

First Order 311

Chapter 311 The young man in the library

Ren Xiaosu's life suddenly became peaceful. Every morning after breakfast, he would lead Wang Yuchi and the other students in their physical training. He would practically push them to their limits before stopping.

While they were training, Luo Lan leaned against the wall and commented, "You guys are too reckless training like that. It's neither methodical nor scientific."

Then Ren Xiaosu remembered Luo Lan was a capable military leader, so he would definitely be proficient at this. He looked at Luo Lan and said, "Don't just mouth off like that. If you say that my methods aren't scientific, how 'bout you show us how to do it then?"

"Hehe." Luo Lan's eyes narrowed and revealed a shrewdness in him. "Don't try to goad me into training them for you. No way!"

"I can share our food with you," Ren Xiaosu said firmly.

"Are you that nice?" Luo Lan didn't quite believe it.

The difference in their meals had become apparent. The food the Yang Consortium provided for Luo Lan and his men were steamed buns, napa cabbages, and pickled vegetables, while Ren Xiaosu and company were given lots of meat to eat. Ren Xiaosu had never lived so comfortably before. He even had drumsticks to eat every day without fail!

When the drumsticks and braised pork were placed onto the table, the aroma even wafted over the wall to the other side. Luo Lan, who was next door, almost cried from craving it!

Ren Xiaosu said, "You are responsible for drawing up training plans for them and supervising their training. Then you and your men can come over and eat together every day."

There were only four people next door, including Luo Lan himself. Fatty Luo had come here as the representative of the Qing Consortium for negotiations, so he could not bring too many people with him. As such, Ren Xiaosu estimated it and felt it shouldn't be much of a problem to share some food with them.

Luo Lan rubbed his hands gleefully and said, "I feel so bad about it, but I'm not doing this for your food. As the elder brother of the Qing Consortium's CEO, would I lack that little bit of food? I just wanted to help you all because I thought your training plan was not methodical at all!"

"Yes, yes, yes, you're absolutely right," Ren Xiaosu said as he did not have time to argue with him.

"But I'm a little curious. What are you training them for?" Luo Lan asked. "If you're not planning on letting them join the military, this strength training won't be useful for them at all. Without a proper system to train in, an individual's strength will never be able to stand up to a supernatural being's strength."

Ren Xiaosu ignored him. He couldn't possibly say it was so Wang Yuchi and the others could take more nanomachines into their bodies in the future, right?

Indeed, the significance of their training would not be that great if they didn't have the nanomachines. But the reason why Ren Xiaosu made them train was so they could gain better control of the nanomachines in the future. They would have to at least reduce the delay to less than 0.1 seconds so they could become combat effective.

If he had the support of eight "nanosoldiers," it would be a considerable level of combat strength. Besides, there would be more than eight of them if he included Yan Liuyuan, Li Qingzheng, and the others. Even the female students were starting to train themselves spontaneously.

Initially, Ren Xiaosu had not planned to let the female students participate in battle. But after going through so much hardship, they had also grown up a lot.

As for where the nanomachines would come from, Ren Xiaosu would have to find a way to get them. Wasn't the Yang Consortium manufacturing nanomachines as well? Since the palace could reset the Li Consortium's nanomachines, it could definitely reset the Yang Consortium ones as well.

Ren Xiaosu, who had been completely set free, would head to the library every morning. The first time he arrived at the entrance of the library, he realized it was not open yet. It wasn't until 10 AM that he finally saw a middle-aged man with unkempt hair arrive.

When the man saw Ren Xiaosu waiting at the entrance, he was taken aback. "You're here to read?"

"That's right." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "Doesn't the sign here state that the library opens at 8.30 AM?"

"Oh." The man said, "People usually only start coming in the afternoon, and there are very few visitors to the library as well. So it doesn't really matter if I come in a little late. How about this? If you come early in the future, call me in advance and I'll be here to open the door for you."

Then the uncle wrote a string of numbers for Ren Xiaosu. It was his home telephone number.

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. Why was this so different from what Wang Yuchi had described? It seemed like anyone could just walk in and read whatever books they wanted with the library's current level of security. Was there even a need for a library card?

Meanwhile, the man wondered where this kid had come from. Did he suddenly vow to study hard now that it was winter break, in the hopes he could strive to become a useful pillar of the stronghold in the future? His enthusiasm would probably subside after a few days, right?

This was what happened to his neighbor's child. During the holidays, he would come up with plenty of lesson plans for himself. If everything proceeded according to plan, the child would definitely become an academic expert of his generation and contribute to humanity's improvement.

However, a plan was ultimately just a plan.

When the library was first built, the Yang Consortium would even deploy soldiers to guard it. This was to prevent people from stealing the books. But later on, they realized the stronghold residents were not even interested in reading books after they graduated from high school. On the contrary, when a small-time celebrity released a new song in the stronghold, swarms of people would gather to attend the press conference.

With time, only a middle-aged man was left here to look after the library.

The next day, Ren Xiaosu woke up at 7 AM and gave the man a call to have him open the library so as to prevent yesterday's situation from happening again.

On the third day, it was the same.

By the tenth day, the man thought something was strange. After opening the library in the morning, he pulled Ren Xiaosu back. "Hold on!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "What's the matter?"

The man, who had dark eye circles after playing mahjong all night, sucked his teeth and said, "You've been coming here every day. Don't you need to rest?"

"It's not like reading books makes me tired." Ren Xiaosu was confused. "So why would I need to rest?"

"I'll be honest with you." The man said, "It wasn't easy for me to save up some money to buy this job in the civil service. I heard that a librarian's job is easy, and I wouldn't have to work from dawn til dusk. But since you arrived, it feels like I have to slog as hard as I used to ten years ago!"

Ren Xiaosu looked at An Yuqian with surprise. "Then what can I do?"

"Don't you think you should treat me to breakfast?" An Yuqian said with a dark expression.

Ren Xiaosu scrutinized An Yuqian. "Are you so poor that you don't even have money for breakfast?"

"Hahaha," An Yuqian laughed long and hard. "Kid, how dare you say I don't have enough money for breakfast? Although, you couldn't be more right about that...."

Ren Xiaosu slapped a ten-yuan bill into An Yuqian's hand. "Go and eat breakfast. I won't join you since I still have a lot of books I want to read."

Wang Yuchi and the other students would come to the library every afternoon to study from 1 to 6 PM. Since they could not borrow the books out of the library, they could only read them here.

Ren Xiaosu felt he was worse at studying than Wang Yuchi and the other students, so he had to spend twice as much time trying to make up for it.

When An Yuqian returned to the library after breakfast, he deliberately went to check on Ren Xiaosu. In the huge library, Ren Xiaosu was the only person sitting quietly at a table. The flipping of pages from time to time was the only sound that could be heard in the entire library.

## Chapter 312 The librarian

In the morning, Ren Xiaosu was doing some reading in the library. Meanwhile, An Yuqian was snoring loudly as he slept in his chair at the entrance.

When the sun shone onto An Yuqian's face from the outside, he would even cover his face with a book to shield himself from the light.

Every morning, when Ren Xiaosu arrived, he would automatically give ten yuan to An Yuqian. Moreover, there was no need for Ren Xiaosu to keep calling An Yuqian anymore as he would be waiting at the door every day at 8.30 AM sharp while yawning.

Gradually, An Yuqian found it extremely uncomfortable that he had to always sleep like that. He used to always play mahjong throughout the night before heading home to sleep well during the morning. But since Ren Xiaosu started coming to the library, he could only sleep while sitting in his chair at the library.

How could sleeping in a chair be more comfortable than sleeping in a bed?

As no one else was using the library, An Yuqian purposely observed what Ren Xiaosu was reading. However, he died laughing when he saw that Ren Xiaosu was actually reading the tenth grade textbooks for math, physics, and chemistry!

Ren Xiaosu's persistence in coming to the library for so many days finally made An Yuqian change his opinion of him. He had thought that for once, a studious kid had finally come to the library. But to his surprise, this studious kid could only read tenth grade textbooks.

Judging by Ren Xiaosu's age, shouldn't he be in 12th grade at the least? So it turned out he was just a weak student who was starting to study from scratch?

An Yuqian counted on his fingers and realized the college entrance exams were only three months away. How could he make it in time if he was still only studying the tenth grade curriculum?

Even though An Yuqian was pacing around him, Ren Xiaosu did not bother looking at him.

An Yuqian could not help saying, "Isn't it a little too late to study now? The college entrance exams are only three months away!"

Ren Xiaosu looked up at him. "I'm not sitting for the entrance exams."

