

The First Order

Chapter 6: Walls and science

There was only one teacher who gave classes at the school. His name was Zhang Jinglin.

Most people felt that the teacher was wise and thought that he knew everything. However, Ren Xiaosu always had doubts since people specialized in different professions, which meant people were usually only good at certain things. So how could it be possible for Mr. Zhang to be omniscient?

Ren Xiaosu had always been different from most other people as he liked to ponder questions that he came across. Later on, he found out from listening to Mr. Zhang's lessons that this was known as dialectical logic.

Yan Liuyuan was sometimes bewildered because Ren Xiaosu would often oppose Mr. Zhang Jinglin's views, yet he still kept coming back to attend classes whenever he had free time.

During the afternoon class, Ren Xiaosu specially brought Yan Liuyuan out to celebrate. It wasn't for any reason other than to celebrate the fact that he could start listening to the lessons from the yard in the future.

Usually when he squatted on the walls, he was too distant from the classroom to clearly hear what was being taught. Zhang Jinglin used to like to keep the windows shut during class as he was afraid that any outside commotion would affect the students and distract them.

But after he realized that Ren Xiaosu was eavesdropping from outside the class, he left a window open for him.

And now, he might as well just let Ren Xiaosu into the yard.

Living in this chaotic world, many of the students' parents sent their children to school not because they wanted them to gain knowledge, but so that they could easily get married in the future. This was especially true for the girls who attended school as they would often marry into good families.

In this generation, it was impressive to be literate and to handle three-digit calculations.

Everyone was busy trying to survive, so who would care if you were cultured or not when food was short?

Hence, most of the parents were sending their children to school not because they had any long-term plans for them. Even in this hamlet, there were poor and rich people. Wherever there were people, comparisons were unavoidable.

Yan Liuyuan saw Ren Xiaosu go into the grocery store to buy a filtered cigarette. Old Wang even proudly mentioned that his cigarettes did not have any additional substances and were very safe to smoke.

A cigarette costs 20 yuan per stick, extremely expensive.

Yan Liuyuan asked with suspicion, "Bro, why are you buying a cigarette?"

"Your teacher allowed me to listen to his lessons from the yard. Even if I don't have to pay tuition, I should still show my gratitude." Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "I know that Mr. Zhang likes to smoke."

Whenever someone treated Ren Xiaosu kindly, he would return the gesture.

While everyone was out in the school's backyard eating lunch, the two of them took the opportunity to approach Zhang Jinglin. He was eating some stir-fried cabbage when Ren Xiaosu handed the cigarette to him with a grin.

Zhang Jinglin did not reject it. However, he made Yan Liuyuan stand a distance away from him. "It's not good for you to inhale cigarette smoke while you're still growing."

Ren Xiaosu thanked him. "Thank you for letting me into the yard to attend your lessons, sir."

"Phew." Zhang Jinglin lit the cigarette with a match he used for preparing meals at home. Then he blew out a breathful of smoke, looking pleased. "Students who enjoy attending lessons like you are rare. You can attend the lessons if you like. In the future, you can stand at the door, but you're not allowed to enter the classroom."

"That's great." Ren Xiaosu said, "Teacher, I have a question."

"Speak." Perhaps due to the fact that Zhang Jinglin rarely had the chance to have a smoke, he didn't mind any questions that Ren Xiaosu had for him.

"Teacher, you said before that humans had a lot of technology before The Cataclysm happened. Since we humans were not wiped out, why didn't those technologies reappear?"

Zhang Jinglin glanced at Ren Xiaosu. "For a period of time after The Cataclysm, humans did not keep track of how long they had been drifting along in anarchy. It was good enough to survive each day, so nobody bothered with gaining knowledge and becoming a learned person."

“But we should still have some information left, right? If we learn them, couldn’t we return to civilization quicker?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“It’s become lost through the generations,” Zhang Jinglin said in regret. “Let me ask you. If I gave you a set of instructions to construct an airplane, would you be able to make one?”

“It’s not like I’ve learned how to do it before. Although having the instructions can save a lot of time, I’ll still have to start from scratch,” Ren Xiaosu said.

“That’s right. Everyone is starting from scratch.” Zhang Jinglin looked at the remaining half of his cigarette, feeling a little pained. It looked like he was deciding on whether to keep smoking.

He had intended to save the remaining half of the cigarette to smoke at a later time. But if he put out the cigarette in front of Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan, wouldn’t it be a loss of face for him?

