

First Order 201

Chapter 201 Escapees form cliques

By evening, it stopped snowing.

As far as could be seen, there was snow everywhere in front of them. It felt like they had ventured out into another world.

A large field mouse crawled out of the ground and scurried through the snow, looking for food. It could smell the grains while it was still in its burrow. During winter, the animal's fur had grown much denser and made this field mouse look just like a furball.

However, before it could scurry far from its burrow, Ren Xiaosu, who was hiding in the snow behind it, suddenly pounced. Having been lying in the snow for a long time, the snow that fell on him had concealed the outline of his body and his breathing.

The plump field mouse was so shocked it instantly puffed up its fur. But it was too late for it to get back to its burrow.

Nowadays, field mice in the wilderness were extremely quick. If it were the average person, it would be impossible for them to catch it. However, a dagger came stabbing at the field mouse as though it knew beforehand where it was going, pinning the field mouse dead to the ground on the path leading back to its burrow.

Cheers broke out in the distance. Jiang Wu and her students were rubbing their hands in the cold weather and cheering with joy. They were going to have meat for dinner again tonight!

Ren Xiaosu walked over holding the field mouse by its leg. "It takes patience to hunt in the wilderness. The wild animals these days have become smarter. They won't fall for it if you just place some bait out there. If you do not have more patience than them, you'll end up going hungry."

It had just stopped snowing, but Ren Xiaosu had lain in the snow for several hours. Although he and Chen Wudi could go out to hunt for wild boars instead, that would not be a suitable hunting method to teach these students.

Ren Xiaosu's main purpose was still to teach and... earn their gratitude tokens.

After Ren Xiaosu finished sharing his experience, the students quickly thanked him with smiles on their faces. In just the short span of a day, Ren Xiaosu had gained more than 400 gratitude tokens by relying on the idolatry of these students.

He had always been trying his best to gain as many gratitude tokens as he could ever since he was assigned the side quest. In the end, Ren Xiaosu discovered that students were still the more gullible ones.

Ren Xiaosu had been worried that Jiang Wu had brought along too many students and it would delay their escape. But now he felt she had brought along too few students, resulting in him unable to earn more gratitude tokens at a faster rate.

Ren Xiaosu would patiently go out and teach the students how to hunt, set up traps, and raid squirrel nests every day. With everyone so well-fed during the escape, they looked much healthier, with rosy glows on their faces.

As he led the students back to their campsite, he said, "If you manage to find a squirrel nest during winter, it's a really great harvest. It's filled with all kinds of food that the squirrel has stockpiled for winter, so it'll definitely be enough to last you several meals at least. Furthermore, there isn't any worry of being poisoned by food that a squirrel would eat."

One of the students asked, "If we clear out the squirrel's food, how is the squirrel supposed to survive through the winter?"

Ren Xiaosu comforted, "If you just eat the squirrel as well, it won't have to survive through the winter."

When the students heard that, it made sense to them.

When Jiang Wu, who was slowly following them, heard how Ren Xiaosu was teaching her students, she was a little conflicted.

At the campsite, Yan Liuyuan and company had already set up a campfire. Meanwhile, the students were carrying more firewood over. With the fire able to burn for longer, they wouldn't have to feel so cold tonight.

The large group of escapees set up their campsite not far away. Now the escapees just followed Ren Xiaosu's group wherever they went. However, they did not dare approach them. But compared to the initial number of escapees who had escaped from the stronghold, only slightly less than half of them were still able to keep up with Ren Xiaosu's group.

Xiaoyu took the dagger from Ren Xiaosu and skillfully prepared the field mouse meat. After that, she cleaned off the blood on her hands with some snow.

Yan Liuyuan whispered to Ren Xiaosu, "The escapees have already started forming cliques. Just today, I discovered some people ordering others to do their work for them while they enjoyed the fruits of their labor."

"Mhm," Ren Xiaosu grunted as he sat at the edge of the campfire and tried to make the fire burn stronger by prodding it with a stick. He added some pine twigs to the fire and heard them crackle. He said, "Ignore them. Such things can't be avoided. At the beginning of an escape, everyone will constantly be on the run. But soon after, some of the smarter and more ruthless people will start making use of others. Such is human nature."

"In the past, they could live a proper life inside the stronghold by just following the rules and working daily. There were also many types of entertainment outlets for them to spend their money on. Although

they worked, they couldn't save much money. They would just repeat their lives day in, day out and have no time to think about other things," Ren Xiaosu continued. "But once they come out into the wilderness, they understand what this world is really like."

Then Ren Xiaosu sighed. "Those strongholds are like a world that the organizations have carefully designed for the residents."

Right at this moment, a fracas broke out in the escapees' group. Ren Xiaosu looked up and was surprised to see a few of the men attempting to catch a lone escapee.

That escapee broke free from their grasp and ran over to Ren Xiaosu's group.

"Bro, what should we do?" Yan Liuyuan asked.

"Let's wait and see how it turns out." Ren Xiaosu took the field mouse meat and roasted it over the fire.

The men ran over as they chased down the escapee. But halfway through, they came to a halt when they saw Ren Xiaosu, who was sitting next to the campfire.

The escapee had concealed herself very well. Although the people behind her had already stopped in their tracks, she continued running and stumbling around in the snow. Finally, she fell into the snow not far from Ren Xiaosu's group and stopped moving.

That escapee seemed to think that Ren Xiaosu's group would get alarmed by the disturbance, and someone would go over to help her up. But as it turned out, she ended up lying there for over an hour.

After some time, Chen Wudi, who was sitting at the edge of the campfire, couldn't help but say, "Master, someone's over there."

"Don't worry, she's just sleepy. Let her sleep for a while and don't disturb her," Ren Xiaosu said with a smile. The others might not know, but he could sense that the person lying in the snow had an irregular breathing rhythm.

An unconscious person wouldn't breathe that way. Furthermore, she even surreptitiously adjusted her posture just now when she apparently felt a little bit uncomfortable in that position.

A moment later, the person lying in the snow slowly got back up. She acted as though she had just regained consciousness. Then she removed the scarf on her head to reveal a beautiful face. Yan Liuyuan whispered, "It's a woman."

That woman stared blankly at Ren Xiaosu and the others. "Oh, how did I pass out here? Hello, I'm Fang Yujing."

Ren Xiaosu glanced at her. "Since you've regained consciousness, please go back to your side."

He was really not interested in a scheming person like her. Although she was beautiful, she was still not the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Don't you guys know who I am?" Fang Yujing was stunned.

Everyone in Ren Xiaosu's group speechlessly looked at each other next to the campfire. Ren Xiaosu said, "You might not believe it when I say this, but we really don't know who you are...."

Chapter 202 The Li Consortium's army

While Ren Xiaosu was still at Stronghold 109, he had heard of Fang Yujing and Cicada's names on a streetcar. At the time, he wondered if the celebrities of this stronghold were also members of the Saboteurs based on the situation with Luo Xinyu.

But later on, he felt that he was wrong to think that way. When the great disaster struck Stronghold 109, Luo Xinyu and Lu Yuan had specially waited for Yang Xiaojin in the wilderness for some time. However, no one else was in the vehicle. If these two celebrities were also members of the Saboteurs, they would have been taken by them back then.

Moreover, if Fang Yujing were a member of the Saboteurs, she would not need to approach him in such a manner. It would be just as how Luo Xinyu had greeted Ren Xiaosu openly after discovering he was her neighbor.

Right now, it seemed like the escapees who had started forming cliques had somehow learned of Fang Yujing's identity and wanted to get their hands on her. As a result, she approached Ren Xiaosu's group in a roundabout way to get his help.

No matter whether his deduction was right or wrong, Ren Xiaosu did not actually intend to bother with Fang Yujing's plight. If someone made immoral advances on the celebrity again after she went back, Chen Wudi would naturally give them a thrashing...

By this point, Ren Xiaosu fully entrusted Chen Wudi with doing all the good deeds. However, Ren Xiaosu still reminded Chen Wudi over and over to try his best not to reveal his superpower. He also told this to Jiang Wu as well.

When Jiang Wu awakened her power yesterday, no one noticed since the escapees were busy fleeing in panic. Therefore, they were just a group of normal people with guns in the eyes of the other escapees. This way, they would not attract any special attention from the corporations when they reached the next stronghold together. This was also the reason why Ren Xiaosu would rather use a gun instead of depending on his powers last night. After all, most of the organizations were not really friendly towards supernatural beings nowadays.

Then the faint rumbling of vehicles came from ahead of them. Ren Xiaosu looked up at the sound and was surprised to see a convoy of vehicles approaching them. On the sides of the vehicles, the logo of the Li Consortium's white spider could be seen.

In reality, it wasn't exactly a white spider. It was just a logo in the shape of a nanomachine that resembled a spider drawn with well-defined edges.

Ren Xiaosu frowned. The last thing he wanted to see now was the Li Consortium's people.

Hundreds of military transport trucks slowly came to a stop in front of the escapees, and all of their tires were fitted with snow chains.

A dozen or so combat platoons jumped out of the vehicles and slowly approached the group. The escapees were crying and shouting for help like their saviors had arrived. It was as though they had finally met their family members again.

The officer commanding the platoons asked coldly, "Where have you all come from?"

With tears streaming down his face, an escapee said, "Sir, we're residents of Stronghold 109. We escaped from there."