"You're not sitting for the entrance exams? Then why are you studying tenth grade math, physics, and chemistry?" An Yuqian asked in surprise. "Shouldn't you start working at a factory after you graduate from high school? What's the point of learning all this stuff?"

"Knowledge will always be useful, and whatever I learn belongs to me," Ren Xiaosu said calmly.

An Yuqian shrugged and turned around. "Just don't forget to pay for my breakfast every morning. If not for you, I wouldn't need to eat breakfast. This expenditure is incurred only because of you."

"OK," Ren Xiaosu said.

However, An Yuqian suddenly realized that other than Ren Xiaosu, there was another group of students who came to study in the afternoon. There were over 20 male and female students, and they had been sitting in the library all afternoon for several days in a row.

Even though there were also others who came to study in the afternoon, it would not be so frequent and scheduled. Furthermore, their numbers were always the same. This group of students... actually sat next to Ren Xiaosu in an organized and disciplined manner.

After waking up in the afternoon, An Yuqian got closer to have a look and realized Wang Yuchi and the others were reading books related to mechanical engineering. This topic exceeded the syllabus of high school.

When the library was about to close, Wang Yuchi suddenly said to Ren Xiaosu, "Monitor, should we go home now since it's closing time?"

An Yuqian was stunned. The young man who paid for his breakfast every day was actually the class monitor of this group of students? These normal students were learning knowledge beyond their years while the monitor was still studying tenth grade textbooks? What sort of nonsensical crap was this.

Ren Xiaosu took a look at the sky and said, "Y'all can head back first. I wanna read a little while longer."

"Hey!" An Yuqian could not sit still anymore. "Dontcha know it's time for me to leave too?!"

"I'll give you 50 yuan," Ren Xiaosu said without even raising his head.

An Yuqian said unhappily, "That won't do. I have to leave now to play mahjong. Who knows if I'll recover my losses tonight!"

Ren Xiaosu quietly put the book back onto the bookshelf before turning to leave.

The first thing Ren Xiaosu said when he saw An Yuqian the next morning was, "So did you recover your losses?"

"Kid, why are you so annoying?" An Yuqian was upset. "Should you even be asking something like that?"

"Then you must have lost." Ren Xiaosu slapped a ten-yuan bill into An Yuqian's hand. "Go on, get your breakfast."

As An Yuqian held the ten-yuan bill, he felt insulted.

In the afternoon, when Wang Yuchi and the others came to the library again, An Yuqian suddenly sat down across from Ren Xiaosu. Ren Xiaosu looked up at him in surprise. "What's up?"

An Yuqian said, "You guys must be trying to learn more about mechanical engineering, right? However, you're all reading the wrong books!"

Ren Xiaosu frowned. He glanced at the books Wang Yuchi and the other students were holding. "Then what books should they be reading?"

Without a teacher's guidance, they had to learn everything by themselves. It was like crossing a river while holding a stone in their arms. Their progress was extremely slow.

Although Jiang Wu was a teacher, she was only a language teacher.

An Yuqian replied, "For 500 yuan, I'll tell you all what books you should read!"

In response, Ren Xiaosu threw 500 yuan over. Wang Yuchi whispered from beside him, "Monitor, why do I get the feeling that he's a scammer?"

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "A scammer can't possibly not even have any money for breakfast."

An Yuqian wanted to curse out loud. Ren Xiaosu was insinuating that he was not even qualified to be a scammer!

An Yuqian said with a sneer, "If you want to properly study mechanical engineering, don't try to run before you learn how to walk. You have to first learn math and physics!"

Ren Xiaosu leaned back in his chair and listened quietly. Meanwhile, Wang Yuchi and the others opened their notebooks and were preparing to take notes.

"I suggest you all first read Chen Jixiu's Mathematical Analysis as an introduction, then learn linear algebra. You won't have learned enough about this topic in high school."

"There's no need to read General Physics." An Yuqian threw a book onto the table. "Just read The Feynman Lectures on Physics."

"True Analysis... Forget it, you don't have to read that yet."

"As for the Methods of Mathematical Physics, you can have a look at Wang Dexin's books. All the books cover real functions, special functions, equations, and so on. There isn't much of a difference between them.

"You should also read up on thermodynamics."

An Yuqian kept talking for half an hour. Ren Xiaosu started to get the feeling that it would take several years to learn everything. But at this moment, An Yuqian smacked his lips and said, "And that's just the beginning. If you really want to gain a deeper understanding of mechanical engineering, you're all seriously lacking!"

Ren Xiaosu finally understood. So this guy was just rambling and trying to let off some steam. However, Ren Xiaosu also realized that An Yuqian was not an ordinary person. Even a scammer would probably not recite all that just to earn 500 yuan. Most importantly, no one could possibly teach him how to say what he just said.

Ren Xiaosu looked at An Yuqian and said, "If you teach them, I'll pay you 500 yuan for each lesson."

An Yuqian's eyes lit up, but he immediately held himself back. "But my time is very precious."

"400."

"Hey, why is the offer getting lower?!"

"300."

"Alright, I'll teach! 500 yuan! And not a cent less!"

Only then did Ren Xiaosu smile. "If you don't teach them well, I won't pay you."

"How can I not teach them well?" An Yuqian's eyes widened. "I... Forget it, you wouldn't understand even if I told you!"

But An Yuqian suddenly felt there was much more about this young man before him than he had thought. Would a normal student pay 500 yuan just to attend a lesson?

Chapter 313 Under watch

As soon as An Yuqian received the payment from Ren Xiaosu, he went to a second-hand market and purchased a blackboard. After he brought it back to the library, the venue was all set for teaching.

At first, he thought the teaching process would be very tedious based on what he knew of Ren Xiaosu. After all, if the class monitor was still studying the tenth grade curriculum, how much better off would the other students be?

At most, they should only be slightly better than Ren Xiaosu, right? Although they had been reading up on mechanical engineering books beyond their level, this gave An Yuqian the negative impression they were trying to run without learning how to walk first.

But when he started teaching them, An Yuqian realized Wang Yuchi and the others had a really good foundation.

Although he was giving a lecture on the advanced foundation of math and physics, not things a high school student could easily grasp, Wang Yuchi and the other students picked it up with ease in class.

Regardless of which student, they would all be considered top students at any of the high schools around. They were the type of students who stood a chance of getting into university!

An Yuqian frowned and asked, "Are you all planning on getting into university? You don't have to learn these things to qualify, though."

Wang Yuchi answered, "We're not planning to attend uni."

"Oh." An Yuqian did not say anything else. It was quite a pity that these fine young students were not thinking about attending university.

But if these students were not planning to do that, why would they still want to learn all this? However, that had nothing to do with An Yuqian. He only had to teach them and collect his pay.

However, An Yuqian realized Wang Yuchi and the others were always drenched in sweat every afternoon when they came over to the library. It was as though they had just finished exercising.

He asked, "What have you guys been doing?"

"Fitness training," Wang Yuchi answered simply.

This confused An Yuqian even more. "Why do you have to do fitness training? Are you planning to enlist in the military?"

"No."

"Then what are you doing the exercises for?" An Yuqian was still confused.

"What are you asking that for?" Wang Yuchi became wary. "We will just train if our class monitor tells us to do so."

As An Yuqian was their teacher now, Wang Yuchi would still be respectful towards those who imparted knowledge to them. But if An Yuqian kept questioning them on matters unrelated to learning, he felt he would have to be a bit more cautious.

An Yuqian felt that something was off. "He's only your class monitor, so why do you listen to him so much?"

Why were they so obedient that they did whatever Ren Xiaosu asked of them, be it learning new knowledge or fitness training?

As a matter of fact, An Yuqian was also the monitor of his class back in the days when he was still in school. Did anyone take him seriously back then? Why was there such a huge difference even though they were both class monitors?

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These days, Ren Xiaosu would go out by himself every morning and return home only at night.

Such peaceful days were really rare for him.

Ren Xiaosu really enjoyed days like these. It would be even better if no one were tailing him.

Although someone claimed the plainclothes cops who were watching over them had already left, Ren Xiaosu found out by the third day that there were different people following him around every day whenever he went out.

In order to tail him, they even switched personnel at intervals while following him. Whenever an intersection appeared, the lead person tailing him would walk off in a different direction and let the next person take over the tailing.

This group of people were quite professional in their methods. If not for Ren Xiaosu's keen sense of observation he developed in the wilderness, he would probably not have noticed their presence.



Who wanted to follow him? And why would they follow him?

Ren Xiaosu was quite sure that some of his identities were not known to these people yet, so in the eyes of many, he should only be a normal refugee.

