!

The recoil from the sniper rifle packed a punch. If a normal person were wielding this weapon, they would probably have been thrown back by the recoil after firing one shot.

But Yang Xiaojin looked like she wasn't affected at all. Very quickly, she fired at another Experimental.

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu always felt an extreme amount of contradiction seeing Yang Xiaojin's petite figure wielding that sniper rifle. Yet this contradiction exuded a unique aesthetic of violence.

...

Ren Xiaosu had originally been worried about if he would get there in time. Ren Xiaosu knew that if nobody went to support her, Yang Xiaojin would definitely reach a point where she would get overwhelmed. After all, there were simply too many Experimentals.

But now he was a little relieved. At least he still had some time to get there!

Or rather, Yang Xiaojin was buying time for herself!

Ren Xiaosu picked up his pace and accelerated forward. But with everyone else heading toward the stronghold gate, Ren Xiaosu was going against the current.

When the fleeing people passed Ren Xiaosu by, even in this life and death situation, every one of them could not help but look at him in amazement. How could someone be going in the opposite direction, towards the Experimentals? All of them wanted nothing more than to get away from those creatures right now!

At this moment, everyone in the city was fleeing for their lives and were being driven towards the stronghold's gate by the Experimentals. On these streets, only one person was heading in the opposite direction of everyone else.

Yang Xiaojin was watching this scene from the building in the distance. When she saw Ren Xiaosu making his way back towards the stronghold, she suddenly felt that the current Stronghold 109 was not that scary anymore.

Then an old man recognized Ren Xiaosu in the crowd. Wasn't that the boy who had bought a lot of food supplies from his store?

This old man was the grocery store owner from before. Yesterday, he was still making fun of Ren Xiaosu for worrying too much. But now he finally realized just how great of a fool he was.

How did this young man know there would be danger?

Moreover, since he already knew there would be danger, why hadn't he fled in advance? Why was he still heading in the opposite direction from them at this time?

Those two questions kept swirling around in the grocery store owner's mind. As he continued running, he kept wondering why. But as soon as he passed Ren Xiaosu by, screams burst from the front of the fleeing crowd!

At the far end of the street, many Experimentals suddenly rushed out from the left side of the intersection in front. These Experimentals had actually taken another path to outflank them!

However, only Ren Xiaosu, who was going in the opposite direction, was not surprised by this. This was because, having taken on the Experimentals before, he knew well that their hunting style was to leave no survivors.

If they were not fully prepared, there was absolutely no way they would have waited so patiently underground in ambush.

The intelligent being that helmed these Experimentals surely had greater ambition!

Chapter 183: Running out of time!

Soon, Ren Xiaosu arrived at the back of the crowd as he made his way through them in the opposite direction. Here, three Experimentals chased after over a 1,000 people and slaughtered anyone they could get their hands on. When they realized Ren Xiaosu was heading straight for them, one of the Experimentals gave up on its target and pounced at Ren Xiaosu instead!

But before they could even get in front of Ren Xiaosu, Ren Xiaosu had already pulled a saber out of thin air. Even at this moment, Ren Xiaosu did not stop moving. He ran even faster, leading with shoulder forward, brushing past the Experimental that had pounced at him.

Ren Xiaosu gripped the handle of the extremely sharp saber firmly as he felt it going through the Experimental's body. Its gray skin was sliced open by the blade.

The muscle fibers within the gray skin ruptured thread by thread. Following, the bones were cleanly cut through. Finally, the gray body was split in two as large amounts of pale yellow blood spurted out of it.

All of a sudden, the crowd that was fleeing toward the stronghold's gate was blocked off by some Experimentals up ahead. Everyone instinctively turned around and ran back to where they came. Turning around didn't mean they would survive, but they did not know what else they could do!

The despairing crowd had lost all sense by now. They had not received any evacuation training, nor faced the wilderness before. As such, even if they had a strong desire to live, their survival instinct was unable to guide them on where to go.

The instant they turned around, they saw the sight of an Experimental getting sliced in half. The black saber, the youth who was bursting with strength and power, and the Experimental that looked so vulnerable in the face of the blade.

A girl discovered to her surprise that the youth who did this was the Ren Xiaosu who had once been asked by their class to drop out of school. Back then, they were all afraid that Ren Xiaosu would bring disease and death to them since he was a former refugee. But what did that student who spoke up for him say at that time?

On that day, one of Jiang Wu's students had said to them and their parents, "Side with him? We're not siding with or helping him. And he doesn't need our help either. You people are utterly clueless about the outside world. I find it to be really sad."

No one knew what that student was trying to say at the time. But now she realized what it meant.

So this world had become this dangerous. The students who escaped in the wilderness to Stronghold 109 had clearly gone through life and death with Ren Xiaosu. As a result, they knew exactly what he was capable of.

Such capabilities might not mean much inside the stronghold. But compared to the larger world, these strongholds were just a mere speck.

The girl tugged at a middle-aged woman next to her and shouted, "Mom, that's Ren Xiaosu! He's the refugee who was forced to switch classes by you all!"

A complicated look appeared on the woman's face. But in this life and death situation, was there a need to have other considerations? She said, "Do you know him? Ask him to come back and save us!"

At this moment, when the fleeing crowd that had been forced to turn back by the Experimentals saw that Ren Xiaosu could slay these creatures, someone shouted, "Follow him, follow him closely!"

It was as though they had found their savior and thought they could survive just by following Ren Xiaosu.

But after slaying one of the Experimentals, Ren Xiaosu did not come to a stop. He immediately hurried away from the battle site so the other two Experimentals would not have a chance to close in on him and cause any further delays.

His objective was to save someone, not stay behind to kill these Experimentals!

With just a moment's effort, Ren Xiaosu left the Experimentals and the fleeing crowd far behind.

Seeing they could not catch up to Ren Xiaosu, the Experimentals turned back around to the frightened crowd. When the girl saw Ren Xiaosu running further and further away, and just as she was about to call out to him to come back and save them, the Experimental in front of her pounced and bit down on her throat!

The girl's cry for help did not even manage to make it out of her mouth, and only despair remained in her eyes.

Ren Xiaosu was never a savior of others. There was only one person's life in this stronghold he cared about right now.

Then the palace suddenly said, "Quest: Save the stronghold's residents."

But even so, it did not make Ren Xiaosu turn his head.

He definitely needed to complete the quest. But Yang Xiaojin was also a resident of the stronghold, so wouldn't saving her also allow him to complete the quest? Ren Xiaosu always had a unique understanding of the quests assigned by the palace.

While he was running with everything he had, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see an Experimental crouched next to a man who had fainted. The man did not have any visible injuries on his body and seemed to have only been knocked unconscious.

Ren Xiaosu kept his distance from this Experimental as he continued running towards the building. However, he couldn't help but keep noticing its odd behavior.

Usually, the Experimentals would pounce when they noticed a living being like him. However, this Experimental apparently had something more important it needed to do.

The Experimental suddenly opened its mouth wide and stuck out its tongue. Ren Xiaosu thought it was going to lick its "food" before devouring it. However, he noticed there was a small syringe wrapped around the end of its tongue. Then the Experimental took the syringe and held it in its hand. It attempted to inject the syringe filled with a gray liquid into the man's neck!

Ren Xiaosu felt a chill run up his spine. What was this Experimental trying to do?

Luo Lan had already reminded Ren Xiaosu that these Experimentals were known to conduct experiments. At that time, Ren Xiaosu was wondering what else would the Experimentals do if not experiments? But at this moment, he was shocked.

