

Chapter 191 Look at how big and round this cauldron is

Actually, Qing Zhen was not wrong. If they were to debate this subject, neither Qing Zhen nor Yang Xiaojin could convince the other. Both parties were coming from a different standpoint, and there was no way to distinguish who was right or wrong. This was because “right” and “wrong” were just judgments imposed by others.

But be it the matter of nuclear technology or nanorobotics, Ren Xiaosu felt that there was indeed no right or wrong regarding these two matters. However, what motives did those who wanted to use them have?

While they were deadlocked, Ren Xiaosu suddenly raised his own doubts. “I have a question. Are those nanomachines really that great?”

“They weren’t in the past.” Luo Lan gave a simple explanation. “They used to only be deployed for angioplasty through some basic programming, but it’d totally be different if they could directly interface with neurons in the brain and be put to military use.”

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. “Different in what way?”

“Just think about what if those tiny yet extremely tough nanomachines could become your new skeletal structure and muscles? What’s more, after interfacing with your neurons, they’ll fully be under your control like how you control your fingers. There wouldn’t be a need to give them any specific instructions. Just use them like how you would use your hands,” Luo Lan said.

“It still sounds rather normal to me,” Ren Xiaosu said.

“Forget it, you won’t understand!” Luo Lan scorned, “There’s no way to communicate with an uneducated person.”

Ren Xiaosu grew unhappy. “I scored 560 points on my final exams, so who are you calling uneducated? How much did you score on your exams?”

Luo Lan was embarrassed. “Hahaha, why would you bring that up!”

Yang Xiaojin calmly watched Ren Xiaosu and felt he was really thick-skinned. He could even deceive himself like that?

At this moment, Qing Zhen laughed and said, “No matter what, we’re still brothers in arms today. Whatever happens in the future, let time be the judge. We don’t have any use for the hard drive, so feel free to take it back with you.”

Yang Xiaojin suddenly asked, “The Experimentals you people caught, are the results of the study you did on it out yet? Just what are those things?”

Qing Zhen thought for a moment before saying, "You might not believe it even if we tell you. Those things are full of cancer cells. No, to be more precise, they're full of cancer cells that seemed to have reached a state of equilibrium.

"It's common knowledge that cancer cells are a heterogeneous population, with giant nucleated, binucleated, and heteromorphic nucleated cells. However, the cancer cells found in the Experimentals comprise only of a single binuclei[1] population, and they're even uniformly divided as normal human cells are.

"I suspect the Pyro Company attempted to search for a way to live forever. There was once a woman who, after her death, had her cancer cells taken and cultured. Later, those cancer cells were used to propagate into tens of thousands of generations of cancer cells became known as the HeLa cell line[2]."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "Has that already been verified, or was it just your guess?"

"Oh," Qing Zhen laughed and said, "it was just my guess. After all, we haven't started our research on the Experimentals for long, so don't take it too seriously."

Ren Xiaosu thought, 'If you were only guessing, please don't sound so certain when you are relating it to us.'

"Wait." Yang Xiaojin suddenly also conjectured, "They were selectively injecting drugs into humans, so does that mean they're selecting people with cancer cells?"

Qing Zhen said, "But I think, since cancer cells are derived from a mutation in normal cells, if you're trying to define it, you can also say it's uncontrolled evolution. But in my opinion, such evolution will always be an inferior product."

Today, Ren Xiaosu came into contact with various kinds of speculations, and some of these speculations were not even ideas he knew before. For a moment, Ren Xiaosu felt a little envious of these people for having received a complete education. It meant that these people were able to have a complete understanding of the previous world.

"Let's part ways here." Qing Zhen smiled and said, "Speaking of which, I'm still under house arrest."

"Aren't you worried about the threat that they pose to this world?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Qing Zhen waved it off as he stepped into an armored vehicle. "They're not enough to cause me any worry yet. It's only the kids who find them scary."

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Yang Xiaojin and thought that it was no wonder she wanted to shoot him with her rifle. What a pity it was to not shoot a show-off like him.

However, his relationship with the Qing Consortium had suddenly turned from enemies into something much more ambiguous. At least when he encountered Luo Lan next time, they wouldn't have to immediately fight it out to decide a victor.

Actually, there wasn't really a conflict between Ren Xiaosu and the Qing Consortium. He was just a typical supernatural being who wanted to survive in this post-apocalyptic wasteland.

Ren Xiaosu watched as the armored vehicles drove off. He then summoned the shadow clone to carry him and Yang Xiaojin on its shoulders, before getting it to start running. The Experimentals had only retreated because they were afraid of the armored vehicles' firepower. Now that they had driven off, Ren Xiaosu would have to quickly get them both out of here.

"What plans do you have now?" Ren Xiaosu asked during the bumpy ride on the shadow clone's shoulder.

"I'm going back to Stronghold 88," Yang Xiaojin said.

"Stronghold 88? That sounds really far," Ren Xiaosu said with a sigh, as there was such a big difference between the strongholds' numbers.

"It's not exactly that far." Yang Xiaojin said, "It's only two strongholds away."

"Eh? Then why is its number so distant?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

"It used to be called Stronghold 101," Yang Xiaojin explained, "but the consortium thought it'd be luckier to call it Stronghold 88, so they changed it. The previous Stronghold 88 has been renamed to Stronghold 101."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for such a long time that he could not say anything. It could even be done that way? Wasn't that such a feudal form of superstition?

"How about you, what plans do you have?" Yang Xiaojin asked.

"I'll have to find Yan Liuyuan and the others first. I told them to head north."

At this time, the sky was just starting to turn bright. The two of them were being carried on the left and right shoulders of the shadow clone and chatting without a care as it ran into the distance. The eerie stronghold city behind them that had been destroyed got further and further away from their sights.

If anyone came here in the future, they would probably not expect this place to have a glorious past.

Meanwhile, Xu Xianchu was trekking in the wilderness. As he was already very far away from any Qing Consortium-controlled territory, he was no longer worried they could do anything to him anymore.

When he passed by the Zong Consortium's town yesterday, he even used the money Ren Xiaosu had given to him to purchase quite a few supplies. As a matter of fact, the Qing Consortium's banknotes were really quite useful out here. Other than having to pay some administrative fees, there was no need to worry about it not being accepted.

In this era, people who often traveled between strongholds would always have to bring along different corporation-issued currencies, which made it very inconvenient.

The further northwest Xu Xianchu traveled, the more desolate the scenery became. Sometimes when a gust of wind blew, yellow dust and sand would get swirled up into the air.

All of a sudden, Xu Xianchu stopped in his tracks. He was surprised to see a group of people on motorcycles speeding towards him. Sensing danger, Xu Xianchu immediately summoned his shadow clone.

The refugees at the Zong Consortium's town had cautioned him beforehand to be careful of bandits when he headed further north.

But in the instant he summoned his shadow clone out, he froze. For some reason, a large black cauldron floated in front of him before his shadow clone came out.

The incoming group of people started indiscriminately shooting at Xu Xianchu from afar. But the bullets did not even leave any marks on the black cauldron as they hit it!

Xu Xianchu was very happy. Could his superpower have evolved to become even better?

As for these bandits, would a supernatural being need to be afraid of them? Xu Xianchu grinned. He would have to test out his new power on someone!

Chapter 192 I'm giving you an out

News of Stronghold 109 getting destroyed and taken over by the Experimentals had quickly spread to the rest of human civilization under the Alliance of Strongholds.

If Stronghold 112 and 113 were destroyed by acts of nature, there was nothing that humans could do about it. But for Stronghold 109's destruction, the shadow of a nonhuman species challenging the survival of mankind hung over the incident.

That was because Stronghold 109 was not destroyed by an act of nature. This threat came from a new species that also happened to be extremely aggressive.

The strongholds had been standing in this world for hundreds of years now, while some of the most powerful empires in the history of human civilization only lasted 200 years at most. Therefore, humans had almost become accustomed to the safe lives they knew in the strongholds.

But now, the appearance of the Experimentals was telling humanity they had to reexamine this world.

The road from Stronghold 109 to Stronghold 111 was mainly flat. The armored vehicles had already left, leaving only two off-road vehicles speeding their way through the vast wilderness. Behind the off-road vehicles, a large cloud of dust was left in their wake. This was a grand sight to behold from afar.

Qing Zhen sat in the back of the vehicle with his eyes closed and seemed to be thinking of something. Next to him, Luo Lan kept eating. Every now and then, he would say a few words to Qing Zhen.

“Are we really just going back to Stronghold 111 without putting up a fight?” Luo Lan said indignantly. “Does the Board really intend to kill the donkey the moment it leaves the millstone? We have done so much for the Qing Consortium, yet they’re placing us under house arrest just like that?”

Qing Zhen opened his eyes and looked at Luo Lan. “You can call yourself a donkey if you want, but don’t drag me in.”

