

The Mechanic 21

Chapter 21: The Old Man Who Plays Chess

Now that Han Xiao had escaped from the Germinal Organization, he no longer had access to the resources that he would need to become stronger. Joining the Six Nations would solve this problem.

Han Xiao already had a plan in mind.

In Galaxy, there was known to be a secret encounter hidden in the Western Capital.

Han Xiao arrived at the gates of a workshop concealed inside an inconspicuous alley. The workshop was nameless, but it had a spanner for a logo.

The secret encounter will be mine in this life!

There was a chess table set up at the entrance of the workshop. Two elderly men were currently engaged in a game.

Their appearances were in stark contrast to one another. The shorter elderly man was bearded and had long, unkempt hair, while the taller old man was prim and proper. Both of them were staring at the chess board intently.

Han Xiao noticed that the tall old man had a missing arm.

Both of them paid little heed to Han Xiao as he stepped into the workshop.

Han Xiao took a look at the chess board. They seemed to be playing playing an intense game of Go.

Suddenly, Han Xiao realized that it was not Go at all! It was Five in a Row!

What the hell are you guys looking so serious for?

A woman appeared from within the workshop. "Do you need something repaired?"

She had a fair complexion, rosy cheeks, and was around 1.65m tall. Her hair was clipped behind with a black pin, and she was wearing a black vest on top of denim shorts. Although Han Xiao wouldn't go so far as to call her a stunning beauty, she did have an extremely pleasant-looking face. She was very much the proverbial girl-next-door who had gentle eyes and a warm smile. She seemed to be in her mid-twenties—Han Xiao's personal preference.

Women at twenty can be compared to peaches—good to look at but not yet ripe.

Women at thirty, on the other hand, are like ripe grapes.

Of course, these things are always a matter of taste.

As for women at forty...

Huh, what about fifty?

Fifty-year-old women cannot be described as fruits anymore! They are potatoes!

“May I know if this place needs an apprentice?” Han Xiao asked.

For some reason, the woman was overjoyed to hear his words. She hastily grabbed Han Xiao’s elbow and pulled him in, as though afraid that he would change his mind.

“Come in, quickly! You might catch a cold.”

Han Xiao looked up at the blazing sun and wondered, *Is catching a cold the dialect here for heat stroke?*

The workshop was largely coloured in black and white, and there was a second floor.

The first floor was the working area, and it was a fairly spacious area. There were a number of vehicle platforms and workbenches equipped with various tools and machinery. Han Xiao could tell from the blemishes on the workbenches that they were relatively old. There was also quite a number of metal shelves lined up against the wall that were stacked with all sorts of metals and spare parts.

“My name is Lu Qian. I’m the boss here. You can call me Sister Qian,” introduced the woman.

“Sister Qian,” Han Xiao greeted. He then inquired, “I wish to take up apprenticeship here. Are there any requirements?”

“Tell me your situation,” replied Lu Qian. Her first impression of Han Xiao was quite favorable. She particularly liked the dead look in his eyes—they made Han Xiao look like he was a bum.

He will probably be content with a low wage, she thought to herself.

“I come from afar. My name is Han Xiao. I’m 21 years old, and I have some basic mechanic skills. You can call me Technician Han.”

Technician Han? A puzzled look appeared on Lu Qian’s face.

“From afar... meaning you’re not a student of the Western Capital School?”

The Western Capital School was an elite school that only a select few could enroll in. It followed a special syllabus based on the knowledge given to Aquamarine by the galactic civilization. There, students were taught Pugilist and Mechanic knowledge. Many of its graduates went on to become important figures in Stardragon.

However, as less than 1 in 10,000 people possessed superpowers, having guidance did not make it easier to awaken them.

“I’ve only learnt some basic Mechanic theory,” Han Xiao replied humbly.

“That’s a pity...” bemoaned Lu Qian.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean it that way,” she hastily added.

“It’s fine.”

“Anyway, I still need to test you. I do need a helper, but you will have to meet my criteria first.”

Lu Qian went to fetch a faulty household appliance back to test Han Xiao. Before Han Xiao could begin, the shorter old man at the chess board suddenly spoke. "Kid, why did you come here?"

Lu Qian frowned in puzzlement. Wasn't it just to find work?

Han Xiao looked at the old man and replied, "I'm just looking for a job."

For some reason, his reply upset the old man, and he flipped the chessboard.

"I am the owner of this shop. Pass my test, and I will allow you to stay."

"Oi, Old Man Lu, you're being a sore loser again," erupted the tall old man.

"I have something important to do," stated Old Man Lu matter-of-factly.

"Shameless," replied the tall old man exasperatedly.

Chapter 22: Prosthetic Limb

Stardragon Strategic Defense Division, also known as Division 13.

Han Xiao's mind was racing.

Old Man Lu was none other than the key character in the secret questline, and Han Xiao had come here to meet him.

However, what Han Xiao had not expected was running into the tall old man here. This old man was an important figure in Stardragon, and Han Xiao knew that there was no point in trying to hide his identity from him.

Han Xiao's original plan had been to gain Division 13's trust before revealing himself. He intended to do so by feeding them with anonymous intel on the Germinal Organization. However, that was no longer possible.

To have to reveal himself to Division 13 so soon had certainly not been a part of Han Xiao's calculations, but Han Xiao was not rigid in his thinking.

Since remaining hidden was no longer an option, he might as well reveal himself and demonstrate his value to them. Like they say, the enemy of an enemy is a friend; Han Xiao and Stardragon shared common ground.

Fortunately, he was now in the city; if he had been exposed before entering, it would have put himself in an unfavorable position to negotiate.

Furthermore, the unexpected turn of events might prove to be a good thing instead. The tall old man was extremely influential, so gaining his trust would give him quite the head start.

"What test?" he asked Old Man Lu in response.

Old Man Lu looked around as he tried to come up with something. Suddenly, his eyes lit up. Pointing towards the tall old man's missing arm, he said, "Make him a prosthetic limb. If it satisfies him, you pass."

"Why drag me into this?" The tall old man was confused, but he quickly understood Old Man Lu's intentions from his subtle winks.

"Grandpa, you're too much! What if you scare him away? Every day, all you do is drink, play chess, and go for strolls. When was the last time you actually bothered to help out with the business? Can't I even get a helper?"

Lu Qian was disgruntled, but her words fell on deaf ears. Old Man Lu ignored her as he looked at Han Xiao for a reply.

For some reason though, Han Xiao seemed amused.

"Are you sure you want me to make a prosthetic arm that satisfies him?" he asked to clarify.

"If you're scared then leave!"

"I accept," Han Xiao happily agreed to the task.

He still had the [Bionic Arm] blueprints that sat gathering dust in his inventory! Not only was Old Man Lu's request too simple for Han Xiao, it even presented him with the opportunity to curry favor with the tall old man! For some reason, everything seemed to be going well for Han Xiao, as though someone was looking out for him.

"You only have three hours; I don't have the time to wait an entire day," Old Man Lu snorted.

"Grandpa!" Lu Qian exclaimed in protest.

Creating a bionic limb was not a straightforward task. Measurements first had to be taken, followed by designing, and lastly crafting. Designing alone would take hours, and while using a workbench would speed up much of the crafting process, that would still take another two hours! It was completely unfair!

However, Han Xiao, was not flustered at all. He whipped out a measuring tape and asked the tall old man politely, "Senior, may I?"

The tall old man removed his outerwear without fuss. He observed Han Xiao thoughtfully as his measurements were taken. To remain calm and confident despite being pressed so was praiseworthy, he thought.

'But why would the Germinal Organization lay a million dollar bounty on him?'

Yes, the tall old man indeed recognized Han Xiao. The Germinal Organization's issuing of a bounty had caused a huge commotion in the underworld and this resulted in Han Xiao's face becoming well known. Such news did not escape his ears.

'Looks like there's some corrupt guards again,' he concluded from Han Xiao's presence here in the city.

'Why did Han Xiao come to the Western Capital?'

'Does he pose a threat to Stardragon?'

These were the questions on the tall old man's mind. He decided to continue observing Han Xiao for now.

