

Elite Mages' Academy

Chapter 71 - Flame Shield

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No wonder that woman was the leader of the merchants. On Planet Norma, mages were considered a privileged class and were regarded as better than normal people.

That instance caused the two of them to lose spirit for a moment; the rest of the merchants quickly wielded their blades and rushed forward. Gu Xiaoyue snapped back immediately, and started to fire off her energy bombs again. However, the enemy started to get smarter and they split up, avoiding being caught in the blasts. The two sides were separated by less than twenty meters; it was impossible to clear out everyone with just the spells from the two of them.

Lu Renyi was still shooting off arrows, but he eventually could not hold back the poison in his body and lost the strength to use his bow. The others continued to pull out those who were not conscious out of the cave. Looking at the situation at hand, they started to get anxious as well.

“Monitor! Why don’t we...we leave first!” One of the girls clenched her teeth and finally uttered the words that everyone else wanted to say, but did not have the heart to.

If the ones who could still move retreated immediately, there was definitely the possibility of getting out alive, but Xiao Lin had no way to conclusively gauge how many of their teammates were still alive, so retreating could very well cause the test to fail completely, leaving them not even able to complete the compulsory tasks.

Under the light of the torches, Xiao Lin only had a few seconds to consider their next step. He raised his head and looked at the woman with the flame shield. He breathed in before saying solemnly, “Gu Xiaoyue! Leave the cave with everyone else!”

The ones who were not heavily poisoned and were still conscious showed a despondent look on their faces. That decision could be considered the obvious choice to save the others, but to those that were being sacrificed, they would definitely not be thankful to Xiao Lin because of that.

However, they suddenly widened their eyes in disbelief when they saw that not only did Xiao Lin himself not retreat from the cave, he even rushed forward.

[Replication skill, activate!]

[Target acquired!]

[Currently analyzing target skill]

[Flame shield, Black Iron-rank spell. It has F+ rank defensive capabilities when facing ice spells, and F- rank defenses when facing water and earth spells. To everything else, it has F-rank defenses. At the same time, it will inflict F-rank fire damage on the user.]

[Spell evaluation at F+, Replicable Skill!]

At that time, Xiao Lin was so excited, his heart almost jumped out of his chest, the first step of his gamble had succeeded and the Norman woman's spell was within his replication capabilities. The instructor said that the task had its difficulty tuned down to protect the new recruits, so the spell could not possibly be that high ranked. He guessed it right, and the flame shield was an F+ ranked Black Iron spell.

[Skill replication success!]

"Flame Shield!" Xiao Lin did not hesitate as he used the spell, and a flaming red rectangular shield appeared in front of his chest. The shield was about as tall as a person, and there was a burning flame on the surface that completely blocked the front.

As Xiao Lin rushed to the very front, now also a very threatening mage, the armed merchants immediately made him the biggest target and turned their attention to him. The flame shield suddenly appeared, and the intense fire burnt everyone who was nearby. They did not even have any basic defenses, let alone anything to stop the damage from the spell.

He could hear cries of misery as about five or six of the merchants that rushed at him were forced to retreat from the flames. They tried to attack him from behind, since the flame shield's protection and damage was only in the front, which was the spell's greatest weakness. Otherwise, the spell that could both attack and defend would not be only F+ ranked.

Xiao Lin did not give them the chance, and when all the ones in the way retreated, he bit down on his cheeks and forced himself to withstand the dizziness as he shouted and ran forward.

He had already used three ice bullets, and now he was using a Black Iron-ranked spell; he was already mentally at his limits. He could not even use any more ice bullets. If he even thought about using his wand to cast a spell, the pain in his brain could probably cause him to faint on the spot.

Xiao Lin did not hesitate as he threw away his wand and pulled out his dagger. The Norman woman was right in front of him, and she had a look of terror and shock on her face. She frantically raised her palm up and unleashed two fireballs. However, to Xiao Lin who also had a flame shield, the fireballs could not face up to the F-rank defenses of the fire shield, only dispersing against the shield.

The flame shield was good for defending against spells, but could not protect against physical attacks. The two of them ran into each other head to head, and the two flame shields collided, producing intense heat and letting out a spray of sparks; even the Normans nearby could not help but avoid them.

Xiao Lin thrust his dagger in his right hand toward the woman's chest. The tip of the blade pierced through the flames, but was avoided by the woman, only wounding her shoulder. The flames very quickly caused Xiao Lin to temporarily pull back his dagger.

The Norman woman shouted out in pain, and Xiao Lin had already bitten his lips until they were bleeding, but both of them stubbornly held on as the devastating flames started to cause fire damage to the both of them. Two spells of the same rank were colliding, causing the magic power within to rapidly disappear.

Boom!

The two of their flame shields seemed to disappear at the same time; Xiao Lin and the Norman woman were sent flying by the explosion caused by the spell disappearing. Xiao Lin's clothes were already mostly burnt to a crisp, and his skin had bright red burn marks. However, it was not nearly as painful as he expected; even he would never have thought that the Fire Chicken that Department Head Song fed him a month ago to earn him LV1 Basic Fire Resistance would prove to be so important.

Xiao Lin's wounds were much lighter than the Norman woman. He hurriedly got up and picked up his dagger from the ground. He rushed forward and held the blade in front of the Norman woman who had numerous burn wounds.

The woman tried to struggle very intensely, but the fire damage she had sustained caused her wear a painful expression. Large patches of snow-white flesh were exposed on her body, but Xiao Lin did not have the mood to stare; he did not dare have any compassionate thoughts at the moment.

"Shut up! I'll kill you if you move!" Xiao Lin shouted. It was a pity that the woman could not understand him, and only started to struggle even more. Xiao Lin was furious and raised his blade, hitting her right on the head with the hilt. The woman let out a frustrated sound and her body went limp. Xiao Lin held his finger to her nose and let out a sigh of relief. Thankfully, she was still alive.

"@#¥%...&," The rest of the merchants said some words furiously, itching to run forward, but Xiao Lin's blade never left the woman's throat.

"Gu Xiaoyue! Tell them this woman is still alive. If any of them dare to walk any closer, I can't guarantee her life!"

Actually, Xiao Lin did not need to say anything. Gu Xiaoyue had already guessed his plan and speedily used the words she could grasp to relay the message.

Chapter 72 - Captive

Chapter 72: Captive

Xiao Lin held his breath; this was his only option at the moment. It was a gamble—he was gambling on the fact that the woman had a high position among the merchants and that the rest of them would not throw her life away so easily. Otherwise, Xiao Lin's monthly test would probably end right there.

The woman had to be the strongest person among the merchants, as well as the only mage. The others were very average in skill. Xiao Lin was not doing so well himself though; he was already at the limit of his mental strength and could not use any more spells. In the collision of flame shields earlier, he sustained quite a bit of damage, and the rest of the students were mostly poisoned, so they were absolutely outnumbered. It was impossible to solely rely on Gu Xiaoyue as well.

Gu Xiaoyue looked like she was a bit nervous; she was worried that she did not properly convey the meaning, so she ended up repeating it a few times. Her clear voice was echoed in the cave.

The other Normans were apprehensive and held onto their weapons, not daring to move. Xiao Lin looked at Gu Xiaoyue and said, "Make them drop their weapon!"

Gu Xiaoyue did the translation and the Normans looked at each other with hesitation. A few of them suddenly shouted at Xiao Lin, aggravated.

"What did they say?" Xiao Lin asked.

Gu Xiaoyue went deep in thought, and shook her head, "I don't really understand, they seem to be asking about our ancestors."

"Go f*ck yourselves!" Xiao Lin shouted in anger, then added, "Oh, don't translate that. Tell them I'll count to ten, and if they don't drop their weapons, this woman will die on the spot!"

Xiao Lin applied more force to the dagger and a line of blood began to flow down, causing more enraged shouts from the Normans.

"1, 2, 3..." Xiao Lin counted to three and realised something was not right. He coughed and said, "Gu Xiaoyue, you do the counting."

Gu Xiaoyue rolled her eyes at him and started to count in their language.

