

Chapter 301 Creating chaos

The interrogation of the survivor got very intense right off the bat. That refugee insisted that someone had thrown out a “quad three” bomb that caused the explosion in the barracks.

But how could anyone believe that? After the soldiers in charge of the interrogation finished, they felt their intelligence had been insulted and became even more aggressive with the questioning.

Slowly, confusion started setting in and the refugee admitted to being a spy.

Most people in this world would not be able to endure an interrogation where they would force a confession from the suspect. The Public Order Division was actually the department that specialized in this area. According to them, unless one had the belief, no one would be tough enough to withstand the use of torture and force.

After the refugee admitted he was a spy, the Yang Consortium’s soldiers and officers could finally put their minds at ease knowing they had found the spy. But during this entire process, they could also vaguely feel something was not right.

At first, the officer had instinctively judged by the explosion that a spy could possibly be among the refugees. But it wasn’t like he was stupid. After he calmed down, he could naturally tell that something was amiss.

The officer asked, “But if the refugees were really spies, why would they blow themselves up? That doesn’t make sense at all. Besides, spies shouldn’t be gathering together like that.”

A soldier asked doubtfully, “Those refugees might have found something out about the spy’s plan, so they got silenced?”

“That’s very possible.” The officer said, “I asked you to keep a close eye on Wang Fugui and the others. Did you notice anything about them yet?”

“There’s really something about them.” The moment the soldier spoke about Yan Liuyuan and the others, he got excited. “I realized that there’s something wrong with one of their members.”

“Who?” The officer looked over.

“It’s a refugee called Li Qingzheng.” The soldier said excitedly, “Hahahaha, he’s too unlucky. Once he starts moving around... hahahaha...”

The moment he started, he couldn’t stop himself from laughing for more than ten minutes. The officer’s face darkened as he slapped the soldier. “Are you done laughing?”

The soldier stopped laughing abruptly. He realized the officer was starting to get a little angry, so he quickly added, “This Li Qingzheng is really unlucky, but he’s also very lucky at the same time. The

unfortunate things that happen to him are trivial, but he always stumbles upon some food sources after suffering from his bad luck.”

This was not what the officer wanted to hear. There was already someone who inexplicably found a potato field anyway. Anything that happened in the wilderness wouldn't be considered strange.

Then the officer asked, “Anyone else acting strangely in that group?”

“Oh, yes.” The soldier said, “The strange thing about them is that their group has a lot of injured people.”

“What's so strange about that?” the officer asked puzzledly.

“Actually, there aren't that many injured people among the refugees at our campsite.” The soldier explained, “That's because those who were injured back then could not get out of the stronghold. But as these people were quite united, they managed to bring all of their injured along and escaped. I've checked with the others. They said this group's members were already wounded when they left the stronghold. They took turns carrying the injured and ended up bringing them all the way here.”

“That just means they've got a good relationship with each other in their group.” The officer said, “I've heard that Ren Xiaosu's injuries are quite serious?”

The soldier said, “That's right. The doctor said he has fractures in more than a dozen places, and they're even comminuted fractures. He was previously in a coma until recently.”

“Wait!” The officer was stunned. “Fractures in more than a dozen places? But there aren't any gunshots on his body. There's no signs of his hair being burnt or any other external injuries either, so how did those fractures come about?”

The soldier was also taken aback. For fractures as serious as that without any signs of any external injuries, how could that be possible?

“Go,” The officer said, “Check on the wounds of those people and see if they have any gunshot wounds! I want to reinterrogate that survivor. Bring him to me!”

As soon as he finished speaking, the soldier led a platoon over to Ren Xiaosu's group and pushed open the door to their barrack.

Wang Fugui went up and tried to make conversation with them but got pushed away by a soldier.

The soldiers came to the front of Wang Yuchi and lifted his pants at the ankle, only to find some shallow bruises on his legs. There were still some wounds that were oozing blood.

The soldier was taken aback and thought for a moment before getting someone to bring over a pen and paper. Then he said to Ren Xiaosu and the others, “Without communicating with each other, write down the reason for your injuries.”

In the end, after the six of them finished writing, including Ren Xiaosu, the soldier collected the paper and had a look at them. Although the descriptions were different, they all said they had been knocked down by other vehicles while trying to escape from the stronghold.

The soldier frowned as he lifted Ren Xiaosu's shirt. However, he discovered that Ren Xiaosu's injuries were also mainly bruises and some external wounds. It just looked more serious than the injuries Wang Yuchi and the others had.

The soldier said nonchalantly, "So it was a car accident. Rest well then."

With that said, he led his platoon away. Indeed, he had no other questions for them.

Ren Xiaosu watched calmly as the soldiers left. Wang Yuchi whispered, "Monitor, how did you know that they would come and check on our wounds?"

Originally, Wang Yuchi and the others had suffered gunshot wounds. But after using the black medicine, they recovered within three days, so the soldiers were unable to find anything suspicious.

And the bruises on their bodies were purposely inflicted by Ren Xiaosu a few days ago, including those on his own. This was so that it would prevent anyone from suspecting them if they checked.

Ren Xiaosu said, "I wasn't sure either. It was just a precaution."

Wang Yuchi and the others were stunned. They had thought that Ren Xiaosu was too cautious. Two days ago, when Ren Xiaosu forged those injuries on himself, they were wondering if he had overthought things. After all, the bruises he had created would still be quite painful.

But from the looks of it, Ren Xiaosu was right. There was nothing wrong with being more cautious.

"Bro, they're starting to suspect us," Yan Liuyuan said in a low voice.

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "It's not a big problem. Everything is still under control."

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu gave a sigh. It looked like he would have to resort to his trump card.

That night, the officer interrogated the refugee again. "Tell me, how did Cao Junpeng and Yan Liuyuan's feud start?"

"Cao Junpeng felt that Yan Liuyuan was very good at finding food, so he wanted to take the kid in and use him. But Yan Liuyuan scolded him instead." The refugee prisoner said, "Before y'all arrived and subjugated us, Yan Liuyuan had already killed several people because of his brother. He was extremely ruthless and fierce, so Cao Junpeng decided that he would just kill the kid if he didn't want to join us."

"Oh?" The officer nodded. "Then something happened to you all that night? Where did those playing cards come from?"

The refugee said, "Sir, we got the cards from y'all as a hand-me-down..."

The officer raised his eyebrows. "So you're saying that I was the one who blew you all up?"

“No, no.” The refugee shook his head and said, “The four ‘threes’ were very new and looked different from the cards that you all gave us—”

And then at this moment, a hand suddenly threw out four “threes” onto the table between the two of them before disappearing.

The officer froze. “Were they cards like these?”

The refugee hurriedly nodded. “Yes, yes, yes!”

The officer said, “Fuck...”

With a loud boom, the reinforced companies’ commander’s tent was sent flying into the sky. At the same time, loud explosions rang out from many places in the refugee camp. The refugees were all screaming and fleeing outwards!

Chapter 302 A dangerous situation, a rescue by Yang Xiaojin

The escapees were a group scarred by their recent experiences. Some of them would even get nightmares and wake up with night terrors.

So when the explosions went off, someone among the escapees thought that war was breaking out again and cried out for everyone to quickly run. As such, all of the other escapees mindlessly followed suit.

They could not even tell where the explosions were coming from!

Truly, the Shadow Door and Explosive Poker was a really stealthy combination that could catch people by surprise. No one knew where the next explosion was going to happen.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu could have used this method to cause chaos long ago. It was just that he had always felt a little unwilling to part with his gratitude tokens and could not bear to use them like this.

His gratitude tokens had reached more than 900 coins and he was so close to unlocking the new weapon.

But now his gratitude tokens slipped back down to slightly over 800 coins.

Ren Xiaosu threw out the Explosive Poker cards consisting of more than ten sets of “quad threes” in one go. As for the more powerful sets, he kept them on hand.

While he was preparing to throw them out, he planned to throw them at random places to cause some casualties. That way, more chaos could be created. But Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of Chen Wudi for some reason and decided to throw the “bombs” into the uninhabited areas and near the Yang Consortium’s guard post as well.

If it were the past, would Ren Xiaosu have hesitated for even half a second?

At the end of the day, that beam of light still shone.

Ren Xiaosu's group blended into the crowd and tried to head westward. Meanwhile, the Yang Consortium's soldiers were all rushing back to their tents to save their own people and did not have time to care about where the escapees were fleeing.

When the escapees rushed out of the refugee camp, the soldiers on guard duty only fired a warning shot or two before giving up. They knew they wouldn't be able to stop the escapees who had already lost all control due to their fear of death.

Yan Liuyuan stayed by Ren Xiaosu's side throughout as Ren Xiaosu was still very weak. He had to make sure that no one would knock him down accidentally.

It was not easy for Ren Xiaosu to fix his bones. If they were to get broken again, it would be much more painful to have to set them again. So whenever anyone came near to Ren Xiaosu, Yan Liuyuan would push them away.

"Bro, where are we going?" Yan Liuyuan asked.

"The forested mountains in the west." Ren Xiaosu said, "We will hide in the forest."

But at this moment, engines roared from the south. Ren Xiaosu stopped in his tracks and looked in that direction to see dozens of military transport trucks returning from the front lines.

This convoy was definitely not here for them. Although the soldiers had called for reinforcements after the explosions went off at the refugee camp, they couldn't have arrived this quickly no matter how well-trained they were by the Yang Consortium. Hence, this was the Yang Consortium troops that were returning from the front lines of the battlefield!

"How damn unlucky!" Ren Xiaosu sighed.

He had wasted so many gratitude tokens just to create a chance for them to leave. But unfortunately, the plan did not go according to his wishes and he had to encounter the Yang Consortium troops who happened to be returning from the front lines!

