

## **Chapter 61: Attitude changes faster than flipping through a book!**

How difficult was it for the refugees to get into the stronghold? According to Wang Fugui, he had only seen four people get into the stronghold successfully in his forty years of being alive. All of them were the “distant relatives” of certain important people in the stronghold.

Many of these people came to the stronghold to seek refuge with their relatives but were turned away by the stronghold. So they had to settle down in town and slowly wait for an opportunity to come.

If it was already so difficult for the relatives of important people to get into the stronghold, would Luo Xinyu’s claims of giving away three spots even be possible? If you were really that influential, you wouldn’t have had to make a deal with the soldiers to go to Stronghold 112. Shouldn’t you have gotten them to escort you there directly?

Stupid people think others are stupid.

Ren Xiaosu felt that Luo Xinyu was going through too much trouble to achieve her objective. Even though he was a refugee, he did not lack judgment. If someone else were the guide, they might just believe her claims. However, Ren Xiaosu did not.

If Ren Xiaosu accepted her terms, how would he find Luo Xinyu once she got back to the stronghold? What would prevent her from jumping ship?

Besides, honestly speaking, Ren Xiaosu did not have a good impression of Luo Xinyu and Liu Bu at all.

Everyone was parched after having pork for lunch. However, all of their bottled water and food had been left behind in the pickup, or rather, most of their bottled water and food had been destroyed when Xu Xianchu and the others mercilessly shot at the provisions.

Xu Xianchu looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, “How can we find a source of water out here?”

At this moment, the palace assigned a quest. “Quest: Teach everyone how to locate a source of water.”

“You can only search for a river or collect dew from leaves.” Ren Xiaosu did not hide information from them. “But I don’t recommend you go to the riverbank. Based on my estimates, the nearest river is still quite a distance away. Just bear with it for now. You won’t die of thirst yet. We’ll collect dew tomorrow morning.”

Xu Xianchu nodded and said, “Thank you.”

“Gratitude received from Xu Xianchu, +1!”

Ren Xiaosu waited for quite a while before asking in his mind, “Where’s my reward?”

However, the palace ignored him. Ren Xiaosu wondered what was going on.

It was as though this was the first time the palace had witnessed Ren Xiaosu completing a quest without resorting to unconventional methods. Thus, the palace had some trouble making a decision on the outcome!

After a long time, the voice from the palace in Ren Xiaosu's mind finally said, "Quest complete. Awarded 1.0 Strength."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Although the quest had been completed, it was not what he had expected. Why was he given additional strength again?

Ren Xiaosu had been wondering if the palace would increase his Strength and Dexterity attributes in an even manner. But in the end, his Dexterity still remained at 4.1 while his Strength had already reached 7.5.

With a few more quests, Ren Xiaosu's Strength would probably hit three times that of what a normal adult had.

Right now, Ren Xiaosu still had the two bottles of water he had traded half a fish for. It was not possible to hide them. After all, his jacket's pockets were only so big.

Suddenly, Liu Bu came to Ren Xiaosu and said, "Sell me a bottle for 1,000 yuan."

Ren Xiaosu gave him a look. "I'm not selling."

"2,000 yuan!" Liu Bu said eagerly, "Will you sell it to me for 2,000 yuan? I'm really thirsty!"

Ren Xiaosu felt that Liu Bu was seriously a little dumb. He looked at Liu Bu and said, "Money is of no use in a place like this. The value of food and water is priceless. If you want to drink water, go get it from the riverbank yourself."

Liu Bu wanted to vent his anger at Ren Xiaosu. But he couldn't as he no longer had the bluster he had at the beginning. He also knew that Ren Xiaosu's role had become increasingly more important than his during the journey. Based on Xu Xianchu's character, if there were any disputes or irreconcilable differences between the two of them, he would definitely choose to abandon Liu Bu instead of Ren Xiaosu.

When he first came out of the stronghold, Liu Bu thought that the refugees were simply there to serve the stronghold, and those from stronghold like them would always be regarded as high and mighty. But now he was sobering up to the fact that it was not that way.

Ren Xiaosu wiped his hands clean with some leaves picked from a tree. Then he went to look for Wang Lei and showered him with concern again to obtain more gratitude tokens.

But how could there be an unlimited amount of gratitude tokens that he could gain from him? After receiving Ren Xiaosu's warm and passionate care, Wang Lei realized that something was off with how Ren Xiaosu was treating him. As a result, Ren Xiaosu did not get any more gratitude tokens from Wang Lei's thanks.

When Ren Xiaosu recognized that he was not receiving any more gratitude tokens from Wang Lei, he decisively gave up on him. By now, his gratitude tokens were at 84.

In the afternoon, Xu Xianchu looked up at the sky and said, "This place is not suitable for setting up camp. We must find a place that is not as open to prevent wild animals from attacking us. Everyone, let's endure and keep going."

Ren Xiaosu agreed with Xu Xianchu's suggestion. This place had become too dangerous after a boar was killed and barbecued. It might seem like nothing was happening right now, but as the venomous snakes, bugs, and ants got more active at night, it could spell disaster for everyone when night fell.

Didn't the rat that was dumped earlier become just a skeleton?

Xu Xianchu went to the stretcher and said to Ren Xiaosu, "Come, let's carry him together."

Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "Why would I carry him?"

Xu Xianchu and Wang Lei were confused.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Liu Bu and said, "Go and carry the stretcher. If you don't carry it, I'll chop you up."

Liu Bu nearly broke down. Had he gone crazy?!

The others at the campsite were shocked at this development. They thought, 'Are you a schizo or what? Why has your attitude changed so quickly? Didn't you say that you would chop whoever tried to vie with you to carry the stretcher this morning?'

Xu Xianchu did not want to waste any more time. He said, "Everyone will take turns carrying the wounded except for the ladies. Some of you might also get hurt at some point. If you don't want to be left for dead when that happens, you should help out now."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt that Xu Xianchu was quite a rational person. No matter what went on with the team, he would try his best to get everyone back on track.

Along the way, some misbehaving soldiers started getting closer to Luo Xinyu again. They would even pretend to casually brush their arms against Luo Xinyu when they passed her. But Luo Xinyu would keep anticipating it and try to avoid their advances. After which, some of the soldiers would laugh perversely.

Logically speaking, Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu should have a good relationship, but Liu Bu didn't even dare to speak out when he saw this. How could he offend the soldiers?

After hitting a roadblock with Xu Xianchu and Ren Xiaosu, Luo Xinyu seemed to be somewhat at a loss. She did not know what to do and could only passively avoid them.

Moreover, the soldiers were starting to reveal their bestial sides as they found themselves stuck in this seemingly dangerous situation in which they might not even survive until tomorrow.

But Ren Xiaosu did not want to intervene. As the team moved forward, he remembered he had gained another Skill Duplication Scroll. He wondered if he could copy Yang Xiaojin's advanced combat skill this time.

However, when Ren Xiaosu raised his head to look for Yang Xiaojin, he saw her pointing a gun at a soldier's head. Yang Xiaojin turned to Ren Xiaosu and said, "His gun belongs to you now."

## **Chapter 62: Preserve your dignity**

The soldier Yang Xiaojin was pointing her gun at happened to be the one who harassed Luo Xinyu the most. Hence, Ren Xiaosu thought that Yang Xiaojin was finally going to help Luo Xinyu.

Previously, Ren Xiaosu thought that Yang Xiaojin was also someone who didn't care about anyone other than herself. However, he never expected that she could not tolerate seeing Luo Xinyu being harassed by the soldiers. Perhaps that was the bottom line for women.

The people at the front looked back at this commotion and wondered if a violent clash would occur between Yang Xiaojin and the soldiers.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Xu Xianchu and saw that he had frowned but was not about to step in. It looked like Xu Xianchu also felt that these soldiers had gone too far.

Meanwhile, none of the other soldiers dared to step forward or speak up for the soldier. It was clear at a glance their team was not united.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not intend to act politely with them. He walked right next to the soldier and pulled out his gun from the holster. When these soldiers were escaping, they felt that their firearms were too heavy to lug around, so they threw away their rifles, only keeping their sidearms.

The soldier said coldly, "Do you know how serious of a crime it is to seize a gun from a soldier?"

Yang Xiaojin said calmly, "If you threaten me again, you just might die."

Ren Xiaosu almost applauded when he heard that. She really was a decisive girl...

When he pulled the soldier's gun out from the holster, the soldier used his right hand to clasp it tightly against his waist. He was attempting to quietly stop Ren Xiaosu from taking his gun. However, Ren Xiaosu's current strength was so great that it was unimaginable. He forcefully pried each of the soldier's fingers away. If this soldier hadn't given in midway, Ren Xiaosu would have broken his fingers on purpose.