Furthermore, Yang Xiaojin was definitely not in the know. If she had arranged for this, she should have known that if Ren Xiaosu really wanted to run away, these normal people would not be able to catch up to him.

As these people continued tailing him day after day, Ren Xiaosu's fractures healed. Many of his fractures no longer required the nanomachines to hold them together anymore.

After he fully recovered from his injuries, he could set aside some time to take the combat classes. He was looking forward to the class a lot.

An Yuqian would always see Ren Xiaosu sitting quietly in the library. Unless he got up to get a different book to read, he would not move at all.

On one hand, Ren Xiaosu was really quite focused when he read. On the other hand, he felt pain whenever he made any movements. Therefore, he would not make any unnecessary movements unless he was required to.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was on his way to the library. He didn't plan to alert the people who were keeping watch on him. Although he did not know what their motives were, it would be best to let them think that he was just a normal person.

Zhang Jinglin had offered him a little tip about what to do when he suspected he was being followed. In that scenario, he should stop and look at his watch. When he did that, the person tailing him would also subconsciously take a look at their own watch.

But Ren Xiaosu did not do so because he did not have a watch.

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In the Yang Consortium's manor, Yang Yu'an was carefully going through a document. As he was a little nearsighted, he would put on his glasses whenever he went through any documents.

But he did not usually wear glasses when he was outside. That was because his nearsightedness was not particularly severe. It was probably only in the range of 200 to 300 degrees.

At this moment, a housekeeper came in and said, "Sir, someone from the Intelligence Service is here to see you."

Yang Yu'an thought for a moment before saying, "Show them in."

A woman walked in. She was very young and probably only in her early twenties. She wasn't particularly beautiful, but she had an air of elegance to her. Ignoring her identity as a secret agent, she would look just like any other young woman with a charming demeanor if she were out on the streets.

She came over to Yang Yu'an's table and said respectfully, "Boss, I've been monitoring that kid for some days, but I haven't discovered anything unusual yet. Apart from heading to the library and returning back home day in and day out, he doesn't go anywhere else."

"Great work, Yingxue. Have you ever lost track of him before?" Yang Yu'an asked.

"No." The girl whose name was Zhou Yingxue said, "He's really stupid and didn't even realize we were tailing him. As you know, this is what I'm best at, so I believe in my judgment."

"Very good," Yang Yu'an said. He was starting to wonder if Ren Xiaosu might really just be a normal refugee after all.

He heard of the name Ren Xiaosu back when he was wanted by the Qing Consortium, but he was quickly taken off the list. The Qing Consortium had removed his name after confirming internally that he was just a refugee.

Yang Yu'an had also asked Lu Yuan about Ren Xiaosu, but Lu Yuan told him he had not heard of this person before. Yang Yu'an asked him whether it was Yang Xiaojin who asked him to say that, but Lu Yuan denied it.

Yang Yu'an frowned. Could it be that he was really just a refugee? He somehow felt that someone was hiding something from him, but he had no evidence. But from the looks of it, Ren Xiaosu really did seem like just a refugee.

Yang Yu'an looked at Zhou Yingxue and said, "Do not take the investigations lightly. I still feel that something is wrong. How could a normal refugee possibly attract Xiaojin's attention? If and when necessary, you can go and test him."

#### Chapter 314 Spare Me, Great Lord

Ren Xiaosu continued heading to the library as usual every day. In recent days, he discovered the library would already be open by the time he arrived, and An Yuqian would be snoring loudly in his chair at the entrance. It was clear that he had played mahjong all night again.

By rights, earning 500 yuan each day would be enough for An Yuqian to make a living. The monthly income for an average family of three in the stronghold was only 4,000 to 5,000 yuan. With a monthly salary of 15,000 yuan, he should be living a very comfortable life. But An Yuqian just had to use this money to play mahjong.

Even though Ren Xiaosu was footing all of the tuition, he had to get Wang Fugui to secretly trade a small amount of gold for cash. After all, they did not have any sources of income right now.

Fortunately, he still had quite a lot of gold left. Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu hoped he could come across the ruins of another civilization again or something similar in the future. Human civilization before The Cataclysm was full of gems.

If it were really as Yang Xiaojin had said, any single item from a research laboratory could be exchanged for an inexhaustible amount of money. That would absolutely be a godsend.

It was no wonder Qing Zhen had spared no effort in trying to excavate that research laboratory in the Jing Mountains.

Cigarettes could go bad and wine could volatilize, but paper documents stored away in enclosed areas were simply priceless.

Of course, some people had found wine that hadn't volatilized yet, but that was wine that had been stored in specially sealed packaging. If that were sold, the seller would earn a vast fortune overnight.

Ren Xiaosu knocked on the table in front of An Yuqian. "Have you eaten breakfast yet?"

"Huh?" An Yuqian looked at Ren Xiaosu and said sleepily, "Not yet. I was waiting for you to hand me the money for breakfast. When I passed by the stuffed bun shop this morning, the smell was heavenly."

Ren Xiaosu slapped a ten-yuan bill onto the table and said peeved, "Go and eat breakfast, I'll help you look after the library."

"Haha." An Yuqian pocketed the ten-yuan bill and said, "You're such a good person!"

"Wait a minute." Ren Xiaosu asked, "Why must you spend all your money on playing mahjong?"

In his opinion, An Yuqian was definitely not ordinary. How could someone who came up with a proper lesson plan in such a short time to teach math and physics in logical steps be an ordinary librarian?

The basic knowledge might seem very simple on its own, but to form them into a systematic lesson plan was a truly remarkable ability.

An Yuqian laughed and looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Then let me ask you: What can I do if I don't play mahjong?"

Ren Xiaosu was stumped as he really could not come up with an answer.

As An Yuqian walked out of the library, he waved. "Since the world is so boring, isn't it better to just play mahjong all day and sit around while we wait to die?"

Ren Xiaosu smiled. Well, sounded about right.

After a while, An Yuqian came back. He even had a bag of stuffed buns for Ren Xiaosu. "Try some. The buns from this shop are incredible. You don't look like a local, so I bet you haven't tried the buns from this shop before. You know, the proprietress of this bun shop is gorgeous. Her nickname is 'Bun Beauty!'"

Ren Xiaosu curled his lips. After he saw Yang Xiaojin's looks when she took off her cap, he felt he had already encountered what humans would define as true beauty.

As for that bun shop's proprietress, Ren Xiaosu had seen her before. She was definitely not as beautiful as An Yuqian had claimed. It could also be because the Bun Beauty had chopped scallions sprinkled all over her face when he passed by the shop, leading him to subconsciously think she was not that pretty after all.

An Yuqian glanced at the book Ren Xiaosu was holding. "Oh, I've also read this novel titled Spare Me, Great Lord. It's quite a good book, but unfortunately, only the first two volumes have been preserved after The Cataclysm. No one knows where the rest of the volumes are."

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "I was just browsing."

"The books you read are quite random." An Yuqian said, recalling, "Each morning, you read a variety of different books before switching to reading textbooks in the afternoon. If I remember correctly, you've read books on economics, literature, history, science, geography, and even comics."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded.

"So what do you really want to read?" An Yuqian asked, "There must be a purpose, right? I can divide reading into three categories. The first category is entertainment and is done purely because one simply likes reading books. The second category is information. For example, you can read a recipe if you want to learn how to cook. The third category is knowledge. For example, reading textbooks because you're taking the entrance exams and doing problem sets."

"Then I'm probably reading for entertainment," Ren Xiaosu said with a smile.

"But what are you trying to find out from the books?" An Yuqian asked.

"I want to know what this world is really like." Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, "In the past, I didn't have many opportunities to read books nor had the chance to systematically learn about the world. So I want to cherish the opportunities that I have now."

"Oh." An Yuqian nodded. "But there are still two types of books you haven't read yet."

"Which are they?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He had not really taken note before.

"You don't read books on philosophy. I saw you take out a book the day before, but you placed it back after reading two pages," An Yuqian said.

Ren Xiaosu was amused. He had not expected An Yuqian to be observing him so closely. "I just didn't feel like reading it."

"But it's philosophy. It's such an interesting topic." An Yuqian lamented, "How can you not want to read it?"

"I didn't want to torture myself," Ren Xiaosu said and smiled.

This time, it was An Yuqian's turn to be stunned. He fell silent for a while and then said with a smile, "You're interesting. The meaning of philosophy is to understand the world through self-reflection, but they're written based on the understanding of others, so it's fine not to read it. But why didn't you read political books?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "Because the world itself is much more interesting than politics."

