

Chapter 81: A ruined civilization

A complete platoon consisted of 30 people in a corporation's order of battle 1 . When they encountered any danger, they could immediately use all their firepower to carry out a full coverage attack. This was also the reason why the wild animals could only flee in haste when facing them.

However, even with such a powerful platoon, they did not hesitate to call for reinforcements when they came into contact with the "Experimental." This showed that they did not have the confidence to defeat it with their current strength!

Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu knelt on the ground as they listened to the sound of gunfire bursting out around them. A soldier slung his rifle over his shoulder and tied Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu's thumbs on both hands together with some plastic strips 1 . It was tied so tightly that they were in pain.

Furthermore, the soldier completed a body search on Liu Bu in just two seconds and ensured that this man and woman in front of him would not be of any threat.

The soldier did not ask them anything. He just left them to rejoin his team and continued with the battle.

All the other soldiers ignored Liu Bu. It was as though he did not exist. Each of them had their own responsibilities and were working like gears in a well-oiled machine. They took every step with steady precision.

Someone muttered, "What is that plastic doll he's carrying on his back?"

Someone on the communications channel shouted, "The Experimental has fled to our 9 o'clock. Take notice, formations over there. The Experimental has fled to our 9 o'clock!"

The Experimental also did not seem like it wanted to confront these platoons with such heavy firepower. It chose to avoid them for now.

At this moment, Liu Bu felt that comparing the combat strength of the consortium's troops to the private army was simply a matter of heaven and earth. With these sights, the private army was like a pig farm compared to the consortium!

Liu Bu had been worried the consortium would immediately kill him. After all, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin had described them as demons. By the looks of it, that was not the case. The consortium tied him up together with Luo Xinyu but did not do anything to them.

With that, Liu Bu was finally relieved. At least, he would not have to die, right?

However, a moment later, Liu Bu heard the screams of the troops up front. It sounded like they had suffered some casualties!

...

Ren Xiaosu was hiding in the shadows of the forest and was very well-hidden within the bushes. A centipede was crawling quickly towards him, but Ren Xiaosu stabbed it down into the soil with his dagger. Ren Xiaosu had changed into Sun Junzheng's private army uniform. He didn't put on a dead person's clothes because he was that poor but because the camouflage patterns would help him to stay well-hidden in the forest.

Soon after, he heard the sound of footsteps coming from in front. As he had not gone far, he could hear the consortium's platoon calling for backup from their comrades.

For Ren Xiaosu, this was probably the best chance to sneak past the perimeter that was set up by the consortium. If they needed reinforcements on this side, the consortium's line of fire would gradually be concentrated here. At that time, openings would start appearing in the perimeter of defense!

When he and Xu Xianchu parted ways, there was no mention of where they would meet up again. At this point, they had tacitly chosen to act alone as they believed that their individual skills surpassed the strength of the group.

But that alone was not enough to give them a reason to act solo. More importantly, they still did not trust each other.

Everyone still had some scruples about the team when Yang Xiaojin was around. The three people kept each other in check and formed a temporary, stable alliance. But now that Yang Xiaojin had suddenly disappeared, it led to the immediate breakup of the group.

Ren Xiaosu held his breath and waited for the oncoming platoon to pass him. It was obvious that the Qing Consortium was more informed than Xu Xianchu. They even knew what the chain dragging monster was.

Experimentals? People were conducting experiments in the depths of the mountains?

Ren Xiaosu had some doubts, but he did not waste too much time thinking about this. After a supporting platoon passed him by, he headed towards the hinterlands of the Jing Mountains at a shockingly fast pace. During this time, Ren Xiaosu almost encountered another two platoons that responded to the call for reinforcements. Fortunately, he managed to avoid them in time.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu felt a little puzzled. They could not even kill one monster with so many people? Or... could it be that monster was too powerful?

He did not care too much about that since he had to sneak past the inner perimeter first. Whether he was planning to escape from the Jing Mountains or explore its secrets, this was the best opportunity.

As Ren Xiaosu galloped through the forest, the knotty roots and pitfalls in the ground were not an obstacle to his advancement. His travel speed in the forest had never been slowed by such obstacles before.

Gradually, Ren Xiaosu could hear the sound of heavy machinery operating ahead of him. It seemed an ongoing excavation was being carried out at a huge site ahead.

There was a hill in front of him. When Ren Xiaosu quietly climbed up to have a look at the other side, he was stunned. Frankly, he had not expected there would be such a lively place in the hinterlands of the Jing Mountains.

He was surprised to see a dozen excavators digging up the soil about 500 meters behind the slope of the hill he was on. Then Ren Xiaosu saw something. It was not these dozen or so excavators that caught his interest but the magnificent sight of a city behind this slope!

However, the city had been reduced to ruins. The dozen or so excavators were doing some digging near a pit that looked like it had just been blown up by the Qing Consortium with their shaped charges. It looked like they were searching for something.

In reality, the city in front of him was not considered a complete one. In fact, it was far from that. At the furthest point that was visible to him, the skyline of the city abruptly came to an end with the rest of it buried underneath mountains and earth.

The jagged city from before The Cataclysm was like a giant maze that got destroyed.

Even though Ren Xiaosu could only see a part of it, he could already imagine how magnificent the city was in the past!

He saw a relatively well-preserved metal sign hanging on a building with the characters "xiao long kan 1" on it.

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. What sort of a name was "xiao long kan"? Was it the idea of a carp turning into a dragon after jumping over a waterfall 1? What a mysterious sounding place.

But before Ren Xiaosu could figure it out, the sign crumbled into pieces when the excavator touched it. Eons had passed, so everything was in a state of decay.

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu was really looking forward to seeing this place. The tectonic movements that occurred had buried much of the Pre-Cataclysm civilization deep underground, but these plate tectonics were also responsible for the formation of the volcanoes in the Jing Mountains.

Somehow, a huge city was preserved in this location. Although the buildings were all broken and in pieces, the main structure still existed!

When Ren Xiaosu looked into the distance from the hilltop, he saw that some areas spaced several kilometers apart had already been excavated. However, some of the excavation sites had stopped halfway.

It looked like... they were searching for something. Once they found the excavated site was not what they were searching for, they would immediately stop work and identify a different location.

Ren Xiaosu could sense that whatever the Qing Consortium was searching for, it must be very important to them. Furthermore, they knew exactly what they were searching for.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu spotted a place heavily guarded by soldiers in the distance. Some cargo containers were stacked over there. Next to it, soldiers were injecting drugs into some unconscious animals before loading them into the containers one by one.

Were these wild animals captured by the Qing Consortium? Perhaps even these evolved beasts would find it difficult to escape the fate of being studied.

“Should I leave?” Ren Xiaosu wondered as he felt he might not even have a chance to get near the “target” the Qing Consortium was searching for.

After all, he had already witnessed the might of the Qing Consortium, so he knew it would be impossible for him to snatch the “secret” away from them.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu saw a young man in a white suit standing on the roof of a building overlooking the city.

In the wilderness, that white suit was so spotless it would amaze anyone.

A sight like this was just like a clash of violence and civility that would make it unforgettable to whoever witnessed it.

Chapter 82: Tobacco and liquor

As the important people had to pass through town whenever they came out of the stronghold, Ren Xiaosu had seen them sitting in their cars in their suits from afar. Back then, Ren Xiaosu thought those important people had an imposing air about them.

But if someone wore a suit out into the wilderness, and a white suit at that, Ren Xiaosu would definitely cuss that person under his breath, “Dumbass!”

Wearing a suit would be too much of an impediment in a fight as it would restrict the wearer from raising their arms and legs. If someone encountered a wild animal they could not beat, they probably couldn’t even run away.

But when Ren Xiaosu saw that young man standing atop the building, he did not find his clothing to be unsuitable or incongruous with the wilderness. That was because this person was not required to fight.

He was probably the leader of the Qing Consortium for this operation. Ren Xiaosu felt that this consortium’s VIP really looked quite different from the others.

He kept his head low as he was afraid that he would get discovered by the Qing Consortium’s troops. Over a thousand troops had been mobilized just to handle the security in the vicinity of the excavation

site. Ren Xiaosu felt that both he and Xu Xianchu had underestimated the Qing Consortium's determination to lock down the area.

Ren Xiaosu looked around his surroundings with curiosity and wondered where Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin were hiding.

Although he could not see them, Ren Xiaosu knew that they must be around here somewhere.

"Time to get out of here," Ren Xiaosu told himself, not caring what the others would do. When he learned he could not get his hands on the secret of the Jing Mountains, the thought of making a retreat grew in his mind.

