

SINGLE PLAYER ONLY

BOOK 01

Mobile Newspaper

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Single Player Only

(绝对单机游戏)

by

TodayAgain

(手机报)

Synopsis

When Yue Qiang dropped all 8 free distribution stat points into his Charm his entire life had changed.

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English Translation by Craxuan @ EccentricTranslations

Translation Edit by JerryDaBaws, darklord5555, Jerry @ EccentricTranslations

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ Hasseno Blog

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Chapter 1: Charisma?

It was exactly noon. Yue Qiang climbed out of his bed and walked to the grocery store to buy his lunch.

“I want a pack of bag noodles, chicken mushroom flavor please.”

The store clerk is a woman who carried a slight charm to her. However, the moment she saw Yue Qiang with his baggy eyes, unshaven beard and drab looks, she coldly hmped and tossed the noodles and his change at him without even look him straight in the eye.

Already used to being scorned, Yue Qiang indifferently walked out of the store. As soon as he arrived at his house, he started to boil his instant noodles and switched on his computer.

Yue Qiang readied himself for yet another day of gaming.

As of late, he was rather enthralled by the single player game named ‘The Witcher 3’ and had mindlessly sunk many hours of playtime into it. It was a free roaming game with great graphics and packed a reasonable amount of punch. He planned to continue playing it today at max level difficulty.

He double clicked the game icon. Huh? Was it his imagination or did Geralt of Rivia somewhat resemble him? Maybe his eyes were fogged up by the steam wafting off from the instant noodles? Not to mention the game had loaded surprisingly quick? Although he had spent most of his money to buy this computer, it should still

take at least a few seconds for his game to load and it shouldn't have loaded instantaneously like just a while ago.

It was then he realized that something was amiss.

The interface was definitely not displaying The Witcher 3's title screen. He was instead greeted by an unfamiliar, yet incredibly gorgeous graphics that emanated an antique feel. At the center of the screen were two artistically drawn ancient Chinese characters, which he barely could read as 'The Game', below which was a start button and to the side three tiny progress bars of red, green and blue.

Yue Qiang's curiosity was piqued. He was sure that he had not click the wrong icon and that he did not move the original icon anywhere else; not to mention he had routinely clicked it everyday so it was impossible for him to make such a mistake.

So that begs the question: What is this game?

Yue Qiang was certain that he had never installed this game before on his PC. Also, wasn't the title a little bit too odd? You can call a game 'World of Warcraft: The Game' or 'The Witcher 3: The Game', but what the heck is a 'The Game: The Game'? Furthermore, a single player game would usually have 4 options: 'Start', 'Save/Load', 'Options Menu' and finally 'Return to Title Screen'. But this game only has one option, 'Start'.

Yue Qiang did not click on the game. His first thought was to return to desktop and continue playing 'The Witcher 3'. First, he

tried ALT+TAB (Switch Windows) to no avail, then he tried CTRL + ESC (Open Start Menu) with similar results. WIN+D (Show Desktop)? ALT+F4 (Close Current Window)? CTRL+ALT+DELETE (Task Manager)? But nothing worked. Really? I can't quit the game?

Although the game interface looked incredibly gorgeous, the textures and animations were all top-notch, Yue Qiang still did not want to play it. The reason was because that the game was clearly developed domestically: from its antique art style to the water paint background effects, plus the classic Sizhu a.k.a Silk and Bamboo music playing from the speaker; they all reminded him of homemade classics such as 'Chinese Paladin' and 'Xuan-Yuan Sword' series. While these domestic single player games weren't too badly received, and when he was but a wee he loved them to death – let's just say that the latest releases left much to be desired.

Anyways, Yue Qiang eventually came to the conclusion that this was probably a malvertisement installing a demo or malware into his PC, and he could quit only after he had progressed to a certain point in the game. Looks like force restart was the only way to quit the game. Yue Qiang wanted to do it right then and there, but knowing that a force restart would most likely damage his hardware, he gave in and clicked the 'Start' option.

At the very least, I should see what this game's all about, right?

The character creation screen showed up right after the title screen faded into the background, but to his surprise, the character was already created.

Player Name: Yue Qiang

Class: Student

The character display was a 360 slow rotating model, he was again surprised that the character somewhat resembled himself. The only difference was that the model wore a traditional Chinese robe, and for whatever reason it made him look... weird, so to say. It wasn't that the clothes were badly designed, it was just that his natural looks... left much to be desired.

Ouchies. Yue Qiang tried to change his appearance through the character customization screen but found that the option was completely grayed out. He then tried to change his username into something more V587, but found out that it was also grayed out and unchangeable. He continued to scroll downwards, There he found the game's five initial stats, they were:

(T/N: a slang that means powerful and mighty, short form awesome)

Strength: 12 (You're strong enough to move bricks)

Constitution: 6 (You're weak and you often fall sick)

Mind: 14 (You're a perpetually calm person, and even the stark reality of your life cannot affect your mind. You can always find solace in video games)

Wealth: 2 (You're as poor as a church mouse)

Charisma: 7 (No one loves you, neither male nor female)

He didn’t know if these stats were randomly distributed, but they seriously somewhat resembled his own life. When he was at high school he often participated in sports, so he was pretty fit back then.

However, after he went to university the only things he did were gaming and fapping, the end result is being left with a sickly body. His highest stat was his Mind which stood proudly at 14 points – unfortunately, even after reading the description he didn’t know what kind of function it would serve in-game. There really was no need to look at his Wealth: he had just enough to feed himself a pack of noodles daily. As for his Charisma, it was a given. Disdainful looks from his classmates, pedestrians, and even store clerks were the norm to Yue Qiang.

As he scrolled to the bottom of the page, he found a single line at the very bottom of the interface.

It was written in Song Ti font and thus in complete contrast with the game’s antique design.

> Free Distribution Stat Points: 8

Yue Qiang rubbed his eyes and glanced over once again. 8 free distribution stat points? Isn’t that a lot?

For a veteran gamer who had dabbled in all kinds of single player

video games, 8 points really wasn't a small sum. Looking at the base stats, Yue Qiang thought that 10 points would be the normal stat average for a new player, but if he had 8 free points and he pumped all of them into let's say... Strength or Constitution, wouldn't his character be broken?

It was really strange. Yue Qiang thought that this 8 free distribution stat points would cause the game to be extremely unbalanced. Adding on the jarring mismatch between the line's font and overall art style only added to his confusion. On the other hand, Yue Qiang wasn't planning to play this game anyway. He only wanted to play it until the malware allowed him to stop playing. So, he very carelessly dumped all his points into the stat 'Charisma'.

His Charisma stat now reads:

> Charisma: 15 (Everyone loves you, flowers bloom in your presence).

As he slid his mouse and clicked 'Confirm and Enter', he accidentally knocked over his noodles over.

Depressed, Yue Qiang set the game aside and went downstairs again to buy a new packet.

"I want to get more bag noodles, chicken mushroom flavor please."

The somewhat pretty woman handed over his instant noodles – except this time it wasn't a bag of noodles, but the bowl-type noodles.

We're having a promotion right now, all bag noodles have been upgraded to noodle bowls." the store clerk shyly said. Yue Qiang blanked out for a second.

"Also, since you're our regular and you come here every day, this is my personal gift to you: An 'Extra' bottle of chewing gum. Get it?" she winked flirtatiously at Yue Qiang, "May you always have a smile!"

(T/N: There exists a brand of chewing gum called 'Extra', pun added for flavor)

Again, Yue Qiang blankly stared at her, he grabbed his goods emotionlessly and headed out of the store. From his back, he heard the woman calling after him,

You're welcome! Please, come again!"

Chapter 2: Player Freedom

Yue Qiang thought that the kinda pretty madame must have had a screw loose in her head for her attitude to suddenly take an 180-degree turn. Eh, who cares. He didn't think any further. Video games were the most important thing in his life anyway, and everything else came second.

As Yue Qiang returned home, he decided that he would first eat his instant noodles. While he was eating, he also decided that he would force restart his computer. It was obvious now that this malicious 'demo' of a game wouldn't end anytime soon, and since it was impossible to force quit it through the normal way, he had no choice but to reboot and force an uninstall.

Force shutdown.

Restart.

Yue Qiang slurped his noodles while blankly staring at his monitor.

Suddenly, Yue Qiang stared in shock at his monitor.

Everything still looked fine when he shut down the computer, but the startup process left him bewildered. Normally when a computer boots, the motherboard manufacturers would first advertise their hardware, such as 'ASUS Motherboard' or 'ONDA Motherboard' and so on. Next would be the Windows interface where its logo brightens with increasing clarity and depending on

the version of the Windows there would be different effects. It is at the end where the users are finally greeted with the familiar Desktop. Depending on the hardware, the entire process may take between half to several minutes, but of course, if you have a Solid State Drive (SSD), then the startup process may theoretically be shortened to less than ten seconds.

But this was a second.

No. Yue Qiang felt that even a second was overstating it. The whole process took only an instant to complete. He hadn't even managed to swallow his first bite when he saw the game's icon appearing on the monitor instead of the usual manufacturer and Windows' logo. There was no doubt in his mind that this was the malicious game icon that had somehow installed itself into his computer. Then, before he could react the icon clicked itself, and after a short tune of harmonious intro music the exact same character creation screen appeared before Yue Qiang's eyes.

This time, Yue Qiang was shocked down to his very core.

He didn't even know such a powerful malware existed. Not only it could execute itself automatically upon restart, it even came with the nice 'perk' of increased booting speed. Every other malware he had encountered such as Computer Manager or Baidu Anti Virus were dipshit compared to this champ.

But of course there are two sides to a coin, and the downside of it was pretty obvious: Now, he could ONLY play this game.

He didn't want to.

Yue Qiang is a hardcore gamer, a hardcore single player gamer. Emotionally speaking, he had always held single player video games, especially domestic single player video games he played as a child with nostalgia, therefore he wasn't actually averse towards this kind of game malware made with such traditional flair. The problem wasn't that the game wasn't good enough, but rather a matter of player freedom.

There is a saying that goes: China made video games have no freedom, and every time Yue Qiang saw this he could only sigh helplessly. He was part of the generation who grew up playing these types of games. Back at those times the only games that existed were 'Minesweeper' and 'Solitaire', so imagine what a boon it was for that generation to suddenly have a scene of Lee Xiao Yao peeking at a bathing Zhao Ling Er, even if the entire 'Chinese Paladin' game at the time was only 17 MB huge, or that a single high definition photo of a cute girl might already have exceeded this size.

During the 20 years Windows became the most widely used Operating System (O.S.) in the world, single player video games had been advancing massively in every corner of the world except for China. For example the'Call of Duty' series of the First Person Shooter (FPS) genre, the car racing game 'Need For Speed' series, the stab-everyone-with-a-knife 'Assassins Creed' series, 'Prototype' Biohazard Bundle, the refreshing 'Trails In The Sky' series, the pinnacle of sandbox games 'Grand Theft Auto' series, the only game which boasts an infinite map that even a primary schooler could play, 'Minecraft', and finally the game where killing a chicken could inflict the entire town to hunt for your head, 'The

Elder Scroll' series. There were now an endless variety of single player games filling into the PC gaming market, but only China made single player games had completely fallen off the radar and appealed only to a very small, and very niche audience.

There were many explanations as to why China made single player video games had declined, but to a hardcore single player gamer like Yue Qiang, the most damning element of it all was that there was no player freedom. When 'Minesweeper' and 'Solitaire' were the only games around, a game which boasts drama, monster killing and leveling up was of course very attractive. But after consuming the same thing over and over again, the plots which you could guess the ending from the opening, turn-based combat, one-dimensional character design and so on – they became poison, and no one would willingly consume poison unless they had no other choice.

Nowadays, China mostly made single player video games were adapted from TV series. Some examples would be the recent 'Chinese Paladin 6' or 'Legend of the Ancient Sword', or even more recently 'The Gate of Firmament'. However, if all these games had turned into TV shows, then how much 'gameplay' was actually left in the game?

If you want to see plot then you can't have freedom, and the true charm of video games lies in the ability to do all sorts of things in it, and that is a high degree of player freedom.

And that is the full reason why Yue Qiang didn't feel like trying out a new China-made single player video game.

As he stared at the familiar antique interface, Yue Qiang suspected that this was a virus developed by some unnamed domestic game developer, forcing players to test out their new game. Yue Qiang let out a sigh, but in the end, he gave in and clicked the ‘Start’ button.

