

Outside of Time

Chapter 10: Scavengers Campsite

The forbidden zone formed in this part of the eastern region of the Nanhuang Continent wasn't very big.

The ruins that Xu Qing's group had left were at the edges of the forbidden zone.

This was also why the scavengers were able to rush over to the city on the first day the sunlight came.

Therefore, when the sky was gradually turning dark, they were almost out of the forbidden zone's perimeters.

They had encountered some mutated beasts on the way, but the beasts were quickly taken care of by these scavengers.

Xu Qing came to an assessment after observing them.

He felt that if he were to make a move, amongst the six scavengers, he would have a chance against any of them other than Captain Lei.

"They aren't cultivators, but the viciousness when they fought, their grasp of timing, as well as their indifferent attitude toward death in critical moments allowed their killing prowess to be enhanced."

Xu Qing assessed these people and analyzed the situation. He reckoned that he could fight against any one of them in a one-on-one battle, other than Captain Lei.

In fact, it might not be impossible for him to take on two of them at once. But he probably couldn't handle three in one go.

Xu Qing became increasingly cautious after he made this judgment.

At the same time, he was also sharp enough to notice that as the distance from the external world grew closer, those scavengers' expressions became a lot more relaxed.

They even started to chat and joke with each other on the way.

Only the old man who was called Captain Lei didn't say a word along the way.

The others treated the old man with a lot of respect, and this made Xu Qing feel a little curious about his identity.

However, this curiosity didn't reduce his wariness. Even though they were almost out of the forbidden zone, Xu Qing continued to be on his guard. So, even when he was following these scavengers, he didn't get close to them completely.

Instead, he kept a suitable distance and followed cautiously as he listened to them talking.

When the sky was almost completely dark, Xu Qing paused in his footsteps as a sensation of warmth gushed over him. He then turned and stared at the desolate land behind him, before looking at the world in front of him.

Between heaven and earth, the place he was standing in seemed to have an invisible boundary.

Within the boundary was a rudimentary forbidden zone that had just been formed. It was extremely cold.

Outside the boundary was the normal world that was filled with vitality and warmth.

They finally walked out of the forbidden zone.

Although it was nighttime outside, the starry sky was dazzling and the bright moon hung high up in the sky.

Although the land outside also reeked of desolation, it was a far cry from the coldness in the forbidden zone. There'd also be occasional cries from ordinary birds and beasts.

Xu Qing even saw a rabbit in the bushes far away, and it was looking at them warily.

Everything here made Xu Qing feel a little in a daze.

At this moment, those scavengers' expressions became completely relaxed. Even Captain Lei's brows were no longer knitted.

"We're finally out. This trip is considered quite smooth. If it's possible, I wouldn't want to take another step into the forbidden zones."

"Don't go to the forbidden zones? If you want to survive in this damned world, if you want to live a better life, you must risk your life in the forbidden zones. Sooner or later, I'll buy a residency right in a Seven Blood Eyes' branch city!"

Now that they were out of the forbidden zone, these scavengers were clearly in a more relaxed mood and kept chatting with each other.

Xu Qing kept quiet but listened attentively. From the conversations he had heard on the way, he had gained a lot of information that he wouldn't have heard of in the past.

Take the Seven Blood Eyes for example. He had heard these scavengers mention them many times. They seemed to be a very powerful influence.

Also, the name Purple Earth had been mentioned by them many times.

"You only have such a small ambition? There are many Seven Blood Eyes' branch cities. Antler City, which is nearby, is one of them. However, the qualifications there can't be bought with just spirit coins. You still need the recommendation of a Seven Blood Eyes's disciple. Residency rights? My goal is to obtain the qualifications to enter the Seven Blood Eyes and become a Seven Blood Eyes's disciple!"

"If you go to the Seven Blood Eyes, you won't be able to survive for more than three days. Who doesn't know how to boast? Why don't you say that your goal is to head to the Wanggu Continent overseas? The place of origin for the human race can be found there."

When Xu Qing heard this, his heart skipped a beat. He had seen the name Wanggu on the bamboo slip.

