

Elite Mages' Academy

Chapter 61 - The Monthly Exam Begins

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At about 7:50 A.M, a total of 60 people from Class Seven had arrived, each with different expressions. Some remained quiet and looked tense as they held their weapons and sulked in corners. Others appeared rather nervous. There were also those that looked rather excited, like Wang Dalin. He was carrying around his novice machete and engaging in conversation with everyone who cared to entertain him.

“Who cares about those Thunder Kingdom guys. I’ll kill them as they come!

“There’s nothing to be afraid of! Just follow me! I’ll cover everyone!

“What level did you reach in your elective courses? Hehe, I’m not gonna lie; I’ve reached Level Two in all my courses! It’s just foreign language that annoys me a bit, but it doesn’t matter since it’s useless anyway!”

...

Xiao Lin looked at the map for a while, but was so irritated by Wang Dalin’s loud voice that he was unable to concentrate, so he looked at the latter with a cold expression. Wang Dalin was trying to win over people’s hearts. Xiao Lin laughed slightly, ignored Wang Dalin, and turned his head to glance at the girl beside him.

Even in such a noisy environment, Gu Xiaoyue was still holding the map and scrutinizing it with her full attention. Her long, shapely eyebrows were knit in a frown, as if thinking about something. Her fair hand was holding a pen and she drew circles on the map from time to time.

Xiao Lin observed for a long time and could not help but ask in a low voice, “What are you drawing?”

More than ten seconds passed before Gu Xiaoyue raised her head and adjusted her drooping black-framed spectacles. “I’m looking for the army camp.”

“The Thunder Kingdom’s army camp?” One of the optional objectives of the combat mission was to draw a picture of the army’s defense. To do that, one first had to find the location of the Thunder Kingdom’s army camp.

Gu Xiaoyue lowered her head again and pointed to the circles she marked on the map. She then muttered to herself, “The number of troops in the Thunder Kingdom is between three to six thousand. There’s also the cavalry. It’s impossible that they’d be stationed in a very narrow position, and they have to be close to a water source. The locations that meet this condition in this topographic map are actually very limited.”

Xiao Lin opened his mouth and smiled wryly. “This is just an optional mission. Our main goal is to escape from kingdom troops’ pursuit. Survival is our bare minimum.”

“No, that’s not right. If their cavalry and infantry are stationed separately, then all these locations might not necessarily be suitable.” Gu Xiaoyue bit her lip and drew on the map again.

Xiao Lin sighed after being completely ignored. He was the only one who knew that the girl had two years left to live, but Gu Xiaoyue did not seem to care at all. She actually wanted to complete the optional tasks.

Exploring the army camp’s defenses meant that they would have to actively venture deeper, which in turn, was a sharp increase of the level of risk. Was she really so fearless in the face of death?

At 8 A.M, instructor Qin Chuan appeared in the public classroom again and looked at everyone. “The teleportation will begin in one minute. For this month’s exam, Xiao Lin will be your commander.”

Some people were stunned. Wang Dalin practically slammed the table and demanded to know why. He had just started forging relationships with everyone before the exam because he wanted more people to follow his lead during the exam.

Qin Chuan could not be bothered to talk nonsense with him. “For all team-based exams, the class monitor will receive commanding authority by default.”

Xiao Lin was not surprised to hear that. As the acting monitor, he roughly knew that he had authority, but he sighed to himself after seeing so many unsightly expressions. It was one thing to have commanding authority, but whether others accepted it or not it was another matter altogether.

One minute later, countless white rays of light fell from the sky in the classroom hall, enveloping everyone in it. Most were either surprised or nervous when they saw that their bodies were disappearing quickly. Soon, the noisy classroom was empty.

Xiao Lin could only notice that his eyes were getting blurry. Once his vision became clear again, he found himself standing on barren red soil surrounded by open clearings. In front of him was the steep entrance to the canyon. The sun hung high in the sky, and the heat produced billowing heatwaves in the unsheltered canyon.

The freshmen’s monthly exam had officially begun!

[Time: One week]

[Map: Sunset Canyon]

[Combat goal: Escape the pursuit of the Thunder Kingdom’s army within a week and arrive in a safe location. Those who complete the mission will get 10 credits and 100 redemption points. This is a team-based task. If 30% of the class and above arrive at the safe location, the task will be deemed completed]

[Optional tasks:

[1. Infiltrate the Thunder Kingdom's border army and draw a map of the area where the troops are stationed. You are successful if the accuracy of your map exceeds 70% and you will get 10 credits, as well as 200 redemption points.

[2. Kill the wolf cavalry squadron's captain. Reward: 15 credits and 300 redemption points.]

[Condition for failure:

[1. More than 70% of the class is wiped out by the kingdom's army.

[2. The mission ends after one week.]

[Warning: This is a simulation of actual combat. 10 years of life will be deducted for each death.]

Everyone's mind reverberated with the central computer's reminder about the mission. Although those contents had been known in advance with the information released the day before, it was obvious that there are some additional details in the official announcement that day.

All 60 people in the class were there. In addition to the necessary weapons, everyone had an extra backpack, containing a box of compressed biscuits, a flask of water, a pen, and a notebook. That was the extent of the equipment they were provided.

Once they recovered from the short post-transmission silence, someone asked, "Where are we?"

"What a stupid question. We're at Sunset Canyon."

"Your statement is stupid. I'm asking about our exact location IN Sunset Canyon!"

The crowd had already started discussing and their gaze finally shifted to Xiao Lin. Whether they accepted it or not, Xiao Lin was acting monitor and theoretically has commanding authority.

Xiao Lin sat on the ground. He picked up his notebook and scribbled something quickly. Several other people were doing the same thing. They tried their best to memorize the canyon's topographic map before the exam, and had to quickly draw it before they forgot it.

After a quarter of an hour, several people completed their drawings one after another. They then compared their results and made some improvements. The rough topographic map of Sunset Canyon was at least 70% to 80% complete. Many found it hard to understand why the academy forbade them from bringing any materials in.

However, Xiao Lin had no objection about that after talking with Song Junlang. He had a deeper understanding of the monthly exam's significance. If it really was a simulated exercise, then it probably meant that America's Judge Academy had an incomplete topographic map too.

"We're probably here now, at Sunset Canyon's south entrance." Xiao Lin pointed to the topographic map that he had drawn up quickly, but because his drawing skills were poor, almost no one could understand it except himself.

"How do you know that this is the south entrance?" someone questioned, seemingly unconvinced.

“The information clearly stated that about a third of the Sunset Canyon is located in the Thunder Kingdom. The plains are behind us. If the kingdom’s army chooses to station, they’ll likely do so in the plains.” Xiao Lin glanced at Gu Xiaoyue. He patted his notebook and said loudly to the students approaching around, “So the current situation is actually very clear. Behind us is the enemy’s garrison, and in front is the canyon.”

Having said that, Xiao Lin could not help but sigh in distress.

Many people were still in a daze, but a few people were gradually starting to understand Xiao Lin’s words. They lowered their heads and whispered for a while, and soon the exchanges became louder and louder. Everyone then understood that they were facing a very awkward situation.

Chapter 62 - Split Ways

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Should they advance and enter Sunset Canyon or turn back and enter the Thunder Kingdom’s territory for reconnaissance? Everyone faced a dilemma as soon as they were on the simulated battlefield.

“Let’s analyze the exam tasks first. Everyone has heard the prompt from the central computer, and it’s interesting that there’s a bit of difference from the information we were given yesterday.”

Xiao Lin said slowly, “It’s a little different from what I expected. Not everyone needs to escape the enemy’s pursuit and reach a safe area. The mission is completed even if only thirty percent of us reach there.”

“What does this mean?” someone still failed to understand.

“It means that seventy percent of us can be treated as expendable, as bait to corner the enemy, so the remaining thirty percent can safely pass through the canyon. Isn’t that right, Monitor Xiao?”

Xiao Lin frowned. He did not even need to look up to know who it came from. Wang Dalin and Xiao Lin were at loggerheads during the admissions test, and Xiao Lin later used his class monitor’s authority to directly mute Wang Dalin on the Dawning Forum for a month.

The two of them did not like each other in the first place, and Wang Dalin showed aggression toward the monitor’s position, especially when everyone basically knew that Gu Xiaoyue would assume the position. Based on strength however, Wang Dalin—whose basic attributes were quite strong—would be a big threat to Xiao Lin’s position in the comprehensive exam three months later.

The conflict of interest caused Wang Dalin to find every opportunity to attack Xiao Lin. Xiao Lin had to admit that Wang Dalin’s analysis was correct, and when first saw that regulation, he immediately thought of that possibility too.