Might as well give it a look. At least the graphics looked better than even triple-A games out there.

As the background faded in and out an antique style room appeared before Yue Qiang. It looked just like a room in a China made game, such as the one where Lee Da Niang pummeled her son, Lee Xiao Yao blue and black in Chinese Paladin. The room was incredibly small, and there was a person who looked just like Yue Qiang kneeling in front of a low table and holding a bamboo slip, bumbling and wagging his head about as he read.

The protagonist, that is, Yue Qiang’s in-game character, looked like a thief. He looked as if he was reading, when in fact, he was constantly glancing about the corner of his eyes towards the teacher standing beside him. When his teacher looked at him with stern eyes, his character would act as if he was studying seriously; when his teacher’s attention was placed somewhere else, his character’s expression would loosen and relax.

The characters’ facial expressions were incredibly lifelike. Without a doubt, the game’s physics engine and its dev team’s dedication had reached unbelievable heights. Yue Qiang had never heard of a video game that could synchronize both expression and action together to such a degree. Combined with its inherently exquisite graphics, an interior design that was obviously created

with a lot of hard work put into it even at first glance, exquisitely drawn layers, object shadowing, air flow, dynamic portraits; Yue Qiang almost could have believed that this wasn't a game, but a movie starring him as the main character.

Yue Qiang tried to move his character tapping WSAD on the keyboard, and in the game, his character too started as if he was about to stand up and move around. But the second he moved he was discovered by the teacher standing beside him, and a dialogue box popped out of the interface. Inside the box was the teacher's preaching,

"Young sir, you should not be distracted and study the Analects seriously." The border of the dialogue box vibrated constantly as if to indicate that the teacher was speaking in a very loud voice.

Immediately Yue Qiang formed a notion about the game inside his mind. This is a product made in the veins of China made single player video games. The game barely started and already he was treated to a long winded story scene with no freedom whatsoever. If this was a foreign open world single player video game, they would probably acclimate the players with some combat or tutorials first to get them familiar with the flow. On the other hand, domestic games did it by first introducing their players to the plot.

Confirming once more that this is a game with minimal freedom, Yue Qiang felt an immediate surge of disappointment. Feeling bored, he began randomly clicking at every furniture he could see in the room, and at the same time his character too sneakily squinted about here and there. But his actions were spotted by his

teacher, and again a dialogue box popped beneath the screen,

Teacher, Mr. Chen Zi Han: “Young sir, how could thou not study the Analects seriously and be quizzing about?”

Oddly placed archaic words and more border shaking. Yue Qiang let out another sigh in his heart. Really? Am I not allowed even to click at my leisure?

Amidst boredom, Yue Qiang brought up the system menu. In comparison to the wonderful interface, this system menu, on the other hand, was unusually simple. Even the good ol’ ‘Chinese Paladin’ had four options to choose from: Status, Items, Spells, and System Option. This game actually had only two options. One was Items, and the other was Character Status.

Is that it? No Spells, no Cauldrons, no Dictionaries, no Attributes, no Equipment, not even BGM or SE or Resolution or Shading or Frame Rate options NOTHING? How fucking lazy could you possibly be, dev??

Yue Qiang opened the ‘Items’ tab, and found that it contained only a single book, ‘the Analects’. Clicking the book, the first line he saw was,

“Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application? Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters? Is he not a man of complete virtue, who _____ though men may take no note of him?”

He found many more such quotations beneath this line, and there were many blank spaces in the sentences as well. Yue Qiang noticed that, when he clicked open the book earlier, the teacher standing beside him began stroking his beard looking incredibly pleased with his actions.

He closed the ‘Items’ option and opened the other ‘Character Status’ tab. Immediately his initial stats from the character creation interface was displayed on the screen. Yue Qiang was about to close this option too idly and check out what’s truly behind this game, when suddenly, he noticed something that made his eyes bulged round and wide. He reopened the character stats screen again and reread it thoroughly in disbelief.

Character Name: Yue Qiang

Class : Student

Strength : 12 (You’re so weak you can’t even slaughter an animal)

Constitution: 6 (Your body is pretty weak, and you most likely won’t live past thirty)

Mind : 14 (Your attitude is barely passable, but you’re still far from hitting the average)

Wealth : 2 (You’re pretty damn rich)

Charm : 15 (You’re not particularly liked, but not particularly hated either. Excluding Teacher Chen Zi Han that is.)

Chapter 3: Quest Reward

Yue Qiang had always been sensitive about numbers, and he would remember in game character stats especially well.

Although this game wasn't like most others that had quantitative data such as Speed, Agility, Intelligence, HP, MP, Rage and so on – Strength and Constitution were the only attributes that were slightly more common, and the rest Mind, Wealth, and Charisma being more similar to The Sims type of games – Yue Qiang still remembered the numbers and its secondary descriptions very clearly. He did not even need to bring up the character creation screen.

According to his earlier deductions, this game should have an average stat pool of 10 points. But the current stat description was a different story from the one he saw at the character creation screen. But with this current version of data, the game's stat pool should be hovering around 20 instead. So here comes the question: Why are the descriptions of the character stats, before and after he began the game, completely different?

Yue Qiang was pretty sure that his stats was the same as it was at the beginning (before he purchased his cup noodles), and even his 15 points of 'Charm' was the total of 7 initial stats and 8 free stats. But the fact was the game had provided two completely different kinds of stat descriptions, and it really confused Yue Qiang.

As he pondered, he suddenly remembered something.

Wait... Charisma...

Yue Qiang suddenly recalled that, when he went downstairs to buy his cup noodles a second time, the store clerk's attitude suddenly took a very flirtatious turn, as if she suddenly had a screw loose in her head. If he thought hard about it, could it be that it was because his Charisma had suddenly increased? Maybe she changed because he added 8 points into his Charisma?

Yue Qiang shook his head. Ridiculous. Now who's the one who had a screw loose?

Meanwhile, Mr. Chen Zi Han a.k.a the teacher in the screen seemed to realize that Yue Qiang was lazing around. This time, he did not do his Lion's Roar but instead pulled a study ruler out from his lap, went through the motions, and slapped it down hard on Yue Qiang's skull.

KUANG!

He had to say the game's sound effects was way too realistic. For an instant, Yue Qiang thought that if he was there in person he would have a huge bump on his head right now. Maybe teacher Mr. Chen Zi Han looked like a skinny man, but his strength was definitely nothing to scoff at.

At a whim, Yue Qiang right clicked at the teacher. While he was clicking around the room randomly he had not thought to click on him, and to his surprise, a status screen actually popped out.

Character Name: Chen Zi Han

Class: Teacher (A poor scholar who teaches for a living)

Strength: 22 (Since he often beats his student as punishment, his strength is slightly larger than a normal man)

Constitution: 12 (Studies non-stop and thus is quite sickly)

Memory: 25 (Well read in ‘the Analects’, ‘Le Memoir’ and some other books)

??: ??

??: ??

???: ???

He was right. These NPCs do have an average stat pool of 20 points. Even a teacher had a strength value of 22 points, whereas his character’s sat at a measly 12. With a question out of the way, another one popped up.

The game was only beginning and this was just the first NPC he interacted with, but already there were three attributes that were hidden behind question marks “?”. Next, he was a player and he had only five attributes, whereas a mere NPC, Teacher Mr. Chen Zi Han actually had six. Other than the possibility that this NPC might be an important plot character, it also subtly hinted that the scale of this game might be far bigger than he initially imagined.

As a hardcore single player gamer, Yue Qiang knew very well that the more casual an opening appeared to be, the better it gets as you

delve deeper and deeper into the game. There were two reasons to that. One was that the game developer was beyond using equipment or levels or skills as a selling point. The other was that a game that pays attention to minute details, combined with powerful logic and balance would naturally be incredibly interesting and long lasting.

"Looks like this game developer is shooting for the sky," Yue Qiang thought to himself.

He clicked at Mr. Chen again, hoping to discover more interesting points. As he expected, after suffering yet another ruler slap a choice appeared on top of the teacher's portrait,

> Teacher Chen Zi Han offers you a quest: <>. Will you accept?

Yue Qiang knew that this was most likely the main quest. Just to see what would happen he chose the option 'No', and of course, he was smacked with the ruler again.

KUANG!

> System Message: You have taken damage from Teacher Chen Zi Han's ruler attack, and due to your poor constitution you have become Stunned.

System Message: Teacher offers you a quest again: <>. Will you accept?

Yue Qiang could've sworn he felt pain on his own head as he stared at the two bruises on his character's poor skull. After a moment's consideration, in the end, he selected the option 'Yes'.

System Message: You have accepted a quest: <>

Quest Log: The poor teacher Chen Zi Han was entrusted by Mister Yue (your father) to teach you the Analects, a book about the rules of governing.

Quest Objective: Pass Mr. Chen's test.

Quest Reward: None.

Yue Qiang stared blankly at the big word 'NONE' next to Quest Reward before he suddenly felt nostalgic: this really is just like the classic domestic single player games, isn't it? The plot driven and game progression through NPC interaction; although this quest system was most likely picked up from Western open world single player games. Originally, domestic games did not have any sort of quest system whatsoever, and plot progression was reliant entirely

on interaction with NPCs. Sometimes the reason a player became stuck at a certain segment wasn't because they didn't have enough levels to beat the boss, but rather because they forgot to talk to a critical NPC. Even worse, the earlier games would not provide you with any hints whatsoever.

Yue Qiang could still remember the time he played 'Chinese Paladin' and was stuck at a forest maze for the longest of time. There was a monkey blocking the path and no matter what he tried he just could not go past that point. After searching for a guide everywhere and consulting his classmates, he finally realized that he needed to find a specific banana tree in town and obtain the item 'Banana' to feed the monkey, and only then he could walk out of the maze. It was one of the most annoying things about these classic single player games.

As for 'Quest Reward: None'? You'd be lucky to even get a quest notification!

While Yue Qiang was thinking, teacher Chen's test had already started. The test itself wasn't hard, after all, it was just filling in the blanks with some sentences from the 'Analects'. Even if he had forgotten his primary lessons, he still had mobile Baidu, right? Sure he couldn't check the Internet on his computer, but he still had his phone.

He quickly wrote down the answers to some questions.

> Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?

> The student of virtue has no contentions. If it be said he cannot avoid them, shall this be in archery?

Confucius said of the head of the Chi family, who had eight rows of pantomimes in his area, “If even if his uncle can bear to do this, his aunt cannot bear to do?”

And then his jaws dropped. The quest was far more complex than he had thought. At first, Yue Qiang thought that he could casually write a few sentences and complete the quest, but he soon realized that the game actually wants him to type out all 503 lines in the Analects. This wasn’t an ABC objective test question but a complete fill-in-the-blanks. Moreover, since his computer restarted directly into the game he didn’t have any internet connection and by extension no Pinyin dictionary. Yue Qiang quite literally typed himself dizzy as he struggled with all sorts of unusual words.

Yue Qiang had never expected this first quest to be this crazy. Still, holding onto his pride as a hardcore gamer Yue Qiang forced himself to type the hundreds of lines of Analect quotes all the way until the end. The reason was that he knew there was a pattern. In single player games, the harder a quest is, the greater its reward would be, and if this ridiculous quest required its player to do so much research and type so many unusual words to complete it, then its rewards would definitely not be the big ‘NONE’ indicated by the system.

And he was right. After a little past an hour Teacher Chen finally

concluded the test, and as he examined Yue Qiang's test paper his face grew more and more surprised. As if afraid that the player hadn't noticed it, the system even dropped a huge exclamation mark on top of Teacher Chen's head.

Chen Zi Han: Young sir, you are truly a dragon and a phoenix among men. Although you may be lazy and mischievous, in fact, you are smarter than most, with terrific memory, and hold the law in high regard inside your heart. This old man is impressed. Very, very impressed."

More awkward archaic talk. Yue Qiang ignored the NPC's completely and clicked his mouse to see if the NPC would give him with any hidden rewards, and sure enough, Chen Zi Han said,

"Young sir, you are truly talented. Please, accept this old man's sliver of refined energy."

Refined energy? What's that?

Yue Qiang thought that the system would explain how this 'Refined Energy' works, but to his surprise, the quest ended just like that. Even no matter how many times he clicked at Teacher Chen, he would only say, "Young sir had completely mastered the essence of the Analects, this old man is impressed. Very very impressed."

...Interesting.