If not, it would be quite pointless for him to stay here. As for the secret of the Jing Mountains, Yang Xiaojin and Xu Xianchu probably had a greater interest in that.

Ren Xiaosu felt there wasn't a need to risk his life for this secret. If someone else here had all kinds of advanced skills, and Ren Xiaosu had dozens of Basic or Master Skill Duplication Scrolls on hand, he might be willing to give it a try. Someone like that would be a real treasure trove for him.

In reality, the most important thing was that Ren Xiaosu was seeing more and more of those buildings that had been excavated belowground. Some of them even collapsed at the lightest touch from the excavators. They had still been standing upright but that was only because no one had "touched" them.

He could still vaguely recognize some of the buildings exposed aboveground based on their relatively intact store signs. For example, there were beauty salons, blind massage, and so on.

Ren Xiaosu did not believe there would be anything too valuable here. And that was the main reason why he wanted to get out of here.

When Ren Xiaosu saw those signs, he felt that his trust had been betrayed and his intelligence insulted. Upon recalling those things like the QR code, "xiao long kan," and the plastic doll, it was obvious they were not particularly rare things at all!

He wondered what Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin would think if they saw these sights. Anyway, Ren Xiaosu had had enough of it. 'After running all this way out here and experiencing so much danger, it was all for the sake of showing me this?'

Ren Xiaosu kept his head low as he quietly headed towards the side of the mountain. At present, he could still hear gunshots going off in the forest behind him. This meant the Qing Consortium's troops had not successfully taken care of that monster yet. The gunshots were at least an assurance for Ren Xiaosu that the Qing Consortium would definitely not have the time to deal with him at this moment.

Although more soldiers were patrolling at the foot of the mountain, the problem was that these people were focusing on the excavation site nearby. The abandoned sites seemed to have already lost their value, and the soldiers did not even bother looking at them.

However, Ren Xiaosu could make use of the sites abandoned by the consortium as an opening to sneak past the perimeter.

The Qing Consortium had cut down so many trees along the way that it was enough to pave the entire length of the road back to Stronghold 112. Ren Xiaosu had to admit he was impressed with what an organization was capable of.

In a place like the wilderness, they could open up a path as they liked, and there was no need to consult with the wild animals living in the mountains.

This led Ren Xiaosu to reevaluate the capabilities of an organization. Importantly, this was only the combat troops of one stronghold. According to Yang Xiaojin, an organization might control 10 to 20 strongholds in total!

So if Ren Xiaosu escaped in the direction of Stronghold 112, whatever wild animals or the like along the way would have already been scared away.

Although it would be a little more difficult to return to Stronghold 113 and required him to take a longer detour if he went this way, he had no other options since this was his best choice.

As Ren Xiaosu quietly walked towards the other areas of this “city,” the natural ravines and ruined buildings exposed aboveground became his best cover.

He saw the ruins of a tall building that had collapsed and was broken into two sections. Ren Xiaosu had no doubt that there used to be people who could totally stand atop this tall building and get a bird’s eye view of the entire city before The Cataclysm.

In the past, Ren Xiaosu would often fantasize about what it would be like to stay in the stronghold with Yan Liuyuan when they were living in the town. But it seemed that, although the stronghold was bigger than this city in terms of area, the level of grandeur and prosperity in there was incomparable to this place.

Of course, the grandeur and prosperity were things of the past. Now, only ruins and desolation were left here.

Ren Xiaosu slid down the hill’s slope under the cover of the shadowy forest and saw some signs covered in dust scattered around the ruins. He muttered, “Why are there so many reflexology spa signs in this city? Did the past people enjoy washing their feet this much?”

While walking between the abandoned city and the mountainside, Ren Xiaosu carefully avoided being caught in the line of sight of anyone. He was only about 500 meters away from the Qing Consortium’s combat troops at this moment. As long as he carefully made use of the blind corners and buildings, he wouldn’t get discovered by them.

But as he proceeded, Ren Xiaosu started feeling like he could hardly walk anymore. He was surprised to see a well-preserved tobacco and liquor store on his left-hand side.

Although a majority of the buildings had been crushed to dust during the earthquakes caused by tectonic shift, 30% of the buildings in the city still remained.

Ren Xiaosu’s eyes gleamed when he saw the tobacco and liquor store.

Tobacco and liquor were scarce goods in town. Why else would a teacher like Zhang Jinglin not have cigarettes to smoke every day?

The stock in this tobacco and liquor store was probably more than what Old Wang and Old Li had in their stores combined. If he could bring it all back, he could easily become the richest person in town!

Ren Xiaosu stole a glance at the Qing Consortium's people. When he was sure no one was looking in his vicinity, he rushed into the store excitedly.

He reached for the cigarettes on the counter. As there was a transparent plastic wrapper around the cigarette pack, Ren Xiaosu thought it would still be in a good condition since it was protected by an outer layer of plastic.

But the moment he touched it, the cigarette pack disintegrated into powder along with it.

Ren Xiaosu felt a pain in his heart. Just how long had these things been kept here?

In fact, Ren Xiaosu did not know that cigarettes also had a shelf life. Although the tobacco factories never stated how long their cigarettes could be kept for, they would generally turn bad after more than three years of storage.

After all, the packaging of the plastic seal could not be more simply done.

Chapter 83: A peculiar child

Ren Xiaosu looked at the disintegrated packs of cigarettes and felt a pain in his heart. Based on the selling price of 20 yuan per cigarette at Wang Fugui's store, how much would the cigarettes in this shop be worth?

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu had estimated there to be at least five tobacco and liquor stores on this street.

Ren Xiaosu converted the prices and felt that humans from before The Cataclysm were really rich.

In his haste, Ren Xiaosu did not realize that tobacco was actually not a scarce commodity before The Cataclysm. He turned around and looked at the bottles of liquor that were placed on the shelves against the wall. As they were not sealed in plastic packaging, the liquor was gone. All the bottles here were empty.

It seemed that some of the liquor bottles had been scattered onto the ground and were in pieces, probably due to earthquakes, while some were still standing on the shelves. But when Ren Xiaosu opened one of the bottles, he found that the liquor in it had disappeared.

He wondered how long it had been since The Cataclysm happened. The liquor in the bottle had completely vaporized.

Ren Xiaosu grumbled, "Didn't the wineries in the past know how to seal bottles better?!"

He refused to believe this as he took another well-preserved bottle and shook it. However, the liquor in the bottle was also gone without an exception.

In fact, this kind of liquor needed to be processed with a specialized technology if it were to be preserved, such as sealing the bottle with wax. Otherwise, it wouldn't be uncommon for only half a bottle of liquor to be left after 50 years of storage.

These days, the most expensive things in town were cigarettes, liquor, and medicine. Especially alcohol, which was banned. The townspeople were even more attracted to it. The more something was prohibited, the more valuable it became.

When Ren Xiaosu saw these shops initially, he thought that he had found a huge treasure trove. But now, he realized that his thoughts were pure fantasy.

The Cataclysm was like a gigantic sword that cut between the old and new civilizations. Ren Xiaosu thought that if both the tobacco and liquor products he found were already like this, there would be even less of a need to mention the medicine.

Earlier, he was thinking of checking out a pharmacy if he saw one. But now, it seemed like there was no need for that anymore.

Ren Xiaosu started thinking seriously as he walked out onto the street. Was there anything that did not have a shelf life? Or rather, something that could last for over a hundred years?

He suddenly saw the name of a shop next to him called "Family Planning & Healthcare," but he did not go in. After all, in his opinion, it should just be a shop selling healthcare products. But what healthcare products could be kept that long?

He felt reassured when he saw that the Qing Consortium's people had not shifted their attention over to his side yet. Ren Xiaosu could still hear gunshots coming from the outer perimeter. He wondered if that Experimental was really that powerful.

But all of a sudden, he thought of something. 'Aren't metals able to last hundreds of years without decomposing?'

Ren Xiaosu whipped his head around. He had heard from Wang Fugui before that there were jewelry shops inside the stronghold. In that case, there must also be jewelry shops in a city as large as this!

Ren Xiaosu, a little downtrodden before this, had his morale lifted again!

Gold was still a hard currency even in these times. Ren Xiaosu had asked Zhang Jinglin why gold was still needed as a hard currency after the Qing Consortium's bank had issued its own currency.

Zhang Jinglin smiled and answered, "Because it's not only the Qing Consortium that has issued their own currency. Perhaps that currency is usable within the Qing Consortium's territories, but it'll be useless once you go to another stronghold that's not controlled by them. At that time, there's a need for something that can be conveniently measured and valued to replace your paper money."