Another escapee said in elation, "Didn't I say? The rescue troops would definitely find us. The Li Consortium hasn't forgotten about us. Sir, do you have any food? We're on the verge of starving to death."

But the officer sneered, "I'm not here to save you all. We've been ordered to come to Stronghold 109 to annihilate the invaders. We were instructed to send everyone back to town at Stronghold 108. We aren't responsible for providing any meals to you."

The escapees were taken aback. "Aren't you going to give us any aid?"

The officer looked at the escapees and told the adjutant next to him, "Do a headcount of the escapees."

These armed troops of the consortium quickly did a headcount of everyone. But during the process, their guns remained pointed at the escapees to prevent them from rioting.

When the escapees who had been thinking of protesting against being treated like this saw the guns, they suddenly became as obedient as quails and did not dare say anything more.

When everyone saw the army arriving, they were overjoyed, like they had been reunited with their family members. But now they realized these people did not even care about them!

Someone finally could not hold back anymore. A young man walked to the front of the crowd and said, "My brother-in-law is a supervisor at Stronghold 108's Public Order Division. Kind sirs, please take me back with you. My brother-in-law will definitely reward all of you handsomely."

The officer said with a smile, "All civilians are strictly forbidden to pass through the strongholds now. Even if you all came back with us, you wouldn't be allowed to enter the stronghold. So it's better not to speak all those empty words. I hope you can recognize the situation you're in. You're all refugees from now on and no longer residents of a stronghold. Moreover, claiming that a lowly supervisor at the Public Order Division could reward those of us from the Li Consortium's army, isn't that too much of a brag?"

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he realized the Li Consortium had probably decided to implement stricter controls on people passing through the stronghold after the lesson at Stronghold 109. This was to prevent any further dangerous elements from getting into their strongholds.

However, this was exactly what Ren Xiaosu wanted as he did not intend to enter a stronghold that was controlled by the Li Consortium. Who knew what kind of dangerous plans Li Shentan was up to?

From the conversation, Ren Xiaosu could tell that soldiers who were under the direct jurisdiction of the Li Consortium had never thought much of the stronghold's management. This alone was enough to show just how important the army was to the entire consortium.

A man wondered, "Then what should we do when we go back? Are we only allowed to become refugees in town? We really are the stronghold's residents!"

The officer smiled. "You don't have to worry about having nowhere to go. Our Li Consortium has already started a new round of conscription. All of those who are of suitable age will be required to join the military. Who knows, some of you might end up working under me in the future. As for the women, they'll be sent to the factories to make military uniforms for the new recruits. Since it's wartime, there's no need for me to explain anything to you people."

Ren Xiaosu frowned. The Li Consortium was actually planning to draft soldiers? Surely he wasn't fucking going to get conscripted, right?! After the stronghold had been destroyed, the Li Consortium had lost an entire stronghold of combat troops. In order to face an increasingly dangerous world, it would only be natural for them to recruit more soldiers.

Moreover, several organizations were responsible for the destruction of Stronghold 109. If the Li Consortium wanted to seek revenge, they had to first expand their military strength.

However, Ren Xiaosu could never have expected that he would really get conscripted!

"Bro, what should we do?" Yan Liuyuan muttered.

At this moment, the officer said to the adjutant, "Call the private troops and tell them we've located the escapees. Get them over here to escort the escapees back, and make sure to watch over them carefully."

After a while, another dozen-odd military transport trucks arrived from behind them. Ren Xiaosu said, "There's nothing we can do now. Let's follow them to the town at Stronghold 108 first. We'll try to find a way to leave when there's a chance."

At this moment, it was definitely not practical for them to force an escape from here. If Ren Xiaosu was by himself, he could just leave as he wished. But if he were to go, what would become of Yan Liuyuan and the others?

The men and women boarded separate vehicles with the private army soldiers pointing their automatic rifles at them and keeping a close watch. It was as though they were afraid they would try to escape.

Before they went their separate ways, Ren Xiaosu looked at Jiang Wu and said, "It's your turn now to protect Xiaoyu while I protect the male students on my side. I'll leave the rest to y'all to watch out for your own safety."

Jiang Wu looked at him and said in a serious tone, "I will. You be careful as well."

After that conversation, Ren Xiaosu, Yan Liuyuan, Chen Wudi, and all the men boarded one of the trucks, while Xiaoyu, Jiang Wu, and the women boarded another.

Chapter 203 Exemption from military service

As the military transport truck rumbled along noisily, a cold, piercing wind blew through the exposed cargo bed, the knife wind cutting the passengers' faces.

At the beginning, what worried Ren Xiaosu the most was that these military transport trucks would transport the men and women to separate places, with the women being directly transported to the factory to work as female workers. However, that situation did not happen, and it allowed him to let out a temporary sigh of relief.

Wang Fugui said with a frown, "We couldn't bring our bicycles with us."

The moment he said that, Ren Xiaosu's face turned gloomy.

This was probably the first time their group had suffered such a significant loss since leaving Stronghold 113.

This was the wasteland. All belongings were but worldly possessions, where things got discarded at a whim. If that saying applied to human lives, it was even more so for bicycles!

In the current situation, even though Ren Xiaosu and Chen Wudi were both supernatural beings, it would still be extremely difficult for them to take on an entire unit.

Watching the Li Consortium's troops heading towards Stronghold 109, Ren Xiaosu felt that he might not see them anymore in the future. That was because he did not think those troops were a match for over a 1,000 Experimentals in urban warfare. Unless, of course, the Li Consortium resorted to using heavy weaponry to flatten the stronghold.

But a stronghold was built precisely for the resources around it. Would the Li Consortium be willing to completely give up on an entire stronghold just like that? They definitely would not. The price to pay was simply too great if they had to blow up an entire stronghold and rebuild it from scratch.

The trucks drove through the snow for seven to eight hours straight. During this period, some of the trucks in the convoy broke down several times. It was only at such times that the people in the trucks were allowed to get out to stretch and relieve themselves.

The private troops kept an eye on the escapees as though they were supervising prisoners. Ren Xiaosu exchanged glances with Xiaoyu and Jiang Wu from a distance, but they had no idea what the other party was trying to say.

After the trucks were repaired, the convoy continued on with its journey. During this time, Wang Fugui was striking up conversations with the soldiers, which was what he was best at. In just a short while, he was on very familiar terms with the soldiers who were assigned to watch over them.

When they got back into the truck, Wang Fugui whispered to Ren Xiaosu, "It seems that we're heading straight for the town outside Stronghold 108. I'm sure we all know what these soldiers are like. Once we get there, I'll see if I can get them to secretly exempt us from military and manual labor by offering them some money and antibiotics."

The "manual labor" was referring to the female escapees getting recruited to work in the factories.

With someone like Wang Fugui in the group, any news would not become too inaccessible for them. Ren Xiaosu and the others were not good at dealing with people, so Wang Fugui had to be the one to do

Ren Xiaosu asked in a whisper, "Did you ask them what the situation at the other Li Consortium strongholds is right now?"

"I asked, and everything is fine for now," Wang Fugui replied. "However, they're on full alert now. The Li Consortium has announced to the world that they're on wartime alert. It seems like war will be breaking out soon."

"It looks like they're not only gonna be dealing with the Experimentals this time." Ren Xiaosu sighed. If it were only about handling the problem of the Experimentals, there wouldn't be a need to raise the alert across a dozen-odd strongholds at once.

But where did the Li Consortium find the confidence to start a war? Surely they didn't intend to rely on their nanomachines, right?

Yang Xiaojin had mentioned that even though the research results that everyone had been trying to get their hands on did not get destroyed in time by the Li Consortium, they must have already transferred the research data through their own satellite network. So the Li Consortium's research was definitely not for nothing.

At the time, Ren Xiaosu even raised some doubts regarding the matter. If that were the case, the portable hard drive was probably left behind on purpose. If the Yang Consortium decided to use it, it would be better for them to inspect it first. Otherwise, it might turn out to be a trap.

Such was Ren Xiaosu's nature. While other people might not overthink things, he would be extra careful and alert as long as he felt there was something unusual.

As of now, the best solution was for them to use money to get an exemption from having to serve in the military and perform manual labor. The soldiers were swearing in the truck at having to come out to work in such cold weather. They were quite similar to the private troops in Ren Xiaosu's memory.

These troops were also very greedy and always thinking about money. In the truck, Wang Fugui quietly swapped the most valuable items to Ren Xiaosu so he could stuff them into his storage space. That would prevent the soldiers from getting any ideas in case they saw the valuable items they had.

The escapees in the truck had ashen looks on their faces. They thought they would be rescued once the Li Consortium's troops arrived. No one expected it would turn out like this. Going from a stronghold resident to a refugee—they were rather unable to accept such a fall from grace.

Just as they were about to arrive at the stronghold, the private army's convoy suddenly came to a halt. Then an officer who did not even bother wearing his beret properly said while tucking his thumbs in his belt, "Look, we also don't wish for all of you to suffer as soldiers or manual laborers, but it's not up to us since these orders came from above."

An escapee begged, "Sir, I've got problems with my knee. I really can't be a soldier."

A woman also begged, "We really don't know how to sew. We've never done anything like that before." With a smile, the officer of the private army said politely, "Don't worry, it'll be easy to pick up. However, I have another solution. I'm very familiar with Commander Li, who's in charge of the draft. If any of you have any ideas, I can put in a word for you. But it's certainly not enough to just talk about it. Let me make this clear: I do not stand to gain anything from this. All I'm trying to do is to plead on everyone's behalf."