While Old Man Lu did not know anything about the infamous Zero, he had his reason for wanting to chase Han Xiao away. A seasoned veteran himself, he was able to sense that Han Xiao had killed before. He simply wanted to avoid trouble where he could.

"Looks like Old Lu is leaving it to me," thought the tall old man as the pair exchanged glances.

As soon as Han Xiao finished taking measurements, Lu Qian offered him her help.

"Tell me your concept. We can draw up the plans together to save time."

"No need, I already have the perfect design," declined Han Xiao unexpectedly.

"Only two minutes?"

Lu Qian's eyes were wide with disbelief.

"Your bragging might even reach the moon!"

Old Man Lu burst out in laughter. To come up with a complete blueprint in just two minutes was an impossible task even for him, what more a kid like Han Xiao?

Han Xiao passed a list of the materials and tools he needed to Lu Qian, who swiftly went to fetch everything. However, she did not hold much hope for Han Xiao as the test was simply absurd and unfair.

Han Xiao started to use the pressing machine to shape metals into shapes and parts. He planned to use an aluminum alloy as the core material of the arm as aluminum alloys were light, yet sturdy, but also easy to shape. Having parts like screws, rivets, and chains readily provided saved him a lot of time.

[Basic Machinery Affinity] gave Han Xiao keen intuition for the composition of machines. For a second, it seemed to him like the parts themselves came to life, as though they were excited at the prospect of being assembled into a machine. A mechanic's affinity and skills with machines was extremely important. Each level in [Basic Machinery Affinity] improved production quantity as well as crafting speed by 1%.

A top-class bionic limb could be operated simply by thought, and would be functionally indiscernible from a real limb. The prosthetic arm of the Winter Soldier was a strengthened version of such a limb. However, the installation of such a prosthetic would require surgery, as well as the 'Control' talents of [Basic Electromagnetism] and [Nerve Integration].

With cybernetics, it was possible to replace any part of the body, except the brain, with machines to turn a person into a cyborg that relies not on physical stamina and bio-energy, but modular upgrades and replacements instead. Although a cyborg wouldn't need to eat or drink to survive, and could live much longer than a normal human, the loss of one's human senses would gradually make a cyborg susceptible to manipulation and eventually cause them to lose their sense of self. While this could be

prevented by implementing thought programming and logic parameters to immunize one against external influences, they would then lose their freedom of thought instead. More advanced civilizations used this method to produce cannon fodder.

A voice-controlled prosthetic could also be made with the 'Control' talent, [Basic Acoustics]. Mechanics were a multi-layered class that was able to utilize all sorts of knowledge to create different versions of tools for the same purpose.

Presently, though, Han Xiao was not that far advanced as a mechanic, and his concept was very simple; he was using the Lightweight Mechanical Arm as a model for his prosthetic. He planned to incorporate its dynamics and chains into his prosthetic for realistic movement. Unlike the Lightweight Mechanical Arm, however, it would run on clean batteries instead of smoke-causing fuel.

Old Man Lu watched Han Xiao as he enjoyed a bottle of beer. He couldn't wait to see him make a fool of himself.

Chapter 23: You Set Me Up!

As Han Xiao began to weld and assemble the parts he created, the prosthetic arm began to take shape. The others were surprised by the fact that Han Xiao did not create any excess parts. He had been thoroughly efficient from the start, which proved that he had actually planned everything out.

"My god, he won't actually succeed, will he?" muttered Old Man Lu, causing Lu Qian to glare at him. What a sly grandpa!

Seeing them look so amazed almost caused Han Xiao to burst out in laughter. How could he possibly fail when he already had the blueprint in his memory?

You have created [Bionic Arm – Left (Mechanical Version)], giving you 2000 exp!

[Bionic Arm – Left (Mechanical Version)]

Special Item

A very realistic prosthetic created using the principles of machine dynamics and suspension. Adjustable to suit the user's needs, it is soft, yet extremely durable!

The polished metallic prosthetic took Han Xiao a total of 2 hours and 33 minutes to make. One look at its structure and everyone present could tell that it was an extremely functional prosthetic.

Everyone was shocked!

He really made it!

As Lu Qian covered her mouth in disbelief, a single thought came to her mind. *I've struck gold!*

"This prosthetic will look realistic if you cover it with—"

“Save the bullshit, let’s test it now,” interrupted Old Man Lu as he swallowed his saliva. Although Han Xiao had truly exceeded his expectations, his mind was still unchanged.

The tall old man rolled his eyes at Old Man Lu and picked the prosthetic up to examine it. He instantly fell in love with it. It fit onto his stump extremely comfortably, unlike other prosthetics that had nonadjustable, rigid attachments. The reason that he did not like to wear a prosthetic arm was that they always got in the way of his movement. However, Han Xiao’s creation did not give him this problem. It felt so realistic that when he moved it, it felt like he had grown back an arm! The elastic suspension enabled him to effortlessly make simple movements.

Perfection!

This was the only word that could describe how he felt about it.

“What do you think? Satisfactory?” asked Old Man Lu coolly as he sipped on his beer.

Lu Qian looked anxiously at the tall old man.

The tall old man found himself in a tight spot. Should he help his friend? Or should he say his true feelings? Which was more important?

“This thing is excellent. I’m satisfied!”

Old Man Lu spat out his beer and glared at the tall old man as he coughed continuously.

Weren’t we allies? We had a plan!

“Since you like it, you can have it.” Han Xiao was not surprised at all.

The tall old man nodded his head and replied, “I will remember this favor.”

Old Man Lu was flabbergasted. *The arm was made with my materials! Did you ask for my permission?*

“Then, can I stay?” Han Xiao turned to Old Man Lu and asked, his lips curling.

Old Man Lu’s shock immediately turned into embarrassment. As he turned around to head upstairs, he reluctantly replied, “Whatever, if you want to stay, then stay. Let’s see how long you’ll last.”

Lu Qian shook her fists in celebration.

The tall old man smiled at Han Xiao before leaving the workshop. After walking out of the alley, he entered a black sedan car that had been waiting for him.

The chauffeur respectfully passed a mobile phone to him. As the tall old man picked up the phone, his entire demeanor completely changed. He now looked extremely stern, a totally different person from the genial old man from before.

“The Germinal Organization fugitive has snuck into the Western Capital. These are the coordinates...” he spoke in a deep voice. “Have the intelligence department monitor him for now. I have come into contact with the target, and will slowly find out his intentions. Unless necessary, do not act.”

Deserters of the Germinal Organization were highly valued by the Six Nations as they sometimes held valuable information. Unfortunately, most of the deserters were usually small fry. Han Xiao, on the

other hand, was the first person to have a bounty issued for on him; it followed that it was highly likely that he possessed crucial information.

In the workshop, Han Xiao turned his eyes back from where the tall old man had left.

His performance should have let the tall old man know that he was not hostile, and laid the groundwork for a better relationship.

There were three things for Han Xiao to gain from coming to the workshop. The first was that Old Man Lu kept a very comprehensive collection of Mechanic-related basic knowledge.

The second was that this workshop was a good place to hide from the Germinal Organization. While the Germinal Organization had spies across the Six Nations, they did not know every single nook and cranny. This workshop was one of the few places that they were not aware of. And even if they found it, there was Old Man Lu. Old Man Lu was far stronger than the current Hila. Although he appeared like some carefree good-for-nothing, he was actually one of the few Class-D superhumans on the planet. On beginner planets in Version 1.0, the strongest superhumans were only Class-C.

There was a lot of discussion regarding why Mechanics were a superhuman class, such as: 'If Mechanics were limited to a normal human's standards, it would restrict their inventions by over 90%', and 'Only a superhuman can use some of the stronger machines they make.' At higher levels, there were stricter requirements for using the machines that Mechanics made. Some of them were even not usable by the other four classes, but only by Mechanics.

Mechanics were not all about big guns and giant robots! A high level mechanic could specialize in one of many things. They might prefer to wield swords, specialize in assassination, or even pilot mobile suits! These were but a few of the endless possibilities that the class had to offer.