The normal skin color of the man suddenly started to visibly turn gray. His muscles that couldn't be counted as particularly lean also started bulking up rapidly.

In the past, Ren Xiaosu thought the Experimentals' goal was to slaughter all living things. But right now, he realized they were not actually looking to kill everyone.

What exactly was the liquid that had been injected into the man?

To tell the truth, when Luo Lan mentioned the "nanomachines" and "Experimentals performing experiments", Ren Xiaosu reacted quite scornfully to it. After all, a break in human civilization had occurred, so technology should still be in its preliminary stage of revival, right?

But Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of what Zhang Jinglin had said to him before. Technology had not really been fully displaced.

Zhang Jinglin's original words were: "They are in the possession of a minority of the people."

That should be the reason for the organizations rise to become what they were now.

Ren Xiaosu realized why the Experimentals' numbers were increasing.

It was no wonder the Experimentals were attacking another stronghold. It was because they were trying to increase their food sources and expand their community, so they had to take over new strongholds in order to get them.

If Stronghold 113 had not collapsed from an earthquake, the Experimentals would not have been able to expand in numbers so rapidly. It was because they didn't have enough numbers to attack and take down a stronghold before that event.

But ever since they increased their numbers at Stronghold 113, they had raised a big enough army to devour a stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu knew he was running out of time. He needed to get Yang Xiaojin out of this place pronto.

Chapter 184: Rescuing Yang Xiaojin

Finally, he arrived at the entrance of the tall building.

The firing of the sniper rifle had stopped. It was quite likely that the Experimentals were already up on the roof, and Yang Xiaojin had given up on using the sniper rifle and switched to close combat.

Ren Xiaosu did not choose to take the stairs. He called upon his shadow clone and hopped on its back as it started climbing to the top of the building from the exterior.

Between here and the top, the shortest route was a straight line. If he took the stairs up, Yang Xiaojin would probably already be dead by the time he got up there!

Ren Xiaosu felt some regret. If he had completely copied Luo Xinyu's power, would he have to spend so much effort now?

When he first copied Shadow Door, he got Yan Liuyuan and Xiaoyu to buy a live chicken back from the market for him. It wasn't because he wanted to eat meat but that he wanted to try and see if he could pull someone through the Shadow Door like Luo Xinyu did.

But as it would be too dangerous to test it on Yan Liuyuan, he could only try it out on an animal.

After testing it out, Ren Xiaosu gave up. Even when the target he was trying to bring through the Shadow Door was a chicken, he could only manage to get one of its legs through. It couldn't be pulled any further than that.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu still got a little angry about it.

Suddenly, perhaps alerted by the sound of him climbing up the building, two Experimentals crashed through the windows on the seventh story and climbed out. They were forcefully blocking Ren Xiaosu's path to the roof.

Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, "Just the two of you and you want to block me? Do y'all know how many Experimentals I have killed? Do y'all know..."

However, the two Experimentals simply hung upside down on the façade and kept their eyes on Ren Xiaosu without flinching.

Ren Xiaosu lamented, "Alright, it seems like I couldn't scare you."

As soon as his voice trailed off, his shadow clone pushed off from the exterior with all of its limbs and leaped up. The fuzzy outline of the shadow clone solidified into steel.

Ren Xiaosu and his shadow clone separated in midair, and both of them drew a black saber out of thin air at the same time, their actions in unison.

The two Experimentals above him growled and pounced down. But before they could finish, the two black sabers cut through their necks.

The shadow clone kicked one foot off of a falling Experimental's body and used this change of direction to regain its grip on the steel frame of the building with one of its hands. The other hand grasped tightly onto Ren Xiaosu's wrist.

In the blink of an eye, the two Experimentals did not even make a ripple when facing Ren Xiaosu and his shadow clone.

The coordinated move of Ren Xiaosu and his shadow clone was flawless.

Without any obstacles between him and the roof, his shadow clone took him to the top in a single bound.

When the Experimentals that had surrounded Yang Xiaojin saw another human being jump onto the rooftop, all of them turned to look at Ren Xiaosu ferociously.

Ren Xiaosu stood on the edge of the roof and scrutinized his surroundings. There were seven Experimentals in all, but one of them was already immobilized on the ground. Yang Xiaojin, who was injured and stained with blood all over, had her back facing the parapet walls of the roof as she gasped violently for breath. She was holding a new dagger that did not look like it was cast from normal steel.

This was Ren Xiaosu's first time face to face with so many monsters. If it weren't for his shadow clone, Ren Xiaosu would probably have to die here as well.

Seeing the suspicious look on Yang Xiaojin's face, Ren Xiaosu said to his shadow clone, "Old Xu, let's get all of them!"

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu somehow felt that Yang Xiaojin was hiding a slight smile in her eyes despite looking really pathetic at this moment.

Yang Xiaojin said weakly, "Xu Xianchu is already a few hundred kilometers from here."

"Hahahaha, is that so?" Ren Xiaosu laughed in embarrassment.

Yang Xiaojin did not bother arguing with him and slowly sat on the ground. Every wound on her body was giving searing pain. Having lost a lot of blood, she was almost in a state of shock as well.

Ren Xiaosu calmly said, "You rest for a bit. I'll get you out of here."

"Mhm," Yang Xiaojin responded softly.

...

Luo Xinyu burning with anxiety in the lab as the seconds ticked away. Before she came in here, she already knew the Experimentals were about to start their attack on the stronghold. If she didn't go and bail her out now, Yang Xiaojin would be in great danger.

But in this enclosed lab where light encroached upon every corner, there was nothing she could do.

Luo Xinyu tried shooting at the ceiling, but even the glass roof was bulletproof. She could try to use her coat to create a faint shadow, but that wouldn't be big enough for her to activate the Shadow Door.

This was where Luo Xinyu was different from Ren Xiaosu. Although Ren Xiaosu's Shadow Door only allowed him to put an arm through it, he could adjust the size of his Shadow Door at will. Luo Xinyu's Shadow Door could only be conjured at the standard size she had no control over.

Suddenly, the sound of a gunshot rang out from outside. Then she heard a voice yelling, "Hehe, if it's something I want, you can bet I'll get my hands on it!"

Luo Xinyu's eyes lit up. Who could have expected Luo Lan to come barging in at this moment? As soon as Luo Lan opened the door and came in, the light source would turn off. At that time, she might have the chance to immediately leave through the Shadow Door.

Luo Lan's voice sounded from the outside, "Hurry up and key in the password for the door to open. Otherwise, I'll finish you off where you stand."

It sounded like Luo Lan had taken an employee hostage and was ordering them to open the lab's door.

With a rumble, the door slowly started lifting. The employee had apparently inputted the correct password, but a gunshot still rang out. The lab employee screamed in fright. But after screaming for a while, he realized he was not dead.

"Aren't you going to kill me?" the lab employee asked, trembling.

Luo Lan chortled and said, "When have I ever gone back on my word? Do you think your wretched life or my reputation is more important? Now get lost!"

Luo Lan waited for the door to raise halfway before bending down to get in. When he saw Luo Xinyu on the inside, he froze.

By this moment, the bright lights in the lab used to drown out any shadows had already turned off. Meanwhile, Luo Xinyu's Shadow Door had already vaguely formed.

But when Luo Lan saw this sight, he immediately took out a powerful flashlight from his waist pocket and shone it at Luo Xinyu's Shadow Door. With that, the Shadow Door disappeared again.