All of their hearts almost jumped out of their throats; if these Normans decided to bet everything on one quick strike, or if the Norman woman was not as important as Xiao Lin thought, then this would be a losing battle.

"7, 8, 9..."

The numbers were said in Planet Norma's common language; even though Xiao Lin was not very good at pronunciation, he could still make out the numbers. He heard Gu Xiaoyue make an especially long pause after nine, and he gripped the dagger even tighter. The Normans also looked to be in a difficult spot, but not a single person made any moves.

"10!" The last count was finally uttered.

After a very short pause, the closest man to Xiao Lin, who was very large and fit, threw his sword on the floor in frustration. Since someone who seemed to be of good standing started, the rest of them resigned themselves to their fates as they followed suit after the first man uttered a few words at them.

“@# ¥%...&*” The first man said as he looked at Xiao Lin in anger.

“Is he scolding me?” Xiao Lin looked at Gu Xiaoyue.

Gu Xiaoyue shook her head, “He seems to be telling you the woman’s status, and then he said some stuff I can’t make out. Basically, he’s warning you not to be reckless.”

Xiao Lin laughed coldly. “What bullsh*t! Oh, I’m talking about him. Ask them to stand back! Stand all the way against the walls and kneel down with their hands over their heads!”

Now that he had a clearer grasp on the situation, Xiao Lin started to be more confident. He moved the blade in his hand slightly away to pacify the Normans; things were about to go much smoother.

The rest of them had been observing at the entrance of the cave. They were initially very conflicted when Xiao Lin asked them to leave the injured and the poisoned behind, not knowing whether to be thankful or hateful. However, the situation had quickly reversed and they could now only stare in awe.

With the current situation, even the most stupid of them knew what they should do. The ones who could still move split themselves into two groups; one group took care of the injured, and the other went to collect all the weapons on the floor.

“What should we do with these people?” Lu Renyi asked, bearing the pain in his stomach.

“Find something to tie them down!”

“I’ve looked around; there doesn’t seem to be any rope.”

“Their clothes! Strip them and tie them up with it!”

“If their clothes are not enough, use their pants! Make sure you tie them up well!”

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After busying themselves for about ten minutes, the short battle was finally at an end. Including the woman, there were 18 Normans still alive. All of them were stripped naked with both their hands tied up. There were three of them who were heavily injured, and looked to be at the end of their lives. Xiao Lin discussed with everyone, and even though one of the girls had some objections, he still moved the three heavily injured ones out of the cave. It was scorching hot outside, and their fates were pretty much sealed. Xiao Lin tried not to sympathize with them.

As for those who were poisoned, they quickly figured out the situation. Those Normans used juices from the wild fruit to poison them. It was quite common in the area, but the juices were mostly used to hunt.

Poison was not life-threatening, but they were very potent. The few of them who were more heavily poisoned were all in a state of half-consciousness. The merchants did not have the cure either, so they could only let them lie down for the moment.

Night was fast approaching, and even though there was still much to do, most of them were already at the brink of exhaustion both physically and mentally. The first thing they needed was enough rest. Once they had some food and water that they made sure was safe, they fell asleep within the cave.

Of course, Xiao Lin made sure to arrange shifts of two people to take turns keeping watch. One reason was to prevent those Normans from escaping; the other was to look out for potential soldiers from the Thunder Kingdom.

As the acting monitor, Xiao Lin proactively took the responsibility of standing guard for the first half of the night. Gu Xiaoyue surprisingly offered to accompany him.

Night time at Sunset Canyon saw two differently-sized moons hanging in the night sky. The difference in temperature from night and day was huge; it was scorching hot in the morning, and close to freezing at night. Right in the middle of the cave was a blazing hot bonfire, fueled by the plants that grew nearby on the cave walls. The leaves had a lot of fat in them, so the fire burned very fiercely, giving some warmth to the surroundings.

The Normans did not get that treatment; they were all tied up in the corners. The ice-cool walls were good for avoiding the heat during the day, but at night it only made them shiver in coldness, especially since they were all stripped naked. A few of them were unhappily causing a ruckus, but Lu Renyi beat them up and quickly quieted them down.

As for that woman, she was treated a bit better. Most of the team were not willing to be so rough to a girl, so they still gave her some clothes. Even though her hands were tied, she could still be near the bonfire and she was even given some food and water. However, when the woman woke up, she did not speak a word, nor did she eat or drink. All she did was stare at Xiao Lin and the rest of them with a hateful gaze.

“This woman doesn’t want to eat!” Xiao Lin bit into some bread as he talked to Gu Xiaoyue in a low voice.

After turning those Normans captive, they obviously liberated all the goods the merchants had as well. When they realized that, other than the dried meat, there was even a small amount of fragrant bread, everyone immediately gave up the rotten meat.

Chapter 73 - Interrogation

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“What’s her name?” Xiao Lin tried to find some topics of conversation with Gu Xiaoyue.

“@%&” Gu Xiaoyue said in the common language.

“What?”

“Her name. The pronunciation is just like that; there’s no way to translate it.”

Gu Xiaoyue hugged her knees as she looked at the bonfire, suddenly saying, “I roughly investigated the goods they were sending just now; most of it were different kinds of alcohol, probably to be sent to the soldiers at the border. There were also some weird-looking animals, probably used for transportation.”

Xiao Lin laughed out loud, “I think I know what those animals are. I don’t really know what the Normans call it, but the academies call them camel fowls.”

“Camel fowls?”

“Yeah, I heard that those animals actually have similar genes to chickens, and somewhat look like them too. However, they have similar traits to camels as well, being that they can tolerate hunger and thirst very well. They are widely used as transportation in the deserted and hotter areas of Planet Norma.” Xiao Lin explained very intently. Even though he never went to the library before, he still saw camel fowls that were reared by Department Head Song.

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Gu Xiaoyue looked at Xiao Lin with her bright eyes in silence and said after a while, “That team of people are either dead or caught at the moment. This is our only chance; it might even be the best solution to the exam.”

Xiao Lin furrowed his eyebrows and said with some hesitation, “I know what you’re getting at, but there are way too many variables. It’s way too risky. I don’t think the chances of success are all that high.”

Gu Xiaoyue did not have much of an expression. “Then I’ll just bring a few men with me; you and the rest of them can bring the injured out of Sunset Canyon first to complete the compulsory task.”

Xiao Lin answered resolutely, “No way!”

Gu Xiaoyue blinked at him, her expression as calm as always. Xiao Lin and her were not mere acquaintances, so he immediately understood what the look meant: ‘Who are you to control me!’

Xiao Lin was furious, and said in agitation, “Have you thought of the consequences! Your lifespan... If you fail, you’ll...”

The Norman woman looked up at that moment, staring at Xiao Lin for a moment before quickly burying her head back down.

Gu Xiaoyue pushed her glasses, calmly saying, “The chances of success are quite high.”

“Bullsh*t!” Xiao Lin raised his voice by a bit and he stared into her eyes. “Don’t think I don’t know what you’re thinking. You want to disguise yourself as a Norman merchant and poison the alcohol while infiltrating the army camp! I’ve thought of it too, but the chances of success are way too low!”

“That might just be the solution.”

Xiao Lin was extremely angry at that point. “Screw the solution! How are you going to get in? Why would these Normans help us? Don’t forget: the reason they attacked us was because they saw through our identity! We’re invaders in this world. We’re absolutely the villains here!”

Gu Xiaoyue tilted her head and earnestly explained, “Even during the War of Resistance against Japan, there were traitors on both sides.”

Xiao Lin rubbed his eyes, “Do you think these people are Norman traitors? Ah, it’s not the time to discuss that. The only reason they would help us is if we threaten them or if we give them some benefit. We don’t have any benefits we can give them, so we can only threaten them. Would you trust them if we just threaten them? If they decide to betray us in the army camp, then we’ll be facing two large squadrons of infantry and one medium squadron of wolf cavalry; we wouldn’t even be able to retreat at that point!”

Gu Xiaoyue was still stubborn, “Then we can just kill off these people and I’ll go there myself. I can speak the language as well!”