The official information described the class as such: "Masters of combat machinery and compaction. Well balanced."

After learning [Compression Technology] and [Spatial Technology], mechanics would be able to disassemble and compress huge machinery into small capsules that they could activate whenever they wanted to reassemble them instantaneously!

After learning certain skills like [Rapid Assembly], Mechanics with a large amount of energy would be able to create machines on the fly without the need for tools or equipment. All they needed was sufficient energy and necessary materials, and they would be able to bypass the creation process and instantaneously create whatever they needed.

Player inventories were weight-realistic, and with these abilities, mechanics were the only class—apart from Mages and telekinetic ESPers—to be able to disregard weight constraints.

The third reason that Han Xiao had come to the workshop was the most important one, for the secret story line! Its rewards were some blueprints of early level godly equipment!

In the future, Old Man Lu would leave the workshop and leave behind a digital safe that contained these blueprints. He would instruct Lu Qian to pass it to her father, Lu Cheng, who was a warlord amongst the wanderers. He and his father, Old Man Lu, were always on bad terms.

Back in the game, a player managed to complete the tedious quest line and obtain the password to the safe. He then had to painstakingly search for the necessary materials to craft those equipment. However, it all proved worth it. With just that equipment, he was able to dominate the PVP arena and set the highest record of 38 continuous victories!

While all that time and effort was certainly worth it for that player, Han Xiao didn't have to go through the entire quest line as he already knew the password!

Although the secret quest line was a competitive quest, and only one person could complete it, other players that attempted it also learnt the password to the safe. Since it was not a big deal, the password was posted alongside information to the quest line in various forums.

Still, the story line only occurred after release, so there was still plenty of time before then. Han Xiao intended to foster a good relationship with them first.

For the godly equipment!

"I'll explain your apprenticeship. Your meals and accommodation will be provided for; there is an unused room on the second floor. Your job scope will consist of helping out with maintenance work, as well as orders. I'll pay you \$1000 a month, is that fine?"

Lu Qian looked at Han Xiao nervously. She knew that he was skilled, but she truly did not have the money to offer him a higher salary.

"I accept!" said Han Xiao without hesitation, at which she rejoiced.

On the second floor was a full apartment complete with a living room, a kitchen, and several bedrooms.

Lu Qian brought Han Xiao to his bedroom. It was furnished simply with a wooden bed, a wardrobe, a book shelf, and a small work space.

"This is now your room," said Lu Qian happily as she passed the key to Han Xiao and began to dust the area.

She really couldn't be any happier. A thousand dollars was a very small amount of money, not even enough for an average person's monthly meal expenses! Han Xiao was a steal!

I must treat this kid well so he won't run away! she thought to herself.

Han Xiao didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Shouldn't the job applicant be the nervous one, instead of the boss?

Chapter 24: What Is Weak?

Lu Qian left after tidying up the room.

Han Xiao climbed onto the bed and closed his eyes. Now, he had to wait for Division 13 to approach him.

“I am not strong enough yet.”

Han Xiao understood that he couldn't just rely on Stardragon to deal with the Germinal Organization. He had to become much stronger in order to be able to take matters into his own hands. In any case, for now, he also had to be strong enough to gain Division 13's special attention.

Since there were neither quests to do nor monsters to hunt, the only way to get stronger now was through crafting. Han Xiao would need money to make machines, so he planned to find some way to make extra income. The city provided him with many opportunities. His long journey had only just begun.

With only six months left to launch, he had to treasure the remaining time.

After resting for a while, Han Xiao returned downstairs. Lu Qian was working on a household appliance at the workbench. Her denim shorts truly accentuated her perky curves, and Han Xiao couldn't help but steal glances at those slender, long legs of hers.

“The orders are in the drawer,” she said to Han Xiao as she wiped her sweat with a towel.

The workshop didn't see much business and most of the orders were advance orders. Han Xiao picked out a few easy ones and began working.

At 7 PM, they closed for the day.

Lu Qian changed into a comfy white dress and let her hair down, giving her the air of a kind, beautiful sister. There were patches sewn onto her dress, implying that they weren't doing so well financially. Han Xiao wondered if the reason she wore so little during work was if she was saving fabric.

Old Man Lu finally showed his face for dinner.

“Let's eat.”

Old Man Lu with his long and, messy hair certainly did not seem the type of person to do household chores. Their meals were, indeed, always prepared by Lu Qian.

Han Xiao picked up a piece of char siu ¹ with his chopsticks and placed it in his mouth. It was fatty but not oily, and was extremely tasteful. Han Xiao was visibly delighted.

“Delicious, right?” smiled Lu Qian in glee.

Now this—this is proper food! What the hell have I been eating for the past 6 months?

“There's still a lot, so eat slowly,” she added, pleased by the sight of his voracious appetite.

As they continued eating, Old Man Lu suddenly asked, “Who exactly are you?”

Han Xiao, stopping his chopsticks in mid-air, replied, “I'm just an ordinary person.”

“Do you think you can deceive me with such a blatant lie, kid? Tell me the truth,” the old man snorted.

Han Xiao's eye twitched.

“And what if I don’t want to?”

“Don’t want to?”

Suddenly, Old Man Lu tilted his head back as he began to release a domineering aura of strange, wild melancholy that threatened to engulf Han Xiao.

A look of seriousness appeared on Han Xiao’s face. Twisting, he leapt backwards five meters, raising his arms in a cross-shaped guard to defend himself.

Old Man Lu’s eyes narrowed.

“I have a skill that can kill the target’s very soul in an instant. Do you want to test it?” he asked.

“Does such a godly skill really exist?” Han Xiao’s face began to pale.

“The level of strength I have attained cannot be comprehended by the likes of you!” Old Man Lu snorted in reply.

Suddenly, a black, stormy cloud arose from behind Lu Qian. Lightning crackled and thunder roared. Wearing the same usual smile that she always displayed, she tapped the table with her chopsticks and ordered plainly, “Sit down and eat.”

The duo instantly returned to their original positions and continued eating, as though nothing had happened at all.

The Western Capital was vast, comprising of eight districts and three citadels interconnected by military roads.

District 1 was the central district and the Western Capital’s seat of government. Regular citizens were not allowed inside.

Although the Six Nations were united against the Germinal Organization, they still remained competitive with one another. After all, alliances were only temporary. The assassination of important figures occurred frequently amongst the Six Nations, and although they would always blame these incidents on the Germinal Organization or other dangerous individuals, the governments knew that 70% of them were each other’s doing.

The Germinal Organization, the wanderer’s army, intelligence agencies and brokers, illegal arms dealers, individual criminals, mercenary assassins, hackers, and other kinds of shady groups comprised the planet’s underworld.

Dragonhorn Tower was the central building of the government, where the top brass operated from. Its walls were reputed to be strong enough to repel intercontinental missiles.

The headquarters of a secret department was situated below Dragonhorn Tower.

Beneath Dragonhorn Tower, at an undisclosed basement level was the Stardragon Strategic Defense Division.

Dozens of screens hung from the wall, displaying countless data and information. Intelligence agents typed away at their keyboards while even more bustled around. This place was the central network of the government, where information was filtered and channeled.

Division 13 served not only as Stardragon's ears and eyes, but also as a hidden knife.

"Reporting: 'Zero' has been located."

A gentle-looking bespectacled female secretary hastily knocked open the office door of the department's director. A stern-faced man was seated behind the desk. Drool could be seen on the corner of his mouth.

"Speak," he said in a low voice.

"Director, were you secretly taking a nap again?" The bespectacled secretary squinted at him.

"Cut the crap!" The intelligence director glared back. "Talk."

"Zero is currently hiding in a machinery maintenance shop in district 7."

The director swiveled away from his secretary and she could hear him sigh in contemplation with his back faced towards her. After a moment, he turned around to face her again and said, "The higher-ups want to adopt a friendly approach."

"You just turned back to wipe your drool, right?"

"I really regret promoting you..."

The secretary pushed her glasses up and ignored him. "How exactly should we proceed?"