If Yue Qiang was completely disinterested in the game earlier, he was now slowly but surely changing his mind. Did you know? Games these days, especially online games were completely dominated with auto-mapping, fixed class, Pay-to-Win (P2W) players dominating everything and other dumb factors. Although graphics and hardware requirements improved by leaps-and-bounds every single day, various gameplay elements such as systems, skills, loot, titles and so on grew more and more complex, it just felt like they were missing some… 'heart'.

And what is 'heart'? Yue Qiang couldn't really answer. He simply felt that games these days were played just for the sake of playing. Leveling up, killing mobs, training, PK, and that's it. In the past, the old him would have racked his brains all day to the point he even forgot to eat, just to solve a puzzle or a maze without relying on a walkthrough. As his gaming age grew, it became harder and harder to rediscover that magical feeling.

But this game is different.

Maybe the installation process was a little malicious, maybe the quest system was a bit janky, maybe the archaic words are kinda lame, the game is…… a little interesting.

As an old school single player gamer, Yue Qiang's desire to explore were completely drawn into the open. He began clicking around the entire picture with his mouse by instinct, and lo and behold, at a very obscure position of the bottom right of the screen there was a very tiny tricolor progress bar which caused his cursor to change the moment he hovered over it.

Gotcha!

Suddenly, Yue Qiang remembered. This tricolor bar was already there during the character creation screen, but because it was so tiny he had overlooked it. Now that he think about it, the fact that the game was so graphically exquisite and yet the progress bar so bland and simple was by itself very suspicious.

After a careful examination, Yue Qiang realized that the red and green bars were no different from before, whereas the blue bar had increased by a tiny, almost unnoticeable bit. Accurately speaking, the blue bar was the exact point that had caused the mouse cursor to change.

Does this blue progress bar have anything to do with the quest reward ‘Refined Energy Points’?

Hovering his cursor over the blue bar carefully, he clicked once and as he expected a window had popped into the surface. It was a window that he was quite familiar with by now: the character creation screen. He saw his name, his character model, his five attributes and most importantly his stats descriptions. They were the same as the ones he read previously; the one with 10 stat points as the standard:

Strength: 12 (You’re strong enough to move bricks)

Constitution: 6 (You’re weak and you often get sick)

Mind: 14 (You’re a perpetually calm person, and even the stark reality of your life cannot affect your mind. You can

always find solace in video games)

Wealth: 2 (You're poor as a church mouse)

Charisma: 15 (Everyone loves you, and even flowers bloom in your presence)

At the bottom of these stats descriptions, he finally found the answer he was looking for; an inconspicuous line in Song Ti font that said:

Free Distribution Stat Points: 1

Chapter 4: The Key To Single Player Games

Yue Qiang remembered very well that he had already put all of his free distribution points into ‘Charisma’, so where did this 1 point come from? Could this be the ‘Refined Energy’ Chen Zi Han was talking about?

It most likely is!

So from the looks of it, if you complete the quests in this game the normal way then you wouldn’t be getting any rewards at all. On the other hand if you completed them excellently – like how he did copy-pasting everything from mobile Baidu and scoring near perfect score except for that one line, ‘even if his uncle can bear to do this, his aunt cannot bear to do’ – then you would be given additional rewards such as this ‘Free Distribution Stat Points’, that is the ‘Refined Energy’ mentioned by Chen Zi Han. And free stats are always great no matter what game you’re in, considering that they’re precious resources you don’t come by often.

It was at this moment Yue Qiang recalled that ridiculous notion he had earlier.

Should I drop this point into Charisma as well?

It is a common rule in RPGs that when you dump stats, you should focus on one stat alone. This is because stats fall under precious resources and are usually hard to come by. Since it’s impossible to increase every stat to a reasonably high level, maxing out one stat is the logical choice for most players, especially since

Yue Qiang couldn't forget what happened earlier. He really wanted to know what would happen if his Charisma changed from 15 to 16.

By the way, did you know? It is incredibly hard to improve one's stats from 15 to 16. There is an old saying that explains this situation as, 'one should strive to improve further despite achieving a fair degree of success'. If we are to speak in modern mathematical terms, the probability of getting a value of 6 or more in a normal distribution is incredibly small.

For example, an average human's IQ would hover between 80 to 120, and if someone's IQ were to increase from 80 to 90 or 110 to 120, it would still be within bounds and would be nothing to be surprised about. On the other hand, if someone's IQ were to increase from 150 to 160, then this person would be like a genius becoming an even greater genius. Not only that, their IQ value would also no longer be an accurate reflection of their true mental prowess.

As Yue Qiang continued pondering, he added the point into 'Charisma'.

System Message: 'Refined Energy' points cannot be changed once allocated. Are you sure you want to continue?

He selected 'Yes' without the slightest hesitation. This time, the circumstance of his stats distribution was different yet again.

System Message: Your ‘Charisma’ has reached its threshold value and would be temporarily fixed.

At the same time, his ‘Charisma’ stat had turned a gray hue of unchangeable text and was clearly different from his other stats.

So 16 is the system’s current threshold? Yue Qiang thought to himself as he brought out his phone in an attempt to test out that ridiculous notion of his. But before he could even dial a number, he was already receiving an incoming call from an unfamiliar number. Yue Qiang pressed the ‘Answer’ key, brought the phone to his ears, and listened to a pleasant woman’s voice,

“Hello Yue Qiang, I am the class beauty of our class Rao Xiao Ting.”

“Yue Qiang, I’ve always thought that you’re a pretty cool person. You may not talk much in the chat group, but the things you said were always humorous and meaningful, deep and delicate. I’ve always wanted to become your friend, but I could never gather the courage to say it. I took liberties to call you today because I really wanted to listen to your deep, magnetic voice.”

“Yue Qiang, do you think we can become good friends?”

And Yue Qiang murmured, “As I thought the difference between 15 and 16 is HUGE, man.”

“What 15 and 16?” Rao Xiao Ting asked curiously.

“Nope, nothing. I mean, of course we can become good friends!” Yue Qiang answered, but his eyes were completely glued to the number ’16’ on his screen.

For the next twenty minutes, Yue Qiang listened to Rao Xiao Ting telling exactly how much she admired him. He wasn’t texting a few emoticons in the QQ group, but being a man of few words. He wasn’t sleeping in class, but revising old materials and gaining new insights from them. He wasn’t a video game otaku, but an armchair detective who knew the world without setting a foot out of his house. Yue Qiang never knew he had this many ‘virtues’!

After finally putting down the phone, Yue Qiang immediately tossed away those compliments to the back of his head and remembered one line alone,

“I am the class beauty of our class, Rao Xiao Ting.”

Instinctively Yue Qiang thought that there was something off with these words, despite replaying those words over and over again he couldn’t pinpoint nor find anything wrong with it. Anyways, his current situation was crystal clear. Under normal circumstances, Rao Xiao Ting would never have called him for no apparent reason, and even less would say that she admired him. If that ridiculous notion of his was actually true, then everything that had happened could be explained, such as the scene where the store clerk who sold him noodles shot him a flirtatious wink.

In that case, if he can complete all of the Game's quests perfectly, wouldn't he become OP in real life?

Hmm, Yue Qiang could vaguely feel that some things wouldn't be as simple as they seemed.

Ah, screw it. I'll deal with it when the time comes.

He placed his attention back onto the game. Yue Qiang had finally decided to ditch his initial half-hearted attitude and instead play this game with 100% focus. First, he must dig through his memory for tips and tricks that only an old schooler like him would master.

As an example, opening a treasure chest. Usually, treasure chests were single-use and after you had acquired its items it would appear on the mini map in an unlocked state. Naturally, clicking the treasure chest again would never net you the same items for a second time, and some of the more user-friendly systems would even display a message informing you that the 'this treasure chest is empty'.

But for a certain old school massively single player game, Yue Qiang knows that after clicking and triggering the 'this treasure chest is empty' notification ten times in a row, the protagonist would then angrily dismantle the entire treasure chest, and through that action acquire some incredible rare materials in the game.

So that's yet another annoying element about domestic single

player games.

The next one would be the NPCs' response towards the player.

Under normal circumstances, every NPC exists in a game for a reason. For example, an NPC may exist for the purpose of trading, skill learning, plot device and so on. NPCs would always function according to their set script, and no matter how many times you tried to converse with them, be it ten times or a hundred times, their responses would always be the same.

But again, But for certain domestic single player games, Yue Qiang knew that if you conversed with a certain NPC for over 20 times, the player would then be able to learn a hidden skill. Yue Qiang had thought in the past that maybe it was because the developers couldn't keep up with the industry standards that they had to resort to such methods to surprise the players in a good way.

Thinking that he should give it a shot, Yue Qiang began initiating a conversation with Teacher Chen Zi Han by clicking at him again and again.

"Teacher Chen, please teach this little one about the rules of governing." Yue Qiang said.

"Young sir, you have completely mastered the essence of the Analects.

Therefore, I no longer have anything left to teach you.” A dialogue box popped beneath the teacher, and as he stroked his beard he was all but the vivid image of a poor scholar.

But as Yue Qiang tirelessly talked again and again with Chen Zi Han, with the help of the incredibly realistic facial animation engine, he realized that although Chen Zi Han’s answer was always the same, he wasn’t always answering with the same stroke-the-beard-and-smile expression. In fact, he was looking as if he was getting more and more impatient.

There it is!

Yue Qiang clicked the chair beside him, selected the drag option, and dragged the chair until it was right beneath Chen Zi Han. Then he selected the Talk option again.

“Teacher Chen, please have a seat. Teacher Chen, please continue to teach this little one about the rules of governing.” Yue Qiang’s dialogue subtly changed, and this time, Teacher Chen’s expression too underwent a change. He no longer looked impatient, and a proud look befitting of a model teacher appeared on his face instead.

“This youth is indeed worth educating. Seeing that you have a sincere heart, this old fool shall teach you a unique skill belonging to my sect.”

System Message: Chen Zi Han will teach you ‘Gui Gu

Mathematics’. Do you accept?

Chapter 5: Hidden Stats

Yue Qiang immediately selected ‘Accept’.

To tirelessly click on an NPC to initiate dialogue over tens of times was something no average gamer would have done. Only a hardcore gamer like Yue Qiang would have the experience to mindlessly do this sort of thing. Now that a change – unexpected, but entirely within his predictions – had finally happened, the choice whether or not to accept the offer was a forgone conclusion.

‘Gui Gu Mathematics’. You could tell just from the name alone that it completely outclassed something as general as ‘Analects’. Yue Qiang knew that Gui Gu Zi definitely qualified as a Boss-class figure of the Warring States Period, and according to rumors, famous Warring States generals and strategists such as Sun Bin, Pang Juan, Su Qin, and Zhang Yi were all Gui Gu Zi’s students. There was even a legend that says that Gui Gu Zi was a celestial being with incredible divine powers, and he could divine anything in existence, predicting both the past and the future. In fact, in many games, Gui Gu Zi is often inserted as a hidden boss.

Yue Qiang excitedly waited for the next dialogue to appear.

System Message: You need a minimum of 20 Tactics to learn ‘Gui Gu Mathematics: Entry Level’. At the moment, you are unable to study this.

An ‘I knew it’ look appeared on Yue Qiang’s face. It would be

weird if he could learn something this awesome right off the bat.

Wait a minute, what the heck was ‘Tactics’?

His in-game character has five stats, and they are: Strength, Constitution, Mind, Wealth and Charisma. He had this data memorized to the letter and he could recite them even without reopening the blue progress bar. So where exactly did this ‘Tactics’ come from? Could it be…

Yue Qiang’s thoughts rapidly raced as he intently stared at the lifelike image of Teacher Chen Zi Han, and thinking to give it a try he right clicked the teacher’s portrait and selected ‘Check Status’. As he thought, the situation had once again changed.

Character Name: Chen Zi Han Class: Teacher (A poor scholar who teaches for a living)
Strength: 22 (Since he often beats his student as punishment, his strength is slightly larger than a normal man) Constitution: 11 (Teacher Chen Zi Han has become even weaker than before) Memory: 25 (Well read in ‘the Analects’, ‘Le Memoir’ and some other books) Tactics: 37 (Received tutelage under the student of Gui Gi Zi’s student and is quite knowledgeable in theorem and research) ?? : ?? ??? : ???

So this is how it is. By completing hidden quests, he could collect more information about the Game.

Since he couldn't learn this at his current level, he might as well talk to Chen Zi Han some more and see if he could draw out any more useful information. Yue Qiang continued to right click Chen Zi Han to talk with him.