"Wanggu? You think that I wouldn't go if I had the capability to ignore those forbidden creatures in the sea?"

Two of the scavengers seemed to have some verbal conflict and started arguing.

As Xu Qing perked his ears and was about to continue to listen to their conversation to obtain more information, the old man named Captain Lei threw a glance at them. He then spoke for the first time on the journey.

"It's not impossible if you want to go to the Wanggu Continent. There are four ways to do so, and you guys can give it some thought to see which method is suitable for you."

"Firstly, achieve Foundation Building by the age of 15 years old, becoming a rarely-seen heaven chosen. Secondly, pay 300,000 jun* worth of spirit coins and purchase a migration quota from Purple Earth, Seven Blood Eyes, or the Litu Sect*."

"Thirdly, make an outstanding contribution in alchemy for the human race. Fourthly, be taken in as a personal disciple by one of the great clans from Purple Earth, or by one of the Seven Blood Eyes's peak lords*, or the Litu Sect's sect master."

“Oh, there’s a fifth way, which is to become a treasure-nurturer. Think about it. Which method is suitable for you?”

All the scavengers fell silent, especially when they heard the fifth method. Their expressions became very unnatural and their gazes revealed horror.

Xu Qing focused his gaze. He had heard of the term ‘treasure-nurturers’ before.

Back when he was in the slums, he had a few close companions with him who were taken away by some people dressed in luxurious clothes.

It was said that they wanted to nurture them into treasure-nurturers. Back then, the other children in the slums were very envious.

Therefore, he hesitated a moment before looking at Captain Lei and asking softly.

“May I ask... what are treasure-nurturers?”

Captain Lei’s gaze landed on Xu Qing and he slowly spoke.

“Using one’s body to nourish magic treasure and cultivate unique techniques, using one’s flesh and blood to dilute the anomalous substances in magic treasures. This will help to ease the anomalous substances increment with each use of the magic treasure. While it allows the continuous usage of the magic treasures, the treasure-nurturers’ bodies will gradually wear out and they’ll die.”

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed and he fell silent for a long while.

Everyone seemed to have lost interest in chatting because of the words ‘treasure-nurturers’. They then continued to walk silently in the dark night.

It was until they had left a distance away from the forbidden zone and arrived at a stretch of plains that Captain Lei chose to set up camp.

Unlike how they had done things in the forbidden zone, when they set up camp in the external world, they not only set up tents but also started a campfire.

As the flames burned, the warmth grew stronger. These scavengers then sat around the campfire, each taking out their food to roast. Fragrance gradually permeated the air out as they cooked.

Xu Qing gulped when he saw their food. Meanwhile, he sat in the far distance and took out half a piece of tough meat jerky, putting it into his mouth and chewing it off with great effort.

Captain Lei, who was next to the campfire, looked over. He then got up and went over to where Xu Qing was.

As Xu Qing abruptly raised his head, Captain Lei tossed over a leather pouch. There were a few hot buns within.

Xu Qing's eyes widened the instant he saw these buns. He held in his urge and spoke up in a low voice.

"Thank you."

Captain Lei didn't say anything and returned to the side of the campfire. A scavenger next to him laughed and asked.

"Captain Lei, why are you treating this kid so well?"

"We're all pitiful people. Since we met each other, we are fated. If I can help, then I'll help a little."

There were three buns in the bag and they felt very warm to the touch.

Xu Qing hesitated for a moment. He saw that everyone next to the campfire was also eating the same buns. Therefore, he first pretended to take a bite while he continued to observe those scavengers. After noticing that they were all fine after a while, he continued to hold his impulse in for a very long time before he finally took a small bite, keeping the food in his mouth and waiting for a moment.

Only after ascertaining that it was fine did he slowly chew it thoroughly and swallow it slowly.

And after another long period of waiting and confirming again that it was fine, he completely relaxed and heaved a sigh of relief in his heart. He couldn't hold it in anymore and finished one of the buns in big bites.

Then, he hesitated for a moment and finished the second one as well.