He belly laughed. "I haven't even gotten my revenge for getting slapped on my forehead by you, so how dare you take what I want and try to escape? It was a good thing I brought along a flashlight just in case!"

After Luo Lan was slapped by Ren Xiaosu on his head, he started carrying around a powerful flashlight for defensive purposes. However, Luo Xinyu was confused by what Luo Lan said. "What did I slap?"

Luo Lan did not banter with her. "Hand over the information and I'll let you go."

Luo Xinyu sneered, "Do you think I'll believe you? Step back, or I'll destroy this hard drive!"

Luo Lan started laughing. "Your partner should still be on top of that building, right? The Experimentals have already gotten into the stronghold. If you don't hurry up and rescue her, she probably won't make it out of here. How about this? Hand the hard drive to me and I'll let you go rescue her."

Honestly, Luo Xinyu did not believe that Luo Lan would let her go. However, if she did not go and rescue Yang Xiaojin now, it might really be too late.

So Luo Xinyu decided to take a gamble.

She threw the hard drive over to Luo Lan, then went on guard against him.

In the end, Luo Lan caught the hard drive and turned around to leave. "Hurry up and rescue her. I, Luo Lan, will never break a promise. Don't start guarding against me like you would a petty criminal. If I wanted to kill you, I wouldn't have said so much already."

Luo Xinyu looked at him, then opened a Shadow Door to leave. In a single step, she arrived at the rooftop she and Yang Xiaojin had agreed to meet at.

But what she saw stunned her. All she could see were the scattered, torn pieces of Experimentals' bodies here, but Yang Xiaojin was nowhere to be seen.

Who had rescued Yang Xiaojin?!

Luo Xinyu looked around from on the high-rise building at her surroundings. All she could see were gray Experimentals traversing the streets as they hunted their prey. She was a little worried. Even if someone had saved Yang Xiaojin, they couldn't possibly have escaped from the stronghold, right?

That person must have taken her somewhere to hide.

Chapter 185: Exposing each other

In the wide and gloomy sewers, footsteps echoed clearly. Compared to the narrow space Ren Xiaosu had imagined, the sewer system in Stronghold 109 seemed more like it was designed based on the specifications of a bomb shelter.

When the strongholds were built many years ago, people were still living in the shadow of The Cataclysm. That led to their designs being influenced by the possibility of war breaking out again. So when Stronghold 109's sewer system was designed, it was done so that the sewer pipes were constructed as wide as a bomb shelter. But of course, only the main sewer pipes were designed this way.

The black shadow clone was walking in the sewers and carrying an unconscious Yang Xiaojin on its left shoulder. Ren Xiaosu, who was enduring its pain, was being carried on its right shoulder.

Ren Xiaosu had also been injured, and blood was dripping down into the murky sewage from his dangling arm.

Seemingly attracted by the blood, huge sewer rats watched the shadow clone as it walked by in the darkness as well as the two wounded people it was carrying on its shoulders.

But for some reason, the rats did not dare to come out to attack them.

Ren Xiaosu was not only dealing with his own injuries but also enduring the pain from the bites the shadow clone had received during the battle that were in turn transmitted to him.

This was probably Ren Xiaosu's toughest battle to date. At first, he thought he would only have to face six Experimentals. But once they started fighting, he discovered that another five Experimentals in the building had been attracted by the noise.

During the fight, several Experimentals had been kicked off the building and died on impact. As their corpses were not on the roof, Luo Xinyu misjudged the state of the battle when she arrived at the scene.

Based on Luo Xinyu's understanding, a supernatural being who could attack and kill six Experimentals at the same time was already very terrifying. In fact, she would not even have dared think beyond that scenario.

In this era when supernatural beings had just started rising up, everyone was slowly feeling their way forward as they advanced in the realm of the supernatural. Unless it was a natural-born evil like Li Shentan, an individual would still find it difficult to use their power to overcome the masses.

That was to say, no single person today would be strong enough to ignore the number of their enemies. Supernatural beings were not powerful to that extent. Why else would they be hunted by the organizations to the point they had to remain hidden all around the world?

But there was a consensus among all the supernatural organizations. A supernatural being powerful enough to ignore the masses would definitely be born sooner or later.

As the shadow clone continued walking forward in the sewers, Yang Xiaojin suddenly regained consciousness. At this moment, all of her body ached so badly that she could not even lift herself up. "Ren Xiaosu?"

Her voice was oddly abrupt in the empty sewers. Ren Xiaosu said dejectedly, "Hm?"

“Where are we?” Yang Xiaojin asked.

“Good question.” Ren Xiaosu answered, “Broadly speaking, we’re in the sewers. But if you want to be more specific, I have no clue where we are.”

Yang Xiaojin instantly realized Ren Xiaosu might also be injured. But from the way he was still speaking nonsensically, his injuries shouldn’t be too bad.

The shadow clone finally came to a stop when it found a dry platform to place Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu down on.

Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu both leaned against the wall and sat down. Ren Xiaosu took out a candle and lit it before placing it on the ground. He asked, “Why didn’t Luo Xinyu take you away this time?”

“Probably because something happened.” Yang Xiaojin had recovered a little. “If something hadn’t, she would have come for me.”

Ren Xiaosu still did not give up on trying to hide his powers even at this time. He said to the shadow clone, “Thanks, Old Xu.”

Yang Xiaojin chuckled. “My injuries hurt a lot, so please don’t make me laugh.”

“Old Xu ran from over a hundred kilometers away just to rescue us. Are you really not going to thank him?” Ren Xiaosu said righteously.

“We secretly planted a tracker on Xu Xianchu.” Yang Xiaojin explained, “He just crossed over the Tungsten Mountains this morning and was continuing to head northwest to Stronghold 178. It was you who told him to go that way, wasn’t it? I remember you mentioning Zhang Jinglin before. I didn’t think much of it at that time, just that the name sounded familiar, but I wasn’t sure if it was the same one I knew.”

Ren Xiaosu got angry. “What right did y’all have to plant a tracker on Old Xu!”

“Don’t change the topic.” Yang Xiaojin said softly, “So I used to have a question I couldn’t figure out an answer to. I clearly saw you in the Jing Mountains, yet the Qing Consortium never put you on their wanted list, instead placing a huge bounty on Xu Xianchu’s head.”

Ren Xiaosu said, feeling guilty, “That has nothing to do with me. Don’t try to accuse me of anything.”

“So your superpower is to copy others’ superpowers, right?” Yang Xiaojin said in a soft voice, “You also copied mine. I carefully studied the angle you raise your gun at, and it’s exactly the same as mine. There’s no difference.”

Yang Xiaojin had always felt that Ren Xiaosu raised his gun in an awfully familiar way, as though she were looking at a male version of herself. It wasn’t until now that she finally figured it out.

Yang Xiaojin did not know how she should gauge Ren Xiaosu's power. The consensus among supernatural organizations was: A supernatural being cannot have more than one superpower at the same time.

But Ren Xiaosu was different. He had already exceeded it having two superpowers since some time ago.

All supernatural beings only managed to awaken their superpowers after going through tough times, yet this superpower of theirs could now easily be copied by someone else. In fact, the replicated superpowers were even stronger than the originals. How frustrating.

For example, Xu Xianchu's shadow clone was not as strong as Ren Xiaosu's.

As such, Yang Xiaojin felt... Ren Xiaosu's power placed him above all of the other supernatural beings.