"Young sir, your qualifications are lacking and thus, you are unable to learn the advanced and complicated 'Gui Gu Mathematics'. It will only strain your mind if you force yourself to learn this, so please, you should start by first studying the very basics of the art of war, young sir." Teacher Chen Zi Han uttered righteously while stroking his beard.

But Yue Qiang was not one to give up easily, so he continued to try talking to Chen Zi Han. While the teacher's lines did not change whatsoever, his beard, on the other hand, was gradually blown up in an obvious display of impatience. After a few more attempts Chen Zi Han whipped his sleeves and pulled out the ruler he used earlier and struck Yue Qiang hard on the skull.

KUANG!

"Brat! To bite off more than you chew cannot possibly be the right path of learning! You will be this old man's death!" said Chen Zi Han before he ignored Yue Qiang completely and stormed out of the room.

Yue Qiang got up to his feet as he stared at the three bruises on his head with a wry smile. As he replayed the scene where he was struck on the head with the ruler. In his mind, he thought to himself: This game's sound effects and animation effects are pretty realistic alright. Instead of rushing after the teacher so he could exit the house and further explore the Game's world, Yue Qiang forced himself to stay in and take a breather while he summarizes and concludes the events thus far.

It was clear that this game was very different from any of the games he had ever played before in his life. To begin with, stats in the Game actually reflected onto the real world, and this could be proven from Rao Xiao Ting and the store clerk's reactions. Next would be his in-game stats. Other than the 8 free distribution stat points he got at the beginning of the game, he could acquire more stats if he completed his quests 'perfectly', and not only that, they could also be freely distributed.

Moreover, after his interaction with the NPC Teacher Chen Zi Han, an idea was beginning to formulate in his mind. What if his initial five stats weren't actually fixed? If an NPC could have 6 stats, then as a player he couldn't possibly be weaker than an NPC, right?

In that case, was it possible that he could acquire more hidden ability stat points if he worked harder in the game? For example, the Tactics points required to learn 'Gui Gu Mathematics'?

Yue Qiang roughly went through all the information he had gathered in the game thus far and came up with a simple plan. He

still hadn't walked out of the door yet. In Yue Qiang's opinion, if he was going to play a game seriously, then he should research as much info as possible before he truly started.

Well, no need to think about web surfing on the computer; the game had pretty much blocked off all available switching methods. Yue Qiang turned on his phone, browsed into a gaming forum that he frequented and posted a thread:

[Advise: Has anyone played a game called 'Game: The Game' before?]

[Um, it's like this. The game's title is a bit weird, called 'Game'. It's a single player game and it doesn't need a web connection to play, but once it's started you cannot switch out to any other screen. The graphics, sound, and animation effects are all incredibly realistic, and this game's physics engine is surprisingly powerful. I am well and truly shocked that my 4000 Yuan machine could even run such a high-quality game. Um, also the beginning character has five stats. Has anyone played this before? Do reply below, thank you very much.]

Carefully, Yue Qiang kept all of the Game's oddities out of the passage and only mentioned a few obscure points. He planned to log back in tomorrow and check the replies. Usually, the users on single player forums have pretty vivid imaginations; who knows, maybe there really are others who have played this game? Even if he was the game's only player, the forumers should still be able to provide explanations on all angles about the Game.

Finally, he logged out of the forum and picked up his peripherals

once more. He was almost ready. Yue Qiang planned to walk out of this house and take a deep look into the mysteries behind the Game.

As he inched closer towards the exit, to his surprise, Yue Qiang realized that the game's perspective had unconsciously switched into first person perspective. What this means is that at the beginning, Yue Qiang was observing his character as well as his interactions with Teacher Chen Zi Han from a top-down perspective, and as he walked closer and closer towards the door he then realized that the game's perspective had changed. He, as the player didn't even realize it until it was too late.

There are obvious advantages to this transition. For example, when playing 'Need For Speed' the experience between third person and the driver's perspective (switch by pressing the 'C' key) is completely different. Personally, Yue Qiang himself is a die hard fan of first person games.

Through the first person perspective, Yue Qiang could see through the main entrance and observe the scenery outside the house. There were blue skies and lush green trees; the smithy just opposite of the house. He could even scroll the mouse wheel to zoom in and enlarge a specific location's image to a certain degree. For example, he could see right now a blacksmith striking iron while sweating buckets inside the smithy.

And do you know what this means? It means that this game does not require scene changes at all! It means a frightening amount of computational power, and every scene could be freely traversed without ever needing to load at all!

Yue Qiang glanced at his old PC. He knew very well that it was impossible for his PC to be able to run such a high spec game. Lifting a wry smile, Yue Qiang controlled his character and headed towards the door.

Chapter 6: The Proper Gestures When Talking With An NPC

The moment he walked out of the door, once again, Yue Qiang found himself shocked by the level of photorealism in this game.

Yue Qiang felt as if he was under an illusion. It was as if he had actually been transported into the world of Ancient China.

As a hardcore single player gamer, besides loving the hell out of gaming itself, Yue Qiang was also deeply interested in the physics engines, graphic details, game balances, random algorithms, etc in the games he played. This was because these elements also showed the developers' level of dedication. In other words, if a game's details were extremely refined as a whole, then how bad could the game possibly be?

Tilting his perspective upwards, he could see an endless expanse of a blue sky along with waves of white clouds. Returning to the normal view, he could see the trees and grass swaying with the wind. A few NPCs were busy with their work in the village. For example, the farmer NPC was threshing the wheat; the NPC who stored ice was busy checking his account book; and the blacksmith on the other side of the house was still striking iron with great concentration. He did not know how to describe the entire scene. If he had to use professional terminology, then he could say very confidently that within visible range, he could not find a trace of any 'textures' at all.

A game where you could not even find a single trace of 'game textures' was shocking and strange because it meant an

unbelievable large amount of processing power and game storage volume.

Yue Qiang could remember clearly that in the ancient first person shooter game CS, when a character died, there would be a scene of the character swiveling on its feet and falling. He could still remember that when the character dies sometimes he could even see the pixels on the ceiling textures.

Except that now, he could not even see a trace of the game's 'textures', much less the pixels. He even controlled his character to purposefully crouch with the button 'X' and carefully examined the floor, but, he had to admit that even at this short range the ground's soil effect was incredibly realistic. He could even see an ant hill not too far away; there were even ants moving the body of dead insects on the side. This... Are these kind of effects even possible to make with just textures?

Suppressing the shock in his heart, Yue Qiang began to weave his game plan. It was obvious now that this game in many ways had exceeded the specs of current available technology. However, in the end, this was just a game and judging from the current situation, it was impossible that this could be an online game.

There was a 90 percent chance that this was a single player game, and if it was, there would be patterns that he could follow.

The game was made with an antique style, so it meant that this was a domestic single player game, and a domestic single player game would definitely not exclude this key fact – plot progression through interaction with NPCs.

The fact that domestic single player games heavily revolved around plot was practically a public axiom. Although there were countless things about this game that were outright bizarre, the fundamental direction of the game should remain unchanged.

Yue Qiang continued to ponder but his eyes were darting about and processing the environment around him. As he glanced again towards the blacksmith opposite the house, he thought to himself, Alright, you will be the one. Let's try talking to him and see if I can get any interesting information.

Tapping away at the arrow keys, he moved his character towards the blacksmith's side. As their distance closed he had a deep sense of exactly how brawny the man was. His arms were both taut and powerful; about the size of his own character's thighs. The bronze color of his skin gave off a strong and healthy feel.

Yue Qiang did not left click the blacksmith like most other games to initiate a conversation straight away. Instead, he very carefully right clicked the blacksmith and checked his status. He could not let go of any opportunity that would lend him a deeper understanding of the game and verify his assumptions.

Character Name: The Blacksmith, Tan Xiong Class: Blacksmith (Previous occupation unknown)
Strength: 27 (He is as fit as a bull) Constitution: 16 (He appears to have been sick before and his

constitution is slightly weak)

?? : ??

Skills:

?? : ??

?? : ??

The moment he saw the word ‘Skills’, Yue Qiang thought to himself: It’s arrived! The main course is here!

If one were to say that stats were the foundation of a game character, then skills would be the key to unleashing the full potential of those stats. The fundamentals of combat, defeating a greater opponent with a much weaker strength. In the classic single player games, skills and even stats were incredibly rare apart from Skill Trainer NPCs. However, this Blacksmith Tan Xiong that he ran into right after he exited his house already possessed two skills, and those skills were even displayed as ‘?’ within the status screen. Of course, this meant that the game’s database was incredibly robust, but most importantly it also hinted that players could acquire information on skills through certain means and perhaps even learn said skill.

Yue Qiang had a hunch that both of this blacksmith’s skills were down-to-earth combat skills and definitely not a non-combat kind of trade-oriented skill. The reason was due to this little hint by the system:

Class: Blacksmith (Previous occupation unknown)

The system would not give out a pointless hint. Since it already said so, then it was very likely that this hidden skill displayed in a '?' fashion was connected to the blacksmith Tan Xiong's old class. Yue Qiang had also made some guesses about the information the system was hiding, that is the information that was displayed with '?'. Unfortunately, it would seem that he must obtain the relevant information and even better, relevant information that is important and only then would the system would unlock this hidden information.

This was just like how he repeatedly conversed with the teacher Chen Zi Han and obtained the opportunity to learn 'Gui Gu Mathematics'. Although he didn't have enough 'Tactics' to learn it, he still acquired some info regarding 'Tactics' and unlocked a row of stats from Chen Zi Han's stat screen.

In retrospect, it would seem that acquiring as much critical information as possible is the foundation for progress in this world.

Confirming his thoughts, Yue Qiang's need to converse with the NPCs had become even more urgent than before. Moreover, he also realized that in this game he most likely could not ALT skip through the dialogues like other normal domestic single player games and enter combat immediately.

He carefully left clicked the blacksmith and initiated a conversation.

In reflection of the game's realistic real-time feedback system, no dialogue box appeared below the blacksmith. Instead, the blacksmith Tan Xiong with an indifferent gaze scornfully shot Yue Qiang with a scrutinizing look. A line of Song Ti characters immediately appeared on the game screen: The Blacksmith, Tan Xiong sized you up with a contemptuous look.

Interesting.

Yue Qiang left clicked the blacksmith again but there was still no dialogue box which appeared. Now the screen's Song Ti characters had changed into: The blacksmith is still ignoring you, but he is now swinging his hammer even harder.

Just as Yue Qiang wanted to click at the blacksmith Tan Xiong for the third time and see if the screen's message would change again, he abruptly recalled an incident and immediately released of the mouse.

Thank goodness I reacted in time...

In that instant, Yue Qiang had recalled the three bumps on his head. Based off his deductions, the basic stats in this game is twice the amount of the stats in real life. Even the feeble teacher Chen Zi Han could brutalize him with a simple ruler, much less the blacksmith Tan Xiong who had a strength value of 27. Recalling the message 'The blacksmith is still ignoring you, but he is now swinging his hammer even harder', Yue Qiang immediately broke out in a cold sweat. If a mere ruler was enough to knock three bumps on his head, then this hammer would...

Yue Qiang did not doubt in the slightest that such an incident may very well happen. Furthermore, up until this point, Yue Qiang had not found anything that resembled a Save/Load option. It's best to remain cautious for now until he found a proper solution.

Now then, how should he converse with this NPC?

While sweating beads, the blacksmith Tan Xiong continued to strike iron right in front of Yue Qiang. Each one of his swings appeared to be exactly the same; the direction, the angle, and the force used did not change in the slightest. Should he perceive this as the game developers being lazy or that the blacksmith Tan Xiong's true strength had reached a point where he could easily control the heavy hammer with perfect precision?

As Yue Qiang continued to watch the sweaty NPC, an idea flashed into his head. Having observed this place closely when he exited the house, on the side of the street he remembered hat there was an ice storage shop.

Yue Qiang controlled his character and left the blacksmith. He then ran until he was in front of the ice shop. The shop keeper NPC was a proprietress. She was both beautiful and young, and coupled with a realistic traditional clothing, she possessed an extraordinary charm.

Left clicking her avatar, a dialogue box appeared beneath the beautiful proprietress:

Gongshu Shaoyang: “Isn’t this Young Sir Yue? What a rare sight! What’s the matter, why have you come to my humble store in this sweltering weather instead of sleeping inside the house?”