Although he was still hungry, he still wrapped up the last bun and carefully placed it in his leather pouch, as if he was storing a precious treasure.

As it quickly got later into the night, the scavengers returned to their tents in succession. After that, Captain Lei acted the same as yesterday and passed a sleeping bag to Xu Qing. He then said a sentence before he left.

"This is a gift for you."

Xu Qing raised his head and looked at Captain Lei before he suddenly spoke.

“Why?”

“What do you mean why? Are you talking about the three buns and one sleeping bag... There’s no reason for that. If you feel grateful, just get me some food in the future.” Captain Lei turned and headed toward his tent.

“What do you like to eat?”

“Me?” Captain Lei stood next to his tent and thought about it.

“Snakes. Those things don’t taste bad.” After saying that, he entered his tent.

Xu Qing held onto the sleeping bag and looked at Captain Lei’s tent for a very long time. He then nodded heavily in agreement before entering the sleeping bag and closing his eyes.

However, he didn’t fall asleep immediately. Instead, he quietly circulated the Mountains and Seas Art with his eyes closed. This had already become a habit of his.

Even though it felt extremely chilly when cultivating, he didn’t give up at all. He made use of all the time he had to work hard in his cultivation.

This was especially so after Captain Lei had mentioned the point of achieving Foundation Building before the age of 15. Although he couldn’t compare with those heaven chosens mentioned in books, he still had some hope.

“I’m 14 this year...” Xu Qing mumbled and then continued cultivating.

Just like that, time slowly ticked on and very soon, five days passed.

Xu Qing followed these scavengers to cross over mountains and travel across plains.

Three people had left midway through the journey. This also verified Xu Qing’s assessment previously that these people had grouped together on a temporary basis.

By the seventh day, after the two blade-wielding scavengers left as well, only Xu Qing and Captain Lei remained.

On this night, at the foot of a mountain, Captain Lei looked at Xu Qing. The latter took small bites of a bun next to the campfire while keeping some of the buns for later. After that, Captain Lei slowly spoke.

“Kid, we’ll be able to reach our destination tomorrow at noon. That’s the place I live at and it is also a campsite where scavengers gather.”

Xu Qing looked up at the old man.

The old man gazed into the far distance and continued speaking.

“Scavenger campsites tend to be set up next to forbidden zones. Therefore, the area on that side of the mountain next to the campsite is also a forbidden zone.

“Compared to the rudimentary forbidden zone you were in previously, this one has existed for a very long time. Not only do ferocious beasts exist there, but there are also dangerous places, and the density of anomalous substances is extremely high. If an ordinary person doesn’t come out from there after one day, they’ll definitely die. Even I can only hang on for seven days at most there.

“However, that place produces seven-leaf grass in abundance. It is a necessary ingredient in refining white pills.

“White pills are the foundational alchemy pills that cultivators use to neutralize the anomalous substances in their bodies. Therefore, many outsiders come to this place. They care for their lives and aren’t familiar with the terrain, so they rarely go pick the seven-leaf grass themselves. They usually tend to spend spirit coins to get the native scavengers to enter the forbidden zone and pick the grass.”

After saying this, the old man looked at Xu Qing.

“Do you understand what I mean?”

“You’re saying that the native scavengers in the campsite are people who can do anything for the sake of money.”

When Xu Qing heard about the white pill and its effects, he squinted his eyes and said this after some thought.

Captain Lei’s gaze had a hint of surprise and he smiled.

“Your answer is partially correct. What I want to tell you is that the rule in scavenger campsites is simply the survival of the fittest. Strength is above everything else.

“However, it is still a place of residency at least. Moreover, it has a marketplace where one can purchase or sell living necessities. There’d even be merchant groups who would come occasionally. Therefore, the housing at the campsite is quite valuable.

“As such, not everyone can enter as they please. For an unfamiliar face to gain residency rights, they must go through a beast fight. This was a rule decided by the camp leader.

“And if you pass it successfully, I can allow you to stay at my place for a fee,” said the old man slowly as he looked at Xu Qing.