“Oh, oh, I used the wrong idiom,” Luo Lan corrected himself. “But you get what I mean anyway.”

“The Qing Consortium is our home. If we don’t go back there, where do we go?” Qing Zhen said, sounding bored, “Since you’re going back with me this time, it’s going to be safer for you. By placing you in someone else’s stronghold, who knows what kind of trouble you’ll cause again.”

“I didn’t cause trouble for nothing though.” Luo Lan was unhappy. “Didn’t I successfully get my hands on the Li Consortium’s research results? But who knew you’d go and give it away just like that? Speaking of which, why’d you give it to that little girl from the Yang Consortium? Even if our nanorobotics tech hasn’t had any breakthroughs yet, what if we do get a breakthrough later on? Just think, we’re both normal humans, but we can become superhuman with this nanorobotics tech!”

Qing Zhen didn’t care to explain. “I don’t like all that fighting and killing.”

“But all you’ve been doing is fighting and killing.” Luo Lan said, “Isn’t that what everyone thinks you’re best at?”

“I’m best at growing flowers.” Qing Zhen said in seriousness, “I’m warning you. Don’t you dare touch the flowers I grew when we get back.”

“Sure.” Luo Lan curled his lips. “Why would I touch your flowers when I can touch women instead? But anyway, I still find it such a waste that we gave that hard drive away to the Yang Consortium.”

Qing Zhen laughed and said, “It’s not a waste. One of the Li Consortium’s strongholds has been destroyed and their research results were even stolen. To resolve their internal conflicts, they’ll be sure to pin the blame on an external party. The Yang Consortium will be that target. With our two neighbors fighting, we can rest easy.”

“As if they would start fighting so easily. There hasn’t been a real war in such a long time,” Luo Lan said.

Qing Zhen looked out of the window and said calmly, “That’s where the problem is. There hasn’t been a war in such a long time among mankind. If we human beings don’t start a war, can we still be called greedy humans?”

“Look at you, putting down humanity like that. Well, I dislike wars, but that’s just how life works.” Luo Lan said, “But now that the Saboteurs have discovered your secret base, you should increase the defenses around it.”

Qing Zhen said calmly, “They haven’t found where it is yet. They’re only guessing it exists.”

“How do you know that?” Luo Lan was taken aback.

“Based on how the Saboteurs operate,” Qing Zhen chuckled and went on, “they would have already blown up the place if they discovered our nuclear test site.”

All of a sudden, Luo Lan shouted, “Eh, look up front.”

On the road ahead, a convoy of heavily armed vehicles were blocking their only path to Stronghold 111. There was the logo of the ginkgo leaf on the vehicles. Luo Lan was amused. “The Board seems to think rather highly of you.”

Qing Zhen waited for their own vehicles to come to a complete stop before getting out. A man dressed in a suit and wearing sunglasses approached them from the vehicle convoy opposite. “Qing Zhen, do you know you’re still under house arrest?”

Qing Zhen sincerely stated, “Secretary Zhou, please let me explain. Weren’t you all thinking of capturing that fatty, Luo Lan, to place him under house arrest? I’ve done that for you!”

Luo Lan echoed from the side, “That’s right. He captured me after such great efforts since I was really resistant to the idea of coming back.”

Secretary Zhou, who was clad in a suit, was taken aback. He had thought there would be a clash between him and the two brothers, so much so that he even brought troops over for this confrontation. But who knew that Qing Zhen would come up with that reason? He was a bit confused.

Secretary Zhou sneered, “Don’t think I don’t know why you went to Stronghold 109. Where are those troops of yours? Qing Zhen, as a member of the consortium, how dare you raise personal troops!”

Qing Zhen said sadly, “The troops were all killed during the capture of Luo Lan!”

Luo Lan hooted, “That’s right, do you think it’s so easy to capture me?”

Secretary Zhou was so angry he laughed. “What are you two putting on a crosstalk in front of me for?!”

Calm spread on Qing Zhen’s face. “I’m giving you an out here, so just take it.”

In that instant, Secretary Zhou felt the hair on the back of his neck stand. It was as though the party in front of him was a tiger. Even though he was only standing quietly, he was like a ferocious beast that would make anyone tremble with fear.

Qing Zhen walked over and took off Secretary Zhou’s sunglasses to put them on himself. “The sun’s really harsh, and I just so happen to lack a pair of sunglasses. Secretary Zhou, I’m afraid you’re still not qualified to ask me about those troops. The Board will have to personally question me.”

Secretary Zhou turned around and went back to his vehicle. “Let’s see if you can still keep up the bluster after we get back to the stronghold!”

Then the convoy of vehicles started moving towards Stronghold 111. Secretary Zhou, who was in his car, could feel his hands trembling.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu's and Yang Xiaojin's injuries had gotten much better. They kept heading north, albeit not at a fast pace.

Yang Xiaojin raised her head and glanced at the scorching sun in the sky. She asked, "We aren't going in the wrong direction, are we? Why can't we see Liuyuan and the others yet?"

"No," Ren Xiaosu said, "identifying directions is a basic skill in wilderness survival. However, I can't say if Yan Liuyuan and the others might have gone the wrong way." "That can't be. We saw so many campfires still around yesterday. It looked like there were quite a few people who managed to escape out of Stronghold 109, so they should be together with the rest of the escapees," Yang Xiaojin said.

Chapter 193 Parting ways

"I have a question." Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "Did y'all really discover Qing Zhen's nuclear test site?"

Yang Xiaojin looked at him. "No, I was just bluffing Qing Zhen. His people had been in contact with several particle physicists. But soon after their meeting, those physicists all went missing, including their family members. However, the Qing Consortium has never made any foray into this field of research, so we suspect it's Qing Zhen's own private dealings. He must have his own private nuclear test site."

"Isn't he part of the Qing Consortium? Why does he have to defend against his own people in that case? He even set up an independent base of his own?" Ren Xiaosu did not understand.

Yang Xiaojin explained, "Because he knows very well that in the past hundred years or so, almost none of the Qing Consortium's Shadows have come to a good end. A Shadow... will always remain as just a Shadow."

"Oh." Ren Xiaosu nodded. So Qing Zhen was probably doing this for self-preservation?

Yang Xiaojin said, "When we explain it to the others, we'd better say it was Xu Xianchu who saved us both. Otherwise, your superpower will get revealed very easily. I'm seriously advising you this time. You must not let anyone know you have the ability to copy someone else's powers. It'd be too dangerous if anyone found out."

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. "Wait, but don't the Saboteurs already know that Xu Xianchu isn't at Stronghold 109 anymore? So how are we supposed to say it was him who saved us?"

Yang Xiaojin said, "Well, that was a bluff as well."

"Ha, ha." In reality, Ren Xiaosu had many unanswered questions on his mind and was slowly answering them with Yang Xiaojin. "Is Lu Yuan also a member of the Saboteurs? I saw you providing him with cover earlier."

"He's not a member of the Saboteurs." Yang Xiaojin said, "He's from the Yang Consortium. The Yang Consortium and the Li Consortium have been carrying out research and development on nanotech all this while, because they believe nanotech will provide a breakthrough in terms of individual combat prowess. Actually, Qing Zhen was right. The Yang Consortium is also planning to use nanotech to prepare for war."

“Then how are the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium related?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“The Saboteurs were created by the first supernatural being of the Yang Consortium.” Yang Xiaojin explained, “Actually, the Saboteurs have a complicated relationship with the Yang Consortium. Currently, the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium do not agree on their ideals and have gradually started moving in their own directions. It’s just that the relationship between both parties is a little difficult to make clear. Actually, the Saboteurs were not called such in the beginning. But since that was what everyone called us, we just went with it and took up that role in this chaotic world.”

Ren Xiaosu did not probe too much into the current relationship between the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium. After all, it seemed like that was Yang Xiaojin’s family affairs. However, Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little uncomfortable. After all, he was just a refugee.

Yang Xiaojin came to a stop in front of a rock that had a strange symbol etched into it. From her pocket, she took out a finger-length metal stick and activated one end of it, shooting a flare into the sky.

Ren Xiaosu quietly watched and thought that Yang Xiaojin must’ve discovered a sign that her fellow Saboteurs had left for her to send them a signal.

Suddenly, an off-road vehicle rushed out of a narrow pathway with Luo Xinyu waving out of the window from the backseat. “Xiaojin, I’m so glad you’re fine.”

The off-road vehicle, being driven by Lu Yuan, came to a stop in front of Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. Lu Yuan got out of the vehicle and said to Yang Xiaojin, “Let’s go back home. This mission was a failure. The hard drive Xinyu managed to procure was taken from her by that Fatty Luo.”