Ren Xiaosu immediately knew that he was hinting at getting some bribes.

Someone immediately took off his wristwatch. "Sir, this watch is a Soaring Bird. I just bought it last year."

The officer immediately beamed and said, "Note his name... Is there anyone else who wants to be exempted from military or manual labor?"

Wang Fugui immediately went over and pulled the officer aside. "Sir, my name is Wang Fugui. I've got a 100 antibiotics and five branded watches over here. However, there are quite a few of us who would like to get exempted."

When the officer heard that he had a 100 antibiotics, his eyes popped out of their sockets. When he heard he was being offered five watches as well, his eyes shone brightly!

Wang Fugui said softly, "The thing is, we have more than 20 students in our group. Just think about it, what are students capable of doing? They won't be able to contribute at all. Besides, students are the foundation of our future. Wouldn't it be such a waste for them to become soldiers or female workers?"

The officer looked at Wang Fugui. "The female students can be exempted but the male students can't. To be honest, the bottom line is that all men of the right age must be conscripted. If I dare to overstep this line, I'll get executed tomorrow."

When Wang Fugui heard this, he started panicking. He couldn't care less about other people, but Ren Xiaosu definitely couldn't be conscripted. He pointed to Ren Xiaosu and said, "Didn't you just exempt someone from military service?"

"To be honest with you, the person who was exempted is too old and not within the conscription requirements at all," the officer said with a smile.

Old Wang could completely understand that manual labor could be exempted, but military service was unavoidable. The middle-aged man who handed over his watch had purely been taken for a sucker. He rephrased his words and said, "Look at that person over there. He might look young, but it's only

because he has kept his face well-maintained. I hope this won't make it sound like a joke, but he's actually my uncle."

"Fuck." The officer was chuckled. "Old Wang, can you be any more shameless than this? No means no. With these antibiotics and watches, I can only exempt the girls from their manual labor. But the men are all of suitable age, so they won't be exempted from military service."

Wang Fugui sighed. Wang Dalong and Yan Liuyuan did not have to be conscripted as they were too young. But based on the current situation, it was certain that Ren Xiaosu, Chen Wudi, and all eight of Jiang Wu's male students would have no choice but to serve in the military.

Chapter 204 Master, don't get too upset

Knowing the opportunity was hard to come by, Wang Fugui did not hesitate any further. He would have to handle the exemptions for Li Xiaoyu, Jiang Wu, and the rest of the female students from their manual labor first.

He went back over to Ren Xiaosu and told him about it. Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "It's already quite good that we can get an exemption from manual labor. You'll need to settle them in town after we get conscripted. If we decide to escape one day, it'll be easier for us to meet up when that time comes."

Right now, only ten people in their group were required to serve in the military. This consisted of Chen Wudi, Ren Xiaosu, and the eight male students. The remaining people would be allowed to stay in town for the time being.

Who could have everything go their way in a chaotic world like this? This was already a very good outcome.

After the soldiers finished receiving their bribes, they continued on their journey. After an hour, they finally arrived at the outside of Stronghold 108. To Ren Xiaosu's surprise, the town outside the stronghold was much livelier than the other towns he had been to.

Construction vehicles could be seen shuttling back and forth. There was even a huge military base stationed just outside the town. It seemed that the Li Consortium had already gathered a lot of its military forces outside Stronghold 108.

Although it was early morning, it was extremely busy outside the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. Even if Stronghold 108 was the closest to Stronghold 109 where the Experimentals now were, was it really necessary to gather so many troops here?

When they got out of the vehicles, the officer in charge of escorting them immediately instructed those who had paid bribes to run into town via a narrow trail to avoid getting drafted into manual labor. The remaining people were made to stay there to await further instructions.

The officer chuckled and said, "Let me introduce myself. My name is Li Qingzheng, and I'm going to bring you all over to the conscription office now for a physical examination. I'll secretly share some good news with you all. As long as you pass the test, you stand a chance of returning to the stronghold. In any case, I'm not that fortunate. But for you all, it's all up to your own luck."

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. Was this a normal physical? It could even decide whether a person would end up becoming a refugee or a stronghold resident?

They followed Li Qingzheng and came to a large military tent. At this moment, a group of people happened to be coming out of the tent. One of them said excitedly, "I can get into the stronghold! I can go live in the stronghold!"

Li Qingzheng was watching that man's excitement with a grimace. "What a lucky man. A refugee has been elevated in status just like that."

He looked at Ren Xiaosu and the others while explaining, "That person was previously a refugee from Stronghold 107's town. However, he's become a stronghold resident after being sent here and taking the physical. Interesting, right?" Ren Xiaosu stood outside the tent and looked at that man from behind. He suddenly felt that this physical examination was likely to be related to the Li Consortium's new technology.

Everyone stood in line and waited for their turn to enter the tents. Currently, the physical examination was being carried out in more than a dozen tents within the military base at the same time. Not only were there refugees undergoing the physical examination, but even the active servicemen of the Li Consortium were required to go through the physical examination again!

Ren Xiaosu went into one of the tents. However, the physical examination being carried out on the inside was not what he had expected. There were only several people dressed in white coats standing in front of an apparatus. The person undergoing the physical examination was required to sit on a stool that was attached to the apparatus. He was also wearing a metallic ring that was connected to some wires on his head.

A person in a white coat read the data and said, "Synchronization rate at 3%, fail."

The staff member next to him dismissed the person who was undergoing the physical examination. "You did not pass."

Ren Xiaosu slowly moved all the way to the back of the line. He kept having a feeling that something was off about this.

Li Qingzheng chuckled, "What, don't you want to get back into the stronghold? I heard you used to be a stronghold resident." Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "Aren't you a stronghold resident?"

"No, I only became a platoon commander because the private army's strength increased. But I was also a refugee before," Li Qingzheng said with a smile.

So it turned out that the Li Consortium was increasing its military strength all across the board. Even refugees were being recruited into the private army now.

At this moment, one of the people in the white coats said, "Synchronization rate at 81%, pass. Record this person's details into the personnel database."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "What does this 'synchronization rate' mean?"

"I'm not sure either." Li Qingzheng said, "Anyway, if you can pass the test, you'll be allowed into the stronghold. But if you fail it, you'll become one of my men."

The man who passed the test was an escapee who had fled together with Ren Xiaosu's group from Stronghold 109. He asked the doctor in disbelief, "Am I allowed to enter the stronghold?!"

The doctor in the white coat glanced at him and said indifferently, "Congratulations. Your name?"

"Hahaha, I can finally enter the stronghold!" the escapee said excitedly.

The doctor said impatiently, "Name, please?"

"Lin Qi! My name is Lin Qi!" the escapee answered excitedly.

Then someone took him away. One by one, the people in their group stepped forward for the physical examination. The synchronization rates of the eight male students basically fell between 40% and 60%, but the passing requirement was apparently much higher than that.

When it came to Chen Wudi's turn, the doctor frowned. "Synchronization rate at 1%. Why is it so low?"

But Chen Wudi seemed unaffected by the result. When the doctor asked him to leave, he asked Ren Xiaosu in a whisper, "Master, why is my synchronization rate only at 1% and so much lower than theirs?"

"It might be a test of whether your brain is functioning properly or not." Ren Xiaosu hesitated for a moment before replying. "It's only because there's something wrong with your brain that you scored 1%."

At this moment, the doctor urged Ren Xiaosu to come forward for his turn.

At one point in time, Ren Xiaosu felt that his synchronization rate would somehow turn out to be surprisingly high. But what if he got selected to enter the stronghold? He wasn't keen on entering the stronghold at all!

When Ren Xiaosu placed the metallic ring over his head, he felt like there were some barely discernible strands of silk threads trying to communicate with his mind. They felt like a physical presence in his mind, but before those threads could connect with the palace, they started snapping in quick succession!

A second later, the doctor opposite him said in a surprise, "Synchronization Rate at 0%?!" How can that be?"

Nearby, Chen Wudi said with a look of sarcasm, "Master, don't get too upset."

Ha ha...

Ren Xiaosu was confused. Was it because of the palace that his results were 0%?

Then the doctor said, "Record it. Neuron interfacing was a complete failure." He called out to the person after Ren Xiaosu, "Next."

If Ren Xiaosu had not said those words to Chen Wudi, he would definitely have been accepting of this result. But now, he found it really hard to swallow. Although he did not wish to pass this test, his score should at least be higher than Chen Wudi's, right?!

"Doctor," Ren Xiaosu said in a serious tone, "I think I can get a better result than that. There must be something wrong with the machine. How else could I have scored so low?"

The doctor shot him a look. "Don't waste the stronghold's resources. Next!"

As Ren Xiaosu got dragged out of the tent by Li Qingzheng and the others, he kept shouting, "Doctor, please give me another chance!"

The doctor in the tent said coldly, "I've seen loads of people like that. It's going to be the same no matter how many times they get tested. What a bunch of good-for-nothings."

However, when the next person sat down on the apparatus, the doctor froze. "Why is there no reaction? It's not displaying any data at all."

"Could the machine be faulty?" someone asked softly.

The doctor keyed in a 16-digit PIN on the apparatus to unlock the refrigerated chamber in the middle where a bottle of silvery, liquidlike substance could be seen.

The doctor puzzledly took another bottle of the "liquid" and replaced the one in the chamber. The machine was immediately restored back to normal.

