

First Order 48

### **Chapter 48: All human behavior and motivation stems from the fear of death**

Why did Xu Xia's corpse disappear? And where did it go? These two questions lingered in everyone's minds.

Ren Xiaosu kept wondering about something. If the entity could make something as large as a corpse disappear without a trace, why didn't it do the same to those who were alive?

Judging by what the entity was capable of, it could easily inflict heavy casualties on the entire campsite during the dead of the night.

Something was amiss!

Everyone was sitting in the vehicles except for Ren Xiaosu, who was in the bed of the pickup truck. When they first came here, all of them were chatting, laughing, and even singing with the windows down!

But now, all of the windows were shut tight. They were afraid that something paranormal would suddenly get into the vehicles and kill everyone.

Everyone felt that the additional layer of a window between them and the wilderness would make them safer.

As Ren Xiaosu sat in the cargo bed, the woods slowly disappeared from his sight. The shadows of the swaying leaves seemed to hide a killing intent. Even Ren Xiaosu got a little frightened by it.

But what could he do? So he started eating the crackers to calm his nerves.

Whenever Ren Xiaosu thought of a conjecture that frightened him, he would eat a cracker to calm down.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu felt that sitting in either the pickup or the off-road vehicles were both just as unsafe. Now that his physical fitness had become better, and with a relatively broad view of the surroundings, he could immediately find a way out or make a plan in the event of any danger.

Nobody in the entire convoy could outrun him other than maybe Yang Xiaojin, whose stamina was unknown.

Ren Xiaosu had never considered saving the others if danger descended upon them. After all, he was not an idiot!

As their guide, not only did they not provide him with food, they even made him sit in the bed of the pickup. They were already fortunate that Ren Xiaosu did not take revenge on them!

Everyone was fleeing like there was a monster chasing after them. Liu Bu was still persuading Xu Xianchu when they got into the vehicle, "Sir, let's turn around and give an explanation to those back at the stronghold. Surely your superior won't be so heartless as to drive you out, right?"

But Xu Xianchu did not answer him. If it were anyone other than him, his superior might not be as heartless. However, it was a different case for him.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu noticed a long time ago that Wang Congyang and Xu Xianchu, both of whom were officers in the private army, had likely offended their superiors before.

When a plight arose in the wilderness during the middle of the night, the first person they sent out was Wang Congyang. After Ren Xiaosu and Luo Xinyu requested for him to be replaced, Xu Xianchu became the next in line to be sent out by the stronghold.

The successful officers would be enjoying themselves in the stronghold. Only those who were unpopular would get ostracized and be made to perform missions in the wilderness. Why else would anyone be willing to leave home and head into battle in the middle of the night?

There was a sense of honor among soldiers before The Cataclysm happened. But Ren Xiaosu felt that these soldiers from the private army were nothing like that.

In fact, Xu Xianchu and Wang Congyang were both in awkward positions within the ranks of the private army. Their superiors were already looking to suppress them, so with a valid reason like them failing their mission this time, they would probably not be allowed to go back.

However, Ren Xiaosu still had some doubts. He glanced beside him and finally asked Yang Xiaojin in a whisper, "Are these troops really reliable? The stronghold's defense is dependent on them, but it feels like they'll start behaving like a disorderly mob the moment they encounter any danger."

Yang Xiaojin gave Ren Xiaosu a look and said something that sounded confusing to him. "The Consortium's troops are the Consortium's troops. The stronghold's troops are the stronghold's troops. The Consortium does not wish for the stronghold to control a powerful military."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a long time. What were the Consortium's troops like? Xu Xianchu was obviously shrewder and tougher than the other soldiers. Ren Xiaosu had never seen him smoking or slacking off on their journey thus far, and he always carried himself with dignity.

Who were the ostracized officers? Ren Xiaosu knew at least two of them. One was Wang Congyang; the other was Xu Xianchu. Without mentioning Xu Xianchu, Wang Congyang had displayed his meticulousness when he searched Ren Xiaosu back in town. He was completely different from these private troops and even showed his contempt for them in front of Ren Xiaosu.