Ren Xiaosu turned around and led his group back since it would be impossible for them to go head-to-head against the Yang Consortium's combat troops.

They noticed the convoy had discovered the chaos going on in the refugee camp, and their troops immediately split up into several groups to intercept the escapees from fleeing by stopping them in their tracks.

These escapees were just like docile lambs that had been tamed. When they saw the shepherd arriving, they subconsciously obeyed him.

The soldiers who jumped out of the vehicles forced the escapees back into their barracks with their guns. "Go back to your own barracks! Those who disobey orders will be executed!"

The escapees turned back. At this moment, they realized the explosions had stopped.

An officer wearing the rank of lieutenant colonel said loudly, "Who's the one in charge of the refugee camp? Why was there a riot happening?!"

A soldier from the reinforced company ran out and reported, "Sir, I don't know what happened, but explosions suddenly went off everywhere in the refugee camp. The escapees were fleeing only because they got frightened. Our commander died in the line of duty."

The lieutenant colonel was stunned. "Didn't you all make sure to seize all of their weapons? You should know that you'll have to be careful of spies mixed among these people, right?"

"We made sure we seized all of their weapons, but we don't know where the bombs came from." The soldier replied, "I think there's something fishy about this. There was also an explosion I suspect has something to do with this matter."

"Tell me what happened," the lieutenant colonel said.

The escapees stood in a trance outside the barracks and listened to the exchange. There was dust everywhere in the refugee camp, and some of the barracks had caught fire. Fortunately, the distance between the barracks was not too close, so there wasn't too big of a fire.

The soldier looked around and said, "There was a group of escapees who were suddenly blown up inside their barracks, so we were investigating their murderer. But in the end, even we got blown up as well. Although we don't know how they managed to do it, I can't help but feel that the two incidents are related."

"Have you all identified any suspects?" the lieutenant colonel asked.

"Yes." The soldier said, "We only got targeted after we started investigating this group of suspects."

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu's nanomachines were buzzing in his body as he quickly prepared himself for a fight.

If the situation really got out of hand, he would have to kill his way out. His life was saved by someone who gave up his, so no one was going to just take it away like that!

Ren Xiaosu said, "Actually, this was my fault."

Ren Xiaosu was good at self-reflection. From when he first killed the refugees to the chaos he had just created, even though it might look like he had been very cautious and well-prepared, it was not actually the case upon further consideration.

Even if the refugees wanted to kill Yan Liuyuan and threatened the safety of the women in their group, or the fact that Yan Liuyuan might get ambushed at the construction site a day later, Ren Xiaosu should

still have used a more stealthy method to resolve the matter instead of resorting to using the Explosive Poker cards.

But of course, he had only chosen to do so due to the inconvenience of his immobility. If he had been able to go to work at the construction site, he would have a 1,001 ways to make sure the refugees died outside in the wilderness. That way, they wouldn't be in such a tight spot right now.

He would have to be more careful in the future. Ren Xiaosu was not thinking about whether or not he should kill anyone, but rather, how to be more cautious when killing them.

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

"Return to the barracks and stay put there. Don't go out!" Ren Xiaosu said calmly.

Wang Fugui and the others looked at Ren Xiaosu's back. When the critical moment arrived, it was still Ren Xiaosu who had to bear the pressure for everyone.

"Bro..." Yan Liuyuan said anxiously. He knew well that with Ren Xiaosu's injuries, he would not be able to sustain himself in such an intense battle.

"Liuyuan," Ren Xiaosu said firmly, "curse me

But before he could finish speaking, an off-road vehicle drove in from outside the refugee camp. It looked like that vehicle was driven here from the north.

The vehicle came to a stop in front of the crowd. A girl wearing a cap jumped out of it and said, "Where is the person-in-charge? Have him come and see me."

That lieutenant colonel frowned and walked over. "What's your name?"

The lieutenant colonel had already seen the license plate of the other party's vehicle. It was black with red lettering, and such license plates were only used by the core members of the Yang Consortium. Thus, his tone became more polite.

The girl flashed her ID, and the lieutenant colonel said respectfully, "So it's you. I've only heard about you but never had the chance to meet you until now."

"Mhm." The girl nodded calmly. "Have you all seen a young man named Ren Xiaosu around here? I'm looking for him."

Chapter 303 Heading north to Stronghold 88

Nobody in the refugee camp could understand what had just happened. Why did a girl suddenly come here looking for someone? Moreover, it even looked like that Yang Consortium lieutenant colonel had to speak politely to her. This seemed to subvert all common sense. Could she be the core member of the Yang Consortium? But what was the name that the girl mentioned just now? Ren Xiaosu?

Then they heard Yang Xiaojin repeat, "Do you have someone here named Ren Xiaosu or Yan Liuyuan? I'm here to take them away."

The escapees could only feel envy. She was actually here to take those people away? From the way she spoke, it seemed like it would be a good thing to get taken away by her.

Hold on a minute! The escapees were not familiar with Ren Xiaosu's name because he had been lying down and recuperating from his injuries all this while, so he did not have much of a presence in their minds. But they were all too familiar with Yan Liuyuan's name!

"Big Sister Xiaojin, we're here," Yan Liuyuan shouted and raised his hand.

Yang Xiaojin's eyes lit up. She did not really expect to find Ren Xiaosu and the others here.

Yang Xiaojin had no choice but to follow Luo Xinyu and leave the battlefield when she got surrounded by the Experimentals in Stronghold 108. When she went back to look for Ren Xiaosu, she couldn't find him anymore. She didn't know where Ren Xiaosu and the others had fled to.

After traveling north for some time, Yang Xiaojin was still indignant about the matter. When she heard that there was a refugee camp being built here, she decided to come over to try her luck.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Liuyuan and asked in a low voice, "You didn't make the wish or curse, right?"

"No." Yan Liuyuan shook his head.

At a critical moment like this, Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu suddenly arrived here after driving through the darkness of the night in an off-road vehicle.

A lot of people were in between Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. But when Yang Xiaojin walked over to Ren Xiaosu, the escapees parted like the sea. It was like this was a stage, and the two individuals at both ends of the stage were the stars of the night.

Yang Xiaojin walked up to Ren Xiaosu and sized him up from top to toe. She was still wearing her cap as usual, and the form-fitting sports outfit remained unchanged as well. "You're injured?"

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded and said, "I accidentally took a blast from an RPG that was fired by the Li Consortium."

The lieutenant colonel's jaw dropped. He thought to himself, 'You must be bragging, right? How could anyone still be standing after taking damage from an RPG? Who do you think you are?' However, he reminded himself of Yang Xiaojin's identity, so Ren Xiaosu's account sounded somewhat understandable.

Then Yang Xiaojin said to the lieutenant colonel, "I want to take these people away. Please process the paperwork."

The lieutenant colonel said, "We're currently investigating a case of spying, and these people are the main suspects." Although he was very polite to Yang Xiaojin, business was still business.

Yang Xiaojin calmly asked, "Are you implying that my friend is a spy? Then what does that make me? They're from the Yang Consortium as well. It's just that you don't know about it at your level. So are you still going to arrest them?"

"I wouldn't dare." The lieutenant colonel's tone softened. He turned to the soldier beside him and said, "Release them!"

Ren Xiaosu gave a mental sigh. Well, it looked like he had gained yet another identity as part of the Yang Consortium. He had completed the full set.

He reckoned that his identities were just like a top-secret file. In 50 years when the confidential records of the Yang, Li, and Qing consortiums were declassified, everyone would definitely be astonished.

Of course, the Li Consortium wouldn't exist anymore by then.

The nearby refugees were all shocked. Who was this big shot from the Yang Consortium? Their jealousy of Ren Xiaosu was reaching a fever pitch. Weren't they all supposed to be refugees? So why had he suddenly become a core member of the Yang Consortium? There was even a beautiful young lady who specially came to pick him up in the middle of the night!

While they were fleeing, the escapees were already very jealous of Ren Xiaosu's group for having food to eat. Later on at the refugee camp, that jealousy was alleviated when they thought about how they were all fellow captives. But everyone realized at this moment that that had not been the case at all!

Yang Xiaojin counted the number of people in Ren Xiaosu's group and then said to the lieutenant colonel, "I'll be taking one of your transport trucks."

The lieutenant colonel hurriedly said to a soldier next to him, "Go and drive a truck over!"

Then the lieutenant colonel asked, "Where do you plan on going?"

Yang Xiaojin replied, "Stronghold 88."

The lieutenant colonel shouted, "Fuel the tank to full!"

Apparently, the journey from here to Stronghold 88 was a long distance, so much so that they had to fill the gas tank all the way up for the trip.

Yang Xiaojin did not take the off-road vehicle but followed Ren Xiaosu and the others onto the military transport truck. Luo Xinyu pouted as she sat in the driver's seat of the off-road vehicle alone. However, she did not say anything in the end.

In the back of the truck, Yang Xiaojin asked again, "Are your injuries serious?"

Beside them, Yan Liuyuan said, "He suffered 17 fractures all over his body, and four areas are even comminuted fractures."

Yang Xiaojin was stunned. She had thought that Ren Xiaosu wasn't too seriously injured when she saw that he was able to move about freely. But upon taking a closer look, she realized his forehead was covered in sweat.

Although Ren Xiaosu used the nanomachines to set his broken bones and had already healed a little, it still hurt to move. This was unavoidable.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yang Xiaojin and said, "I'm fine. I'll recover in another 20 days or so."

Of course, what Ren Xiaosu did not say was that even after a hundred days, broken bones would still be a little more brittle than other places. Therefore, he would still have to recuperate for another month or two before he would fully recover.