This was a gun! Ren Xiaosu could finally hold a gun openly. Ever since he acquired the Advanced Firearms Proficiency, he never had the opportunity to handle a gun so openly!

The soldier who had his gun seized looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Haven't you already taken the gun from me? Why are you still touching me?"

“Where’s the magazine?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

The soldier was speechless. “It’s on the left side of the uniform.”

As he let Ren Xiaosu continue searching his person, he sneered at Yang Xiaojin and said, “Even if you give him the gun, does he know how to use it? He’s only a refugee.”

The others also felt that the soldier’s words were not wrong. Only Yang Xiaojin was slightly doubtful of that when she saw the way Ren Xiaosu held the gun.

Yang Xiaojin was undoubtedly the most knowledgeable on firearms of all the people here. Otherwise, the palace would not have evaluated her skill as perfect.

So when the others thought that Ren Xiaosu would not know how to use a gun even if he were to carry one, she had already noticed that his stance of holding the gun was very natural and proficient. Even with his arm lowered, it was still placed at the most suitable angle to raise the gun in an instant!

This was not a skill a refugee should have. The others could not tell, but Yang Xiaojin definitely could!

But she didn’t dwell on this for too long. She just said to the soldier, “Get lost.”

Being stripped of their firearms was probably one of the greatest humiliations a soldier could experience. That soldier looked ghastly pale as he stood aside. When Xu Xianchu saw that the matter had been resolved, he said, “Let’s keep moving forward. We need to find a suitable campsite before sunset.”

Xu Xianchu did not want to get involved in the mess that was going on in the team. He had nothing else on his mind other than getting to the Jing Mountains.

Along the way, the soldiers drew a clear boundary between themselves and Luo Xinyu, Yang Xiaojin, and Ren Xiaosu. Both sides were keeping their distance from each other.

However, Ren Xiaosu was thinking about something. If Yang Xiaojin insisted on helping Luo Xinyu, or even offered to help her get out of this place together, he would probably have no choice but to abandon their temporary alliance.

At this moment, Luo Xinyu said to Yang Xiaojin, “Thank you for helping me. I hope that we can work together to get out of the Jing Mountains over the coming days.”

But Ren Xiaosu clearly noticed a moment of hesitation from Yang Xiaojin. Then Yang Xiaojin said to Luo Xinyu, “I’m not helping you for nothing. Give me back the money that I paid you first.”

Luo Xinyu was speechless for a moment. She took out 10,000 yuan from her bag and handed it to Yang Xiaojin. “Back then, you paid me 5,000 yuan. But I’ll return 10,000 yuan to you. Take this as my gratitude to you.”

Yang Xiaojin evenly acknowledged her and pocketed the 10,000 yuan without standing on ceremony.

Luo Xinyu smiled when she saw Yang Xiaojin accept the money. "Then you'll help me on this journey, right?"

"Let me correct that." Yang Xiaojin said to Luo Xinyu, "I've never thought about helping you get out of the Jing Mountains. I can only ensure that you'll get to preserve your dignity when you die."

Luo Xinyu was speechless.

Listening to their conversation, Ren Xiaosu understood what Yang Xiaojin meant. She would only ensure that Luo Xinyu would not get violated by these soldiers. As for whether she would survive, she didn't care much about that.

In reality, Luo Xinyu was also rather pitiable. Although she was the one who initiated their trip out from the stronghold, she couldn't trust a single person anymore.

A fork appeared in the road. These were two mountain roads leading in two different directions.

The canopy here was so tall it covered almost the entire sky. They could not even tell the position of the sun and which direction led to the Jing Mountains.

Xu Xianchu turned around and asked Ren Xiaosu, "Which way do we go?"

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu heard the voice from the palace intone, "Quest: Give directions."

Ren Xiaosu pondered it for a moment before saying, "Go left."

"Quest complete. Awarded 1.0 Dexterity."

Ren Xiaosu could feel that his muscle density getting firmer again. He could finally confirm something. 'Strength and Dexterity combined are what makes up true muscle density. It's not good enough to just increase Strength or Dexterity.'

At this moment, the soldier who had his gun seized said coldly, "Didn't you say that you haven't been out this far before? I remember you mentioning that you hid in the canyon for a few days before coming out. So how do you know which way to go?"

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "I don't."

Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin were speechless.

Everyone was left speechless. 'If you don't know the way, why did you tell us to go left?'

However, Ren Xiaosu was not under any pressure. He was only asked to give them directions for the palace's quest. It did not say where he had to direct them. Whether or not he knew the correct way, all he had to do was point a way forward.

He did not know the correct path, but the quest had to be completed!

Xu Xianchu hesitated for a while and said, "Then why did you point to the left?"

Ren Xiaosu said, "Although I don't know which way to go, I know that the Jing Mountains are on the left ahead of us."

"OK." Xu Xianchu nodded. "Then we'll go left. You can tell me when you spot a suitable place to set up camp."

When Xu Xianchu made a decision in the wilderness, he would habitually turn to Ren Xiaosu for his opinion. And as the facts had shown, his opinions were generally correct.

Ren Xiaosu would climb up any pine trees they came across along the way to pluck some pine cones and plump pine needles. The others had some misgivings. They could understand why he plucked the pine cones since those things were edible. But why did he pluck the pine needles? They saw Ren Xiaosu squeeze out a light green substance from the pine needles one by one and then lick it all up. He said to the others, "If you guys don't wanna die of thirst, you can learn from me."

Some of them hesitated as they did not know whether they should learn from him or not. In the end, only Yang Xiaojin and Xu Xianchu climbed up the pine tree without any hesitation.

### **Chapter 63: All of them have disappeared**

Speaking of survival instincts, Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin were the two least pretentious people in the team other than Ren Xiaosu.

When Ren Xiaosu said that the substance extracted from the pine needles was drinkable, the two of them did not hesitate and climbed up the tree to search for suitable pine needles to extract. They even plucked a whole lot of pine cones as well.

In fact, only someone like Ren Xiaosu who had been surviving out in the wilderness would know that nature was generous. It doesn't care who gains from it. So long as you put in the effort, you can depend on nature to survive.

Someone lamented, "It's better off being an animal if I have to do this. How I wish that I can be reborn as an animal in my next life."

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "Animals do not lead as carefree a life as you think. I've heard that giraffes, which are the tallest land animals around, can defend against their predators due to them being bigger in size. However, its mating process can get very complicated. That's why the male giraffe needs to drink the urine of the female to determine whether she's in heat before he starts courting her. If it doesn't turn out as he expects, the male giraffe will have drunk the urine for nothing...."

The rest of the team suspected that Ren Xiaosu was deliberately trying to gross them out.

No, this refugee kid was definitely trying to gross them out!

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu's confidence was boosted since he possessed a gun now. There were only 11 people and 7 guns within the entire group, with 3 of the guns already in the hands of Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin had the advanced firearms skill and perfect firearms skill respectively. Unless they clashed head-on with Xu Xianchu, their simple alliance would definitely ensure them a complete victory over whoever they came up against.

While waiting for everyone to pluck the pine needles and pine cones, Ren Xiaosu had nothing much to do. He then remembered his still unused Skill Duplication Scroll. He glanced at Yang Xiaojin and said decisively in his mind, "Use the Skill Duplication Scroll."

"Randomly copied target's advanced skill: Bomb making."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He immediately learned the skill but was a little puzzled. What kind of training did Yang Xiaojin receive in the past? Why were all her skills so violent?

Besides, the combination of her firearms, bomb making, and jumping rope skills were so mismatched. Were these skills really from the same person?

Ren Xiaosu got curious. He asked in his mind, "Does the target have an assassination skill?"

"This information can be revealed if it's for a former target you've attempted to learn from. She has an advanced assassination skill."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of something and asked, "Does the target have Nursery Rhymes Singing?"

"This information can be revealed if it's for a former target you've attempted to learn from. She has Advanced Nursery Rhymes Singing."

Ren Xiaosu was left speechless. What a bunch of messed up skills...

He felt like he must have been really crazy to ask those questions, but he never expected her to really have those skills, and they were even advanced skills too.

By this time, the whole lot of them had finally finished plucking pine cones and pine needles. Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "Can't y'all pluck them from different trees? By taking everything from the same tree, it's nearly been stripped bare by y'all!"

When everyone heard this, they looked up. Sure enough, the tree was nearly stripped bare.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while and said, "Shouldn't y'all be thanking me for teaching you how to survive in the wilderness?"

The others were taken aback. Then several people thanked Ren Xiaosu. However, Ren Xiaosu discovered that only Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin were sincere in thanking him.



With his gratitude tokens at 86, Ren Xiaosu became even more eager to unlock the weapon. So he shifted his attention to the others around him.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu realized that Luo Xinyu's hands were still empty. Even Liu Bu was holding several pine cones.