Yang Xiaojin continued, "So when Luo Xinyu's bounty was raised the other day, that was also because of you, huh?"

Ren Xiaosu really could not admit to it. "Not at all! I refuse to accept that!"

It was not like he was worried that other people would find out he had framed Luo Xinyu, but rather, he really did not want Yang Xiaojin to know that the power he had copied from Luo Xinyu had actually diverged from the original. She could bring someone through the Shadow Door, but he could at most put an arm through it.

Wouldn't it be embarrassing if he admitted to that?

"So you own up to everything else, right?" Yang Xiaojin giggled.

Ren Xiaosu felt he couldn't just let Yang Xiaojin have her way and keep exposing his secrets. He needed to counterattack, so he suddenly said, "Let's first consider how to escape from this stronghold. I have a plan. Even if we can outrun the Experimentals, we don't have the stamina to run at full speed for a long distance, so we need a mode of transportation. I know where there's some bikes. Don't you know how to ride a bike? When you've recovered, you can ride lead and get us both out of here."

Yang Xiaojin was taken aback. Then she calmly said, "OK, OK, stop probing me. I don't know how to ride a bike either."

"Hahahahaha." Ren Xiaosu stifled his laughter. 'Yang Xiaojin, serves you right!'

"That's enough," Yang Xiaojin calmly said.

Chapter 186: An unfinished quest

"Lu Yuan is also a member of the Saboteurs, right? So you already knew that I would be going to that school, yet you pretended not to know anything about it?" Ren Xiaosu questioned.

"Ren Xiaosu, you should know when to stop..."

“Hahahaha!”

Ren Xiaosu kept laughing for a long time. It made Yang Xiaojin start laughing as well. It was infectious.

Inside the dark sewers, the only light source was the faint candlelight where Ren Xiaosu was. Even though the ground above them was likely very dangerous and teeming with Experimentals, both of them still found some joy to cherish in this difficult moment.

Yang Xiaojin started coughing as she laughed. When she finally got her breathing under control again, she suddenly asked, “Why did you come back to save me?”

“I forgot my wallet,” Ren Xiaosu answered matter-of-factly.

“Mhm,” Yang Xiaojin acknowledged.

They both knew this reason was lame beyond belief, but neither said anything about it.

Yang Xiaojin said, “Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone about your secret. You probably haven’t realized this yet, but you’re already considered very strong even among supernatural beings.”

Yang Xiaojin recalled the the battle.

In fact, she wasn’t sure at the time if Ren Xiaosu could take on six Experimentals and beat them. This was because based on what she knew, there were not many supernatural beings who could take on six Experimentals at once.

In the current era, supernatural beings had started sprouting up like bamboo shoots after a spring rain. However, their powers were not strong enough to break past a certain threshold yet. The Saboteurs defined this threshold as: Is the supernatural being capable of ignoring the power of the masses?

In layman’s terms, it just meant whether a supernatural being was capable of destroying an organization’s fighting forces alone.

Li Shentan could be considered halfway there because his power depended on hypnotizing his targets, so he would be considered as using the masses against the masses. As for his own strength, it might not be that great.

But there would surely be a day when a truly strong individual emerged from the world of the supernatural beings.

The Saboteurs termed this the “Dawn of Gods.”

Back on the roof, Yang Xiaojin had witnessed the power of Ren Xiaosu’s shadow clone. It had a strength and speed that crushed the existence of the Experimentals. Moreover, even when a hoard of Experimentals attacked it at once, they still couldn’t bring it down completely.

But what surprised Yang Xiaojin most of all was that both Ren Xiaosu and the shadow clone were able to wield their own sabers.

Honestly, Yang Xiaojin had never seen a weapon that was capable of slicing through the Experimentals like that. It didn't even feel like it was something that modern civilization was capable of producing. As such, it could only be attributed as a kind of power.

At that time on the roof, Ren Xiaosu displayed strong combat awareness. This "combat awareness" did not refer to technique but an instinct.

Instinct was not something that could be trained.

Training could allow a person to increase their reaction speed, gain greater strength, become faster, and even learn cleverer ways of generating power, but none of that could replace instinct.

Some people said that hard work could make up for it, but only a true elite would understand that hard work could never replace talent.

And Ren Xiaosu had this talent for combat.

If it weren't for the last Experimental that had crawled up and sneak attacked, Ren Xiaosu would not even have gotten injured.

At this time, Ren Xiaosu took out two pieces of hardtack and handed one to Yang Xiaojin, leaving one for himself in his other hand.

Yang Xiaojin did not stand on ceremony and simply took it from him. They were both injured and had lost a lot of blood, so they needed to replenish whatever necessary energy they could get.

She looked at the candle on the ground next to them and suddenly realized that this might be the first candlelit dinner she had eaten in her life. "Does this count as a candlelit dinner?"

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and asked, "What's a candlelit dinner?"

Yang Xiaojin laughed. "Never mind."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "I heard you mention Zhang Jinglin earlier? Just what kind of a person is Mr. Zhang?"

This question seemed to have stumped Yang Xiaojin a little. She even had to carefully search for the right word in her mind but was unable to think of something that accurately described Zhang Jinglin. "You can say he's the most 'enlightened' person in our current times."

This answer truly stunned Ren Xiaosu. "What kind of an appraisal is that? What is his identity in Stronghold 178, really? And what exactly is Stronghold 178 protecting?"

"Whether it be the strongholds or the towns, the organizations will try to tell you that there are extremely powerful beasts and terrifying creatures, as well as scary insect swarms beyond the outermost perimeter of the strongholds," Yang Xiaojin said.

“Isn’t that true?” Ren Xiaosu was slightly taken aback.

“It’s not.” Yang Xiaojin said, “Stronghold 178 in the northwest and Stronghold 169 in the northern plains are not really there to stop the wild beasts from coming in, but humans. The humans who try to invade into the interior every now and then.”

“Like the Experimentals?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“No, they’re people just like you and me.” Yang Xiaojin said softly, “Even after the disaster, wars between humans have not stopped at all. That’s probably about the most ironic thing that has happened.”

This was a secret Ren Xiaosu had never known about. So there were still humans who lived beyond the outermost perimeter of the ring of strongholds!

Yang Xiaojin said, “Zhang Jinglin was the original commander of the fighting force at Stronghold 178, the true controller of that place. He suddenly disappeared more than a decade ago, leading to many people saying he had grown tired of war. But no one knew the real reason behind his disappearance. However, everyone at Stronghold 178 is waiting for him to return. That place is an independent force by itself that falls outside the control of the Alliance of Strongholds. In recent years, the Zong Consortium, which is active at the frontier, has been trying to gain control of Stronghold 178, but now that Zhang Jinglin is going back, the Zong Consortium’s plans have all come to nothing. Those bastards only recognize Zhang Jinglin. Not even money moves them!”

Ren Xiaosu was doubtful of this. Zhang Jinglin did not even look like a soldier as he was so weak. How could someone like that have such a powerful background?

But this also reassured Ren Xiaosu. Xu Xianchu would definitely get special treatment by bringing that recommendation letter there, so he didn’t feel as bad anymore.

Wait! Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of a problem. Why wasn’t his quest that required him to save a stronghold resident complete yet? Didn’t he already save Yang Xiaojin?

Could it be that he needed to get her out of the stronghold before the quest requirements were met? That couldn’t be! Ren Xiaosu kept thinking that something must be wrong somewhere. He looked at Yang Xiaojin and asked, “Do you hold a Stronghold 109 ID card?”