He handed the bottle of "liquid" he took out of the machine to his assistant. "Send this back to the stronghold for checking. There might be some problems with this bottle of nanomachines."

Chapter 205 The outpost's new recruit, Ren Xiaosu

The synchronization test was being carried out across the entire Li Consortium. Not only were Ren Xiaosu and the others tested, but even the Li Consortium's own combat troops were also involved.

Looking in from outside the tent, Ren Xiaosu watched as those soldiers lined up and entered the tent. Whenever someone passed the synchronization test and got selected, others would come forward to congratulate them.

These troops from the Li Consortium should know exactly what they were being screened for. So seeing how they were all congratulating their comrades upon passing the test, it must be a matter that was extremely worth being happy about.

“Monitor, what is this synchronization screening about?” a student asked.

As they were all classmates, they continued addressing Ren Xiaosu as their class monitor, even calling him “teacher” sometimes.

Ren Xiaosu did not hide it from them. He gave it some thought before sharing his assumption with them. “The Li Consortium has made a breakthrough in nanorobotics and neurotechnology. It seems like they’re selecting suitable candidates as hosts for the nanomachines.”

Indeed, the Li Consortium had immediately put their nanorobotics technology into military use after they saw a breakthrough in their research. If it were really as Luo Lan had said, nanomachines could help humans gain a stronger skeletal structure, muscles, and even achieve other improvements. At that time, the Li Consortium would probably try to build an elite unit that was assisted by nanomachines.

However, Ren Xiaosu somehow felt that it would be extremely uncomfortable to have machines placed into his body.

The officer named Li Qingzheng looked at Ren Xiaosu and the others with a smile. “Everyone, follow me. We’ll go and handle the registration first. After that, you’ll all be my men starting from today. Stick with me, and we will have good food and wine together!”

Ren Xiaosu looked at him. At present, Li Qingzheng still wore his beret crookedly, while his collar was also unbuttoned. It was like he was just some ruffian. No, he was exactly what a real ruffian would look like.

Ren Xiaosu walked over and shook Li Qingzheng’s hand. At the same time, he stuffed two banknotes into his hand and said, “Pleased to meet you, Platoon Commander Li.”

Seeing how Ren Xiaosu understood the “rules,” Li Qingzheng beamed. “Don’t worry, everyone. I just become an officer, so let’s not have any bureaucracy between us. Let’s all be brothers from now on!”

With just two banknotes, their superior-subordinate relationship had now changed to a brotherly relationship. Ren Xiaosu asked, “Where are we heading now?”

“Let’s get all of your registrations completed first. Then we’ll head to an outpost at the front after getting your uniforms. The entire outpost will be all ours!” Li Qingzheng said in high spirits.

Ren Xiaosu had some doubts about this. Wasn’t Li Qingzheng just a platoon commander in the private troops. How could he possibly command an entire outpost?

“Aren’t we going to be carrying out our duties nearer to the stronghold?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“There are still some factories out there. We need to protect those factories from being attacked,” Li Qingzheng explained. “We’ll be fine. Y’all don’t have to worry at all. I’ve been practicing martial arts with the blacksmiths in town since childhood. I’m proficient in many types of boxing now.”

When Ren Xiaosu heard that, he did not exactly feel better. It was fine that he had to serve in the private army, but how did he end up getting drafted into such a haphazardly assembled group of soldiers?

Li Qingzheng looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, "Although you look a little skinny, have a really low synchronization rate, and don't look to be much of a soldier, you can rest assured that Big Brother Li here will protect you!"

"Mhm. Thanks, Big Brother Li," Ren Xiaosu said. After his Dexterity went up, he did look a little on the skinny side.

The students beside them all looked at one another, not knowing what to say. To them, it looked more like Li Qingzheng's brains would get smashed out of his head with just a single punch from Ren Xiaosu.

At this moment, seven other escapees in the group were also required to perform military service. These escapees looked grief-stricken. They had thought that refugees were the most inferior humans in the world and were only born to serve the stronghold residents. But they could never have expected they would end up becoming refugees themselves one day!

Since Ren Xiaosu was the one who paid the money, he was Li Qingzheng's brother. But these other escapees did not have any money on them to pay him with. Li Qingzheng looked at them with a different expression. "You people over there, hurry it up. Who are you trying to gain sympathy from with your crying? You'll feel better once we get to the outpost."

Originally, Li Qingzheng only had about a dozen soldiers under him. But now he had finally gathered up to a total of 30 soldiers to make up a full platoon.

Ren Xiaosu learned from Li Qingzheng that they were going to be serving under Eighth Platoon, the Iron Second Battalion of the private army.

At this moment, Li Qingzheng was still unaware of what kind of people had joined his unit.

Their group went and registered. When they were collecting their uniforms, the soldiers of the Logistics Division informed them there was a shortage of uniforms, and they would be issued at a later date.

Ren Xiaosu wondered just how big of an expansion the military was undertaking that they could not even afford to issue them with uniforms. Were they going to guard the outpost in their current attire?

Wasn't the conscription carried out too fucking hastily?! Even though the stronghold had expanded the size of the private army, they did not give them any priority. When it was time for them to collect their weapons, they were not even issued with firearms!

Along the way, he suddenly saw Yan Liuyuan standing outside the military base. Neither of them spoke, and Yan Liuyuan simply threw a note over the wooden fence. Ren Xiaosu opened it up and read: We've settled down in town. Everything is fine.

Ren Xiaosu could finally feel relieved.

At this moment, Li Qingzheng shouted from a military transport truck not far away, "Brothers, get in! We're setting off to the outpost!"

Ren Xiaosu walked to the truck after giving a nod to Yan Liuyuan. He was unsure of what kind of outpost he would be assigned to. The moment he figured out his situation, he would take Yan Liuyuan and the others away.

Meanwhile, the bottle of silvery, liquidlike nanomachines was being sent into the stronghold. A researcher draped in a white coat was standing in front of the stronghold's gate and having his ID checked. When the garrison guards saw his special identification papers, they immediately let him through. They even prepared an exclusive car for him to send him to Research Facility 613, located on the inside of the stronghold.

As the researcher sat in the car, he thought about something. Since their nanorobotics technology had become mature, it would still be justifiable if only one or two of the nanomachines were defective. But for an entire bottle to be defective was a little strange. The number of nanomachines contained within this bottle of silvery liquid was simply astronomical. They couldn't possibly all be defective, right?

Nanomachines were not exactly smaller than a nanometer. They would just have to ensure that their operating tentacles were in the range of nanoscale levels, with the individual body size of each nanomachine at approximately four nanometers.

What is a nanometer? A nanometer is equivalent to 0.000000001 meters. If this entire bottle of nanomachines were defective, then it would definitely not be due to a technical issue but some other reason.

He was extremely confused and also highly suspicious.

When he arrived at Research Facility 613, he walked straight into the research building and said to the secretary, "I would like to see Mr. Li!"

The pretty secretary adjusted her glasses. "If you have anything, just tell it to me. Mr. Li is very busy."

"We've encountered a minor problem with this thing here." The researcher said, "Please let Mr. Li know immediately."

"You can place it here with me and write down your contact information. I'll inform you when we get results. Multiple cases of defective nanomachines due to operational error have occurred across the various strongholds today. Mr. Li is busy handling all that right now," the pretty secretary said nonchalantly.

The researcher was stunned. The nanomachines were damaged due to operational error? But why did he somehow feel that their situation here was different? He clearly remembered that there was no mistake in the way he operated the machine!

He said in earnest, "I'll go back and wait for your news. But please make sure to explain to Mr. Li that there was no operational error with our bottle of nanomachines. The circumstances surrounding its failure were extremely suspicious!"

The secretary gave him a look and then pasted an "urgent" label on that bottle of nanomachines right before his eyes. Only then did the researcher give a sigh of relief. "Thank you!"

But what he did not know was that there were already hundreds of bottles of samples labeled "urgent" that had been sent into the laboratory.

Chapter 206 Middle of nowhere

The military transport truck slowly drove through the vast wilderness towards a mountainous region. Here, the mountains were not very high.

While the platoon sat in the back, Ren Xiaosu silently took note of their current position. This should be a place several dozen kilometers away from Stronghold 108.

When they passed by several factories along the way, Li Qingzheng introduced the place to them. "These are the Li Consortium's oil refineries, and our outpost is just up front. Our daily responsibility will be to observe any signs of approaching enemies. If there are, we have to report it immediately through the satellite phone."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "What do we do after reporting it?"

This question stumped Li Qingzheng. The higher-ups had not mentioned what actions to take after reporting an intrusion. Were they supposed to defend the place until reinforcements arrived or should they retreat?

It seemed like their task was just to keep watch and function as an early warning system.

But Ren Xiaosu felt they would be risking their lives by keeping watch here.

They were not issued with any uniforms or firearms. An entire platoon consisting of 30 people only had 11 automatic rifles and just over 20 magazines with them. What else could they be other than cannon fodder?

However, Li Qingzheng was not too worried about that. "Just think about it. A large contingent of soldiers from the combat troops have already been deployed to Stronghold 109. If there's any danger, they'll be the ones to handle it. What do we have to worry about?"

"What if other organizations start a war?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"That won't happen." Li Qingzheng waved it off and said, "How can there still be wars in this era? I've never witnessed a real war since the day I was born!"