Xiao Lin looked at the Norman woman who refused to talk, smiling bitterly. “You’re saying you want to kill off these people right in front of their faces; that’s not very good... Don’t even think about lying to me, you’re only at LV3 with your language skills, even if you can sort of grasp the basics, you have no understanding of anything remotely complicated. The most important thing is, no matter the accuracy, the phrases or the accent, it’s way easy to tell you apart. Don’t forget, if this woman knows any of the troops there, then your identity would immediately be exposed as well!”

“I know, but the possibility of success is still there. You can’t deny that.”

Xiao Lin felt a wave of frustration; she was not wrong. If they managed to disguise themselves as merchants and infiltrate the army camp, the first optional task would be completed very easily; they could even possibly complete the second optional task and kill the leader of the wolf cavalry squadron too.

It was very risky, but from the perspective of the academy, should optional tasks all not come with risk in the first place? The difficulty of the test would definitely be set so that not everyone could complete the optional tasks. Weighing the risks against the benefits was up to themselves in the end.

Gu Xiaoyue was right; that might be the correct solution. Judge Academy managed to complete the tasks all those years ago, even though they were grossly outnumbered, so they could very possibly have used these merchants as well. After capturing these merchants, Xiao Lin had considered the possibility as well, but very quickly shot himself down.

Gu Xiaoyue only had two years left in her life. Xiao Lin could take the risk, everyone else in their class could as well, except for this girl. She did not have any capital to risk!

Next to the bonfire, the two of them fell into an awkward silence.

Xiao Lin did not understand. Gu Xiaoyue did not seem like someone who did not care for her life; after all, she was the one who showed immense interest in increasing her lifespan during

admissions. She might look very gentle and quiet, but she had very strong opinions. Xiao Lin understood very well that he had very little chance of changing her views.

The next day, a lot of them recovered quite a bit. However, the few injured ones were still not in good shape, so after some discussion, everyone agreed to continue resting there.

There had been some results from interrogating the Normans. They had already started doing it yesterday after capturing them, but there were no visible results. One of the reasons was language, but the Normans were also very stubborn. No matter what they asked, they would only constantly repeat a few sentences.

During the start, no one understood them. However, after a few repeats, they managed to make out a few curse words, even without Gu Xiaoyue's translating.

The next day, after everyone had recovered quite a bit, they were no longer so forgiving. After being poisoned, attacked, and almost dying, even if it was just a simulated environment, it would still have cost them ten years of their lives, so a lot of people were absolutely furious. The perfect place to vent their frustrations were right in front of them.

No one used any overly cruel methods of torture, but they beat the Normans up with their fists and feet, even using their belts and other tools. Xiao Lin silently allowed it, but a few girls could not stand the sight of it. However, they had still gone through a whole month's worth of training in the academy, on top of the fact that they were harmed by the Normans yesterday, almost losing their lives. The girls turned around in silence and did not stop it.

Gu Xiaoyue was the only one who had a LV3 in the language, so she had to stay there to translate; otherwise, the interrogation would be meaningless. However, facing such a gruesome scene, the girl acted as if everything was normal. She even said that if it was not enough, she did not mind helping out with her magic...

Chapter 74 - Interrogation (2)

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The interrogation focused on gathering information on the Thunder Kingdom's troops, since the information provided by the academy was extremely limited. A few of them even felt that, if they could dig out the troop's defense formations from the merchants, they could possibly complete the optional tasks with ease.

The notion was perfect, but reality was nowhere near that. No matter how much they hurt the captives, they could not gain any information. They did not know if the Normans really did not know, or if they were just extremely stubborn.

Of course they managed to gain some random bits of information, such as the number of troops the enemy had. The Thunder Kingdom currently had two large infantry squadrons and one medium wolf cavalry squadron stationed at the border, totalling up to about five thousand troops.

Xiao Lin kept on observing by the side. When he heard that, he caught a perplexed expression on Gu Xiaoyue's face; the girl knew what he was going to ask, so she said, "The humans on Planet Norma organize their armies by small, medium and large squadrons followed by legions. One small squadron is around 100 people, one medium squadron comprises 10 small squadrons and one large squadron is made of 10 medium squadrons. The Thunder Kingdom has two large squadrons and one medium squadron stationed here, so they would normally number about twenty thousand people.

Xiao Lin pointed at the bruised Norman, asking, "So he's lying?"

Gu Xiaoyue shook her head, "That might not be it. I'm referring to normal circumstances. However, the simulation we're working on is set in 45 N.C., what I know about this era is not more than what you know."

They followed by interrogating several other people and arrived at almost the same information. At the very least, they knew that the troops stationed at the border were not as numerous as they initially thought. In truth, Thunder Kingdom was a very small country, so it was hard for them to recruit soldiers. The troops stationed at the border were always extremely lacking in soldiers, and they did not even have enough supplies for themselves. Otherwise, they would not have needed to resort to buying alcohol from merchants.

Xiao Lin quickly noted all that information, since it could be counted toward the task of obtaining information about the troops. As for the combat strength and defenses, the Normans seem to not know anything.

"Bro, I think we need to ask that woman!" The one speaking was called Zhou Feng. He was bald, not very tall, and quite skinny, but he had a look of someone who would always give it his all. He was the one who was saved by Xiao Lin's ice bullet when they battled the desert iguana, so this guy was looking at Xiao Lin like his savior. He would listen to anything he said. However, he was not used to calling Xiao Lin 'monitor', so he stuck to 'bro'.

That was why when he brought up the idea of interrogation the day before, the others were a bit conflicted, but Zhou Feng stood right up and embraced the task. He even looked to be really skilled at torturing people, being heavy on his hits, but never actually threatening their lives. He had said, "It doesn't matter if we understand them or not, as long as the Normans know what pain was, then I'll be able to pry open their mouths." The Normans that were interrogated by him were left breathing heavily, constantly repeating the same phrase. After asking Gu Xiaoyue, it turned out that they were calling him a demon.

"These are all small fry, so they won't know much." Zhou Feng wiped sweat off his forehead as he took a large gulp from a canteen. He had filled it with alcohol, and it seemed to be quite strong, so he would drink it every time he felt uncomfortable.

The rest of them looked to Xiao Lin; they had labored for an entire day, and a lot of them were not very good at interrogation. However, Zhou Feng's instructions allowed them to more or less pick some things up, causing them to gain quite a bit of information by the evening, but it was all more or less the same.

It was obvious that those small fries did not know a lot, and the real one at the helm was still the woman. However, Xiao Lin had told them not to touch her and everyone had obeyed.

After the battle the day before, even though these students were not to the degree of worshipping Xiao Lin, they had all recognized Xiao Lin as the monitor in their hearts, at least for the exam.

The most important thing was that, even though they did not choose any magic-based classes, they still knew a lot from discussions on the forums. In just one month, Xiao Lin had mastered two skills. There was nothing more shocking than that. Even Gu Xiaoyue could only look at Xiao Lin's flame shield in shock and disbelief during the battle.

Those who were injured or poisoned were especially grateful and respectful to Xiao Lin, since technically they owed him for saving them.

That was why the question of interrogating the woman was ultimately left to Xiao Lin to decide. With everyone's gazes on him, Xiao Lin was deep in thought, then finally walked toward the woman. Zhou Feng gaped and hurriedly followed him alongside Gu Xiaoyue.

“@#¥%...&;*” The woman spat at Xiao Lin when she saw him, spewing out a string of words with intense passion.

The woman was thrown out of the cave for the whole day. Other than occasionally feeding her a few mouthfuls of water, she had been left under the scorching sun. He was not intentionally trying to torture her, but rather just could not help but be wary of her.

The merchants were not that big of a threat, and all of them could be left unattended. The only problem was this mage. According to Gu Xiaoyue, casting a spell was a process requiring manipulation of the elements. In the early stages, it still required a wand or some hand movements to speed up the process. However, experienced mages could completely ignore that step.

They were still not sure what level the woman was at, so before they could get a better picture, all they could do was temporarily enact some measures. Making her stay in the scorching heat and only feeding her a minimal amount of food and water were all to weaken her mentally, and her hands were bound so that she could not make any movements.