"Since Zero came to the Western Capital alone, he must want to cooperate... Activate protection protocol immediately. We must not let Germinal's agents learn of his presence here. Have the hackers intercept any news of his trail and prevent leaks. Also, send an undercover agent to check him out; he might just be a spy they sent. Get confirmation before making direct contact."

"A traitor worth a one million dollar bounty. There are two possibilities: either he possesses important information, or he possesses great power. For now, we are unable to ascertain how dangerous he might be, so proceed with utmost caution. I don't want a repeat of what happened with Black Spider. Two streets bombed yet we failed to apprehend him. I was scolded for two whole hours by the minister as a result of that."

Chapter 25: New Talent!

As the workshop wasn't that busy, Han Xiao had quite a lot of free time to look for the extra income he needed.

Kero Junkyard: the biggest disposal ground in District 7. Here, endless piles of trash were sorted out everyday.

This place fell under the territory of an underworld boss known as Big Raccoon. Where there is light, there will be shadows—such is society—and this holds all the more true in times of chaos.

Although the Western Capital was the main capital of Stardragon, it was certainly not a holy sanctuary for the law-abiding. It was infiltrated with spies from other nations, and plagued by criminal networks and illegal businesses. Small-time bosses like Big Raccoon may have been infamous, but they were certainly not the key players.

As Han Xiao entered the junkyard with a dust mask on, he was stopped by a few vicious-looking thugs.

“Kid, you’re in the wrong neighborhood.”

A bald, muscular thug blocked Han Xiao’s path as he stared him down. To them, Han Xiao, with his small frame, looked like an easy target to bully.

Han Xiao, unfazed, spoke. “I want to see Raccoon.”

The thugs instantly burst out in laughter.

“We don’t have time to play with you, kid. Run home to mummy, or I’ll break your legs,” threatened the bald thug.

“Is that what Raccoon teaches his dogs to say?”

“What did you say?” The bald thug was enraged. He began to grab Han Xiao by the collar.

Han Xiao looked back at the thug calmly as he squeezed his wrist.

The pain caused the thug to let go of his grip, and when he looked at his wrist, he found that there were already bruise marks on them.

“Friend, which gang are you from?” The bald thug’s expression had changed to one of caution.

Suddenly, he paused to listen to his receiver and stepped away from Han Xiao’s path, saying, “The boss wants to see you.”

Han Xiao followed the bald thug and was brought to a resting area inside the junkyard where a thin man sat cross-legged on a sofa as he enjoyed a glass of red wine. From his appearance alone it was hard to believe that this man was the infamous Raccoon who ruled the District 7 underworld.

“I heard that you want to see me. What’s your name?” he casually asked.

“Technician Han,” answered Han Xiao.

The Raccoon sneered.

“You should know what will happen to you if you’re just wasting my time.”

The reason why he had agreed to letting Han Xiao in was that he was curious to see what business a snotty-looking brat had with him.

Suddenly, Han Xiao reached out to steal the bald thug’s gun. The bald thug felt a tug at his waist and turned around, but it was too late.

The grunts behind Raccoon hastily drew their guns.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he asked nervously. The bald thug was one of his most trusted subordinates, and he was strong enough to take on ten people at the same time. Yet, he wasn’t able to react to Han Xiao’s speed! Who the hell is this kid?

Unexpectedly, Han Xiao began to disassemble the gun, but it wasn’t a simple disassembly. The gun unraveled almost instantaneously, as if Han Xiao were performing some kind of magic; the disassembled parts fell and scattered onto the floor.

“Firearms are a sure-profit. I can help you manufacture them in exchange for a little bit of compensation.”

This kid can make guns!

Firearms were hot in demand in the black market. Using a gun and making a gun were two completely separate concepts. Mechanics who knew how to create guns were rare and highly esteemed. Even though Raccoon was the leader of a gang, they were just small-time hoodlums. To be able to find a mechanic willing to make guns for them was inconceivable; yet, here Han Xiao was. ‘This is my chance!’ thought Raccoon.

“What arrangements do you have in mind?”

“I will make a list of materials and parts for you to gather. Manufacturing and assembly will all be done by me. I’ll come here to work for two hours every morning. I want \$1500 per gun, and freedom to take anything I want from this junkyard.”

Han Xiao had already thoroughly analyzed the Germinal Organization’s guns. He was now able to easily make simple guns.

“Since I’m providing the materials, \$1000,” negotiated Raccoon.

Han Xiao instantly turned around and began to walk away.

This caused Raccoon to become flustered. He had only been trying to test out Han Xiao, and did not expect such a big reaction.

“Wait wait wait—we’ll follow your charges,” he hastily said.

One handgun was worth \$3,000 to \$4,000 on the black market. Han Xiao’s asking fee was still quite reasonable.

“Get a workbench ready, along with the materials. I will come from tomorrow onwards. I’ll go check the junkyard out now.”

A skilled craftsman always retained the power to dictate his terms. Han Xiao knew full well his own value. Furthermore, his true strength and identity was a mystery to them. This gave him the complete upper hand.

...

Han Xiao salvaged quite a number of parts from the junkyard before leaving. As he left, he noticed that someone was following him. Clearly, Raccoon was trying to find out more information about him. However, for Han Xiao, shaking him off the thug was an easy task.

Division 13 will learn of my mechanic skills... thought Han Xiao to himself. The fact that he was working with Raccoon would definitely be found out by them. In any case, it was a way to demonstrate his abilities to them, plus he also needed the opportunity to craft machinery for experience.

The reason he had chosen Raccoon was due to the junkyard's proximity.

...

When he returned to the workshop, Lu Qian questioned his whereabouts.

"I went to the junkyard," said Han Xiao, pointing to the big bag of spare parts in his hand.

"The junkyard? That place is not safe. Don't go there in the future."

Lu Qian wasn't really concerned with what Han Xiao did in his free time as long as he did his job right. In fact, she had a soft spot for people who did not demand high pay.

Han Xiao put the spare parts aside and summoned the interface. He still had a lot of unused talent points, and he decided he would dump all of them into the two unlocked 'Arms' talents.

This workshop was a treasure trove of Mechanic knowledge. It was one of the best places to level up as a mechanic. Han Xiao went to look for Old Man Lu to borrow some of his books. He found him cooped up in his room as he expected.

"I wish to borrow some Mechanic knowledge books."

"Go away, you! There's not a single book for you here."

"Don't be so petty! Think of it as investing into a promising young man and nurturing him."

"...It seems like you are more thick-skinned than me. However, I simply don't want to lend you my books. What can you do about it?"

What, indeed, could Han Xiao do about it?

...

The following day, Lu Qian entered Old Man Lu's room with a spare key and stole some books for Han Xiao. Old Man Lu was infuriated.

"Why do I have such a disloyal granddaughter?"

"Just you wait! I will make you leave this workshop!"

...

In Galaxy, each player's advancement mission was not always the same. Han Xiao's Lv. 20 advancement mission could be counted as one of the harder ones as advancement knowledge was extremely rare on beginner planets. In fact, his advancement difficulty was actually comparable to a Lv. 40 one.

Most Lv. 20 characters were usually unable to find basic knowledge for even one talent tree. Some unlucky ones would not even have a main class.

Since there wasn't any advancement knowledge in the workshop, Han Xiao could only learn more basic knowledge. However, Han Xiao was content with this. Finding knowledge books was a common problem for players. Some players weren't even able to learn all their class's basic knowledge by Lv. 40 or even Lv. 50!

Fortunately for Han Xiao, the workshop contained a complete set of basic Mechanic knowledge, which more than gave him a head start—it was an expressway to the finish line!

Inter-galactic Contact Law (7th Edition).

“When coming into contact with new civilizations, these 127 intrusive actions are to be avoided: war, gene manipulation...”

This was why Planet Aquamarine had not been given any cutting-edge technology. Advanced knowledge was the best that the planet had to offer, and even that itself was heavily controlled and treated as a top secret.

Chapter 26: Blueprint: Robot (Type: Rover)

[Basic Weaponry] contained knowledge on how to craft simple guns and conventional weaponry. It also increased mastery and crafting speeds.