When Luo Xinyu realized that Ren Xiaosu was staring at her, she said in embarrassment, "I can't climb up...."

Since when had Luo Xinyu, a celebrity from the stronghold, ever climbed a tall tree like that? Hence, she was the only one who was empty-handed. When does someone feel the loneliest? When everyone has something, but not you.

For example, everyone has money, but not you.

For example, everyone has pine cones, but not Luo Xinyu.

Luo Xinyu hesitated for a bit before saying to Ren Xiaosu, "I'll pay you 10,000 yuan, so can you help me pluck some?"

Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. He immediately stuffed all of the pine cones and pine needles that he had wrapped in his clothes into Luo Xinyu's arms. "You're my bro from now on!"

Luo Xinyu was surprised. "Thank you."

"Gratitude received from Luo Xinyu, +1!"

Ren Xiaosu had not sold his water earlier because bottled water was too precious. It was clean and convenient to carry around. But the pine cones and pine needles were different as they were readily available.

Furthermore, Luo Xinyu offered a lot of money! What could he do with 10,000 yuan? He could use it to live the good life in town for up to two years. There wouldn't be a need to worry about food and clothing!

In fact, you would never know whether you would become Ren Xiaosu's brother before giving money to him. This was also known as Schrödinger's brother 1 !

Luo Xinyu took the pine cones and pine needles from him. However, she realized that Ren Xiaosu did not go and pluck any more. She asked curiously, "Aren't you going to pluck some more pine cones? What are you going to eat at night?"

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "I'll eat the chocolate."

Luo Xinyu was speechless.

Ren Xiaosu still had the chocolate with him that he had traded with Luo Xinyu for. It happened that the chocolate had melted a little while he was carrying it on his person for the past few days. Although it was late fall, his body still transmitted heat through his pockets.

At the beginning, he did not believe Yang Xiaojin when she said the chocolate would melt. After all, he had never eaten chocolate before. He had planned on bringing it back for Yan Liuyuan to try, but it seemed that he could not bring it back.

In an instant, Luo Xinyu's gratitude vanished. That chocolate was the one he had scammed from her!

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Before evening fell, Ren Xiaosu found a huge hollow that was suitable for setting up camp. A rock protruded out of a cliff, creating a huge overhang that formed a natural, semi-open shelter like a cave.

Ren Xiaosu noticed some cirrocumulus clouds in the sky when he passed through a clearing. Although he did not understand the principle behind it, he knew it was a sign of rain.

Now they could rest better as they found a cliff face that would shelter them from the wind and rain.

While they settled down beneath this rocky overhang, the rain began to pour. Xu Xianchu turned to Ren Xiaosu and asked, "Can we drink the rainwater?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "Even though it's not so acidic anymore, you can still die from drinking acid rain."

Ren Xiaosu was still unsure of how acid rain formed and what criteria classified it as acid rain, so he could only use "acidity" to roughly describe the hazard level of acid rain.

Suddenly, some strange sounds came from the forest outside the hollow. But it traveled far away in an instant, not giving Ren Xiaosu and company time to react.

Right at this moment, the person deepest in the hollow said, "Look, someone etched some words over here."

Ren Xiaosu and Xu Xianchu went to the wall and were surprised to see two lines of crooked writing etched by someone at the top of the hollow: "We saw some strange shadows moving in the forest. They've disappeared, all of them have disappeared."

## **Chapter 64: Satellites**

When everyone saw the two lines of writing, the atmosphere in the hollow plummeted to a freezing point.

Since entering the forest today, the group did encounter any more dangers. Other than exhaustion from a sleepless night, no other strange occurrences took place.

This gave everyone the wrong impression that this place was safer than the canyon and the other places they had been to earlier in the journey. They'd nearly even forgotten about the warning that was written outside the canyon.

But it was all coming back to them at this moment.

The missing corpse of Xu Xia, the horrible face bugs, and those words carved on the cliff wall that warned: "Stop here, ye who live."

"Has anyone gone missing so far?" Xu Xianchu's first reaction was to count the number of people in their group. However, he found that no one was missing.

"Could someone be playing a trick on us by etching those words here?" Liu Bu wondered. "There are no signs of any struggle in this hollow, and we didn't even see any skeletal remains of humans or wild animals along the way."

'Wait a minute!' Liu Bu's words startled Ren Xiaosu. Actually, that was the strangest thing that had been happening. Some skeletal remains would usually be scattered throughout the forest. Be it birds, snakes, or any larger wild animals, their skeletal remains should be commonly seen.

But the strangest thing about this forest was that Ren Xiaosu had yet to come across any skeletal remains even once, other than the one belonging to the rat he had thrown away.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu wanted to turn back to confirm if the rat skeleton had disappeared as well. After all, it hadn't been thrown away for too long, and some bones still remained when he had gone to check on it in the morning. But by now, the bones might have disappeared.

It was the same for Xu Xia's body and the fish scraps and bones.

There was something creepy about this huge forest. A soldier asked, "It seems like some people have been here within the past year, and it was even quite a large group too. But almost no one from Stronghold 113 have come out here to the Jing Mountains during this past year."

"It might've been the people from Stronghold 112 who were traveling to our stronghold, but something unexpected happened to them." Xu Xianchu searched his memory. "But since we're the lowest ranking troops in the private army, we can't possibly know who's been here."

Xu Xianchu was right about that. They were the most insignificant people within the private army, so why would the higher-ups tell them all the information they knew?

Someone said, "Could it be that we were sent here because something happened to the team that came out here? And when the higher-ups in the stronghold found out about it, they sent us in to investigate? If that team had carried a satellite phone, they should've been able to transmit information back to the stronghold, right?"

This was the first time that Ren Xiaosu heard of the term "satellite phone." It had not even been mentioned before by Mr. Zhang at school.

He had wondered about this several times as well and believed that there should be some form of communication between the various strongholds. And it seemed that their communications were made through this satellite phone they were talking about?

Ren Xiaosu asked Yang Xiaojin in a whisper, "What's a satellite phone? I've heard from Mr. Zhang that there's something called a telephone in the stronghold, but what's a satellite phone?"

Yang Xiaojin looked at him and said, "Mankind has taken control of several satellites from before The Cataclysm, so we can maintain communication between the various strongholds."

Someone said indignantly, "If the higher-ups knew they'd gone missing, it's obvious they intend to send us to our deaths by sending us out here. Were they thinking of using human lives to confirm whether the news was true? If we die out here as well, it would mean that this place is really dangerous. It's no wonder that we weren't even given any satellite phones this time. It seems like they're trying to minimize their losses, right? Could our lives be worth less than a satellite phone?"

Xu Xianchu glanced at him and said, "Don't go making wild guesses when you have so little information. Also, your speculation isn't logical either."

In reality, the soldier was too frightened at the moment and could not speak sensibly. As such, Xu Xianchu did not agree with his assumptions. However, Ren Xiaosu took a closer look at the two lines of words and said, "What was used to etch these words in the wall? I think it might've been something like a bayonet. It's not possible to carve such deep marks into the rock surface using everyday items that normal people carry around."

Xu Xianchu nodded. "It should be the soldiers from Stronghold 112." He turned to everyone and said, "Sleep tight tonight. If anyone wants to head out of the hollow at night to relieve yourself, make sure to go together in groups of three."

This arrangement was made to prevent inexplicable disappearances from happening again. Even if they got into danger, it was unlikely that three people could not scream for help.

Xu Xianchu continued, "And tonight, everyone has to take turns to keep watch. How about this? I'll take the first shift before the others take over. The ladies don't need to keep watch."

Ren Xiaosu accepted the arrangement but thought there wasn't really any point in keeping a night watch. Not only did they have to guard against external dangers, they also needed to guard against internal dangers from the team.

After all, Yang Xiaojin and he had just seized a gun from a soldier, so it was quite likely that the soldier would try to sneak attack him in the middle of the night.

But at this moment, Yang Xiaojin said to Ren Xiaosu, "You keep watch for the first half of the night while I'll take over for the second half."

"OK." Ren Xiaosu nodded. Their temporary alliance had another basic foundation: They did not have any reason to harm the other.

"I'm going outside for a while," Yang Xiaojin said.

Ren Xiaosu thought, 'Aren't you afraid that something will happen to you?' He asked her, "Do you need me to go with you?"

Yang Xiaojin paused for a while before saying in a low voice, "There's no need."

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. Isn't this girl a little too brave? Just what kind of skill is she hiding?

Beside them, Luo Xinyu stood up and said, "Let me accompany you." She then turned to Ren Xiaosu and gave him a look. "You're really ignorant."

Ren Xiaosu felt his face burning with embarrassment. He just realized what was going on!

The two girls braved the rain and went outside. Xu Xianchu saw them but did not say anything.