Yang Xiaojin took the hard drive out of her pocket. “Qing Zhen’s giving it to the Yang Consortium, but I think he’s just trying to deepen the conflict between the Yang Consortium and the Li Consortium. Doesn’t really matter anyway. It’s not like our two families had a good relationship in the first place.”

Luo Xinyu cheered. However, they were both more concerned about how Yang Xiaojin had managed to get out of trouble. Yang Xiaojin explained, “Xu Xianchu and Ren Xiaosu teamed up and saved me. Xu Xianchu is very powerful now, so we had better keep a close eye on him.”

Luo Xinyu was startled. “I went to the site of the battle and looked around. How did the two of them combined manage to become such a lethal force?”

“It’s mainly Xu Xianchu’s credit. But he’s already heading to Stronghold 178,” Yang Xiaojin said calmly.

“Oh, we can return home then.” Luo Xinyu quipped at Ren Xiaosu, “Hey, Ren Xiaosu, do you want to come with us to Stronghold 88?”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned before shaking his head and saying, “No, it’s fine. I still have to search for my brother.”

Yang Xiaojin looked at him. "I've got to go now."

Ren Xiaosu made a noise in acknowledgment.

Yang Xiaojin said, "After you find Yan Liuyuan and the others, come to Stronghold 88. I'll wait for you there."

"Alright."

Then Yang Xiaojin hopped into the off-road vehicle. Lu Yuan stepped on the accelerator and the off-road vehicle roared into the distance.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu knew the two of them would eventually have to bid each other farewell. But when adults parted ways, it was always an easy thing to do. Sorrowful goodbyes were only reserved for poets.

If they wanted to meet again, they'd definitely be able to.

Ren Xiaosu watched as the vehicle got further and further away. He suddenly remembered and shouted, "Hey, give me a ride if y'all're going north!"

However, the off-road vehicle was too far away.

Snowflakes suddenly drifted down from the sky. This was the first snow of winter this year and it looked heavier than usual. The snowflakes fluttering down from the sky seemed almost like they were here to clean off the bloodstains from this wasteland.

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There were already quite a few campfires burning at a campsite in the north. Thousands and thousands of people were shivering in the cold wilderness. The campfires in front of these people were the only thing that provided them some warmth.

Even though the Experimentals had broken into the city and gone on a killing spree, there were still only slightly over a 1,000 of them. Meanwhile, the number of residents living in the stronghold was in the hundreds of thousands, so there were quite a lot of people who managed to escape the siege.

Furthermore, the little girl next to Li Shentan had also participated in the battle and opened up a path of escape for a group of residents.

Li Shentan and that little girl named Si Liren had gone off to someplace unknown. The escapees had begged for the two to bring them along, so Li Shentan told them to head north and find a group of people who rode on bicycles so that their survival would be ensured.

From the sounds of it, Li Shentan was playing a little joke on Ren Xiaosu.

The escapees revered Li Shentan like a god who had saved them, but they didn't know he was actually one of those who had brought this disaster upon them. After getting his revenge on the Li Consortium in Stronghold 109, Li Shentan did not make any further moves there. Instead, he headed off to the other

stronghold cities that were under the control of the Li Consortium. He seemed to be planning on bringing down the entire Li Consortium all on his own.

Eventually, the escapees located the cycling group, who happened to be fixing their bicycles after heading north. Compared to Yan Liuyuan and the others who were riding on bicycles and carrying backpacks, the escapees appeared to be in a much more miserable state.

At this moment, Wang Fugui said mysteriously, "Liuyuan, I found something good that might be of great use."

Yan Liuyuan looked at Wang Fugui and asked, "Uncle Fugui, what'd you find?"

Wang Fugui carefully took out a deck of cards. "See this? It's a pack of explosives!"

Chapter 194 Zixia

Yan Liuyuan looked at the old deck of cards in Wang Fugui's hand. He explained to him earnestly, "In my brother's hands, the cards would be bombs. But in your hands, they can only be used to play Fight the Landlord."

Off to the side, Wang Dalong said, "Can't we play three-card brag[1] instead?"

Yan Liuyuan paused for a moment. "Well, you can."

Wang Fugui might have been surprised by Ren Xiaosu's four "threes" the last time around, so he still had some lingering thoughts. When he found a pack of cards that someone had dropped, he was quite happy about it. They were ammo to him. However, when Yan Liuyuan told Wang Fugui he could not use it, he smacked his lips and said, "I'll keep it for Ren Xiaosu."

Yan Liuyuan didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Ren Xiaosu's cards might seem like ordinary cards, but they were really conjured up by his superpower.

As all the other refugees cried in misery, Yan Liuyuan and company were caught in a heated discussion about card games. It even seemed like they might start playing Fight the Landlord at any moment now.

Truly, there was a difference between being prepared and unprepared. Although it was very cold outside in the wilderness and would be quite difficult to bear even if you were prepared, people usually lived in comparison to others. When you saw other people in a miserable state, you wouldn't think you had it that bad anymore.

Chen Wudi mumbled from off to the side, "Master will get abducted by the ruler of Womanland soon, and y'all are still in the mood to play cards?!"

Wang Fugui chuckled heartily and said, "Don't worry, Master will definitely not ditch us."

"Really?" Chen Wudi's eyes lit up.

"Of course!" Wang Fugui said with a smile.

Chen Wudi said, "Then let's play three-card brag, I'm pretty damn good at it."

All of a sudden, a cry rang out from the crowd in the distance. Chen Wudi immediately stood up and turned his attention to them. He saw a man trying to snatch a scarf from a plump woman.

Snow blanketed the ground with white. The man must have been unable to bear the cold since he was only wearing his fall clothing. However, he didn't dare snatch the other men's clothing, so he could only snatch some from a woman. A woman's clothes wouldn't fit him, but a scarf would still be useful.

It can be difficult to imagine how despicable some people can get in the face of adversity. The man was willing to resort to any means necessary as long as it meant survival for him.

But this was only the beginning of their escape. For refugees like Yan Liuyuan, Xiaoyu, and the others, all of them knew quite well that things would only get worse for this group of escapees.

During their previous escape, the weather was not this cold. As such, human nature did not get pushed to such desperate straits. There wasn't a lack of food either at that time since they managed to locate a field full of sweet potatoes.

But it was different this time. The evil side of human nature thoroughly surfaced at this moment, baring its fangs.

Chen Wudi stood up and strode over. "Get your hands off her!"

That man looked at Chen Wudi. "Mind your fucking business!"

Chen Wudi was tickled pink by this man. "As the Great Sage reborn, I have to poke my nose into the injustices of this world. If you don't let her go, this punch of mine might just kill you!"

By the campfire, Yan Liuyuan and the others quietly watched this unfold. They all knew Chen Wudi's character. In the past, everyone had suspected that Chen Wudi might be putting on an act. But they realized later that he was simply a guy who imagined himself a hero.

Actually, when Yan Liuyuan followed Ren Xiaosu to the bar to listen to the storyteller's stories when he was younger, he also had fancied himself becoming a hero in the future. But Ren Xiaosu told him at that time that other than tears, this world did not believe in heroes.

Back then, Yan Liuyuan felt that Ren Xiaosu was lying, since he was clearly very inspired by the stories too. So Ren Xiaosu must also have had dreams of becoming a hero. It was just that he had suppressed the thought of it.

If giving up on physical strength was the price humans paid for gaining intelligence—then crushing his dreams would be the price Ren Xiaosu paid for survival.

However, Yan Liuyuan felt that the fact that since Ren Xiaosu chose to help Jiang Wu and bring Chen Wudi along with them on their escape, it showed Ren Xiaosu had not completely given up on his dream of becoming a hero.

At this moment, the man who snatched the woman's scarf threw a punch at Chen Wudi. However, Chen Wudi didn't even dodge and just let the punch land on his face. With a crack, the man's wrist apparently broke while Chen Wudi looked totally unaffected.

Yan Liuyuan shouted from afar, "Don't kill him."

Chen Wudi said, "OK!"

After that, Chen Wudi lightly punched the man's stomach. The man slowly tumbled to the ground as his entire body turned numb from the attack.

Chen Wudi said, "That's a small lesson for you as an example to everyone else."

The woman whose scarf had been snatched stood up and came over to retrieve it. Then she hurried over to Chen Wudi and said, "Thank you, thank you so much."

"It's no big deal." Chen Wudi was about to turn and leave.

But the woman suddenly seemed like she wanted to get closer to Chen Wudi. She said, "It seems like we were fated to meet!"

In this wilderness, there would always be a greater chance of survival with help from others. Chen Wudi and company, who were riding on bicycles, stood out too much, so everyone else knew they were well-prepared for the escape and even had food with them. As such, this woman was looking to cotton up to Chen Wudi.

Chen Wudi turned his head. "Huh? Fated?"

The woman shyly twirled her hair. "Aren't you the Great Sage? My name is Zixia, Zhao Zixia!"