Although the difficulty of the examination has dropped somewhat, both the instructor and Department Head Song had repeatedly emphasized that the strength of the Thunder Kingdom’s border defense was still far superior to theirs. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary to avoid

head-on conflict, but when facing enemy troops, it was better to assign some people as bait to confuse the enemy.

It was clear that Wang Dalin mentioned that without actually having any good intentions. He had a distressed expression on his face as he waved his hands around. In that way, more students next to him came around and said loudly, “Everyone knows that every death deducts ten years from your life span. Which one of you can guarantee that you won’t die if you become bait? The instructor also said that the army is stronger than ours!”

Many people immediately understood the truth of that statement. The decoy tactic could guarantee easy completion of the required tasks, but the price of a bottle of Lifewater was 1,000 redemption points. It was definitely not worth risking accidental death.

The sacrifice of a small number of people could be exchanged for the success of the entire mission, but such cohesion was all but absent in such a newly-formed team of classmates. No one was willing to be taken advantage of by a small number of people and be sacrificed in vain.

“What are you going to do, Acting Monitor? You’re the commander of Class Seven!” Xiao Lin’s silence prompted a trace of emotion to flash across Wang Dalin’s face. He deliberately emphasized ‘commander’ and reminded others that Xiao Lin was likely to make such a decision as the commander of that mission.

As expected, everyone looked at Xiao Lin with uncertainty. Wang Dalin’s words were rather harsh, and whether or not Xiao Lin actually planned to suggest the decoy plan, many people would be wary of it if it was mentioned so openly.

As the acting monitor, Xiao Lin was tacitly approved to be the commander of that mission, much to the displeasure of Wang Dalin. He could not go against that rule, but he could attempt to make others undermine Xiao Lin and lose their trust in him. Even if he could sow a tiny little seed of doubt, Xiao Lin would slowly become commander in name only.

Xiao Lin still did not respond and never even looked at Wang Dalin directly. He carefully looked at the notebook in his hand the entire time. It contained the topographic map that he drew quickly, because Song Junlang reminded him that a map was crucial in the simulation battle. He had forced himself to memorize the entire map since the night before, and at that moment, his drawing was the most faithful to the actual map. Even the icons were 70% to 80% reconstructed.

Xiao Lin’s silence disinterested Wang Dalin, and someone then said, “We should first complete the reconnaissance task and get out of here as soon as possible, before the Thunder Kingdom’s army notices our movement!”

“Why should we complete the reconnaissance first?”

The person who spoke was a tall, short-haired, rather beautiful woman who seemed very capable. She said, “The mandatory mission is to escape the canyon and reach the safe area. This is in direct conflict with the reconnaissance mission. I believe the academy is giving us a choice of one or the other.”

“The key to this mission is to avoid the enemy’s scouts. The risk of being discovered increases with each extra day we stay here. We’re too weak. We can’t beat them if we’re discovered. If we don’t want to take risks, the best choice is to enter the canyon and complete the required tasks directly.”

But we’ve worked so hard for an entire month. Will all our hard work be for a mere 100 redemption points?” a sturdily-built boy opined loudly.

“We should complete the first optional task while the enemy hasn’t noticed us yet. Once that is done, we can all retreat. I’m sure we can ensure that most of the people here can leave safely. As for who would end up being killed, well, that depends on your luck.”

“Then what about the last optional task: kill the wolf cavalry squadron captain?”

“That’s out of the question. I don’t think we can kill the wolf cavalry squadron captain. After all, we don’t have any talented students in our class, unlike the other class monitors. They’re all talented students, and their strength is just inherently different from us. All we can do is give up this last task.” Someone flashed their palms in helplessness.

“Although it is a bit dangerous, there’s still a chance of success. If you want to get the redemption points, you’ll have to take a bit of risk. I agree!”

Xiao Lin occasionally looked up at some of the more enthusiastic individuals. Usually, he would use his class monitor’s authority to check the changes in their attributes, as well as their skill levels, whenever he had time to spare. If he remembered correctly, most of those people got Grades A or B in the admissions test. Although they were not as good as the talented students, they could be ranked as second best after the talented students, but in terms of mental fortitude or attribute skill level.

Their analyses were also somewhat reasonable, and their options were what most people could think of and understand at the moment. They could not possibly defeat the kingdom’s army in a head-on conflict, and it was better to complete the task as soon as possible.

Some people stood beside Xiao Lin hesitantly. They did not seem to trust Xiao Lin very much and were worried that they would be used as bait, but at the same time, they did not want to investigate the enemy’s barracks either.

Soon the crowd divided into two factions. Wang Dalin and the few who received high grades believed that they should take the initiative to attack. They were capable enough in terms of strength and were ambitious enough too.

Since the acting monitors of the other classes were talented students, there was almost no possibility of a change in the monitor position after three months as long as they worked hard by themselves. However, the situation in Class Seven was very complicated, and many people felt that they were able to fight for the monitor position. An example would be the radicals in front of Xiao Lin, the number of which nearly accounted for the majority of the class.

Even if Xiao Lin was the acting monitor and the commander, those people felt that the exam results would be higher than that of Xiao Lin, so long as they can persuade the rest of the people to act together. After the comprehensive examination in three months, their chances of getting the monitor position would increase even more.

Wang Dalin's heart skipped a beat when he saw Gu Xiaoyue pausing and concentrating not far away. Her high intelligence value was absolutely terrifying, and everyone had witnessed it for themselves in the admissions test. In particular, Gu Xiaoyue's apparent disinterest in the monitor's position made Wang Dalin feel that he could win her support.

Barely a few steps later, Xiao Lin—who had been keeping silent all the while—closed his notebook suddenly, then got up and looked around. He said to Wang Dalin as the latter walked over, “Let's split ways then. I may be the monitor, but I can't force everyone to follow my orders. That being the case, we might as well split into two groups for now.”

Chapter 63 - Xiao Lin's Plan

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“Huh?” Those who attempted to use the decision of the majority to evade Xiao Lin's authority were stunned all of a sudden. The result was a bit unexpected.

“Split ways?”

“Yes. We should just split into two groups. If you so choose, you can go and do the reconnaissance mission. You can follow me if you want to survive for the time being!” Xiao Lin said to the others.

Wang Dalin's face soured. “What do you mean?”

Xiao Lin said calmly. “Simple. You're just asking to be killed if you go there and scout right now.”

“Why is that?”

Xiao Lin sneered. “Is your brain filled with mush or something? Can't you think for yourself!”

Xiao Lin did not bother to explain to him that although the few people who got Grade A or B they each had their own thoughts, they continued to act harmoniously on the surface and did not openly voice disagreement. Irrespective of what the future held for them, Xiao Lin was still their class monitor for three months. Wang Dalin was the only idiot who would dare to butt heads with him.

“You!” Wang Dalin's anger peaked and he laughed. “Your attributes are low and you skip classes all the time, so you're afraid that we'll complete the optional tasks and get a higher grade than you. So be it, then. We'll split ways! Those who want credits and redemption points can come with us!”

The argument lasted for more than ten minutes. Xiao Lin was firmly opposed to immediate reconnaissance while the others refused to make concessions. The differences between the two sides could actually be described as conservative and radical. Once they entered the canyon, they could only complete the mandatory tasks. In the end, 39 people followed Wang Dalin and others while Xiao Lin's group had only 20 people in addition to himself.

This division satisfied many people. The capable girl said, “Even if thirty percent of our class completes the required tasks, the whole class will be considered having completed all of them. Splitting ways might be good.”

“Xiao Lin, maybe we can have a rendezvous point? Whether or not we’ve completed the reconnaissance mission, we’ll rush to the rendezvous in three days. Then we can all act together and complete the mandatory task. How about it?” One of the boys seemed to have second thoughts.

Everyone else nodded except for Wang Dalin. Once they encountered danger and were forced to separate, the first instinct of those who ended up alone was to group up. Setting a rendezvous point would be a fallback plan, because in the end, they could not guarantee that could remain undiscovered if they went ahead with the reconnaissance.

“NO!” a crisp voice sounded. To everyone’s surprise, Gu Xiaoyue was the first one to object. She stood next to Xiao Lin, and although Wang Dalin tried to persuade Gu Xiaoyue to join him, she gave him a cold glance and showed no indication of agreeing.

Xiao Lin glanced at Gu Xiaoyue with a cold expression, then touched his nose before suddenly nodding happily. “Alright then, we’ll set a rendezvous point! Don’t interrupt me. I’m the monitor and I have the final say!”