In fact, the corporations used currency as a method to control the various strongholds. They allowed people to get used to the convenience of using paper money, but they had the final say in how much currency was issued.

This was the real lifeline of the economy and one of the fundamentals of a corporation.

However, Zhang Jinglin explained, "Because of the currency circulation problem, several consortiums have come together to form the Monetary Management Committee. Everyone has strict regulations on the issuance of money so that there will be no chaos in the world. They are all on friendly terms at the moment, but who can guarantee that it'll remain the same?"

When Ren Xiaosu remembered Zhang Jinglin's words, the more he felt that Zhang Jinglin was no ordinary person. No one knew where the school teacher came from, and he had lived in the town outside of Stronghold 113 for many years.

Ren Xiaosu decided he would carefully watch Zhang Jinglin after he got back to town.

He started exploring further up in front away from the Qing Consortium's people as he tried to find the existence of any jewelry shops or the like. If there were any jewelry shops still standing, wouldn't he become rich?

...

In the backyard of the school in town, Zhang Jinglin had just returned after a day of lessons. He saw Yan Liuyuan, who had already stepped out of his room and was basking in the sun. He smiled and said, "Have you fully recovered?"

"Yes." Yan Liuyuan nodded as he smiled and said, "Teacher, Big Sister Xiaoyu, thank you for taking care of me in this period of time."

Yan Liuyuan was in a fantastic mood at this moment. It was not because of recovering from illness, but that he knew why it had not deteriorated. This meant Ren Xiaosu did not need to depend on much of Yan Liuyuan's "luck" so far. In other words, Ren Xiaosu had not encountered any real danger.

At this moment, Xiaoyu came in from outside the school, holding a basket. When she saw Yan Liuyuan, she said in surprise, "Liuyuan, have you fully recovered already? Go into your room. Don't catch a cold."

Yan Liuyuan looked adorably cute as he smiled and said, "Big Sister Xiaoyu, I'm fine. You can rest easy now. What are we having for dinner?"

"I'll fry some eggs and vegetables for you two." Xiaoyu smiled and said, "I went to town earlier and bought some fatty meat. I can use it as an oil substitute for frying the dishes so that you two can have a taste of meat."

"Alright," Yan Liuyuan responded. But as he walked out of the yard, he said, "I'm going out for a while and will be back before sunset!"

Xiaoyu was about to stop him, but when she turned around, Yan Liuyuan had already disappeared.

As she waited in worry at the gated entrance to the school, Zhang Jinglin thought to himself, 'Weren't you getting ready to cook just now? How much longer are you going to wait there?' However, he was too embarrassed to say anything.

To Zhang Jinglin, the two brothers were not people who would easily end up on the losing side. When they were out on the streets, it should be other people who had to worry.

Just a moment ago, Zhang Jinglin clearly saw Yan Liuyuan taking a kitchen knife and hiding it within his bosom. Whose child would bring a kitchen knife with them when they went out? Would this be the behavior of a decent kid?

But Yan Liuyuan really did return before dark. Both Zhang Jinglin and Xiaoyu did not know where he had gone. When they asked him, he did not say anything and smiled before changing the subject.

There were three rooms in the backyard of the school, but one of them was used as the kitchen. Of the remaining two, one was Zhang Jinglin's room while the other was occupied by Yan Liuyuan and Xiaoyu.

In the evening, Xiaoyu would make the bed for Yan Liuyuan while she laid on the bedroll and slept on the floor. As it was almost winter now, the floor was freezing. However, Xiaoyu never said anything about it.

After turning off the kerosene lamp, Xiaoyu suddenly asked Yan Liuyuan, "Do you think your brother is safe?"

Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "Don't worry, he's definitely safe."

Xiaoyu was stunned. She did not understand why Yan Liuyuan was so confident.

Chapter 84: Gunshots at midnight

"Liuyuan, don't you go running out by yourself again these days." Xiaoyu said in the pitch-black room, "How am I going to answer to your brother if something happens to you?"

"Don't worry, I won't do it again," Yan Liuyuan promised. Recently, he had gotten increasingly trustful of Xiaoyu because she continued caring for him even though she had the opportunity to leave him behind.

As he was running a high fever several days ago, Xiaoyu could have just taken the money and left, but she did not do that.

While he was sleeping, there would always be a fresh and cool towel wiping his face and armpits to keep his temperature down. Yan Liuyuan even heard a gentle singing voice that felt like a warm ocean and reminded him of a child being held in its mother's arms.

Yan Liuyuan had never experienced any of these feelings before. Even though Ren Xiaosu also provided him with a lot of warmth and care, it felt like he was always chasing after his elder brother. It did not feel like an embrace.

“OK.” Xiaoyu felt reassured after hearing Yan Liuyuan’s promise. She thought of something and said, “Since you’ve recovered from your illness, you have to attend class tomorrow to catch up.”

Yan Liuyuan paled at the mention. “Big Sister Xiaoyu, surely that’s unnecessary. My brother isn’t around anyway!”

“That won’t do.” Xiaoyu said, “It’ll be my fault if Xiaosu comes back and finds out that you’ve fallen behind on your homework. He told me before he left.”

“When did he tell you that?!” Yan Liuyuan wailed, “I never heard him mentioning anything about it at all!”

Xiaoyu giggled while lying on the bedroll. “Anyway, I don’t care. You must be obedient.”

Yan Liuyuan lost the will to argue as he stared at the ceiling, but there was a slight smile on his lips. At this moment, he heard someone jump into the courtyard, and it was not just one person!

Xiaoyu also heard the sound. But the usually gentle and timid Xiaoyu took out a bone knife from under her pillow. She clenched her teeth and said, “Stay still!”

In the dimly lit room, Yan Liuyuan could see Xiaoyu trembling a little. They both knew that someone leaping over the yard’s wall at such a late time must have come with evil purposes. But as Ren Xiaosu was not around, Xiaoyu felt that she should bear the responsibility of protecting Yan Liuyuan.

A second later, three burly men kicked open the door to their room. Two of them tried to hold Xiaoyu against the ground while the other man stabbed at Yan Liuyuan, who was lying in bed with a bone knife.

Although Xiaoyu was also holding a bone knife, her strength as a woman was a lot weaker compared to that of an adult man.

When one of the burly men jumped her, he let out a groan like he had been stabbed by her bone knife. However, the other man kicked it out of her hand!

Yan Liuyuan looked at them with the aid of the moonlight. In that instant, he recognized that these three men were some of the idlers in town. He had never unexpected they would target the school!

Perhaps they thought Ren Xiaosu had earned some money after opening the clinic some time ago. Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu was not in town at the moment, so they started getting ideas to commit a crime.

Xiaoyu was very cautious whenever she spent any money during this period. Every time she bought her groceries from the market, she would haggle over the price for a long time. She would even resort to picking wild vegetables so she could pretend she was broke.

However, Yan Liuyuan needed nutrition when he was ill. In the end, she still bought some meat, and that attracted the attention of others.

This was what was scary about a home without a man. Although Yan Liuyuan was also a man, he was too young to be intimidating to others.

As Yan Liuyuan and Xiaoyu likely had a lot of money with them now, not even the thought of this being a school could hinder the robbers from targeting them.

At the same time, Yan Liuyuan heard the door beside their room being kicked open. It seemed like someone else was attempting to kill Zhang Jinglin! These people were so reckless they even dared to touch the schoolteacher. They wanted to silence everyone so no one would know who the culprits were.

However, right at this moment, a gunshot rang through the night. The idler who had rushed at Yan Liuyuan stared disbelievingly at the black muzzle of the pistol before him. Then he looked down at his bleeding abdomen. He couldn't understand why Yan Liuyuan had a gun in his hand!

If they knew that Yan Liuyuan had a gun, they would definitely not have taken the risk to rob them. In fact, guns were prohibited in town. Some people had built their own guns before, but they were all confiscated by the stronghold.

Everyone in the room looked at Yan Liuyuan in surprise. Even Xiaoyu had not expected it.

In an instant, six gunshots were fired off. After Yan Liuyuan killed one person, he did not get frightened. Instead, he shot the two idlers who had rushed Xiaoyu and killed them as well.

Every time Yan Liuyuan fired a shot, he felt like a darkness in his heart was pulling him slowly into the abyss. In this world, if you want to live, you must know how to kill!

He jumped out of bed and ran out of the door. The two idlers who had just barged into Zhang Jinglin's room next door ran out when they heard the gunshots, but it was already too late!

Another two gunshots rang out. Yan Liuyuan had opened fire and killed five people in the space of one minute! The sound of the gunshots cracked through the air and spread outwards like a howling roar!