A soldier whispered mockingly, "It would be such a pity if those two girls went missing."

But less than five minutes later, Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu returned to the hollow as though nothing had happened.

Had something changed? Could it be that the team was not targeted by the "strange shadows" in the forest?

When two soldiers saw that they had come back, they stood up and said, "We'll also go outside to relieve ourselves. Can't hold it in any longer."

The two men had actually let the two girls go ahead to scout out the route before they dared to head outside themselves. Furthermore, the both of them nearly even pissed their pants out of fear. They really couldn't hold it in any longer.

In fact, they had planned to relieve themselves in the hollow. But didn't Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu come back just fine? So they had to muster up their courage and head outside.

Xu Xianchu nodded and said, "Come back quickly. Don't waste time smoking out there."

"Don't worry 'bout it." The two soldiers put on their clothes and went out.

Ren Xiaosu was eating the chocolate and watching Yang Xiaojin, who was drying herself in the hollow. Curious, he asked, "Didn't anything happen to you two out there?"

"No," Yang Xiaojin replied simply.

Someone in the hollow started a fire. After everyone threw the pine cones into the fire, they started squeezing the liquid substance from the pine needles and licked it to quench their thirst.

The pine cones crackled as they roasted in the fire. Everyone was warmed by it. They felt like they were getting brought back to life.

Right then, Xu Xianchu looked out of the hollow. "Those two... why haven't they returned?!"

### **Chapter 65: Withdrawal symptoms**

The two soldiers who had not returned yet had only dared to venture out when they saw nothing had happened to Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu. By going outside together, they took the necessary precautions.

But now that almost ten minutes had passed, the two of them were still not back.

Xu Xianchu stood at the edge of the hollow and peered out into the forest. Although it was only evening, the sky had already turned black due to the rain.

“Could something have happened to them?” someone asked.

“But there wasn’t any noise,” someone said, curled up in the corner of the hollow. “Surely they couldn’t have been attacked at the same time and made no sound, right?”

Logically speaking, that should have been the case. But wasn’t this exactly what made it even more frightening? Xu Xianchu had instructed everyone to go out in groups, but even so, something still happened.

Xu Xianchu said, “Don’t think too hard. They might’ve been delayed just a little. It’s only been ten minutes, after all.”

Everyone in the hollow became quiet. Although Xu Xianchu comforted everyone by saying that, those two soldiers didn’t reappear as time slowly ticked by.

Xu Xianchu said, “Who’s willing to go and look for them with me?”

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. Xu Xianchu was even willing to risk the unknown danger and acid rain to go into the forest and search for his subordinates.

But no one in the hollow volunteered. Who would be willing to go out and seek death at a time like this? Some of the soldiers even urinated at the innermost part of the hollow and filled the entire hollow with the smell of urine. As a result, Ren Xiaosu and the others were forced to sit near the outer part of the hollow where there was ventilation. Although it was a little cold there, at least they didn’t have to smell it.

Xu Xianchu sighed and said, “If you all don’t help the others, don’t blame others for not helping when the same happens to you.”

Ren Xiaosu was not worried about that since he did not expect anyone to save him. Even Yang Xiaojin, who was his ally, would probably abandon everyone in the event of any danger.

As they were not related to one another, it was already great that they did not sabotage each other.

The sound of rain pouring over the forest came from outside. Ren Xiaosu said to Yang Xiaojin, “I’ll keep watch for the first half of the night. You go and get some rest. The forest ground will become very difficult to walk through after the rain. It’ll use up a lot of your stamina. Be careful of those soldiers too. They’re up to no good.”

Ren Xiaosu had known ever since the two of them seized the gun that the soldiers would cluster together from time to time. This spelled potential trouble for them, but Ren Xiaosu had not figured out how to handle it yet.

“Mhm.” Yang Xiaojin nodded. Then she closed her eyes and leaned against the wall to get some rest. But even so, Yang Xiaojin’s gun was still pointing at everyone, including Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and did not mind it. If it were him, he would have done the same.

A team of 11 people had inexplicably turned into nine. Ren Xiaosu looked at the remaining soldiers in the hollow and saw some of them sitting and smoking. The cigarette smoke was still laced with a smell that nauseated Ren Xiaosu.

He found it hard to imagine just how vulnerable the defenses of the stronghold was when even the soldiers of the stronghold were using such psychoactive drugs to stimulate themselves.

Was this only happening in Stronghold 113 or were most of the soldiers from the other strongholds also the same?

These soldiers had brought quite a lot of cigarettes along, and Liu Bu had also prepared ten packs for them. However, they lost most of them while they were making their escape. Right now, they only had around half a pack or a full pack left on each of them, while some of them did not even have any left at all.

The group of people sitting there were smoking together, filling the entire hollow with smoke. Fortunately, Ren Xiaosu, Yang Xiaojin, and Luo Xinyu were all sitting at the outer edge of the hollow, so they were not that greatly affected.

They heard one soldier saying to the others, "Lend me a cig. I've run out."

"I've run out too. This is the last cig I have." The soldier beside him moved a little to the other side. Actually, he still had more than half a pack left in his pocket, but the days ahead of them were still so long. Who the hell knew how long it'd be before they could finally get out of this place? He did not even have enough to spare for himself.

The soldier who wanted to bum a cigarette looked to the others and said, "Lend me a cig. I'll return a pack to you when we get back to the stronghold."

By this time, his "withdrawals" had kicked in. He didn't hesitate making a promise like that just so he could smoke a cigarette. And cigarettes were not cheap in the stronghold.

"Who knows if we can even get back to the stronghold alive?" someone scoffed. "What are you going to pay with at that time, your life?"

Ren Xiaosu sighed. These soldiers were really like a disorderly mob. While two of their comrades' lives were still at stake, they fell into infighting over some cigarettes.

The soldier whose withdrawal symptoms were starting to kick in could only sit inside the hollow when he failed to get any cigarettes. Ren Xiaosu observed him as he started shivering while beads of sweat began forming on his forehead.

Although these soldiers smoked a better quality of cigarettes than the town's workers, their withdrawal symptoms were more intense.

If they encountered danger at this moment, this addict would probably not even be able to stand up, let alone resist.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Xinyu, who was still awake, and said, "What on earth is it like... inside the stronghold you're from?"

This was actually one question that Ren Xiaosu was most curious about as he had always yearned to live in the stronghold, because all of the best quality daily necessities produced in town would get selected and transported into the stronghold. The people inside did not have to eat cornbread, could wash their faces every day, and it was said they had electricity as well.

Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan used to think that the place was heaven, but now it seemed that it was not as beautiful as they had imagined.

Luo Xinyu was delighted when Ren Xiaosu took the initiative to talk to her. She still needed to rely on him plenty during the journey. She explained in a whisper, "Actually, there's people who made them like this on purpose. A mutiny by the private army in one of the strongholds happened, and the overseers of the other strongholds slowly began bearing ill will for the soldiers. While the big shots hoped that there would be people to protect them, they wanted their soldiers to stay loyal and have no ambition. So these cigarettes are the best tool to make them lose their ambition."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Is smoking too much of this stuff OK?"

"Of course not." Luo Xinyu said, "Some veterans in the stronghold behave like zombies.... And some of their wives even ran off with others as a result."

"It's such a mess in the stronghold." Ren Xiaosu sighed.

"That's nothing." Luo Xinyu said, "I've seen a 60-year-old woman with a dozen gigolos she's paying to support. You could say she's robbing the cradle!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "A 60 year old? I don't think robbing the cradle properly describes that."

Luo Xinyu was startled. "Then what would?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment before saying, "Having children in old age!"

Luo Xinyu was speechless. Luo Xinyu realized that Ren Xiaosu's brain was truly wired a little differently from others. It was no wonder the townspeople all said he was sick in the head! He was clearly a normal person, yet he exhibited signs of mental illness. Just how did his mind work?!

At this moment, someone in the cave exclaimed, "What is this?! It's so wet!"

After he said that, the group ran out of the cave as though they received a great shock. Ren Xiaosu looked into the hollow but was puzzled. There was nothing inside.

## **Chapter 66: A businessman**



Ren Xiaosu didn't believe in ghosts and the likes, so he analyzed the situation when he saw nothing in the hollow. Wait a minute! Ren Xiaosu realized what was going on.

He saw water droplets dripping from the hollow's ceiling onto the ground.

It was probably wet due to the rainwater that had seeped through the hollow's ceiling and dripped down bit by bit. The soldier who got alarmed was merely too tense and fell into a state of panic. As a result, he thought the water droplets were caused by some imaginary enemy, like a drooling monster.

But when Ren Xiaosu saw this, he found a treasure. He said to the others, "Y'all can get water straight from here. The hollow's ceiling is a natural filter that makes the water a little cleaner than well water. Of course, if you're still worried, you can also boil it before you drink it."