Other than that, Lu Renyi was tasked with guarding her with a bow about two meters away. He was meant to be on full alert and could kill the woman at the slightest movement, not giving her any chance to cast a spell. If it was only two meters, Lu Renyi was guaranteed to hit her, especially after getting ample rest.

Xiao Lin stopped Gu Xiaoyue, who was about to speak, “You don't have to translate that; I know she's cursing at me. Ask her if she wants to save her companions.”

Gu Xiaoyue tried to translate the words with her limited vocabulary, and got an answer very quickly, “She rejected the offer. It seems like all those people are just slaves from her family or some unimportant folk? I don't really understand the words, but the general meaning is she doesn't care.”

Xiao Lin huffed and pointed to the man who was kneeling not far from her. “How about him? Do you not care about him either?”

The man was the one who was the first to drop his weapon and surrender the day before, so Xiao Lin had a bigger impression of him. During the interrogation that day, Xiao Lin accidentally noticed

that, even though the Norman woman was enduring the heat outside, every time Zhou Feng interrogated this man, she would try to shoot a few sneaky glances inside.

Xiao Lin did not pay it any mind initially, but after a day, especially after he had purposely asked Zhou Feng to pay more attention to the man, he reached a conclusion. Whatever status the man had, the woman seemed to care about him a lot!

Chapter 75 - Infiltration Plan

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Xiao Lin did not stay idle that day; he never let himself forget about the Norman woman. If she wanted to escape and Lu Renyi could not handle her, then he would have to handle her himself, which was how Xiao Lin discovered that little detail.

Xiao Lin said, “What relationship do you have with this man? You can’t be siblings, since you don’t look alike. Could you be lovers? Maybe he’s your bodyguard? And you two developed feelings for each other? Ah, isn’t this just a plot to a web-novel?”

Gu Xiaoyue stared at him. “There’s too many strange words there. I can’t translate it.”

“You don’t need to translate it, just tell her I will kill this man if she doesn’t listen to me! Zhou Feng! Bring that man over here!”

Xiao Lin told the bald man who was not far away, then pulled out his dagger. The sunlight that came into the entrance reflected on the blade as he put the tip of the blade against the hostage’s throat.

That was a moment of déjà vu; he had used the same method on the woman to cause the Normans to surrender the day before, so he should probably have had his own suspicions from that time.

Gu Xiaoyue had already translated his words, and the Norman man was enraged after hearing that, shouting as he tried his hardest to rush toward Xiao Lin. Two students grabbed onto him, refusing to let go, but the sound of a tear could be heard during the intense struggle as he ripped apart the clothes that were binding his hands.

“Motherf*cker!” Zhou Feng saw that the situation was not good; he took out his long sword to slash at the man’s leg. The man cried out in agony and fell to the floor. The wound was deep enough to see his bones, so even if his leg did not snap, he was basically crippled.

Everyone else was shocked, throughout the whole day of interrogations, the Normans were never so aggressive. The man’s actions had also caused them to be more alert of the other Normans.

“@#%!*!” The Norman woman hurriedly said a few words.

“She wants you to let him go. She changed her mind and agreed,” Gu Xiaoyue translated.

“Nothing would’ve happened if she just did that earlier.” Xiao Let got Zhou Feng to drag the injured man inside. The man’s mouth never stopped; no one needed any translations to know he was cursing away.

The woman took a deep breath and said a few words.

Gu Xiaoyue started to have a strange look on her face.

“What happened? What is she saying?”

“She said she agreed, but she hopes you could give her a bit of respect and not do it in front of so many people... Huh.” Gu Xiaoyue did not continue as a rare blush could be seen on her white face.

Xiao Lin was incredulous, but Zhou Feng, Lu Renyi and the others had a look of realization. They patted his shoulder and said a few words while smiling before walking away with knowing looks.

“Should I head back as well?” Gu Xiaoyue started to turn away after a pause.

“Huh? Everyone hold on!” Xiao Lin finally reacted and called out to everyone, “Are you all misunderstanding something? All I want is to ask her to help me locate the Thunder Kingdom’s troops! Gu Xiaoyue, are you sure you translated everything correctly?”

Gu Xiaoyue thought for a bit. “I might have mispronounced some things, but I don’t expect that the phrasing was warped too much.”

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After clearing the misunderstanding, the Norman woman seemed to be more agreeable. She had not even opened her mouth since she was captured, but she finally started to speak.

“Who is the leader of the troops stationed in the border?”

“@#\$”

“I don’t understand. Why don’t you just write it down? Yes, write down the names of all the officers for the different sized squadrons as well.” Xiao Lin tore out a piece of paper and handed it over with a pen.

“Where are the wolf cavalry and infantry squadrons located?”

“Are there any defense mechanisms near the army camp?”

...

The questioning lasted until very late, and the woman seemed to be cooperative. She knew quite a lot, even things like how many archer towers and catapults were in the camp, and where the traps were. Every piece of information was given clearly.

Xiao Lin asked while quickly drawing a general map of the army camp. At the end of it, the map was almost complete, which caused Lu Renyi and the others to get excited. It looked like they would be easily completing the first optional goal.

However, the Norman woman stopped having anything to say after a while. Xiao Lin pointed at the map and raised his eyebrows, muttering, “No, this isn’t enough! I got a notification just now that the map was still only 60% complete, it’s still a little away from the 70% we need!”

“Bro, let me do the asking!” Zhou Feng suggested.

The Norman woman saw how Zhou Feng treated the other captives the whole day, so she hastily added a few words, which Gu Xiaoyue translated as, “She knows a lot, but she knows nothing about the medium squadron of wolf cavalry units.”

Xiao Lin looked at the map in silence. The army camp was split into two parts; the front part is where the two infantry squadrons are stationed, and the wolf cavalry squadron is located at the back. The woman claims to be in decent relations with the troops, but she was never allowed into the wolf cavalry squadron’s section every time she delivered alcohol.

The wolf cavalries were the key point of this army; according to the information they gained from interrogating the others, the two infantry squadrons only amounted to around two thousand people, and they did not have much combat prowess. The key to completing the investigation still lied in the wolf cavalry squadron.

“It seems we really need to infiltrate them,” Xiao Lin said to himself.

Lu Renyi stared blankly. “Huh? Infiltrate? What are we infiltrating?”

Gu Xiaoyue answered for Xiao Lin, “Infiltrating the army camp is the best way to complete this task. No, it is the only choice we have if we want to kill the leader of the wolf cavalry squadron.

Everyone could only gasp and stare in shock, Lu Renyi suspected he had misheard and laughed dryly. “D-don’t joke around! This isn’t a game, we don’t even know how to hide ourselves; how could we infiltrate them! Those infantry soldiers might not be that strong, but it’s not like they’re paper! It would be very easy for them to deal with us just in numbers alone.”

Xiao Lin had an uncertain expression on his face; he was also in a dilemma. If they really wanted to do that, there would be a very huge risk. Even he was not sure it could work.

Zhou Feng suddenly said, “Get her to bring us into the army camp. As long as she agrees, we can promise to let everyone go!”

Gu Xiaoyue did not translate it immediately. She wrinkled her eyebrows and asked, “Is that possible?”

Lu Renyi frowned. “Why do I feel like we’re in a movie? I see this all the time on TV, promising to let the person go after agreeing to something, then killing them right after... Would she believe us?”

Xiao Lin said, “If the thought crossed our mind, it definitely crossed hers as well. If she doesn’t agree to our demands, she knows all of them will definitely die. If she agrees, there is at least a sliver of a chance. If it was all of you, would you agree?”

“Even if she agrees, she could very well be lying to us. The moment we step into army territory, we’re basically sitting ducks!” Lu Renyi voiced his objections.

Chapter 76 - Loyalty

Chapter 76: Loyalty

More people joined the argument. There was confusion in the eyes of the other Norma people; they did not know what Xiao Lin’s group were talking about.