The last sentence was addressed to Gu Xiaoyue, who shot Xiao Lin a strange look and stopped talking.

Xiao Lin opened his notebook and looked at it for a while, then drew a circle on a fork in the canyon. He said, “If you really want to come back, you can gather at this intersection!”

Wang Dalin snorted in apparent acknowledgement to that decision.

After that, both sides parted ways and more than 30 people left for the plains behind them. It was not until they were far enough away that Xiao Lin clapped his hands and said, “Let’s set off then.”

In addition to Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue, there were 18 other people left. Xiao Lin did not think that those people went with him because they trusted him. He knew that they found it too dangerous to do the reconnaissance. While it was true that there was reward amidst that danger, one might not think of it from that perspective if it bore down to life and death.

In the past month, Xiao Lin spent his days between the training hall, the dormitory, and the logistics department. Although the entire Class Seven knew who he was, Xiao Lin did not know everyone else.

“Monitor, where are we going?”

“Are we going to the rendezvous point to wait for them to come back?”

“Why should we wait for them? Let’s go straight through Sunset Canyon and arrive at the safe location!”

“Yes, that’s right. We have twenty people and this fulfills the requirement of thirty percent out of the total number of people.”

...

Gu Xiaoyue adjusted her glasses and asked suddenly in a cold voice. “Are you seriously going to give up the two optional tasks and only complete the mandatory ones?”

Xiao Lin smiled and said, “If I said yes, you wouldn’t just turn around and leave, would y—... Ahem, hey, wait a moment. I’m kidding!”

Seeing that Gu Xiaoyue really planned to leave, Xiao Lin hurriedly stopped her and summoned the others. He said pensively, “Just let me talk about my plan first. First of all, everyone has to understand that it’s impossible to go directly through Sunset Canyon. At the same time, I’m not going to give up the two optional tasks.”

There was a commotion among the few dozen and one girl was very dissatisfied. “I stayed behind because I didn’t want to take risks. My lifespan only allows me to die three times!”

Xiao Lin sighed. “You don’t really think that this so-called monthly exam is that difficult, right? Go on guys, open up your backpack and take a look for yourself. A thermos of water and a small box of biscuits are all the supplies that the school gave us. We have to survive in this place for seven days. Do you think that’s enough?”

After being dropped into the simulated battlefield, the academy automatically issued a backpack to everyone as a sort of complimentary gift.

The girl who complained earlier immediately looked dumbfounded. She looked at the others for a while and asked in a rather unconfident manner, “How long does it take to cross Sunset Canyon?”

“From the topographical map, Sunset Canyon is huge and has many forks. Most of the roads are dead ends. Although I sketched about seventy percent to eighty percent, I’m not that confident about the remaining ten to twenty. In an idealistic scenario with no pursuit, it’ll take at least three days to get out of the canyon.”

“This food and water is only enough for one day,” someone said uneasily.

“Half a day.” Gu Xiaoyue offered a more precise calculation.

Xiao Lin nodded. “The temperature here is crazy high, probably over forty degrees. Food isn’t really much of a problem, because if things really don’t work out, we may be able to do a bit of hunting. The map data already stated that there are a few monsters in Sunset Canyon. The key issue is water. If you go at this temperature, you’ll get dehydrated in half a day because this amount is definitely not enough.”

The canyon was barren, with an abundance of large and small stones. Except for a goshawk hovering in the blue sky, there were no clouds either. The hot sun roasted the ground without the slightest restraint, and in fact, their foreheads were already oozing a fine layer of sweat when all they did was stand and talk.

The monthly examination environment simulated Planet Norma. Although it was not known what super-technology or spells were used, Qin Chuan and Song Junlang had suggested that the degree of simulation was nearly 100% accurate.

There was only one sun on Planet Norma, but it was slightly larger than the sun on Earth. It was dark red and exuded much more heat. For that reason, the temperature of Planet Norma was generally higher during the day compared to Earth.

“That means we need supplies. In other words, we need to find a supply depot first!”

After that, Xiao Lin pointed to a large circle that he highlighted in the notebook. He had been doing all that earlier when Wang Dalin was trying to sway the others.

“Supply depot? Was there any indication of this in the materials distributed to us?” someone asked doubtfully.

“If you look closely at the markers next to the map, you’ll come to find some very interesting things. For example, the water source is marked with a wave-like shape, but the nearest water source is four or five days away from us. Leaf shapes are plants, and these animal-like markers likely refer to creatures in the area, but I don’t understand what these creatures are for the time being.”

After a pause, Xiao Lin pointed to several other signs. “There are some signs I don’t understand, but it’s normal given that we still don’t know much about the humanities and customs of Planet Norma. But there is only one sign that resembles the shape of a building, and if my guess is right, it should probably be something like a nearby supply depot!”

Chapter 64 - Xiao Lin's Plan (II)

Chapter 64: Xiao Lin’s Plan (II)

After a brief argument, Xiao Lin and the others finally stepped into Sunset Canyon. Although he was not that confident himself, he first had to find a supply depot unless he wanted to die of thirst.

The entire Sunset Canyon was V-shaped and the entrance was relatively narrow. After turning the first corner, his field of vision immediately became wider. The canyon was winding as one looked into the distance and the surrounding rocks were stacked on top of each other. The twists and turns of the huge canyon were like a tie snaking and dancing on the Earth.

Although the heat was unbearable, clusters of plants grew in the crevices of the rock formations. Some even produced light-red, thumb-sized wild fruits. Despite Xiao Lin’s repeated warnings, some people could not help but taste one. Barely minutes later, the hapless guy grabbed his stomach, rolled on the ground in pain, and his face turned pale. In the end, Xiao Lin could only knock him unconscious and hesitated before asking everyone to take turns helping him move forward.

That episode slowed the team down considerably and increased their water consumption faster than expected. In particular, many people did not know how to ration their limited water and drank most of it in one gulp. After only about two hours, half of the people had finished all their water.

The heat and thirst tortured them all, but there was no sign of the supply station that Xiao Lin spoke of. Some people had already begun regretting it. “I actually think we should’ve gone all the

way with Wang Dalin. The most important thing is that the area behind us was the plains. I've looked at the signs on the map. The water sources are practically distributed in that area."

Xiao Lin looked at the idiot and said angrily, "If you can think of this, why can't the Thunder Kingdom's troops think of it? The climate around here is incredibly dry, and the garrison will surely build their camp near the water source to ensure a steady supply of water. It's impossible to escape once they enter the lion's den."

"How are you so sure they can't escape? Even though I don't want to take any risks, Wang Dalin actually made sense. The success rate is at least fifty-fifty. It's risky, but if you're not discovered..."

"It's impossible to succeed!" Xiao Lin sighed. "Have you noticed how the mandatory mission is written? We're supposed to escape the pursuit of the kingdom's army. That is the precondition for this mission, which means that the enemy already knows that we're coming from the beginning."

Xiao Lin scratched his head in annoyance. "I've been thinking about this problem since just now, because this precondition is a contradiction. If what is being simulated now is the actual battle that happened in history, then the enemy should only know about our presence after the exam started."

"How did they know? We didn't notice any scouts or anything."

Xiao Lin gestured with his palms up. "I can't wrap my head around it either, but if my guess is true, we'll be walking right into death's door if we do reconnaissance right now."

"That can't be right? Even if they discover us by accident, we could just disperse and retreat—"

"Wolf cavalry squadron," Xiao Lin shook his head and interrupted the other party. "Didn't you read the information? This garrison includes two light infantry squadrons and a wolf cavalry squadron."

"What about the wolf cavalry—Uh, okay..." The man who spoke was a dark-skinned male with a longbow on his back. He was very frank, as he proactively offered an apology to Xiao Lin after realizing that his thought process had been far too simple.

Anyone with a little bit of military knowledge could understand how formidable a squadron was on the plains in terms of the impact and speed. Xiao Lin did not know much about the wolf cavalry since there was no detailed description in the information, but he was quite sure that the students—with their two legs and a strength that barely reached Black Iron rank—were unable to outrun the cavalry of four-legged wolves.

The boy hesitated, then asked, "If the Thunder Kingdom's troops were prepared for this right from the start, why didn't you remind the others that they might not be able to escape the cavalry?"

Xiao Lin smiled bitterly. "I'm sure Wang Dalin never thought of this, but I can't say the same for others. This is all pure guesswork from me. To put it bluntly, there is still a risk."