Mr. Zhang walked out of the room next door and gazed at Yan Liuyuan, who was standing next to him, as though he was getting to know this young man again.

Zhang Jinglin knew that Ren Xiaosu was a ruthless person and even knew that Yan Liuyuan had been deeply influenced by Ren Xiaosu over the years. Although Yan Liuyuan belonged to the youngest batch of students in the school, the older children did not dare provoke him and were even afraid of him.

But whose 13-year-old child would know how to shoot and kill?

He stood there panting in a pool of blood outside the room. As his expression was always calm, you would only realize he was actually afraid if you saw his hands trembling slightly.

Xiaoyu came out of their room as well. She hugged Yan Liuyuan and said, "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid."

It was obvious that Yan Liuyuan had stepped up to save everyone. But for some reason, Yan Liuyuan felt relieved when Xiaoyu embraced him. Her warm touch dispersed the coldness throughout his body.

The loud and crisp gunshots had jolted the entire town awake. Everyone came out and looked in the direction of the school, but they still did not know what had happened.

It was clear that the stronghold's residents had already returned into the stronghold. So why were there gunshots? Based on the refugees' knowledge, only the important people of the stronghold could possess firearms.

Zhang Jinglin looked at the gun in Yan Liuyuan's hand and said with a sigh, "Did Ren Xiaosu leave that gun for you? You went out in the afternoon because you wanted to retrieve it?"

"Yes." Yan Liuyuan said, "I'll leave town with Big Sister Xiaoyu right away. We won't burden you."

When Ren Xiaosu left town, he broke away from the team for a while to go to the place where the gun was buried. But instead of taking it away, he marked the spot where it was buried and left it to Yan Liuyuan.

Before he departed, he quietly told Yan Liuyuan to retrieve the gun after he went away. If he encountered any danger that he could not fight against, he should use the gun and then escape into the wilderness. He had prepared a secret cave somewhere in the wilderness for Yan Liuyuan to take refuge in.

When Ren Xiaosu was finished with his business, he would go and look for him.

Chapter 85: Mr. Zhang

When Ren Xiaosu left, made it crystal clear to Yan Liuyuan that if Big Sister Xiaoyu was still taking care of him at that time, he would have to bring her along with him as well. If Xiaoyu had already taken the money and left, then Yan Liuyuan should go there and hide by himself.

Don't hope to get lucky, and leave immediately at the sign of any trouble!

In Ren Xiaosu's opinion, nothing was more important in this world than staying alive. It was better to have a gun for self-defense than having nothing at all.

Ren Xiaosu also wished that he could bring the gun with him into the Jing Mountains. But compared to his own safety, he felt that it was better to leave the gun for Yan Liuyuan.

It was just that Yan Liuyuan and Ren Xiaosu could not have expected something would happen so soon after Yan Liuyuan had retrieved the gun.

At this moment, Yan Liuyuan was actually not worried for himself. This was because he believed the place Ren Xiaosu had prepared for him would be safe and sound. He also believed that Ren Xiaosu would be back for him.

What he was worried about was Ren Xiaosu.

Ever since Yan Liuyuan gained his power of affecting luck, he suffered the side effects of making a wish several times. Therefore, he knew well that those side effects... were not simply a sickness.

Yan Liuyuan looked in the direction of the Jing Mountains with a frown. He knew that Ren Xiaosu must've encountered danger, and it was definitely something extremely dangerous too.

This was his inexorable destiny, and this was the cause and effect of him making a wish!

"Ren Xiaosu..." There was a pent-up feeling in Yan Liuyuan's heart. In times of danger, these two brothers would always be worrying about each other's safety instead of their own.

"Big Sister Xiaoyu, come with me." Yan Liuyuan turned around and went into the house to pick up some clothes before getting ready to head out of the school. Xiaoyu did not even ask where they were going. She just took the money out from between the bricks on the ground and followed him.

But Zhang Jinglin caught his arm and stopped him. Zhang Jinglin sighed and said, "It's not safe out there in the wilderness. You don't have to escape. Let me handle it for you."

"Let you handle it?" Yan Liuyuan didn't understand what Zhang Jinglin meant. While they were talking, he even thought of breaking free from Zhang Jinglin's grasp. However, he discovered that Zhang Jinglin was much stronger than he had thought and couldn't break free from him.

Zhang Jinglin said, "The wolf pack has already returned. The place Ren Xiaosu prepared for you is very well-hidden, but it won't escape the wolves' noses. I'm afraid that Ren Xiaosu probably did not expect the wolf pack to return so soon either."

Yan Liuyuan had some doubts. Why did Zhang Jinglin know the wolves were back? There was clearly no one in town who had sighted the wolf pack or heard any news about it.

Meanwhile, the stronghold's gate was being raised. Soon after, Zhang Jinglin and the others could hear the sound of footsteps. It looked like the gunshots had also alarmed those in the stronghold, and the private army's troops had come out to check!

The town started stirring, and the nocturnal commotion made all the refugees crawl out of bed. Everyone came out onto the street and looked in the direction of the school where there were some movements. Some of the more daring ones even headed over to the school to check out what was happening.

Zhang Jinglin waited silently. Not long after, someone kicked open the front door of the school. Wang Congyang led a squad of troops and walked in. He observed the surroundings and had a look at the five corpses lying on the ground, then looked over at Zhang Jinglin. At this moment, the gun was in Zhang Jinglin's hand.

Wang Congyang smiled and said, "The pistol was indeed taken by that kid, Ren Xiaosu. I've been thinking about it for a very long time. There isn't anyone else in town who has the balls to go and get their hands on a gun. Only he would dare to do something like that."

Zhang Jinglin and the others did not say anything. Xiaoyu looked anxiously at Zhang Jinglin as though she was worried he couldn't handle the situation before him.

From outside, Wang Fugui came running in with his clothes all haphazard. He smiled and said in a servile manner to Wang Congyang, "Sir, there must be a mistake somewhere!"

"There isn't any mistake." Wang Congyang shook his head. "I'm quite certain Wang Dongyang was killed by Ren Xiaosu."

Wang Fugui took a stack of money out of his pocket at the words and tried to push it onto Wang Congyang. "You're not really on good terms with Wang Dongyang anyway, so whether or not he was really killed by Ren Xiaosu, maybe we should give this matter some further thought."

"Hahaha," Wang Congyang laughed and shoved Wang Fugui aside. "Do you think I'm like the others from the stronghold who only have eyes for money? Round them all up! I'll wait for Ren Xiaosu to come back and see how he explains himself!"

Though pushed aside, Wang Fugui came up to him again. As a result, Wang Congyang pulled his pistol out of its holster and pointed it right at Wang Fugui's temple. "Stay away, understand?"

Then Wang Congyang was taken aback, because he saw Zhang Jinglin take some papers out of his pocket. Zhang Jinglin said, "Bring this into the stronghold and let Fatty Luo come and see me."

Wang Congyang looked at Zhang Jinglin with suspicion. This was because Zhang Jinglin's tone was too calm for this situation. In the vicinity of Stronghold 113, Zhang Jinglin was probably the only person Wang Congyang had met in his life who dared to call Boss Luo Fatty Luo.

Zhang Jinglin did not explain what the papers were. In the past, Wang Congyang had taken notice of Zhang Jinglin. He felt that Zhang Jinglin was no ordinary person, but he did not delve any deeper into it. Honestly, it did not matter to him whether Zhang Jinglin was normal or not.

But it was different now. He realized he had been embroiled into the mystery of Zhang Jinglin's identity now.

As such, Wang Congyang was even a little afraid to take the red documentation from Zhang Jinglin. It looked a little aged, and the outside covering was slightly damaged.

Zhang Jinglin handed his documentation to Wang Congyang. "Here you go, bring it to him and he'll understand. This isn't something that you can handle anymore."

"Watch them," Wang Congyang told the private troops beside him. It wouldn't do to get others to run this errand. He would need to head back to the stronghold personally and look for Boss Luo himself.

And yet he was afraid he had been fooled. Based on Wang Congyang's meticulous nature, it was absolutely necessary to keep the soldiers behind to watch over Zhang Jinglin and Yan Liuyuan.

Xiaoyu looked over at Zhang Jinglin in worry. "Mr. Zhang, will it be alright?"

Zhang Jinglin waved it off. "Don't worry, nothing will happen. They wouldn't dare to do anything to me yet."

Yan Liuyuan whispered from next to him, "Sorry, Teacher."

If he had not fired the gun, Zhang Jinglin wouldn't have had to expose his identity.