[Basic Material Composition] was one of the core Weaponry talents. The quality and grade of a product was affected by that of its materials, and many of the key materials for higher level machinery were synthetic compounds that had to be crafted.

You have learnt five Weaponry talents! You have unlocked [Novice Refining] and [Overload]!

You have unlocked the blueprint [Robot – Rover]!

[Novice Refining] allowed one to refine materials for higher quality ones. Any skills or abilities with the terms 'novice', 'beginner', or 'basic' were generally the lowest versions of themselves. Most of them would have more advanced versions. For example, [Molecular Refining], that allowed the user to perform instantaneous molecular manipulation simply by expending Energy.

Materials were graded similarly to equipment. Of course, the higher the grade, the higher the value, but the two materials of the same grade could also have differing values. For example, a common iron ore was worth about \$13 a pound, while a refined dark iron ore was worth about \$45 a pound. Both were Common materials.

[Overload] – Active Skill

Drains Energy to temporarily increase the output of Machinery by 30-50% at the cost of durability. If Han Xiao activated this skill together with his Lightweight Mechanical Arm, its damage and defense would both be significantly boosted. However, with only 120 Energy, he would only be able to maintain the skill for 10 seconds or so.

I've finally unlocked an active skill! rejoiced Han Xiao. Mechanics had so few active skills in their early levels that it was quite sad. His escape from the Germinal would have been much, much easier had he possessed this active skill back then.

The [Robot – Rover] blueprint was an easy-to-obtain, early level robot blueprint. It was a low level utility robot that could be equipped with weapons and armor for combat, scouting, and defense purposes, and was also able to self-destruct. It wasn't created for a specific purpose, but could be modified and improved. They were widely used for prospecting and mining.

Gaining so much from just two talent points, a bargain!

Suddenly, he noticed Old Man Lu creeping up towards him.

"What are you looking so excited all of a sudden?"

Han Xiao rolled his eyes at him, replying, "Aren't you being a little too nosy?"

"Nosy? Why?" Old Man Lu took a moment to inspect himself.

"It's working hours. If you're not helping then go away!" interrupted Lu Qian as she slammed her welding torch down. Her face was flushed and dripping with sweat under the protective goggles she was wearing.

"Little brat," grumbled Old Man Lu as he carried his bottle of beer outside for a walk.

"Shop owner, is this a repair shop?"

A customer arrived as soon as he left. It was a middle-aged man.

Han Xiao turned to look at the guest, and he noticed the man was looking at him. The man immediately averted his gaze.

Suspicious, thought Han Xiao. When he further noticed his above average sense of balance and solid footing, he realized that the man was most likely an agent from Division 13 who had been sent to test him.

Lu Qian walked forward to receive him with a polite smile.

"Welcome. What is it that you need repaired?"

"My car broke down," replied the middle-aged man as he watched Han Xiao. "It's outside."

"Alright, no problem."

Just as Lu Qian was about to pick up her toolkit, the middle-aged man suddenly pointed at Han Xiao and said, "I want this little brother to repair my car."

Lu Qian was stunned. *Do I not look capable enough? You're being sexist!*

"I'll do it," agreed Han Xiao as he took the toolkit from his dejected boss.

The pair came out of the alley into the main street, where an old sedan car was stopped by the roadside.

"This is the car."

Han Xiao lifted the bonnet, inspected the interior, and swiftly began to perform repairs.

As Han Xiao worked on the car, the middle-aged man tried to strike a conversation.

"Kid, you're quite young, aren't you?"

"I'm 30."

30? Do you think I'm blind or what? The middle-aged man nearly choked.

"How should I address you?" he asked.

"You should show some sincerity when asking for a person's name," replied Han Xiao without looking at him.

"I'm Feng Jun," answered the middle-aged man awkwardly.

"That's a nice name," complimented Han Xiao, except that he didn't sound the least bit sincere, leaving the middle aged speechless." But you misunderstand; I just want a cigarette," he added.

Feng Jun uncomfortably took out his cigarette pack and passed one to Han Xiao.

"You can call me Han Xiao," introduced Han Xiao as he took a puff and returned to the task at hand.

Feng Jun continued to probe. "Han Xiao? You're not a local, are you? Where are—"

"It's done," Han Xiao suddenly interrupted, cutting his words off.

What the hell? I've only just started to probe you! Can you not be so quick?

Han Xiao expressionlessly stretched out a hand, saying, "A pipe was broken. I'll charge you \$60. Pay up."

Of course I know the pipe is broken, damn it! I broke it on purpose!

Feng Jun smiled as he took out his wallet and slowly fiddled around in an attempt to buy more time.

"You have pretty good skills. Where did you acquire them?"

"Natural talent."

"Oh, that's amazing. Where are you from?"

"From the countryside."

"..."

Han Xiao raised an eyebrow.

“Are you trying to get a discount out of me?”

At his wits end, Feng Jun coughed dryly before finally pulling out the money to pay up.

Will the department reimburse me for this? he wondered.

Han Xiao sneered. “I thought it would take you another hour to find your money. How big is your wallet?”

As he whistled whimsically, he proceeded to pack up and headed back to the workshop.

When he left, Feng Jun cheerlessly made a phone call.

“Initial observation concluded. The target is a mechanic and his threat level is still an uncertainty. Duration of contact was 4 minutes and 38 seconds. The target named himself as Han Xiao. I suggest proceeding with more testing, and to avoid direct confrontation.

“My analysis of his character? Hmm... yes... extremely annoying!”

Chapter 27: The Final Test

The next couple of days went by peacefully. Han Xiao’s daily routine now included going to the junkyard every morning to produce guns. He was paid in cash daily after each session, and was able to salvage a number of spare parts for creating the rover. He had already begun to craft some of its parts, but was holding back on assembling it.

Old Man Lu would occasionally lurk around to spy on Han Xiao as he worked. He was trying to figure out Han Xiao’s background from his craftsmanship. However, because Han Xiao was self-taught, his efforts were in vain.

The tall old man frequently came over to compete with Old Man Lu at 5 in a Row, which Han Xiao found hard to understand. Is 5 in a Row that fun? The tall old man also gradually began to converse with Han Xiao more, and Han Xiao was more than happy to entertain him. Everything was going according to plan.

For Mechanics, crafting rewarded the most experience, followed by enhancement, repairing, and lastly, assembly.

As Han Xiao had no way of acquiring advanced knowledge for now, he decided to use his accumulated experience points to raise the 3 skills of [Beginner Machinery Affinity Lv. 3], [Basic Combat Lv. 8], and [Basic Shooting Lv. 6] to close to max level, and he gained quite a number of talent points from this.

The prerequisite for advancing to a [Trainee Mechanic] happened to be unlocking [Intermediate Machinery Affinity], which required Lv. 5 in [Beginner Machinery Affinity]. Machinery Affinity was one of the common prerequisites for many blueprints and skills.

Although Han Xiao now had a whopping 15 talent points, which seemed a lot, it was always better to save some for rainy days. This was something that he had learned the hard way.

To think I actually had to spend over tens of millions of Enas (universal currency) just to buy Water of Lethe to reset my talent points back then!

At Kero Junkyard, Han Xiao had been busily producing guns all morning.

When he was about to leave, Raccoon passed him a stash of money that he pocketed without counting.

“That should be enough for today. I’ll make a move first,” said Han Xiao.

“Thank you for your contribution. We don’t need any more guns for the time being. However, our deal is still valid. You can continue to salvage any junk parts.”

Now that Han Xiao had served his purpose, Raccoon planned to get rid of him. However, it was not time yet. Raccoon was an extremely cautious person.

“Fine by me,” replied Han Xiao, who saw through his intentions.

He left the junkyard, remembering to make a few extra turns to shake off his tail before coming to a large mechanic market.

This market was popular among students from the Western Capital School and the Mechanic School due to the variety of machine parts and metals it offered.

Han Xiao spent all of the 70,000 Aquamarine Dollars that he had earned to buy the remaining materials that he needed for both the rover, as well as another Lightweight Mechanical Arm.