Yang Xiaojin said, "There won't be any danger in heading north, so just rest well and recuperate."

Silence fell, as nobody knew what to say.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly said, "What's the relationship between the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium?"

This matter had puzzled Ren Xiaosu for a very long time. Yang Xiaojin had said that Lu Yuan was not from the Saboteurs but was a member of the Yang Consortium. However, the Saboteurs and Lu Yuan had carried out a mission together. Furthermore, Yang Xiaojin herself was also from the Yang Consortium. So it seemed like there was nothing wrong with saying that the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium originated from the same group.

However, the problem was that the Saboteurs did not seem to have any intention of interfering with this war. He had never heard any news that the Saboteurs had appeared on the battlefield based on what Tang Zhou shared with him.

Yang Xiaojin explained, "The founder of the Saboteurs is my aunt. However, with the Yang Consortium's intent to invade foreign lands getting stronger and stronger in recent years, the ideological differences between the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium have splintered even further. There are those within the Yang Consortium who are supportive of the Saboteurs' cause, but there aren't many. So the Saboteurs no longer have any involvement with the internal affairs of the Yang Consortium, nor do we take part in their wars."

Ren Xiaosu understood something with this explanation. The Saboteurs had probably been set up after Yang Xiaojin's aunt became a supernatural being. Meanwhile, the Yang Consortium also gave her some support in the setting up of the Saboteurs.

But now that the main faction of the Yang Consortium had expanded their influence, the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium had reached the point where they would have to part ways.

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Is the ideology behind the Saboteurs really to uphold peace?"

Yang Xiaojin shook her head. "We're not looking to uphold peace but to prevent anything that can destroy the world from reemerging in society. Over the years, we've destroyed 17 nuclear test sites, but we've not been able to locate any of those controlled by Qing Zhen."

Chapter 304 Cast aside

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu realized he had misunderstood. Before the war, he was wondering why the Saboteurs did not come forward to stop the war or sabotage it. However, he now realized the Saboteurs were merely targeting the nuclear test sites and did not involve themselves with other matters.

It was probably just as Yang Xiaojin had said. The apocalypse had struck the world because of nuclear technology, so humans should not be trying to control it again.

Curious, Ren Xiaosu said, "But I think what Qing Zhen said makes sense. It's the fault of humanity, not the fault of nuclear technology."

Yang Xiaojin said, "That's what I thought at the beginning too, but the 17 nuclear test sites that were destroyed had all been performing military research. And then gradually, people stopped questioning the motivation behind such research."

"But the Qing Consortium was the one who started the war this time. If Qing Zhen really had such a weapon in his arsenal, the Li Consortium would probably have already been decimated, right?" Ren Xiaosu said.

"I don't know." Yang Xiaojin shook her head.

In reality, Ren Xiaosu did not take any side on this matter. This "important" issue just did not seem to have anything to do with him since he was only a refugee trying to survive.

Qing Zhen had his reasons, while the Saboteurs also made their judgment based on facts. Until the very end, who was to decide who was right or wrong?

Ren Xiaosu asked, "17 nuclear test sites? Where are they? Do they all belong to the Qing Consortium?"

"No." Yang Xiaojin shook her head again. "Actually, the main focus of the Saboteurs' activities has already shifted to the Central Plains in recent years. The 17 nuclear test sites were also destroyed there. Very few members of the Saboteurs are still in the Southwest. It's a much bigger world over there in the Central Plains."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. This was the second time he heard others mention the term "Central Plains." After The Cataclysm, human society was kept within the strongholds while information and traffic flow got shut down.

So ever since Ren Xiaosu was young, he had always thought that the world was only this big. In the northeast was the Qing Consortium, while the Yang Consortium was in the north, Stronghold 178 was in the northwest, and the Li Consortium was in the south.

This used to be the entire world map that existed in Ren Xiaosu's mind. However, he later realized this was not the case. Zhang Jinglin had mentioned it before but did not get into a deep discussion about it. He only said that it would not be easy to get from the Southwest to the Central Plains. After tectonic activity destroyed the roads and mountain paths and elevated entire territories, the events had formed into natural barriers for the Southwest.

Ren Xiaosu asked curiously, "What do the Central Plains look like?"

Yang Xiaojin shook her head. "I've never been there either. I heard from my aunt before that it's much more prosperous and glorious over there. There are even roads connecting the strongholds that allow residents to travel freely between them while some people drive to faraway places for vacation. The stronghold gates are kept open during the day and only close at night. She once said that Stronghold 1 is like a miracle of human civilization. When night falls, that place becomes a permanently lit galaxy."

"Do you want to go to the Central Plains?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Yang Xiaojin looked at him and said, "No."

Ren Xiaosu was surprised. Based on what Yang Xiaojin had said earlier, the Saboteurs' activities were localized to the Central Plains. Logically speaking, Yang Xiaojin would have to be there as well, so why didn't she go?

"Oh, right," Yang Xiaojin said, "Luo Lan should be leaving Stronghold 88 soon. If everything goes well on our way there, you should still be in time to meet him."

"Luo Lan is leaving Stronghold 88 already?" Ren Xiaosu was taken aback when he heard that. He knew from Tang Zhou that Luo Lan had been sent to Stronghold 88 by Qing Zhen and that this arrangement was due to the cooperation between the two organizations. As such, Luo Lan headed there as a representative of the Qing Consortium.

But now that Luo Lan was leaving, it meant that the cooperation between the two consortiums was about to end.

After these two consortiums had weakened the Li Consortium to a certain extent, the alliance between them would start losing meaning.

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At this moment, Luo Lan was instructing his subordinates to pack up their things in Stronghold 88. "Be gentler, take good care when moving the items onto the vehicle. These are all souvenirs that I spent a lot of money on. If they break, you won't be able to compensate for them!"

The subordinate chuckled and said, "Boss, are we going back now? Did Mr. Qing Zhen win?"

"Listen to what you're saying!" Luo Lan said with a smile, "How can there be any battles that Qing Zhen can't win? Those old fogeys from the Li Consortium are doomed for sure!"

In this war, other than negotiating with the Yang Consortium, Luo Lan had basically done nothing else. All he did was stay at the Yang Consortium to eat and drink, and eat and drink some more.

Now that he was going back, he might even be able to make it in time for the final round of battles with the Li Consortium. When he thought of this, Luo Lan became excited. For some reason, he liked fighting in battle a lot. Although fighting in battle meant hard days, and he would not get to eat or sleep well, he still liked it very much.

But right at this moment, the sound of a car engine came from the streets of the stronghold. The soldiers beside Luo Lan wanted to pick up their weapons. However, Luo Lan waved his hand and said with a smile, "Don't worry, who would dare to touch us here in Stronghold 88? They're probably here to send us off."

Then they saw three military transport trucks approaching them. When the convoy stopped in front of Luo Lan and the others, a large group of soldiers jumped out of the vehicle. Luo Lan mumbled, "This doesn't look like a fucking send-off...."

As he said that, an officer came up to Luo Lan and calmly said, "No one is to leave yet."

"Why's that?" Luo Lan was taken aback. "Has your Yang Consortium gone crazy?"

"It's not us who's crazy." The officer sneered and said, "It's your Qing Consortium that has gone crazy. Or, to be precise, Qing Zhen is the one who's gone crazy!"

"What happened?" Luo Lan frowned.

"We were supposed to attack the front line at Mount Guangying last night based on the agreement made between both us and the Qing Consortium. However, when our Yang Consortium arrived at the battlefield, the Qing Consortium's troops suddenly retreated and left us to face the Li Consortium's firepower alone. We suffered heavy casualties as a result!" The officer sneered. "Since you all can back out of an alliance, there won't be a need for you all to leave this place. Men, place them under house arrest and guard them 24/7!"

Luo Lan was taken aback. "Is that news true?"

The officer said, "It seems that your brother doesn't really care about your life."

A group of soldiers raised their guns and forced Luo Lan and his men back into the house. Luo Lan raised his hands and said, "Don't push, don't push. We'll go in by ourselves. Everything can be talked about calmly."

When he retreated into the house, his large body even crashed into the door as he stepped back inside.

A soldier whispered to Luo Lan, "Boss, has Mr. Qing Zhen given up on us?"

"What a fucking load of bullshit." Luo Lan snapped, "Qing Zhen would never do something like that!"

"Then this is..." the soldier said hesitantly.

Luo Lan sighed and said, "I'm afraid Qing Zhen is no longer the person with the final say in our military."

Luo Lan understood Qing Zhen the best. He knew Qing Zhen would never walk out on him. In that case, there was only one possibility left: The person who made the decision to withdraw the troops was not Qing Zhen.

Previously, the Qing Consortium had not done anything to Qing Zhen because they were unwilling to accommodate any last-minute change in the military leadership so as not to delay their war opportunities.

But now that the Li Consortium had been defeated, Qing Zhen naturally was of no use anymore. He had served his purpose and was cast aside.

Chapter 305 A 21-kilometer-long mountain road

The troops that Qing Zhen and Luo Lan controlled were only two brigades originally. But with Luo Lan's troops hidden where nobody knew, the Qing Consortium couldn't incorporate them into their own forces.

As such, for the entire frontline troops, there were not many true supporters of Qing Zhen as one would imagine. A portion of the troops supported Qing Zhen while a portion supported Qing Yun. Most of them were neutral and only followed orders and fought battles.

This was also the reason why Qing Zhen wanted to get rid of Qing Yun's supporters in the organization. If he didn't chase away the people who harbored other motives, his orders could end up getting secretly disobeyed.

But even after Qing Zhen finished "cleaning up" those elements, he still could not defy the orders of the Qing Consortium's Board of Directors. They were the true core of the Qing Consortium, after all.