Xu Xianchu asked seriously, "Are you sure this water is drinkable?"

"Yes." Ren Xiaosu said, "It's probably one of the cleanest sources of water you can find in the wilderness. Sometimes, not even spring water is safer than this."

When Xu Xianchu heard that, he grabbed his military issue canteen to top up his water supply. Although the pine needles could replenish some water loss from the body, it was far too little.

Those could only ensure that everyone would not die of thirst.

Xu Xianchu did not hoard the water source for too long. After hanging his military issue canteen over the campfire, he said to the others, "You guys should drink up too."

The others were not like Xu Xianchu who still had his military issue canteen to hold the water and boil it with. They could only collect the water with their mouths, let alone boil it.

The crowd was pushing and shoving under the water source. It was alright for the soldiers as each of them took turns to drink from it for a while. But Liu Bu couldn't be in a more pathetic state since no one would let him have a taste of the water.

After a while, a soldier said, fuming, "How is it enough for anyone to drink water one drop at a time? Ren Xiaosu still has two bottles of water in his pockets. He's making us lick the rock wall and the pine needles while he drinks from the bottle himself. Who knows if there's problems with the water?"

Several soldiers got angry. However, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin each had a gun in their hands, so they did not dare to say anything in front of them.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this, he wondered how great it would be if he could store his items in the palace. He could secretly put the bottled water into the palace tomorrow and claim to the others that he had accidentally lost it. That way, no one would target him anymore.

Otherwise, if these people went crazy for the water, someone might even take the risk to attack him.

Currently, the two bottles of water were in each side of his jacket pockets. He put his hands into the pockets and held the water bottles as he attempted to store them in the palace again.

But the voice from the palace intoned, "Storage rights have not been obtained."

Ren Xiaosu was upset and sullen when he heard the voice. 'You should at least tell me how to obtain the rights, right? Why can I freely store the black medicine in the palace but not the bottled water? Why? Why can't the bottled water be stored?!'

As Ren Xiaosu retreated to one side, Luo Xinyu looked at him. "Why aren't you going over to drink the water?"

Ren Xiaosu saw Luo Xinyu's skeptical look. It was obvious she did not believe he would be so generous.

Ren Xiaosu grinned. "I'm gonna drink the bottled water."

Luo Xinyu was speechless. In this moment, Luo Xinyu realized that Ren Xiaosu was really talented at annoying people at any time.

However, she did not know that Ren Xiaosu had actually given it careful consideration before deciding to leave the water source for the others. First of all, everyone was parched, and the water source that was dripping bit by bit would definitely be insufficient. As a supernatural being, Xu Xianchu could horde the water source for as long as he wanted, and no one would dare to say a thing. But Ren Xiaosu "wasn't" one.

Some people were already jealous of the fact that he still had two bottles of water on him. As such, he didn't need to hoard them.

One of the principles of survival in the wilderness was to not be too greedy. Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu had to make Xu Xianchu understand that if he wanted to survive in the wilderness, the most indispensable person in the team was him, Ren Xiaosu. If Ren Xiaosu could get the support of a supernatural being like Xu Xianchu, wouldn't that be better?

Also, the smell in the hallow was simply too pungent.

In such a tense atmosphere, Luo Xinyu was initially terrified. As such, she chatted with Ren Xiaosu so she could alleviate the fear she was feeling. After all, it was always better to have someone to talk to.

In fact, this method was extremely effective. When Ren Xiaosu spoke about "having children in old age," Luo Xinyu didn't feel afraid anymore. There was only a string of ellipses on her mind.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Do you know where the cigarettes that the soldiers smoke come from? I don't think there's any suitable places near Stronghold 113 to grow something like that, right?"

"You don't know?" Luo Xinyu asked, feeling puzzled. "Wang Fugui said that you had the backing of Luo Lan, so how can you possibly not know anything about it?"

"What does Luo Lan have anything to do with it?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Although he had received a banner from Luo Lan, he and Boss Luo did not have any other dealings.

"Boss Luo is the representative of the Qing Consortium in Stronghold 113," Luo Xinyu explained.

“What is his job title in the stronghold?” Ren Xiaosu asked. Although he heard Wang Fugui mention Boss Luo’s name every day, Ren Xiaosu realized that he actually didn’t know much about Boss Luo.

“Boss Luo doesn’t have a job title.” Luo Xinyu looked at Ren Xiaosu in surprise. “Alright, it looks like you really don’t know anything. He only controls some factories that deal with metallurgy, water production, and chemical plants. If you have to ask what his title is... then he’s strictly considered a businessman.”

“How does a businessman get to call the shots in the stronghold?” Ren Xiaosu said after thinking for a moment. He had thought that Boss Luo was just a stronghold overseer.

“It’s unnecessary for them to hold a job title.” Luo Xinyu said helplessly, “They are like the sky above the stronghold overseers. When nothing happens, everyone lives peacefully together. But when something crops up, that businessman will definitely be the decision maker of the stronghold.”

“Does he have an army around him?” Ren Xiaosu asked after some thought.

Luo Xinyu glanced at him and said, “Yes, he has an army that is many times stronger than these private troops. The combat brigade that’s stationed in Stronghold 113 is way beyond your imagination. They’re nothing like these private troops you’re watching.”

It meant that there were two different types of troops stationed at the stronghold. Although the stronghold had nominal overseers, their authority existed in name only. If they did not resist, the consortium would allow them to enjoy a life of luxury as their puppets.

“But there’s something I still don’t understand.” Ren Xiaosu asked, “Why don’t they just take control of the stronghold and become the overseers themselves? Isn’t it unnecessary to support puppets?”

“Because the Qing Consortium is not the only organization in this world,” Luo Xinyu said.

Hearing this, Ren Xiaosu gained an understanding. The control of the hundred-odd strongholds was in the hands of just a few organizations. Although they worked together to take control of the strongholds, there was a delicate balance of power between them. By using some strange methods of cooperation, they would seize resources for themselves.

“So the Qing Consortium was the one who supplied those cigarettes to Stronghold 113?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

### **Chapter 67: It’s not like you have nothing left**

“All the cigarettes supplied to the private army were delivered from other locations by the Qing Consortium. You’ve seen the fleet of trucks before, right? The supplies they delivered were none other than cigarettes.” Luo Xinyu said, “Actually, the same thing’s happening in the other strongholds. Although the various strongholds’ overseers know they’re puppets, there are always a few who try to break free of their strings.”

Ren Xiaosu nodded. It looked like he could not measure the consortium's power based on the private army's strength. Ren Xiaosu had learned enough from Luo Xinyu for the day and had to digest all of this information.

"I'll ask one final question." Ren Xiaosu asked, "Why did you choose a person like Liu Bu as your manager?"

Luo Xinyu was not exactly stupid either, so why did she choose Liu Bu?

Luo Xinyu explained, "He's the younger brother of a unit chief in the stronghold's Logistics Division."

Ren Xiaosu could more or less understand some of the reasons behind this, but he didn't exactly know what kind of authority a unit chief in the Logistics Division had.

Luo Xinyu felt her relationship with Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu had become a little closer. She hesitated for a moment before saying, "Can you help me make it out of this place alive? I have nothing left out here in the wilderness and can only depend on the two of you."

Ren Xiaosu shook his head and said, "It's not like you have nothing left."

Luo Xinyu was taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"You still have the cheek to ask me to get you out of here alive." Having said that, Ren Xiaosu ignored Luo Xinyu.

Luo Xinyu was left confused by Ren Xiaosu on this dark and rainy night. She still had something left? She still had the cheek to ask him for something?

What fucking language proficiency is this? Are we even speaking the same language?

It was at this time that Luo Xinyu realized that her "close relationship" was only an illusion.

In reality, Ren Xiaosu found Luo Xinyu to be quite pitiable. She was all alone in the wilderness with no one to trust and had no one who was willing to help her. She was even surrounded by these ruffian soldiers who kept trying to take advantage of her.

But who wasn't pitiable? Yan Liuyuan, who was suffering in town from the pain brought on by the side effects of his wish, wasn't he pitiable?

If Ren Xiaosu promised to help get someone out of this place, that would be irresponsible towards Yan Liuyuan.

As long as Ren Xiaosu relied on his luck, Yan Liuyuan was bound to suffer even more from the side effects.

Although Yan Liuyuan would usually only get a headache or fever after making a wish, the problem was that if Ren Xiaosu used his luck to avoid death, Yan Liuyuan would not only be suffering simple side effects like a headache or fever!

This was a power governed by the law of conservation. If one party got luckier, the other would become unluckier.

The moment Yan Liuyuan made a wish for Ren Xiaosu, he had placed his life in Ren Xiaosu's hands.