After obtaining the materials, he returned to his room to continue working on them.

...

A few days later, Han Xiao had finished crafting all of the rover’s parts, and he was now assembling the robot in his room.

1.2 meters tall and armor-plated to protect its interior. Its top half was the shape of a person, except that it didn’t have a neck. It ran on a basic integrated circuit.

It had two sectioned mechanical arms that could bend and rotate like a person’s, and its fingers were remodeled by Han Xiao into guns. Its torso could also rotate 90 degrees, and was inlaid with magazine compartments.

Instead of legs, it moved on tank tracks.

The system prompted Han Xiao to name his creation. Adopting his past naming style, he named it “Rover 1”.

Rover 1 (Tank-style)

Type: Robot

Grade: Common

Basic Stats: 800/800 Durability, 18 Defense, 59 Power Output, 23 Max Speed, 120/120 Energy

Height: 1.18m

Weight: 64.8kg

Mode of Control: Remote (Electrical Signal)

Control Radius: 50m

Energy Source: Battery Unit

Energy Usage: 8/min

Power Capacity: 36/80 Ona

Right Arm Module: Small Caliber Machine Gun – 35-40 Dmg, 4 Firing Speed (Max 7 – for 10 seconds), 30 Magazine Capacity (+60 Belt Capacity), 40 Power Output, 18% Accuracy

Left Arm Module: Small Caliber Machine Gun – 35-40 Dmg, 4 Firing Speed (Max 7 – for 10 seconds), 30 Magazine Capacity (+60 Belt Capacity), 40 Power Output, 18% Accuracy

Skills:

- Self-destruct: Self-destruct to inflict 280-430 explosion damage in a 30m radius.
- Metal Armor: Reduces damage taken by 8% (except penetrative attacks).

Note: Don't underestimate this little fella just because he looks stupid.

The name [Rover] is not exclusive to one type of robot.

The key materials used to craft Rover 1 were two common materials: steel and plastic resin. If Han Xiao had used a higher quality steel alloy, Rover 1 would have higher durability and defense. Nevertheless, he would be able to update or upgrade the rover with better parts when he got them to keep it relevant. This was a selling point of Mechanics.

The number of modules that could be installed on robots, vehicles, and mobile suits, was limited by their 'Energy Capacity'. Beside the quality of the energy source itself, 'Energy Capacity' could be upgraded by 'Energy' talents. Rover 1's energy source was a standard battery unit, so its Energy Capacity was low.

Completing the rover rewarded Han Xiao with 24,000 exp.

The following day, Han Xiao finished crafting the Lightweight Mechanical Arm.

You have crafted Lightweight Mechanical Arm (Left), gaining 2,500 exp.

His second Lightweight Mechanical Arm was still a left arm, like before. However, the materials he had used to craft it were lower in quality than before, causing it to have a lower grade.

Lightweight Mechanical Arm (Left)

Grade: Common

Base Stats: 28-45 Damage, 8-12 Defense, 26 Power Output, 205/205 Durability

Prerequisite(s): 23 STR

Bonus Stats: -4 Attack Speed

Length: 0.51m

Weight: 6.1kg

Additional Effects: Bonus +6 STR

Currently, Han Xiao strongest form of combat was melee combat, so the Lightweight Mechanical Arm suited him well.

Mechanics that favored melee combat were known as Mecha-warriors. Han Xiao did not intend to walk down this path as it was long-ranged capabilities that Mechanics truly excelled in, after all. However, since Mecha-warriors was the style that offered low level Mechanics the highest combat prowess, it would have to do for now.

Han Xiao hid the Lightweight Mechanical Arm before heading downstairs. Lu Qian was engaged in a conversation with a customer who kept on glancing at Han Xiao when he appeared. He was clearly yet another agent from Division 13.

Division 13 had, over the past few days, sent many undercover agents to spy on Han Xiao, but since Han Xiao was a tough nut to crack, they were now attacking from a different angle.

“Why are there so many people asking about you?” asked a puzzled Lu Qian when the agent left.

“Well, I’m popular.”

“But they’re all guys.”

Han Xiao froze up.

“It’s not what you think-”

“Don’t worry! I won’t judge you,” replied Lu Qian as she started giggling.

Why are you giggling like that!

Suddenly, Han Xiao’s turned serious. He had received a system alert.

You have triggered the Class-E Mission, [Assailants!]. Accept/Reject

Han Xiao was bewildered. What could have triggered such a mission?

“Accept.”

Mission Synopsis: The bounty on your head is being eyed. Your enemies are near and they are hiding in the shadows. Meanwhile, a certain group of people has been watching you to assess your potential. What will you do?

Requirement: Avoid death

Reward: 10,000 experience

Bonus Reward: 1x Skill Level-up Card (Basic)

Han Xiao rolled his eyes at the dramatic synopsis.

The ‘group of people’ referred to in the synopsis most definitely referred to Division 13. Han Xiao put the clues together and conjectured that Division 13 could have leaked intel on him in an elaborate set-up to test his combat strength. However, if that were the case, the people after him must not be too strong. After all, Division 13 wouldn’t risk things blowing up in the city.

Although Han Xiao wasn’t interested in typical Class-E mission rewards, the bonus reward caught his eye. A Skill Level-up Card was certainly something handy to have.

If a mission had a bonus reward, it meant that there was a secret condition to fulfill. Han Xiao guessed that this mission’s secret condition was most likely to kill all of his assailants.

“Since the enemy could appear at any moment, I’d better not stay in the workshop.”

Han Xiao didn’t want to rely on Old Man Lu. After contemplating for a moment, he thought of the perfect location for battle.

Kero Junkyard.

Chapter 28: Jealousy

Kero Junkyard was Raccoon’s territory. Han Xiao planned to kill two birds with one stone. He put down his tools and called out to Lu Qian with a request.

“I wish to take the day off.”

“Okay,” replied Lu Qian, blinking. “Is something wrong?”

“No, why?” Han Xiao paused.

Han Xiao always looked lethargic and bored, and Lu Qian, being the observant woman that she was, had noticed the sudden change in air about him. If she had to describe the kind of feeling Han Xiao was giving her now, for some reason, dangerous was the word that came to mind.

“If you’re facing any difficulties, I’ll definitely help you,” she said in a serious tone.

Not knowing what to say, Han Xiao stared at her, which caused her to shift about uncomfortably. She turned away from Han Xiao and twirled her hair, saying, "Don't you know its rude to stare?"

Han Xiao turned away too and replied, "I won't be back for dinner."

"I was actually thinking of letting you try my latest creation, black pepper pineapple baked ribs stew with parsley," responded Lu Qian dejectedly.

Han Xiao shuddered. What kind of cuisine from hell is that?

Han Xiao returned to his room to get ready. After a short while, he headed out with a backpack and a trolley.

...

"Boss, is that kid the target?"

A man wearing shades was tailing Han Xiao. Every time Han Xiao turned back, he would instantly vanish by making use of his surroundings, be it a public phone booth or a magazine stand. He was clearly a professional. He was using the mini receiver in his ear to communicate with his partner who was hiding in an old van two streets away. There was a total of five masked men in the van. They were none other than Han Xiao's assailants.

They were the Bee Sting Squad, a group of mercenaries who specialized in hunting bounties. They were decently well-known in underground networks, having successfully completed numerous missions. They had by chance 'stumbled' upon Han Xiao's trail.

For them, this mission was more important than any that they had ever taken on before. Bounty aside, they were hoping to gain favor with the Germinal Organization and earn their backing.

"How could this kid be worth one million? He looks so ordinary! This will be a piece of cake," said the number two of the squad, full of confidence.

"Don't forget that we are deep in Stardragon territory. Act swiftly," reminded the leader, Kelly, as he inspected his gun.

...

"The target is on the move."

A black, plateless Jeep was following Han Xiao from afar. Inside the Jeep was a team of Division 13 field agents, led by their mission captain, Li Hui. Besides him were 8 other fully equipped agents and Feng Jun, who was acting as an advisor. They were armed with tranquilizer guns.