If they gave Qing Zhen more time, he might even be able to turn the entire frontline army into his own people. However, the Qing Consortium's Board would definitely not give him that time.

As a matter of fact, the timing of the Board was just right. There would not be too much of an adverse effect if they changed the leadership at the front lines at this time. And Qing Zhen had fulfilled his final role for them.

It was still Secretary Zhou who had come to escort Qing Zhen. Secretary Zhou stood at the entrance of the camp while Qing Zhen turned around and looked at the snowy mountains behind him.

Some of the soldiers wanted to stage a mutiny to save Qing Zhen, but they were stopped by him with a smile. "Don't be rash. Your families are still in the stronghold."

This was also the reason why the Board still had control over the military. If the entire military camp were to act rashly at this time, their families would probably die horrible deaths on that very night. So even though Qing Zhen had Qing Yun killed, the Board remained fearless of him. In their opinion, Qing Zhen was not so charismatic that he could make these soldiers abandon their families and children. But even if he did, Qing Zhen would not allow it.

It seemed like the Board already had Qing Zhen in the palm of their hands.

"Sir," an officer said, "let us return together with you."

Qing Zhen was amused. "Don't be silly. Fight the war well with Qing Yi. I'll still say the same thing: Don't embarrass me."

All the frontline troops had been taken control of by a commander named Qing Yi. This Qing Yi was also a core member of the Qing Consortium. However, as he had still been being groomed for a leadership post, the Qing Consortium had not really allowed him to step onto the battlefield yet.

"What about Mr. Luo Lan? He's still at the Yang Consortium," the officer said. "Last night..."

Qing Zhen waved it off and said, "I'm already prepared for that, don't worry."

After saying that, Qing Zhen followed Secretary Zhou into the car. Secretary Zhou ordered someone to put Qing Zhen in handcuffs. Qing Zhen smiled and said, "Are you that afraid of me? I'm not a supernatural being, so I won't do anything to you."

Secretary Zhou snorted in disgust and did not say anything. This time, he had even brought along many troops with him to escort Qing Zhen.

If Secretary Zhou had not been ordered by the Board to come, he would not have been willing to come here and face Qing Zhen, to be honest. The previous time when Qing Zhen killed someone at the command center without warning seemed to have given him bad trauma.

Secretary Zhou sat in the car and said calmly, "Qing Zhen, should I praise you for being smart? Or should I say that you're stupid?"

Qing Zhen smiled. "What do you mean?"

The driver in the car did not dare to even blink and just stared straight ahead at the road.

Secretary Zhou said, "Well, you're really smart; there's no argument about that. A war that Qing Yun wasn't able to win was turned around the moment you joined forces with the Yang Consortium at the front lines and destroyed the Li Consortium. Even I admire you. You're truly a genius."

Qing Zhen smiled. "You flatter me."

"But if I say that you're stupid, it's not wrong either. If you didn't attack the Li Consortium, the Board wouldn't have dared to make their move on you so quickly. That's why you're only good at military affairs and don't know how to handle politics."

Qing Zhen laughed and said, "Then is Secretary Zhou implying that I should have allowed the Li soldiers to live and made them into my own mercenary troops at the front line?"

Secretary Zhou looked at the driver. "I didn't say that."

"Look at how cowardly you are. You dared to say that but you won't admit it?" Qing Zhen said, "Even if I didn't attack the Li Consortium, they would have come and attacked us all the same. When that happens, would I have to sacrifice my troops' lives just to carry on with the act? That's something that I, Qing Zhen, cannot do."

On the battlefield, putting on an act would require people to sacrifice their lives.

And what Qing Zhen wanted was to incur the least casualties possible and fight the perfect battles. Then the surviving soldiers would be able to return home.

Secretary Zhou asked hesitantly, "Have you not considered yourself before?"

"Consider what?" Qing Zhen laughed and said, "Isn't this just about going back and being placed under house arrest?"

"Did you think you'd still be placed under house arrest after killing Qing Yun? This time... it's not going to be as simple as that." Secretary Zhou sneered.

"I see." Qing Zhen sighed.

...

The vehicle escorting Qing Zhen was speeding northwards. Following the off-road vehicle were many other soldiers also escorting it. From this, it was clear that the Qing Consortium's Board thought very highly of Qing Zhen. They were worried that something would happen during the process of escorting him back.

When the convoy drove back into Stronghold 111 two days later, Qing Zhen rolled down the window with his handcuffed hands. "Such a familiar smell. I'm finally home."

Secretary Zhou looked a little tired. As a civilian employee, he had been sitting in a car for two straight days and had barely gotten any shut-eye. He could not take it anymore.

On the other hand, Qing Zhen still looked very energetic. He wasn't even like a prisoner coming back to stand trial.

Secretary Zhou yawned and said, "You're still in the mood to appreciate all this?"

"Wait, why are the theaters all closed?" Qing Zhen suddenly asked.

When the convoy passed by a few theaters, Qing Zhen was surprised to find that all of them had been sealed shut.

Secretary Zhou looked out the window and said, "These are the theaters you usually enjoy going to. Since they don't know which singer you actually like, they just arrested all of the ladies."

In the past, when Qing Zhen visited the theaters, he would never go to a fixed place, nor did he ever reveal which singer he liked. It was precisely because he was worried that he would implicate the other party.

However, Qing Zhen did not expect the Qing Consortium to be so ruthless.

Qing Zhen looked out the window and fell silent. No one knew what he was thinking.

Secretary Zhou asked, "Why aren't you saying anything?"

Qing Zhen suddenly said, "The flowers I've been cultivating at home should probably have withered by now, right? I wonder if anyone has been caring for the vegetables I planted in the backyard."

Secretary Zhou laughed in anger. "You're still in the mood to talk about this?"

"What else should I talk about then?" Qing Zhen said calmly, "If this were a peaceful and prosperous era, I would probably have become a flower farmer instead. The military and politics can't be more interesting than cultivating flowers."

"It's a pity this isn't a peaceful era then," Secretary Zhou said calmly.

At this moment, the car came to a stop.

The Qing Consortium's headquarters were halfway up the mountain, and the vehicle was parked at the entrance to the winding, switchback road.

Secretary Zhou got out of the car and said, "The Board has ordered that you make your way up the mountain on foot."

Qing Zhen glanced at him. "This mountain road is 21 kilometers long."

"That's right." Secretary Zhou adjusted his glasses and said, "The Board wants you to think carefully when you're walking up. Who gave you everything you have today? Take off your shoes and get moving."

There were soldiers standing guard on both sides of the mountain road. When they heard this, they could not bear to look at Qing Zhen anymore.

A lot of people probably would not expect that the Qing Consortium's silent tiger would actually end up in this state.

Chapter 306 The Qing Consortium changes hands .

The mountain located in Stronghold 111 was known as Mt. Ginkgo. In autumn, the mountain would shimmer golden. But in winter, the ginkgo leaves would fall and litter the valley, leaving behind only naked tree branches.

The prosperity was coming to an end and would be buried in mud.

Qing Zhen stood in his spot and looked at the withered scenery in the valley. He suddenly laughed and said, "What a pity."

These were probably the three words that Qing Zhen liked to utter the most.

Next to him, Secretary Zhou frowned and said, "Men, remove Qing Zhen's shoes and escort him up Mt. Ginkgo!"

But the soldiers responsible for guarding Mt. Ginkgo's mountain roads did not move. Secretary Zhou was enraged. "How dare you disobey my orders."

However, the two soldiers remained still. It was as if they could not bear to do what they were told.

Qing Zhen smiled as he looked at the slightly younger soldier and said, "I remember you. You're Zhang Yuge, and you used to be under me. After you killed a member of the Pyro Company, you were recognized and awarded for your contribution."

The soldier named Zhang Yuge got excited. He stood to attention and shouted, "I am Zhang Yuge from the 5th Combat Brigade. I didn't expect you to still remember me, sir."

Qing Zhen turned to look at the other soldier and said with a smile, "You're Wang Hang, one of my soldiers as well. Is your mother feeling better yet?"

Wang Hang's eyes reddened. "Thank you, sir. I didn't expect you would still remember a small matter like that."

Qing Zhen sighed to Secretary Zhou and said, "They're all elite soldiers and should be out fighting the war, but due to their relationship with me, they were left behind here to act as watchdogs for the organization. What a pity. Let's not make things difficult for them. I'll head up myself."

Secretary Zhou said coldly behind Qing Zhen, "Do you know that no Shadows in the history of the Qing Consortium have ever acted like you? All of them have bowed their heads to the organization!"

Qing Zhen smiled and said, "But I'm Qing Zhen."

It was as if Qing Zhen's name was supposed to have some magical ring to it. He had a pride that was embedded to the bone, and he would never yield to anyone.

Then Qing Zhen took off his shoes and socks and started walking up the mountain road littered with dead ginkgo leaves.

The cold winter wind howled down the mountain road, making the ground as cold as steel.

However, no one could see any pain or frustration on Qing Zhen's face. After walking for a while, Qing Zhen suddenly pointed to a ridge on the mountain and said, "When I was young, I used to play in the mud there with Luo Lan. Back then, the river was very cold, so we would dip the persimmons we stole into the icy waters. It's delicious to eat them after taking them out of the river. Back then, Qing Yun was always following us around, but I always had the feeling he hated me."

Following him, Secretary Zhou remained silent. No one expected Qing Zhen would still be so carefree when he was on the brink of death.

"But there's a hidden guard post over there now, so that place is probably sealed off, right?" Qing Zhen said with a smile.

Snowflakes suddenly floated down from the sky. Qing Zhen's clean feet stepped on the thin layer of snow and left a line of footprints on the mountain road.

At the beginning, the snow was white while the footprints were black. Every step revealed the ground beneath the snow.