When Ren Xiaosu heard that, he did not say anything more. Even the refugees were used to living in these peaceful times. Everyone always thought that war was something very far away from them, and even Ren Xiaosu also had such thoughts.

But Ren Xiaosu felt that something was not right. What if the Li Consortium initiated an attack on others? What if those frontline troops of the Li Consortium couldn't beat back the Experimentals?

If war was not coming, the Li Consortium would have no reason to mobilize so many troops. Moreover, the various organizations would also have spies planted inside the other strongholds. If the Li Consortium started ramping up its war preparations, that would make the other organizations nervous as well.

It was like they were all tied together by a single rope. If someone pulled too hard, it would tighten around the others. Once the rope snapped, war would break out.

"We've arrived!" Li Qingzheng shouted excitedly, "This will be our outpost from now on!"

When Ren Xiaosu jumped out of the truck, he was stunned after looking around at the place. He could only see a row of small, one-story houses standing on the hilltop in front of him with a big mountain behind. This was the middle of nowhere.

No one was in the outpost. It seemed like Eighth Platoon of the Iron Second was going to have this outpost all to themselves. It was no wonder Li Qingzheng could speak so pompously back then.

Li Qingzheng pointed at the top of the mountain as he stood on the flat ground of the outpost. "Every day, five of you will be on sentry duty on a rotating basis in the watchtower up there where you'll check for any signs of the enemy. If a situation crops up, report it immediately to the higher-ups."

"Is that all?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Right, there's nothing else." Li Qingzheng said with a smile, "Supplies will be delivered to us regularly, so we don't have to worry about anything at all. All we need to do is to keep a close eye on this direction."

"Who will come from this direction?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"How would I know?" Li Qingzheng was amused. "No one goes into those mountains, and neither will anyone come out from there. So we can all just rest assured that no one will attack us."

Ren Xiaosu made a rough guess of their current position. They should be situated at one of the northernmost outposts in the area controlled by the Li Consortium. Which organizations were to the north? The Qing Consortium or the Yang Consortium?

Ren Xiaosu asked him, "Do you know where Stronghold 88 is?"

Li Qingzheng was surprised. "I don't know."

Alright, Ren Xiaosu would just have to ask someone else when there was an opportunity. He should have asked Yang Xiaojin back then...

After everyone unloaded the supplies from the military transport truck, Ren Xiaosu estimated their supplies would only last the 30 of them seven days at most. He wondered if the subsequent resupply would be delivered on time. Seeing as the Li Consortium was busy on all fronts, who knew if they would forget about them over here.

When Li Qingzheng saw Ren Xiaosu's expression, he said with a smile, "Bro, I know y'all are looking to leave this place. But in the current circumstances, even if you escape back to town, you might not be able to leave with the others. There are many military bases stationed all over town, and there's so many of you as well, so how are you going to leave? Y'all will probably get caught and interrogated before you can even step out of there."

Ren Xiaosu realized that even though Li Qingzheng looked rather stupid, he was well aware of the situation. He clearly knew that Ren Xiaosu's mind was not present.

Li Qingzheng added, "I suggest you just stay here for now. If there's an opportunity in the future, I'll try to transfer you back to the town. Then you can get together more often with your relatives and friends."

Ren Xiaosu knew Li Qingzheng was hinting at more money, but he still thanked him anyway. "OK, I'm counting on you then, Platoon Commander Li."

"Haha, no need to be polite." Li Qingzheng said with a smile, "You can just stay at this outpost with no worries. If enemies really do come, I'll chase them away with my boxing. There's nothing for y'all to be afraid of."

Li Qingzheng had also found out that Ren Xiaosu and his group used to be students from Stronghold 109 and that Ren Xiaosu was the class monitor of the group. To him, it was normal that a group of students would feel afraid coming to such a place. As a big brother, he had to comfort them a little.

The students beside them did not say anything as they unloaded the supplies. They did not know what expression to make when they heard Li Qingzheng's words.

Right at this moment, Li Qingzheng laughed, "Y'all don't have to do this work. Just let the stronghold residents do it. Didn't they used to despise us refugees? It's time we let them experience the life of a refugee."

The students looked at Ren Xiaosu, who said to Li Qingzheng with a smile, "Let's work together instead." Although he also did not really like the stronghold residents, it was not enough to make him want to order the seven escapees around.

Li Qingzheng said with a smile beside him, "You students are really kind, but it's a shame you didn't pass the synchronization test. I heard that those who passed the test will become true elite troopers who can fight against a 100 opponents."

Ren Xiaosu was still skeptical about the idea of one person fighting against a 100. To be honest, he had his own path to follow. So he was not envious of those who had passed the test. The only problem was that he felt a little uncomfortable when he saw the compassionate look in Chen Wudi's eyes.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu looked up and saw the majestic Wolf King standing on the summit of a mountain and watching him quietly. He was shocked to realize the wolves were still following him.

When the Wolf King saw that Ren Xiaosu had noticed it, it did not avoid his eyes. After a while, it disappeared into the mountains. Li Qingzheng followed Ren Xiaosu's gaze and looked at the mountain as well, but he saw nothing there. "What are you looking at?"

Ren Xiaosu smiled. "Just enjoying the scenery."

Suddenly, wolves howled. Everyone jumped up in shock. Li Qingzheng said in panic, "There's actually wolves in those mountains?!"

But Ren Xiaosu did not feel any fear this time.

Chapter 207 Birth of the Lord of Wolves

The howling of wolves seemed to have struck some fear into the recruits at the outpost. A soldier asked, "Platoon Commander, what should we do? Why don't we run away!"

Li Qingzheng was in a dilemma. "But we'll become deserters if we run away now."

"It's better than getting eaten by the wolves." An escapee said, "You haven't seen how huge those things are, but we encountered them when we were escaping. They're even bigger than bison!"

"Are you serious?" Li Qingzheng had not seen any wolves in a long time. When he heard about how big the wolves were, he couldn't help feeling a little nervous. But as the platoon commander, he had to reassure everyone. "Don't be afraid. I did not train in martial arts for nothing. Besides, aren't we also equipped with guns?"

When the escapees heard the word "guns," they suddenly remembered that Ren Xiaosu and his group also had guns on them while fleeing from Stronghold 109. Moreover, their group was extremely intimidating at that time too.

Just as they were about to say something, they noticed Ren Xiaosu staring at them with an ambiguous smile. The escapees realized if they snitched on him, they would have nowhere to escape to! So they held back from speaking.

Furthermore, Li Qingzheng obviously disliked them as they used to be stronghold residents, so there were also no obligation for them to remind him.

For some reason, the escapees suddenly did not feel so scared anymore when they realized they were in the same outpost as Ren Xiaosu's group.

Eventually, Li Qingzheng and his original batch of soldiers were the only ones who were still afraid.

Li Qingzheng and his men held their guns for a long time and waited, but the wolves did not show up. He slowly felt more at ease and said, "Let's clean up the place first. I think those wolves are also afraid of us since we have more people and guns as well, so they don't dare to come here."

It looked like the outpost had been abandoned for a very long time. The pots and pans inside were all covered with a thick layer of dust. It would require a great deal of effort for them to clean up the place if they wanted to live in it.

The escapees did their chores in a trance. Li Qingzheng's attitude towards them made them feel inferior to refugees. It felt like they had become the lowest class of humanity in this world.

Ren Xiaosu had no sympathy for them, but he would not deliberately ostracize them either. The escapees knew he was a ruthless person, and they subconsciously wanted to get on better terms with him. Since Li Qingzheng did not like them, they would have to find another backer somehow.

Everyone was harboring their own thoughts in this small outpost out here. Only the students were busy working with great enthusiasm and performing their tasks with great efficiency.

Li Qingzheng was still a little unsettled because of the howling from the wolves. He kept considering whether he should call the private army's headquarters to ask for reinforcements. But when he finally made the call, he did not receive any help he was expecting even after being ridiculed by them. The person on the other end of the line also warned him not to make false reports of the enemy. Otherwise, they would court martial him.

When Li Qingzheng saw Ren Xiaosu continue cleaning with the students like nothing had happened, he asked, "Aren't y'all scared?"

Ren Xiaosu hesitated for a moment before saying, "Oh yes, I'm so scared."

The students nodded quickly in unison. "Yeah, we're really scared."

Li Qingzheng felt that Ren Xiaosu and the students were just mollifying him. In reality, Ren Xiaosu had already told the students in private while they were escaping that the wolves would not attack them. Although the students did not know why Ren Xiaosu said that, Ren Xiaosu was proven right.

Since Ren Xiaosu was not worried, what was there for them to be worried about?

Ren Xiaosu asked Li Qingzheng, "Platoon Commander, why did you choose to be a soldier?"

"For the pay, of course!" Li Qingzheng explained, "If I were rich, who would be willing to come to this godforsaken place and be a soldier? Have you heard yet? The Pyro Company is offering to buy the blood of supernatural beings. You can get 1 million yuan in exchange for a drop of blood! If I were a supernatural being, I would sell my blood every day until the Pyro Company goes bankrupt!"

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. Who in the right mind would risk selling their blood just to earn some money after becoming a supernatural being?

After cleaning up the place, everyone stared at each other blankly, as they were unsure of what to do next. But in actual fact, this was just how it was in a remote outpost like this. Boredom was simply a part of their daily lives.

At this moment, Li Qingzheng let out a sigh and said, "To be honest, it's such a pity for you stronghold students to come here to be sentries. With all the knowledge that you have, there's nowhere you can apply it to. Y'all have studied for over a decade for nothing."