Zhang Jinglin gave him a glance and sighed. "You were not in the wrong. It's this world's fault. Besides, I still have to thank you. You only did it because you wanted to save me."

In Zhang Jinglin's opinion, he did not think that Yan Liuyuan had done anything wrong. If he hadn't fired the gun, it would have ended tragically for both Liuyuan and Xiaoyu, as well as himself. This was because Zhang Jinglin was simply a normal teacher now.

Did Yan Liuyuan show off his fortune? No.

Did Yan Liuyuan kill the wrong people? No.

Zhang Jinglin suddenly felt that Yan Liuyuan was quite similar to Ren Xiaosu in some ways. He was ruthless like Ren Xiaosu, he was cold to his enemies like Ren Xiaosu, and he always had precaution for this world like Ren Xiaosu did.

In the past, Zhang Jinglin felt that it wasn't good for Ren Xiaosu to be this way. But for some reason, he started thinking Ren Xiaosu was much more human than most people after interacting with him for some time.

This might sound a little wrong, but it was what Zhang Jinglin thought.

Chapter 86: Northern Frontier

The other refugees in town were still unaware of what was going on. The outer wall of the school was not high. It was just an earthen wall measuring about 1.7 meters tall. So some people could see into the school by standing on their tiptoes and looking over the wall. What they saw gave them a fright. There were two bodies lying in the backyard of the school, while blood was still flowing out of the house.

It had been many years, and this was the first time someone had been killed at the school!

Of course, it was also because this event was so odd that it made Yan Liuyuan worry even more about Ren Xiaosu.

Wang Congyang ran back into the stronghold. Along the way, he pored over the documentation for himself. He saw the words "Stronghold 178, Zhang Jinglin" written on the inside.

Wang Congyang gasped. He had never come across any identification like this before. Shouldn't such papers only indicate one's identity and the jobs they did? It might also include the date of birth, a photo, and any other relevant details to easily verify someone's identity.

But this identification was different. Anyone who saw it would immediately know who it belonged to. And at this moment, when Wang Congyang thought about the person from Stronghold 178 who had been rumored to be missing for over a decade, he picked up the pace.

However, Wang Congyang wasn't high-ranking enough, so he wasn't sure if his guess was correct.

Wang Congyang did not go to the stronghold's overseers but drove straight to Luo Lan's residence. In truth, everyone knew that Luo Lan was just a businessman. But whenever something major happened in the stronghold, they would all go and look for him. The overseers of the stronghold had already accepted this as fact.

Luo Lan's residence was located in the dead center of the stronghold. From the time Wang Congyang entered the stronghold, he drove nearly an hour before he reached it, and this was even in the dead of the night when there were no pedestrians or traffic on the roads.

He arrived outside Luo Lan's residence, or rather, a large military base.

At the entrance of the base stood a stone monument, red words carved on it: Military Zone.

The consortium's combat brigade, dressed in black uniforms, handled the security at the entrance. Every one of them was issued with live ammunition and was ready to fight at any time. Before Wang Congyang's vehicle could get close, he could already see spotlights shining down on him from the military base's tall walls.

Wang Congyang flashed his identification at the entrance and said, "I'm Wang Congyang from the private army. There's something I have urgently need Boss Luo for. It's a matter regarding Stronghold 178."

At this moment, Wang Congyang could feel no less than 10 rifles pointing at him. Someone from the consortium's military walked over and said indifferently, "Identification!"

In the face of the consortium's military, the private army's troops were inferior. Therefore, even though Wang Congyang was being aimed at with rifles, he did not dare to say anything about it.

Wang Congyang handed both his and Zhang Jinglin's identification papers over. The soldier responsible for checking them returned inside and came out again after more than ten minutes. "Your identity has been verified. You're free to enter."

The main entrance of the military base was finally opened to Wang Congyang.

The Qing Consortium's military might had always been considered the best, and they were also very disciplined and had an extremely strong combat capability. However, martial law wasn't implemented in the past. It was only after the appearance of a supernatural being who tried to kill a stronghold overseer that the various corporations raised the level of martial law around the strongholds.

In the end, the entire military base illuminated not long after Wang Congyang came in. The sound of sharp marching could be clearly heard, and the stronghold residents living near the base woke up in alarm. They still did not know what had happened at the military base, but the sound of the marching was clearly from the assembly of the combat brigade.

A black off-road vehicle sped out from the stronghold, and it was even followed by three military trucks. The trucks were carrying three squads.

“Are they going to war?” someone said when they saw this scene from their house’s window.

“Who is the Qing Consortium going to war with? But if they’re really going to war, surely they can’t just be mobilizing such a small force, right?” someone said in doubt. “I think it was Boss Luo sitting in the off-road vehicle just now? That guy hasn’t left the base in two years, so what could’ve alarmed him this time?”

But the person most shocked was still Wang Congyang. This was because he saw Luo Lan jump in panic when he received Zhang Jinglin’s identification from him.

Shortly after, the entire military base seemingly entered a wartime state as sophisticated machines of war were deployed in an instant.

It was at this moment that Wang Congyang could confirm that Zhang Jinglin might be the person he guessed he was!

If he really was that person, what made him appear in this place?!

The Qing Consortium’s convoy headed straight for the stronghold gate. Yan Liuyuan and the others were still waiting in the schoolyard. He suddenly turned his head to Zhang Jinglin and asked, “Teacher, what did you do before you became a teacher?”

Yan Liuyuan also understood that Mr. Zhang’s identity was scarily important.

Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, “I was a soldier.”

Yan Liuyuan was stunned. It didn’t occur to him that Mr. Zhang Jinglin would be any kind of soldier he knew. Curious, Yan Liuyuan asked, “Then why didn’t you continue being a soldier?”

Zhang Jinglin went silent for a long while at the question. He was apparently perplexed as well. Zhang Jinglin finally answered after thinking about it for a long time, “Because war will not save humanity.”

“Are you leaving?” Yan Liuyuan asked.

“That’s right.” Zhang Jinglin nodded. “There are still people waiting for me in the Northern Frontier.”

All of a sudden, Yan Liuyuan realized Zhang Jinglin had chosen Ren Xiaosu to be the substitute teacher as he had really wanted him to become the school’s new teacher, because Zhang Jinglin had planned on leaving. Even without tonight’s incident, Zhang Jinglin would probably not have stayed much longer.

“Why do you want to go back to the Northern Frontier?” Yan Liuyuan asked.

“Because this world... is starting to get a little different. I need to be with those who are waiting for me,” Zhang Jinglin explained.

“What’s in the Northern Frontier?” Yan Liuyuan kept asking questions. He and Ren Xiaosu had never been to the place before, and it was said to be far off in the northwest.

Yan Liuyuan recalled the time Mr. Zhang got distracted in class. On that day, Mr. Zhang was looking out of the window at the sky and saying, “The spring snow and ice in the Northern Frontier has yet to melt, so there isn’t any greenery, only sandstorms and yellow earth. The snow in the Northern Frontier is vast and white, and humanity is very lonely.”

At that time, although Mr. Zhang had described the Northern Frontier as a bleak and desolate place, Yan Liuyuan could sense his yearning and nostalgia for it. It was only upon recalling this that Yan Liuyuan understood those feelings. So it was because Zhang Jinglin came from there.

“What’s in the Northern Frontier? There’s cigarettes to smoke?” Zhang Jinglin said with a smile. “Don’t be afraid. They wouldn’t dare do anything to me. They won’t be able to try anything funny and will only send me back to Stronghold 178 in the end.”

“Mhm.” Yan Liuyuan nodded. He thought to himself how Ren Xiaosu would not be able to nag him to do his homework in the future. The town wouldn’t even have a teacher anymore.

However, Yan Liuyuan didn’t feel as happy as before when he thought about not having to do any more homework in the future.

Chapter 87: Living specimen

Meanwhile, Luo Lan was panting as he sat in the backseat of the off-road vehicle. He was making a call on a satellite phone. “Hey, Zhang Jinglin has appeared!”

The person on the other end of the call fell silent for a moment. “Has it been verified?”

“It’s not verified yet, but if it’s true, should I kill him?” Luo Lan seemed to be seeking the other person’s opinion. “Why does this old boy have to hide in my territory of all places?”

From his tone, it sounded like Luo Lan considered Zhang Jinglin a hot potato of sorts.

Everyone usually felt that Luo Lan was always smiling and easy to approach, but the smart ones all knew that Luo Lan wasn’t that different from his crazy younger brother. They were both thick-skinned and black-hearted murderers.