Secretary Zhou shouted from behind him in the snow, "Have you thought it through?!"

The snow gradually fell heavier, and Qing Zhen turned a deaf ear on him.

As he walked, the footprints in the snow on the mountain road started turning red. As he walked up step by step, it was as if he could not see the end of the road at all. However, Qing Zhen's posture was still straight.

As Qing Zhen walked past the sentry guards along the way, they all turned away to look beyond the mountain.

As he walked, Qing Zhen's feet numbed. He could not remember how far he had been walking. With every step he took, he seemed to be thinking about something.

From beside him, Secretary Zhou suddenly asked, "Why did you withdraw the troops last night and leave the Yang Consortium hanging?"

"Oh, you're talking about that?" Qing Zhen said with a smile.

"Back then, Qing Yi clearly had not taken over the power of the military yet. You clearly know that Luo Lan is still in the hands of the Yang Consortium." Secretary Zhou frowned and said, "The Yang Consortium must have placed Luo Lan under arrest now. A lot of people must also have caught wind of you being summoned back to Stronghold 111 by now, so they'll probably think it was Qing Yi's order to withdraw the troops."

Qing Zhen laughed and said, "That's because I knew you all were gonna come after me."

"What do you mean?"

"When our father passed away, he insisted on having Luo Lan protect me. But you should also know what kind of person he is." Qing Zhen chuckled. "He's always eating and sleeping, and really rash as well, so why would I need him to protect me? It is likelier that I'd have to protect him instead."

"So you allowed the Yang Consortium to arrest him then?" Secretary Zhou frowned and said. He actually did not understand the logic behind this, but Qing Zhen's planning had always been a little more effective than other people's.

"If I didn't get someone else to arrest him, he would probably have rushed up Mt. Ginkgo to fight the old fogeys." Qing Zhen sighed and said, "The Yang Consortium will not kill him. A fatty that's alive is worth more than a dead one. Before they get anything valuable out of him, the Yang Consortium won't take his life. It's better than having him come charging back here."

“But they’ll still kill him in the future,” Secretary Zhou said calmly.

“I’ve already prepared a way out for him,” Qing Zhen said.

Qing Zhen had turned on the alliance with the Yang Consortium, not for anything else, but so that he could make Luo Lan stay in Stronghold 88 and not come back here to die. That was because even Qing Zhen himself was not confident he could survive today.

Qing Zhen stood barefooted near the cliff of the winding, switchback road and looked out at the drifting snow. He said, “That fool, Luo Lan, if I were to die today, he would definitely weep his heart out for me. Our damned old man always said that a family needs to be harmonious. We can only exist if our family remains around.”

Secretary Zhou asked, “Then why are you still going against the Qing clan’s patriarch?”

Qing Zhen looked at the mountains in the distance, having figured out something. He said, “Now that I think about it, our family consists only of Luo Lan and me. The others don’t count.”

Then Qing Zhen turned back around and looked up in front of him. He suddenly laughed and said, “I didn’t even notice, but we’re almost there! Come on, let’s go!”

Qing Zhen walked in front with Secretary Zhou asking loudly again from the back, “It’s almost time! Have you seriously thought it through yet?!”

The snow fell heavy as the wind howled.

Qing Zhen said softly in the snowstorm, “I’ve thought it over.”

In front of him, he could see the Qing Consortium’s manor on the mountainside of Mt. Ginkgo. This place was still as brightly lit as he remembered. Qing Zhen stood outside the vermilion gate and said with a smile, “Now that I think about it, I haven’t been here but a few times.”

Secretary Zhou escorted him into the main lobby. Qing Zhen’s feet left bloodstains on the clean and extravagant marble floor. The servants in the hallway remained silent, and no one dared to go over to clean off the bloodstains.

Qing Zhen walked further inside. The door to the conference room was already open, and the Qing Consortium’s board members were all seated inside.

Qing Zhen walked down the long hallway and past a long hall. He walked by himself in front while the others behind him followed from afar.

Suddenly, someone realized that Qing Zhen’s back had remained straight even until now. Not once did he ever slouch.

When Qing Zhen walked into the conference room, he headed straight to the end of the table and sat down.

There was no one next to Qing Zhen. All the members of the Board were seated across from him, as though he were taking on the entire Qing Consortium.

The elder in the seat of honor said calmly, "Do you know what you did wrong?"

Qing Zhen also said calmly, "What wrong did I do?"

The elder's eyes narrowed slightly. He never expected that the 21-kilometer-long mountain road would be unable to make Qing Zhen lower his head.

"Murder, mutiny, privately raising an army, and being disrespectful." The elder said, "All of these crimes are enough to sentence you to death."

Qing Zhen asked, "And I must die for that?"

"If you don't die, I will not be at ease."

These words were the true thoughts of everyone on the Qing Consortium's Board. This Shadow who never respected the rules was starting to make them afraid.

They had never been so afraid of a Shadow before, so this Shadow had to die.

...

Qing Zhen's troops had already been disbanded. Some of them had been tamed after getting incorporated into the various fighting forces, while others who were stubbornly loyal were chained up like dogs in the stronghold. As such, Qing Zhen's influence in the military seemed to have been weakened to almost nothing.

Luo Lan had been placed under house arrest in Stronghold 88.

It seemed like Qing Zhen had even lost his last beam of support.

So when the plan was revealed, the Board was confident of their victory. They were pulling out all stops to ensure Qing Zhen's death.

Qing Zhen got up and walked to the window on one side of the conference room barefooted. Someone shouted angrily, "Qing Zhen, how dare you still act so arrogantly at this time!"

But Qing Zhen whirled around and asked Secretary Zhou loudly, "Zhou Qi, I've already thought it through. How about you?"

While on the 21-kilometer-long mountain road, Secretary Zhou had asked Qing Zhen twice in a loud voice. But now, it was Qing Zhen who was asking him back.

The world outside the floor-to-ceiling windows was vast and wide!

He did not want to be a Shadow anymore. He wanted to be the CEO of the Qing Consortium. 'Breaking custom, I'll shatter positions and destroy countries for me; without the turning of the world, there is no recovery!'

Qing Zhen asked again loudly, "Have you thought it through yet?!"

Secretary Zhou smiled. "I'm glad to be of service to you."

Secretary Zhou, who had at some point placed himself behind the elder, grabbed a stream of thin air. The transparent stream split and flowed towards the necks of the members of the Board.

A cry of surprise from someone startled the security troops stationed outside the conference room, but Secretary Zhou was already prepared. The transparent stream further split itself and shot through the conference room's solid wood door. Screams came from outside and then it went silent.

Continuous gunfire rang out on the mountainside as though to suggest an intense battle was taking place.

At the foot of the mountain, the soldier named Zhang Yuge shouted, "Everyone, today is the day we succeed!"

With that, a large group of soldiers emerged from the wilderness. Although he rushed up with them, the blood he spilled in battle flowed down the mountain road and melted away the thin layer of snow.

Meanwhile, in Stronghold 111, the manhole covers on the street were suddenly pushed up as troops dressed in black rushed out and headed for all the key military zones in the stronghold. When they encountered the regular troops of the stronghold, this army dressed in black was surprisingly brave and fearless in battle!

One of the soldiers in black sat down on the ground slowly after being shot. One of his comrades tried to help him up, only for him to grab his comrade's hand and say with a smile, "The day has finally arrived. Don't worry about me. Tell our commander that we've been waiting for this day for too long!"

...

Secretary Zhou smiled at Qing Zhen and said, "Was it because you weren't sure about me that you didn't want Luo Lan coming back here? We were friends who played in the mud together when we were young. You've made me really sad."

On the mountainside, Qing Zhen had said he and Luo Lan used to play in the mud next to the river and ate frozen persimmons. But what he didn't say was that Zhou Qi was also among those that played together with them.

Many people thought that Secretary Zhou had always treated Qing Zhen as a thorn in his side. This was also why the Qing Consortium's Board liked to get Secretary Zhou to target Qing Zhen.

However, Qing Zhen and Zhou Qi had never been on bad terms. In the early years, they already had thoughts of changing the world.

After being questioned by Zhou Qi, Qing Zhen also smiled. "I really was a little worried about you. After all, when you were young, a fortune teller once said you had rebelliousness written in your stars."

Zhou Qi choked. "Fuck that bullshit!"

The previously cultured and respectable Secretary Zhou suddenly did not look that cultured and respectable anymore.

The elder in the conference room said coldly, "Aren't you afraid that Qing Yi will deploy the troops back here and kill you?"

Qing Zhen said, "What a coincidence. Qing Yi is also one of mine."

"What do we do now?" Zhou Qi asked, "We've revolted, so we can't leave any loose ends."

Qing Zhen said, "Just kill them all. I was planning on making them walk that 21-kilometer-long road in the snow. But now that I think about it, there's no need to be angry with them anymore."

Victors should be magnanimous.

As soon as he finished speaking, the "fluid rope" on the necks of the board members tightened. They were shackled to death.

Zhou Qi looked at Qing Zhen, who was standing in a trance by the window, and asked, "What are you thinking about?"

Qing Zhen came back to his senses. "Oh, I was just thinking that I might not have time to cultivate flowers anymore in the future."

Zhou Qi listened to the gunshots coming from the mountainside and adjusted his glasses. "You and your flowers..."

The board members did not die immediately. They wanted to rip off the "rope" around their neck but realized they couldn't do anything about a supernatural being's powers. The fluid rope felt just like a physical cable.

Winner takes all!

The Qing Consortium had changed hands!

Chapter 307 Arriving at Stronghold 88!

A civil war had erupted within the dozen or so strongholds controlled by the Qing Consortium. It had come without any warning, and there were no precautions against it.