Others nodded profoundly. Compared to Wang Dalin's radical approach, they admired Xiao Lin's steadiness and conservatism. Xiao Lin's choice was based on the premise that his side had been discovered, in which case they entered the canyon to avoid the wolf cavalry's pursuit. That was the best choice.

Xiao Lin glanced at Gu Xiaoyue for a moment. She looked at him with a frown too, but her expression was far from good. Xiao Lin smiled at her, but he had to admit that Gu Xiaoyue's lifespan made him feel like he had a bone stuck in his throat. He could not approve of taking risks at all. Extra rewards could be gained by completing those optional tasks, but if they failed, it was important to note that the girl had only two years of her life left!

The man who spoke patted Xiao Lin on the shoulder and said, "My name is Lu Renyi. I'm taking the Basic Archery course. If you need anything, just let me know, Class...Class Monitor."

The man was in his thirties and looked quite strong. He seemed a little embarrassed to address Xiao Lin as monitor and Xiao Lin did not mind that at all. "Just call me by my name. Lu Renyi, is it? If I remember correctly, your Basic Archery skills are already at level two."

"That's right. I was randomly assigned a saber during the admission test, then I rushed out and killed a few zombies before being killed myself," Lu Renyi complained regrettably. "I learned from that painful lesson and felt that close combat was too dangerous and easy to get yourself killed. That's why I took the Basic Archery course as an elective."

Xiao Lin was not quite sure how to react when he learned that the man was afraid of death. There were far fewer people taking the Basic Archery course compared to spells and melee classes. Xiao Lin occasionally used his monitor's authority to view other people's skill information, and he paid special attention to those who chose to take Basic Archery as a course.

Xiao Lin's explanation temporarily relieved everyone of their irritability. After a short rest, the team moved forward again. If Xiao Lin's map was marked correctly, they would have about half a day to reach the suspected supply depot.

"This road seems to be quite far from the agreed meeting place," Lu Renyi said all of a sudden. He also had a quick hand-drawn map, which was not very detailed. He vaguely noticed that they were going further and was asking out of curiosity rather than having any other thoughts.

"According to Monitor Xiao's speculation, retreating from the plains is impossible once those people are discovered. There is no need to gather for the time being. Let's just go our own way!" Another girl helped Xiao Lin answer.

"That's right, what's important is that we survive the task!" Lu Renyi did not think much of it, or in other words, the people who followed Xiao Lin placed survival as the ultimate goal of their exam.

Gu Xiaoyue cast a strange look at him again but kept quiet. Xiao Lin smiled wryly, for he might not necessarily be able to conceal his meticulous thoughts from that girl.

Gu Xiaoyue opposed the establishment of an assembly point and Xiao Lin insisted on doing so, but the two people were actually thinking in the same direction. They scarcely believed that Wang Dalin's group could actually complete any reconnaissance under the enemy's gaze, or even leave safely for that matter.

Xiao Lin took many things into consideration after the conversation between himself and Song Junlang the day before the exam. They were invaders of that world. If the exam was a near 100% simulation, then it would not just be the environment that was simulated—their enemies might be NPCs too, albeit with high-level intelligence.

The Thunder Kingdom they were going to face were also humans. They were not zombies without intelligence and reason. Would the enemy kill a group of unidentified invaders on the spot if they found out? Xiao Lin put himself in their shoes and thought about it. If he was the commander of an army who caught a spy or a scout of the invader, he would definitely put priority on finding out the other party's intelligence and intentions.

The method of obtaining information was not really important, whether it was torture or using special spells. In any case, Xiao Lin did not think Wang Dalin and the others would die rather than submit once they were caught. When Wang Dalin decided to proactively carry out reconnaissance, it almost certainly meant that their group would be exposed.

Xiao Lin agreed to set up a rendezvous point not to fool Wang Dalin and the others, but to deliberately relay that information to the enemy garrison's commander should any of the students be captured!

Chapter 65 - Desert Iguana

Chapter 65: Desert Iguana

During the latter part of the journey, Xiao Lin restricted what was left of the water among everyone there. The dozen or so people had some trust in him and they all followed suit.

The billowing heatwaves swept back and forth in the canyon. It was really uncomfortable to be rushing on in the blaring heat. However, no one dared slow down, because if Xiao Lin had guessed correctly, the enemy's garrison would have found their tracks early on. It was highly probable that there were already soldiers chasing after them.

Everyone's physical strength was gradually exhausted. Xiao Lin's Basic Fitness and Basic Physique had improved slightly during the entire month's training, but by afternoon his physical strength had waned and was unable to keep up.

The few girls with even lower Basic Fitness levels found it even more unbearable. The lack of water, coupled with the heatstroke, caused them to walk unsteadily, like a small sapling that was bound to fall at any time after swaying in the strong wind.

Xiao Lin looked worriedly at Gu Xiaoyue. He remembered that her other attributes were very poor despite her super high intelligence. Her face was extremely pale and her lips were tightly pursed together. The strong girl never once complained, but Xiao Lin knew full well that Gu Xiaoyue's physical strength was already going into overdrive.

Just as everyone was on the verge of physical and mental collapse, an accident happened at that exact moment. Their team had spread out in a serpentine manner, and a thin, tall boy was walking in front. His physical exhaustion made him listless and caused his gaze to be shaky. All of a sudden, a black shadow leapt out from a small mound two or three meters away from him.

"Be careful!"

"Get away!"

Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue warned the guy at the exact same time. Since the two of them were the only ones in the team who had learnt Basic Perception, they—despite their comparatively low perception level—became aware of its presence much quicker than the others.

The boy was stupefied for less than a second and he instinctively leaned to the right. Unfortunately, the black shadow had already struck him at about the same time, and everyone saw a spray of blood spurt out. The boy's left arm was thrown high into the air and it landed on the sand not far away.

The boy fell to the ground, screaming and howling in pain.

The black shadow landed nearby and everyone managed to get a close look at the attacker. It was a lizard-like creature covered with yellowish-green horny scales, but unlike lizards, the creature was not a reptile[1]. It stood on its powerful hind limbs and its forelimbs were a pair of black half-meter-long blades. Traces of flesh and blood were still on the blades too.

Everyone immediately drew their weapons and pulled away a little later. The injured boy lay in the middle and convulsed uncontrollably, but the strange creature stared at him and made a low grunting cry. For a moment, no one dared to move forward.

“This is a Desert Iguana. It appears in the dry and high-temperature deserts or severely weathered environments. Because it eats high-metal content ores all the year-round, its forelimbs gradually evolved into a blade-like shape, and its instantaneous explosive power is very high!” Gu Xiaoyue's calm voice stunned Xiao Lin slightly as it reverberated through the gorge, but that was not the time for him to ask her how she knew that.

Although there was a reminder in the information about the small number of creatures in the canyon, it did not give a proper introduction to those creatures.

Xiao Lin pulled out his novice dagger and novice staff, then moved slowly to the left and said in a low voice, “I'll distract the iguana[2][2]. You guys save him first and bandage him immediately!”

“Gu Xiaoyue, you and Lu Renyi will cooperate with me by my side! Then, we'll have a couple of other people join forces to subdue this guy!” To Xiao Lin's dismay, he glanced across at his team and saw that only Lu Renyi and Gu Xiaoyue had long-range attacks.

“Its hind limbs are very developed, so be very careful of its jumping power!” Lu Renyi reminded. He immediately took an arrow from the quiver on his back and shot it with his bow. The howling arrow shot through the air and landed on the sand beside the iguana.

The others cast disdainful looks at him. The distance was no more than a few meters, but the arrow failed to even hit its target. Lu Renyi coughed, “Guys, that was... I was adjusting my aim!”

The arrow seemed to have alarmed the desert iguana. It roared and inched toward the wounded person still lying on the ground and bleeding. As soon as it moved, those who were tasked to rescue the person did not dare to move forward.

“Energy Bomb!”

“Ice Bullet!”

Gu Xiaoyue and Xiao Lin shot one after another. The light blue energy bomb crossed the air in an arc and hit the iguana's back. A couple of its yellowish-green horny scales exploded after being hit by the energy bullets. It was severely wounded, and the spell's lethality was rather effective. Next, a roundish ice bullet came right after and struck the iguana's tail.

The iguana uttered a painful roar. A shallow layer of frost enveloped its tail and its powerful feet, severely restricting its movement. That was the slowing-down effect of the Ice Bullet spell.

"Good job!" the others cheered.

"Hurry up and save him!" Xiao Lin yelled and touched his nose angrily. He was clearly aiming at the iguana's eyes earlier, and his accuracy was rather terrible. Fortunately, the attack managed to strike the tail.