Looks like this character isn’t doing so well in this village, and this was after I put 8 points of stats into my Charm… While Yue Qiang was thinking, his conversation with the beautiful proprietress NPC continued as an option box appeared at the bottom. Apparently, he had to make a choice: to say 1, or to say 2.

[1: From this day onwards this young man shall strive to improve himself, share his father’s burden and slaughter his people’s enemies. It is for these reasons I have exited my home to conduct an inspection.]

[2. It’s currently hot summer and I’m terribly thirsty. I’m here to get a bowl of ice.]

Were he going by the standard gamer’s mentality, he would definitely choose option 1 to improve his relationship with the NPC. But because he had a more urgent need at the moment, he chose 2.

Yue Qiang: “Miss Gongshu, it’s currently hot summer and I’m terribly thirsty. I’m here to get a bowl of ice.

Gongshu Shaoyang went down to the cellar and retrieved a frosty bowl of ice, “Eldest Son Yue, Ai, if only you would work hard for the people like your father and not be so indulgent in pleasure.”

So it would seem that the plot set his character as a lazy and unambitious son of a rich family. Perhaps his father might even be a small governor with a land of his own.

Yue Qiang clicked the bowl of ice and selected the ‘Collect’ option. Then he turned around and left the shop. The beautiful proprietress NPC no longer said anything and instead let out a sweet sigh from behind his back. Yue Qiang suddenly realized that he had made an incredibly wise choice dumping all his free stats into ‘Charm’ when he first entered this game.

Evidently, the ‘Charm’ stat affected the NPC’s attitude towards himself. If his Charm had stayed at 7, it would’ve been near impossible to act in this world where stats averaged around 20.

Yue Qiang clicked open the Item screen in the system tray. Other than the completed ‘Analects’ and the unreadable, grey-highlighted ‘Gui Gu Mathematics’, there was now a third item ‘A bowl of ice’.

> Item Description (A bowl of ice): Made by Gongshu Shaoyang. The Gongshu clan are experts in civil engineering and they are able to store ice in a specially made, masterfully crafted cellar. Even in the heat of summer, it could still ensure that the ice would not melt.

He walked back to the blacksmith and arrived beside the blacksmith Tan Xiong. He did not rush to click the character and

talk to him. Instead, he opened the inventory and right clicked on the item (A bowl of ice) to use it.

System Message: You have gifted the blacksmith Tan Xiong with a bowl of ice.

System Message: The blacksmith Tan Xiong has used the item (a bowl of ice).

System Message: The blacksmith Tan Xiong appears to be much more refreshed.

System Message: The blacksmith Tan Xiong is now looking at you in a much friendlier light.

Yue Qiang quietly watched the system messages pop up one by one onto his screen. As a veteran single player gamer, to uncover the depths of the usage of every item was a basic skill. He had no doubt that his efforts in obtaining the blacksmith's favorability would not be a waste of time. What he was waiting for was the next system message; the communication function that he had been anticipating for a while now.

Sure enough, at the end of those four dull messages, a blue sentence of words appeared:

System Message [Blue]: Because you have succeeded in

changing 2 NPCs favorability towards you, you can now activate the ‘Dialogue System’. Will you activate it?

That’s right, this is what I want!

In a flurry of emotions, Yue Qiang slapped his keyboard and leaped onto his feet.

Chapter 7: Tan Xiong, The Blacksmith's Strength

As a single player game enthusiast, there was a slight difference between Yue Qiang's gaming attitude and casual, entertainment seeking gamers. This difference was expressed by the amount of effort spent on playing a game.

Normally, Yue Qiang would explore every available channel such as guides, forums, official websites and more to understand the novelty of a new game. But, this game, with its dubious installation and startup method had rendered the traditional way of acquiring game info almost completely useless. Even the thread he posted earlier on the forum was made without high expectations.

As of now, the only way to understand the game was to go through its plot, or more specifically by talking with the NPCs and inferring from its GUI (Graphical User Interface). This raised a problem:

There is a severe lack of information.

After a period of understanding, Yue Qiang came to realize that this game's NPCs were designed with great thought put behind them. For example, Chen Zi Han would hand out the basic chapter of 'Gui Gu Mathematics' after repeated dialoguing. On the other hand, the dialoguing with the blacksmith Tan Xiong was carried out through eye glances with hints provided by the system. Even talking with the proprietress of an ice seller would trigger an option box.

At the same time, Yue Qiang noticed that this beautiful ice selling proprietress had a pretty interesting surname – Gong Shu. Did you know? An incredibly famous figure was born with this surname during the Warring States Period. His name was Gong Shu Ban, also known by his descendants as the Founder of Carpentry, Lu Ban. In many games, Lu Ban was also known as the father of mechanical contraptions.

Yue Qiang had a suspicion that everyone he had come in contact thus far were probably all 'plot characters'.

It was hard to imagine that interactions with plot characters in this ridiculously suspicious game would follow the same old fixed dialogue system.

Click Avatar – Talk to NPC – The MC says something – the NPC says something – A quest is sent out – A quest is completed – the NPC gifts you the rewards.

Would it really be logical to assume that the traditional flow of a single player RPG would apply to this game? Could there be a hidden, deeper way of interaction?

Combining the above with Yue Qiang's own need to discover more info urgently, he realized that the solution should fall onto the dialogue mode with NPCs.

In other words, there must be a mode of sorts that could be activated.

As for the process for activating it, the system had already given out a hint before. Namely: Not following the normal process, or in other words, completing the hidden mini quests.

So, how exactly should he not follow the normal process? When Yue Qiang first interacted with the teacher Chen Zi Han, he had accidentally used the item ‘A chair’ and placed it beneath Chen Zi Han, and this action indirectly caused the latter hidden conversation to be activated. It was also why he kept a watchful eye on the blacksmith Tan Xiong’s status when he interacted with his second NPC.

This status he was mentioning was neither stats nor skills, but the game itself giving him a ‘Sweaty’ attribute through the use of graphics.

Just like how he dealt with teacher Chen Zi Han’s ‘Haughty’ attribute by pulling him a chair and fulfilling his vanity, the blacksmith Tan Xiong’s ‘Sweaty’ attribute too could very well be a hint stating that by helping and solving the blacksmith’s problem of ‘sweating under hot weather’, he would be able to win his favorability.

More importantly, this must be a hidden quest. No matter how trivial it might appear to be, it was still a hidden quest. Yue Qiang knew deep inside that the secret reward of a secret quest could not possibly be this simple.

Therefore, when he saw that slightly unexpected system message

‘Dialogue System Activated’, he finally felt a tiny sense of accomplishment.

As I thought, this game does need to be played with brains.

He wasn’t particularly in a hurry to talk with the blacksmith Tan Xiong, so he might as well check out first how to use this ‘Dialogue System’.

He looked around the GUI briefly, but could not find any prompts for this ‘Dialogue System’. Yue Qiang thought to himself. Could it be…

He attempted a mouse click on the blacksmith Tan Xiong, and a dialogue box popped into the screen.

The dialog box was empty.

There was also a cursor inside the box.

After seeing this, Yue Qiang was finally certain that his assumptions were correct. This so-called ‘Dialogue System’ was, in fact, the ability to freely converse with the NPCs through typing.

The significance of this system was huge. If his favorability was high enough, then through a single NPC alone he would be able to acquire through askance a huge amount of information about the game’s world.

More importantly, with this free typing method he would be able to use conversational skills from real life!

No matter how bizarre this game might be, in the end, it was just a game. No matter how smart an NPC was, they were still just an NPC.

Arriving at the thought, Yue Qiang began typing inside the dialog box: “I see that Big Brother Tan Xiong is not only a strong man with wide shoulders and a round waist; but also a humble person who hides his essence and true strength within. This kid had admired you for a long time, and today’s display left me especially impressed.”

Yue Qiang typed as he thought: Let’s throw in some ‘priceless’ compliments and see how the NPC reacts.

“If you have business then we’ll talk business. Otherwise, you can save the bullshit.”

Yue Qiang’s attempts to butter up the NPC was met with a brick wall, but he wasn’t discouraged in the slightest and continued typing, “This kid would like to learn a skill, and I wonder if Big Brother Tan Xiong would grant me this honor?”

He finished the sentence, but quickly felt that something wasn’t quite right, so he changed the word “Skill” to “Dharma” before finally tapping ‘Enter’ and sent out the message.

He pondered words and formed sentences to talk to the NPC while he reflected on the benefits of this dialogue system.

Originally he was going to wrack his brain for a way to trigger the hidden quest to learn the blacksmith's skill. Now he didn't have to. As long as he put a little heart into typing the right words, there's practically every chance in the world to learn a skill, and who knows, maybe he could even get a combat skill. Maybe he didn't even need to pay a price. This dialogue system sure saved him a massive amount of time and energy alright.

Yue Qiang typed out the sentence and waited for the other party to reply. He saw the blacksmith Tan Xiong humph coldly and said, "We are on the eve of our country's demise, and only now young master had thought of killing the enemy in battle. Don't you think it's too late?"

Yue Qiang typed: "It is never too late to sacrifice for one's country."

The blacksmith Tan Xiong humph coldly again, "Your constitution really is too poor. I'm afraid you can't learn my body strengthening dharma."

When Yue Qiang saw the reply, he instead became excited. After entering the game for such a long time, this was the first time had a proper discussion with an NPC about skills. They might be using some obscure words like 'body strengthening dharma', but the meaning was nearly the same.

Yue Qiang typed: “In that case, may I ask Big Brother Tan Xiong to know exactly how much stats, excuse me, what level of constitution do I need to achieve, to be able to learn a combat skill?”

“A frail and sick puppy like you wants to learn combat skills? What a lazy toad you are lusting after a swan’s flesh.

Yue Qiang felt helpless. Even a blacksmith in the starting area would dare to mock him repeatedly. Either he did not have enough Charisma or the game’s difficulty was just outright crazy, and since the system had clearly stated that his Charisma points had reached its limit there was no doubt that the latter possibility was very real. At this point, he began, to sum up his thoughts. Since this game was made so realistically, it’s probable the variety of skills should not exceed the realm of reality by too much. Why not take a look at the blacksmith’s Tan Xiong strength, who seemed to have some history of his own?

As soon as he arrived at the thought, Yue Qiang typed: “I wonder if Big Brother Tan can show off to this kid a thing or two?”

The blacksmith Tan Xiong said: “You wanna know my true strength? Sure.”

He lifted the hammer to the air with that taut and muscular arm of his but did not swing it about in a show of techniques. Instead, he tossed the huge hammer gently and sent it flying right towards Yue Qiang’s direction until it landed heavily at his feet. When the

hammer slammed onto the ground, a cloud of dust rose and covered Yue Qiang's view, and even his screen had shuddered slightly in response.

What terrifying weight!

"You can try out my hammer first." Tan Xiong said.

Yue Qiang made his character crouch and attempted to lift the hammer.

> System Message: You do not have enough Strength, and are unable to lift the hammer.

It was as he expected. Before he could type anything in reply the burly blacksmith had already picked up the hammer with ease, and with his other hand he grabbed over a red hot iron and began tapping it with his hammer. In less than a minute, when Yue Qiang took another look at the somewhat reddish iron he was shocked to discover that it had transformed into a delicate iron flower.

It was so lifelike that it was almost real.

If you ignore the color and materials, it would appear as if it was grown naturally. Yue Qiang purposefully turned the mouse wheel to zoom in for a better look, and under a high resolution the iron flower remained as flawless as ever, and not a single blemish could

be found.

At this point, Yue Qiang had come up with a rough estimate in his heart. It was very possible that, other than a powerful strength stat, this blacksmith Tan Xiong must have a skill that was similar to the Accuracy stat, and at a pretty high level too.

“I wonder, how long would it take this kid to train until he reached Big Brother Tan’s stats, excuse me, this level of strength and control? Is there any way to speed up this process?”

The way Yue Qiang spoke caused Tan Xiong to make an angry expression immediately, “There are no shortcuts on the path of martial arts! If you haven’t trained for eight or ten years then don’t even think about it!”

He then said, “Not to mention that three months later, our country will soon perish. Even if you did somehow train to my level in just three months, what’s the point?”

The strong and burly Tan Xiong seemed to hide within his chest a million words that he could not help but spill, “To wrought iron ornaments is just an insignificant skill. Do you want to know what my real ability is?”

Tan Xiong said as he rolled up his left sleeve.