"Alright then." An Yuqian smacked his lips. "I suddenly feel like we might have a lot in common."

Ren Xiaosu turned serious again and said, "I don't think so."

Just as An Yuqian was about to fly into a rage, a voice suddenly came from the entrance. "Hello, is anyone around? I'd like to enter the library to read."

The voice was pleasant and melodious. When An Yuqian turned around to have a look, his eyes lit up. "Coming, coming."

A charming woman was standing at the door with a head of wavy, long hair. Ren Xiaosu could just make out her earrings dangling down to her cheeks, as though they were secretly trying to seduce him.

The woman, wearing a pair of delicate high heels, waited for An Yuqian to check her library card. An Yuqian said, "You're Ms. Zhou Yingxue, right?"

"Yes." Zhou Yingxue nodded.

"OK, that'll do." An Yuqian followed the script. "You aren't allowed to borrow any books out of this library. If there's any damage to the books, please contact me immediately. I hope you take good care of the books here. After all, many of them can't be found anywhere else anymore."

"Mhm, thank you," Zhou Yingxue said with a gentle smile.

An Yuqian was mesmerized by her. "Please let me know if you need anything."

Zhou Yingxue slowly walked towards Ren Xiaosu and sat down across from him. She looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a smile, "Hello."

Ren Xiaosu looked up and said, "Hello, auntie."

From his desk, An Yuqian got anxious when he heard that. How could the kid talk this way? 'Even if Yue Lao[1] used rebar to unite your destinies, you would probably snap the bar with a response like that!'

Chapter 315 Controlled fusion

When Zhou Yingxue heard Ren Xiaosu address her as "auntie," she couldn't hold it in any longer. Thinking of how she was only 25 years old and still in her prime, how did she end up being called an auntie?

Of course, Ren Xiaosu did not really think that Zhou Yingxue was old. It was just that he had seen her outside before.

The people from the Intelligence Service who were watching Ren Xiaosu thought their tailing operation was flawless. They even believed that Ren Xiaosu was extremely stupid to not have noticed them.

But actually, Ren Xiaosu purely didn't care about them as he just wanted to heal from his injuries.

Besides, it would have been better if they had gotten some nanosoldiers to come and keep watch on him. Normal people were not able to arouse Ren Xiaosu's interest in the slightest.

However, Zhou Yingxue was not an average person either. She said with a smile, "At my age, it's more appropriate if you address me as big sister. Are you familiar with the library?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head.

Zhou Yingxue was stunned. He had been coming to the library every single day for almost half a month now, yet he was saying he was not familiar with it?

She continued with a smile, "I'm looking for a book titled The Theory of Time. Do you know where it is?"

Ren Xiaosu looked up at her. He had already given an attitude, trying to distance himself from her, yet she still persisted in striking up a conversation with him.

But at this moment, the voice from the palace said, "Quest: Help the knowledge seeker determine the correct location of the book."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Why did this quest have to be assigned to him now of all times? Moreover, the quest even specifically stated it had to be the correct location, so he could not just point to a random spot. However, he really did not know where the book was.

He would have to do the quest no matter what. He looked at Zhou Yingxue and tried his luck by saying, "The Theory of Time must be in this library. Why don't you look for it yourself?"

Zhou Yingxue was taken aback by the answer. 'You might as well say that the book is inside Stronghold 88! Of course I know it's in this library!'

However, Ren Xiaosu didn't care about that. He thought that since the palace was just asking him to pinpoint the correct location, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the book was right here in the library, right?

The voice from the palace said, "Quest complete. Awarded Basic Skill Duplication Scroll."

Ren Xiaosu wanted to give his own ingenuity a thumbs up. There was probably no one else who could match him in terms of exploiting loopholes when it came to doing quests!

Seeing how awkward it was, An Yuqian quickly found the book titled The Theory of Time and handed it to Zhou Yingxue. Zhou Yingxue got very frustrated but could not vent.

At this moment, a group of people came into the library from outside. It was Wang Yuchi and the others.

When they came to the table where Ren Xiaosu was, they were a little taken aback when they saw Zhou Yingxue sitting there as well. They were used to sitting together at this table to study by themselves.

If Zhou Yingxue was seated here, they would have a stranger in between them. That would make it very awkward, and they would have to be very careful with their words.

They would often discuss some secretive topics during their conversations. After all, they knew too much, so they would unintentionally bring it up while talking.

Zhou Yingxue knew these people wanted to sit together with Ren Xiaosu, but she just pretended to focus on her book and sat there without any intention of excusing herself.

Someone wanted to ask Zhou Yingxue if she could change seats but was stopped by Wang Yuchi. "The library is a public place, so we have no reason to disturb others from reading where they want."

Ren Xiaosu gathered the books in front of him and said, "Let's switch tables."

The library was very large, and there were a lot of tables other than this one. As such, their entire group went to another table and left Zhou Yingxue there to continue reading by herself.

Meanwhile, Zhou Yingxue sat there for the rest of the entire afternoon reading *The Theory of Time*. She had to do so in order to portray that she was really here to read so as not to arouse Ren Xiaosu's suspicions. No one really knew whether she could even absorb what she was reading.

Zhou Yingxue was a little frustrated. She did not lack suitors! How could she not even have enticed the young man in front of her one bit?! Something must be wrong with him, right?!

After that day, Zhou Yingxue never appeared before Ren Xiaosu again. The frequency of him being watched also lessened. Sometimes, they would only keep watch on him once every few days.

Meanwhile, An Yuqian's lectures were starting to progress much quicker. He even sighed, saying how he had never thought it would be this easy to teach students. When he used to teach, he always felt the students were really stupid.

Ren Xiaosu realized An Yuqian could have been in research in the past. Later, he somehow became a librarian. When he had time, he thought that maybe he could ask Yang Xiaojin about it. She might just know something regarding this.

As they learned more, Wang Yuchi and the other male students would occasionally sketch the armor's blueprint from imagination during their breaks. Now that the delay in their control of the nanomachines had been reduced to less than 0.2 seconds, they would sometimes imagine how they would look with the armor on. It was really exciting just thinking about it.

After they sketched out the designs for the arms and hands, An Yuqian caught a glimpse and said with a laugh, "So you'd wanted to design something like that? Y'know, it's completely unachievable!"

Ren Xiaosu looked up at An Yuqian. "Why?"

An Yuqian replied, "A lot of people are looking to design 'mechanical armor' and think that these individual combat systems can play a significant role on the battlefield. However, there's too many challenges to overcome."

Ren Xiaosu asked with great interest, “What kinds of challenges?”

“First of all, you can’t solve the issue of the propulsion system.” An Yuqian sneered, “How could there be such a powerful and portable power source in this world? There’s only one kind of power source like this, and it’s achieved through controlled nuclear fusion!”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Yang Xiaojin was from the Saboteurs, an organization that hated nuclear technology the most. If he were to fit a controlled fusion reactor on his armor, wouldn’t all of the Saboteurs come after him?

“Are there any other potential power sources?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

An Yuqian said firmly, “No! At least not within the limits of known technology! The raw materials for fusion are deuterium and tritium. If the technology is advanced enough, just deuterium alone can be used. An abundant amount of deuterium already exists in water. But the existing methods of controlled fusion, such as the ‘tokamak,’<sup>[1]</sup> present a very difficult problem to solve. The question remains on how to shrink the size of the device so it can be fitted easily on a human body. The larger the visible radius of the device, the better the energy confinement!”

“It’s not impossible if you want to shrink it, but it will be difficult.” An Yuqian looked at Ren Xiaosu and the others with a smile. “It’s just a dream for the several of you to achieve it.”

Ren Xiaosu frowned. He had also been struggling with the power source for the nanomachines all this while. After all, if he only depended on his bioenergy to charge them, he would only be able to use it for two minutes with every two hours of charging. It would not be enough to sustain the nanomachines in a high-intensity battle.

“Are there any other challenges that can’t be overcome?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

An Yuqian said, “How would you command the full body of armor to listen to your orders? How complicated a procedure would it take in order to—”

“That seems rather easy to solve,” interrupted Ren Xiaosu.

An Yuqian was confused. ‘What are you bragging for?!’

However, Ren Xiaosu did not intend to say any more than that. Be it the Yang Consortium or the Li Consortium, no one would possibly use the nanomachines as armor for now. That was mainly because it would be a little too extravagant to use them like that.

Chapter 316 Encountering Lu Yuan again

An Yuqian could not accept Ren Xiaosu’s bragging. “Do you really know what programmable matter<sup>[1]</sup> entails?”

Ren Xiaosu looked at An Yuqian. “What?”