Just as Han Xiao had expected, his assailants, the Bee Sting Squad, were indeed being used by Division 13 to test him, and these agents were, in fact, tasked to play the role of hero.

Feng Jun brought up a video feed of Han Xiao.

"The target seems to be headed to the District 7's Kero Junkyard. The Bee Sting Squad is following him. It would be ideal if the battle took place inside the junkyard."

...

Han Xiao arrived at the Junkyard, to Raccoon's surprise.

Why is he here?

"I've come to find some spare parts," Han Xiao casually lied. It was a reasonably convincing excuse.

Raccoon then invited Han Xiao for lunch, assuming he would decline, but unexpectedly, Han Xiao agreed, causing him to be visibly caught off-guard.

Han Xiao took his dust mask off, revealing his face to Raccoon. Raccoon found his face strangely familiar, but wrote it off.

Although Han Xiao was unquestionably famous in the criminal world, small-time crooks like Raccoon were, for the most part, largely irrelevant. Hence, they were often not privy to, or bothered with, the latest ongoings.

Although Han Xiao had been wearing the mask to keep his identity a secret, it didn't matter anymore.

A banquet table was set up by Raccoon's men. Han Xiao and Raccoon sat on opposite sides, facing each other as they conversed.

"How was the last batch of guns?"

"The 73-WASP is an excellent gun. Even the Six Nations' armies are using it. One of them is worth six to seven thousand on the black market. I've earned a lot thanks to you," answered Raccoon, as he puffed on a cigar. "And the quality of your guns is way better than those shitty second-hand guns on the market."

Although a batch of mass-produced guns wouldn't vary too much in quality, there would always be minor differences from gun to gun. These differences arose from the innate composition of the materials, but they could be minimized by a skilled mechanic. A gun expert would be able to tell a hand-made gun from a mass-produced one.

"What's in there?" asked Raccoon, pointing towards the stuffed bag and the push trolley.

"Some spare parts," replied Han Xiao. Raccoon was satisfied with the answer.

They continued chatting until dusk arrived, and the sky had transformed into a gorgeous hue of orange and indigo.

One of Raccoon's thugs suddenly ran into the room, saying, "Boss, someone is looking for you."

"Can't you see I'm with a guest?" replied an irritated Raccoon.

The thug whispered a few words into Raccoon's ear that made him look at Han Xiao contemplatively. He then got up from his seat and smiled at Han Xiao.

"Please excuse me for a moment," he said before leaving.

Han Xiao narrowed his eyes. Something's up.

...

Half an hour ago.

"Cousin, I travelled all the way here just so I could enjoy a good life under your care. Please don't abandon me!" pleaded Ma Jie as he chased after a young man.

He had come to the Western Capital intending to join his cousin's gang, but his cousin had deemed him unworthy and given him a janitor's position. Obviously, Ma Jie wouldn't settle for it, but what else could he do but beg?

"I've told you before, don't call me your cousin!" barked the irritated young man.

"Of course, of course. My bad. I'll slap myself," replied Ma Jie, after which he actually slapped himself.

"Just look at how pathetic you are. I let you watch the door precisely because we are relatives! Do you know how many wanderers out there have only spoiled food to eat? I'm going to see a big shot now; don't follow me!"

"Big shot?" Ma Jie's eyes lit up. "Who?"

"The boss of District 7, Mr. Raccoon! Each district other than District 1 has an underworld boss. Do you know how powerful they are?"

...

Before the pair realized, they had arrived at the entrance of the Junkyard. Ma Jie tried to follow him in, but the young man glared at him, causing him to give up. Just as Ma Jie was about to leave, he looked beyond the gates and noticed Han Xiao being welcomed. What the heck?

"Isn't that the kid who sneaked in with me?"

A thug stopped the young man.

"Don't loiter here," he said.

"I'm also one of the boss's men," replied the young man respectfully. "I've come to make a report."

Suddenly, Ma Jie interrupted them.

"Who is that guy?" he asked, pointing at Han Xiao.

"Who gave you the right to talk?" snapped his infuriated cousin who motioned to slap him. However, the thug stopped him.

"That person is an important guest of the boss," he answered.

An important guest? Ma Jie was shocked, but his shock was immediately replaced by jealousy and bitterness. This is unfair! Why is that ignorant brat having it so much better than me?

Scenes from their conversation replayed in his mind, causing him to feel embarrassed.

“You know Technician Han?”

“Not really, but we did talk a bit when we were being smuggled in.”

The thug’s eyes suddenly lit up.

“Follow me! The boss will want to see you!”

Ma Jie and the young man were stunned.

Chapter 29: Fall Out

The duo was led to a room.

“What do you want from me?” asked Ma Jie nervously.

“Relax, it’s nothing. That guy is a mechanic who knows how to make guns and our boss has been thinking of making a move on him for a while, but since we aren’t sure of his background, we haven’t acted yet. I just want to know everything you know about him.”

Ma Jie’s eyes lit up at the thought of being able to gain the boss’ favor. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that could allow him to surpass his cousin! He sneered and shot a scornful look at his cousin.

Who cares what happens to that bastard Han Xiao?

After waiting for about half an hour, Raccoon came to meet them. When he arrived, both Ma Jie and his cousin hastily arose to greet him. Ma Jie was so tense that he even knocked his own chair down.

“You know Technician Han’s background?” asked Raccoon.

“His name is Han Xiao. He’s a wanderer who snuck into the city with me. It was his first time coming here; he has no relatives.”

“That’s all?” Raccoon’s eyes twitched.

The sight of the boss’ displeasure made Ma Jie think harder to recall something.

“Oh right, he was empty-handed when he came here. His clothes were also extremely tattered, and he looked like a nobody.”

“Very good.”

Raccoon turned around and left.

“Anything for you, boss,” cried out Ma Jie after him.

Raccoon paused and turned around to look at him.

“I like you. Join my gang.”

Ma Jie’s eyes widened with joy.

I've hit the jackpot!

After Raccoon left, Huang Mao began to fawn all over Ma Jie. Their roles were now reversed.

"Ma Jie, please take good care of me in the future."

"What did you just call me?" scoffed Ma Jie.

"Cou- cousin."

Both of them sure were shamelessly quick to adapt. Ma Jie put his arm around Huang Mao's shoulders gleefully.

"Brother, may I know what boss intends to do with Han Xiao?" he asked the thug.

"Isn't it obvious? We'll force him to spill out the blueprints for the guns before silencing him!"

"That's good then," replied a relieved Ma Jie.

...

Less than three minutes later, Raccoon returned to the banquet hall. Han Xiao had left all the dishes untouched. Raccoon smiled.

"Han Xiao... right?"

"Looks like you've found out my name."

Sensing the calm before the storm, Han Xiao stealthily reached for the Lightweight Mechanical Arm in his backpack.

Click!

He equipped it. Although he had already intended to do battle from the start, Han Xiao still remained as vigilant as ever. He had learnt the importance of vigilance the hard way back in Galaxy, but that's a story for another time.

Raccoon began tapping his fingers on the table.

"Hehe. I've always been curious about your true identity, but it turns out that you're just a wanderer! I must say, you have indeed been very cautious all this time."

"So what?"

Raccoon's face darkened.

"Do you understand the situation you're in? Hand over everything you know about making guns!"

"Why so cold?"

"Cold? We were nothing more than business partners!"

"Would you believe me if I said that I can slaughter all of you if I wanted to?" Han Xiao smiled tauntingly.

Raccoon snapped his fingers as he sneered. In an instant, the four thugs around him were pointing their guns at Han Xiao.

“Did you think that I wouldn’t be prepared? What a joke! All of these guns being pointed at you were created by yourself!”

Other than Raccoon and the four thugs across the table, there were two more men standing guard outside the room, and there was little space for Han Xiao to maneuver in the compact room.

“Even if I tell you, you will still silence me.”

Raccoon laughed coldly. It was exactly as Han Xiao said.

“I do hope that you cooperate though. At least it will save you some suffering.”

“And if I don’t?”

“I have some men who are good at things like torture. You will talk eventually.”

Suddenly, the air about Han Xiao changed as he decided to drop the facade.