Xiao Lin remained undecided and thought for a moment before finally saying, “The interrogation will continue tomorrow, but we’ll change the focus of the interrogation. I’ll write down the questions and Gu Xiaoyue will translate them. You’ll learn these Normese sentences for the time being and ask them... And Zhou Feng, you don’t need to participate in the interrogation anymore. Just head here and observe the situation, but remember not to get too close. Just look for a hidden corner in a distance and hide.”

Xiao Lin’s prestige in the team prevented everyone from rejecting his order. Zhou Feng nodded happily and agreed, then glanced at Xiao Lin’s map on the ground. He was slightly taken aback by it. “Isn’t this the rendezvous point?”

Indeed, the place Xiao Lin told Zhou Feng to check was the rendezvous place agreed upon after Wang Dalin’s group parted ways with them. Ever since it had been determined that their whereabouts were discovered, they believed that the other team would not be spared and had little—if any—chance of escaping and retreating.

If the Thunder Kingdom were adamant on capturing them, they would then send the wolf cavalry squadron into the canyon within the next few days.

Xiao Lin deliberately set up that rendezvous point to mislead the opposing commander and prevent the wolf cavalry from discovering them too quickly.

The sun had yet to shine the next day when Zhou Feng departed early under Xiao Lin’s urging. Before leaving, Xiao Lin repeatedly asked Zhou Feng to place utmost importance on safety and leave as soon as he felt that something was wrong.

“I can’t possibly outrun the cavalry if I’m discovered. But in any case, I won’t bring the chasing soldiers to this place.” Zhou Feng was not an idiot and he immediately understood what Xiao Lin was trying to say. In spite of that, he laughed heartily and patted Xiao Lin on the shoulder to ease the latter’s worries. “You saved my life last time, and I don’t like owing others. I consider this a chance to pay my dues.”

Xiao Lin sighed apologetically. There was a risk of being discovered if he sent someone to investigate, but within the two days, Xiao Lin discovered that Zhou Feng was ruthless and was unsure of what his profession on Earth was. Therefore, such a plan was very appropriate for Zhou Feng.

Of course, Xiao Lin was also well aware that Zhou Feng was the most likely person in the team to accede to his orders, since Zhou Feng had been saved by him.

The interrogation at the supply depot went on. The main point of that day's interrogation was about the deployment of the army camp or the wolf cavalry's garrison. According to Xiao Lin's request, everyone began to interrogate their captives' personal information, as well as who they knew in those garrisons and the personal information of those individuals.

"How old are you this year?"

"What's your name?"

"Do you know the archer who guards the archer tower? What do they look like?"

"What? You had drinks with the captain of the infantry team before? What's his name?"

"How many times have you delivered wine to the garrison?"

"How often do you send it?"

...

Only a few words were required to convey such basic information, and Gu Xiaoyue's last-minute all-night crash course enabled everyone to speak in an understandable manner.

The Norma people, who have been tortured all day, did not dare conceal any trivial information. Xiao Lin specifically separated them during the interrogation, and if the information was found to be wrong, the person would immediately be subject to a severe beating. Everyone gradually became more used to the tactics after some practice. The occasional screams and wails coming from the cave made Xiao Lin feel as though he was transforming into the spy chief in a anti-Japanese war drama...

No one knew what Xiao Lin wanted to do and Xiao Lin himself did not say anything. He and Lu Renyi were still guarding the Norma woman and kept a certain distance. She was already in a semi-dehydrated state after being exposed to the sun for a day and given insufficient water. She was already very groggy and could barely stay awake.

Lu Renyi's heart softened a little, but he did not dare provide the woman with more water and food under Xiao Lin's order. Xiao Lin sighed slightly after seeing the woman's tragic situation and had mixed feelings. As an ordinary person who had lived on Earth for more than 20 years, he could not possibly lose his basic compassion just because he had trained in the academy for a month.

After having suffered a loss once however, Xiao Lin was very much wary of feeling pity for the woman. He repeatedly reminded himself that the woman was their enemy, and a very dangerous

one at that. When he recalled the Flame Shield spell, which had both offensive and defensive qualities, it could have killed at least half their team if Xiao Lin had not replicated it in time!

The success rate of a spellcaster correlated directly to a person's mental state. The woman was already near death, so the possibility of her using the Flame Shield again was reduced to the absolute minimum.

Xiao Lin then compiled all the interrogation information collected by everyone else, supplementing it to the army camp map in his notebook using additional drawings. For example, there were four archer towers in front of the camp, and someone happened to know the soldier atop one of those towers. Xiao Lin would use an arrow to mark the person's name on the tower. It was written in Norma, so of course Xiao Lin did not recognize those words. Nevertheless, it did not matter as much because he simply wanted to record notes.

Gu Xiaoyue was responsible for running errands back and forth to correct Xiao Lin's grammatical errors. If he encountered something that Gu Xiaoyue did not know, all they could do was ask the Norma woman.

He tried his utmost best to get a good understanding of the enemy's garrison.

"@# ¥%...&*!" The Norma woman mustered all of her strength and said something sarcastically.

Xiao Lin put down the pen and paper, rubbed his temples, and sighed. "I don't understand what you said. It's useless, even if you do curse my ancestors."

"She's not scolding you." Gu Xiaoyue came over and could not help reminding him.

"Huh? She wasn't cursing us this time?"

"She said she'll obediently listen to your orders, but she hopes that you'll let her meet that man."

"Which man? Oh, her suspected lover?" Xiao Lin was briefly stunned before shaking his head subconsciously.

"She also said that she would rather commit suicide if you don't allow them to meet," Gu Xiaoyue continued to translate.

"Damn it!" Xiao Lin felt irritated. He mulled over it for a moment and felt that it was fine. The Norma woman had been tortured for several days already, and her spirit was extremely weak. In such a state, she had no energy to resist them and it was useless, even if she had any tricks up her sleeve.

"Let them meet then, but you have to observe them from the side and write down what they say," Xiao Lin instructed Gu Xiaoyue.

Whether or not the Norma woman was willing to help was the key for them to sneak into the enemy's quarters. Otherwise, they would not even be able to enter the army camp. It went without saying that she could not possibly be willing to help, because her actions would be considered treason. Even though Xiao Lin was unsure whether Norma's humanoids understood the concept of loyalty and patriotism, it was almost certain that their direct attack against the invaders.

Chapter 77 - Hesitation

Chapter 77: Hesitation

According to Xiao Lin's plan, the other Normans were taken hostage to intimidate that woman into helping them complete the infiltration reconnaissance mission. However, completing the second mission was purely a matter of chance.

The two Normans were reunited and embraced each other with excitement. They whispered to each other and Gu Xiaoyue listened quietly with a cold expression. In the midst of the conversation, Xiao Lin came over to inquire several times. He was only relieved when he learnt that the two were just talking about their daily torture and concern for each other.

All of a sudden, a strange expression appeared on Gu Xiaoyue's face. She found Xiao Lin and said hesitantly, "I'm not sure if I misheard, but I don't fully understand some of the things they said."

Xiao Lin smiled and comforted her. "Well, your proficiency in their language is only level three; it's natural you're unable to fully understand them."

"That's not the reason." Gu Xiaoyue shook her head and explained, "I have the nagging feeling that they're deliberately communicating in another language."

Xiao Lin was taken aback. "Another language? Aren't they speaking standard Normese?"

"Not entirely." Gu Xiaoyue pondered for a moment and pointed out, "It's like Chinese dialects. The dialect that we learnt is probably analogous to Chinese Mandarin, and Planet Norma has different dialects too. But this is just a guess, of course."

Xiao Lin's face gradually became sullen. He fully understood that logic. As a Chinese person, he would not dare say that he understood the dialects of all of China's regions. It would have been even worse with Norma's lingua franca because they were barely skilled enough in the language to begin with.

Soon, the Norma woman was forcibly separated again, and Xiao Lin kept her under close guard at all times. The woman did not ask for anything else and even seemed very cooperative with some of Xiao Lin's questions. She even said that she was willing to lead the way into the camp of the border garrison as long as Xiao Lin's group could ensure the safety of the others.