At this moment, the Qing Consortium's combat troops and soldiers were all thinking that war would only be happening externally. They never expected that in just one night, there would be a changing of the guard and the Board would get taken down entirely.

Qing Zhen's supporters, who had been scattered across the various fighting forces, had either successfully rebelled against the leaders of their troops or carried out decapitation strikes against them. This left the military without any leaders and created a situation of chaos.

Many people sacrificed themselves that night. They were all willing to die for Qing Zhen's glory. Meanwhile, Qing Zhen had sent out a large number of people to take control of the strongholds, as well as amalgamate the fighting forces.

New political orders were starting to be issued from Stronghold 111. It took Qing Zhen a fortnight to complete the cleaning up and purging of the previous regime's elements.

Many of the Qing Consortium's supporters had no choice but to escape out into the wilderness, but what awaited them was a harsh winter and extreme hunger.

Inside the manor on the mountainside of Mt. Ginkgo, Zhou Qi asked, "Where's the money you promised me? Pay up! Pay up! Pay up!"

Qing Zhen looked at him in amusement and wrote him a check. "Go cash it at the Qing Consortium's bank. It's enough to last you a lifetime."

Zhou Qi happily held the check in his hand. "Look, you just don't trust me. And see what happened? Luo Lan has been locked up in Stronghold 88 as a bargaining chip as a result. Let's see how you're gonna deal with that!"

"You want me to trust you?" Qing Zhen snapped, "You're already asking for your payment as soon as this episode ended, so how can I trust someone like you?"

Zhou Qi was unhappy to hear that. "Although I like money a lot, I could have gotten some from the Board too. So why did I choose to accept your money instead of taking it from the Board? It's all down to our relationship!"

"Like hell I'd believe you." Qing Zhen sat calmly in his seat. The reason for his worries was because he was afraid that Zhou Qi would turn against him at the last minute.

Outsiders would only think that this was Qing Zhen's planned move, but Qing Zhen himself was also sweating over it.

In reality, it was still unknown whether he or the Board would end up as the victor that night. It was indeed a very risky decision to place a portion of the bet on Zhou Qi because Zhou Qi loved money way too much ever since childhood.

Qing Zhen understood very well that a portion of the reason Zhou Qi was on his side was that his money was easier to earn and safer as well.

If he accepted any money from the Board, it might be possible that they would get even with him at a later time.

Of course, a portion of it also involved some complicated relationships. This group of people who had known each other since childhood would still consider the friendship they had.

Zhou Qi said, "Then what do we do about Luo Lan now? Why don't you pay me some money and I'll go rescue him?"

Qing Zhen looked up at him. "There's no need to. I have my own plans."

...

At this moment, a military transport truck was speeding towards Stronghold 88. Suddenly, Yang Xiaojin said, "We're here!"

Ren Xiaosu looked up ahead through the windshield and saw a towering stronghold located in the wilderness. This stronghold was extremely large. It was way larger than Stronghold 108, 109, and 113.

Stronghold 88's location was very special. To the north were the Zong Consortium and Stronghold 178, while the Qing Consortium was to its west, and the Li Consortium was to the south. Some years ago when it was still possible for independent merchants to freely come to the stronghold, this place was a very important distribution center of goods. This was also how the Yang Consortium started.

While in the vehicle, Ren Xiaosu could already see the town of Stronghold 88 from afar. At this moment, a group of refugees were returning home from work. Some of them had cigarettes dangling from their mouths and looked extremely satisfied.

Just as Yan Liuyuan had said, the Yang Consortium was no different from the other organizations. It was only Yang Xiaojin who was different.

When their vehicles drove past, the refugees hurriedly made way for them. They were all afraid that they would be the unlucky ones to get picked on by whichever big shots were in the vehicles.

When Yan Liuyuan saw the town, he got very excited. "Bro, why don't we just settle down in town?"

Ren Xiaosu laughed and said, "Let's head into the stronghold and have a look first."

Yan Liuyuan said, "Alright!"

In front of them, Luo Xinyu flashed her identification documents to the guards from inside her off-road vehicle. The soldiers opened the gate respectfully and let them through.

Stronghold 88 had something unique about it. After entering the gate, there was actually another circular wall on the inside. The Yang Consortium had actually built a barbican for Stronghold 88! This was a structure that was specially used to add to its defensive capabilities. The Yang Consortium actually prioritized its defenses at Stronghold 88 this importantly.

At this moment, Yang Xiaojin said, "Luo Lan was supposed to leave the stronghold at this time, but the Qing Consortium suddenly broke the alliance, so the people from the Yang Consortium placed him under house arrest. I heard there's already been a major change in the Qing Consortium. After Qing Zhen was taken back to Stronghold 111, they started a coup, and Qing Zhen has become the head of the Qing Consortium."

Therefore, it was even more important that the Yang Consortium did not let Luo Lan leave. He was the elder brother of the Qing Consortium, after all. With such an important bargaining chip in their hands, the Yang Consortium Board of Directors would be so happy they wouldn't be able to sleep.

Ren Xiaosu sensed from Yang Xiaojin's words that she somehow felt a sense of detachment from the Yang Consortium. For example, whenever Yang Xiaojin mentioned the Yang Consortium, she would refer to them as "the people from the Yang Consortium."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "How's the war at the front lines now?"

"The Qing Consortium's forces have returned to the front line again." Yang Xiaojin said, "The war shouldn't have gone so smoothly at first, but it was said that a really big case of espionage happened at the Li Consortium's front line. A very capable spy leaked all of their defensive plans at the front line, and even the whereabouts of the Divine Arms Battalion were revealed by this spy."

Upon hearing that, Ren Xiaosu did not say a word anymore. Wang Yuchi and the others were all staring at their toes, afraid they would laugh out loud.

Yang Xiaojin asked, "What's going on with you all?"

"It's nothing." Ren Xiaosu said, "Please continue speaking."

"Mhm." Yang Xiaojin sighed. "The Yang Consortium's losses at the front lines are still pretty big since two of their three armored brigades have been taken out. If the Yang Consortium also had such a spy to support them, it would definitely not have ended up like this."

"Yeah." Ren Xiaosu also sighed and said, "That spy is amazing."

Yang Xiaojin rolled her eyes and said, "You've really been praised to the skies, haven't you? I know that the spy was you. Other than you, no one else would be able to do it! The place I've arranged for you guys to stay at is right next to Luo Lan's house. That's where the Yang Consortium hosts their foreign guests. The condition of the place is still pretty good. If you guys have any other requests, you can ask me."

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment. "Is there a university in Stronghold 88?"

"Yes." Yang Xiaojin nodded. "Why? Are you guys thinking of attending university?"

Ren Xiaosu had been thinking about something all this while. He wanted Wang Yuchi and the others to further their studies so that they could perfect the armor.

The armor he was using now was a little "unfashionable," be it its appearance or structure, so it still needed to be improved upon.

Wang Yuchi and the others had said they could try to improve on it, but some things were easier to imagine than to do. Therefore, Wang Yuchi and the others needed to further their studies a little.

Ren Xiaosu estimated they would have to stay at Stronghold 88 for at least a few years before considering their future plans. So, instead of wasting time, they might as well start preparing for it now.

If the shield he had formed with the nanoarmor had a better shock-absorbing mechanism, it could have led to a vastly different outcome.

Chapter 308 Encountering Luo Lan again

When Yang Xiaojin heard that Ren Xiaosu wanted to make arrangements for Wang Yuchi and the other students to attend university, she thought for a moment and said, "Even I can't directly approve their admission into school. However, I can arrange for them to take the entrance exams in three months' time."

"That's fine too," Ren Xiaosu said.

Wang Yuchi asked, "Monitor, aren't you also going to attend university?"

Ren Xiaosu hesitated for a moment before saying, "You guys can attend first."

Although he was very eager to learn, he knew what he was capable of. Even if he studied with all his might for the three remaining months until the exams, it would be impossible for him to qualify for university!

Unless he grinded his quests every day after getting into the stronghold and got his hands on more Basic Skill Duplication Scrolls, he would not be able to copy Yang Xiaojin's knowledge of mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

When Ren Xiaosu thought of those messed-up skills that Yang Xiaojin had, he felt that it would definitely be a tedious process.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu noticed a gold shop on the side of the street in the stronghold and wondered if the Li and Qing currencies had also depreciated here. If that were the case, he could do that thing again.

Even though he could not spend it outside, he could still keep it and use it to pay for items from the palace in the future.

Along the way, Ren Xiaosu heard the clacking of mahjong tiles being shuffled coming from the buildings next to the street. He was stunned. "What's that sound?"

Yang Xiaojin replied, "Oh, they're playing mahjong."

"There's that many people playing mahjong?" Ren Xiaosu was surprised.

When they arrived at the place Yang Xiaojin had prepared for them, she excused herself as she had a lot of matters to deal with after being away from the stronghold for so long.

Before she left, Yang Xiaojin said, "Please bear with this place for the time being. I'll help you get another residence as soon as possible."

Ren Xiaosu was quite satisfied when he saw the house came with a yard. "It's fine. I find it pretty nice here."

As soon as Ren Xiaosu and the others entered the yard, they saw Luo Lan's large head peeking out over the wall and observing them secretly. Ren Xiaosu was tickled. "What are you doing?"

Luo Lan exclaimed when he realized it was Ren Xiaosu, "You all got arrested too?"

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "You've misunderstood. We aren't in the same situation as you."

Someone was even whispering behind the wall, "Boss, who did you see? Can we also take a look?"

Luo Lan snapped, "What's there to look at? Keep holding me up!"

"Boss, you're really too heavy...."

Ren Xiaosu's eyes twitched a little. So Luo Lan was able to lean over the wall because he had someone holding him up.