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. He had heard from Jiang Wu before that she hoped the students could further their studies in the future, and that these children were all fine saplings who studied very hard and were also very smart.

He looked at the remaining eight students and suddenly said, "I have some textbooks with me. Starting from today, y'all can study by yourselves whenever you have free time. If there's a chance, I'll buy some advanced textbooks from town for y'all. Even though we're now in a place like this, you can't fall behind in your studies."

The students were stunned. "We're going to self-study here?"

They were more interested in learning how to hunt, how to protect themselves, and how to protect others now, rather than continue their education.

After experiencing the cruelty of this world, the students' thoughts on education had started to waver. Sometimes, they would wonder if education was even useful at all.

Ren Xiaosu explained patiently, "I'm your class monitor. Back then, the student councilor said that it's the duty of the monitor to ensure that everyone studies hard."

The students could not find any words to refute him with. Then Ren Xiaosu continued, "In life, your friends might betray you one day, or your lover could betray you; but math, physics, and chemistry will not."

The students were dumbfounded. What kinda nonsensical crap was that!

Ren Xiaosu whispered to them a promise. "Study hard, and I'll take y'all to the mountains to practice shooting firearms tomorrow!"

This time, the students broke out with smiles.

Looking at these students, Ren Xiaosu got the thought that the Yang Consortium was probably also making use of this time to research the nanomachines. If there were no repercussions from its usage, it might be a good idea to give these students some self-protection abilities using the nanomachines.

The next morning, Ren Xiaosu was still sleeping in the house when he heard Li Qingzheng shout from outside, "Quick, come out and have a look!"

Ren Xiaosu put on his clothes and went outside to have a look. He saw a goat lying at the door of one of the houses in the outpost. He also noticed some packed snow in front of the door where a neat row of large wolf prints could be seen.

Ren Xiaosu immediately looked around and saw the Wolf King up on the summit of the mountain again. When it saw Ren Xiaosu looking over, it turned around and disappeared into the wilderness. It was as though it had stood there just to greet him.

This goat was as large as a domesticated cow, and it would probably take several days for everyone at the outpost to finish eating it.

Even though there were some changes to domesticated animals nowadays, they were not as great as the changes seen in the wild. The wolves must have hunted this goat in the mountains.

While Ren Xiaosu was thinking about that, Li Qingzheng was belly laughing. "I never expected the wolves would offer tribute and bow down before me after I arrived at this mountain. Don't address me as Platoon Commander Li anymore. Call me the Lord of Wolves instead!"

Ren Xiaosu's eyes twitched. This fellow was too good at elevating his own status.

Off to the side, Chen Wudi was wondering if he should beat up Li Qingzheng since the title "Lord of Wolves" sounded like a demon name.

Chapter 208 Don't believe in superstitions

"Platoon Commander, what should we do with the goat?" someone asked.

Li Qingzheng cut in, "Don't address me as Platoon Commander, call me the Lord of Wolves! What is the name of the mountain we're at? Oh yes, it's Mount Kun! I shall be known as the Lord of Wolves of Mount Kun from now on!"

Off to the side, Chen Wudi asked, "Master, should I subdue this demon?"

"Not for now, no," Ren Xiaosu replied.

Chen Wudi understood that Ren Xiaosu meant that Li Qingzheng might have to be subdued at some later point. "Master, when can we eat some goat?" He slurped.

"How about now?" When Ren Xiaosu heard Chen Wudi slurping, his expression nearly turned dark.

As the group prepared to cut the goat up and make the campfire, the male student named Wang Yuchi looked at Ren Xiaosu curiously. He lowered his voice and asked, "Monitor, when the wolves last appeared, you brought back such a large rabbit so quickly in the heavy snow. When the wolves appeared this time, they took the initiative and gave us a goat. Isn't that too much of a coincidence?"

Chen Wudi and the students all looked at Ren Xiaosu. Wang Yuchi had spoken quietly enough that only their group heard it.

Ren Xiaosu could only look at them and say with a laugh, "Haha, it truly is a coincidence." Since the situation had come to this, he could only claim it was a coincidence.

Wang Yuchi wondered, "Monitor, did the wolves present you with the rabbit as well? Was that why you said we didn't have to worry about them?"

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that these students were indeed smart. They could figure out the truth with so few details. He whispered, "Don't say that to anyone else."

After all, it would cause somewhat of a sensation if there were any mention of his interaction with the wolves. Since Li Qingzheng was willing to be the scapegoat, Ren Xiaosu was more than happy to let him do it.

But Wang Yuchi said, "Do we need to give anything in return?"

"I don't think so." Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "We don't really have anything that we can give them anyway."

On the same night, the entire platoon sat down beside the campfire at the entrance of the outpost. With the aroma of the roasted goat attacking their nostrils, the escapees started tearing up as they bit into the meat. These people had been starving for many days, and no one gave them any food even after they were conscripted into the military.

Li Qingzheng and his soldiers were refugees who had been recruited during the expansion of the private troops and were also unable to afford meat for their past meals. He lamented, "Actually, I felt terrible when I first learned I had been assigned to the outpost. After all, this is such a nowhere place that it feels like we're being exiled. If we encounter any danger out here, we'll just end up becoming cannon fodder."

Ren Xiaosu gave him a look. He didn't expect Li Qingzheng to understand their situation so well, and that he was actually just not showing it.

Li Qingzheng continued to lament, "But thinking about it now, it's really quite nice if we could have meat for all of our meals. The smell of goat meat is really great!"

"We can go out and hunt since we have guns," Ren Xiaosu suggested.

"But we'll need our guns to fight against the enemy." Li Qingzheng rejected his suggestion.

Ren Xiaosu analyzed, "Look, we only have a dozen guns or so. What can we do with a dozen guns when the enemy arrives?"

"That really seems to be the case," Li Qingzheng replied after some thought.

The students next to them realized Ren Xiaosu seemed to have a unique flair in persuading others.

Li Qingzheng was gnawing on goat leg and said with a smile, "I heard that the big shots in the stronghold can have barbecue for every meal. They even prepare lemons and onions before barbecuing the meat, only cooking it to medium rare so that the original juices are retained!"

Although lemons were uncommon these days, everyone had heard of this type of fruit. They never ate it before, but they heard that lemons were extremely sour. Onions, on the other hand, were still commonly seen.

Chen Wudi asked in a soft whisper, "Master, why do you need lemons and onions for a barbecue?"

Ren Xiaosu pondered it before saying, "So that you can squirt the lemon juice or rub the onions into other people's eyes to get dibs on the meat?"

Chen Wudi was confused.

The people around him looked over with expressionless faces. Li Qingzheng said, sounding rather surprised, "Are you serious..."

But all of a sudden, Li Qingzheng noticed the light from a vehicle heading up the mountain. He stood up immediately. "Why would anyone come to this remote place at this hour of the night?"

A lone off-road vehicle was approaching them. Venturing out in this current wilderness with so few people was usually not too confidence inspiring. Under normal circumstances, most people would choose to travel in convoys. So the appearance of this lone off-road vehicle made the situation seem even stranger.

Everyone at the outpost stood at the entrance. Li Qingzheng and other soldiers who were issued with guns were even carrying them on their backs.

When the off-road vehicle arrived at the entrance of the outpost, the dazzling headlights of the vehicle shone directly in the faces of Ren Xiaosu and the others. It was as though they did not care about how they felt.

When two people jumped out of the vehicle, Ren Xiaosu saw they were both wearing the Li Consortium's military uniforms. But from the looks of it, the fabric was much more exquisite than the ones he had come across in the past.

No. Actually, he had seen it once before. The commander of the combat brigade was dressed just like the two of them.

But when Li Qingzheng saw the colonel epaulets on their shoulders, he saluted. "Sirs, we welcome you to our outpost for inspection." The two officers had fair complexions and looked dignified. When they stepped onto the snow in their leather boots, they made crunching sounds. They were even wearing black leather gloves. However, the two men looked exceptionally young. When one of them saw the roasted goat, he said with a smile, "I didn't expect you all to be enjoying this so much. After inspecting several dozen outposts, we noticed all of them were having difficulties just getting by. It's only you guys here who are living so comfortably. Bring two chairs over for us." After he said that, he walked into the

outpost with the other officer. Li Qingzheng got someone to bring out two chairs for these two officers while he prepared to sit on the ground.

But just as his buttocks touched the ground, that officer suddenly frowned and said, "Did we say you could sit? Stand to the side!"

He took off his gloves and started cutting some meat from the goat. After taking a bite, he frowned and said, "You didn't even season it properly! This tastes horrible. Ptui!"

Ren Xiaosu watched this guy spit out the meat in his mouth along with some saliva onto the roasted goat. How were the rest of them supposed to eat it now?!

But his first reaction was... to stop Chen Wudi. Ren Xiaosu whispered, "Don't be rash. I'll kill them later when no one is around."

With the illumination of the campfire, Ren Xiaosu suddenly saw a silvery gleam underneath the officers' eyes. He thought they might have something to fall back on. Why else would the two of them venture out this late at night? It didn't even seem like they had brought any heavy weapons with them.

The two officers wiped their hands on the snow and put their leather gloves back on. The lead officer said calmly, "Keep a careful watch at the outpost. If you see any enemies approaching, remember to report it immediately. If there is any delay, all of you will be brought in for a court martial. There can only be one outcome then, execution!"