After recovering from the initial shock, everyone else took the opportunity to advance forward and dragged the broken-armed boy back. Two girls hurriedly took out the emergency bandages from their backpacks and bandaged him, while others stepped forward to help Xiao Lin deal with the iguana.

All of them were students who had passed the admission test. They faced the battle at hand with increased calmness compared to their very first time. They quickly surrounded the iguana but were wary of rushing up immediately, as they were still uncertain of whether the creature was of novice or Black Iron rank.

When the desert iguana found itself surrounded, it raised its blade-like arms and extended its scarlet red tongue. Its eyes wore a look of savagery.

Whoosh!

Another light-blue energy bomb whizzed past, but the iguana was well prepared that time. In other words, it was actually waiting for such an opportunity, as it kicked its feet and leapt toward the boy nearest to it, who was holding a dagger. Gu Xiaoyue's energy bomb had practically chafed its abdomen and left a layer of scars, but it did not seem to affect the iguana's speed.

As Gu Xiaoyue mentioned earlier, the instantaneous explosive power of the desert iguana was quite formidable. It was brave enough to attack actively despite being surrounded and at a disadvantage. Its was also incredibly fast, down to seconds or even less than a second. As freshmen who had only started training for less than a month, it was very difficult for them to react.

Snap! There was a crisp crackling sound, accompanied by an explosion of crystal ice chips.

The desert iguana's half-leaping body was once again covered in a shallow layer of frost, reducing its speed drastically. Although it only took a few tenths of a second, it was long enough for the person who had been targeted by the iguana to react and hurry away.

"Monitor Xiao, thank you!" The man was still trying to collect himself when he cast Xiao Lin a grateful look.

"Seriously?" Xiao Lin muttered. His face turned red and he shook his wand somewhat annoyed. In fact, he and Gu Xiaoyue executed their spells at the same time and aimed at the immobile

iguana. Unfortunately, his spell once again deviated from the predetermined trajectory and flew into the air.

Luckily for Xiao Lin, the desert iguana jumped up at exactly that moment. Although it avoided Gu Xiaoyue's energy bomb, it was hit again by the ice bullet that followed.

[1] We believe the author was trying to say that this is not a reptile in the traditional sense of the word.

[2] 挖掘者 – in this and a few other instances throughout this chapter, the author used this term, which means 'digger'. However, since we are quite certain that the author was actually referring to the iguana, we choose to translate all occasions of 挖掘者 into iguana.

Chapter 66 - Victory

Chapter 66: Victory

Xiao Lin felt like he should be buying a lottery ticket after managing to get two lucky hits. Of course, that was contingent on the Dawn Academy actually having something like the lottery.

Xiao Lin's Basic Perception was LV2, and the level of one's perception directly affected the hit rate of spells; that was something they learned in class. Xiao Lin had a new commissioned wand, and the spell that it carried was the Ice Bullet, which had a high requirement for perception. He had never expected that the spell would be on target two times in a row.

As the other spellcaster in the group, Gu Xiaoyue's expression did not look too great. He glanced over at the tired expression on the girl's face and had a moment of realization.

They had been running for half a day in high heat, and everyone had already expended most of their energy, which caused quite a big impact on their fighting prowess. He felt like he should have realized it earlier; the attributes that the recruits gave earlier were just a reference, or rather, just a representation of their abilities in normal circumstances. Things like injuries or a drastic decrease in their physical strength would naturally cause some fluctuations in those attributes.

The injured desert iguana once again tried to break out, but no one was willing to let it go just like that. Most of them had been slaving away for a whole month, and this was their very first battle after all that training. They were not willing to lose, especially after Xiao Lin had shot out two very important ice bullets, which also served to bolster their confidence.

Xiao Lin regained his fighting spirit as well, even though everyone was in bad shape, they still had a big advantage in numbers. If they really let the iguana escape, it would make everyone feel very useless. Furthermore, if the iguana really escaped, the b*stard might return to attack them again, so the best solution was still to solve it once and for all right there.

"We can't retreat! Do not stray too far apart and do not leave enough space for the iguana to jump! Do not be afraid. Surround it! Do you guys want to go back and get laughed at by the others for being cowards?" Xiao Lin commanded. He was appointed as the one in charge, and had saved

people with his ice bullets earlier. which caused everyone to believe in him even more, so everyone decided to follow his instructions.

The others he was referring to were the group of people that followed Wang Dalin on reconnaissance. The majority of the people who scored A and B ranks during the admissions test were there, so they had pretty decent skills.

Encouraged by his words, some of them closed the distance between the iguanas, causing the formation to get tighter. The iguana felt a sense of danger, and began to wave around its two black blades, constantly causing its blades to collide and emit an intense noise. The iguana was very nimble, managing to repel most of the blades that were attacking it, but at the same time it was unable to escape.

“It’s so quick with its blades! It must be at least at the Black Iron-rank!”

“I don’t think so. Its strength isn’t that great!”

“You call that not that great? F*ck, look at how deep the wound on my shoulder is!”

“That’s probably because you’re too weak!”

Everyone quickly understood the level the iguana was at. They did not know its general attributes, but could estimate that it was between novice and Black Iron-rank, but still stronger than these novices nonetheless.

Lu Renyi was at the perimeter and itching to pull his bow, but was stopped by Xiao Lin. He may have a LV2 in Basic Archery, but his exhaustion would decrease his hit rate by a good amount. The chances of him accidentally hitting a teammate was higher at the moment.

Xiao Lin also made Gu Xiaoyue stay on the sidelines; he believed that the girl was still able to maintain a high hit rate at the moment, but rather than risking it, it was better to let her rest up first.

Xiao Lin put away his wand and once again took out his dagger; with his current meditation rank and intelligence, the ice bullet, which was a Black Iron-rank spell, was above his current capabilities; that meant that he only had a limited amount of uses.

The spells he flung at the iguana with Gu Xiaoyue earlier had caused quite a few of the hard scales on its body to fall off. Other than the slow effect from the ice bullet, it also had an F-rank damage rating. When facing a monster that was not yet at the Black Iron-rank, the damage was very visible.

Being surrounded and attacked, many wounds started to appear on the iguana, especially because a lot of them were smart enough to focus their attacks on the weak points left behind by the removed scales. They kept attacking those spots and the iguana was now covered in blood.

The iguana had a lot of vitality. Even though it had been hurt to that degree, it did not stop its blades at all. It would even occasionally catch some people who had slowed down, sending a sharp blade toward them. After a bit, around five or six people retreated from varying degrees of injury.

Xiao Lin had recovered some of his strength and joined the fray. His strength was not the highest in the class, and even within this team, there were a few that exceeded him, but facing the onslaught of blades from the desert iguana, his attacks were the most skillful.

Even in the heat of battle, a few curious ones still took the opportunity to observe Xiao Lin. As the monitor of Class Seven and someone who was publicly called out for having the lowest total attribute scores, it was hard for some of them to willingly accept his position. However, the ice bullets he shot out earlier and the swordsmanship he was showing off at that moment caused quite a few of them to look very surprised.

Xiao Lin was very thankful to Cheng Ming, the acting monitor of Class One, who was horrifying when it came to the talent he had in swordsmanship. During the month of Basic Swordsmanship classes, Xiao Lin had been sparring with that maniac. Even though he asked for Cheng Ming to control his strength, it was still hard to match him, and Xiao Lin ended every class full of injuries, unable to stop himself from spending points to treat himself.

His Basic Blocking ability was honed in that environment, and because of that, Xiao Lin did not feel like the iguana's blades amounted to much; his LV2 Basic Blocking was more than enough to handle it.

After a few minutes, they could feel that the desert iguana was beginning to slow down. It seemed to be on its last reserves of energy. Xiao Lin let the two people beside him hold the iguana off as he retreated two steps. He held his novice sword up high and a cold light began to shine from the tip of the blade.

As if sensing imminent danger, the desert iguana began to get even wilder, causing the blood on its body to splash everywhere as it dashed toward Xiao Lin, but the few people in front of him managed to hold it off.

Slashing!

There were people covering for him this time, so Xiao Lin managed to use quite a few seconds of time to gather his strength for Slashing. The maxed out Slashing skill was very powerful if he got the full charge time; based on his testing during training, it was between F+ to E in power.

The blade fell heavily on the desert iguana's right shoulder; the scales in that area had long since fallen off, revealing the soft flesh underneath. With the full power of Slashing, the blade went through it like a hot knife through butter.

Half of the iguana's body was forcefully torn apart by Xiao Lin's blade, and its organs flowed out with its blood. As it fell on the ground, the iguana cried out in agony and it finally weakly lost consciousness. The thick smell of blood began to spread throughout the ravine.