Chen Wudi looked like he had been struck by lightning. "You're Zixia?! But you don't look that age!"

Zhao Zixia joked, "I might have been reborn a few years before you."

Chen Wudi despaired a little. 'How is that a few years? It's more like a decade, at least! Aren't you jumping the gun?!' However, Chen Wudi calmed down and said, "Big sis, I'm sorry, but I'm not your version of the Great Sage."

Yan Liuyuan and the others were laughing themselves silly over at the campfire. When Chen Wudi came back, no one held back from teasing him. Previously, Chen Wudi had said that he was searching for Zixia, a fairy immortal, but no one thought he would suddenly change the version of the Great Sage now that he had finally found her? He could even switch the version of the Great Sage? That was probably Chen Wudi's last route of retreat he had left for himself.

At the beginning, Yan Liuyuan and Ren Xiaosu thought Zixia was just a relationship setback trope Chen Wudi had created for himself. Now that Zixia had personally appeared and met him, she helped Chen Wudi cut himself off from all mortal desires.

Right at this moment, Yan Liuyuan caught sight of a figure of a person slowly making their way over in the snowy weather. The escapees started whispering among themselves as they never expected someone to still be coming from the direction of Stronghold 109 at such a time.

Before everyone else could react, Chen Wudi and the others stood up. Yan Liuyuan waved his hands excitedly and shouted, “Bro! Over here, over here!”

Although Yan Liuyuan knew Ren Xiaosu was definitely fine, he could only feel truly at ease after seeing him again. For Yan Liuyuan, there wasn’t a point in living comfortably if Ren Xiaosu wasn’t around to accompany him.

Chapter 195 Respect the old and care for the young

When Yan Liuyuan shouted to Ren Xiaosu, some people who did not notice Ren Xiaosu turned to look at him as well.

The escapees did not quite understand why Yan Liuyuan’s group had not ridden their bicycles when they clearly had them. Instead, they just pushed their bicycles along with the crowd without any panic. But now, everyone realized this group of people did not escape as quickly as possible by cycling because they had been waiting for someone.

But where had this young man who just walked over from the frozen, snowy land outside gone before this? Surely he could not have just escaped from the stronghold, right? After all, the stronghold was filled with terrifying Experimentals, so who could possibly escape from there? They should be the last wave of people who’d fled from there.

Suddenly, a girl in the crowd realized she knew Ren Xiaosu. Wasn’t that the scoundrel who deliberately caused her to score badly on her exams?! This girl was Li Mo, and she had sat behind Ren Xiaosu during the final exams. After the exams were over, she had gone to Ren Xiaosu’s class to seek revenge on him. However, she did not even manage to confront him. Furthermore, the students in Class 12-7 really pissed her off when they claimed they were actually protecting her by stopping her from taking her revenge!

Amid the escaping crowd, she saw Ren Xiaosu walking over from the wilderness. For some reason, she felt those students might have been telling the truth and had not deliberately been trying to piss her off.

As Ren Xiaosu passed through the crowd, he knew a lot of people were looking at him. However, he was not exactly bothered by it. He had been walking in the frozen, snowy land for a long time and almost lost his way. It was not that he had bad wilderness survival, but that he could not even get landmarks to use as a reference in the heavy snowfall. He only found Yan Liuyuan and company because of his strong sense of direction!

He really should have been smarter and hitched a ride with Yang Xiaojin’s group. If he had, he wouldn’t have had to go through all this trouble.

When Ren Xiaosu sat down next to the campfire, Yan Liuyuan immediately handed him some hot water and porridge. “Bro, did you manage to save the ruler of Womanland?”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. “Who’s the ruler of Womanland?”

Yan Liuyuan chuckled. "Big Sister Xiaojin."

Ren Xiaosu was confused. 'Wait, when did Yang Xiaojin become the ruler of Womanland?!' He looked at Chen Wudi. "Did you give her that nickname? Stop talking nonsense!"

Chen Wudi smirked. "Only names can be given wrongly. How can nicknames be called wrong?"

Yan Liuyuan kept a straight face and told Ren Xiaosu about the "Zixia" incident that happened earlier. Ren Xiaosu was also amused. "Wudi, will you still look for Zixia in the future?"

Chen Wudi froze. "Zixia? Who?"

"Oh, so you've already forgotten about her." Ren Xiaosu said with a sigh, "How amazing that you can switch versions of yourself. Hey, didn't you used to insist on looking for Zixia?"

Chen Wudi said in seriousness, "Master, I'm crazy, not stupid."

Ren Xiaosu pondered what he just said but couldn't figure out the difference even after a long time.

At this moment, an old lady walked towards them with a child in hand. Ren Xiaosu turned around and had a look at them. He thought that if they wanted to share the campfire to keep themselves warm, he could make some space for them. It was really cold out, after all, and they were an elder and child.

But when the old lady came up to them, she said to Ren Xiaosu, "You people should take the initiative to share your food with the elderly and children. I've been observing you all for some time. But as a group of young people, you all aren't even virtuous enough to respect the old and care for the young. How did your parents teach you?"

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. To be honest, he had not expected such a twist. No one in town had ever mentioned anything about respecting the old and caring for the young before. Like refugees would be so free to discuss virtues and whatnot! So he didn't expect someone would act so righteous to get them to share their food with the elderly and children.

It was getting late into the night, and the temperature dropped rapidly again. It was really not easy for an elderly person to take care of a child while escaping. If this old lady had just asked nicely for some food to be shared with them, Ren Xiaosu would have given it to her. But since she spoke with that attitude, Ren Xiaosu couldn't help feeling disgusted. To be honest, he could not understand how someone like her managed to escape from the stronghold.

The child pointed to the golden circlet on Chen Wudi's head and said, "Grandma, I want that."

Yan Liuyuan mischievously explained, "That can't be removed."

"I don't care, I want it!" the child said selfishly.

The old lady looked at Chen Wudi. "What's the big deal with letting my grandson play with your hairband for a while? And why is a grown man like you even wearing a hairband?"

Ren Xiaosu wanted to laugh aloud. Then a woman next to them said, "What's wrong with you people? Can't you let the child play with it?" Saying that, she removed a hairpin from her hair and gave it to the child. "Here, play with Auntie's hairpin instead."

However, the child slapped the hairpin to the ground and started crying. "I don't want yours, I want his."

Ren Xiaosu threw another two pieces of firewood into the campfire and said with a smile, "Y'all better get lost while I'm still in control of myself. In a world like this, you still dare to boss people around? I feel that you might not get to the next stronghold."

The old lady said with a stuck-up look, "I'm an ancillary family member of the Li Consortium. Even though one of our strongholds has been lost, the Li Consortium's forces from the other strongholds will definitely come to our rescue soon. So don't think you can behave as you like, all lawlessly."

"Get lost," Ren Xiaosu calmly said.

The child got afraid when he saw Ren Xiaosu's calm expression. He hid behind the old lady and said, "Grandma, let's go. I'm scared."

After saying that, he dragged the old lady back into the crowd. It was as though he wanted to get as far away from Ren Xiaosu as possible. Even while the old lady was leaving, she was still scolding and swearing at them.

Chen Wudi wondered, "Master, why are there people like her in this world?"

She was clearly in the wrong, yet she acted as though she were the righteous one and took advantage of her seniority by emphasizing "respecting the old and caring for the young." Ren Xiaosu sighed. "Wudi, I know that you want to be a hero and uphold justice. But if you think that everyone in this world has goodness in their hearts, then you haven't met everyone yet."

"Bro, where are we headed next?" Yan Liuyuan said, "If we keep going north, we'll end up in the Qing Consortium's territory. These Li Consortium residents probably don't even know where they are right now. Even if the Li Consortium really sends reinforcements over, they won't bump into them."

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and replied, "Let's go to Stronghold 88." "Stronghold 88?" Yan Liuyuan was stunned. "Whose territory is that? Why should we go there?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while and said, "Uh, I have an acquaintance there. If we go to Stronghold 88, it'll be easier for us to obtain legal resident statuses and whatnot. You can even attend school."

After chatting with Qing Zhen, Yang Xiaojin, and Luo Lan, Ren Xiaosu really wanted to learn more about this world through education. He might not even need to go to school since Yang Xiaojin mentioned there was a huge library in Stronghold 88.

"OK, whatever you say." Yan Liuyuan asked, "But where is Stronghold 88?"

A bolt of lightning struck Ren Xiaosu. 'Oh, right! Where is Stronghold 88?!'

Chapter 196 Stealing bicycles

In current times, maps of the areas that were under the control of an organization were rarely made available to the public. As such, most people did not really have a clear concept of the geography. Usually, people would just describe the location of the next stronghold with terms like in front, behind, to the left, to the right, up north, or down south. As for the exact distance and where they were precisely located, no one really knew.