If Yan Liuyuan heard what Luo Lan asked, he would be extremely worried for Zhang Jinglin. However, the person on the other end of the satellite call asked, “Kill him?”

“That’s right,” Fatty Luo said. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!”

"A lot of people have now heard he's still alive, right?" The person on the other end said, "Don't you think that, if you kill him now, that damned group from Stronghold 178 might even abandon their stronghold and come over to kill you?"

Luo Lan actually shivered at the words. "I can get it done without causing a scene."

"There's no such thing as an impervious wall in this world." The other person said, "Send him back to Stronghold 178. Isn't someone guarding the Northern Frontier for us better? Even if he has to die... it cannot be to the hands of our Qing Consortium, much less by your hand."

"But what if one day, he..." Luo Lan hesitated.

"It won't be too late to kill him at that time. For now, we'll let others get a headache over this." The person on the other end sounded unquestionably firm. He then seemed to think of something. "By the way, I'm at the Jing Mountains. Is there a refugee from your place named Ren Xiaosu?"

Luo Lan froze: "The one who sells medicine?!"

This time, it was the person on the other end who was surprised. "What about selling medicine? Who's selling medicine?"

"It's nothing," Luo Lan said with some diffidence. "Did you discover anything in the Jing Mountains? I only found out two days ago that Old Liu from our Stronghold 113 secretly sent a squad of private troops to the Jing Mountains. They were even traveling under the pretense of being a band. How childish. I actually quite liked the female singer. It's such a waste that she's probably going to die in the Jing Mountains."

"Oh, the female singer you're talking about, she's not dead yet," the person on the other end said with a laugh. "So Ren Xiaosu is the one who sells medicine and Luo Xinyu is the singer, but who is Yang Xiaojin?"

"Yang Xiaojin? I've never even heard of that name before," Luo Lan muttered. "Discover anything in the Jing Mountains?"

"I'm close to locating the research lab from before The Cataclysm." The person on the other end said, "But, Bro, you can take a back seat in Stronghold 113. You shouldn't be questioning me on such matters."

"Oh." Luo Lan fell silent for a moment. In a normal family, the elder brother would usually have more say over things. However, Boss Luo had absolutely no authority before his younger brother.

"One more question." The person on the other end asked, "How long has it been since Luo Xinyu became a singer at your stronghold?"

"About two years?" Luo Lan replied.

"Then does that Ren Xiaosu have any friends or relatives?" the person on the other end asked.

"I think he has a younger brother," Luo Lan said. Then he turned to Wang Congyang, who was beside him, and asked, "Does that Ren Xiaosu have any friends or relatives?"

Wang Congyang froze. "This Zhang Jinglin is his friend...."

Luo Lan was taken aback. "How coincidental."

"Then don't touch his brother. They're just refugees." The person on the other end sounded less hostile. "While you're sending Zhang Jinglin back to the Northern Frontier, ship Old Liu off from your Stronghold 113 as well. He has no place over there anymore."

Luo Lan muttered, "Why don't we just kill him? It's so much more trouble sending him away."

"Just do as I say." With a click, the other person hung up.

Wang Congyang, who was sitting next to Luo Lan, did not say a word. He had not expected these two brothers could decide the fate of a stronghold overseer with just a call. So this was what an organization could do.

...

At this time, it had also turned dark in the Jing Mountains. The Qing Consortium troops had erected huge spotlights around the excavation sites, with one shining in each of the four cardinal directions, illuminating the entire city in the valley.

The consortium was very experienced at combat operations, so they were used to treating every mission as a real battle. The only difference was that some battles were more major than others.

And the most important factors in a battle were: intelligence and reconnaissance.

After the young man dressed in a white suit hung up, he looked at Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu, who were in front of him, with a smile. It had been several hours since the battle between the combat troops and the Experimental ended. Only afterwards were Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu taken to this ruined city.

"I forgot to introduce myself earlier." The young man in the white suit said with a smile, "I am Qing Zhen of the Qing Consortium, also known as Luo Lan's younger brother. I'm very happy to meet you two, my guests, Mr. Liu Bu and Ms. Luo Xinyu."

Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu's hands had been secured behind their backs with plastic ties. This did not make them feel like they were guests at all. Liu Bu suddenly said, "Everything that I said just now is true. I didn't hide anything. Xu Xianchu is a supernatural being, and Yang Xiaojin is also very likely one. But the person you have to be wariest of is that Ren Xiaosu. I suggest you kill him on the spot if you encounter him! Their motives in coming to the Jing Mountains definitely aren't innocent. I'm sure they're trying to infringe on the interests of the Qing Consortium. I'm very familiar with Boss Luo, so you mustn't kill me!"

Qing Zhen thought for a moment before asking, "Have you two heard about that schoolteacher from town, Zhang Jinglin?"

Liu Bu was startled. "I've heard Ren Xiaosu mention him a few times before. But why are you asking about this? Is it Zhang Jinglin who has a problem? That Ren Xiaosu seems to be very close to Zhang Jinglin, so there has to be a problem with him!"

Liu Bu was getting flustered and panicky. He was answering almost every question posed to him. Usually, the members of the consortium were gentlemanly and refined, and there was always a very graceful demeanor about them when they attended galas or parties.

But right now, they were surrounded by countless troops. These soldiers were all standing as still as statues, yet keeping an eye on all that was going on around them.

The gentleman revealed his fangs and muscularity all of a sudden, as his malicious nature that was usually hidden under his elegant exterior reared its head!

Liu Bu had only heard of Qing Zhen because of Boss Luo. Many of Stronghold 113's residents had secretly talked about this pair of strange brothers. However, Qing Zhen's reputation was not good because he was always the one handling the Qing Consortium's assassinations in recent years.

According to what many people say, Qing Zhen was a demon who skinned his dead victims.

Chapter 88: Shadow, Qing Zhen

Members of the Qing Consortium were divided into several different groups. One of them was the Dependables. They were responsible for running the organizational machine. They did the honorable work and garnered respect and influence for the consortium.

Another group was the Bums, with people such as Luo Lan, who just needed to be kept alive and be well-fed in a stronghold. They were not expected to excel and just stayed around until they died.

Yet another type were the Shadows. Like Qing Zhen, who did all the dirty work yet had hardly anything to do with the inheritance of the consortium. He tended to earn the most money. Normally, an illegitimate child like Luo Lan would not be qualified to take control of a stronghold, yet Qing Zhen was able to help him do so.

Or maybe Luo Lan's competitors did not dare to vie with him for control of the stronghold as they either feared Qing Zhen or relied on him for certain things. It was the first time the Qing Consortium had placed an illegitimate child in the controlling position of a stronghold, which demonstrated Qing Zhen's standing within the consortium.

Qing Zhen looked at Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu and said, "Tell me about those three people. I'm talking about Xu Xianchu, Yang Xiaojin, and Ren Xiaosu.... Eh? Is Ren Xiaosu related to Yang Xiaojin in any way? It sounds like they're pretty compatible based on their names."

"No, they're not related." Liu Bu shook his head. "Ren Xiaosu is just a refugee from outside the stronghold. We forced him to be the guide for our expedition. He has great strength, so I suspect he might also be a supernatural being."

Qing Zhen shook his head. "So it's just his strength that's a little greater?"

"Isn't that enough? He's capable of lifting up a full-grown man single-handed." Liu Bu said anxiously, "And that Xu Xianchu, even though his stamina and strength are quite normal, his power is to create a shadow clone of himself. That shadow clone can even shield him from bullets!"

Qing Zhen got interested. He ordered someone next to him, "Take notes. Xu Xianchu, supernatural being who hasn't reached his full potential; Danger Rating: C. Ren Xiaosu, suspected Strength-type supernatural being; Danger Rating: F."

There were not only combat troops surrounding Qing Zhen, but also many researchers in hazmat suits. One of them was even responsible for making note of the decisions Qing Zhen make.

All of a sudden, Liu Bu realized that Qing Zhen was actually more interested in Xu Xianchu. It seemed like he didn't really care about Ren Xiaosu.

"So Ren Xiaosu is also considered a supernatural being? Then you should hurry up and capture him," Liu Bu said. All this while, Luo Xinyu, who was beside him, hadn't said a word.

Qing Zhen laughed. "We'll definitely capture him. I believe they must be in the city right now. But there's nothing rare about Strength-type supernatural beings."

At this moment, be it Liu Bu or Luo Xinyu, they both realized that Qing Consortium's understanding of supernatural beings was definitely not on a superficial level.

It seemed that the Qing Consortium had gained a very deep understanding of these supernatural beings. But upon some thought, it wasn't that surprising. The world was under the control of the organizations, so it was also quite normal they would have an advanced understanding of such secrets. They had many more resources, as well as the power of information.