Success!

Both the uninjured parties and the ones currently treating their wounds let out a joyous cry, everyone was shaking their hands and hugging each other in celebration.

Chapter 67 - An Educated Guess

Chapter 67: An Educated Guess

There were 20 of them in total, and six of them were injured from the battle. Other than the one who lost his hand, the rest of the injuries were not a big issue after bandaging the wounds. However, most of them were exhausted and they could not help but take a long rest where they were.

The one who mistakenly ate the poisonous wild fruit had already woken up, so it did not look like the poison was life-threatening. The only problem was that he looked dispirited and had no strength at all, which meant he still needed help in order to move around.

“Monitor, that was pretty good swordsmanship.” They had started to test out calling Xiao Lin the monitor after that battle.

Xiao Lin smiled, “My Basic Swordsmanship is already at LV3.”

Everyone was shocked; other than the monitors, no one had access to information about the attributes of others. They were still stuck with the impression of Xiao Lin’s total basic attribute points not exceeding 10 during the admission test.

Basic Swordsmanship was very easy to level up at the start, but the difficulty greatly increased when the ranks went up. There were only very few people in class that managed to train any of their skills up to LV3.

“Monitor Xiao, what spell did you use earlier?” A girl said with a tone of admiration.

“Ice bullet.”

“Isn’t that a Black Iron-rank spell? Is your Basic Meditation already so high leveled?”

“It’s a skill attached to my wand. When the test is over, if you all have enough redemption points, you can consider commissioning one for yourself.” Xiao Lin decided to help advertise that third year senior. He also added, “However, my Basic Meditation is already at LV3, so I do have the ability to learn some novice spells.”

Everyone sucked their breaths in, Basic Meditation LV3 was even more surprising than Basic Swordsmanship LV3; everyone knew how hard meditation was after one month of classes.

Xiao Ling suddenly remembered something. “Gu Xiaoyue, how did you know about the desert iguanas earlier?”

“Library.”

“Huh?”

“There’s a library in the academy.”

Xiao Lin facepalmed; Dawn Academy did have a library, but everyone was usually so busy training, not many people went there. It would seem like he should make some time to go take a look after the test.

Everyone leaned against the rocks as they chatted, using the limited shade the rocks provided to avoid the blazing hot sunlight.

The students that were following Xiao Lin did not have great scores in the admissions test, even though they trained as well, but their abilities were still not as strong as others. They understood that they would probably never get the chance to be a monitor, so they adopted a nonchalant attitude, not offending Xiao Lin, but not completely acknowledging him either.

However, the battle earlier had caused them to look at Xiao Lin more favorably, especially the guy who was saved by the ice bullet. Everyone subconsciously began to think that it would not be too bad if Xiao Lin continued to be the monitor.

“Lu Renyi, what are you looking for?” Everyone had a basic familiarity with each other, and someone looked at Lu Renyi rummaging through the iguana’s corpse and could not help but ask.

Someone immediately joked, “Monitor, you said we could hunt the monsters here if we ran out of food, but let me make myself clear, I absolutely will not eat this plaything!”

Other than the arrow that he missed right at the start, Lu Renyi did not do much earlier. He had already recovered most of his stamina, and was braving the hot sun to rummage through the corpse. He finally brought the two blades from the iguana and smiled, “I was lacking a way to defend myself, so I’ll use these.”

“Are you sure we can bring the things from this world back to the academy?” someone asked.

Lu Renyi gaped. “Ah, I did not consider that.”

Xiao Lin recalled what Department Head Song told him before and said, “I’m afraid you won’t be able to. The novice weapons from the admissions test were given by the school, and not part of the world itself. Do you feel that this world we’re in right now really exists?”

“It’s probably fake.”

“If it’s fake, then why do we need to deduct out lifespan if we die?”

Xiao Lin deliberated and said, “I understand it like this: everyone should be familiar with online games, right? To us, the people in the games are all fake. However, if there is some super skill that can cause us to turn into data and enter the game, then to us, it’s still real.”

Some of them nodded in understanding, while others had a confused expression on their faces.

Xiao Lin shook his head and smiled, “Basically, what I mean is that the school’s mock practices seem to be fake for outsiders, but it’s definitely real for the participants. Ah, fine, I actually don’t really understand it clearly myself.”

Lu Renyi laughed out loud, “Even though this is a simulation, I still feel it’s real. Look at that falcon up in the sky; it’s circling around, probably attracted by the corpse.”

“Falcon?”

Xiao Lin raised his head and squinted, in the vast blue sky, there was a black falcon circling around. Of course this was Planet Norma, so that creature might not be a falcon; he could only say it looked like one.

Xiao Lin suddenly stirred as a serious expression showed on his face. He asked, “I remember when he entered the test environment in the afternoon. There was a falcon in the sky then too.”

Lu Renyi thought for a bit and replied uncertainly, “I think so. I can’t really remember. Why are you asking?”

Gu Xiaoyue’s expression changed suddenly.

Finally some other students seemed to realize something, but they did not want to believe it and were visibly in doubt.

Xiao Lin stood up and brushed away the dirt on his body. “Judge Academy once sent their elites to investigate this area, and they are definitely better than us at avoiding detection, but they were still detected by the troops here. If it isn’t some detail that could be easily overlooked, I don’t think Judge Academy would have been exposed those years ago.”

“So you think that the falcon above us right now is a scout from the Thunder Kingdom?” There were still some people in disbelief.

“Even if it noticed us, how is it going to warn the troops? I actually did notice it following us around all day, but I didn’t think much of it,” a girl said.

Xiao Lin reminded them, “Don’t forget, we’re not on Earth anymore. That thing might look like a falcon, but who knows what kind of creature it is. Furthermore, magic exists on Planet Norma; there might be talking animals as well. There might even be spells that can directly communicate with animals.”

That caused everyone’s expressions to shift. Planet Norma was a place filled with magical wonder. There was still a lot that they did not understand or did not know.

Xiao Lin sighed. “No wonder the compulsory task had us already being discovered as a condition. It might be a little late, but at the very least our movements from now on should not be exposed to the enemy! Lu Renyi, get rid of that thing!”

Lu Renyi had recovered quite a bit of his accuracy after the rest; he pulled bow and shot numerous arrows at the target. The falcon struggled for a while but, like a kite that lost its strings, it fell right down.

Chapter 68 - Supply Depot

Chapter 68: Supply Depot

After a short break, they continued their journey.

The falcon had fallen quite far away. In order to avoid delay, they did not look for it. Xiao Lin still could not confirm if that falcon was a scout, or if it had already relayed their location to the enemy.

That question was bugging Xiao Lin from the moment they started the test, but after removing all impossibilities, no matter how unbelievable the final answers were, they were still the final choices.

They were too preoccupied to concern themselves with the fate of Wang Dalin's group that was sent on reconnaissance, because it was very possible that the Thunder Kingdom's troops were heading for them at this very moment.

With the uncertain atmosphere, everyone had a serious look on their faces as they sped up their pace.

It was the evening when they finally reached the possible supply depot on the map. It was a very large valley, and the rocks around the area were very precipitous. There seemed to be a hole in the southeastern corner, and there were even wooden supports, so it was obviously a man-made tunnel.

That was probably the best piece of news they had the whole day: the supply depot was actually there, which meant they could obtain enough food and water. A smile appeared on everyone's tired face.

"Hold on!" Xiao Lin stopped the ones that were preparing to rush over, he asked, "Let's discuss first; what is everyone's level with the Common Language of Planet Norma?"

Lu Renyi had an exasperated look on his face. "Huh? Why are you asking that?"

Xiao Lin explained, "There will definitely be people in the supply depot, and they will be Normans. We can treat them as NPCs, but how could we possibly talk to them normally? Normans can't possibly speak our language."

Everyone was dumbfounded; many of them had actually not thought of that. Most of them only had LV1 or LV2 in the language, and that was basically the level where they could understand the bare basics; it was hard for them to even converse in daily speech.

Xiao Lin looked at Gu Xiaoyue; he remembered that she already had LV3 in the Common Language of Planet Norma, which was currently the highest in the whole class, but he did not know what sort of standard LV3 represented.

Gu Xiaoyue nodded. "Daily speech is not too hard, but it will be very hard to be fluent. I'll only be able to use a few keywords to try and communicate. The only thing is how do you want to introduce ourselves?"

Lu Renyi had not fully comprehended the situation yet, and asked curiously, "What do you mean?"