Ren Xiaosu thought about how all those strongholds were actually a huge alliance, yet no one came up with a complete map of the lands. The organizations were all guarding against each other as though they were thieves. Of course, he felt that the various organizations would probably have more detailed maps but kept them secret.

This led to... Ren Xiaosu feeling embarrassed when he discovered he did not know where Stronghold 88 was even though he suggested going there.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while. "It's not a big deal. It should be somewhere to the north. We should be able to get there with a bit of walking."

"Bro, why do I feel like you're also uncertain about what you said?" Yan Liuyuan said. He checked with Jiang Wu, who was beside him, but realized she also did not know where Stronghold 88 was.

According to Yang Xiaojin, there were two strongholds between Stronghold 88 and Stronghold 109. The entire distance of the journey should be between 500 to 1,000 kilometers, so it might be quite difficult to get there just by walking.

When normal people looked to travel to another stronghold, they tended to head to the nearby ones. It was impossible to get to those that were too far away. It was only the organizations that were capable of traveling across the wasteland.

So it wasn't a surprise that Jiang Wu did not know where Stronghold 88 was.

"Bro, are we going to ride a 1,000 kilometers on our bikes?" Yan Liuyuan felt despair when he thought about it.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while. "Why don't we try to get our hands on a car after we get to the next stronghold? We can then drive to Stronghold 88!"

"Get our hands on a car? Bro, why don't you just say we're stealing one? You don't need to mince your words." Yan Liuyuan said, "Currently, the Qing Consortium's Stronghold 111 is the closest to us. If you've already decided on stealing a car, I suggest that we go there to steal one."

"Qing Zhen and Luo Lan should be on their way back to Stronghold 111." Ren Xiaosu pondered and said, "I think it would be best to avoid going there. After all, those two are bellicose people, so it's not good to be interacting with them too much."

“Bro, seeing as you’re so insistent on going to Stronghold 88, that acquaintance you mentioned should be Yang Xiaojin, right?” Yan Liuyuan suddenly asked.

“You always have so much to say.” Ren Xiaosu glared at him. “Rest early. We’ll start pushing faster tomorrow and go north first. If we encounter a stronghold along the way, we can stop at the town outside of it for a while. Once we find out where Stronghold 88 is, we can continue there.”

Ren Xiaosu felt it was better to stay away from the Qing Consortium’s Stronghold 111, as well as the Li Consortium. Otherwise, they might just get involved in the wrath of Li Shentan’s vengeance. When he thought of Li Shentan, he sensed the only interest the young man had after getting out of the psychiatric hospital was revenge.

But then, the howling of wolves came from the distance. Following, more howling sounded in the quiet wilderness, scaring people.

Some of the escapees who had fallen asleep jolted awake. They looked around in a panic and wondered why they had to encounter the wolves so soon after escaping from the claws of the Experimentals. So it was actually that dangerous in the wilderness?!

Someone said softly, “Everyone, look at the hilltop over there!”

Everyone looked over and saw several hundred white wolves as large as bison standing atop a hill and staring at them quietly. The size of the white wolves was utterly different from what the stronghold residents had been taught. The wolves they learned about in the textbooks were not this big!

If these wolves attacked the escapees’ campsite, more than half of them would likely get killed or injured tonight. On top of that, the remaining survivors would find it hard to escape the pursuit of the wolves.

Ren Xiaosu did not say anything as he knew the wolves would not attack the escapees’ campsite. That was because if these wolves would’ve attacked a campsite, his group would have died during their last escape from Stronghold 113.

But he could not understand why these wolves kept following them everywhere. Ren Xiaosu’s intuition told him the wolves were here because of their small group, not because of other escapees. However, he was not a 100% sure of that.

But the escapees did not know this. When they saw wolves had arrived, they leapt up and continued fleeing north. When Ren Xiaosu saw the escapees were starting to move again, he said, “Let’s keep up with the bigger group for now!”

As Ren Xiaosu’s voice trailed off, Jiang Wu started waking up her students who were still asleep. They did not ask why and just followed wherever Ren Xiaosu went.

A group of people were riding bicycles and blending into the right side of the escapees’ group. As the road here was not that bumpy, it was much easier to escape on their bicycles than running on foot. The physical exertion between the two was completely on a different level.

“There’s no need to ride too fast. Just keep up with the pace of the crowd,” Ren Xiaosu instructed.

Yan Liuyuan happened to turn around at this moment and saw Ren Xiaosu sitting on the back of Chen Wudi’s bicycle and giving out instructions in high spirits.

“Bro, you still haven’t learned how to ride a bike?” Yan Liuyuan asked.

Ren Xiaosu kept a straight face and said, “I learned how to ride it, but I’ve lost my bike.”

“Bro, why don’t you take my bicycle while I get a ride from you instead?” Yan Liuyuan said.

Ren Xiaosu said matter-of-factly, “Liuyuan, you’re already an adult, so you should be riding your own bike.”

Yan Liuyuan lamented, “Bro, you’re the most shameless person I’ve ever met. No one else comes close.”

Jiang Wu and her students were cycling behind Ren Xiaosu’s group. As they rode along, they felt they really could survive longer just by following Ren Xiaosu.

Suddenly, two escapees who saw the students riding bicycles came over and tried to take them away from them!

Everyone knew they would escape faster with a proper mode of transportation. Besides, Jiang Wu’s students looked like clear pushovers, so some of these people started getting ideas about the bicycles!

The two escapees grabbed hold of a student’s shirt and shouted, “Get off!” They then proceeded to push the student off the bicycle.

Chen Wudi jumped off his bike and leaped in front of the two escapees in a single bound. “How dare the two of you behave so insolently in front of the Great Sage!”

Chen Wudi sent them flying backwards in an instant with a punch and a kick. One of them even had their leg twisted unnaturally!

Chen Wudi picked up the bicycle and handed it back to the student. “Keep your guard up. Shout for me if anyone else dares to come and steal your bicycle

again!”

That female student looked at Chen Wudi and said in a daze, “Th-Thank you!”

“There’s no need to thank me! You should thank my master instead!” Chen Wudi said as he waved it off.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was the one who felt most downcast.

Ren Xiaosu had only sat behind Chen Wudi on his bicycle as he thought he was stronger, so would not be burdened by his weight and get too tired. He could never have expected Chen Wudi to actually jump off the bicycle while it was still moving.

With a loud crash, Ren Xiaosu fell to the ground together with the bicycle!

Chapter 197 The Wolf King's act of goodwill

With Ren Xiaosu's physical fitness, he would not get injured from just falling off a bicycle. He dusted off the dirt and snow on him and got back on his feet. "Wudi, if you see any injustice in the future, just let me handle it. You should focus on riding the bike, alright?"

"Oh, sure thing, Master!" Chen Wudi hurriedly picked the bicycle up and continued riding with Ren Xiaosu as he caught up to the group.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at the wolves on the hilltop. The white wolves were not alarmed by the sight of the escapees running away and stood there motionlessly in the snow. It was as though they had nothing better to do and were only here to take a gander. But Ren Xiaosu could not understand what their motives were.

In front of him, Chen Wudi was pedaling hard and saying, "Master, why are there always people in this world who think nothing of hurting others to achieve their goals?"

"Humans are self-serving," Ren Xiaosu replied nonchalantly.

"What about people who try to get something without making any effort for it?" Chen Wudi asked.

"That's also because humans are self-serving," Ren Xiaosu replied.

Chen Wudi suddenly sounded a little depressed. "Master, do you think I should still fight against injustices in the future? There are so many bad people out there. What if the people I save turn out to be bad as well?"

Ren Xiaosu could feel the contradiction inside of Chen Wudi. It seemed like his dream of becoming a hero was starting to waver. Although Ren Xiaosu did not want to be a hero himself, he found this quality in Chen Wudi's nature to be praiseworthy.

Ren Xiaosu patiently explained to Chen Wudi, "You can continue saving others if you wish to save them. But if you discover that they're bad people after you've saved them, you can just beat them to death."

"OK." Chen Wudi nodded vigorously in response.

All of a sudden, a scream came from the fleeing crowd. A woman shouted, "Someone has taken my belongings! Everyone, please help me! He snatched my bag!"

Immediately, Ren Xiaosu jumped off the bicycle in anticipation of what might happen. By the time he landed on the ground, he saw that Chen Wudi had already rushed to that woman to help her and left the bicycle behind with no one to control it.

Ren Xiaosu felt sad. It was still better for him to learn how to ride a bicycle. It wouldn't do if he had to keep depending on others like this. After a while, Chen Wudi ran back after beating up another man. When he saw the bicycle lying on the ground, he was a little embarrassed. "Master, I'm sorry. I forgot you were on the bike again."

“It’s fine, it’s fine.” Ren Xiaosu had no alternative but to dismiss it. “But with so many people here, you can’t possibly handle everything, right? I’m afraid that you will exhaust yourself to death if you continue dealing with every little matter.”

