

Chapter 42: Losing one's home

It looked like Liu Bu had been pissed off by Ren Xiaosu eating the crackers.

But in reality, Ren Xiaosu knew that even if he had not eaten the crackers, Liu Bu would still have treated him with the same bad attitude. Ren Xiaosu had already expected to not be given any of the convoy's food. However, he was surprised at how upfront they were about it.

It was better this way, honestly. Ren Xiaosu was quite relaxed about it. This way, he would not have anything to worry about. And he had been prepared for the current situation.

He turned around and walked to the forest, but Liu Bu asked in panic, "Where are you going? If you run away now, you'll never be able to return to the town at Stronghold 113!"

If Ren Xiaosu were to leave, they would have wasted their time again today. Without a guide, it would be impossible for them to pass through this forest and find their way to the Jing Mountains.

It had to be said that Ren Xiaosu was fairly impressed by these people. It took another five days to get to the Jing Mountains from here. Last time, they were fortunate to have lost their way early on and eventually found their way out of the forest. If they had walked for another few days and gone deeper, they would probably not have been able to get out.

It would not just be a waste of a day if that happened. These important people who were used to living comfortably in the stronghold had not yet realized whose territory they were in...

Of course, Ren Xiaosu understood that people were suspect to cognitive inertia. It was not as though the important people in the stronghold had only just started despising the refugees. As such, it should be expected for them to be unable to change their mindset so soon into the expedition.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and grinned. "I'm just going to look for something to eat. What are you panicking for?"

"I wasn't panicking." Liu Bu explained in embarrassment, "I just wanted to remind you that the previous guide died around this area. Don't follow in his footsteps by somehow dying in this place and wasting our time."

The previous guide had brought them here and then led them the wrong way forward. In the end, when everyone felt that they had been going in the wrong direction after walking for several days, they decided to return back to the Yun Range. However, that guide suffered an unfortunate end in the morning when he went to the river to wash his face.

As they were talking, a band member exclaimed, "There's some animal tracks on your side of the ground!"

Ren Xiaosu frowned. What wild animals could be here? Very few wild animals would live at the edge of the forest. Besides, when humans started constructing the strongholds, the larger beasts were shut out

on the outside of the stronghold's perimeter. Very few large beasts could get through the defenses on the outside of the stronghold perimeter and get into the zone around Stronghold 113.

Like the wolves that had attacked the factory, such examples were rare.

Everyone went over to see what the animal tracks on the ground looked like. The soldiers were unconcerned. What was there to be afraid of when they had guns with them?

But when they saw the tracks, they were all stunned. The animal tracks continued all the way into the forest, and each footprint looked about half the size of a person's head.

When the soldiers saw this, all of them immediately raised their guns and nervously aimed into the depths of the forest. For some reason, the troops of the private army suddenly felt unsafe even with their guns.

"We didn't see these tracks when we were here last time, right?" someone said in a trembling voice.

"No." Someone shook their head.

When Ren Xiaosu observed the tracks, he knew exactly what kind of animal it was and felt relieved.

Then he gazed at the clearing where the band was going to set up camp. He immediately noticed some garbage that was left behind by the group the previous time they were here. There were a lot of food scraps still lying around on the ground. He said in a serious tone, "It's a bear. It was attracted to the food scraps that y'all left behind the last time."

Liu Bu said with a doubt, "Nonsense! Do you think I've not seen what a bear's paws look like?"

Ren Xiaosu followed the tracks into the forest. He was not kind enough to tell everything that he knew to the band and private troops. "Ahem, it could also be a boar too...."

The group behind Ren Xiaosu could only watch helplessly as he went into the forest. He seemed fearless of the tracks and the dangers lurking inside the forest.

"That kid is too bold." Liu Bu gasped. "Does he not want to live?"

The soldiers lowered their guns. If there were any terrifying beasts in the forest, it would not be too late for them to raise their guns if they heard Ren Xiaosu scream.

These soldiers looked completely unafraid, but the trembling voice from earlier had revealed that they were just putting on a brave front.

Ren Xiaosu was moving around in the forest. In reality, he could tell from a glance that these were the hoofprints of a deer.

He followed the deer tracks because it was usually possible to find a source of water or river by following the tracks of large animals in the forest. Like humans, they needed to rehydrate at certain intervals.

Besides, he also intended to go to the river to understand why that guide died.

According to Liu Bu's account of the incident, the guide was washing his face in the river when he got chewed to pieces by something. As a result, he died on the spot.

Ren Xiaosu muttered, "What an idiot." Even though it was well-known that animals were evolving, it was common knowledge that herbivores still ate grass and carnivores still ate meat.

This guide was probably like many of the others in town who thought that fish only survived by feeding on aquatic plants. However, Ren Xiaosu had read from a perfectly preserved book at school that freshwater fishes like the northern snakehead and catfish were carnivores, while the remaining ones were mostly omnivores. However, there were basically none that were herbivores.

Would any fish refuse such a large piece of meat like your face when it gets placed right in front of its mouth?

Ren Xiaosu was glad that he understood the power of knowledge and that he had also been learning all this time. Otherwise, he might have ended up dying by trapping himself as that guide had done.

He followed the tracks and kept walking. As deer were one of the gentler creatures in the forest, nothing would typically happen if you did not provoke them.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu noticed a trail of sawdust-like matter on a tree. This was obviously left behind by termites after they had gnawed on the wood. He looked at the base of the tree, and, indeed, there was an abnormal dirt mound wrapped around the tree roots.

Ren Xiaosu trampled on the dirt mound and destroyed it with very little effort, exposing the brown termites on the inside. The termites were crawling around rapidly within the nest and looked to be about the size of a pinky finger pad. Although these termites were not tasty, they were full of nutrients.

Importantly, many of the townspeople had been suffering from malnutrition for years. Usually, they would use termites and termite eggs to supplement their diets, and some people would be so happy at finding a termite's nest that it would keep them smiling for days.

But these termites could not be eaten raw in fear that they might secrete formic acid out of their bodies. Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu was not so desperate that he needed to eat these termites in order to survive.

After the nest was destroyed, the termites scrambled around at a loss. Before they could figure out why their nest had collapsed, Ren Xiaosu tore off a large leaf off the branches of the tree and used it to wrap up a small piece of the termite nest, on which some termites were still crawling.

He broke off a tree branch and trimmed it slightly with his bone knife, turning it into a simple spear. With that, he was ready to catch some fish.

Before walking far away, Ren Xiaosu turned around and came back again. He poked around at the termite nest with his bone knife for a while until he located the plump termite queen. He took her along with him as well.

The termites had suffered complete disaster. Ignoring bioethics, this could simply be described as “losing both one’s home and mother.”