Xiao Lin could not help but grin at the headache he had; that was a really tough question. He said, “We’re playing the role of Americans from the Judge Academy, but we can’t just introduce ourselves as people from a different world who have come to invade and conquer their country.”

Everyone looked at each other in dismay. At that time, a lot of them, including Xiao Lin, realized the importance of the compulsory classes. Language, geography and history—those classes were not held in nearly as high a regard as the combat classes, especially to those of them who hated studying. It was such a chore memorizing things, and a lot of them were used to complaining about those subjects in their free time.

However, this was a foreign world, and not some game. It was not a place where having enough skill could settle everything.

“This simulation seems to not only be testing our skill, but all our abilities, including the compulsory classes.” Xiao Lin felt a bit regretful as he looked at Gu Xiaoyue with hopeful eyes. However, she could only shake her head. Even though she was talented, she was still training and studying with everyone as well. She had spent a large amount of time on meditation, so she could not possibly have had the time to do well in her classes.

If they had more of an understanding of the invasion of the Thunder Kingdom by Judge Academy during 45 N.C, or if their language skills were a bit higher, they would not be in such an awkward situation.

However, they still stubbornly went to the cave. Everyone held their weapons tightly, but they would not simply use violence to solve the problem unless they had no other choice.

Walking into the cave, the space in front of them rapidly widened. There was a lot more space inside than they initially thought. It looked like half the hill had been dug empty. It was cool and breezy inside the cave and felt abnormally comfortable. The damp ground told them it was very likely there was an underground water source.

They had been marching in a desolate environment for almost a day, and after going through all sorts of suffering, all of them felt like they had just escaped hell. It was quite dark in the cave, especially since it was already the evening, so there was very limited light coming in from outside. However, they quickly saw a few torches light up in front of them.

“Be careful, everyone!” Xiao Lin warned them in a low voice, and then headed in front with Gu Xiaoyue. Gu Xiaoyue was the only one among them who had the necessary language skills to communicate, so Xiao Lin was especially careful to stay by her side to protect her.

Everyone was alert, but they were curious as well. Even though this was a simulated world, this was still the first time they would interact with a Norman, who could also be called aliens.

Under the torchlight, two men and a woman walked briskly toward them. The female was the furthest forward, and she looked not that much different from someone from Earth. Her hair and pupils were black, and looked pretty similar to an easterner. Her skin was on the darker side, and she wore a long white robe. She was built very sturdily and had a well-travelled look. Professor Dai had mentioned in class before that the humans on Planet Norma looked quite similar to the humans of Earth, the only difference being their various inner skills and attributes.

The woman stopped about ten meters away from them, and the two men stood next to her, looking like bodyguards. They each had a blade in hand and were cautiously eyeing them.

The woman cast a suspicious gaze on Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue, then she said, a clear but foreign voice, “@#¥%...&*”

Xiao Lin still had a LV2 in the common language, so he could somewhat pick out singular words and phrases. However, the woman spoke very quickly, and even had a bit of an accent, so he was completely clueless. Xiao Lin forced a smile, hoping it would be a polite reply, and looked at Gu Xiaoyue with the corner of his eye, signalling for her to quickly translate.

Gu Xiaoyue furrowed her eyebrows and she worked hard to digest what that woman had said. She took some effort to listen, but she was still at least a level higher than everyone else, so very quickly she opened her mouth, and carefully said, “@#,¥%,*&...,@*¥”

Gu Xiaoyue spoke rather slowly; she was not very fluent as well. It was like she used a few simple keywords to string together a passable sentence. Xiao Lin could not help but reminisce when he learnt English in school, and felt a bit of sympathy for the girl. Translating was really tiring.

The woman also had some difficulty making out what Gu Xiaoyue said, but it looked like she understood. The two of them started to communicate with simple sentences, and Xiao Lin could occasionally make out a few phrases, like ‘us’, ‘come from’, ‘merchants’, and ‘soldiers’.

Xiao Lin did not dare drop his guard, but the exchange seemed to be going well. After a few minutes the woman waved and the men sheathed their weapons. Gu Xiaoyue gave Xiao Lin a look as well, and Xiao Lin understood immediately. He asked everyone to sheath their weapons too as a show of good faith in a low voice.

Chapter 69 - Sneak Attack

Chapter 69: Sneak Attack

“I told them we were adventurers passing by and needed a place to stay for the night. I asked if they could spare us some food and water as well,” Gu Xiaoyue whispered to Xiao Lin.

“What did she say?”

Gu Xiaoyue tilted her head and thought for a bit, “There were some phrases I couldn’t quite understand, but the general meaning was that this isn’t just a simple supply depot. It seems to have been built specifically for the troops nearby, and would provide them with regular supplies.”

Xiao Lin was suddenly very anxious. He whispered in an even lower tone, “Could they be soldiers of the Thunder Kingdom?”

“I don’t think so; they seem to just be merchants.” Gu Xiaoyue adjusted her glasses, and had a hint of confusion in her eyes. “I find it odd too that an army garrisoned in the borders of a country would actually need merchants to provide them with supplies. However, it doesn’t seem like they are lying.”

Xiao Lin raised his head and measured the few people. There was a whole group behind the woman, and they were also looking at them both curiously and cautiously. They wore all sorts of clothes, which did not make them seem like an army. Of course, he did not dare to be sure that Planet Norma had uniforms for its soldiers as a custom. In the end, they had way too little information, but it was way too late to regret not studying up on history.

Xiao Lin asked, "Since they're merchants, would they be willing to provide food and water?"

Gu Xiaoyue had a strange expression on her face, "She said they were merchants, and only accept deals."

Xiao Lin was stumped, he obviously knew what a deal was, but what did they have to trade? He did not think Normans would accept currency from Earth.

Gu Xiaoyue added, "Planet Norma's human countries use gold as their primary currency; they also use barter trade."

"F*ck! We should just take it for ourselves!" Lu Renyi had a murderous expression on his face.

Xiao Lin shook his head. They were at a disadvantage in numbers and did not know how strong their opponents were. They had just gone through a full day's journey, and had a few injured people among them, so the odds of victory were not clear. Furthermore, their objectives did not say they needed to fight these merchants, so it would be best to avoid any deaths or injuries that they could.

Probably guessing their predicament, the Norman woman pointed at Lu Renyi and muttered some words at him.

Lu Renyi jumped in fright and gulped as he frantically looked to Gu Xiaoyue. "What...what is she saying? Does she want my body as compensation? She's too ugly!"

Xiao Lin rolled his eyes, managing to somewhat understand what the woman meant. Gu Xiaoyue carefully dissected the words and slowly translated, "She seems to be saying something can be used to trade with them, but I don't understand what she's referring to."

"She must be talking about the iguana blades." Xiao Lin did not understand either, but the only thing Lu Renyi had on his body that could possibly be any worth was the blades he got from the iguana's corpse.

"No way! They're mine!" Lu Renyi said unhappily.

Xiao Lin snatched the two jet-black blades from Lu Renyi, saying, "It's fine, you can't even bring anything from here back to the academy!"

The Norman woman took the blades and had a happy expression on her face. She said some more words, then turned around and left. Gu Xiaoyue softly said, "She has agreed. She wants us to wait here; they will divide a portion of water and food for us."

Xiao Lin let out a breath. No matter what, avoiding battle was a decent result. At the thought of food and drink, everyone had relieved expressions.

“Let’s bring in the injured first,” Xiao Lin said. They were worried there would be some conflict, so did not bring the few injured students in with them.

The ones that were injured by the iguana did not have huge problems, but the one who accidentally ate wild fruit was still in a powerless state. The poison was not fatal, but it seemed like the effects lasted for a long time. After entering the cave, he lied down on the cold rock wall and licked his dry lips, blushing in shame as he said, “I’m really sorry for dragging everyone down like this.”

“It’s okay. You must be really thirsty. Don’t worry, we’ll have water soon.”

After a few minutes, a few men carried a few jars of water and some bowls; they also brought a few slabs of dried meat. They left quickly after placing the things on the floor. Even though both sides had a successful deal, they were still cautious of each other, and neither side would willingly go near the other.

The clear water felt like ambrosia at that moment; everyone’s eyes shone brightly as they rushed to the jars, fighting for a drink. There were very limited bowls available and the ones who did not manage to get a bowl would just drink straight from the jars.

“D*mn! How disgusting can you get!” A girl shouted out in horror. However, she could not hold herself back and followed suit as well.