Therefore, for Yan Liuyuan's sake, Ren Xiaosu could not promise anyone that he would help them get out of here alive.

The other people's lives were not as valuable as Yan Liuyuan's.

When Yang Xiaojin woke up in the middle of the night, she looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, "It's your turn to sleep."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. Then he closed his eyes to get some sleep. He had not gotten any rest for nearly 30 hours. Even that was too much for him to bear in his current shape.

Ren Xiaosu kept thinking about a couple questions while in a semiconscious state. 'What exactly is Yang Xiaojin's identity? Does she belong to the so-called combat brigade of the Qing Consortium?'

No, that couldn't be right. If she were from the combat brigade, she wouldn't have to hide her identity to join the team, right? Besides, she even had to pay Luo Xinyu to join them.

In Ren Xiaosu's opinion, if the Qing Consortium's combat brigade stationed at Stronghold 113 were to send someone to join them for the mission, wouldn't the soldiers from the private army revere her like a god?

After all, that was the authority that really had the power to control life and death in the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu could not figure out Yang Xiaojin's motive, so he could only remain suspicious of her identity.

The hollow was completely quiet in the early morning. Yang Xiaojin was feeling energetic again after waking up. As she had received relevant training in this field, the way she slept was beyond most people's imagination. She was actually able to stay alert while sleeping.

This was something that normal people could not understand, just like how normal people in the current day still could not understand supernatural beings.

The rain outside came to a stop. Just as Ren Xiaosu had said, the forest ground became quagmire of mud after the rain. Some people would probably fall behind during tomorrow's journey.

Some of the soldiers in the hollow were still not asleep and were whispering about something. Meanwhile, Liu Bu was catching the dripping water with his mouth open. It was finally his turn to drink now that everyone else had enough.

Yang Xiaojin was opening the pine cones left over from the evening. She took out the pine nuts from within and put them into her mouth one by one to replenish the nutrients she needed.

Yang Xiaojin, who was sitting across from Ren Xiaosu, was looking at him sleeping as she ate her pine nuts. Was he really asleep or was he in a semiconscious state?

However, Yang Xiaojin heard Ren Xiaosu start snoring. She wasn't the only one who heard it; the entire hollow heard it as well! The snoring was way too loud!

At this moment, two soldiers got up and said to Xu Xianchu, "We'll take over the watch from you. You should get some rest now."

Xu Xianchu nodded. "Be on your toes, don't lower your guard."

"Don't worry," one of the soldiers replied.

The two soldiers slowly walked to the entrance of the hollow, as though they were going to keep watch there.

Yang Xiaojin lowered her head and hid her gaze under her cap. When she saw the two ruffian soldiers, the corners of her mouth curled up a tad. This was because she noticed that Ren Xiaosu's snoring had... stopped.

But the two soldiers did not seem to have noticed anything. One of them remarked, "I wonder if we can get back to the stronghold alive."

"Who knows?" the other replied.

It seemed like the two men were having a normal conversation. But when they passed Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu, they sprang into action. As the rain had stopped, the hollow was completely silent.

The two soldiers, standing on the left and right side, whipped out their bayonets. They were actually thinking of sneak attacking both Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin!

Which would react faster within three steps? A person or a gun? This question had been discussed by many people before, and everyone felt that a person could probably react faster in the space of three steps. But right now, the two assailants were only one step away from Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. Within such a short distance, it would be almost impossible for Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin to pull out their guns.

They were not foolish. Therefore, they waited until the wee hours of the morning when Ren Xiaosu had just fallen asleep and Yang Xiaojin was just waking up to carry out their plan. A person tended to have stiff muscles when they were just waking up from sleep. This was not due to being in bad shape, rather, the body's mobility has not fully kicked in yet.

They had probably decided to launch a sneak attack on Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu for their guns, or their water, or for Luo Xinyu. However, they did not know what kind of opponents they were about to face!

Bang!

With a gunshot, the ruffian soldier standing before Yang Xiaojin looked at the bleeding wound in his abdomen in disbelief. He clearly saw that Yang Xiaojin had been peeling pine nuts, and her gun was not out. So how did Yang Xiaojin manage to react so much quicker than him?

Meanwhile, the assailant on the other side let out a pained cry. Just as he was about to use the bayonet in his hand, Ren Xiaosu sprang up and grabbed him by his neck in an instant, quick as lightning.

The assailant wanted to stab Ren Xiaosu with the bayonet in his hand, but he realized that Ren Xiaosu had already grabbed his arm. He could not move a muscle.

Ren Xiaosu lifted the adult man weighing 85 kilograms up by his neck with one hand. Then the assailant felt a great pain radiate from his back. In the blink of an eye, Ren Xiaosu had slammed him up against the stone wall with one hand!

The bayonet fell to the ground as the assailant could no longer grip it.

### **Chapter 68: Master Skill Duplication Scroll**

All of the others who were sleeping were awoken by the outbreak of a sudden fight. As the thunderous gunshot echoed through the hollow, everyone felt like an explosive had gone off beside them.

While these people who had just been awoken were still clueless about what was going on, Xu Xianchu's gray shadow clone appeared and stayed put by his side.

The temperature at Yang Xiaojin's gun barrel rapidly cooled as her opponent's body quickly turned cold. This was actually the first time Yang Xiaojin had fired her gun during the expedition. It seemed no one had expected that she would be so firm and decisive in her actions.

Moreover, she looked exceedingly calm while killing someone. It looked as normal as drinking a glass of water.

But actually, what left the deepest impression on the others was not Yang Xiaojin's actions, but Ren Xiaosu's.

It only took a moment for the gun to go off and the bullet to enter the soldier's body. The huge kinetic energy of the rotating bullet then tore through the muscles and organs inside of him and only came to a stop after the kinetic energy was fully expended. But neither anyone on the outside nor the victim himself could see the internal effects.

But it was different for Ren Xiaosu's side. The sight of an adult man being forcefully lifted up with one hand was too violent.

Ren Xiaosu was only 1.78 meters tall, and his body was still not fully developed at the age of 17. So whether it was Xu Xianchu, Liu Bu, or Yang Xiaojin, they had never thought about Ren Xiaosu's "combat prowess" before.

They thought, 'How much strength could a malnourished young refugee from town have?' At most, he would have some survival skills that he honed from living in the wilderness.

Ren Xiaosu had never revealed his true power, and Yang Xiaojin had not fired her gun before this, so it led everyone to have only a very vague idea of their combat strength. This was the why the assailants dared to attack them.

However, no one could have expected that this vague idea they had turned out to be extremely wrong.

Ren Xiaosu's fingers were locked around the assailant's neck like a pair of pincers. The assailant could immediately feel the blood flow to his brain stopping. In fact, he could have kicked at Ren Xiaosu's vital regions with his legs, but his mind had already turned blank while his hands and feet convulsed in spasms.

Yang Xiaojin did not look at the soldier who had fallen in front of her but looked quietly at Ren Xiaosu instead. She was already holding up two guns and pointing them at everyone else in the hollow.

However, she was also a little puzzled. Earlier, Ren Xiaosu was clearly asleep. He could have faked his snoring, but it was impossible to disguise the movement of his eyelids.

She had even been trained to judge whether someone was sleeping for real. A person could pretend to be asleep, but the mind would subconsciously cause the eyelids to move. A person who was not fast asleep would find it impossible to control their eyelid movements for an extended duration.

So she knew that Ren Xiaosu had really fallen asleep just now. But the moment the assailants got up, Ren Xiaosu's snoring stopped, which proved that he was awake at that point.

How could a person in deep sleep constantly remain alert like he had? A refugee like Ren Xiaosu couldn't possibly have received the same kind of training she had!

Back in town, Yan Liuyuan was actually the happiest when he could keep watch during the night for Ren Xiaosu. It made him feel like Ren Xiaosu needed him the most at such a time and he was able to do something for him.

Although he couldn't go hunting with Ren Xiaosu as a result of having to keep watch at night, he still felt that being a "night watchman" was extremely meaningful.

But what Yan Liuyuan didn't know was that Ren Xiaosu actually didn't need anyone to keep watch at night for him ever since the palace came into existence.

And at this moment, the Ren Xiaosu in Yang Xiaojin's eyes was displaying a supernatural strength. How could a thin young man like him possess a strength like that? Even Yang Xiaojin couldn't have expected this.

The soldier, who was soaking in a pool of his own blood on the ground, struggled to spit out, "Sun Junzheng, get them!"

But the soldier named Sun Junzheng was currently curled up inside the hollow. He was so afraid that he didn't dare say a thing.



Xu Xianchu frowned and asked, "What's going on here?"

Ren Xiaosu ignored him and continued to glare at the assailant. He had found those pine cones and pine needles for these people and even let them have the water source in the hollow. Although his motivation was to get their gratitude tokens, the overall outcome was still a good one.