Yang Xiaojin was taken aback, as though she couldn’t wrap her head around why Ren Xiaosu was asking this question. “No, why would I need one? If anything crops up, I can just look for Uncle Lu to settle it. We don’t need any ID cards here.”

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. Oh, so Yang Xiaojin wasn’t really a resident of this stronghold?!

It was no wonder the palace had specifically stressed Ren Xiaosu save the stronghold’s residents. So it seemed like the palace was also afraid that Ren Xiaosu would only attempt to save Yang Xiaojin and not the others. However, Ren Xiaosu did not realize the intention of the quest at that time!

Yang Xiaojin wondered aloud, "I found it weird at the time. There were clearly so many people who were still running for their lives on the streets, so why did so many of the Experimentals split up from the rest and come to attack me instead?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment before answering, "Probably because you're not a resident of the stronghold."

Yang Xiaojin was confused.

Chapter 187 I'll carry you

Yang Xiaojin just looked at Ren Xiaosu. They had attacked her because she wasn't a resident of the stronghold? What kind of nonsense was that!

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu said, "This particular group known as the Experimentals have been growing stronger and stronger. When I was on my way to rescue you, I saw an Experimental inject a normal human being. When the gray liquid was injected into that person's body, he somehow turned into an Experimental as well."

Yang Xiaojin was hearing this for the first time. She said in shock, "So if they inject all of the stronghold's residents with that drug, wouldn't there be hundreds of thousands more Experimentals? No, wait, they're probably selective about who they inject it into."

"That's right." Ren Xiaosu said, "They probably selected specific individuals to inject the drug with, but we don't know what kind of conditions they must meet. I think as long as we can figure out the origins of the Experimentals, we should be able to understand how they select their candidates. There had to have been thousands and thousands of survivors in the aftermath of the disaster at Stronghold 113, but the number of Experimentals only increased by around a 1,000 or so in the end."

Yang Xiaojin suddenly said, "We received intel about the Pyro Company, and it seems like that lab in the Jing Mountains is related to them. They were using it before The Cataclysm, and it became lost after that. They had no choice but to give up on that portion of their research, so the related studies were also lost as a result."

"Then do y'all know what kind of experiments they used to carry out in there?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"We don't know. All we know is that they experimented on cancer patients. The cancer patients knew they wouldn't live for much longer, so they decided to sell themselves to the Pyro Company in order to leave behind a lump sum of money for their families," Yang Xiaojin replied.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu's wounds seared with pain again. He retrieved the black medicine from the palace and applied some on himself. "You should apply some medicine on your wounds as well. Where are you hurt?"

Yang Xiaojin said, "Give me the medicine. I'll apply it myself."

Ren Xiaosu handed a bottle of the black medicine to Yang Xiaojin. He had wanted to inform her of the price but managed to hold back from doing so.

Then he watched Yang Xiaojin blow out the candle before she started applying the black medicine on her wounds in the dark. "I've long heard about how miraculous this black medicine of yours is, but I really didn't expect it to be this effective."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu said curiously in the darkness, "Do you have any wounds that you can't reach? Let me..."

With a striking sound, Yang Xiaojin used a match to relight the candle. Ren Xiaosu lowered his head and continued applying the medicine on his wounds.

Yang Xiaojin watched Ren Xiaosu lift up his shirt to reveal four very deep and bloody wounds around his abdomen. They were probably inflicted by the claws of an Experimental. It was fortunate that his organs were not wounded. She said in surprise, "Didn't you find it painful just now?"

Ren Xiaosu had been speaking with her like everything was fine for a long while. It didn't look like there was any indication of pain on his face.

As he applied the medicine on his wound, Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "I'm used to it."

"Used to it." These three words seemed to have a kind of quiet strength. Over a decade of bitterness and suffering were harbored within these three words.

Used to the pain.

Used to getting injured.

Used to enduring it.

In the candlelight, Yang Xiaojin noticed that Ren Xiaosu's forehead was dripping with sweat. Moreover, his lips had turned pale. He was clearly suffering from very serious injuries.

She took the black medicine from Ren Xiaosu and lifted his shirt up. She was greeted by the sight of more than a dozen wounds everywhere. Yang Xiaojin said, "I'll apply it for you."

Ren Xiaosu did not say a thing and just let Yang Xiaojin's finger go over his wounds.

This skin of the girl's hand was not delicate at all. In fact, her hand was covered with callouses, clearly demonstrating she had been through some very tough training

In fact, Ren Xiaosu already knew while in the Jing Mountains that Yang Xiaojin wasn't delicate and fragile like most other girls.

"Is it painful? Tell me if I'm too heavy with the application." Yang Xiaojin said softly, "Turn the other way. You have injuries on your back as well." Yang Xiaojin sounded very firm.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while before saying, "The place above where we were earlier should be filled with Experimentals. Now that we've walked quite far away, we should be getting close to the stronghold's gate. However, I'm not sure if we can escape from there."

It would be very simple to get from underground to the surface, but how could they avoid getting hunted down by the Experimentals afterwards?

If they bumped into the Experimentals the moment they went up to the surface, they could be chased for up to several hundred kilometers from the stronghold and still end up dying!

Ren Xiaosu could feel the soothing effects of the black medicine. The pain of his wounds was relieved, leaving him in much better spirits. "But I think these Experimentals definitely need to rest during the day. So if we wait here quietly until daylight when it's time for them to hide, we can make use of that time to flee. We should just rest and conserve our strength for now."

Yang Xiaojin replied, "It's no secret they're afraid of daylight, so your deduction is correct. They'll be certain to go into hiding to sleep when it's daytime."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded at her affirmation. He thought, 'Great minds think alike.'

The two of them sat in the dark sewers and fell into a brief silence. Yang Xiaojin suddenly said, "Actually, not even a close friend would come back to save me in that kind of a situation. I'll skip the thanks and just--"

But Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, "You should still thank me."

Yang Xiaojin was taken aback. "Thank you..."

"Gratitude received from Yang Xiaojin, +10."

Wait a minute! Ren Xiaosu was startled. He had only gotten Yang Xiaojin to thank him because he thought that since the quest could not be completed, he should at least earn a gratitude token to make up for his loss. As a result, Yang Xiaojin's thanks actually earned him ten gratitude tokens!

What made Yang Xiaojin so special?!

But at this moment, the manhole cover above them suddenly moved. Then an Experimental jumped down from above. However, the Experimental did not expect to see anyone down here either, so both parties were equally surprised by this encounter!

Whatever happened to making their escape at daylight? Why had this Experimental suddenly come down into the sewers? It was almost daybreak now. Shouldn't it be looking for a place to get some rest?

Yang Xiaojin said softly, "I suddenly thought of a problem. Where do you think they'll retreat to during the day?"

Ren Xiaosu considered the question for a moment. "The sewers?"

"Mhm." Yang Xiaojin nodded.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt terrible. He had wanted them to make their escape when it was daylight, but it looked like they had to quickly run now. Otherwise, they might end up having to sleep with the Experimentals. Who knew if the Experimentals would welcome them?

In an instant, the Experimental roared and pounced at the two of them. Ren Xiaosu did not even need to move as his shadow clone rushed forward with the black saber in its hands. The shadow clone choked the Experimental with one hand and raised the black saber with its other hand before plunging it through the Experimental's heart. The Experimental was pinned against the sewer wall on the opposite side.