Moreover, the woman seemed very calm after that, and the indifference on her face made Xiao Lin feel a little uneasy, though he was unsure where that uneasiness came from.

Of course, Xiao Lin understood that the woman was extremely dangerous. Once she had recovered enough mental power to release the Flame Shield, they would not be strong enough to kill her. As a result, the woman was still thrown out to the desert every day to wear her spirit down, despite having cooperated very well.

In the afternoon, Zhou Feng finally came back when Xiao Lin was still waiting anxiously. Everyone was quite unsure whether the news he brought was good or bad. A small number of wolf cavalry troops had appeared at the rendezvous point they initially set up!

“That means someone in the group has already been captured and ratted us out? Motherf*cker!” Lu Renyi could not help but yell.

“They did it just to survive.” Xiao Lin looked calm; he expected that result.

“Will the wolf cavalry squadron come here? I’m sure they know about this supply depot too!” Zhou Feng was a little worried. He had been running around all day and his skin was almost tanned.

Xiao Lin unfolded the map again and looked at it for a while before shaking his head and saying, “The possibility is relatively slim. They’ll assume that we’ve left Sunset Canyon because of the misleading information that I gave. Look, the information the academy gave us only says that one-third of the entire canyon is under the Thunder Kingdom’s territory. The number of people in their border troops is small to begin with, and it’s unlikely that they’ll travel long distances across the border just to slowly search for us in the canyon.

“From the intelligence obtained during the interrogation today, this caravan will head to the army camp about once in a fortnight. Each time, it delivers supplies, including wine and meat. There’s still three or four days before the date of their next delivery, which means that the wolf cavalry will most likely come over if the caravan doesn’t arrive at the station in three or four days.”

Finally, Xiao Lin thought for a moment before saying, “Of course, this is all just guesswork. I can’t guarantee that the enemy will act according to my predictions. If they really crossed the border and went deep into the canyon for the past couple of days, it’s entirely possible that they’d find out about us.”

Gu Xiaoyue frowned and muttered, “Whether they’ll send their main wolf cavalry squadron to commence this cross-border reconnaissance depends on the diplomatic relationship between the Thunder Kingdom and America’s Judge Academy. The internal elements of political response within the Thunder Kingdom itself must also be taken into account. If they’re sufficiently cautious against Judge Academy, it will be unlikely that they’d risk cross-border reconnaissance.”

Xiao Lin gestured with outspread palms and blinked helplessly. “We really have to learn our history lessons when we go back.”

He gathered everyone by the bonfire for a short meeting and explained his plan in detail. In another seven days, they would dress up as merchants and follow the Norma woman into the army camp, while another group would stay behind to take care of the other hostages. The key was the Norma woman’s alleged lover—as long as he remained in their hands, the woman was more likely to act in their favor.

Finally, he concluded, “Those are my thoughts. It’s a risky plan and I’m not going to force everyone to do it. Those who are willing to complete only the mandatory tasks can leave Sunset Canyon tomorrow. Those who are willing to try the optional tasks can stay back and sneak into the camp with me on the seventh day.”

“Why wait until the seventh day?”

“Is it because the supply team usually arrives at the border then?”

“No wonder the duration for this mission is only seven days.”

Xiao Lin kept quiet and did not expound on the reasons. His replication skill required a seven-day cooldown, and the infiltration mission was full of uncertain variables. Keeping his replication in hand would allow him more options to deal with anything.

For example, if the Norma woman suddenly changed her mind halfway, he could copy the opponent’s Normese skills and then communicate by himself without immediately being discovered. In another example, if he encountered the squadron captain of the wolf cavalry—who was the biggest boss in that mission’s task—it was very likely that the captain would have some very powerful skills. If Xiao Lin could replicate their riding skills, he might be able to grab a wolf and make an escape.

In short, his replication skill was very useful. Waiting seven days for it was completely worthwhile, but—for obvious reasons—Xiao Lin could not just express his intention to everyone. “My personal opinion is that at least one person should come with me. The minimum number of people who must complete the task is thirty percent, which translates to eighteen people. We have twenty on our team, and the other eighteen can leave Sunset Canyon first.”

To Xiao Lin’s marked surprise however, several people were willing to follow him on the infiltration and reconnaissance mission. He was initially worried about whether he had to force a few people to go with him if there were not enough. However, his decisiveness during the past two days’ battles unconsciously made everyone trust him as the monitor.

However, Xiao Lin was also under greater pressure because of that. He understood that the entire group would likely be killed if he failed. Should that happen, he would lose 10 years of life in addition to failing the required tasks.

He had that nagging concern in his heart, and Xiao Lin knew that the Norma woman was the source of that anxiety. At the end of the meeting, Xiao Lin asked a very strange question, “To what extent do you think that Planet Norma’s people will be loyal to their nation?”

Everyone was stunned. They were roughly able to guess what Xiao Lin meant by that question. After discussing it, they realized they knew little about the Thunder Kingdom and could only analyze it from the perspective of humanity and rationality. After all, they may differ in race and planet, but there could still be some similarities in terms of human attributes and sensibility.

Chapter 78 - The Final Madness

Chapter 78: The Final Madness

“I don’t think the woman will lie unless she really doesn’t care about her lover’s life!”

“He’s a secret lover too! That man looks like he’s a guard and the woman looks as though she’s the heir to a big family. Knowing usual plot developments, their love affair will definitely be forbidden in all aspects, and the woman might even have a grudge against her family and country...”

“Do you think this is a f*cking Korean romance drama! What if this woman is a fanatical patriot?”

“Reality is often more unpredictable than a TV series... But the human countries in the Norma world seem to be similar to the Earth’s ancient feudal and slavery systems. I don’t think their loyalty to the country is high in any way.”

“Why not! Are you saying that there are no real patriots in China’s thousands of years of history?”

“That’s not what I meant!”

...

Xiao Lin smiled wryly and stopped everyone when he saw that they were all arguing in the midst of the discussion.

Regardless of whether or not he would end up implementing the infiltration plan, he made ample preparations for it during the next few days. The caravan contained about a hundred barrels of wine, the barrels of which were made of oak-like materials. Some of it was damaged in the previous battle, and everyone drank a lot in the past two days, leaving only about 70 to 80 barrels remaining.

The animal that pulled the caravan was called a camel fowl, but that was no doubt the nickname given by the academy and its actual name in Planet Norma did not really matter. The creature looked like a rooster but ten times bigger. Most notably, it had a huge brownish-yellow fleshy crown on its head and vestigial wings. After asking the Normans about the creature, he learnt that it inhabited the canyon’s nearby rock formations and fed on the lithophytic plants present there.

Everyone was busy feeding those animals and waited until the last day arrived.

The past few days had been rather calm. Zhou Feng went to the nearby areas to scout a few more times and the situation was far from optimistic. The wolf cavalry entered the canyon more frequently, and each time, they were expanding the scope of their reconnaissance. It remained unknown what the captives said to make the enemy so interested in them.

When the last day arrived, everyone got up early and packed everything up while the sky was still dark. According to their plan, Xiao Lin would bring a couple of people to escort the Norma woman to the camp of the border garrison. If everything went well, they would complete the gathering of intelligence on the defense layout and bring the woman back safely.

If they were lucky enough and happened to encounter the wolf cavalry squadron’s captain, Xiao Lin would consider poisoning the wine. So long as the other party drank the poisoned wine, Xiao Lin was confident that he could use his Ice Bullet to kill the opponent in seconds then, no matter how strong the opponent was. In that case, the second optional task could also be successfully completed.

As time went by, the anxiety that lingered in Xiao Lin's heart became stronger and stronger, making him a little irritable. Other people could sense that he was not in a good mood and the atmosphere before their departure was a little tense.

"The woman said that she would like to see that man again for the last time." Xiao Lin was vehemently opposed to Gu Xiaoyue's inclusion in the infiltration plan and forcibly excluded her from it. The others were somewhat puzzled, but it was inappropriate for Xiao Lin to explain it to the others. In fact, the girl has only two years of life left and she could not afford to waste it.