Moreover, this was just the beginning of their escape. There would probably be many more instances of such bullying among the escapees in the future.

“Then I’ll just handle them one at a time.” Chen Wudi said hesitantly, “I can’t possibly just ignore them.”

After fleeing for a while more, Ren Xiaosu suddenly called out to his group, “Alright, let’s stop here. The wolves aren’t pursuing us. Besides, if they were really chasing after us, none of us could get away.”

Yan Liuyuan and the others came to a stop. When the other escapees saw them stopping, they also slowly stopped in their tracks. Everyone was weary to the bone now.

The only good thing that came of this was that they did not feel as cold after some exercise.

Now that they had fled to a new location, they would have to rebuild their campfires and collect more firewood to burn. Some people who were too lazy to go around doing all that again just laid in the snow. Meanwhile, Yan Liuyuan led the group of students who did not mind the trouble of restarting their campfire.

This was what Ren Xiaosu had requested of them. No matter how cold or tired they were in the snowy wilderness, they were required to make a campfire. Otherwise, they would pay a hefty price.

“Bro.” Yan Liuyuan asked, puzzled, “Did you sense anything strange about those wolves?”

“You sensed it as well?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Yes.” Yan Liuyuan said, “I keep having the feeling that the Wolf King is constantly watching me from afar. It’s like I can feel its gaze on me all the time.”

This was something new to Ren Xiaosu since he did not feel that he was being watched.

When it was late at night and Ren Xiaosu saw that everyone around them had fallen sleep, he reminded Chen Wudi and Yan Liuyuan, who were keeping watch, to be careful. He needed to go somewhere for a while.

Ren Xiaosu walked into the wilderness with great doubts on his mind. He was going in the direction of where the wolves had appeared.

The snow was very deep. Ever since The Cataclysm, the winters would get exceptionally cold, and the snowfall also became much heavier.

He walked towards the wilderness with some difficulty in the snow. Some escapees who were still awake were shocked when they realized someone was brave enough to venture into the wilderness at such time.

“Is he going for a potty break?” “Maybe, but wasn’t he the one who came from the wilderness alone and joined us?”

“Look at how well-prepared their group is. They probably knew something was going to happen to the stronghold.”

“How did they know?!”

A woman who had her face concealed behind a scarf was secretly watching Ren Xiaosu’s receding figure. Suddenly, someone beside her said in surprise, “Aren’t you… Fang Yujing?”

Even though she had concealed herself very well, someone still recognized her. The person said happily, “It’s really you! I’m your fan! I heard you were going to be participating for a couple days in the music festival, but I never thought something like this would happen.”

Fang Yujing forced a smile. “It’s good enough that we’re all still alive.”

When she turned her eyes back to Ren Xiaosu, she discovered he had disappeared into the distance.

Ren Xiaosu crested a tiny hillock and was surprised to see the wolves playing in the snow. Several of the females even had a dozen little wolf cubs with them. The wolf cubs seemed unafraid of Ren Xiaosu as they looked over from afar.

Ren Xiaosu did not dare go any closer as he was worried the wolves would suddenly attack him.

He just wanted to see what was going on with the wolves here. But before that, he would have to ascertain if the wolves saw him as prey.

The strong and powerful males in the wolf pack stood still in the snow and observed him. Then they moved aside for the Wolf King as it made its way over from the rear with a large rabbit dangling from its mouth. The rabbit was still warm and dripping with blood.

Ren Xiaosu stood still. He wanted to see what the Wolf King was planning to do, while the black saber was getting restless as it kept buzzing in the palace.

The rabbit was as large as a bicycle tire. Ren Xiaosu didn’t know what it ate to grow to this size. He could see condensation coming from the rabbit’s warm blood as it dripped onto the snow.

The Wolf King stopped not far from Ren Xiaosu and placed the rabbit on the ground. Ren Xiaosu wondered, “Are you giving that to me?”

But the Wolf King did not respond. It just turned around and left with its pack. Ren Xiaosu could only watch as they padded away.

This confused Ren Xiaosu even more. Had the wolf pack gotten so sociable that they even sent food to humans? But what astonished him was that the number of wolves seemed to have increased by a lot this time. It looked like the Wolf King had been tirelessly accepting new wolves into its pack.

Chapter 198 The escapees attempt robbery

In the middle of the night, Ren Xiaosu's sudden walk into the wilderness by himself shocked many people. No matter what he intended to do, the fact that someone would venture out alone was very surprising to the escapees. After all, the wolves were still out there.

But now Ren Xiaosu returned carrying a large rabbit in tow. Did he go hunting just now?

Seeing as the weather was freezing as snow continued falling heavily from the sky, a lot of people were worried they would get buried under the snow when they woke up. But even in such bad weather, someone still went out to hunt and returned with such a large rabbit.

When the Wolf King dropped the rabbit, the snow was already very deep. Ren Xiaosu watched quietly as the Wolf King cleared a path through the snow by walking in front while the other wolves followed behind it. That would make the walk much easier in the snow.

Ren Xiaosu did not know what the Wolf King's intention was when it left him a rabbit. But he found it a little odd.

On the way back to the campsite, he noticed many people staring at him in surprise. However, Ren Xiaosu would never explain to them that the wolves gave him the rabbit.

When he got back, Yan Liuyuan asked, "Bro, did you hunt the rabbit yourself?"

Ren Xiaosu whispered, "The wolves gave it to me. That Wolf King doesn't seem to have any malice towards us. For now, we won't have to worry too much. At the very least, we don't have to worry about the wolves attacking us." If the wolves had any malicious intent, killing Ren Xiaosu just now would definitely have been the best opportunity they had. After all, the distance between them earlier was just a leap away.

Ren Xiaosu was not in a hurry to eat the rabbit. Since everyone was already asleep and ate dinner in the evening, they definitely would not feel too hungry yet.

The escapees around them were so hungry their eyes gleamed upon seeing the rabbit. After all, some of them did not have anything to eat as they fled over the past two days. If it hadn't snowed today, they would not even have replenished the water lost from their bodies.

The snow may have looked white, but it was not as clean as you would think. Ren Xiaosu knew the escapees would pay the price for casually putting things in their mouths when they woke up the next morning

Currently, only a miniscule number of escapees still had any food left on them, while most of the others were famished with nothing to eat. When some people saw Ren Xiaosu bringing such a large rabbit back, their eyes lit up.

Some of those people were whispering among themselves, apparently discussing something. Yan Liuyuan glanced at Ren Xiaosu. "Bro, you'd better make an example of some of them quickly so that the others won't get any ideas."

Ren Xiaosu looked up at those escapees. "Upon identifying the ringleaders, we'll kill them off. Wudi, make sure to protect everyone when it gets chaotic later. I'll handle the killing." When Ren Xiaosu mentioned killing people, his expression didn't change.

Then he noticed Jiang Wu had also woken up. Jiang Wu said, "Xiaosu, do you have any weapons to spare? Can you lend one to me?" Jiang Wu and her students had also brought a lot of food with them. Although the escapees looked like they were only interested in the rabbit for now, Jiang Wu's group was also in danger of being targeted.

However, Jiang Wu did not request Ren Xiaosu to protect them as well. Instead, she wanted to borrow a weapon from him so they could protect themselves. Because Jiang Wu and her students had a separate campfire, it looked like they were two separate groups of people. Ren Xiaosu had also mentioned to Jiang Wu before that they would have to depend on themselves once they had escaped into the wilderness.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and quietly handed a gun to Jiang Wu. After the events of Stronghold 109, he had amassed quite a few firearms in his storage space. At the very least, he had enough to issue one to each person in their group.

When the Li Consortium's troops were attacked by those under the control of Li Shentan, many soldiers had died and a lot of their guns went missing. Ren Xiaosu was there at the scene.

"Ms. Jiang, do you know how to use a gun?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Jiang Wu shook her head. "No."

Ren Xiaosu asked again, "Then have you killed a person before?"

"No." Jiang Wu shook her head again. However, her tone soon became determined as she said, "For the sake of my students, I can do it."

"Why not you give the gun to a male student to hold? Wang Yuchi looks quite strong. He can learn how to do this," Ren Xiaosu said.

"No." Jiang Wu said, "Their responsibility right now is to learn, not kill people. I know it's not good to be so protective of them in times like these, but I know people change after killing someone. As long as I can protect them for one more day, I don't need them shouldering such sins."

Chen Wudi, who was next to them, suddenly said, "If I don't descend into the Underworld, who will?"

Ren Xiaosu told Chen Wudi, "With a teacher like Jiang Wu around, you being a hero will have meaning."

At this moment, someone within the escapees' group stood up and led others towards Ren Xiaosu's group. Ren Xiaosu smiled at Yan Liuyuan and said, "Remember the faces of these people."