Ren Xiaosu was still doubtful. “How could no one have overcome the hardships and gotten into research and building up knowledge again in all those years?”

“Those who attempted all died from starvation,” Zhang Jinglin said.

“Could all of that knowledge really have become lost through the generations?” Ren Xiaosu could not accept it.

Zhang Jinglin looked at Ren Xiaosu seriously this time and said pointedly, “They are in the possession of a small number of people.”

“That’s enough.” Zhang Jinglin stood up and said, “Don’t pursue this matter any further.. It’s time for class.”

Ren Xiaosu pestered Zhang Jinglin with a final question. “Teacher, when were the walls of the stronghold built? And why did they build them?”

“After The Cataclysm, wild animals ran rampant. A very long time ago, there was even a bug infestation. As such, humans were forced to build tall walls to ward off the danger,” Zhang Jinglin explained.

“But even though animals have evolved, they don’t actually initiate attacks on humans.” Ren Xiaosu was curious about this. Monkeys still remained omnivores, and sparrows still loved eating grains, so it was not like they would actively try to make a meal out of humans.

In the “ring” where humanity was living in at Stronghold 113, the majority of the more ferocious animals had actually been isolated outside of it.

The higher the number of a stronghold, the more dangerous a place it was. For example, the legendary Stronghold 178 would often see many casualties each year as they tried to expel beasts from around their area.

Meanwhile, Stronghold 113 was considered to be an “inland” area.

There were still many dangers lurking out in the wilderness though, like the wolf pack he had encountered before. However, it wasn't impossible to overcome them. So then why were there still such towering walls built in a huge gathering place of humans like this one?

Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, “So long as danger still exists on the outside, refugees must depend on the stronghold to make a living. In this way, the stronghold will gain a large force of cheap labor. Do you think that the organizations controlling the strongholds do not have the ability to eliminate those dangers out there? The firearms and explosives that humans possess are more powerful than you can imagine. But why would they want to eliminate them? They don't pose any threat to the organizations at all.”

Ren Xiaosu fell deep into thought. Although he was mature beyond his years, there were still some things he hadn't experienced. As such, it was expected that he could not understand them. This was also the reason why he was so thirsty for knowledge.

Zhang Jinglin continued, “They won't topple the walls. Why would groups with a vested interest behind the walls give up a stronghold that gives them a natural class superiority?”

Zhang Jinglin then went to get a change of clothes. Ren Xiaosu asked, “Teacher, why did you change your clothes? Your previous set of clothes were not dirty at all.”

Zhang Jinglin adjusted his collar and replied, “The set I was wearing earlier reeks of cigarette smoke. It is not good for the students if they smell it.”

Yan Liuyuan's respect for him deepened, but Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little unhappy. “So it's alright for me to smell it then? It wasn't like you asked me to stand further away from you just now, right?”

Zhang Jinglin thought for a long while. “Get lost.”

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu heard a voice speak again from the palace in his mind, “Quest: Thirst for knowledge is never a bad thing. But you have to teach other people whatever you've learned.”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He did not fully understand what this quest required him to do.

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During the afternoon class, the students found it very refreshing when they saw Ren Xiaosu, who was a few years older than them, standing outside the door. It made many of the students turn their heads to look at him.

Zhang Jinglin had to knock on the blackboard several times before he could get the students' attention. He said, "I'll be teaching about survival for the afternoon class."

This was the current era, and the distinctiveness of school came from not only teaching the arts and sciences, but also teaching survival.

However, Zhang Jinglin had always felt exasperated when teaching this lesson, because he wasn't experienced with surviving in the wild.

Therefore, for most of this lesson, he could only teach it according to what was written in the books that were preserved from the past.

Zhang Jinglin looked at the students in the classroom. "Pay attention and listen in class. Don't think that danger is very far from you. For now, your parents are still protecting you. But when you grow up, you have to learn how to protect yourselves. For today's lesson, we'll be discussing what you should do if you encounter a pack of wolves."

The students in class actually liked listening to the survival lessons the most. The other subjects were still a little boring for their current age group, whereas they found the survival lessons to be the most interesting.

The classroom quieted down. Zhang Jinglin looked at Ren Xiaosu, who was standing at the door and listening in on the lesson. "You there, tell us what you do when you encounter a pack of wolves in the wild."

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought before replying, "I'd try my best to find a slope surrounded by greenery, because that will be the most suitable place for an auspicious burial ground."

Zhang Jinglin was surprised.