Xiao Lin was in a petulant mood after listening to Gu Xiaoyue's translation and was about to wave his hand to refuse. All of a sudden, he became suspicious. "Hold on, are you sure that the Norma woman said 'for the last time'?"

Gu Xiaoyue adjusted her glasses and thought for a moment before nodding with certainty. "I'm certain that there's no error in translation for this term."

Xiao Lin felt the uneasy shadow in his heart was expanding rapidly. He seemed to have caught on to something, but he could not put his finger on it for certain. Logic told him to immediately abandon the optional tasks, but the rewards for the mandatory tasks were very limited. Anyone who had even a sliver of ambition would not give up those rewards so easily.

"Do you think the woman still has any mental strength?" Xiao Lin asked. He acknowledged that he was inferior to Gu Xiaoyue's understanding of spells.

Gu Xiaoyue answered with certainty. "Her body is already in a state of collapse. In fact, I suspect that she'll die on the road before getting to the barracks. She can no longer cast spells, especially spells with a higher need for mental power like the Flame Shield!"

"Let that woman see her lover!" Xiao Lin finally agreed, but he also followed the Norma woman. The woman just glanced at him indifferently and her haggard face was completely without feeling. It was as though she had zero attachment to anything.

The two Normans met again, though there was a distinct lack of excitement that time. A trace of sadness appeared on the man's face and there was a long silence. Neither said a word, as if they were speaking only with their gazes.

Just as everyone was getting impatient, the Norma woman suddenly spoke up. Days of torture made her voice very hoarse, but her tone was still firm and low. Every time she uttered a word, her whole body trembled slightly, as if she was exerting her utmost best.

Xiao Lin instinctively turned to Gu Xiaoyue. The girl frowned, shook her head, and said, "I don't understand any of it, but I'm pretty sure that these words are not ordinary Normese. The language is completely different from Norma's common language. Could it really be a regional dialect?"

Xiao Lin hesitated for less than a second before his gaze became determined.

[Replication skill, activate!]

[Target: Scanning Basic Linguistics]

[Passive skills: Ancient Normese (Northern Dialect) MAX]

[Evaluation level: F. Replication is possible!]

Ancient Normese? Although it was not Standard Normese, Xiao Lin hesitated no more and decisively chose to copy the Ancient Normese skill.

Replication was successful! The obscure vocabulary immediately became clear.

The Norma couple looked at each other affectionately and with resolution. Every single Ancient word was uttered very slowly, "... O Almighty Ancient One... I am willing to sacrifice my soul and my life...in exchange for the power that I beseech..."

Xiao Lin barely heard a few words and the hairs on his body were already standing on edge. The woman was not saying goodbye to her lover at all. Those words were clearly some kind of spell, or some kind of curse prepared before a sacrifice!

It was already too late for him to analyze why the Norma woman who had near-zero mental strength could still use it. Xiao Lin quickly pulled out the novice wand from his waist. Under everyone's shocked and puzzled gazes, as well as the bewildered and angry gaze of the Norma man, an ice bullet shot out and struck instantly at close distance.

The woman stared in disbelief at the ice blade that penetrated her chest and her chanting stopped abruptly. She looked at the man before her and opened her mouth to say something, but in the end, she could only spit out a mouthful of blood and fall limply to the ground.

The Norma man went berserk, as if about to rush toward Xiao Lin. Zhou Feng and the others reacted in time and held the man back, but their punches and kicks proved useless against the man's frenzied struggle at that point. Aside from him, the other captive Normans in the cave tried to stand up after witnessing the death of the woman. Despite having their hands tied behind their backs, they even attempted to bite at them with their mouths.

Someone's ear was bitten off amidst all the wailing and screaming.

Chapter 79 - Execution

Chapter 79: Execution

"F*ck! Are these guys insane?" Zhou Feng was getting rather annoyed. His ruthless interrogation during the past few days had subdued those Normans, but little did they know that they captives would just go nuts that very day. He immediately brought a few people up to stop them, either by chopping their hands and feet or stunning them directly.

Xiao Lin let out a long sigh and placed his hand on his forehead. He nearly fell into that woman's trap again and underestimated the loyalty of those people. In other words, he was still miles away from actually understanding their country and their planet.

He initially wanted to ask the man what spell the woman was about to use, but the madness before him was a clear sign that he might not be able to get anything if he asked.

His replication duration was not yet up, and for that moment, he could clearly comprehend what the Normans were saying without needing Gu Xiaoyue's translation.

"You blasphemous invaders!"

"I'm going to kill you!"

"Long live the kingdom!"

...

"Kill them all!" It was not until the skill ended and their shouts became obscure again that Xiao Lin sighed and spoke in a low tone. He put a lot of resolution into making that decision, but he knew that it was something he had to do at that moment.

"Kill? Kill them? But they're just prisoners!" Lu Renyi's eyes opened wide; he could not wrap his head around Xiao Lin's orders.

"What about the infiltration reconnaissance plan?" someone asked.

"Forget it. The two optional tasks are too difficult for us!" Xiao Lin smiled bitterly. "The academy must have arranged this exam just so we can understand some things, rather than just having us complete the task blindly."

"What things? What do you mean?"

Xiao Lin pointed to Norman resistance in front of him. "This. We're the invaders. When there is aggression, there is resistance. The only people we can trust in this world are ourselves."

"This is just an exam. We're just playing a game, correct? They're just NPCs, and it doesn't matter if they're killed, right!" Lu Renyi smiled dryly but his words served more as a form of self-comfort.

Killing was not something every freshman could accept immediately after being admitted to the academy for a month. It was different from killing zombies in the admission test, and differed even more compared to the forced challenge in previous battles.

They were office workers and otakus that had just been living in a peaceful society a month ago. They might be able to kill chickens and ducks without batting an eye, but they might not have the courage to stab a person with a sword.

For that reason, when Xiao Lin chose to use the Ice Bullet—a Black Iron-ranked spell—to attack a woman who could not resist and had a failing mental strength, it was a pure waste of his own mental strength. However, he subconsciously avoided directly killing the opponent with a sword.

Long-range attacks and melee combat were two completely different experiences.

In the previous battle with the Normans, Xiao Lin copied the Flame Shield and ended the battle ahead of time, so no one—save for himself and Gu Xiaoyue—had actually fought before. As a result, their hesitation was clearly evident.

“This may be a simulated battle, but as I’ve said earlier, everything feels real to us. Our lives and theirs are real.”

Xiao Lin spoke slowly as he was pondering, while Lu Renyi and the rest seemed to look enlightened. Zhou Feng frowned, but he did not say anything. Everyone felt that Xiao Lin’s remarks were indicative of his reluctance to kill.

Xiao Lin’s tone changed quickly and he bitterly smiled. “The instructor said that this so-called monthly exam is actually just a simulation exercise. When we go to the New World in the future, we will encounter this sort of thing sooner or later.”

“What sort of thing?” Lu Renyi asked stupidly.

“Killing, of course!” someone lamented softly.

Xiao Lin’s tone was indicative of his conflicted feelings. “Anyone in our position would feel reluctant facing this, but we have to adapt. The Normans are our enemy. If we don’t kill the enemy, the enemy will try to kill us. This is probably what the academy wanted to teach us with this exam. Frankly speaking, I owe everyone an apology; my misjudgment almost put everyone in danger twice.”

Xiao Lin’s feelings were unbearably complicated. He seemed to express his regret to everyone else while muttering to himself, “The first was when we forgot our identity as invaders, which led to our own poisoning. After we captured them, we quickly forgot that they were actually still our enemies, and that the Norma woman was thinking about how to kill us until the very last second.”

There was a short silence and several of the girls found it hard to accept. “Even if that is the case, do we really have to kill them? Isn’t there another way?”

Zhou Feng accepted everything quickly and chided, “Don’t be stupid! Do you think this is a game? We’re invaders of their country. Are you going to make friends with someone who invaded your country? Xiao Lin’s right. In fact, none of us has had the right attitude. We have never really regarded ourselves as conquerors, and I reckon the academy wants to use this exam to remind us of that fact!”