But an even greater calamity was to come. This Experimental's roar had alerted all of the other Experimentals aboveground. Two other Experimentals laid on the road next to the manhole and popped their heads down to have a look. Ren Xiaosu said, "Run, I'll carry you!"

He couldn't let his shadow clone carry Yang Xiaojin since he needed it to fight!

However, Ren Xiaosu did not realize that his body could hardly hang on any longer. After the intense battle during the night and getting injured, he was finding it difficult to even remain standing.

Right at this moment, Yang Xiaojin knelt down in front of him and said, "I'll carry you."

Before Ren Xiaosu could react, Yang Xiaojin had already placed him on her back and started running.

Yang Xiaojin was quite tall, but her body frame was small. Ren Xiaosu felt a little awkward when he was being carried by her, because he had never ever relied on anyone else before even in the most difficult of times.

He had come back to the stronghold to rescue someone. But right now, the person he wanted to rescue was carrying him instead.

Chapter 188 Experimentals in the sewers

In the dark sewers, danger lurked behind every corner. While Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were making their escape, the manhole covers above them were constantly flipped open by new groups of Experimentals that had rushed over. Following that, these Experimentals would join in and chase after them.

The saber-wielding shadow clone was surprisingly lethal, but this was not the moment to savor that. The shadow clone battled with the Experimentals while slowly making its retreat as well, because there would only be more and more Experimentals coming down into the sewers from here.

Yang Xiaojin piggybacked Ren Xiaosu and kept running in the sewers. There was the sound of splashing with every step she took in the dirty water. Ren Xiaosu could even hear Yang Xiaojin breathing heavily. He knew Yang Xiaojin was already at her limit, so it had to have been taking a heavy toll on her to carry another person on her back at this time.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Why don't you put me down—"

“No!” Yang Xiaojin stubbornly said before he could finish. Just like in the Jing Mountains, the girl’s character had always been tougher than a man’s.

The shadow clone kept colliding with the sewer walls to prevent the Experimentals from locking it down with their limbs. When one of the Experimentals pounced onto its back, the shadow clone rammed the sewer wall with its back and crushed the Experimental.

In just a moment, Ren Xiaosu’s shadow clone had blocked five or six of the Experimentals that had just crawled into the sewers behind it. Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were now getting further and further away from the Experimentals.

However, the number of Experimentals that were attracted into the sewers by the noise kept increasing. Ren Xiaosu did not know how long his shadow clone could hold them off for.

“It’d really be quite an injustice if we died in here,” Ren Xiaosu said with a sigh.

Yang Xiaojin said, “We won’t die here. I’ll definitely get you out of this place.”

Suddenly, a rough voice boasted from ahead of them, “Haha, these stupid Experimentals must not be expecting their Uncle Luo to be hiding right under their noses in here.”

Right after that, Tang Zhou said in a perfunctory tone, “That’s right, Boss is absolutely right.”

All of a sudden, Luo Lan sounded a little uncertain. “Uh, did you all hear that?!”

Yang Xiaojin hooked a left at one of the intersections and ran right into Luo Lan’s dumbfounded group.

Luo Lan, Tang Zhou, and their men were all on guard and holding their guns up cautiously. The moment they shone their flashlights on Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin, Luo Lan was amused. “You’ve gotten your comeuppance too, eh, Ren Xiaosu?”

Ren Xiaosu couldn’t care less and weakly called out, “Run!”

Luo Lan was stunned, not understanding the situation. “Run? Why?”

Then the roars of the Experimentals reverberated behind Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. Luo Lan blanched as he turned tail. “Fuck! Why does nothing good ever come out of meeting you!”

Yang Xiaojin suddenly said, “Luo Lan, you’re familiar with the sewers! Bring us to the courtyard house we rented!”

Luo Lan said guiltily while running, “Like I know where your rented courtyard house is! It’s not like I’ve been monitoring you all!”

When Yang Xiaojin saw that Luo Lan was still acting dumb at a time like this, she sneered, “Do you want to live or die?!”

Luo Lan turned his head and saw the Experimentals getting closer and closer. “Turn left!”

As they ran for their lives in the sewers, the well-trained Qing Consortium combat troops fell to the back of the group. Occasionally, they would stop and rake the Experimentals with gunfire in an attempt to delay them so Luo Lan could escape. As their shots were not aimed, however, Ren Xiaosu's shadow clone got hit by the random gunfire as well.

This had nothing to do with purposeful friendly fire. Ren Xiaosu understood that no one cared to carefully take aim at their targets at a time like this. But more importantly, he could feel pain when those bullets hit his shadow clone! The continuous firing from the guns left Ren Xiaosu in extreme pain. He was already sweating, but there was nothing that he could do about it.

When Luo Lan happened to turn back and saw the shadow clone, he muttered as he ran, "I didn't expect Xu Xianchu to still be in the stronghold. Where is he in person? I've heard this shadow clone isn't afraid of bullets, but I didn't expect it to be true."

Ren Xiaosu expressionlessly looked at the rotund figure of Luo Lan from behind and made a note to remember what happened here today.

At this moment, Luo Lan checked their position with a glance and roared, "We're here, climb up!"

With that, the group climbed up to the surface via a rusty ladder that extended into the sewers as over a 100 of the Qing Consortium's combat troops remained below where they formed a simple intercepting line of fire.

They knelt on one knee in the dirty sewage water and took turns firing their guns. When the first row of soldiers ran out of bullets, the second row of soldiers immediately replaced them in the firing line. Only by doing this could they hold off all the Experimentals in the sewers. Even these creatures that were not afraid of bullets, they still wouldn't dare to rush into such an intense hail of fire.

Ren Xiaosu controlled his shadow clone to force its way back to his side. The pain he felt from the gunfire nearly caused him to pass out. By this point, his shadow clone was no longer shouldering the responsibility of holding back the Experimentals. Therefore, he made it carry himself and Yang Xiaojin on its shoulders again. Ren Xiaosu knew that Yang Xiaojin was also nearing her limits. She had purely been running on willpower while she carried Ren Xiaosu all the way here.

The group took turns to climb up to the surface while the Experimentals were kept at bay by the Qing Consortium's suppressive fire. But as everyone started climbing up to the surface, the number of people who were holding the firing line decreased. In the end, some people would have to remain behind in the sewers, because they had to hold the Experimentals back for the others, and no one would be able to do it for them.

The Experimentals in the sewers had realized the firepower was getting weaker, so they got ready to pounce forward again!

Luo Lan shouted out into the sewers from above, "Hurry up and get up here!"

However, the remaining five soldiers belowground detached the grenades from their uniforms and said with a smile on their faces, "Boss, it's too late now. After you escape, remember to drink more on our behalf."

"Fucking stop uttering nonsense. Do you all want me to drink myself to death?" Luo Lan cursed down into the sewers.

As he said that, he looked like he was about to go back down into the sewers. However, he was firmly held back by Tang Zhou. "Boss, you'll die if you go back in there!"

"What's there to be afraid of? At most, we die together!" Luo Lan said angrily, "Get your fucking hands off me!"

However, after Ren Xiaosu's shadow clone placed the two people it was carrying onto the ground, it jumped right back into the sewers. Then the dark shadow clone wielded the black saber in its hands and stood in front of the five Qing Consortium soldiers. In front of it, the Experimentals were surging forward.

The shadow clone looked back and signaled to the five Qing Consortium soldiers: Go.

The Qing Consortium's soldiers looked at one another. They had not expected such a twist. They all softly gave thanks and hurried up the ladder to the surface. Meanwhile, the shadow clone was instantly overwhelmed by the Experimentals!