Ren Xiaosu had realized long ago that these people were plotting something. He initially thought that these people would have a bottom line or at least show a little restraint.

He didn't even try to ask the assailants what they were after. Water? Guns? Luo Xinyu? Ren Xiaosu thought that there wasn't a need to ask them like he was being betrayed and feeling anguished since he did not need an answer from them.

Without any trust in the first place, there was naturally no sense of betrayal. In Ren Xiaosu's eyes, there was no difference between these teammates and the wild beasts.

Ren Xiaosu did not immediately snap the assailant's neck only because he wanted to see how Xu Xianchu would react.

But at this moment, the voice from his palace said, "Quest: Give the enemy a swift death."

Ren Xiaosu was really stunned this time. Wasn't this a palace that advocated doing good? Why did it suddenly become so straightforward and decisive then?

In the past, Ren Xiaosu would always try to take the easy way out to complete his quests by taking advantage of any loopholes. But this time, it was so direct that he couldn't get used to it.

Or perhaps to the palace, not torturing the enemy was considered a good deed? 'Damn, aren't you bending your principles a little too quickly?' But Ren Xiaosu knew that the palace did not have a mind of its own. It must have its own judgment mechanisms for it to assign a quest like this.

With a muffled crack, Ren Xiaosu snapped the assailant's neck. When Sun Junzheng, who was in the hollow, heard the sound, he trembled. "It's got nothing to do with me.... I didn't even tell them that you had great strength!"

Bang!

Yang Xiaojin shot Sun Junzheng right between his eyes before he could finish speaking.

Ren Xiaosu turned his head to Yang Xiaojin. Yang Xiaojin calmly said, "Hiding a crime is the same as committing one."

Ren Xiaosu sucked in a breath. Yang Xiaojin was implying that even though Sun Junzheng did not tell Ren Xiaosu's strength to the assailants, he did not give any prior warning about their intention to attack them either. Therefore, to rid themselves of any further threats, Sun Junzheng had to die as well.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu felt that even though he had repeatedly updated his understanding of Yang Xiaojin, her ruthlessness and decisiveness still exceeded his expectations.

But he did not feel that she was wrong.

A team that originally consisted of 11 people was now left with six people in the matter of a night. Only Xu Xianchu, Ren Xiaosu, Luo Xinyu, Liu Bu, Wang Lei, and Yang Xiaojin were left.

“Quest complete. Awarded Master Skill Duplication Scroll.”

Without pausing to think, Ren Xiaosu used the Master Skill Duplication Scroll on Xu Xianchu. Using Yang Xiaojin’s firearms skill as a comparison, there wasn’t much significance in upgrading his Advanced Firearms Proficiency to the master level. So at this moment, he needed Xu Xianchu’s power more!

“About to copy the target’s master-level skill or superpower. If you do not have the corresponding advanced-level skill after copying a master-level skill, you will not be able to learn it. The target does not have a master-level skill. Randomly copied target’s superpower, ‘Shadow Clone.’ Do you want to learn it?”

Ren Xiaosu was overjoyed. So if the target had no master-level skills, he could directly copy their superpowers?

He had thought the chances would be very slim!

“Yes!”

“You have learned ‘Shadow Clone.’”

Ren Xiaosu could feel the new power in him that he had just copied and learned. He was surprised to discover a shadow clone of himself standing quietly within the palace.

But what left Ren Xiaosu a little surprised was that, while Xu Xianchu’s shadow clone was gray in color, his was black. ‘What’s with this? Is it darker because I don’t wash my face?’

## **Chapter 69: Got what they deserved**

The atmosphere in the hollow reached freezing. Everyone felt glum and downtrodden after two of their teammates disappeared in the night without any explanation. And now, to everyone’s surprise, another internal conflict happened between those who were left?

The four of Xu Xianchu, Luo Xinyu, Liu Bu, and Wang Lei roughly knew that the soldiers had planned on attacking Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. However, that was handled by the two of them in an instant.

The duration of this fight was so quick that it was unimaginable, and the conflict also made Xu Xianchu seriously reassess these two people standing in front of him.

He sighed and said, “They probably got what they deserved.”

Ren Xiaosu did not say anything. After thinking about it, he understood that Xu Xianchu had no motive to cause this assault.

If it were for the guns, Xu Xianchu still had his rifle and pistol on him. If it were to possess Luo Xinyu, Xu Xianchu got the opportunity long ago. After all, Luo Xinyu had even thrown herself at him, yet he never reacted positively to her advances. If it were for the water, Xu Xianchu had already collected a bottle in the evening. He didn't have any reason to set his sights on Ren Xiaosu's two bottles of water.

Ren Xiaosu was worried that Xu Xianchu would take action to maintain order in the team, but as it turned out, he did not want to get involved in this conflict at all.

Xu Xianchu's overarching objective was to explore the mystery of the Jing Mountains and the evolution of the creatures that lived there. He was not concerned about getting the others out of this place alive.

"But surely Sun Junzheng's crime should not amount to his death, right?" Xu Xianchu sighed again. "Forget it, no one can truly be faulted out in this wilderness."

Ren Xiaosu felt that Xu Xianchu already understood the principles of wilderness survival. There was no right or wrong. Survival was the only gospel truth.

He also did not want to say that Yang Xiaojin was right to do so, but there was absolutely nothing wrong with ridding themselves of any threats!

Ren Xiaosu carried the three corpses and threw them outside the hollow. Then he said to Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin, "I could never figure out how Xu Xia's corpse disappeared, so why don't we closely observe what happens this time?"

He told Yang Xiaojin, "Shout me awake if anything strange happens." He then sat down against the stone wall and went back to sleep.

The others looked at Ren Xiaosu and wondered how he could remain so calm. Why could he go straight back to sleep like nothing had happened when he obviously just killed someone? Were you not the one who killed that person just now?

In reality, Ren Xiaosu was not asleep. He was just taking a mental look at the palace because a black shadow clone had appeared in it. This made Ren Xiaosu lose his sleepiness as his interest was piqued!

Crucially, he had been very envious of Xu Xianchu and was even a little envious of Zhang Baogen's power of blowing the explosive saliva bubbles.

Although the saliva bubbles looked very weak, Ren Xiaosu suspected there was still room for improvement in its power.

Did the supernatural beings have any room for improvement? He felt that there certainly must be.

As for him, even though he had a palace that looked quite intimidating, the problem was that he had mostly been raising his Strength and Dexterity attributes thus far. It made him feel like he was not really

a supernatural being. After all, some people could also reach his current state of strength after a long period of training.

As such, before he learned the Shadow Clone power he copied from Xu Xianchu, he could not be truly regarded as a supernatural being. At the very least, he could not be considered as one in terms of combat strength.

Ren Xiaosu had long coveted Xu Xianchu's Shadow Cone that was capable of blocking bullets. In Ren Xiaosu's opinion, weapons such as firearms and explosives were terrifying. The initial velocity at which a bullet was fired at could reach Mach speed or several times Mach. Normal people would have no chance of fighting back against weapons like firearms.

Therefore, to Ren Xiaosu, the qualifier that separated a normal person from a supernatural being would be the fear of firearms and explosives.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu was also not fearless of firearms and explosives. He would still die if someone carried out a sneak attack on him with those weapons.

At this moment, the black shadow clone stood quietly and motionlessly beside the brass typewriter in the palace. Ren Xiaosu scrutinized it and saw that the silhouette of the shadow clone was clearly his own. It looked just like a blurred version of him.

Why was Xu Xianchu's shadow clone gray in color while his was black? He had clearly copied the power straight from him, so could there be other differences?

Ren Xiaosu started to nimbly manipulate the shadow clone by moving it around within the palace. Then he realized that... the strength of the shadow clone seemed to be closely related to that of his own strength. Even without any testing, Ren Xiaosu knew that this was a kind of connection on the mental level. It seemed like the shadow clone was formed straight from his mental willpower.

The strength, speed, and even "density" of this shadow clone were twice of what Ren Xiaosu had. It was no wonder it could even block bullets. A normal person could also block bullets, but they would die, while the shadow clone wouldn't.

Through Ren Xiaosu's personal experimentation, he found the usage of the shadow clone was determined by the willpower he had. As long as he was full of vigor, he could continue using it.

But Ren Xiaosu was a little curious about how something as vague as willpower could be calculated.

He tried asking the palace, "What's the level of my willpower?"

The voice from the palace answered, "Unauthorized to answer."

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. Since his master-level Wilderness Survival Proficiency could be determined, and his Strength and Dexterity attributes could also be determined, then why couldn't the palace determine the level of his willpower?

Was there no criterion for determining one's willpower or was there some other reason for it?