“If this is the case, we might as well remember this moment as clearly as possible!” Xiao Lin remarked softly. His expression looked rather subtle, as if he had worked up a certain determination. He placed his wand back, drew out his short sword, then walked toward the nearest Norma man.

“I’m sorry!” Xiao Lin murmured, then gritted his teeth, and raised the sword before slicing a thin wound on the man’s neck. Blood gushed out like a fountain, splashing all over Xiao Lin’s face, and the smell made his stomach churn.

Xiao Lin once read a quote in a novel that killing a person from a distance using a gun left a completely different psychological impact compared to killing a person with a blade at close range.

He finally realized what that meant. Before he could even drop the sword, he hurried to the entrance of the cave and vomited, despite his best efforts to try and calm his upset stomach.

Zhou Feng glanced at him with a rather surprised and commending look. He quickly drew his saber and disposed of a Norma man nearby him. Then, he walked to Xiao Lin's side and patted the latter on the back, saying indifferently, "I didn't expect you to be this brave. You've convinced me this time."

Xiao Lin looked at the nonchalant Zhou Feng, wiped the corners of his mouth and smiled with some effort, "Have you killed anyone before?"

Zhou Feng smiled plainly.

Xiao Lin shook his head. "Sorry, I shouldn't be asking you this."

Zhou Feng waved his hand to indicate that he did not mind the question as much. "It's okay. Earth is in the past now. In any case, I don't ever want to return to Earth again. In fact, I really like this academy. No matter who we were in the past and what identity we had, the future ahead of us is unlimited."

Xiao Lin and Zhou Feng chatted casually while the others were still struggling and hesitating. After the duo led the way however, more and more people began doing it too. None of them were idiots, and they also knew that such incidents would happen sooner or later since they would end up colonizing the entire planet in the future anyway. It was inevitable, but it was still very difficult actually crossing that psychological obstacle for the first time.

Chapter 80 - The End of The Monthly Exam

Chapter 80: The End of The Monthly Exam

Screaming, roaring, verbal abuse.

Sunset Canyon's silence was shattered by their various wails. Silence returned again half an hour later, as if nothing had happened at all. However, there were dozens of corpses in the supply depot cave, and the pungent smell of blood made everyone uncomfortable. Many either left the cave, squatted down and retched, or leaned against the rock wall in silence. The remaining few chatted with each other.

"The Thunder Kingdom seemed to have resisted for only three years, but America's Judge Academy destroyed their capital and colonized the entire territory."

"Judge Academy killed a lot of people back then!"

"Isn't that obvious? Bloodshed is inevitable during the course of war!"

"It increasingly feels like we're the villains!"

"Can we talk about justice when we're the invaders?"

“Won’t justice catch up to wipe out the evil invaders?”

“You’ve watched too much TV. History has always been written by those who are the victors!”

...

Everyone used their own way to relieve the weight on their hearts. They had been living and training in Dawn Academy for a month, but only then did they gradually come to an understanding of what ‘colonization’ actually meant.

During the school opening ceremony, the dean mentioned that colonization would bring them wealth, territory, power, and many other unimaginable things. However, Xiao Lin realized then that the dean had only said half of the truth.

Colonization brought war, blood, and death!

Xiao Lin remembered Department Head Song’s introduction about the origins of the monthly exam before the exam started. When the resurrection law first appeared, Dawn Academy terminated the simulation exercise, resulting in a thumping loss for Dawn Academy during the subsequent war with the orcs.

When he thought about that, those graduates—however strong they might have been—never once experienced a simulation exercise, which meant that they never killed anyone or smelled blood. It was incredibly difficult to imagine how those people would react if they went directly to war.

“What should we do now, Monitor?” someone asked.

“Go back!” Xiao Lin did not want to stay there for too long. Completing the two mandatory tasks was out of the question, and it was best for them to leave as soon as possible before the enemy wolf cavalry squadron arrived.

No one objected. They got used to the idea for a bit before making their way hurriedly. After the cave was some distance behind them, the smell of blood in the air had disappeared considerably, and the heaviness in everyone’s hearts had relieved.

“Monitor, you saved us again this time.” Lu Renyi’s half-teasing and half-serious remark broke the silence within the team.

Xiao Lin froze and dismissed the comment in shame. “I was careless. In the end, I was the one who brought up infiltrating and doing reconnaissance.”

“All of us had been careless. I think the academy didn’t want us to complete the optional tasks at all because it’s too difficult!” someone complained.

Gu Xiaoyue thought for a moment. “In fact, sneaking is the only option to complete the task in that situation, but our strength is too low to complete it.”

“It’s a pity that we could only obtain sixty percent of their defensive formation through the interrogation.” Zhou Feng felt a little regretful.

In any case, no one meant to blame Xiao Lin, or rather, everyone had actually been negligent. They had not been able to adjust their mentality quick enough, but it was certain that they would not repeat the same mistake again. They would likely understand everything much more after the exam was completed.

It was not until midday did they finally step out of Sunset Canyon, shortly before the exam ended. As soon as they set foot outside, a white beam of light once again covered their heads as their bodies gradually melted into the light.

In a manner similar to the admission test, Xiao Lin saw a blur before his eyes, and when his vision became clear again, he was already in the public classroom.

Xiao Lin was still in a slight daze when the coldly-mechanical voice of the central computer had already appeared in his mind: [Your monthly test results are assessed as follows:]

[Student: Xiao Lin]

[Student ID: 201235]

[Monthly Exam Map: Sunset Canyon Reconnaissance Battle]

[Task completion status: Mandatory Task completed. Optional Task 1 failed, Optional Task 2 failed]

[Comprehensive evaluation: B]

[Reward: 10 credits, 100 redemption points]

[Additional evaluation: You were able to master an Ancient dialect. You have a relatively good talent in language and you can consider developing in that direction.]

The Grade B evaluation was within his expectations, since that was the most they could get after completing the mandatory tasks. The measly reward, at least compared to the admissions test, left Xiao Lin feeling sour.

He lingered over the last concluding comment before finally reacting. It was probably because he used his Academic Genius skills to replicate the Norma woman's weird language. He remembered that it was not Norma's ordinary common language; it was some sort of northern dialect. He did not actually pay much attention to it after his replicating ability ended.

Why then, did the central computer suddenly mention that he had mastered that long-lost dialect? The surprised Xiao Lin suddenly thought of a possibility. Before the monthly exam, he successfully entered the threshold of meditation by replicating the passive skills of Basic Meditation. Could the unexpected replication of language skills have allowed him to master that basic skill?

He had to go back to his dormitory to check his skills before he could say anything with certainty, but on closer recollection, some very strange vocabulary combinations flashed in Xiao Lin's mind. He confirmed that they were not Norma's common language, but belonged to the lost language that he could now understand!

Xiao Lin found it quite interesting. He had yet to achieve a good enough understanding of the replication skill; it might prove more useful than he initially expected. As for the ancient language that he mastered, he did not place much importance on it. The central computer stated that it was a lost language, which meant that no one used that language anymore in present-day Planet Norma. Mastering it was pointless.

When he exited the evaluation message, Xiao Lin discovered that a quarrel had somehow started in the public classroom.

“F*CK! I wouldn’t have died if you hadn’t proposed to go scouting first!”

“Wang Dalin! You’ll pay with your life! I only have eighteen years left!”

“Like hell I would! Why do I care if you got killed because you’re weak!”

“F*ck you! At least we tried blocking the wolf cavalry squadron. You just f*cking knelt down and surrendered! Shameful, just shameful!”

...

The people quarreling were the team who chose to conduct the reconnaissance mission right after the exam began. Xiao Lin listened for a moment and pieced together what happened to them. The wolf cavalry squadron had ambushed them shortly after they left and they failed to even reach the enemy’s garrison. The result was just as Xiao Lin predicted—there was no possibility of escape when they faced the cavalry’s pursuit on the plains.

Despite all their attempts to resist capture, those with high basic skills managed to combine their efforts to kill several of the wolf cavalry’s soldiers, but at the cost of serious injuries themselves. The rest of the soldiers quickly killed them, and when the first person willingly surrendered, the remaining knew they could not escape and were eventually captured.