An Yuqian raised his voice and said, “Programmable matter is a type of ‘intermediary matter’ that changes its physical properties based upon user input or autonomous sensing.”

Ren Xiaosu thought for a second. “Real words, please.”



“In short,” An Yuqian said, “if you want to build this kind of armor, its components must at least have the ability to shapeshift and self-reconfigure. Without programmable matter, you can’t create flexible self-combination and separation processes.”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu said calmly, “No worries about that.”

An Yuqian nearly went crazy. “Don’t you understand what I am saying? How can you not be worried about something this important!”

To be honest, Ren Xiaosu could solve all the problems An Yuqian brought up, other than the problem with the power source. As for the “programmable matter,” the nanomachines were better performing than that.

Ren Xiaosu realized An Yuqian definitely had not specialized in the field of nanotech research. Otherwise, he couldn’t possibly be unaware of the current progress that nanomachines were making. Furthermore, he was certainly not a core member of the Yang Consortium.

But how did An Yuqian end up in this state? Although Ren Xiaosu’s knowledge was still quite far from allowing him to become an academic, he could feel An Yuqian’s stubbornness and pride in the face of science. Why was An Yuqian willing to be a mere librarian here?

In the following days, An Yuqian focused on teaching and playing mahjong, no longer bothering with the so-called power source and programmable matter.

Ren Xiaosu urged Wang Yuchi and the other male students to come up with designs for the armor after they got home and to approach An Yuqian for help during their breaks during the day to resolve any technical difficulties. For some reason, An Yuqian was willing to help them out.

From An Yuqian’s point of view, if he helped Ren Xiaosu solve all of his current difficulties and led him to the issues he mentioned, Ren Xiaosu would come to realize how wise he was.

He felt that Ren Xiaosu was not bothered by the state of programmable matter technology only because he wasn’t at that level and had yet to encounter the bottlenecks of the technology! After all, An Yuqian did not think that a tenth grader could possibly understand his vision and previous position in the academic field. Thinking of this, An Yuqian even wanted to bug Ren Xiaosu to teach him remedial courses so Ren Xiaosu could quickly understand just how awesome he was.

One day, when Ren Xiaosu wanted to resume studying a textbook from the day before, he found a notebook placed next to it. This was something he had not seen before.

Ren Xiaosu opened the notebook and saw someone had carefully sorted the learning order and key points of knowledge. With just a glance, he knew exactly who had written it. It was definitely An Yuqian!

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at An Yuqian in amusement. Was that guy trying to act mysterious? “Is this your notebook?”

An Yuqian was a little embarrassed. “Oh, it’s just something from the past I stumbled upon and thought would be useful for someone else. You can have it if you think it’ll be useful. It’s pretty suitable for you.

Some topics are deliberately simplified in high school. If you follow the curriculum, you'll end taking a lot of repetitive steps. So why don't you just follow the method I used to learn?"

Ren Xiaosu said, "Thank you, how much is it?" He was about to pay for it.

However, An Yuqian flew into a rage. "I didn't give you the notebook for money!" Then An Yuqian angrily went back to the entrance to watch the door.

Ren Xiaosu returned to his seat with a grin. After getting guidance from An Yuqian, the outlook for the armor was becoming better and better. In An Yuqian's words, "Science is an extremely mysterious subject. When a design moves closer to rationality, it will have an even more special charm to it."

It was a charm that could truly conquer the mind.

Wait. Ren Xiaosu remembered he'd just received a Basic Skill Duplication Scroll. Although it could not be used to copy superpowers, it was still very useful for learning normal skills.

He had wanted to use it when he saw Yang Xiaojin again, but Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized he did not have to copy Yang Xiaojin's skills by all means. Couldn't he just copy from An Yuqian, who was right in front of him? Yang Xiaojin's knowledge of mathematics and physics would definitely not be as good as a professional academic's like An Yuqian.

It was not that Yang Xiaojin was not smart, but that people specialized in different professions. There was no need to compare an amateur to a professional.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu said in his mind, "Use the Skill Duplication Skill."

The voice from the palace answered, "Randomly copied target's skill: Master-level mahjong playing. As the host does not have the corresponding advanced-level skill, the host will only be able to learn it up to the advanced level. Do you want to learn it?"

Ren Xiaosu immediately looked at An Yuqian. Why would he still lose money every day when he clearly had a master-level skill in playing mahjong? There had to be something wrong! Could it be that someone set up a scam for him? Or did the opponents cheat?

An Yuqian noticed Ren Xiaosu staring at him. "What are you looking at me for?"

"Oh, it's nothing." Ren Xiaosu replied to his mind palace, "Yes."

By now, Ren Xiaosu had almost recovered from his injuries. As long as he did not exercise vigorously, he would be alright. He did not find it painful anymore even if he moved around.

Finally, it was time for him to learn about hand-to-hand combat. He wondered who Yang Xiaojin had arranged for him to learn hand-to-hand combat from.

Yang Xiaojin had given him an address not far from the library. When he felt that his injuries had healed, he could go there by himself. A martial arts school stood there.

During the day, he would spend his time in the library. In the evening, he would head to the martial arts school. Ren Xiaosu's life had never been more fulfilling.

He went to look for the place based on the address Yang Xiaojin had given him. It seemed that the martial arts school was located inside a small alley, so it didn't look well-known at all.

"Nangeng Alley. Here we are!" Ren Xiaosu said.

It really was a small alley. Ren Xiaosu felt that whoever ran a martial arts school in this alley was likely losing money. They probably could not even cover their overheads.

But when he got to the entrance of the martial arts school, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see a lot of students inside. Several dozen students were standing in a yard slightly over 200 square meters. Many parents were waiting outside the martial arts school to pick up their children after class ended.

When he looked up, he was surprised to see the door frame and school signboard were carved out of a solid piece of wood. From the look of it, it was quite old. Rainwater had eroded the surface, creating white stains.

He saw the words "Lu Family" written on the sign.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if he might actually know the owner of the school. He went in and said to an instructor, "Hello, I'm looking for the owner."

The instructor shouted to the inside loudly, "Old Lu, someone's looking for you!"

Lu Yuan walked out. When he saw Ren Xiaosu, he said with a kind smile, "Quick, come in. We haven't met in a while!"

The parents standing at the entrance were stunned. When they saw Ren Xiaosu earlier, they thought he was just a normal young man. But they could not have expected Lu Yuan would personally come out to meet him.

### **Chapter 317 A precious quality**

When Ren Xiaosu saw the two words "Lu Family," he thought the hand-to-hand combat teacher Yang Xiaojin had found for him might be Lu Yuan.

When they were in Stronghold 109, Lu Yuan had walked leisurely through the chaos while Yang Xiaojin protected him from afar atop a tall building. At that time, Ren Xiaosu still did not know Lu Yuan was from the Yang Consortium.

However, Ren Xiaosu was still unclear about Lu Yuan and Yang Xiaojin's relationship.

Currently, there was an intense war going on at the Yang Consortium's front line. Although it looked like victory had already been secured, the question was why didn't Lu Yuan get deployed to the front line when he was a known supernatural being in the organization?

Even though it was difficult for supernatural beings to do much on the main battlefield, it was still better than having none deployed at all. It would also be quite good to have some supernatural beings accompanying and protecting the generals.

Therefore, when Ren Xiaosu saw Lu Yuan in the stronghold, he realized the relationship between Lu Yuan and Yang Xiaojin might be a little closer than the relationship between Lu Yuan and the Yang Consortium.

Lu Yuan led Ren Xiaosu to the backyard. As he walked, he laughed and said, "There's no need for any formalities. I used to be the housekeeper of Xiaojin's family, and she grew up under my care, so you can address me as Uncle Lu. I served the Yang Consortium in the past, but I was able to regain my freedom and enjoy retirement because of that hard drive."

Lu Yuan was also an understanding person. Since Yang Xiaojin trusted Ren Xiaosu, he might as well be open with his identity and introduce himself.

"Hello, Uncle Lu." Ren Xiaosu asked, "Luo Lan is also here in the stronghold. Why didn't you go and beat him up? He's freeloading off our family right now."

"Haha," Lu Yuan started laughing. "When I'm in character for my missions, I have to be immersed in my role. But after that, I need to get out of character. Otherwise, I'll get embroiled in many difficult situations. Since I'm no longer Stronghold 109's overseer, whatever had happened before has nothing to do with me."

Ren Xiaosu thought he was such a forgiving person. It was no wonder he could leisurely retire here and even open a martial arts school. "Xiaojin recommended me to learn hand-to-hand combat from you. What time should I usually come?"