As the escapees walked over aggressively, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to discover the old lady who tried using her seniority to her advantage also within the crowd.

But Chen Wudi's expression seemed a bit strange. "Master, there's someone in that crowd I've helped before."

A man had his jacket taken by someone else, but Chen Wudi managed to prevent the robbery in time. But now, that man ended up joining forces with others to rob Chen Wudi and his group.

Ren Xiaosu did not know what to say.

The group of escapees walked up to Ren Xiaosu's group and said, "I'm sure you all knew beforehand that something would happen to the stronghold, right? Did you people have anything to do with what happened at Stronghold 109?"

"Why? Are y'all trying to gain the moral high ground?" Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "The Li Consortium, the Qing Consortium, and the Yang Consortium all knew that something was going to happen at the stronghold, yet none of you knew a thing."

The people in their group looked at one another as this was their first time hearing about this. But soon, someone raised their voice and snapped, "There's so few of you here. Can you even finish eating so much food? Also, you are so well-prepared with supplies, so why can't you just help everyone?"

As that person spoke, one of them came over in an attempt to take the large rabbit away!

Ren Xiaosu sneered as he took out his pistol and fired it into the air. The crowd of people were stunned. They did not expect Ren Xiaosu to have a gun on him!

The crowd started retreating quietly. Some of them even pulled others in front of them to shield themselves. They were hoping they would not be the ones to die when the bullets flew.

"Who were the ones who suggested you rob us?" Ren Xiaosu asked with a smile.

Noisy chatter filled the escapees' group. "It wasn't me! I think it was that guy in blue!"

The man in blue said in panic, "It wasn't me, don't lie! I said not to come over, yet you people insisted on doing so!"

"Enough with the arguing." Ren Xiaosu calmed down. "I know who they are."

He raised his hand and shot the instigators that were standing at the front. In a mere two seconds, Ren Xiaosu had already identified and shot the three masterminds dead.

Everyone in the crowd started screaming and retreating. Not only did they not expect Ren Xiaosu to have a gun, they did not expect he would open fire on them!

This was what you would call a mob. They did not have any goals nor considered the consequences before doing things.

When something really happened, they would be easily scared off by just one person.

The man Chen Wudi had helped fell to the ground after losing his balance and got trampled by the crowd. He could not stand up again.

All of a sudden, someone whisper-shouted, "Let's take the food from those students since they can't fight back!"

They shifted their attention to Jiang Wu and her students immediately. The escapees all knew that Jiang Wu's group also had food on them!

Chapter 199 Jiang Wu turns superhuman!

The escapees who had gone hungry for two days acted as though they were under a spell. When they heard the word "food," everyone made a mad dash to Jiang Wu's group.

They had long since noticed this group of people. Although Jiang Wu and her students were on good terms with Ren Xiaosu's group, there was still a separation between them. Didn't the two groups also sit separately while eating?

But they did not understand that Jiang Wu was only trying to be independent so they would not become a burden to Ren Xiaosu's group.

Just as the crowd was about to make a rush for Jiang Wu and her students, Chen Wudi stepped forward to get between them. Since he had been instructed by his master to protect the campsite, he would have to do it even if a million troops descended down on them!

To Chen Wudi, the people in front of him were no longer escapees but heinous demons. From his point of view, their faces had turned to dark, smokey appearances, and their hands and feet had become animalistic claws.

But... before Chen Wudi could get in front of Jiang Wu, he saw her resolutely raise her pistol and shoot it into the crowd.

The people who bounded at her had shocked expressions on their faces. Someone fell to the ground after unexpectedly getting shot, and there was even an incredulous look on his face as he dropped to the ground. After the victim's heart got shot, his blood splattered out from the gunshot wound and stained Jiang Wu's fair cheeks blood red.

However, the students did not feel scared at the sight of this. Rather, they thought the bloodstains resembled plum blossoms in the snow.

The crowd got frightened off after hearing the second gunshot and retreated. Jiang Wu did not lower her pistol and panted heavily, as though dazed.

From the side, Ren Xiaosu watched the scene unfold. This world had even forced someone as nice as Jiang Wu into shooting and killing others?

Xiaoyu walked over and slowly removed the pistol from Jiang Wu's hand. Only then did Jiang Wu come back to her senses. Xiaoyu comforted, "Everything's going to be fine. Don't worry."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Jiang Wu and asked, "Are you scared?"

In the frozen, snowy lands, the flickering, red-orange campfire illuminated Jiang Wu's face very gently. Jiang Wu turned to Ren Xiaosu and said tearfully, "If I don't descend into the Underworld, who will?"

Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see the bloodstains that had been splattered on Jiang Wu starting to move involuntarily towards her hand. When they finally finished gathering in her hand, a crimson plum blossom was produced. It had formed into a single stalk of a single plum blossom in her hand, the petals of the flower all sharp as knives.

Following, all five plum blossom petals detached from the stalk and started hovering around Jiang Wu as though they were protecting her.

A faint breeze circulated around Jiang Wu as it made her soft hair flutter and come alive.

Ren Xiaosu threw a dry log at Jiang Wu as he had thought of something. The plum blossom petals apparently perceived it and crushed the log into pieces.

This time, it was Ren Xiaosu's turn to be stunned. He had never expected that Jiang Wu would become a superhuman with one shot from a gun.

Her students went over and looked at Jiang Wu happily. When they approached her, the plum blossom petals reattached themselves to the stalk in a way that resembled a bud waiting to bloom.

"Teacher, you've also become a supernatural being," the students said in elation.

Wang Fugui took out the pistol Ren Xiaosu gave him a long time ago. He looked at the pistol, then at the crowd who was fleeing. He was caught in a dilemma.

Ren Xiaosu snapped at him, "It has nothing to do with guns or killing others. It happened purely because her willpower has reached a transition point."

"Then can I reach my transition point as well?" Wang Fugui said with anticipation. Seeing how Wang Dalong kept doubting his family bloodline, Wang Fugui was really eager to prove himself.

Ren Xiaosu was tickled pink by Wang Fugui. "Don't think about all that irrelevant stuff. It's not like everyone can become a supernatural being. Even if you're not one, you can still live a good life."

At this moment, the escapees' group was keeping their distance in fear that Ren Xiaosu would seek them out to settle the score. It wasn't until this moment that they understood that the moral coercion and societal pressure that were effective in the stronghold were no longer effective here.

These were the wastelands, not the stronghold.

In the past, they believed that as long as they had more people on their side, and as long as they dared to kick up a fuss, they could definitely get things their way. They believed that as long as they had the

moral high ground, others would have to yield to them. But that was not the case out here in the wilderness, and Ren Xiaosu had fired a shot to make them learn.

Now that everyone was awake, Ren Xiaosu decided to gut the rabbit and roast it for everybody to have a taste of meat.

Some time ago, Xiaoyu discovered that meat sold in the stronghold was extremely expensive after first arriving there. Even imitation meat[1] was extremely expensive too. So they ended up having less meat to eat than before while living in the stronghold.

Since Ren Xiaosu knew how to hunt, he caught more wild animals in the wilderness to make up for the lack of meat in their diet.

In the earlier years, Ren Xiaosu's hunting targets were limited by his physical fitness and skills even if he knew how to hunt. But now, he was no longer constrained to just hunting for sparrows.

As the fatty meat of the plump rabbit roasted over the fire, Ren Xiaosu brought out some honey from his storage space. He made some cuts on the rabbit and applied honey to it. Very quickly, fats from the meat started dripping down bit by bit into the campfire.

The sight of this made the students on the other side salivate. But since Ren Xiaosu did not say they could eat it, they could only watch quietly as the rabbit cooked.

During their escape, Jiang Wu had been constantly reminding them that they would have to depend on themselves for everything and not rely on others for help.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Y'all can come over and have some too."

The students looked towards Jiang Wu with anticipation. "Teacher, can we?"

Jiang Wu smiled and nodded. "Go ahead, but remember to give thanks."

With just some barbecued meat, Ren Xiaosu managed to gain more than 40 gratitude tokens without much effort. Some students even thanked him several times in a single breath and were always sincere each time they said it.

Ren Xiaosu thought these well-educated students were way too well-mannered. "Hahaha, eat up, eat up!"

The group of students surrounded the campfire in great anticipation. Ren Xiaosu saw them holding their knees together as they sat by the side and swallowed hard.

When he saw the meat on the surface browning, he cut out a small piece of it for everyone to share. However, the students were all showing humility to each other and only cut a small piece from the shared portion for themselves before handing it to the next person.

Ren Xiaosu felt Jiang Wu had really taught them well.

The aroma of the meat drifted towards the escapees when the wind blew. The escapees could only sit there in a daze in the snow and smell the aroma but not eat the meat.