But it felt like even the Qing Consortium was unable to fully define the level of powers that a supernatural being had. They could only use danger ratings to rank them.

This danger rating was probably assessed based on what could threaten the consortium, right?

So, for example, Xu Xianchu, who could summon a shadow clone to battle on his behalf, was assessed to be a C-class danger due to the bullet blocking ability it had, while Ren Xiaosu, who only had greater strength than normal, was ignored. No matter how strong one was, could they possibly overcome firearms and explosives?

Fists and kicks were ultimately no match for guns and cannons. In the eyes of the organizations, if someone's strength didn't surpass the power of a firearm, then the supernatural being's destructive powers would be limited.

This was because the vast majority of firearms were still controlled by the organizations.

Qing Zhen was now sure that Ren Xiaosu was a refugee from the town outside of the stronghold, Xu Xianchu was an officer of the private army, while Yang Xiaojin's origins remained unknown. Of course,

even though Luo Lan had told him about them personally, he still might not believe his words. He was always the type who liked to verify the truth for himself.

Liu Bu could not really understand. Compared to Ren Xiaosu and Xu Xianchu, Qing Zhen was clearly more interested in Yang Xiaojin. According to Liu Bu, Yang Xiaojin was very well-informed about the Pyro Company and other organizations. Therefore, this made Yang Xiaojin's identity far more complicated than Xu Xianchu and Ren Xiaosu.

Qing Zhen was currently standing in the ruins of the city. With a destroyed civilization and tough combatants of the consortium around him, his white suit remained spotlessly clean. He asked with great interest, "Has Yang Xiaojin shown herself to have any types of special skills?"

"Yang Xiaojin doesn't have any special skills." Liu Bu thought about it carefully for a long time. It felt like other than being decisive and ruthless, Yang Xiaojin was just a girl who didn't exhibit any trace of special skills.

If Ren Xiaosu were here, he would have none of it. Those advanced jump rope and Advanced Nursery Rhymes Singing skills were both very impressive skills! Surely that was special enough, right?

But of course, Ren Xiaosu wasn't here right now. By this point, he had located the jewelry shop he was longing to find!

Qing Zhen did not get the answer he desired, so he looked at Liu Bu seriously and said, "Think harder."

For some reason, Liu Bu suddenly felt an oppressive force come over him. He clenched his teeth and said, "Yang Xiaojin really doesn't have any special skills. Instead, I think you should raise your guard against Ren Xiaosu."

"Oh?" Qing Zhen nodded. He turned to look at Luo Xinyu. "Just what is so special about this Ren Xiaosu that Liu Bu cannot take his mind off him? Could it be that he has some special skills other than his strength?"

Luo Xinyu froze. Ren Xiaosu's special skill?

She gave it some thought before venturing, "Maybe he's quite skilled at annoying people?"

Luo Xinyu was not making this up. In fact, she felt deeply about this!

But when Qing Zhen heard this, he laughed. He said to the person beside him, "Xu Man, bring a team and seek these three people out. Get back here before 12 midnight."

"Affirmative." The soldier named Xu Man led six platoons off, using 180 men to deal with three people. This was probably the highest form of "treatment" even within the Qing Consortium.

As Qing Zhen's trusted aide, Xu Man understood the secret of the Jing Mountains must not be leaked. Everyone who was an outsider today would not be allowed to walk away from here.

Qing Zhen stood still and started humming a song. He had apparently relaxed. However, Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu did not feel the same way. Luo Xinyu couldn't resist testing Qing Zhen by saying, "Do the changes in the Jing Mountains also have something to do with this research lab?"

"No, no, no." Qing Zhen said with a smile, "The changes in the Jing Mountains were beyond our expectations as well. We normally call this place... the Holy Land. Due to the changes in a certain person, there was a change to the entire mountain range. Because we discovered the change in the Jing Mountains too late, we were unable to identify who that person is."

Liu Bu said nervously, "This matter has nothing to do with us!"

Qing Zhen paused. "I know it has nothing to do with you two. If it did, I would be the nervous one."

"Then what are you planning to do with us?"

However, Qing Zhen did not seem to hear him. He was just waiting for Xu Man to bring Ren Xiaosu, Xu Xianchu, and Yang Xiaojin to him.

At this moment, the troops returned from the forest. It looked like they were carrying something back with them. Qing Zhen smiled and said to Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu, "Don't get too alarmed later."

Chapter 89: A product of genetic modification

Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu looked at them in surprise. When they were brought back here earlier, the Qing Consortium's combat troops were still dealing with the Experimental. So was this commotion related to the troops bringing back the Experimental? Honestly speaking, both of them were curious. Just what were those Experimentals?

But a moment later, they were stunned. They saw a multilayered, reinforced steel cage get carried over. Lying inside of it was a gray... person!

Liu Bu suspiciously checked out the person inside the cage. That person was riddled with bullets, but there wasn't much bleeding. It was as though it could control its skin and muscles to close up its wounds the instant the bullet entered its body.

This would be pretty unimaginable to the average person because no one could control their bodies like that.

In addition, this gray figure was chained up by its arms and legs!

The chains had been meant to imprison the person somewhere, but it had somehow managed to break them off. Did the sound that Liu Bu and the others hear the other night come from this person?

At this moment, Liu Bu remembered the ravaged corpse of Xu Xia and the human teeth marks on it. He vomited on the spot at the thought. When Xu Xianchu and the others said that it was a human who bit Xu Xia's corpse, he did not believe them. But now, there was no reason not to believe it.

Feelings of terror and disgust were gripping Liu Bu's stomach like they were squeezing everything out of it.

He had no food inside him, so he could only vomit out a pale-green mixture of gastric juices and bile.

Qing Zhen looked at Liu Bu with great interest. "It looks like you also have some understanding of this thing here. Have you seen it chewing on a corpse too?"

Luo Xinyu's reaction was tougher than Liu Bu. She forced herself to calm down and asked, "Just what is this thing?"

"Since it's called an Experimental, then of course it's something that's used for performing experiments on." Qing Zhen said, "But don't misunderstand, this thing's got nothing to do with our Qing Consortium. They are a product from the Pre-Cataclysm times. We also found out about their existence just recently."

"It was from before The Cataclysm?" Luo Xinyu said, rather shocked. "How many years has it already been since The Cataclysm happened? Can they live for so long? Wait, when you said 'they'..."

It was at this time that Luo Xinyu realized there wasn't just one of these things around!

Qing Zhen carefully sized up the "person" in the cage. He said, "They seem to have just escaped from the research laboratory. Even I'm very curious about how they managed to live until now. This is basically a living specimen."

Liu Bu shivered. This Qing Zhen was treating a living person as a specimen, even if that person was neither human nor demon.

Luo Xinyu suddenly realized what the Qing Consortium had come to the Jing Mountains for. They had even mobilized a large number of industrial machinery and spared no manpower or logistics, all so they could locate the research laboratory where these freaks were previously imprisoned!

When they realized that there wasn't just one of these Experimentals around, they finally understood why the combat troops had called for support at first contact with the Experimental. It was because they were worried there would be more of them in the area!

"How many Experimentals did you all encounter, and how many people were injured or killed in the capture of this Experimental?" Qing Zhen asked.

Nearby, someone answered, "We only encountered this one. We mobilized five platoons, and three people died while another 13 were injured."

Qing Zhen shook his head. "It's enough to capture one of these Experimentals. For future encounters, it doesn't matter whether they live or die. Just destroy them all. Don't add to the number of casualties on our side."

"Roger," an officer of the consortium's combat troops answered.

The Experimental in the cage was clearly not dead yet. Luo Xinyu and Liu Bu could tell because they could see it was still breathing from the rising and falling of its chest.

However, Luo Xinyu was a little skeptical. "It should've been centuries years since The Cataclysm happened, right? How are they still alive?"

This was the most puzzling thing. The average human's lifespan was only several decades long, or at most, a little over a hundred years. But if these Experimentals were really from the time before The Cataclysm, how did they manage to survive til now in the underground lab? This didn't make sense.

Even if their lifespan could be extended, what did these Experimentals eat in the underground lab?

Qing Zhen stood before the cage and laughed. "Did I not capture them to find out their secret? For example, multicellular organisms like humans use cell division to perform growth and reproduction. Logically, cell division should be an infinite process, since if it could be divided once, then it could be divided again for a second time or more. But what's strange is that human cells can only divide an average of 50 times before they stop dividing 1 . After that, they will head into an irreversible decline."