Li Qingzheng bowed slightly as he nodded and said, "Yes, yes, we'll keep a careful watch here at the outpost."

As the two men spoke, they got back into the vehicle. With a roar, the vehicle moved off and left behind deep tracks in the snow with its snow chains.

The two of them had trashed the originally good mood everyone was in. Someone asked, "Are we going to let them leave just like that?"

Li Qingzheng could only helplessly wave it off. "Put out the fire and go to bed. What else can we do if we don't let them leave? Just blame it on our shitty lives. They're family members of the Li Consortium, after

all!"

"What about the goat?" someone asked.

"We can still eat it after cutting off the parts they spat on," Li Qingzheng replied. As refugees, they had had a certain submissiveness hammered into their characters. So what if they were angry and feeling wronged? Life would still go on.

He then walked into his house. Ren Xiaosu looked at the others and said, "Y'all can go to sleep first. We'll tidy up the place."

By “we,” he was referring to their smaller group consisting of himself, Chen Wudi, and the students, which they themselves were fully aware of. But since the students were always diligent at doing their work, no one thought anything of it.

When everyone else returned to their houses to rest, Ren Xiaosu said, “Y’all take your time to tidy up. I’ll head out for a while.”

When the students heard that, their eyes lit up. “Good on you, Monitor!”

The off-road vehicle was moving slowly along the mountain road. Even though the vehicle was equipped with snow chains, they could not drive too fast in the snow, especially not when they were driving downhill.

Jazz music was playing inside the vehicle while the officer in the front seat chuckled as he put in another cassette. “You can really feel the control the Li Consortium has over these lands when you see the fear in those people’s eyes.”

“It’s really quite interesting to see them angry but not dare to show it.”

“After we get back this time, we should be able to step up for the second stage of synchronization. By then, even more nanomachines can be injected into our bodies. Apparently, a family member of the Li Consortium in Stronghold 107 has already gone on to the second stage of the process.”

“There’s no hurry. We’re only just beginning.” The family members of the organization were all outstanding and intelligent. They received the best education and understood the truest face of the world. If all the roads in the world led to Rome, they would be born in Rome.

But since the Li Consortium could even produce a demon like Li Shentan, they could create even more of such demons. The only difference was that one of them was lonely while the others were not.

During their conversation, something suddenly dropped down from above. They looked astounded but managed to react quickly enough to open the door and jump out at the same time!

With a loud bang, the shadow clone landed on the off-road vehicle from above and smashed right through the middle. The sparks from the black saber cutting through the vehicle were extraordinarily striking in the darkness!

Ren Xiaosu watched this scene quietly from the hillside. But to his surprise, the reactions of the two officers were much quicker than he expected. Furthermore, they should be showing signs of fractures and other injuries after jumping out of the vehicle into the hilly terrain. However, they were unscathed!

The two officers got up from the ground and dusted off the snow on their bodies. One of them sneered, “Could it be someone from the outpost?”

They were not stupid. Anyone who would attack them in a place like this would definitely have to be from the outpost. But they could never have expected there to actually be a supernatural being posted to that shabby outpost back there.

As an officer took off his gloves, he could feel a silver torrent gushing through his veins. The new nanoforms followed his will and gathered within his body until even his blood turned silver.

“You’re the first supernatural being to face our newfound strength, so you should feel honored—”

His voice stopped abruptly. He only had enough time to see the black shadow clone suddenly disappear from above the vehicle before a menacing hand grasped him by the neck. With a slight twist, his neck was broken.

Ren Xiaosu found it a shame that Luo Lan was not here to see this. Didn’t he tell him to not believe in superstitions?

When the shadow clone disappeared from sight again, the other officer turned around and tried to escape into the wilderness. However, he was immediately chased down by the shadow clone from behind.

The shadow clone punched the spine of its opponent, making a cracking sound. Ren Xiaosu felt some sort of special energy surrounding the spine that was trying to disperse the weight of the punch with an intense, regular motion. However, the strength of the shadow clone was simply too great! Before the opponent could build up his defense, it had already started to break apart.

Ren Xiaosu slowly made his way out of the forest. He had noticed a lake on the hillside that was suitable for discarding the corpses and vehicle in. It was just that it would be a bit tough on the shadow clone to carry the vehicle over. After all, it did weigh more than a ton.

Ren Xiaosu did not use his saber throughout the battle because he was worried about leaving bloodstains behind. In the end, his opponents turned out to be surprisingly vulnerable. At the beginning, the arrogance of these two people made Ren Xiaosu very cautious of them. He did not expect that his punches would be so strong against them.

Just like his encounter with Midnight back then, he had planned on giving it his all in an earth-shattering battle. But before he could even get to that point, his opponents had already been killed. With the outcome like this, it seemed like he had gotten all stoked for nothing...

But a moment later, Ren Xiaosu saw a silvery glow seeping out from under the skin of the two bodies. It was as though it was being guided by his will. Ren Xiaosu was surprised to discover that he seemed to be able to... control them.

Chapter 209 Returning the favor

When Ren Xiaosu battled the two officers, he had observed a fine, silvery glow coming from the blood vessels on the backs of their hands. As the blood vessels of an ordinary human should look bluish on the outside, it was obvious there was some kind of special energy flowing within their bodies during the time their hands glowed from the inside. At that time, Ren Xiaosu was guessing it was caused by the nanomachines. And from the looks of it now, it was just as he had thought.

The silvery radiance emanating from the two officers’ bodies right now was like a stream converging into a river as it started building up on the surface of their skins. Ren Xiaosu was hesitating, approaching it warily, not knowing if he should try to acquire this unknown power.

He had always been cautious about the unknown.

'If I end up using it after saying to not believe in superstitions, would that be a little hypocritical?' Ren Xiaosu was in a dilemma.

During the physical examination at the military base, he discovered that the nanomachines were trying to interface with his neurons via an external controller. But now that no one was controlling them, he realized he had natural control over these things.

Nanomachines did not have a mind of their own and were only machines. In the early days, nanomachines could not be put into military use because they were too small to be loaded in with overly complex instructions.

After gaining a breakthrough in neurotech, the human brain ended up becoming a processor, while the nanomachines were just an execution terminal. To put it simply, they were purely tools to be used.

But nanomachines needed to be paired with a specific DNA sequence before they could be used. Each person's DNA was just like a unique password that could only be used to pair with their own nanomachines. The nanomachines would determine whether they were in an operable state via an authorization process. The paired nanomachines were a safe locked with a password. Without the password, they would stop working and refuse any unfamiliar consciousness from trying to access them. Therefore, the two officers were unable to control each other's nanomachines, and neither could anyone else access theirs.

But when Ren Xiaosu's willpower tried to initiate contact with the nanomachines, he detected them to be in an idle state. It was as though there were some sort of a barrier denying him from syncing with those nanomachines.

But after his willpower swept over them, the typewriter in the palace suddenly typed several lines of small words.

"Reloading system..."

"Resetting to factory settings..."

"Reinstalling applications..."

"Pairing successful."

After that, Ren Xiaosu found he had actually taken control of these little machines.

The silvery "river" started flowing towards him across the surface of the snow. They moved up along his legs and finally gathered in his hands. The nanomachines extracted from these two officers combined only amounted to the size of a fist.

It was no wonder they were so weak. So it turned out they had this few nanomachines inside their bodies?

After the nanomachines lost their owners, their ports reopened to wait for a new pairing. Under normal circumstances, they should have been sent back to the factory to be paired again. However, the palace had bypassed all of those steps and helped Ren Xiaosu interface with these nanomachines.

If the ports had not been reopened, the palace could not have proceeded with the pairing process.

The silvery, liquid-metal ball cycled through various strange forms within Ren Xiaosu's palm. Then it turned into a metallic gauntlet that wrapped around Ren Xiaosu's hand. After interfacing with Ren Xiaosu's neurons, they became just like a part of his body and did not make him feel uncomfortable at all.

When he threw a punch at the body of the off-road vehicle, he watched the steel body creak and then collapse. Meanwhile, the nanogauntlet on Ren Xiaosu's hand did not seem damaged at all.

When Luo Lan mentioned the nanomachines, Ren Xiaosu disdained them greatly. But now his opinion had changed a little.

If he could create body armor with the nanomachines, did it mean he wouldn't have to use the shadow clone to shield himself from bullets? After all, that method was still rather painful for him.

Of course, it had only changed his opinion a little for now. As for whether it would really prove to be useful, Ren Xiaosu felt that he would only find out after extracting more nanomachines from the other members of the Li Consortium.

Someone would surely come and investigate after two elite members of the Li Consortium disappeared while they were out on inspection. Ren Xiaosu wondered if those who came to investigate would also have nanomachines in them.

Ren Xiaosu ordered the shadow clone to place the two corpses in the vehicle and carry it to the location of the lake as per his memory. He had to be extremely careful when it came to dumping these corpses since he still needed more people with nanomachines to come out here in the future.

When he killed them, he did not use the saber as he was afraid of leaving behind any traces of blood. Right now, he was being even more careful for fear of leaving behind any evidence.

As Ren Xiaosu led his shadow clone forward, he asked, "Old Xu, do you think the amount of nanomachines in the body varies from person to person?"

"Since the synchronization rate goes from low to high, there must be a difference in the amount of nanomachines one can control, right?"

"Do you think that the next group of people to arrive will be even stronger? That would be good. Who knows, they might have even more nanomachines in their bodies... "Aren't you being a little shy? Why aren't you talking?"