Not once had they thought about how if all of them worked together, they could easily catch some wild goats, wild pheasants, or wild ducks with the number of people they had. These creatures in the wilderness had multiplied to great numbers without any human interference. But the thought of gaining something for themselves through their own efforts had never crossed their minds.

One of Jiang Wu's students suddenly asked Ren Xiaosu while eating, "Can you please teach us how to hunt? Or how to use a gun? We would also like to rely on ourselves to find food so we can protect our teacher in the future."

[1] Restructured steak is a catch-all term to describe a class of imitation beef steaks made from smaller pieces of beef fused together by a binding agent.

Chapter 200 It wasn't my fault

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Your teacher just wants y'all to study hard so you can work in research or similar fields in the future. Wouldn't that be better?"

A student said, "But we can't always depend on others."

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Jiang Wu. "Alright, I'll teach y'all tomorrow."

"Thank you," the students said earnestly.

With this wave of thanks, he received another 20-odd gratitude tokens. Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt that his decision to bring these students along was one of the wisest decisions he had ever made!

Meanwhile, someone among the escapees asked in a soft voice, "Why don't we go and apologize to them?"

"How would that help?" someone wondered.

A middle-aged woman said, "If so many of us apologize to him, what more could he ask for?"

But in the end, still no one dared to say anything to Ren Xiaosu and company. They did not even have the courage to apologize.

However, the other escapees who were not involved in the attempts to take the rabbit for their own also kept a distance from the group that did. They feared they would end up becoming collateral damage if those people got punished later. But only a minority of the escapees were not involved, and they probably only made up 20% of the entire group. At that time, they maintained their rationality and stuck to their morals.

As it turned out, they were right. Although Ren Xiaosu had killed the perpetrators, he was still a little angry about the incident. In the middle of the night, he was still thinking about whether he should open up some Shadow Doors and drop snowballs over the campfires of those escapees to extinguish them.

However, the person whose fundamental values were rocked most was actually not Jiang Wu and her students, but Chen Wudi.

While divvying up the meat, Chen Wudi kept hold of a small stick as he sat on the edge of the campfire.

When Ren Xiaosu handed him some meat, he asked, "What's the matter?"

Chen Wudi thought for a little and said, "That group of people felt like a cloud of darkness trying to devour me."

The long-awaited palace finally spoke at this time. "Quest: Help Chen Wudi stabilize his mental state."

In fact, even if the palace did not say anything, Ren Xiaosu would still do it. However, the palace probably also recognized Chen Wudi's current state of mind and did not want him to be defeated by reality. Therefore, it assigned Ren Xiaosu a quest to help him.

But wasn't there something wrong with how the palace had phrased its words? By stabilizing his mental state... did it mean that it did not wish for Chen Wudi to get better?!

Ren Xiaosu thought for a long while before saying, "Humans are always being attacked by reality and the ugliness of their own species. Everyone will slowly begin to think that everything is meaningless. When that happens, they try to seek the light in the dark."

Chen Wudi was somewhat confused. "Master, what's wrong with this world?"

This time, Ren Xiaosu said in a serious tone, "But, Wudi, try to think about it differently. If you constantly feel that you're devoured by the darkness, wouldn't it mean that you are that light?"

Chen Wudi's eyes lit up. "Is that true, Master?"

"Yes."

"Quest complete. Awarded 1.0 Strength."

Currently, Ren Xiaosu's physical attributes reached 9.5 Strength and 6.1 Dexterity. He was still unable to accurately gauge how strong his punches were, but it became an even more terrifying power when they were amplified through his shadow clone.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not wish to gain any further Strength right now. He preferred having a few Basic Skill Duplication Scrolls so he could learn other people's cycling.

When the sky turned bright, Ren Xiaosu's group quickly packed up and prepared to set off. They had followed the large group of escapees because they were afraid of the wolves. But now that Ren Xiaosu realized the wolves were not going to attack them, he decided to speed up their journey. The earlier they could locate a new human settlement, the easier it would be for them to determine which direction Stronghold 88 was and readjust their route.

Ren Xiaosu did not intend to enter a new stronghold yet. He only wanted to ask around for directions in the town outside the stronghold so they could avoid getting into any conflict with the authority of the stronghold.

After all, there were a few too many supernatural beings in their group, so it was inevitable that the stronghold overseer would regard them as enemies.

It was only they who had eaten meat for their meals and had blankets to cover themselves with on this escape so far. The other escapees did not have such comforts at all.

Some of the escapees even had to resort to eating ice to quench their thirst. In the morning, a minority of the escapees' faces were flushed and their temperatures went up. In their current condition, they most probably would not get up anymore.

Ren Xiaosu knew that even the cleanest-looking snow in the wilderness had to be boiled for at least 15 minutes before it was safe for drinking.

Bacteria is one of the most deadly things in the wilderness. Just because they could not be seen, some people would ignore their existence.

A man whose face was flushed stood in front of Ren Xiaosu's group and blocked them from leaving. He begged, "Since you're all so well-prepared, you must have brought along some medicine like antibiotics or something, right? Please, give me some of it. Otherwise, I definitely won't survive for much longer."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Liuyuan. Then Yan Liuyuan said, "He was one of the troublemakers."

With that, Ren Xiaosu ignored the man and left him pleading behind them.

The man realized Jiang Wu would be kinder, so he turned to her and begged for help.

However, Jiang Wu was no longer the young and naïve teacher. She said to her students, "Let's hurry up and keep pace with the group. Remember this person. He tried to rob us of our things yesterday."

Along the way, Ren Xiaosu taught some wilderness survival techniques to the rest of the group. He said in a loud voice, "Right now, it's not the season for harvesting wild berries. But when you do encounter them, remember that 90% of the purple, blue, and black berries are edible, while 50% of the red, green, and yellow berries are edible. So if you're extremely hungry, it's better to find the purple, blue, and black berries to eat first..."

While the students rode on their bicycles, they felt that even though this young man was being ferried on the back of a bicycle, his back had become larger than life.

A little kid among the escapees shouted to an old lady next to him, "Grandma, I want to ride on a bike too. Get a bike for me!"

His grandmother, who had still been ordering people around, was stumped by her grandson's request. Her grandson shook off her hand and started crying, "You're not a good grandma. I want my mommy and daddy."

When the other escapees walked past them, nobody cared about what was happening. No one had any sympathy for them nor were they going to offer any help.

Along the frontier in the heavy snow, Xu Xianchu was slowly advancing against a violent blizzard with a black cauldron floating in front of him. The snow was so deep that it had already come up to his waist. If it weren't for his shadow clone carrying him, he probably wouldn't have walked any further.

Suddenly, a dozen-odd people camouflaged in white cloth got up out of the snow. While pointing their guns at the big black cauldron, one of them shouted into the wind, "We're the 3rd Combat Brigade of Stronghold 178! State your name and purpose!"

When Xu Xianchu heard the words "Stronghold 178," he couldn't be more overjoyed. He shouted, "I'm Xu Xianchu from Stronghold 113! I have a recommendation letter from Zhang Jinglin!"

The soldiers were stunned when they heard Zhang Jinglin's name. As they cautiously approached Xu Xianchu, one of them went over to take the letter from him while the others stood by for further instructions. Their guns were still pointed at Xu Xianchu's figure. It was just that the black cauldron and shadow clone felt a little strange to them. "Brother, you're a supernatural being, right? Why do you have two types of superpowers?"

The soldiers from the observation post buried under the snow seemed to understand supernatural beings very well. Xu Xianchu was stunned by that question. "I'm not sure either. But can't I have two superpowers?"

The person who questioned him read the letter and said to the person next to him, "It's really Commander Zhang's handwriting. The secret code in the letter is also correct."

Everyone nodded. "Brother, come with us!"

They then led him towards Stronghold 178 in the distance. Currently, the walls of Stronghold 178 were white. It looked like it was encased within a wall of solid ice, giving it a sense of time-worn dilapidation. But it still looked exceptionally magnificent nonetheless.

While they walked against the blizzard, someone asked, "Brother, did you come from Stronghold 113? That place is so far away!"

Xu Xianchu shouted into the wind, "I came out of Stronghold 113 and went to Stronghold 112. Then I was forced to go to Stronghold 109 before finally heading here."

The person next to him was stunned. "Brother, those strongholds you've been to are all gone now...."

Everyone around Xu Xianchu stopped in their tracks. It seemed like they were seriously considering whether they should still take him to Stronghold 178.

Xu Xianchu hesitated for a while before saying, "It wasn't my fault."

Creator's Thought

Dear readers,

Regarding the East/West Gate matters that affected which direction the Experimentals would attack from.

-Stronghold 113 is in the northeast of Stronghold 109.

-Experimentals attacked from the east gate.

-Ren Xiaosu's family moved from the east to the west of the stronghold.

-Li Shentan wreaked havoc in the Western District.

The wrong directions have been rectified.