Since he could not get an answer for the time being, Ren Xiaosu did not dwell any further on it and went to sleep!

But Ren Xiaosu had sort of figured out why Xu Xianchu's shadow clone was gray while his was black. His own body was stronger than Xu Xianchu's, so his shadow clone was denser!

...

When the sunshine shone on Ren Xiaosu's face in the morning, the first thing he did when he woke up was to look at the spot where he dumped the corpses. It surprised him that nothing had occurred with the three corpses. It was no wonder Yang Xiaojin did not wake him up in the middle of the night to say something. So it turned out that nothing unusual had happened.

It was good that nothing had happened. He couldn't constantly hope that something dangerous would happen to them, right?

Then he turned his gaze back into the hollow and happened to meet Liu Bu's eyes. However, Liu Bu did not wear the arrogance he had from long ago when he first came out of the stronghold. He was starting to avoid looking at Ren Xiaosu.

Liu Bu did not rest well last night. He was someone who only knew how to bully the weak and fear the strong. When he learned that Ren Xiaosu was actually powerful, he started to panic a little.

He could not help but feel anxious. He, Luo Xinyu, and Wang Lei were all shocked to discover that even with so few people left on the team, everyone else were monsters, unlike the three of them.

Xu Xianchu was already standing outside the hollow. He was thinking about something as he looked at the forest before him.

When Ren Xiaosu walked beside Wang Lei, who was lying on the stretcher, Wang Lei flinched away from him. But how could he be faster than Ren Xiaosu?

Ren Xiaosu lifted up his shirt and took a look at Wang Lei's stab wound created by Xu Xianchu. He said, "Alright, you can get up now and walk on your own. The wound's already healed."

All of a sudden, Wang Lei realized that his wound did not hurt anymore. Could Ren Xiaosu's black medicine really be that effective?!

## **Chapter 70: Storage rights**

When Xu Xianchu returned to the hollow, he saw Wang Lei inspecting his wound. He asked Ren Xiaosu, "Do you still have any of that medicine?"

With Wang Lei acting as the guinea pig, Xu Xianchu knew well how important that black medicine was. If he sustained any injuries in the wilderness, his survival chances would greatly increase as long as he had the black medicine with him!

“No,” Ren Xiaosu instinctively replied.

“I’ll pay you for it...” Xu Xianchu said.

“In that case, I still have a little,” Ren Xiaosu replied. If it were for something else, he would probably not be willing to exchange it for money. After all, there was no use for money in the wilderness. However, the black medicine was different.

But Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of a problem. “Haven’t you run out of money?”

Xu Xianchu said, “There was money on those three that you two killed, so I took it from them.”

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt such a heart-wrenching pain that he couldn’t breathe. He was too inexperienced! How could he not have searched the bodies?! How could he have made such an amateur mistake?!

So it turned out that Xu Xianchu had gone outside to search the corpses just now. This guy was too good at waiting. He was afraid it would be dangerous during the night, so he waited until dawn before going outside.

Ren Xiaosu said resentfully, “That isn’t your money! It’s clearly my money! You have to at least share half of it with me!”

Xu Xianchu gave it some thought and said, “Money is of no use for me here. As long as you give me the black medicine, I’ll give all of the 8,000-plus yuan on me to you.”

When Ren Xiaosu heard that those three had more than 8,000 yuan with them, the pain in his heart grew even greater.

However, Ren Xiaosu carefully sized up Xu Xianchu. ‘This guy really isn’t greedy for money?’ He took out the bottle of black medicine, which was now half-used after it had been applied on Wang Lei, and handed it to Xu Xianchu. “Money, please.”

“Here.” Xu Xianchu took all the money out and handed it to Ren Xiaosu. He even purposely turned his pants’ pockets inside out to prove that he had no money left on him.

Ren Xiaosu nodded in satisfaction. Although he did not know Xu Xianchu well, it felt like he was rather sincere through his actions on the journey thus far.

And when Ren Xiaosu took the money from Xu Xianchu, the voice from his palace said, “It has been detected that the host is carrying 20,000 yuan in cash. Basic storage rights have been unlocked for purchase.”

When Ren Xiaosu treated Wang Lei’s wound, Wang Lei paid him 1,200 yuan. Then Luo Xinyu handed 10,000 yuan to him for his help. And now, he received a further 8,900 yuan from Xu Xianchu. Added together, Ren Xiaosu’s cash on hand reached 20,100 yuan.

But Ren Xiaosu was astounded this time. Before this, he had been very anxious to unlock the palace's storage function, but the palace never once told him how to gain access to it.

He had guessed that he might have to complete a certain quest or side quest that was similar to unlocking the weapon.

But never could he have imagined he would have to spend his own money to unlock the storage! 'As a virtual palace, why would you need money?!

Ren Xiaosu had never saved more than 10,000 yuan in his entire life before. But now that he had received close to 10,000 yuan from Xu Xianchu, he was going to have to spend it all again. This really felt like going back to square one.

He had no choice but to spend the money! Ren Xiaosu knew very well how important it was to have a storage space in the wilderness. He clenched his teeth and said to his mind palace, "Purchase it!"

"Purchase successful. You've unlocked basic storage rights."

At this moment, another door appeared in the palace and slowly opened. Then Ren Xiaosu saw a space measuring one cubic meter embedded in the middle of a wall behind it.

'What a scam! 20,000 yuan bought me such a small space? What did the palace say just now? Oh right, the basic storage rights have been unlocked.'

That meant he could still buy the intermediate, advanced, and so on and so forth grades of storage in the future? The space behind this door would probably get larger after more purchases and maybe even turn into an actual house?

But how much money would he have to spend for that? Ren Xiaosu did not even know if he could make that much money in this lifetime!

Ren Xiaosu had thought it impressive to earn 20,000 yuan!

Ren Xiaosu felt it was bittersweet. Honestly, his harvest today was far greater than the previous days of the expedition combined. He went outside and broke a tree branch off, then peeled off the bark and used the white stem inside to scrape his teeth clean. Although he could do without washing his face, he needed to keep his teeth feeling clean and fresh.

To be able to live freely in this wilderness, you had to have good oral hygiene.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu discovered that Yang Xiaojin and Xu Xianchu were also "brushing" their teeth with the snapped off branches like he did. These two people had a very positive attitude regarding survival. They were learning from nearly everything Ren Xiaosu did.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly grabbed a handful of leaves and stuffed them into his pocket. As a result, Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin also plucked a handful of leaves from the same type of tree and stuffed them into their pockets.

As the saying goes: "There will always be someone to learn from in a group of people." When Xu Xianchu and the others realized that Ren Xiaosu had far more experience in wilderness survival than them, their first thoughts were to learn from him. Only by learning from Ren Xiaosu could they survive a little more comfortably in this wilderness.

But Xu Xianchu was a little curious. "What use do these leaves have?"

Ren Xiaosu chuckled as he took the leaves out and threw them away. "They have no use. I only wanted to see if the two of you would copy what I did."

Xu Xianchu was surprised. He looked at Ren Xiaosu for a long time without saying anything. He stubbornly kept the leaves in his pocket and did not throw them away. He plucked the leaves because he wanted to pluck them and definitely not because he was copying Ren Xiaosu's actions!

But Yang Xiaojin was different. She acted like no one was around and grabbed another handful of leaves and stuffed them into her pocket.

The mental fortitude of Xu Xianchu, Yang Xiaojin, and Ren Xiaosu was obviously better than Luo Xinyu's and the others'. After witnessing so many deaths last night, the three of them could still face their circumstances with calm. It was as though they did not take these matters to heart.

But Luo Xinyu and the others could not do it. When Ren Xiaosu, Yang Xiaojin, and Xu Xianchu went out of the hollow to brush their teeth, Luo Xinyu and the others did not dare go out because they were scared of the three corpses lying outside.

Luo Xinyu, Liu Bu, and Wang Lei had to calm themselves for half an hour before they finally dared to come out of the cave. They just couldn't understand why the others could still laugh after all that had happened.

"Let's get ready to set off." Xu Xianchu said, "Although we don't know what dangers we might encounter later on, we can't stay here. Before it gets dark again, we have to find a suitable place to set up camp for the night. I hope that no one is thinking of going around on their own anymore. After all, you've all seen what happened to those who went by themselves."

They were now on the periphery of the Jing Mountains, and Ren Xiaosu could even see the black smoke spewing from the active volcanoes in the range. The further they went in, the more dangerous it would get.

"Can y'all say what exactly exists in the Jing Mountains?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

Xu Xianchu thought for a moment and said, "It could be the mystery of the wild animals' evolution that's hidden within or perhaps the origination of a new taxonomic order."

"When you came out of the stronghold, did they tell you what the site that possibly existed there might be?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Xu Xianchu stopped hiding the information. "A mysterious city."