So were Xu Xianchu and Wang Congyang both ostracized because they were unwilling to wallow in the mire with them?

By his worst reckonings, Ren Xiaosu thought that even the cigarettes might have been supplied by the Consortium. Had the Consortium been carefully scheming all these years and finally managed to completely cripple the stronghold's military force? Ren Xiaosu was unable to ascertain this. But as Mr. Zhang had said before, a minority possessed science and technology now, so wouldn't it also be natural for the military to fall under the control of a minority as well?

But he still had doubts about Xu Xia. Was it true that people who were alive would not get attacked? If not, why didn't anything happen to them?

Why was the stronghold so interested in the Pre-Cataclysm ruins hidden in the Jing Mountains? Could the dangers that they'd faced today have originated at the site of these ruins?

Xu Xianchu said sternly, "I'm taking over the wartime management of everyone. As for any future plans, none of you have any rights to question me about them."

Liu Bu opened his mouth but stopped short of saying anything. He realized that Xu Xianchu had turned serious.

At noon, the convoy took a short break at a place called the Rainbow Cliffs. The formation of the Rainbow Cliffs was related to plate tectonics as well. They were cliffs formed by the compression of the Earth's plates and were made up of many colorful rock layers. The private army's troops named it as such when they went out into the woods many years ago to clear out the wild animals from the area.

Liu Bu was wiping his sweat as he supported himself against the cliffs. He said, "It's almost winter, but why is it getting warmer the further we walk north?"

Ren Xiaosu sat nearby and belched while saying, "There are several volcanoes up ahead in the Jing Mountains. They aren't extinct yet, so there's a lot of volcanic activity."

Many of the people on the team were surprised to hear that as they had never been to this place before. They always thought that volcanoes were something that was distant from them and never expected several of them in the Jing Mountains.

But Xu Xianchu was not surprised as he had already familiarized himself with the terrain around the Jing Mountains based on the private army's briefing for the mission. The private army's troops had also been here before, so it was natural they knew about these volcanoes as well.

But Xu Xianchu wondered how unprofessional his predecessors in the private army were. After clearing out and eliminating the wild animals in the Jing Mountains, they did not even bother to map out the area?

As of now, none of the various major strongholds had even come up with an accurate map of the area!

Liu Bu walked over to the pickup to get some food to distribute to everyone. When he saw that many of the crackers had gone missing again, he nearly passed out. His voice was trembling as he asked Ren Xiaosu, "Why would you eat so many crackers!"

Ren Xiaosu burped and patted his chest. "What's wrong with me eating some of your crackers to calm my nerves? I was sitting all alone by myself in the bed of the pickup!"

Suddenly, a howl came from the north. It sounded so eerie that all of the soldiers raised their guns and pointed them northwards at the main road. They heard Ren Xiaosu say, "Quick, help me up. Let me have another cracker to calm my nerves."

Liu Bu was speechless.

Luo Xinyu looked at Ren Xiaosu. "You must know what sound that is."

Xu Xianchu pointed his gun at Ren Xiaosu. "Don't hide anything from us!"

Ren Xiaosu raised his eyebrows and said, "That sound comes from the Howling Canyon. We're not far from the large canyon pass that will lead us into the Jing Mountains. When a strong gust of wind passes through the canyon, it makes a sound like that. It's nothing to be scared by."

Only now did everyone realize that it was still very useful to have an experienced guide on the team. It wasn't until this time when they were all fearful that they began to recognize Ren Xiaosu's value. At the very least, they didn't feel so afraid anymore when they heard the howling.

Their original plan was to arrive at the canyon in three to five days, but the power of fear had accelerated their progress some. If nothing unexpected happened, they could reach the Howling Canyon by this evening!

The schoolteacher, Mr. Zhang, had once mentioned in his lectures that all human behavior and motivation stemmed from the fear of death.

They ate because they didn't want to die; they struggled just so they could stay alive.

But now, they were all caught in a mountain range where death could occur at any time. The possibility of death was like a shot of adrenaline that made everyone even more clearheaded and eager to get out of this place alive.