"Xiaojin told me you always spend the day reading in the library until evening, so just come at night." Lu Yuan said, "Have you trained before?"

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and said, "I've never learned it systematically before. But I did wonder about it while living in the wilderness."

"Then I'll teach you systematically from how to generate power to the actual execution of techniques when in combat. Afterwards, we'll train your reaction speed and your awareness of your opponent," Lu Yuan said.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "Shouldn't I be learning some boxing styles? The type they're practicing outside..."

Right after he came into the school, he had seen a lot of children practicing boxing techniques. The way they were practicing was rather fascinating.

However, Lu Yuan said with a smile, "That's something only children will learn. It's used to cheat parents out of their money. Parents nowadays get distressed the moment their children suffer a little, so how can they possibly practice boxing that way?"

'How honest of him to blatantly admit that he's cheating others of their money,' Ren Xiaosu thought to himself.

Lu Yuan said, "The technique to generate power needs to be practiced. You'll have to suffer first and learn through hardship before you can master control of your body."

The technique to generate power while throwing a punch was that you had to punch while twisting your hips. If not, the resulting punch would be extremely weak.

Lu Yuan continued, "The actual skill in combat is the technique in which you use to kill. It's very complicated to explain but will help you know what you should think about when attacking someone, and what others might be thinking as well, stuff like that."

"Then what are reaction speed and awareness of the opponent about?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Reaction speed varies from person to person." Lu Yuan said, "Everyone's reaction speed can improve with some training. But of course, everyone also has a 'ceiling.'"

"In other words, you're saying that everyone's potential is different?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Yes. Take Xiaojin for example. If she has to fire a shot at a fast-moving target with only one chance of hitting it, the window available for her is a mere 0.06 seconds. If that were the upper limit you were born with, that's what you have. But if you don't, you can't master it no matter how much you train. Not even a supernatural being can do that."

"0.06 seconds?" Ren Xiaosu said in surprise. He had never calculated time down to two decimal places before. So Yang Xiaojin's reaction speed was that terrifying?

What Lu Yuan was currently talking about was the theory of talent. When everyone worked hard and put in the same amount of effort, they could all reach a certain standard, such as achieving the master skill level.

But if one wanted to break through that ceiling and advance further to the perfect skill level, they would need to have a real talent for it. That was something they were born with.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu felt a little awkward when he remembered his one and only perfect-level skill was to "annoy people."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Can I test my reaction speed?"

Lu Yuan said with a smile, "Let's do this step by step and not get too ambitious so early on. Since you haven't received training before, you should first properly master how to generate power."

"OK." Ren Xiaosu did not argue with him. Since he came here with the attitude to learn, he had to do his best to learn properly. He could not get conceited just because he felt very powerful already.

The two of them came to the backyard where Lu Yuan pointed to a sandbag hanging in the middle of the yard. He said, "Hit it with all your might and let me see how strong you are."

“Mhm.” When Ren Xiaosu walked up to the sandbag, Lu Yuan watched him bend his knees a little. Then he channeled all his strength into the punch and tore straight through the sandbag!

Lu Yuan was stunned. This was a sandbag specially prepared for supernatural beings to use!

But what surprised him was not Ren Xiaosu’s strength. The strength of supernatural beings ranged from high to low, and the power displayed by Ren Xiaosu was not particularly rare. It could at most be regarded as extremely strong but still shouldn’t really surprise anyone. Of course, this was before Ren Xiaosu activated his City Crusher.

What surprised Lu Yuan was that all of Ren Xiaosu’s muscles seemingly acted as one at the point he generated power. It was flawless. Especially the slight bending of his hind leg, which was extremely important. Most people couldn’t exert their strength because they did not make use of the power in their legs.

Had he really not trained before?

Moreover, he could tell that Ren Xiaosu had not exerted all his strength yet. His left hand and arm remained in a semi-relaxed state throughout, and he could still pull back his punch at any moment.

It was much harder to control strength than to fully exert it.

Lu Yuan asked, “Why didn’t you put in your best effort?”

“Oh.” Ren Xiaosu explained, “Probably just a force of habit. I always encountered wild animals in the wilderness, and sometimes, I don’t know how they’ll attack. So I have to guard against them.”

Lu Yuan said, “Let’s see your kicking this time. Do a side kick.”

However, Lu Yuan still couldn’t find any flaws in Ren Xiaosu’s performance. This was probably also some kind of talent. Lu Yuan sighed. “It seems you’ve led a rather difficult life.”

If he had led a carefree and easy life before this, he couldn’t possibly be so good at generating power.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, “It’s mainly because I’m afraid to die.”

Lu Yuan also smiled. “You don’t have to learn how to generate power since you’re already so adept at it. Let’s start with learning practical combat techniques.”

“OK.” Ren Xiaosu nodded.

After waiting for a long while, Lu Yuan thought Ren Xiaosu would ask him again if he could test his reaction speed, especially after he had praised him. However, Ren Xiaosu did not even mention a word and slowly learned what he was taught with a patient attitude.

This was not talent but a precious quality that existed in a person.

Chapter 318 Get over here and help me!

“The thing about the ‘calf slicer’ move is that you have to grab hold of your opponent’s ankle as soon as they lose balance. You then have to use that opportunity to grab hold of their calf and create a pinch point with the back of your knee to exert force onto their calf. That way, you can apply a pressure of a few hundred kilograms on your opponent’s tibia and fibula. Although the tibia is one of the strongest bones in the human body, you can break it easily by using this type of lock.” After Lu Yuan spoke, he called for an instructor to spar with Ren Xiaosu.

Such a technique would have to be tried out in actual combat. Ren Xiaosu couldn’t grasp the concept by just looking at it.

The instructor looked at the scrawny Ren Xiaosu in front of him and felt that he should be rather weak. As such, he said with a smile, “Let’s go through the motions.”

He thought Ren Xiaosu must have been sent here by some family member of the Yang Consortium. Why else would the owner offer to train him personally? So it would be better not to injure someone like him. If his parents came to seek answers, he would be in deep trouble for sure.

Lu Yuan said to Ren Xiaosu, “Although it’s only practice, it’s still necessary to make you understand that even though you might have an idea of how to execute a move, if you’re not fast and steady enough, the idea will just remain an idea.”

Then Lu Yuan said to the instructor, “Do your best and don’t allow him to immobilize you.”

“Alright,” the instructor responded.

After the two of them got in position, Lu Yuan suddenly told them to start. The instructor was just about to turn around to put Ren Xiaosu in a lock, but he found out that Ren Xiaosu had already grappled his leg!

Before the instructor could react, he felt his entire body being shoved to the ground and his leg being firmly locked in Ren Xiaosu’s arms. Not only that, after Ren Xiaosu had him immobilized, he unconsciously tried to strike the instructor’s ribs with his free hand. Ren Xiaosu was going to terminate his opponent’s ability to fight.

The instructor started sweating. It was as though he was about to experience something terrifying.

Lu Yuan hurriedly shouted, “Stop, stop, stop!”

Everything happened so quickly that the instructor could not react. He had nearly died from Ren Xiaosu’s punch.

Only Lu Yuan had seen it clearly. If Ren Xiaosu landed his punch, the instructor would probably become disabled. That punch might have even caused his organs to rupture and lead to his death.

The instructor got back up on his feet in a daze and heard Lu Yuan say seriously to Ren Xiaosu, “Why were you trying to kill him?”

When the instructor heard that, sweat started rolling down his back.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "Actually, I wouldn't have punched him for real. But I thought that if I only immobilized my enemy, I would appear weak."

"You're saying it's a sign of weakness if you just make your opponent vulnerable but not kill him?" Lu Yuan had a strange look on his face.

"Well, it's not that." Ren Xiaosu said, "The enemies that I encountered in the wilderness would all fight to their deaths. There's no other outcome. So I thought that it wouldn't be enough to just break one leg. What if the opponent has a gun in his hand and fires it at me? I'll definitely die!"

Lu Yuan went silent for a while. As he had grown up in the stronghold, the civilization here had taught him to show mercy to others and resolve conflicts peacefully.

However, the philosophy of life that Ren Xiaosu had gained from living in the wilderness was that kindness was the same as weakness.

Next to them, the instructor suddenly felt a little ashamed that he got beaten to the point of no retaliation by such a scrawny young man. "Sir, I—"

"It's alright." Lu Yuan smiled and waved it off. "It's not your fault. Let me train with him instead. That way, everything will be fine. You can also take the opportunity to observe from the sidelines and witness the power of supernatural beings."