However, it seemed that Luo Lan and his men were still in quite a good state of mind. Ren Xiaosu asked, "Aren't you being confined right now? But you don't look depressed at all."

Luo Lan said without a care, "The Yang Consortium won't do anything to me. A fatty that's alive is worth more than a dead one. Besides, I'm used to being confined because of Stronghold 111."

"You sound rather optimistic." Ren Xiaosu curled his lips. "Have you heard about it yet? Qing Zhen has successfully taken control of the Qing Consortium. Congratulations."

Luo Lan nearly burst into tears at the words. "Fuck, I'm fucking done for this time. The Yang Consortium will definitely not let me go anymore."

In an instant, Luo Lan understood his value. As the elder brother of the Qing Consortium's CEO, he would probably be worth more than a stronghold. Thinking of this, Luo Lan even started feeling a little excited for some reason. Had he really become this valuable?

"Come, come, lift me up a little higher." Luo Lan said to the people below him, "Let me go to the yard next door to catch up with Brother Xiaosu."

Ren Xiaosu pressed Luo Lan's head down and refused to let him come over. "As a prisoner, don't you run over here like that. What if you implicate us?"

Luo Lan said unhappily, "Look, I'm already addressing you as brother. As the saying goes, 'slap not an apologetic, smiling face.' How can you treat me like this!"

Ren Xiaosu gave him a glance. "But I'm allowed to slap someone with a fake smile."

"I have money!" Luo Lan shouted.

It was only then that Ren Xiaosu let go of his hand. "It's not about the money. I just wanted to invite you over."

Then Ren Xiaosu watched Luo Lan climb over the wall in the yard clumsily. If he didn't catch him from below, Luo Lan would have probably crashed to the ground.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Since you can freely come into the yard next door, why didn't you just make your escape from there?"

“The people who originally stayed here at your place were plainclothes cops instructed to keep watch on me.” Luo Lan dusted off the dirt on his backside and said, “I didn’t know why they left this morning, so I leaned over the wall to have a look. But that doesn’t mean that they aren’t keeping watch on me anymore. The entire street is filled with the Yang Consortium’s plainclothes cops. If I take a step out of here, I’ll probably get turned into Swiss cheese!”

“Eh?” Ren Xiaosu was stunned. So that was what happened.

“In the morning, someone even specially came over to clean the house for you all,” Luo Lan said as he paced around the yard. When he saw the female students standing behind Jiang Wu, he couldn’t take his eyes off them. “Beautiful ladies, let me introduce myself. My name is Luo Lan, and I’m the elder brother of the Qing Consortium’s current CEO!”

But at this moment, no one really wanted to bother with him. Ren Xiaosu was also considering their current situation. Since the entire street was under the Yang Consortium’s surveillance, why did Yang Xiaojin bring them here? Was it because she was left with no other choice, or did she want to place them under surveillance as well? Did Yang Xiaojin know about this?

Wait a minute. It was no wonder Yang Xiaojin told them to bear with this place for the time being before she left. She must have known about this matter as well, but it was just that she could not do anything about it.

It seemed that the conflict between the Saboteurs and the Yang Consortium had already affected Yang Xiaojin’s status in the Yang Consortium.

Yan Liuyuan whispered next to him, “An organization’s attitude will not be changed just because of Big Sister Xiaojin alone. So, Bro, have you thought about what we’ll be facing next?”

Ren Xiaosu patted his head and said with a smile, “It’ll be fine. When I recover, the Yang Consortium won’t be able to stop us. When the time comes, we’ll head to the north to become bandits. I heard that the area between the Yang Consortium, the Zong Consortium, and Stronghold 178 is an unincorporated zone.”

Ren Xiaosu was right about that. Even Xu Xianchu had encountered the bandits that tried to attack him when he was on his way to Stronghold 178.

The bandits had ties with the Zong Consortium when free trade was still active some years ago. Some of them were even the Zong Consortium’s own regular troops in disguise, all so they could plunder and steal goods.

But over the years, the Zong Consortium had raised a tiger that brought them calamity. Many of the bandits got out of control and lived their carefree and comfortable lives in the unincorporated zone.

Ren Xiaosu thought that living in a place without rules could actually be quite good, and that he should be able to gain a foothold there with his skills.

Therefore, he would stay in the stronghold for the next few days to recuperate and observe the situation. If they realize that Stronghold 88 was really not a viable place to live in, they could just head north and become kings in the mountains.

But at this moment, someone knocked on the door. Wang Fugui went to open it and was surprised to find a group of people waiting outside with some food.

A middle-aged man at the door said with a smile, "Hello, everyone, I have instructions from the higher-ups to send you all some food."

Luo Lan gasped. Why was the difference in treatment so great?

Chapter 309 The Bronze Ram of the Yang Consortium

The middle-aged man who came to deliver the food greeted Ren Xiaosu and was about to leave after putting down the food. Luo Lan grumbled for a bit in the yard, "Stop right there! As the elder brother of the Qing Consortium's CEO, shouldn't I get some respect too? Why didn't you all deliver any food to us?! I'm Qing Zhen's elder brother!"

But the middle-aged man ignored him.

Luo Lan stopped yelling when he saw them leaving. Then he took a closer look at the food delivered by them. "Wow, these are ingredients for hot pot. The beef slices are already marinated, the tripe is served on ice, and there's even a broth!"

Ren Xiaosu and the others looked at each other. They had also eaten hot pot before, but they never really had any meat dishes in the past.

The refugees would always have their hot pot in a nine-sectioned pot. In this case, the nine grids were not used for separating the ingredients while cooking, but rather because everyone was poor. Therefore, those who gathered together to eat in one hot pot would get a grid each so that no one would be able to take advantage of the other.

But back then, the grids were not fixed and were actually only bamboo strips. Therefore, there would always be some who liked stealing other people's food through the bottom of the pot.

Even though there were plainclothes cops outside keeping watch, they were finally able to get some good rest now that they had arrived at this new place. Besides, they even got food delivered to them.

Just as Ren Xiaosu had said, the most important thing for them now was to wait for him to recover rather than cause any further trouble.

Several tables had been set up in the spacious yard that had three entrances. Up to 100 people could sleep in here. 30 people could easily live here.

When the broth in the hot pot started boiling, Luo Lan said as he started eating, "Did Yang Xiaojin get you all into Stronghold 88? Why didn't you head to the Qing Consortium's territory to look for my brother instead?"

“Why should we go to the Qing Consortium?” Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. “Your Qing Consortium is in utter chaos at the moment. We might even get implicated if we head there.”

“It’s better than coming here to the Yang Consortium at this time, especially since you’re with the Saboteurs,” Luo Lan said.

“Why do you say that?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“Do you know that most of the Saboteurs have already left the Yang Consortium?” Luo Lan said.

“Yeah,” Ren Xiaosu answered.

“Now that the main faction is holding power, the Saboteurs are a marginalized group. Furthermore, the Saboteurs have always been isolated from the organization and became an independent force of its own, so that made the Yang Consortium’s Board extremely upset. As such, they ended up parting ways with each other!” Luo Lan said with a chuckle, “I must say that I’m really impressed with the Saboteurs since the entire Yang Consortium could not even do anything about them. This is something that can only be done by a group of supernatural beings.”

“You’re still praising them when the Saboteurs are trying to destroy your nuclear test site?” Ren Xiaosu said.

“Hehe, there’s no contradiction at all.” Luo Lan laughed and said, “I’m just telling the truth. I don’t have to belittle others to make myself look good. Besides, they won’t be able to find our site. No one can find it!”

“Alright.” Only now did Ren Xiaosu realize the Saboteurs were actually disliked within the Yang Consortium. “By the way, how are you going to leave the Yang Consortium? They probably won’t let you go anymore, right?”

Luo Lan suddenly changed the subject. “Hahaha, have some tripe. Y’know, there’s a particular way to eat tripe. I’ll teach you, after you dip it into the broth—”

But Ren Xiaosu suddenly grabbed Luo Lan’s wrist tightly. “There’s no need to teach me. You’ve already taught us using half a plate of tripe. We can handle it ourselves.”

...

The north of Stronghold 88 was the rich side of the stronghold. The entire area was covered in greenery, a stretch of garden manors.

In a 3,210-square meter villa, servants were bustling in and out of the dining room. Two steel knives with jewels mounted in their hilts were hanging from the wall in the dining room. They looked extremely valuable. But this exquisitely crafted melee weapon was just a decoration in the era of firearms and explosives. They would only be touched when the servants were cleaning them.

There was also the symbol of a bronze ram that was exclusive to the Yang Consortium on the hilts. It was said that the founder of the Yang Consortium had almost starved to death in the wilderness a very long time ago. But before he could die from starvation, a ram came up to him and knelt down in front of him, willingly offering itself to be eaten.

If Ren Xiaosu learned about this story, he would probably flip the table.

The servants placed all kinds of dishes onto the table, while there were only three people seated at the long table. They were Yang Xiaojin and a middle-aged couple.

The middle-aged man rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt and said, "Xiaojin, I heard that you brought some refugees back?"

Yang Xiaojin stayed silent for a moment before answering, "That's right, Third Uncle."

"It's not a good habit to be making friends with refugees." Yang Xiaojin's third uncle picked up his chopsticks. "The class of a person's friend determines the class of said person as well. You're allowed to go outside because we don't have to worry about you and so that you can broaden your horizons. But don't let yourself get carried away, and don't you pick up those bad habits from your aunt either."

Yang Xiaojin said calmly, "They're different."

Currently, the head of the Yang Consortium's Board was very old. So half of the organization's affairs had been handed over to Yang Xiaojin's third uncle, Yang Yu'an.