Yue Qiang hurriedly adjusted his screen to take a closer look. He was quite a distance away and wasn’t paying his full attention

earlier, but now that he examined closely, he realized that the blacksmith Tan Xiong's left arm was actually made out of wood! The texture was exquisite and a diverse variety of joints actually made it work in no way less than a human arm. Now that he thought about it, when he grabbed that red hot iron with his bare hands, he was also using this wooden arm.

"Out of my entire body, the greatest weapon I have is actually this prosthetic wooden limb. This was made by that lassie from the Gong Shu family after I lost my arm during the war years ago. With this arm, my combat capability had actually improved a step further, and now I'm at the point where I barely surpassed the limits of a normal human's strength.

"But so what?" The blacksmith Tan Xiong's tone seemed to imply that he was recalling the countless tragedies of the past, "Even with this arm I am still completely helpless! Ai, three months later, the country will no longer be a country, so there's no point in talking about these things. Young master, you should just keep being the scholar you are and enjoy another three months of peace."

The moment he finished, as if wrought in great sadness, he actually stopped smithing, the blacksmith walked back into his home and locked the door.

Yue Qiang never thought that he would acquire so much information from the blacksmith Tan Xiong right after the Dialogue System was activated.

Even more surprising was that the blacksmith didn't stay at his

original location after saying his part. In a single player game, the situation where you were unable to continue dialoguing any further meant that the main scenario had begun.

According to the information derived from the conversation just now, “Three months later, the country will no longer be a country” most likely meant that this village was about to face a huge crisis in the future. Even after accounting for his added strength after the lassie from Gong Shu family made him his prosthetic limb, there was no chance that the blacksmith Tan Xiong would be strong enough to defend against this crisis.

He didn’t know who the enemy was, but from the way Tan Xiong described it, “Completely helpless”, it meant that their strength was above even Tan Xiong’s.

At the same time he also noticed a very important point and that was the way to increase stats in this game:

There are no shortcuts on the path of martial arts!

If you haven’t trained for eight or ten years at least then don’t even think about it!

If it was any other game Yue Qiang would never have given two shits about these lines because he probably didn’t need to look far before an NPC would obediently pass over some peerless martial technique right into his hands. But judging from the game’s level of realism and how insufferable it was to complete the two hidden quests before, to practice martial arts – that is to increase his stats

most probably would consume a huge amount of time. At the very least, there was no way to quickly improve his strength within the mentioned three months.

What should I do?

Is it really impossible to level up in this game?

Yue Qiang did not give up. The blacksmith Tan Xiong had returned to his smithy and locked the door, and was in a ‘could not be talked to at the moment state’. So he began making rounds within the tiny village and at the same time typed very carefully when he conversed with the village’s NPCs. He didn’t dare to let his guard down when using the Dialogue System, and his attitude was either slightly cautious or even flattering when he typed.

It wasn’t a joke. This game was so realistic that who knows if these NPCs are just lines of codes or some other incomprehensible things?

After making one round after another and chatting cautiously with over 20 NPCs, Yue Qiang realized that every NPC shared the same pessimistic note when they talked. It was as if all of them had taken a ‘do one’s level best and leave the rest to God’s will’ attitude towards this certain event three months later.

It seemed that this village’s eventual demise should be the main scenario. In that case, would altering the scenario and saving the village be the incredibly obvious hidden quest?

Also, how the heck should he level up in this game?

The reason Yue was so concerned about the way to level up in this game wasn't simply because wanted to complete the game's quest. The other more important reason was, of course, him recalling the 8 free distribution stat points during the character creation screen, and the series of changes that followed after he used those points.

Leveling up in almost any game meant the all-around increase in stats, and in this game increasing stats had this extra layer of meaning in real life.

Yue Qiang moved his character back into the house at the beginning of the game and began to ponder deeply.

Suddenly, he had an idea.

"If my thoughts are correct, then leveling up in this game may need to be realized outside the game." Yue Qiang muttered to himself.

Chapter 8: Free, or...?

After spending half the day dallying about the village, the in-game time had already turned to evening and it was also dinner time in real life. If he went about as he usually did, it would be around the time he went downstairs to buy some instant noodles again.

Yue Qiang did not continue exploring inside the game. Instead, he calmly put down his mouse and used a very short amount of time to come up with a small plan.

He wanted to make an experiment. That experiment where he could level up his character outside the game.

The first thing Yue Qiang did was to sweep out everything under his bed with a broom.

As a standard hikikomori, the thing he had the most under his bed was, of course, used and unwashed stinky socks.

He had to admit that it really stank.

Yue Qiang picked the smelliest pair out of the group; a black and a gray one and wore it on his feet.

Then he went to the toilet to find a pair of slippers.

After he tidied things up for a bit, he found a pair of flip flops that had lost its bottom. He weighed it in his hands, thought that it was okay and proceeded to wear it on his feet.

Again, he had to admit that wearing flip flops on a pair of socks was a super weird combination. Not only the socks smelled really bad, their colors didn't even match.

This wasn't the end of it. From the washing machine he dug out an old man's T-shirt and wore it, then he swiped a handful of dust from the windowsill and rubbed it into his hair. After he was done, Yue Qiang looked at himself in the mirror...

Hmm, okay. Now this is about right.

With this 'outfit', Yue Qiang then went outside.

His first objective was to personally verify whether or not that 16 points of Charisma was real or not, to see if the game had really given him some inexplicable powers or it was just his bunch of bad friends playing a prank on him.

Yue Qiang arrived at a pretty famous hairdressing salon in the city.

"Boss, please give me a haircut."

"Mister..." The receptionist was a pretty hot babe who upon seeing the dust on his hair, smelling the stink on his body and

especially that mismatched combination of bottomless flip flops and socks, came this close to throwing him out of the salon. But the moment she saw Yue Qiang's eyes – no, more accurately speaking, the moment Yue Qiang stared into her eyes – the receptionist girl's perception changed.

"Mister, what kind of haircut do you want?" the girl said meekly, "We have the 388 Yuan package, the 588 Yuan package, and the finest, top class 888 Yuan sexy time service. We will definitely in every way be able to meet your design and modeling needs."

Yue Qiang thought for a while and said, "I want to have my head shaved."

The receptionist girl was surprised, but when Yue Qiang stared at her again, her eyes changed once more, "Mister, our high-class salon will be able to meet your needs even if it is something like a bald haircut. Also, I personally think that it is extremely fitting for your disposition."

Soon, the bald haircut was done.

The bald Yue Qiang stood in front of the counter, stared into the girl's eyes and said, "I want to be exempted from my bill."

When Yue Qiang said this he pretended to be very calm and collected, when in truth he was nervous to the extreme. Throughout the entire process, he stared firmly into the receptionist girl's eyes and did not avert his gaze in the slightest. The receptionist girl's eyes did not change, nor did her expression

show any surprise. In a perfectly ordinary tone she said, “Oh mister, we couldn’t get such a high-end customer like you even if we begged them to come. Exempting your bill is but a small matter.”

Upon saying so, the receptionist girl and the two princesses at the front door then gracefully escorted Yue Qiang out of the high-class salon.

After Yue Qiang left, he did not go back home just yet. Instead, he went to yet another incredibly famous bar in the city.

It was the same weird à la carte and the same weird drink orders. He even ordered a beautiful hostess.

After he finished eating, again he asked to exempt his bill.

When he made his request Yue Qiang stared at the hostess girl and never looked away. But her expression was normal, and she even took on a teasing tone, “Oh handsome, do you know how handsome you really are? I’m afraid we are the ones who should be paying to be able to have you drink with us.

Before he left, she also threw him a wink and said, “Feel free to come by to have some fun!”

Yue Qiang left.

Throughout the night, he went to many luxurious venues and

made many baffling, if not outright exotic requests. While the receptionists' replies were somewhat normal in the beginning, the moment they matched eyes with Yue Qiang, they would become both meek and obedient.

It was eleven at night. After exiting from a luxurious club, he did not look for another entertainment venue and continue his crusade. Instead, he ran to the riverside.

The riverside's night wind was quite strong and caused his shaved head to feel chilly.

He felt a lot more sobered up.

There was no doubt that tonight's experiment had concluded successfully to a certain degree.There was no doubt that something had changed within himself. However, was this really the so-called power of 'Charisma'? Were these changes really caused by the 8 free distribution stat points that he somewhat carelessly allocated under 'Charisma'?

On the surface, it did seem to be true. With an outlook of poverty, he somehow managed to fulfill all of his exotic requests at every luxurious venue, and even his requests to exempt his bills were easily accepted by all kinds of receptionists. To say that it was his high charisma that caused all those people to blindly worship him without reason was a plausible explanation.

And yet, he couldn't help but feel that something wasn't quite right.

Suddenly, it struck him. He started feeling cold sweat pouring down his back.

Suppose that it wasn't him, but the President of the United States who was freeloading while wearing a smelly pair of black-and-grey socks, a pair of bottomless flip flops, and an old man's T-shirt that stank so bad it would choke any passerby. He most likely wouldn't receive the same treatment as he did, would he? Even if the President's charisma was lower than his right now, there couldn't possibly be too much of a difference.

He suddenly realized that he had probably fallen into a jumbled web.

At first, he thought that this was just an enhanced version of a malicious trial software developed by some unnamed game company. Then, he guessed that it was a prank by a close friend.

When he came out tonight, freeloading and drinking and rubbing the hostess' thighs, for just an instant he really thought that he had become the cheat of legends. But now, as he sat by the river and felt the cool river breeze, he regained a mind of clarity.

There must be something that I'm missing.

And to find the answer, I will probably have to get back into the game.

His progress in game seemed to have reached a stagnant point. If he could not increase his stats quickly within three months, then he and the entire village would be swallowed up by the unknown existence mentioned by the blacksmith. And according to his latest received information, it would be incredibly difficult to level up in this game – There are no shortcuts on the path of martial arts!

It would seem that he had been caught in a dilemma.

The good news was that Yue Qiang already had an idea when he first left the house.

Testing the 'truth' of his Charisma was only the first step of his plan. The second step was the real key to his whole plan.

If he was to succeed in this part of the plan, then he would gain the basic strength needed to continue exploring in the game and with that, the possibility of pursuing the truth.

Yue Qiang reaffirmed his beliefs once more.

He arrived at the city's largest business district. There was a very high-class gym in this place.

It was already midnight and traffic was scarce.

Yue Qiang slowly walked inside.

From the beginning, this was the place that he had intended to come.

Chapter 9: Exposed!

“Hello mister, is there anything you need?”

“I need a workout.” Yue Qiang said.

“Mister, workouts can be broken down into many different types. The simpler ones would be weight loss, muscle building, body remodeling; and it can also be categorized more strictly into aerobic, anaerobic or even more specialized options. May I know your specific needs?”

“I want to increase my constitution and I want to increase my strength.” Yue Qiang said before he slowed down his speech and used heavier articulation, “I would like to undergo a significant change in a very short period of time.”

“Mister, exercise is a systematic process and it requires years of continuous training to bear fruit. It is not practical to wish for massive improvement within a very short period of time…”

The front desk receptionist had wanted to elaborate some more but she came to a sudden halt. He saw a woman in a small business suit, who appeared to be a senior management staff walking towards him. The front desk receptionist tensed up as she meekly said, “Hello m-manager, what brings you here today?”

The woman – who was called a manager – wore a mask of indifference as she waved towards the receptionist, “Your business is done here. You can go home now.” Once she finished she began

to closely observe Yue Qiang.

Yue Qiang remained silent as he sized up the senior management staff-like female manager.

She had a delicate face and wore a light makeup that was very professionally done, and it gave her a smart and competent appearance. From the looks of her aura and the panic-stricken front desk receptionist, this woman was most likely the owner of this fitness club.

Yue Qiang's expression did not waver, but he could hardly contain the excitement within his heart.

Did you know? This is the city's most infamous business district, and at this place where every inch of land was worth an inch of gold, this fitness club had occupied an entire half-a-storey for itself. You could just imagine the owner's wealth. Could it be that the woman standing before him is the owner of this fitness club?

Yue Qiang had never look at a 'rich person' so closely before and he did his best to size her up with a harmless gaze; especially the fabric on her clothes and the quality of her accessories. The white-collar beauty didn't look like she was in a hurry to talk either as she too eyed Yue Qiang with great interest.

A long while after, she finally said, "Mr. Yue Qiang?"

"I am Yue Qiang." Yue Qiang said calmly.