“Do you actually think that you have me cornered?”

The sudden change alarmed Raccoon, but he shook his head.

“Even if you do have some kind of trump card in that bag of yours, do you actually think you can move faster than a bullet?”

“What if I told you that there’s powerful explosives in here?”

Raccoon laughed. Ma Jie’s appearance had been, without a doubt, a coincidence. How could Han Xiao have made preparations? Who was he trying to fool?

“I don’t know who the person who told you about me is, but he obviously knows very little. Why don’t you try checking the underworld network to see the latest bounties?”

Raccoon frowned. How could Han Xiao remain so calm, and what was he playing at?

Although Raccoon did have some power in the Western Capital, he was actually just a small-time hoodlum in the grand scheme of things – too insignificant to partake in the matters of the underworld. Hence, he paid little attention to such matters.

He must just be trying to buy more time! Why should I even listen to him?

“Since you don’t believe me, wanna bet? Life is always full of surprises anyway. Now that I noticed, this room is pretty small, isn’t it? Perfect for an explosion. First comes the blast, followed by the shrapnel. Then, this entire place will be razed to the ground. But I guess that’s fine, since we’d all have died in the initial shrapnel...”

“Enough! I have no time for jokes. Stand up, or I’ll fill you up with holes!”

Han Xiao shrugged his shoulders, sighing, “Can’t we talk things through? Fine, I’ll give-”

Suddenly, as the last rays of sunlight dissipated, darkness descended.

Han Xiao had been waiting for this!

Vroom!

The mechanical arm roared to life, shredding the backpack apart! Han Xiao flipped the dining table, sending pots and plates smashing into Raccoon and the four thugs.

Talk things through? Ha! As if!

There were four thugs in front of him, and two behind. Han Xiao knew exactly what he had to do. He picked the table up to use as a screen and charged forward like an unstoppable juggernaut, holding the mechanical arm up in front of him.

Crash!

The four thugs were knocked aside like flies.

“Fire!” screamed an enraged, bloody-faced Raccoon.

The two remaining guards began to fire.

Chapter 30: The Mighty Rover

Bullets clinked and clanked onto the mechanical arm, causing its durability to plummet. A bullet found its mark, hitting Han Xiao in his shoulder and doing 16 damage, dyeing his shirt with blood. However, all it did was give Han Xiao an itch. Han Xiao’s pain tolerance was extremely high, and his solid muscles halted the bullet.

Han Xiao smashed the mechanical arm into one of the thugs’ chest. One loud thud, and he exploded on the spot. He then proceeded to yank the other poor thug up to use as a meat shield against the four thugs who had gotten back up and were firing at him.

Gathering all his strength, Han Xiao ripped out the door from its bolts and threw it at them before running out.

“Chase!” barked Raccoon.

Dozens of thugs throughout the entire Junkyard were alerted by the gunshots and they were rushing over to help.

Kero Junkyard was Raccoon’s main base, and Han Xiao had to tread carefully to avoid being surrounded. He looted a gun from one of the thugs he encountered which made things easier for him.

With his fast reflexes, as well as [Basic Shooting] and [Precise Aim] to help auto-correct his shots, Han Xiao was able to always have the edge against the thugs in the battle of guns. If he encountered a group of them, he would tumble and duck and fire lethal shots as he evaded. The only limitation that he faced was ammo, so he would loot their magazines after each wave. The trail that Han Xiao left behind was

bloody and littered with corpses, and Raccoon could hardly believe what he was seeing. Han Xiao had effortlessly taken out over 20 of his men single-handedly!

However, there were indeed way too many thugs converging on Han Xiao, making it hard for him to take the initiative.

Han Xiao hid behind the vehicle frame of a scrapped sedan as dozens of guns were fired in his direction, their muzzle flashes lighting up the night. The bullet storm was deafening, making it hard for Han Xiao to even hear his own breath, and it was extremely difficult to return fire.

“Good thing that this is my territory. No matter what, he can’t possibly make it out of this alone!”

Raccoon was seething with rage.

“I will make him regret ever being born!”

Suddenly, something unexpected occurred.

Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang!

A submachine gun was being fired from the side of the battlefield! The thugs began dropping in numbers as their screams filled the air.

Bee Sting Squad was entering the fray! Under the guise of nightfall, they instantly overwhelmed Raccoon’s inexperienced thugs.

“Where did these mercenaries come from?”

Raccoon was scared shitless. *Are they after me?*

However, the mercenaries suddenly changed direction and advanced towards Han Xiao instead, ignoring him.

These mercenaries are after him?

Raccoon stared at the unfolding events in disbelief.

As a villain himself, he understood the simple fact that the stronger a person was, the stronger his enemies. The fact that these mercenaries were willing to risk exposing themselves in the capital to go after Han Xiao meant that Han Xiao must not have been an ordinary person!

He thought back to Han Xiao’s words. *“Why don’t you try checking the underworld network to see the latest bounties?”*

He wasn’t just talking big?

Who exactly is he?

...

“That’s the sound of submachine guns.”

His mission target had appeared! Han Xiao was able to sniff out the Bee Sting Squad’s location from their muzzle flashes.

“300m to the west: six people, six submachine guns.”

Han Xiao rapidly performed calculations in his head. The enemy’s firepower was overwhelming. It would be unwise to meet them head on.

Lucky, I came prepared with my trusty Rover. Han Xiao sighed in relief. He whipped out the touchscreen remote control that he had created for Rover 1.

When activated, the rover’s visual feed would appear on the screen. However, the display was currently reading “Out of Range”. Han Xiao had to get to within 50m of the rover to activate it!

Steeling himself, Han Xiao stood up and began to run back along his original path. He was instantly assaulted by submachine gun fire.

Han Xiao made use of the heaps of scrap and junk to duck and take cover, advancing through the rain of bullets.

“Damn it! There’s so much cover for him here,” cursed a long-haired Bee Sting Squad member as he reloaded. “He’s faster than a bloody rabbit!”

Although their original plan had been to assassinate Han Xiao, they had decided to take advantage of the ongoing fight between him and Raccoon to mask their intentions.

“He’s already exhausted! Go in for the kill!” Kelly shouted out.

After the earlier bloodbath, all of Raccoon’s men were either dead or had lost all morale and were unable to fight. Seeing Han Xiao running so desperately emboldened the Bee Sting Squad, and they gave chase.

While he ran, Han Xiao suddenly sensed danger and ducked down. A bullet narrowly missed him, severing a strand of his hair.

After sliding under two more scrap cars, he finally came in range with the rover!

Connection successful!

“Activate!”

In the resting area, amidst debris and dust, the cloth cover on the push trolley suddenly began to vibrate, and two red lights appeared from beneath it!

The rover’s eyes!

The rover’s engine started to whirl, and its wheels began to rotate as Han Xiao piloted it out of the resting area.

At this point of time, the Bee Sting Squad had come extremely close to Han Xiao. Rover 1’s defenses were not strong enough to take on the collective fire of six submachine guns, so it would be too risky to send him in head-on. The sole edge that Han Xiao had over them was the element of surprise, as they would never imagine him to have a robot as a reinforcement.

Han Xiao surveyed his surroundings to find a suitable spot for an ambush.

He found two scrap cars along the Bee Sting Squad's path that were angled in a such a way that the bend they formed provided a spot of concealment! Han Xiao piloted the rover to hide inside the bend.

The noise from Rover 1's engine was masked by the ongoing chaos, and only Kelly suspected that something was off. The instinct that he had acquired from surviving through numerous life-and-death encounters told him so. Pausing, he said to his team, "Something doesn't feel right here."

"What did you find?" asked the long-haired man.

"That's the thing; I don't see anything."

"Well, it can't be. The target is already cornered. He's dead meat."

At this exact moment, his squad entered Rover 1's shooting range, and Han Xiao was quick with the command.

Du-du-du-du-du-du...!

Hell rained upon them from Rover 1's fingers!

The entire squad was wiped out on the spot.

Your machine, Rover 1 (Tank-style) has killed a mercenary! You have gained 800 exp!

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