After he said that, Lu Yuan went to spar with Ren Xiaosu. After all, normal instructors would just be like toys in the face of Ren Xiaosu. They were not qualified to spar with him at all.

The instructor finally heaved a sigh of relief. So this young man was a supernatural being. It was no wonder he was not his match. It looked like he could only let the owner spar with him personally.

Ten minutes later, Lu Yuan slapped the floor. "Let go, let go! I lost, I lost! That hurts, that really hurts!"

The instructor was dumbfounded. When Lu Yuan got up from the ground, he said to Ren Xiaosu in seriousness, "You need to learn how to control your strength. Remember, we're just helping you fully understand the weaknesses of the human body's joints by showing you these techniques. There's no need for you to exert so much strength."

Lu Yuan had thought that since he was a supernatural being too, his strength should be more or less equal to Ren Xiaosu's. But to his surprise, he had overestimated himself and underestimated Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu nodded and said, "Alright, I won't exert too much strength."

"Alright, we'll end today's lesson here then." Lu Yuan said, "Remember to come every night. If you have something else to do, call me and tell me. Little Li, please jot down our phone number for him."

After Ren Xiaosu left, Lu Yuan grabbed his own waist and said, "Get over here and help me."

The instructor asked softly, "Sir, who is that young man?"



After thinking about it for a while, Lu Yuan did not know how he should describe Ren Xiaosu's identity.

It was still quite early when Ren Xiaosu went home at night. The sound of people playing mahjong could still be heard on the streets. It seemed like the stronghold residents were not bothered by the war outside since they had already won.

Along the way, he also saw some workers who had just knocked off from work. Although the stronghold stipulated they could only work eight hours a day, no one ever oversaw or upheld this rule at the factories. As a result, many of the stronghold residents did not lead a happy life.

The social circle of these stronghold residents was similar to a city structure, and most of them had never ventured outside either. Ren Xiaosu felt that these people were more like a higher class of refugee, as everyone still had to serve the organization in some way and led busy lives every day. It was just that one group had to earn a living in the wilderness while the other had to do so within the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu used to think that people living in the stronghold would leave their doors open at night and no one would steal their belongings as everyone trusted one another. But after getting into the stronghold, he found that it was not true.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu heard a familiar voice coming from a small alley. "Nine bamboo!"

When Ren Xiaosu walked into the alley, he found An Yuqian seated inside a small yard. He was playing mahjong with two old ladies and an old man, and they were all completely absorbed in the game.

Ren Xiaosu was a little confused. He had thought that An Yuqian might have been scammed by someone in a gambling den, so he could not win even with his master-level mahjong playing. However, that wasn't the case at all.

After observing them from a distance for a while, he noticed the old man and the old ladies were secretly switching tiles under the table. But it didn't look like An Yuqian had noticed anything.

Just how stupid could he get?

If anyone were to switch tiles like this when playing mahjong with Ren Xiaosu, he would flip the table in his opponent's face.

An Yuqian was stunned when he saw Ren Xiaosu. He said to the old man and the old ladies, "Please wait for me a little. My friend is looking for me."

Then An Yuqian stood up and went over to Ren Xiaosu. "What are you doing here?"

"With that loud voice of yours," Ren Xiaosu said, "I could hear you shouting 'nine bamboo' even from two streets away!"

**Chapter 319 The only thing that can destroy humanity is humanity itself**

If it weren't for An Yuqian's loud voice attracting him, Ren Xiaosu would definitely not have found his way over.

"Was I that loud?" An Yuqian was a little taken aback. Then he looked at the sky. "Are you going home now?"

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu looked into the yard and saw the old man and old ladies looking quite happy. He asked An Yuqian curiously, "So they were the ones who won your money?"

"Yeah," An Yuqian said with a smile.

"Did you know that they secretly switched their tiles?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

An Yuqian fell silent and quickly dragged Ren Xiaosu out of the alley. Ren Xiaosu suddenly understood and said, "Then you deliberately lost your money to them?"

"Yes," An Yuqian said with a sigh.

Ren Xiaosu realized the reason behind this might also be related to why An Yuqian was living such a dejected life. After all, Ren Xiaosu had asked the palace about An Yuqian's proficiency in mathematics and physics. The palace told him he was at the master level. Ren Xiaosu initially thought An Yuqian's proficiency would be at the perfect level, but the palace said there was no perfect rating for science subjects. Therefore, everyone could at most be at the master level.

Ren Xiaosu understood what the palace was trying to say. After all, humans were still exploring the realm of science, so of course they couldn't reach perfection.

But for a person with mastery in math and physics, he ended up becoming a librarian? If there wasn't some sort of a story behind this, Ren Xiaosu would definitely not be convinced.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "What's their relationship with you?"

"They're the family members of two former good friends of mine who were also my students." An Yuqian said, "During an experiment, an explosion happened in our laboratory due to my negligence. As a result, both my assistants perished."

"What type of experiment?" Ren Xiaosu guessed, "Was it a nuclear experiment?"

"If it was, you wouldn't be seeing Stronghold 88," An Yuqian snapped.

"Oh." Ren Xiaosu had thought An Yuqian worked in nuclear physics. "Then what happened after that?"

"Afterwards, I got sacked and lost my job. Even my girlfriend broke up with me. Before she left, she also took away the pet tortoise we had at home." An Yuqian sighed.

"So was that why you got depressed?" Ren Xiaosu did not quite understand.

"What do you think? What would you have done if it were you?" An Yuqian asked.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment. "At least halve the tortoise so you can put it in your own separate wines[1]."

An Yuqian was confused. Weren't they just talking about his sorrowful past? Why the sudden mention of halving the tortoise then?

He did not know that for refugees like Ren Xiaosu, even if their loved ones had died, they would still have to live on as usual. Who had the time to be sentimental?

Ren Xiaosu had come across so many townspeople whose family members had passed away the day before and would still show up at work the very next day.

As the two of them walked down the street, An Yuqian cut a bleak figure under the dim yellow streetlights.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Then you deliberately lost money to them so that they can have a better life?"

"Yes." An Yuqian nodded. "I'm fine with it since I can survive no matter what. But they're different. Without their children, nobody will support them."

"Alright," Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "You're quite the loyal person."

"They died because of me, after all," An Yuqian said.

"Well, I'll see you tomorrow morning!" Ren Xiaosu waved and parted ways with An Yuqian. Although he could not sympathize with An Yuqian, he still respected him.

An Yuqian suddenly called out to Ren Xiaosu, asking, "Why do you seek knowledge?"

Ren Xiaosu turned around and said on the long street in the dark, "I've answered this question before."

"But do you know where the end of the road lies for science?" An Yuqian asked.

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head.

"There's no end!" An Yuqian said, "That's what makes people despair!"

"What's there to despair about?" Ren Xiaosu could not understand.

An Yuqian no longer seemed to be talking to Ren Xiaosu. He was saying to himself, "There were creatures that lived on these lands for a 165 million years, but the Homo genus has only been in existence for about 3 million years. We don't have to consider whatever natural disasters or mutations that might occur, nor will we even get to witness an apocalypse brought on by a natural disaster within our lifetimes.... The only thing that can destroy humanity is humanity itself!"

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little lost. He did not know why An Yuqian would say this to him and wondered what had gotten into him. He asked An Yuqian, "Then how do you think humanity will destroy itself?"

“Science.”

This word crashed through the backdrop of the night. It was like a fate that awaited humans at the end of a long road.

“You’re crazy.” Ren Xiaosu waved it off and headed home.

...

When Ren Xiaosu returned home, he found everyone waiting for him out in the yard. He looked at everyone’s expression. “Why do I have a bad feeling about this?”

Yan Liuyuan walked over and handed him an invitation that came with gold embossed letters and decorative patterns at the corners. There was also an ornamental tassel extending down the middle of the invitation.

The invitation was sealed with wax that had an exquisite design of a bronze ram on it. This was the Yang Consortium’s symbol.

Yan Liuyuan said, “Someone delivered it here this evening. They told us that the Yang Consortium has invited the two of us to their manor and even reminded us to wear something formal since a lot of distinguished guests will be present that night.”

Ren Xiaosu opened the invitation. Although it was written very politely, everyone knew the reason an organization like the Yang Consortium would suddenly invite two refugee kids was definitely not as simple as wanting to get to know them.

“Should we go or not?” Yan Liuyuan asked in a whisper, “I feel that the Yang Consortium has a more sinister motive.”

“A Feast at Hongmen?” [2] Ren Xiaosu chuckled and said, “Surely there won’t be 300 assassins rushing out of the shadows when a cup gets smashed, right?”