After re-confirming his identity, she abruptly pulled back her domineering aura and to his surprise, put on the appearance of a usherette. She pressed her thighs together tightly and skillfully switched her position from the opposite side of Yue Qiang to his flank. She then bowed and stretched out her slender arm towards Yue Qiang to make a half-bow welcoming gesture.

Her posture was perfectly standard and absolutely impeccable.

Yue Qiang had only ever seen those VIPs receiving this kind of heady mannerisms in high-end clubs on TV shows.

And to think that this woman before him, whom he had guessed her potential wealth and status would act in such a way towards him. It greatly surprised him, but he also felt stoked on the inside.

Concluding the formal etiquette, she returned to her usual posture and drew the trace of a beautiful and stunning smile on her face,

“Mister Yue, please follow me.” she said, “I am here because the lead had told me to expect your arrival.”

“Lead? Who is that?”

The manager did not answer. Instead, she simply made a leading gesture and began escorting Yue Qiang towards the front. Her hips were very thin and her hips very round, and since he was following

from the back, Yue Qiang could easily get an eyeful of enjoyment. But even with such a fantastic view before him, he still devoted most of his attention to observe his surroundings.

There was no other reason. The decor of this place was simply too astounding.

From the outside, this fitness club would appear to be just okay. But when you actually stepped inside, without a doubt the only word to describe this place was ‘luxurious’. The countless machines he couldn’t put a name on was just the beginning. The sleek corner design, the handrails as exquisite as relief sculptures, the vertical mirrors that could be seen everywhere and so on; combined they gave Yue Qiang the illusion that he was a barbarian entering modern society. He could hardly imagine that a mere fitness club could be designed so luxuriously that it was like being in a palace or a dream.

At the end of the hallway was an open room, and the manager forcefully led Yue Qiang inside.

It was a room decorated in the image of a study. It was really dark inside and the only light in the room was from a lamp on the desk.

Sitting in front of the desk and with her back facing towards Yue Qiang was a woman.

The reason Yue Qiang could confirm without a shred of doubt that she was a she, even when he was looking at her back in such a dark environment was because her femininity was just too

obvious.

Was she the ‘lead’ the manager was talking about?

Without giving him much time to think, this woman with her back towards him began to speak. Her voice was slightly deep and yet it contained a strange magnetism to it, “Your business here is done, you may leave.”

The words weren’t directed at Yue Qiang.

The manager who led him here answered with a soft ‘Yes’ and gently closed the door. Suddenly, Yue Qiang and that woman were the only ones left inside the room.

The lights were a bit dim and the atmosphere a little awkward, and Yue Qiang… felt a little nervous.

The woman did not look like she had any intentions of turning around. She was reading a book in front of the table, and on occasion, she would flip a page or stop and tilt her head in thought. It was as if this problem that she was thinking about was of paramount importance to her.

For a time Yue Qiang simply stood there by the door, until he finally recalled his own purpose and tried to say something. But it was this occasion the woman had picked to open her mouth and say,

“You are here for a way to improve your constitution, aren’t you?” her voice was slightly deep and incredibly attractive.

Originally he was going to say, “I’m here to workout”. He hadn’t expected her to point it out in advance, so he could only say, “That’s right.”

“The shorter the training time the better, is it?” she said again, “And preferably not more than three months?”

Yue Qiang flinched in his heart upon hearing the words ‘three months’. He did not reply immediately, and instead took the time to carefully recall his conversation with the receptionist earlier at the entrance. After he swiftly ran the dialogues once over his head, he was sure that he had never mentioned at any point of time the info ‘three months’ at all. What followed after the short recollection was complete astonishment.

How did she know that I only have three months left?

She did not give her much time to think as she continued, “Really, it’s not a problem if you’re just looking to workout. In fact you’re pretty tough to begin with, and you are strong enough to move bricks already. That being said, your constitution’s a bit weak and you get sick often, don’t you?

I’m very curious, though. Why would a man as attractive as you spend so much effort to train yourself, when you’re so loved by everyone that even flowers bloom in your presence? Isn’t it easier to find a rich wife and live comfortably for the rest of your life?”

The moment he heard her words Yue Qiang could no longer hold back the shock in his heart because those words she mentioned were pretty much the same as his own character's stat descriptions! These descriptions were just generated this afternoon and he was absolutely sure that he had not shown them to anyone at all.

He asked loudly, "Who are you?"

Heeding his question, the woman turned around and stood facing Yue Qiang directly. Her body shape could only be described as perfect. She wore a fat baggy pants on her lower half, and although her pants were extra large, when she turned around and stood up he could see clearly the perfect contour of her legs and her hips. She wore only a sports bra on the top, showing off her perfectly smooth and firm abdomen. Her voluptuous breasts quivered underneath the tightly stretched sports bra. Her eyes and brows were especially vivid; whenever she spoke the corner of her eyes would lift up slightly, as if she found it amusing to have exposed some unsaid secrets.

"Me? My name is Duan Yi," she put down the book in her hands and casually said, "Surname Lu Qiu."

"You are free to call me by my first name or my last. It doesn't really matter anyway. After all, I am the last person left in my family."

Chapter 10: The Price To Level Up

Yue Qiang really did come here to workout.

When he went out this evening, he had already planned tonight's operation. The first step would be the substantive test of his 'Charisma'. He wanted to use those ridiculous and somewhat laughable actions to test if he had truly acquired 'Charisma' in real life.

And the matter of fact was that he succeeded. He could even freeload at every luxury venue using his 'Charisma'! However he was not carried away by this almost joke-like ability, in fact, it rang a warning bell in Yue Qiang's head. It was just like the time he was on the phone and heard the school beauty say, "I am the class beauty Rao Xiao Ting".

He instinctively felt that something was wrong, yet he couldn't tell exactly what was wrong either.

Of course, as of now it... it didn't look like resolving this doubt seemed too urgent of a matter. Right now, the most pressing problem was to know how to level up inside the game.

Yue Qiang had an idea about this issue.

He remembered clearly that his initial in-game stats were pretty similar to himself in real life. In that case, if he trained his body and improved his physical fitness by working out, then would it possibly increase his in-game stats too?

He had made a rough estimation on the blacksmith Tan Xiong's constitution before, and it was probably impossible to reach a similar level of constitution in a short amount of time. But if it was to increase his 'Strength' and 'Constitution' stats by a few points out of thin air through the use of modern scientific methods, he believed that it was doable.

Naturally, this would require incredibly scientific arrangements, detailed training programs and meal plans, and there was no way to know how the final results would turn out. However it was a potentially feasible method, so he decided to give it a try. Besides, why shouldn't he utilize his high level of Charisma? At the worst he could also seduce the little girl at the front counter and be exempt of his bill or something.

It was with these thoughts that Yue Qiang came to this high class fitness club, but he did not expect the scene that unfolded before him afterwards.

He never expected that he would run into a woman – what did she call herself again? Lu Qiu Duan Yi – with such a weird name. What was even more unexpected was that this woman seemed to know his situation inside the game.

He instinctively became alert.

This woman called Luqiu Duanyi noticed his vigilance. She showed a soft smile, walked until she was beside Yue Qiang, raised both arms then rested them on his shoulders. She had deliberately

pressed close against him; Yue Qiang could even see his own reflection from her pupils.

“Take it easy.” She said.

Yue Qiang did not let down his guard, “What is this place, who are you, and how did you know -”

“Haven’t I told you earlier? I am Luqiu Duanyi. You can call me directly by my surname. This is just like… when you go to school, and there are always people with compound surnames such as the usual Ouyang, Dongfang and so on. Didn’t you just call them by their surnames to save yourself some breath?” She said casually as if she was making idle chatters, “As for what this place is, you can see it for yourself this is a fitness club, yep, a top class fitness club.”

Luqiu Duanyi moved away from his body and twirled lightly around him, “I am your fitness coach. That’s right, I guessed that you are probably here to look for a fitness coach. I believe that, in this field, you would not find a more professional fitness coach than me.”

Luqiu Duanyi waved her arm gently and interrupted Yue Qiang’s attempt to speak. She went on to add, “You’re wondering why I know you so well? Yes, I simply guessed them; and in truth it isn’t as hard as you would expect.”

“Nowadays there are more and more strange men and bizarre happenings in society. Even a boss from a big company would sometimes play a sucker by pretending to be a beggar to date car

models or get some fun. So what's so strange about someone like you who goes out in slippers while intentionally wearing the wrong socks?" She said, "What is it? Are you wondering how I determined your constitution? This is actually quite simple for people in our line of work. From how developed your muscles are, to even something like a hunched back, we are able to tell a lot about your physical condition. As for your charm... The way our receptionist and executive manager treated you did not slip my eyes, you know?"

She chuckled and walked to the side as she said with a careless attitude. At the same time, her hand pressed some unknown buttons, and somewhere in the room the lighting grew brighter and brighter. Beneath the light, a mini bar-like furniture appeared right before their eyes, and from the bar counter she picked up a scarlet liquid and poured it into a glass. She took a light sip, then poured another glass of boiled water and walked gracefully back to Yue Qiang's side, passing him the drink.

"Do drink some water. You reek of alcohol." she glanced once at Yue Qiang meaningfully before adding, "Since you have decided to work out, then you should stay away from all alcohol from now on."

Yue Qiang licked his dry lips. He was feeling very thirsty, but despite holding a full glass of clear water, he did not drink it.

This woman before him – Luqiu Duanyi – there was nothing wrong with her explanation. If she truly was a veteran fitness coach, then she could definitely grasp in detail a person's physical and health condition through muscle development and other

external factors. However this wasn't Yue Qiang's concern, but rather that the words she had used to describe her body when they first met each other.

Her chosen adjectives just happened to be the exact same as the system's? Where in the world would you find such a coincidence?

Yue Qiang was about to press for some answers, but after a moment's thought he held back the impulse. At the beginning, this woman seemed to be telling him something. On the other hand, her latter explanation made it look like she was trying to hide that something too. Could it be... that she was hinting that anything related to the game could not be said directly?

Yue Qiang decided that he would set this particular question aside.

After all it was still early, and three months was actually not a short time. If she really is going to become my fitness coach, then there will be plenty of opportunities for contact later. I can afford to take it slow.

Having made his decision, Yue Qiang's mind also slowly returned to a calmer state. He sat down on that ridiculously huge sofa in the room, grabbed an unopened bottle of mineral water from the table and took a sip, saying, "You are correct, I am here for a workout. I wonder though, how far can Miss Luqiu temper my body in just three months' time?"

When Luqiu Duanyi noticed that Yue Qiang did not drink the

water she gave him and instead grabbed an unopened mineral water for himself and drank that, the trace of a subtle smile flashed across her face. She said, “Well, obviously I can’t turn you into Schwarzenegger. But it will be sufficient to meet your needs.”

When she said those words, there were deep meaning in her eyes.

Again, to describe someone’s physical fitness with the words ‘sufficient to meet your needs’ seemed really strange, but if it was used to describe ‘stats’ instead then it would be perfectly fine.

It looks like she really does know something. Yue Qiang thought quietly to himself, but on the outside he said, “Okay. But I don’t have money to pay the training fee.”

Luqiu Duanyi snapped her fingers crisply, and threw herself entirely onto the sofa. Her shapely body sank deep into the sofa cushion, and then she raise both her legs high up into the air before resting it on the coffee table. She did not mind showing off her lean and straight legs right before Yue Qiang’s eyes at all. He could hear clearly the two words tumbling out of her mouth, “It’s free.”

“Is there any other price that I have to pay?” Yue Qiang asked cautiously. He did not dare to treat Luqiu Duanyi like the rest of the babes of the night who had been ‘dominated by his Charisma’.

“Yes.” She stuck close towards him again; their distance minimal, her breathing distinct, “Sleep with me.”

Chapter 11: Never-Before-Seen Training Program

When Yue Qiang woke up, he found himself lying on top of a huge bed.

He was the only person on the bed. And yet there were the traces of two people having slept on the bed.

He closed his eyes tightly, then reopened them.

His head felt incredibly clear; the drowsy feeling that usually accompanied morning awakenings was completely absent. It was still dawn outside, and the wall clock on the wall said six ten. So, it was early in the morning. He was used to waking up in the afternoon and having lunch + dinner + supper as his three meals per day, so he actually found it a bit weird to wake up in the morning. However, he could feel that his body was in a pretty good condition.

Suddenly, he started as if he had just remembered something.

This wasn't his little rented nest, and the bed beneath him was also not the single bed he was used to.

This was a supersized bed at least half the size of his rented apartment.