The Experimentals scuttled like spiders and blanketed the shadow clone's body. Even with the physical fitness of the shadow clone, it found it difficult to put up any effective resistance.

Ren Xiaosu said ruthlessly, "Blow them up!"

Luo Lan was stunned. "But Xu Xianchu's shadow clone is still down there."

Even though he hesitated, Yang Xiaojin did not. She knew Ren Xiaosu must have said so for a reason. As for what reason that was, she didn't have to consider it.

Chapter 189 The gratitude tokens that disappeared

Yang Xiaojin seized two grenades from one of the Qing Consortium's soldiers with lightning speed. The Qing Consortium soldier unconsciously tried to avoid her attempt since protecting one's weapons was the instinct of every soldier. But in the end, all he felt was a numb sensation in his hand, the grenades gone.

Yang Xiaojin resolutely and decisively pulled out the safety pins and threw the grenades into the sewer. With a thunderous boom, the stone bricks on the streets flew up with the explosion.

The Experimentals confined in the tight space of the sewers couldn't withstand the destructive power of two grenades going off at once. They were blown away and dropped to the ground with blood oozing from all orifices.

But even so, everyone discovered that several of the Experimentals were actually unaffected by the blast. Ren Xiaosu said in a cold voice, “Blow them up again!”

Yang Xiaojin seized another two grenades and threw them down into the sewer. It was only at this time that the remaining Experimentals that were still mobile started retreating and letting go of Ren Xiaosu’s shadow clone!

Ren Xiaosu laid on the ground with his head throbbing. He was finding out for the first time just how powerful grenades were.

The feeling was like 10,000 knives cutting into his flesh. The shrapnel from the explosion was even more powerful than he imagined.

However, he had the bravery to let Yang Xiaojin throw the grenades in because he knew he could bear with the pain from the blasts, and his shadow clone would not be affected by it.

But after this was over, Luo Lan would owe him a great big favor!

When the shadow clone crawled out of the sewers, Luo Lan teared up and held its hand. “Xu Xianchu, I’ve really got to thank you for this.”

Ren Xiaosu thought, ‘This has nothing to do with Xu Xianchu.’ But he couldn’t explain it to them yet.

In the past, he had always made his shadow clone his scapegoat. But now that he had done something good with it, Ren Xiaosu was unused to it.

Luo Lan suddenly said, “Go on, everyone, thank him. If it weren’t for Xu Xianchu, five of our men would have died in the sewers.”

“Thank you, Xu Xianchu!” Seeing this big group of people thanking his shadow clone in unison, Ren Xiaosu did not receive one single gratitude token!

Ren Xiaosu immediately felt his heart ache. Over a 100 gratitude tokens had slipped through his hands just like that!

As a matter of fact, he was still around 800 gratitude tokens away from unlocking the next weapon in his Side Quest #2. If Luo Lan had his men to give thanks a few more times, wouldn’t the weapon be unlocked with just a snap of a finger?

A 100 gratitude tokens were all that was needed to give him a powerful weapon like the black saber. If it weren’t for the black saber, Ren Xiaosu would have died several times over. So Ren Xiaosu was really anticipating what kind of weapon a 1,000 gratitude tokens could get him. But instead, he had lost the opportunity to gain over a 100 gratitude tokens just like that!

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu even considered admitting to all of the deeds he had committed. As long as there were gratitude tokens to be earned, to hell with being wanted!

Then Luo Lan looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, “Xu Xianchu carried and helped both of you to escape. Shouldn’t you two also thank him?”

Ren Xiaosu said, “... Thank you.”

Yang Xiaojin stifled her laughter as she also expressed her gratitude to the shadow clone. She was quite amused by this sudden turn of events, but this was not the time to tease Ren Xiaosu about it. She said, “The sound of the explosions here will be sure to attract many Experimentals. Everyone, gather up all the bombs you can from inside the courtyard!”

Yang Xiaojin then pushed open the courtyard house’s door. Everyone was stunned on the spot when they saw the entire courtyard filled with cluster bombs. Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought about how Yang Xiaojin was always sleeping in class and wondered if she had been staying up late every night just to finish making all these bombs.

Ren Xiaosu said, “There’s also bombs at my place next door.”

The 100 or so soldiers from the Qing Consortium looked at Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin in silence. Everyone was thinking about how young these two looked yet the things they did were all so violent.

Luo Lan roared, “What are you all standing there for! Hurry up and gather the bombs, then quickly find a place to plant them along our escape route. Let’s bomb the fuck out of those bloody bastards!”

They had bombs now. As for how they should be used, Yang Xiaojin didn’t need to teach them. These Qing Consortium soldiers under Luo Lan were all elite troopers, so they couldn’t be more familiar with how to use the devices.

Luo Lan had also smuggled in a lot of explosives from outside the stronghold. But during the conflict with the Li Consortium, they had used up all of them. Now that they could rearm themselves with more ammunition, everyone couldn’t look more eager.

They had all been pushed around by the Experimentals for far too long, so of course they would have to kill some of them to appease the hatred inside.

Just as expected, the explosion from the four grenades thrown into the sewers had attracted a 100 other Experimentals from the surrounding areas. While Luo Lan was escaping, he looked back at them. He was shocked to discover those Experimentals were scurrying between the uneven buildings like they were on flat ground.

Suddenly, flames shot into the air behind them as explosions rang out.

The Experimentals that happened to pass by the bombs were sent flying by the massive force of the explosion.

The Qing Consortium’s soldiers who were responsible for setting up the bombs looked at one another. They had thought that the bombs would not be powerful since they were homemade. But as it turned out, these bombs were far more powerful than they had imagined. They couldn’t help but look at Yang Xiaojin. These bombs were actually built by a girl?!

A number of Experimentals were blown to smithereens by the explosions. However, this did not frighten the other Experimentals at all. Instead, it turned them even more savage and ferocious!

More explosions boomed behind Ren Xiaosu and the others as they made their escape. But even as the bombs went off one after another, the number of Experimentals pursuing them did not seem to lessen. It was not that the Experimentals did not die from the blasts but that new Experimentals kept joining in the chase.

These Experimentals had seemingly become even more aggressive like they wanted nothing more than for this group of people to die!

Luo Lan covered his head with his hands and said through clenched teeth, "Even though we have a lot of bombs, they're not enough to hold back the more numerous Experimentals. Even if we manage to flee from the stronghold, we won't be able to escape their pursuit!"

When they saw the stronghold's gate appearing in their field of vision, nobody let down their guard. The Experimentals were not simpletons with predictable behavior. Getting out of the stronghold didn't mean they would give up on chasing them.

Even after getting past the gate, it wouldn't necessarily mean they were saved.

But at this moment, an armored vehicle crashed through the already half blown up stronghold gate and sent debris flying everywhere. Luo Lan noticed the ginkgo leaf logo on the bulky armored vehicle. The black armored vehicles acted like a giant land beast as it barged its way forward. One by one, more and more of the Qing Consortium's armored vehicles came roaring into the stronghold. Ren Xiaosu estimated the number and thought there could be several dozen of them in total!

Could the Qing Consortium have sent an entire army here?!

Luo Lan suddenly stopped running and stood still at the end of the street. He started laughing hysterically at the incoming wave of Experimentals and said, "Little bastards, Grandpa's backup has arrived, hahahaha!"

This fatso who had been covering his head in fear turned cocky the moment his support arrived.