“I don’t think that will happen.” When Yan Liuyuan saw Ren Xiaosu taking it easy, he also started laughing. “But this matter is definitely not so simple.”

“Alright, let’s not think too much about it.” Ren Xiaosu patted Yan Liuyuan’s head. “I’ll bring you out to shop for some clothes tomorrow morning. We should also go and have a look for ourselves at what the feast held by the organization is all about.”

“OK,” Yan Liuyuan replied obediently.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, “Did you face any problems at school?”

“No, it’s been pretty good,” Yan Liuyuan said with a smile.

“When you tell a lie, you always smile like this.” Ren Xiaosu said, “Are you and Dalong getting ostracized by your classmates?”

“No, no, you should quickly go and get some rest. You still haven’t fully recovered from your injuries,” Yan Liuyuan said as he pushed Ren Xiaosu into the house.

Wang Fugui came up and said, “I went out to trade some of the gold for money today. I didn’t trade too much to avoid attracting attention...”

“Why are you talking about money at this time of night? Xiaosu is tired, so let him get some rest first.” Xiaoyu rattled off at the back, “Xiaosu, have you eaten yet? I’ll heat up some dishes and make some scrambled eggs with stir-fried tomatoes for you. There’s chicken soup in the pot as well...”

Ren Xiaosu smiled. This was what home felt like.

### **Chapter 320 A gulf and a natural divide**

When Ren Xiaosu was asleep, Xiaoyu suddenly pulled Yan Liuyuan aside and asked, “Why didn’t you tell your brother what happened at school?”

“Big Sister Xiaoyu, keep your voice down.” Yan Liuyuan said as he dragged her out, “I can’t tell him.”

“Why can’t you tell him? You should let your big brother teach those little bastards a lesson. What gives them the right to call you and Dalong names and ransack your belongings?” Xiaoyu said furiously.

Yan Liuyuan whispered, “If they need to be taught a lesson, I can do it myself. But it wasn’t easy for my brother to decide to come here for Big Sister Xiaojin’s sake, so how can I trouble him at a time like this?”

After Yan Liuyuan started attending school, his classmates immediately figured out he was a refugee. That was because he had a different understanding of how daily lives went.

Yang Xiaojin had selected the best school in Stronghold 88 for Yan Liuyuan to attend. The students there were not ordinary people, and many of the students’ parents were extremely well-connected. So they already knew about these refugees enrolling into the school.

At the beginning, the students bluntly called Yan Liuyuan a refugee. Later on, as the others started joining in on the name calling, someone even called him and Wang Dalong riff-raff. After all, there was only a syllable[1] of difference between the two.

The teacher forced Yan Liuyuan and Wang Dalong to sit in the last row and even deliberately left the seats next to them empty.

But from the beginning to the end, Yan Liuyuan did not show any retaliation. Ren Xiaosu had already done a lot for Yan Liuyuan, so it was not a big deal to make some sacrifices for Ren Xiaosu.

Early in the morning, Ren Xiaosu brought Yan Liuyuan out to shop for clothes. Since they had been invited and there were also instructions for them to be dressed formally, he wouldn’t be deliberately contradictory.

For this reason, Wang Fugui specially handed all the money he had recently exchanged to Ren Xiaosu. Although he did not know where Ren Xiaosu had gotten his gold from, Old Wang knew Ren Xiaosu still had a lot left in his possession. And it was much more than he could imagine.

Xiaoyu even reminded Ren Xiaosu repeatedly to not be thrifty and to make sure they dressed nicely.

But when they arrived at a well-known tailor shop in the stronghold, Ren Xiaosu realized they did not have any formal clothes here.

“Bossman,” Ren Xiaosu called the owner over, “do you have any formal wear? We’d like to try them on.”

An old man came out with a measuring tape dangling around his neck and two sleeves hanging off his arm. “You wish to buy formal wear?”

Ren Xiaosu nodded. “Do you have anything suitable for us?”

The old man examined Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan and then said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t sell you any suits.”

“Wait a minute.” Ren Xiaosu said in surprise, “Why not? I have the money!”

“It’s not really about money.” The old man explained patiently, “The stronghold regulations state that only people in public office can buy formal wear. Moreover, the suits have to be custom-made here at our shop. Both of you must have an event to attend tonight, right? A custom-made suit will take more than 20 days to be ready. Even if you order one now, you won’t be able to wear it tonight.”

The old man sounded very polite and did not portray himself in a high and mighty way. However, the objective facts he stated made Ren Xiaosu feel very helpless.

At first, he thought the Yang Consortium wanted to flex their financial might by inviting him and Yan Liuyuan to the function. They might have thought that as a refugee, he couldn’t afford a suit. But it wasn’t until now that he realized the Yang Consortium was just trying to flex their status.

Ren Xiaosu led Yan Liuyuan out of the shop. He went to look at the route information at the streetcar station to find out if any streetcars went to the Yang Consortium’s manor.

However, he couldn’t find a streetcar that stopped at the Yang Consortium’s manor even after looking at the information board for a long time.

Ren Xiaosu asked a pedestrian next to him, “Hi, do you know which streetcar goes to the Bronze Ram Manor?”

That pedestrian was slightly taken aback. “The Bronze Ram Manor? You guys are going there? Why are you two going there?”

Ren Xiaosu explained, “We’re attending the gala organized by the Yang Consortium tonight.”

“Haha.” The pedestrian laughed and said, “You’re really funny. Anyone who attends a gala there should be chauffeured to the event. Why would anyone take the streetcar there? Those who live there don’t need to squeeze into streetcars like us every day!”

Ren Xiaosu understood no streetcars could bring them there. If they wanted to get there, they would have to take a streetcar to the vicinity of the manor and then walk for more than ten kilometers before they could reach the place.

The custom-made suits and cars that were a prerequisite to attend the galas were essentially the difference between the refugees and those from the consortiums.

Under that stronghold regulations, the differences in the hierarchy of humans was like a natural divide that even money couldn’t surmount.

In the eyes of an organization, money flowed through their hands like quicksand, while power was a fortress that guarded their wealth.

“Bro,” Yan Liuyuan said gloomily, “they must be doing this on purpose, right?”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu nodded.

The Yang Consortium had probably anticipated that they would not be able to get a fitting suit for the gala. The organization used their brains to suppress the people. This was akin to cutting meat with a blunt knife.[2]

Yan Liuyuan thought the stronghold would slowly start to accept them now that Yang Xiaojin had brought them here. So he didn’t mind bearing with it for the time being even if he felt oppressed, thinking that things might improve after a while. But he realized the people in the stronghold were only going to get more unreasonable. Yan Liuyuan asked in a whisper, “Why don’t we just skip the function?”

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, “No, why should we skip it? Before we leave the stronghold, we should go and have a look at the feast of the organization.”

At noon, they made a trip back home where they saw Luo Lan feasting in the yard. When Luo Lan saw them, he was amused. “Didn’t you say you’d be attending the dinner party? Why are you back so soon?”

Ren Xiaosu was also amused. How did a proper gala event end up sounding so crass when it came out of Luo Lan’s mouth?

Ren Xiaosu was not embarrassed and said, “We went out to buy suits this morning. But when we got there, we were told the suits had to be custom-made in advance and only people in public office in the stronghold could buy them. Also, there’s not even a streetcar that goes there.”

Luo Lan frowned in response. “They didn’t invite you in advance or send a car to pick you up?”

“No.” Ren Xiaosu shook his head.

“Those bastards must be deliberately making trouble for you.” Luo Lan banged on the table and stood up. “This is too outrageous. I’ll go with you all later. We’ll dress in our casual wear, take the streetcar, and then walk our way in! Let’s see which bastard dares to talk behind our backs! I received the invitation too, but I wasn’t planning on going!”

Then Luo Lan flashed an invitation that looked the exact same as theirs out of his bosom.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Lan with a smile. “What are you up to this time?”

“I can’t just keep freeloading off of you, right?” Luo Lan wiped his mouth. “Besides, we’re friends, really good friends!”

“Aren’t you afraid that you’ll be looked down on if you’re seen with us?” Ren Xiaosu chuckled.

“Hehe,” Luo Lan laughed. “Even though I’m a hostage right now, I’m the most valuable hostage in the entire Southwest. Everyone knows what kind of person Qing Zhen is. It’s understandable why the Yang Consortium would take me as a hostage, but if some insignificant characters try to put me down, they still have to be qualified enough to do so. Even if I kill someone in this stronghold, they won’t dare to do anything to me. The current head of the Qing Consortium is Qing Zhen, the vengeful Qing Zhen! And he’s my little brother!”