This is the reason why humans grow old and die. After human cells divide themselves about 50 times, the cells enter a senescence phase. Then the organs start to fail until death occurs.

Qing Zhen looked at the person in the cage and continued, "I suspect this lab has discovered a way to make the cells divide indefinitely. By doing so, the human body's metabolic rate and lifespan increases. However, they did not consider the consequences of doing something like that."

Qing Zhen labeled this creature in the cage as a Fiend, but it was neither human nor demon. To him, these Fiends had lost their human minds, and their intelligence had degraded to the point of being not that much different from a beast.

But in contrast to their intelligence, these Fiends had physical strength and agility that surpassed the average human's to the point that not even wild animals were a match.

Moreover, wild animals obeyed an order. Just like Ren Xiaosu had said, the different species still had taxonomic orders 1 .

But these Experimentals were different. They did not belong in an order.

Right at this moment, the Experimental that had been shot four or five times started coming around. It curled its body and slammed itself against the steel cage, as if it wanted to use brute strength to break the cage apart!

However, it seemed that this cage had been specially built by the Qing Consortium. It got slightly deformed but did not break apart from the Experimental slamming itself against it.

Eventually, the Experimental stopped trying. It just glared daggers at Qing Zhen, who was in front of it. Luo Xinyu and Liu Bu discovered that Qing Zhen remained unusually calm no matter how aggressively the Experimental was struggling. There was no point in time that he took a step back due to fear.

Qing Zhen removed the magazine from a pistol and threw the pistol into the cage. The Experimental bit into the steel pistol and crushed it with its jaws!

Qing Zhen and the Experimental looked at each other. Suddenly, he said, "Note this down. Subject's teeth have evolved to become harder, its pupils are narrow, and it has a habit of crawling to move around. This thing can no longer be categorized as human, and it's suspected that they are a product of genetic modification. The lab is suspected as a possible secret testing site for the Pyro Company from before The Cataclysm."

From nearby, someone took out pen and paper to take complete notes on Qing Zhen's observations. Compared to Luo Xinyu and Liu Bu's startled looks, everyone else looked like they had gotten used to Qing Zhen's calm demeanor.

Chapter 90: Rounding up Ren Xiaosu

For some reason, Luo Xinyu suddenly felt that the calm-looking Qing Zhen standing outside of the cage was even more vicious than the Experimental inside of it.

And... what did this have anything to do with the Pyro Company?

"Shine a bright light at it," said Qing Zhen.

Someone shone the spotlight onto the Experimental's face. The Experimental feared the light so much it instinctively tried to block its eyes with its arms.

Qing Zhen wondered, "They are clearly afraid of light, so why were they active during the day today? Have they evolved even further... or was it because there was something special that attracted them and made them want to come out even in the light!"

Someone beside him said calmly, "There are two possibilities why they're afraid of the light. One would be that their former human personalities can't face their current selves, and the other would be that their DNA was inserted with animal behavior like nocturnality."

"This isn't urgent." Qing Zhen nodded and said, "Ask Xu Man over the radio whether he's located those three people yet. I'm guessing they must've sneaked into our area of operations during the time you all were busy capturing the Experimental."

Qing Zhen had managed to guess when Ren Xiaosu and the others had sneaked past the perimeter they had locked down. Qing Zhen was very eager to find the trio because he wanted to know if the Experimentals had suddenly come out in the daytime because one of the three had attracted them.

...

Ren Xiaosu was wandering around a huge shopping mall. Perhaps due to the incredible construction quality of the building, this huge mall did not collapse from earthquakes.

But even so, while the façade of the building was still intact, the interior furnishings were damaged beyond recognition. Many of the dropped ceiling tiles had crashed to the floor, and the messy counters below were gray and dusty. The layer of dust that had gathered on them looked like it was at least ten centimeters thick. The items that could not stand the passage of time had all deteriorated and been damaged.

And it was in this shopping mall that Ren Xiaosu finally saw a jewelry shop.

The jewelry had oxidized, and the silver ornaments on the counter had all tarnished black. Only by snapping them apart could a trace of its original silvery color be seen in the break lines.

As for gold jewelry, they would oxidize as well. The gold in this shopping mall had apparently come in contact for a long time with some iron that was contained in the collapsed dropped ceilings, resulting in red spots forming on the surface. But of course, that wouldn't affect the intrinsic value of the gold itself.

He definitely did not want the items made of silver. Silver was not particularly valuable in these times.

Ren Xiaosu could only take a limited amount of items with him by himself. He had to go for the items that were the highest in value.

It was at this time that the benefit of the storage space was amplified. How much gold could be loaded into a space of one cubic meter? Ren Xiaosu had been worried about how he could continue upgrading his storage space. But now there wasn't a need to worry. The gold that was here would probably be enough for him, Yan Liuyuan, and Sister Xiaoyu to live comfortably for many decades to come!

Most of the gold in the shopping mall was in the form of jewelry. So to save space, Ren Xiaosu squeezed the gold bracelets and gold necklaces into a clump before storing them in the palace. After all, he could do anything he wanted with his strong hands.

But even so, there was still a lot of empty space in the storage area after he had stuffed it full with the gold, which Ren Xiaosu felt was tragic.

In the end, he took off his jacket and used it to wrap some of the gold up.

Ren Xiaosu even saw diamonds in the shopping mall, but diamonds were no longer considered valuable in these times. Mr. Zhang from the school had once said that a long time ago, diamonds were extremely expensive, even though there was a large quantity of them in the world. It was only priced highly because supply was controlled and prices were inflated.

As such, in the current day, no one was advocating owning diamonds anymore. Or perhaps, in times when everyone was more willing to purchase food and not diamonds, the value of diamonds would naturally depreciate.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu heard the sound of footsteps neatly marching outside the shopping mall. He frowned when he realized the Qing Consortium's people had arrived.

Ren Xiaosu knew well that the Qing Consortium would find out about the existence of Xu Xianchu, Yang Xiaojin, and him. Since Liu Bu had been captured, he would surely tell the Qing Consortium about them.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was in the shopping mall carrying gold inside his jacket as the storage space in his palace was full.

He didn't care if Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin had achieved their purpose for the expedition. He had everything he needed.

Perhaps Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin were here to find out about the secret of the supernatural beings and the evolution that was happening in the world, but Ren Xiaosu was not interested in that at all. If there were a reflexology spa still operating in this city, he might be interested in that....

Ren Xiaosu was just thinking of making off with the gold he had gotten his hands on.

But just as he was about to leave the place, he heard the neat marching of the Qing Consortium's troops as they arrived outside the mall. Ren Xiaosu frowned and stepped back into the jewelry shop.

It looked like Liu Bu had already revealed their existence after getting captured by the Qing Consortium. However, Ren Xiaosu was not panicking yet. This shopping mall was gigantic, so Ren Xiaosu did not think the troops would easily find him even if they came in and searched.

Moreover, this ruined city was colossal, and there were a lot of buildings too. Even if the Qing Consortium had thousands of troops, and they were all mobilized to conduct a search of the entire city, it would still take them at least ten days to a fortnight to sweep through it.

The Qing Consortium's Xu Man was leading the platoons through the dusty streets. They were ready to engage in combat at any time, because based on Liu Bu's description, Xu Xianchu and Yang Xiaojin were both relatively dangerous people. This was especially so for Xu Xianchu since he had a danger rating of C.

As for someone like Ren Xiaosu, everyone's judgment of him was more or less the same: A typical refugee who had slightly greater than normal strength and knew how to kill people but was otherwise not considered much of a threat. It wasn't because Xu Man and Qing Zhen were blindly arrogant, but because Liu Bu didn't know what Ren Xiaosu's ace in the hole was.

Xu Man was a professional soldier with an abundance of combat experience. He also understood that if Ren Xiaosu only had greater strength than normal, he wouldn't stand a chance against their firearms.

Ren Xiaosu hid behind a dilapidated steel shelf in the shopping mall. He made sure he was completely hidden in the shadows so he would not be discovered by anyone who happened to pass by outside.

When he saw a platoon of soldiers being led by Xu Man slowly passing by in front of the broken entrance, Ren Xiaosu felt a slight relief.

When Xu Man led the platoon past the next building's corner, he halted in his tracks. He turned around and said to the soldier behind him, "I don't remember some of the things in that building being placed that way. Someone's been here, and he could still be inside!"

Ren Xiaosu had probably not expected there would be such a fearsome combatant within the ranks of the Qing Consortium. He was very detailed about things and had an amazing memory too.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu did not really touch the items on the counters facing the outside. At most, he had handled one or two of them. But even so, that did not escape Xu Man's eyes.