Xiao Lin shook his head; he carefully rationed his water the entire journey. Even though he was thirsty as well, he still had some water in his canteen, so he was not pressed to fight with everyone else. He took a piece of dried meat and sat on the side, looking at Gu Xiaoyue, who was not fighting for the water either. He tore his meat in half and offered it. “Eat some. I saw that you didn’t touch the biscuits in your bag at all during the journey.”

Gu Xiaoyue accepted the meat, and took a small bite, taking her time before swallowing. She said softly, “If we did not find the supply depot, the biscuits would have been our last resort, so it obviously needed to be saved.”

Xiao Lin smiled and took a bite as well. He could not tell what sort of meat it was; the texture was very dry and the taste was not great either. It felt a little like rotten meat, he almost spat it out after he swallowed it, but looking at the girl in front of him who was the epitome of calm, he forced himself to keep it down.

That meat tasted horrible, but it was very filling. After a few mouthfuls, Xiao Lin felt like his stomach was full. Looking at the meat they had left, he estimated that the 20 of them could make it last for about two days if it was properly rationed.

As he thought about how they could get even more food, Xiao Lin gulped down the last bits of water in his canteen before getting up and refilling it. He suddenly heard a cry of pain from Lu Renyi, and he fell right onto the floor, clutching his stomach in pain. Everyone else started to drop down as well.

Xiao Lin was extremely surprised, and he could make out a few shadowy figures rushing toward them in the dim light. He took out his wand with his left hand in realization and fired two ice bullets.

Light was limited in the cave, and Xiao Lin could not concentrate properly before firing. However, the enemies were numerous and all close to each other; two flowing ice bullets flew toward the opponents with unsteady trajectories and he could hear two cries in agony and a clear sound of impact, telling him his two spells did not miss.

Gu Xiaoyue was on the alert as well; after the ice bullets, she fired three energy bombs as well. She targeted the enemy crowd, and when the explosion cleared, three enemies had turned into mush right on the spot. The ones next to them were also hit by some of the impact, and even though they did not die, they still cried out in pain as they suffered injuries.

The sudden counterattack caused a lot of confusion; Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue's speedy retaliation did not manage to completely stop the assault from the Normans, but both of their spells seemed to have been out of the enemy's expectations. The sneak attack was halted, everyone who was not injured on the enemy's side began to get up, each of them grasping their own weapons. However, they seemed to be afraid of Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue, temporarily too afraid to advance.

Chapter 70 - Counterattack

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Translator: EndlessFantasy Translation **Editor:** EndlessFantasy Translation

"Anyone who can move, come now!" Xiao Lin did not dare turn his head around, so he shouted.

"They...they poisoned the water!" Lu Renyi shakily climbed up from the ground, his face pale as he held onto his longbow with his right hand. His entire body was trembling and he did not seem to even have the strength to pull his body.

It was true; those Normans did something to the water, but the meat did not seem to have been tampered with. Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue did not manage to drink the water earlier, so they escaped it by sheer luck. The ones that did not drink the water totaled up to five people, and about four or five others drank very little. Even though their faces showed that they were in pain, they could still force themselves to get up.

The rest of them were miserable; most of them could not even stand up. They were in pain and cursing up a storm; a few more severe cases were not even making noise, it was unclear if they were dead or just unconscious.

The Norman woman walked up slowly, and uttered a slew of words. This time, Xiao Lin could somewhat make out one of the phrases she said: "Surrender."

"Why!" Xiao Lin did not understand why they were being ambushed like that.

Gu Xiaoyue tried to translate, but the woman shook her head, as if she did not understand. Gu Xiaoyue slowed her speech, and slowly repeated the sentence.

The woman had a strange look on her face. "@# ¥ %...&*"

Gu Xiaoyue thought for a while, and did not translate right away. Xiao Lin looked toward her and the girl said with a difficult tone, “Invaders. She said we’re invaders.”

Xiao Lin paused momentarily, then his face went green. He understood that he made a huge mistake this time. Song Junlang’s words before the test once again rang in his ears.

‘Who are we?’

‘We are invaders! We are no different from the allied forces who invaded China at the end of the Qing Dynasty!’

‘The moment we stepped into Planet Norma, we were destined to be enemies to that whole world.’

‘Our hands are definitely stained with the blood of a foreign world!’

Song Junlang had warned him very strictly, and he felt that he had it ingrained in his mind as well. However, the current situation occurred because Xiao Lin forgot his status. Even though they were playing the role of Judge Academy’s elites, they were still invaders in this world.

It might not be the real world, and they might be facing NPCs that were extremely well-simulated, but this was still a test environment that was as good as real. The Normans did not need too much of a reason to poison them, since they were still invaders at the end of the day.

The situation could not properly be understood unless one personally experienced it, and that might just be the reason why the academy had the scenario in the test.

Wallowing in both anger and regret, the only thing that made Xiao Lin feel somewhat happy was that this was just a simulated practice. Even if they really died here, they would only give up ten years of their life. If it was in Planet Norma, then they would have had to give up 20, and if they were captured, they might even be in a situation where death was the better option.

“She wants us to surrender, and seems to be saying she does not want to kill us mercilessly! However, she might just be saying we can’t beat them,” Gu Xiaoyue explained with some uncertainty.

“Ask her to go and die!” Xiao Lin clenched his teeth, quickly trying to analyze the current situation. The opponents were a self-proclaimed merchant troupe, and numbered to about thirty people. Gu Xiaoyue and himself struck first earlier, and eliminated at least five of them, and another four or five had varying degrees of injuries. However, the opponents did not look like they were all combatants, and less than twenty of them were holding actual weapons.

On Xiao Lin’s side, there were currently only 10 of them that were ready for battle, and half of those 10 were enduring pain, so their combat capabilities were still unclear.

“They have the advantage in numbers, but they’re not that strong,” Xiao Lin analyzed, and gave the rest of them some confidence as well.

Gu Xiaoyue and his spells were both F-rank in damage and seemed to have been instantly fatal when they hit earlier. Part of the reason was that those people did not have any defensive tools,

but it was also obvious that they would not be that skilled, possibly even far below the desert iguana.

“Lu Renyi, can you move?”

Lu Renyi forced himself to nod, and clenched his teeth in pain as he said, “I’ll do my best.”

Xiao Lin sighed in secret; only him, Gu Xiaoyue, and Lu Renyi had long ranged attacks on the team; the rest of the spell users and archers were all on the other team.

“Everyone else, get the ones who can’t move out of the cave; we’ll hold them off at range. They don’t seem to have any long-range capabilities. Lu Renyi, all you need to do is focus on firing. You don’t have to aim, we just need to suppress them.”

The cave’s entrance was too small, so if the enemies rushed them all at once, they would not be able to avoid it; the ones who were immobile could very well be killed.

One of the criterias for failure this time was if over 70% of the class died, and they currently did not know what the situation was on the other team. Worst case scenario: if a few of them died there, it could very well cause the whole class to fail the task.

The Norman woman in charge saw through their intentions and, with a wave, about ten of them started to advance. Lu Renyi forced himself to pull his bow; it was hard to aim, but as long as he shot toward the crowd, there was a good chance of him hitting someone. The enemies did not look like they had any long-range attacks and seemed to lack defense. This made Xiao Lin believe that they were really just a group of merchants that happened to have some weapons, since they could not possibly be the army.

Just accounting for damage capabilities, those merchants were probably not a match for them. The power of magic once again showed itself. Mages were harder to train than melee classes, and their numbers were even less, but the destructive power was very shocking.

However, actual battle did not rely on statistics. Xiao Lin’s ice bullet spell was very mentally taxing, and he did not get much time to rest either. He was actually feeling a bit dizzy at that point. Gu Xiaoyue’s Basic Meditation and Intelligence were high enough that they could support her casting energy bombs many times, but the spells were not instantaneous. In that world, spells did not have anything like special incantations, but rather needed to have their elements compiled, arranged, and constructed, which required time. At their current level, it was impossible to shorten that process to the level where it was instantaneous.

Their enemies seem to have grasped this weakness as well, and everyone rushed over, as if they planned to throw away their lives. It was impossible for Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue to handle all of them at once.

‘Ice bullet!’

‘Energy bomb!’

Xiao Lin and Gu Xiaoyue did not need to discuss it; they looked at each other and chose the same target. The ice bullet and energy bomb both shot toward the leader of the merchants: the big Norman woman.

Boom! Boom!

Two simultaneous explosions and the woman who was just standing there was hit without issue by the two spells. All the other Normans were momentarily stunned, and they slowly stopped their onslaught. When the dust settled, a bright, hot flame shield was in front of the woman.

Both the ice bullet and the energy bomb were stopped by the flames. The woman was actually a mage!