The woman seated across from Yang Xiaojin said, "Your third uncle is also doing this for your own good. If your parents were still around, they would say the same too. Refugees aren't educated, and they don't have any manners. There are also no topics in common to discuss when dining together. Therefore, it's better not to have any close interactions with them. If you want to help them, you should just offer them an appropriate amount of help."

When the woman said to offer help to the refugees, her expression looked like she meant it as performing charity.

To Yang Xiaojin, she somehow felt that the vision of her third uncle, Yang Yu'an, and her third aunt, Meng Rong, was still stuck at the level of normal people. However, this world had changed. The quality and strength displayed by that young man had already surpassed most supernatural beings.

However, that was not the most important issue here.

Yang Xiaojin put her chopsticks down. "I'm full."

"I still have some important matters to discuss with you." Yang Yu'an said, "Currently, there shouldn't be any issues with the battles at the front lines. The opponent we're facing next will be the Qing Consortium. Qing Zhen is an ambitious man, so it's not a good thing for our Yang Consortium that he succeeded in seizing power. Have the Saboteurs located the Qing Consortium's test site yet?"

"No." Yang Xiaojin shook her head. "But I doubt they'll resort to using that kind of weapon in this war."

“We still have to guard against it nonetheless,” Yang Yu’an said. Currently, the Yang Consortium still supported some of the Saboteurs’ activities. Actually, the reason he was willing to let Yang Xiaojin go out previously was that he was hoping that the Saboteurs could locate the Qing Consortium’s test site so they could destroy the last unknown factor of their expansion plans.

Yang Yu’an continued, “There’ll be a lengthy conflict with the Qing Consortium in the future, so we should also plan ahead and make the Zong Consortium in the north our ally before the Qing Consortium does so. On one hand, it will help cover our rear. On the other hand, our combined forces will act as a deterrent to the Qing Consortium. It’s not only him who can form alliances. Our Yang Consortium is capable of that as well.”

Yang Xiaojin looked at Yang Yu’an. “Third Uncle, what are you getting at?”

“Someone from the Zong Consortium will be arriving in a few days. I want you to go and welcome them,” Yang Yu’an said.

Chapter 310 The northern land’s Zong Consortium

The Zong Consortium was located at a corner in the north. The northern lands were barren, and plenty of natural disasters happened there. Therefore, the overall strength of the Zong Consortium had always been inferior to the Yang Consortium’s and the Qing Consortium’s, and they never dared to cause any significant troubles for the organizations to the south.

Although they did not make any big moves, they still resorted to many cheap tricks. For example, the Zong Consortium was the one who created the problem of the bandits.

Yang Yu’an’s evaluation of the Zong Consortium was that they were ambitious but did not have the ability to support it. This was also the reason why the Zong Consortium kept getting ideas of infiltrating into Stronghold 178. If that damn group from Stronghold 178 were to attack south, the Yang Consortium and the Qing Consortium would surely get a headache.

The Zong Consortium had thought of taking advantage of the period when Zhang Jinglin was not around to complete their “Peaceful Evolution”[1] strategy on Stronghold 178. However, they underestimated the belief of that damn group of people from Stronghold 178.

After Zhang Jinglin returned to Stronghold 178, all of the plans the Zong Consortium made over a decade went up in smoke. At that moment, everyone realized Stronghold 178 had borne the name of Zhang all this while.

If Yang Yu’an were aware of the friendship between Ren Xiaosu and Zhang Jinglin, he would probably treat Ren Xiaosu as an honored guest immediately. That was the most terrifying power in the northwestern borders. They were all brave warriors shaped by the harsh environment who were not afraid of death.

But it wasn’t only Yang Yu’an who was unaware of that. Even Ren Xiaosu did not know who exactly Zhang Jinglin was. But he had never thought of relying on him either, even handing the recommendation letter from him to Xu Xianchu.

At this moment, Yang Yu’an said, “The young man from the Zong Consortium who will be coming is called Zong Cheng, and he’s in charge of the Zong Consortium’s defensive strategies. Although he’s very

young, he already commands an important position. We're getting old, and the world belongs to the younger generation now. I heard that a young officer named Xu Xianchu has also risen through the ranks at Stronghold 178 recently, and he's highly regarded by Zhang Jinglin. I find the name quite familiar. Isn't he that Xu Xianchu you've crossed paths with before? Do you know him well?"

Yang Xiaojin was stunned. She was not on familiar terms with Xu Xianchu. Instead, it was Ren Xiaosu who had a great relationship with Xu Xianchu.

All of a sudden, Yang Xiaojin found it a little funny. How did the currently famous figures at Stronghold 178, people like Zhang Jinglin and Xu Xianchu, have such a close friendship with Ren Xiaosu? Thinking of this, Yang Xiaojin felt that Stronghold 178 also seemed to have become a little bit closer to her for some reason.

Yang Xiaojin said, "I don't know him well. We've traveled together before, but I'm not really friends with him."

Yang Yu'an said, "Hm, you should still be friends. From now on, you can work on forming a relationship with Stronghold 178. If we can get their support, even Qing Zhen will have to back off."

Yang Xiaojin did not say anything. Stronghold 178 would never be willing to deal with the interior organizations. The people from Stronghold 178 were bloodthirsty, so if the Yang Consortium really wanted to get close with Stronghold 178, she would probably need Ren Xiaosu to show up in order to deal with them.

Then Yang Yu'an continued, "That Zong Cheng is about the same age as you, and I heard he's also a supernatural being. This will be a great opportunity."

It was evident what he meant. Yang Xiaojin frowned. When her third aunt, Meng Rong, noticed, she said, "Don't you try to snipe him on the road. The last time, you..."

Yang Xiaojin's fine eyebrows hidden under the shadow of her cap raised slightly. "Alright, I understand."

...

It was the next morning when Yang Xiaojin came to Ren Xiaosu and his group's residence again. When Yan Liuyuan heard the sound of knocking on the door, he knew it had to be Xiaojin. As it turned out, it was her.

Ren Xiaosu was squatting on the ground and brushing his teeth. He spat out a mouthful of toothpaste and said with a smile, "You're here this early?"

Yang Xiaojin got straight to the point. "I'm afraid that Wang Yuchi and the others won't be able to sit for the entrance exams."

Yesterday afternoon, she contacted the relevant departments about this matter. But when her third uncle heard about it, he immediately stopped her.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Was there a problem?"

“It’s because you guys aren’t residents of the stronghold.” Yang Xiaojin said in a low voice, “Furthermore, the university is conducting some confidential research. So you aren’t allowed to get involved.”

To put it simply, they were not from the Yang Consortium and neither did the Yang Consortium have any intention of letting them become one of their own. That was because Yang Yu’an did not like refugees and did not think they could be useful.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not dwell on this matter. He asked again, “What about Liuyuan and Dalong? They’ll only be attending junior high.”

Yan Liuyuan stepped forward. “But I’m not a stronghold resident either!”

Yang Xiaojin smiled and said, “Both of them can attend school, and enrollment has already been handled as well.”

Yan Liuyuan and Wang Dalong nearly cried upon hearing that. “We really aren’t residents of the stronghold. We’re just refugees! Refugees do not deserve to attend school!”

“Alright, that’s enough, you two.” Ren Xiaosu looked at them in amusement. “You’re just going there to gain knowledge and learn how to solve problems. You’re making it sound like you’re going to jail. Stop crying about it already.”

“But even though Wang Yuchi and the others aren’t allowed to sit for the entrance exams, I still made library cards for you all. There’s a library at the center of the stronghold where you can borrow books,” Yang Xiaojin said.

Wang Yuchi was stunned. “We can do that?”

“Yes, you can,” Yang Xiaojin said with a nod.

As civilization progressed, a lot of people abandoned the pursuit of knowledge. However, some people were still determined to fill in the missing gaps.

Human technology had never been completely lost, but that only referred to the overall state of technology. A portion of it had still been lost with time. As such, the current developmental direction of technology varied greatly from the times before The Cataclysm.

This was not determined by what humans needed but on what kind of technology was left behind and what resources were suitable for development.

Someone once found a research laboratory of a civilization from before The Cataclysm, and the information found there had been auctioned at a certain stronghold in the Central Plains. The price it was sold at was unbelievably astronomical.

And how did civilization pass on its legacies? It depended on words and symbols passed down in writing.

Although the various organizations also had their own libraries, one had to be of a certain status to use them. When Wang Yuchi and the other students attended school in the stronghold, they were not allowed to enter the library because they were not qualified.

Thinking about it, Yang Xiaojin must have spent quite a bit of effort to help them apply for the library cards.

Ren Xiaosu was very happy. "OK, it's not a bad idea to go to the library to study by yourself. Thanks a bunch."

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Is there anything else you need?"

"Uh..." Ren Xiaosu thought carefully and said, "Are there any teachers in this stronghold who teach hand-to-hand combat? I would like to learn it systematically."

In the past, Ren Xiaosu had always fought ruthlessly in the wilderness by relying on his instincts he had achieved after long periods of training. Whether it was power generation or hitting weak spots, all of that was slowly accumulated through experience. So his martial skill had always remained at the intermediate level as he only relied on his ferocity.

Yang Xiaojin thought for a moment. "I'll think of something!"

Next to them, Yan Liuyuan suddenly realized that as long as it was Ren Xiaosu's request, Yang Xiaojin would not reject it. He knew Ren Xiaosu had saved Yang Xiaojin's life before, so it seemed to make sense to think that way.

Suddenly, Yang Xiaojin said, "There's something..."

"What is it?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"People from the Zong Consortium in the north might be coming to Stronghold 88 soon. Can you come with me to welcome them when they get here?" Yang Xiaojin asked.

"OK."