The convoy of armored vehicles whizzed past the escaping group of people and came to a stop between the Experimentals and them. Qing Zhen emerged and got out of one of the vehicles, and a vast number of the Qing Consortium's troops followed him out.

Chapter 190 The Mountain Obliterator

These Qing Consortium troops took their positions behind the heavy machine guns mounted on top of the armored vehicles. When Qing Zhen gave the order, the heavy machine guns started spitting out a barrage of thunderous fire. Countless bullets within their sight range could be seen interweaving like a net of fire as it forcefully subjected the Experimentals to a terrifying metal storm!

Spent shell casings were spat out continuously in great numbers from the top of the armored vehicles. In just half a minute, the ground around these armored vehicles turned a yellowish hue as the roads got filled with empty bullet shells.

The Experimentals that were unafraid of bullets were swept up by this metal storm, and their tough bodies were penetrated by the bullets. The force at which the bullets hit them even sent them flying into the air. But before they could hit the ground, an even greater torrent of bullets raked over them again until they became mincemeat.

There used to be a lot of houses over there. But when the metal storm hit, the rows of walled structures got utterly destroyed and pulverized into a fine powder.

The housing structures collapsed like a mountain from the intense hail of bullets.

Some of the Experimentals had taken shelter behind the houses, but none of them could have expected that this torrent of bullets could even bring down buildings.

Ren Xiaosu did not continue fleeing anymore. He just watched this violent and bloody scene play out before him. This was probably why humanity once controlled the world. The grand civilization could even create weapons so terrifying that the supernatural would fear them.

The roaring armored vehicles were the true ferocious beasts, while the bullets were like a sea of arrows whose might was even greater than a tsunami.

Only the Qing Consortium had these heavy machine guns in their arsenal. The entire structure of the gun was like a heavy iron case, and this heavy machine gun earned the nickname of the "Mountain Obliterator," meaning that it could even be used to destroy a mountain.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu noticed that the interior of the armored vehicles seemed to have several metal pipes linking out to the main gun structure. Each of the armored vehicles were actually equipped with cooling equipment to prevent the heavy machine guns from overheating.

Qing Zhen stood in the middle of the road and quietly watched as the Experimentals slowly retreated in the face of human civilization's firearms. The fearless Experimentals were finally starting to feel afraid.

All of a sudden, someone discovered an Experimental standing upright atop a building in the distance staring at them. However, Qing Zhen looked right back at it undaunted.

Luo Lan said to Ren Xiaosu with a laugh, "See that! Half of the forces here are my old troops from Stronghold 113. Aren't they amazing!"

Ren Xiaosu did not reply. So this Qing Zhen had already assembled all of Luo Lan's troops that had gone missing during the earthquake? These two brothers must have still been keeping in contact all this while. Otherwise, Luo Lan wouldn't have become fearless the moment he saw the ginkgo leaf logo.

The Experimentals began retreating. Qing Zhen said coldly, "Don't pursue them."

Everyone understood that if they maintained their positions and kept fighting, their heavy machine guns would definitely be more powerful. But the moment they started going after the enemy and headed into urban warfare, there wouldn't be enough people to fight just based on the numbers that the Qing Consortium had here.

Moreover, this stronghold was also under the control of the Li Consortium. There was absolutely no reason why the Qing Consortium would want to help the Li Consortium clear out the Experimentals from this place. It was better to leave this headache of a mess to the Li Consortium themselves.

The Qing Consortium previously controlled 21 strongholds, but ever since the earthquake in the Jing Mountains, only 19 remained. Under these circumstances, the Qing Consortium's people couldn't wish more for the other organizations to lose a few of their strongholds as well. It would only be fair.

When the Experimentals retreated deep into the city, Luo Lan plopped onto the ground. "Hurry up and get me some water."

Several soldiers carried a few buckets of clean water out of the armored vehicles before handing out some cups to the refugee-like people who'd fought together with Luo Lan.

Qing Zhen looked at him and said with a laugh, "I told you to leave this place earlier, yet you insisted on getting your hands on the Li Consortium's research results first. It's not worth getting pinned with the blame for that stuff."

"You don't know this" — Luo Lan took a sip of the water — "but the Li Consortium has discovered a way to connect directly to the neurons in your brain. In the future, they won't need to program the nanomachines anymore. The human brain itself will act as the interface of the program. This is a very important technology. Just think about how scary nanomachines will be if they can execute complex operations."

Qing Zhen laughed and said, "There are a lot of important technologies in this world, but this isn't what we need. Without the breakthrough we require in the field of nanorobotics, it's practically useless to get our hands on this technology."

"But we can sell it to the other organizations." Luo Lan said angrily while pointing at Yang Xiaojin, "Just look, their Yang Consortium is also thinking of getting their hands on this tech, so why not we just sell it to them?"

Qing Zhen's gaze shifted to Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. He said to Ren Xiaosu, "You saved my brother before, so I promised you a favor."

"That favor has already been returned." Luo Lan hurriedly said, "I've already returned it for you!"

Ren Xiaosu was not happy to hear that. "But I've saved so many soldiers again this time."

Luo Lan was also unhappy to hear that. "It was Xu Xianchu who saved us. What has it got to do with you?"

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. He realized he could not refute that.

Suddenly, Luo Lan said startled, "Eh, where's Xu Xianchu? Wasn't his shadow clone around a moment ago?"

Yang Xiaojin said calmly, "He's afraid you all will arrest him, so he's already fled."

Ren Xiaosu echoed, "That's right, he's already fled."

Qing Zhen said to those around him, "Xu Xianchu is no longer wanted starting from today. Our Qing Consortium and him are even now." Qing Zhen then looked at Yang Xiaojin and asked, "Why have the Saboteurs made me a target?"

"Shouldn't you know all about the nuclear test site you set up?" Yang Xiaojin said coldly.

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself, 'Girl, they have so many people on their side right now. Should you really be arguing with them at a time like this?'

As a result, Qing Zhen laughed and said, "Not even the Board of our Qing Consortium knows about the site, yet you all actually found out about it? So just for that, I have to die?"

Yang Xiaojin looked at him calmly. "You're trying to control something that humans can't control. The world has already been destroyed once because of it. You're playing with fire."

Qing Zhen shook his head. "Was that the fault of nuclear technology? It was the fault of humanity. You don't even know how beautiful that blue glow inside a nuclear reactor is. It's literally a gift from the world."

"Humanity should never have even tried controlling a power that could destroy themselves," Yang Xiaojin said stubbornly.

"Should we not eat just because we fear choking?" Qing Zhen said earnestly, "If we have a nuclear reactor, do you know how much energy we can save?"

Then Qing Zhen had someone bring over some lighting equipment. "This is our radioluminescent light. If there are no accidents, it can retain its brightness for as long as 20 years without any external help. This is the power of nuclear technology."

"What if nuclear technology is used for war again?" Yang Xiaojin asked calmly.

Qing Zhen laughed. "It can also be used to end wars. Actually, we won't be able to come to an agreement on this no matter what. Facing the Experimentals today, we're brothers in arms. But I'll still welcome the Saboteurs anytime after today. Let's not hold back or show mercy to each other."

He then took a hard drive from Tang Zhou and threw it to Yang Xiaojin. "This is the thing your Yang Consortium is after. Have you ever thought what it'll be like if you all can link your nanotech, which is still only being used in the medical field, with neurotech and commission it for military use? Are you saying the Yang Consortium is not trying to get its hands on this technology for war?"