People always said that small details make a big difference. So, in order not to expose his own identity, Ren Xiaosu decided to name his shadow clone "Old Xu."

Before Ren Xiaosu threw the vehicle into the lake, he removed the two officers' uniforms and put them away in his storage space. Who knew if they would be of any use later? These were the Li Consortium's colonel uniforms, after all.

After he filled the vehicle with stones and threw it into the lake, he returned to the outpost. When the students saw him coming back, they went up to him and asked, "Monitor, how'd it go?"

"It's been taken care of," Ren Xiaosu answered simply and comprehensively. "Go back to sleep. We still have to get up early tomorrow."

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu noticed the Wolf King standing on the summit of the mountain way in the distance. He thought for a while before heading out into the mountains.

In reality, Ren Xiaosu also did not know why he was so eager to interact with the Wolf King. As he walked on the mountain path, he suddenly felt it was sometimes easier to get along with the wolves than with people.

Before Ren Xiaosu could get far, he saw the Wolf King slowly coming down from the mountain ridge. He had planned on chatting with the Wolf King, but he did not know what to say after he saw it.

As the Wolf King looked calmly at him, Ren Xiaosu thought about how it was still chasing him all over the wilderness just one and a half years ago.

He suddenly remembered the student who mentioned giving the wolves something in return for their favor. Ren Xiaosu opened his mouth and broke the deadlock. He said, "Um... since you gave me a rabbit and a goat, shouldn't I also give you something in return?"

The Wolf King did not say anything, but Ren Xiaosu could feel it relaxing its muscles slowly. This meant the Wolf King was also putting down its guard.

When Ren Xiaosu saw no response, he prodded, "Since you can't speak, why don't I let you choose from a few gifts that I have? Look at you, you're always running around by yourself in the mountains. I can understand that a king is always lonely, so why don't I present you the Lord of Wolves of Mount Kun? He can chat with you since both of you are considered 'kings' of the wolves. Who knows, you two might have something in common."

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu felt the Wolf King understood him! Because, when he mentioned the Lord of Wolves of Mount Kun, the Wolf King immediately gave a look of disdain. Ren Xiaosu wondered how the Wolf King was even able to make such an expression!

Chapter 210 Trade complete

When Ren Xiaosu looked at the Wolf King's strange expression, he said, "If you don't want the Lord of Wolves of Mount Kun, I still have other things that I can offer you." He took out a pistol and asked, "Do you want this?"

The Wolf King kept quiet as it reverted back to its calm expression.

Ren Xiaosu put away the gun. A man and a wolf were sitting next to each other on this mountain path with the moonlight shining down upon them. It was an atmosphere that could only be described as exceptionally harmonious.

“Do you want this?” Ren Xiaosu took out a bottle of antibiotics Old Wang gave him before they parted ways. Although he did not fall sick as often now, he could use it to save the students in case they fell ill.

However, the Wolf King still did not respond.

Ren Xiaosu pulled out a dazzling array of items like a hammer, shovel, pot, etc., but the Wolf King still remained unmoved. Ren Xiaosu sighed, “If you are gonna be so picky, I won’t be able to return your favor.”

Wait a minute! He still had one item he didn’t take out. At this moment, Ren Xiaosu brought out a vial of black medicine from his storage space. “Do you want this?”

When Ren Xiaosu said this, he did not hold any high hopes while pulling the stopper off the vial. But when the Wolf King sniffed and caught a whiff of the smell in the air, it suddenly nodded to Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu was momentarily taken aback as he did not expect the Wolf King to really understand human language.

He threw the vial over and the Wolf King picked it up with its mouth as it got up. Ren Xiaosu could finally let out a sigh of relief. It looked like they were not going to be lacking any meat from now on. “I never expected that you’d need something like this while in the prime of your life.”

When the Wolf King heard that, it looked a little confused. It didn’t seem like it realized what Ren Xiaosu had just given it. It was just that there was an inexplicably attractive smell emanating from the vial into the air. It was not the smell of the medicine that attracted it, but a smell of mystery that originated from the palace.

Then the man and the wolf parted ways. After a brief exchange, Ren Xiaosu felt that his relationship with the Wolf King had become a little closer. At the very least, they were now trading partners or something like that. As long as they were not enemies, anything was fine.

In the wee hours of the same night, everyone at the outpost was jolted awake by the noisy howling of the wolves. Everyone put on their clothes as they walked out of their houses and looked towards the mountains. They could not tell where the howling was coming from.

Li Qingzheng was wearing a military overcoat and wondered, “What’s the matter with those wolves in the middle of the night? They’ve been howling for over an hour already. Are they out on a hunt?”

Ren Xiaosu felt a little guilty. “They probably are. Who knows?”

“Could they be gathering their allies to attack the outpost?” someone wondered.

“That’s unlikely. They wouldn’t need to gather their allies to attack our outpost. We’ll all be dead if just a few hundred of them came to attack us,” someone said.

“Aren’t we putting ourselves down too much by saying that?” a soldier said.

Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, “That’s what you call self-awareness...”

However, Ren Xiaosu felt a little guilty because he suspected it might have something to do with the black medicine he had given the Wolf King that caused the wolves to behave so abnormally.

For the next two days, the Wolf King did not send any additional game from their hunts to the outpost. After they cut off the dirtied part of the roasted goat, Li Qingzheng and the others continued eating it with relish. However, Ren Xiaosu did not have any appetite for it anymore.

It was not a matter of whether the meat was dirtied or not, but in Ren Xiaosu’s opinion, that spit represented an insult from the high and mighty family members of the organization.

But of course, it was mainly because he was not hungry.

Li Qingzheng lamented as he sat at the edge of the campfire and looked at what remained of the goat, “I wonder what happened to the wolves. Why aren’t they sending us food anymore?”

“They’re probably exhausted.” Ren Xiaosu sighed. He was thinking about if he should have clearly explained the effects of the medicine to the Wolf King. After all, there was quite a difference between using it externally and internally.

Seeing how the Wolf King did not send them any more game after taking the medicine, could it bear a grudge against him now?

But when Ren Xiaosu was sleeping that night, he suddenly heard something that sounded like goods being unloaded coming from outside the house. When Ren Xiaosu looked out the window, he saw the wolves dumping several goats, boars, pheasants, and whatnot on the ground! It was quite a selection of different wild animals!

Just looking at the quantity, they not only made up for not bringing any game over for the past two days, but they also brought a lot more than that! After the wolves left, everyone at the outpost was in shock. A soldier looked at Li Qingzheng and said, “Are you really the Lord of Wolves?”

Even Li Qingzheng was also shocked at this. “Could I really be the Lord of Wolves of Mount Kun?”

Those who did not know the truth felt a sense of respect for Li Qingzheng. But the students who knew better all looked at Ren Xiaosu with complicated expressions on their faces.

A student asked, “Monitor, how did you manage to do that?”

“The Wolf King probably knows that my master is ill, so it decided to send over more game for his recuperation,” Chen Wudi said with a sigh.

“There’s nothing wrong with my brain,” Ren Xiaosu snapped at him.

He reckoned the Wolf King had sent over all this game mainly because it wanted to thank him. He could have never expected that the Wolf King had an underlying condition.

At this moment, someone said, "How long will it take for us to finish eating all this? Fortunately for us, it's winter now, so we can store them for a longer time."

"But we can't just leave it there like that. Why don't we make it into cured meat?" Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "If we make it into cured meat, it wouldn't even be a problem to keep them until the start of spring."

The group started busily skinning and cutting up the meat. However, they did not have enough salt to start curing the meat, nor were there any seasonings and spices.

Cured meat was usually made by cutting the meat into strips before rubbing the surface with salt and drying it. There wasn't a need to worry about wasting salt, since the salt needed by the human body would be present in the cured meat. By eating it, it would be as good as replenishing the body's salt content.

Ren Xiaosu said, "In another two days, we can trade for some salt and seasonings with the meat we have during the supply run. We won't be able to finish this much meat anyway."

"Don't do that." Li Qingzheng said softly, "You'll suffer a huge loss if you barter with those ruffians. We might as well sell them in town. Not only can we buy more salt that way, but we can also earn quite a bit of money. We can then afford to buy more things so that it won't get too miserable in the mountains during winter."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Li Qingzheng, who seemed to be very familiar with the private troops' behavior. He heard Li Qingzheng say, "We'll sneak back to town in another two days. Don't you still have some friends in town? We can bring some of the cured meat to them. It can be a little difficult to get by winter without having some meat to eat."

"Sure." Ren Xiaosu nodded in response. This would also be his chance to go back to town to visit Yan Liuyuan and the others. If they'd encountered any difficulties, Ren Xiaosu would be able to help them to resolve them as well.

Everyone was working outside in the open ground in front of the outpost. Li Qingzheng weighed the fleshy meat in his hand and said with a sigh, "This feels more blissful than the days I spent in town."

"Master, what does 'blissful' mean?" Chen Wudi asked Ren Xiaosu.

Li Qingzheng was amused. "Wouldn't having meat to eat already count as blissful?"

Ren Xiaosu gave Li Qingzheng a look and said softly to Chen Wudi, "Everyone's definition of bliss is different. Are you happy when you're subduing demons and monsters?"

"Yes, I am!" Chen Wudi said.

"Well then, that's what bliss means to you." Ren Xiaosu said.

“I get it!”