He had never slept on such a huge bed before. Scratch that, he had never even seen one this big.

Last night, I... Yue Qiang carefully recalled what happened last night.

He had found a top class fitness club, and then met with a woman with a very unique name and interesting demeanor. And after that... there was nothing; nothing except that he had just woken up on this enormous bed.

Yue Qiang shook his head and sat upwards with a bitter smile.

Since he had woken up at a luxurious big bed and not his tiny nest, at the very least, proved that the Game, the ‘Charisma’ the game had granted him, and everything and everyone he had encountered afterwards was not just a dream.

Instinctively, he began to examine his surroundings.

This was a very luxuriously decorated room. Bright, spacious, atmospheric and simple. It shared a similar decor to the study last night.

Maybe I am still somewhere inside the fitness club? Perhaps this room is right next to the study last night, and is that woman Luqiu Duanyi’s bedroom?

He wasn’t given more time to think. A wandering figure soon

entered his view, and it was none other than Luqiu Duanyi. The woman had such a gorgeous body that it was neigh impossible to miss.

She was holding a large men's sportswear in her hands, and she said, "Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"How was your rest last night?"

Yue Qiang gave it a thought before replying with a hint of wry smile, "I don't even remember when I fell asleep, so obviously the quality of this sleep could not be any better."

"That's great." Luqiu Duanyi said with a smile on her face. She didn't seem to realize that Yue Qiang was quite wary of the fact that he had mysteriously fallen asleep and just as mysteriously woken up on this huge bed, and continued speaking with a most ordinary and homely tone, "Now put on these clothes. The countdown for your training starts now."

Seeing the slightly dumbfounded look in Yue Qiang's eyes, she laughed and added, "What's wrong? Have you forgotten your original goal already?"

Yue Qiang shook his head and said, "No. I simply thought that when a gentleman is dressing, the lady should know to leave him in private."

“Eastern ladies would not like your Western jokes, oh master of charms.” Apparently Luqiu Duanyi thought it pretty interesting when she heard his answer and laughed aloud. However, her expression quickly turned serious and calm as she said, “You have thirty seconds to change your clothes. I’ll be waiting for you at the study outside.”

Yue Qiang quickly finished dressing, and when he walked out of the bedroom swiftly he saw Luqiu Duanyi, a table of excellent-looking breakfast, and a single form.

Is the training about to start already? He first picked up the form and began to read it.

But he put it down very soon after.

“Are you sure the content on this form is the workout routine you’re putting me through?” He asked in surprise.

“That’s correct.” Luqiu Duanyi said seriously.

Yue Qiang had thought that the top class fitness workout routine would be comprehensive, systematic and diverse. For example, it might involve how many sets of bench press per day, how many reps of squats per week, how much force to use or how heavy an equipment and so on. But to his surprise, he did not read comprehensive training program on the form. Instead it was a comprehensive eating program.

That’s right, it was going to teach him how to eat.

It defined in great detail the kind of food ingredients Yue Qiang should consume. He had to admit that it was quite the rich list, and Yue Qiang did not recognize more than half of the food ingredients on it. As for the other half that he did recognize, Yue Qiang was surprised to find potato and yogurt being the large majority of it.

Other than that, it also defined the number of times Yue Qiang should eat every day. He took a close look at the number, then read it again, and again. That’s right, his eyes weren’t deceiving him; he had to eat SIX meals a day.

The form had even specified his sleep: He had to sleep 4 times a day until he wakes up naturally; there was no need to worry about time. This sleeping ‘duty’ must be completed, and if he really couldn’t fall asleep then he could drink the mineral water on top of the coffee table.

Finally, at the very end of these descriptions on how to eat, drink and sleep was the exercise plan he had been looking. However, in comparison his exercise plan was outrageous simple.

Jogging (on the treadmill), run until you’re so tired that you can’t run anymore.

“This is my training program?” Yue Qiang looked through the entire program once more and looked towards the serious-looking Luqiu Duanyi at his side.

“This is a workout program especially tailored for you.”

“May I... know the principles of this setup?” After a moment’s hesitation, Yue Qiang still asked, “After all I do have some basic understanding on the subject; something like 8 to 12 reps for each set, 4 to 6 sets every time, alternate training between big muscle groups and small muscle groups and so on. Shouldn’t a comprehensive training program include these things?”

Luqiu Duanyi’s expression had been very serious for a while now, and it was like she was a completely different person compared to last night. She said coldly, “The only thing you need to do is to obey.”

Yue Qiang’s expression also became serious, “Alright. But I have one last question.”

“Say it.”

“Can I go home during the training period?” He remembered about his game progress.

“Three days later, you will have one chance to return home. The time limit is... a full day; enough for you to do what you want to do.”

And just like that, Yue Qiang’s workout plan, hmm, a.k.a indirect national salvation and roundabout level up plan had officially

begun.

He thought that the plan's name could maybe be changed into something more appropriate though. For example – the pig farming plan?

The main course of his breakfast was potatoes and milk, and the rest were food ingredients which names he couldn't make head or tails of. Some of these food ingredients were very tasty, and some he couldn't swallow at all.

There was also another very important rule in his training program, and that was his mealtime must not be shorter than half an hour. This was in complete contrast to the principle he usually practiced where he takes 3 minutes to cook instant noodles and 1 minute to eat so he could save more time for gaming.

After the meal there would be a 30 minute meal break, and after that it would be that extremely simple exercise plan where he jogged on a threadmill until he was so tired he couldn't run anymore.

Yue Qiang had long since forgotten the last time he went out to play. He didn't even last 5 minutes on the treadmill before he ran out of breath.

"If you're tired then go to sleep." These were the exact words Luqiu Duanyi had told him.

“But it’s only seven in the morning; an hour after I woke up. What kind of sleep is this?”

“You can treat this as unprotected sleep.”

And so Yue Qiang went back to the room and slept. Maybe it was because he ate too much, or perhaps it was because he was too tired from jogging, but this unprotected sleep of his was exceptionally comfortable.

Two hours later, Yue Qiang sat in front of the dining table.

“I’m pretty sure I’ve already eaten breakfast.” He said with a wry smile.

“You can treat this as snack.”

The amount of snacks was obviously huge. It was still the same potatoes plus milk main course, but the rest of the nameless food ingredients did change quite a bit. It was still the same thirty minutes meal time and thirty minutes meal break, and after less than ten minutes of jogging, Yue Qiang was once again breathless.

“What? Sleep again?”

“Yes.”

“And what kind of sleep is it this time?”

“Maybe you can treat this as… taking a nap?”

This time Yue Qiang could fall asleep no longer. So he walked to the coffee table, unscrewed the mineral water he opened yesterday and took in a big gulp.

Soon enough, he began to feel very sleepy.

He opened his eyes forcefully and asked Luqiu Duanyi in a very serious tone, “Are you absolutely sure this can increase my st… improve my constitution?”

When Luqiu Duanyi saw Yue Qiang’s serious look, her own expression had relaxed instead. She picked up the book she kept flipping and reading last night, and answered him with a somewhat casual tone, “You don’t have to ask me. In any case, you’re going to find out three days later in a very precise manner through the use of numbers.”

Yue Qiang didn’t even hear her last sentence before he fell into sleep.

Chapter 12: Training Results

And so Yue Qiang lived three days as a livestock.

He now had two words that he was afraid to hear the most. One would be ‘eat’, and the other would be ‘sleep’. He had never imagined that eating and sleeping could turn into something this terrifying. Now he seriously sympathized with those pigs, cows and goats that were raised by humans. Think about it; every day the only thing you do other than eating was to sleep, um, and going to the toilet. Wouldn’t such a life be deathly boring?

The past three days of his life had been filled with arrangements to the brim, and yet his head was extremely empty. Every day, the thing that Yue Qiang thought about the most was still the effects of his workout. Could this method of only eating and sleeping really increase his constitution; or should he say that even if he did increase his constitution, would the results actually be reflected into the game?

He didn’t need to wait for long. Very soon, he would be able to see the results.

He returned to his tiny rented apartment, and turned on the computer hastily.

The booting speed remained just as quick, and within seconds he had entered ‘The Game’s’ character interface. Yue Qiang paid close attention to his own character stats.

Character Name: Yue Qiang

Class: Student

Strength: 13 (You're very strong and can now move even heavier bricks)

Constitution: 13 (You're so healthy it's terrifying)

Mind 14: (You're a perpetually calm person, and even the stark reality of your life cannot affect your mind. You can always find solace in video games)

Wealth: 2 (You're a pauper)

Charisma: 15 (Everyone loves you, flowers bloom in your presence)

It really worked! Even though his strength had only increased by a point, his constitution had more than doubled!

Constitution, constitution... who would've thought that my health would increase so much in just three short days. It really is an improbable matter. Looking back at that slightly weird training method, menu, and timetable, it seems that Luqiu Duanyi's training is geared towards my health and not my strength since the beginning.

After Yue Qiang did a simple analysis, he then clicked the 'Enter Game' button. The red, green and blue progress bar seemed slightly different in comparison to the first time he entered the game.

After a short fade in and fade out, he had appeared once again inside the house. Before he could do anything, the entire game interface suddenly underwent some changes. The interface changes were very similar to the time when he activated the ‘Dialogue System’.

> System Message [Green]: You have learned the skill ‘Run’ LVL 1 , and activated the stamina gauge. Your maximum stamina is 130. Activating the running function will deplete your stamina points. Walking or staying still will recover stamina points. When stamina points reach zero, the skill ‘Run’ cannot be used.

Press and hold the tab key on the keyboard to toggle between walking and running mode.

When Yue Qiang saw the words ‘You have learned the skill’ he was even excited for a little. After all, he was a complete white board in this game. Not only his stats were impossibly bad, he didn’t even have an exclusive skill. Now that he had finally seen a skill, he really was quite excited.

(T/N: same meaning as blank slate)

However, when he had finished reading the entire message, he was a bit speechless instead.

A ‘Run’ skill? How is this useful? It seemed that its only purpose would be to save time running about the map. And it would even deplete the stamina gauge?

Yue Qiang compared this to the games he had played before such as Blizzard's 'Diablo' series and 'World of Warcraft'. The in-game characters did have walking function, but it was probably that absolutely no one would use it. This was the same with domestic single player games. The moment a character had switched to walking mode, their movement speed would become terrifyingly slow.

In other games this function would only take the simple press of a key to toggle. But in this game it was actually heavily emphasized into a 'Character Skill'.

Yue Qiang didn't even know what he should say about this game anymore. Could it be that because he had been running every day for the past two days other than eating and sleeping, that the system had recognized that he had attained certainly level in the aspect of running? But this wasn't a skill that could be useful inside a game.

Never mind. let's give it a try first.

He walked out of the door. Held the 'Tab' key and switched into running mode!

I run, I run, I run run run!

In the blink of an eye, he had run from his own house to the blacksmith's front door.

Hmm, this speed is faster than I thought.

Because his travelling speed had turned suddenly quick, Yue Qiang's character ran into something and stopped continuing forwards.

> System Message: You have run into the blacksmith's furnace and received a burning effect. Lose 5 points of health per second for five seconds.

A Debuff icon appeared at the status bar beside his avatar. On his lifelike character model, the top of his head had added another red hot mark; contrasting with the three bruises from three days ago.

Okay, this speed is faster than what I imagined. This skill... is still fine, I guess.

With that 'something is better than nothing' mentality, Yue Qiang dragged his only skill 'Run' Level 1 to the first space in the skill bar.

It is the only skill I've learned after all. Let's just leave it like this.

At this moment, it appeared that the noise of his head knocking into the furnace was too loud, and the commotion had alarmed the blacksmith Tan Xiong.

The burly figure walked out while holding a huge sledge hammer; looking like a miniature hill. He looked once at Yue Qiang, and then three thin inward lines appeared on top of his head. Yue Qiang knew that this was an emoticon representing surprise.

“Hey, kid, I haven’t seen you in a few days and your body seemed to be much stronger than before.”

“This junior has devoted himself into thinking for a long time at home, and have finally came to a realization. Only by training one’s body, can a man protect his country. Therefore I have been training hard for the past two days.”

At first the blacksmith Tan Xiong nodded slightly to express that he was pleased, but then an even bigger surprise emoticon had appeared on the top of his head immediately after. A dialog box popped out at the bottom and the words were of much thicker font. It even had a jitter effect,

“Impossible, how did your body improve so much in such a short time? Can it be that you have met the people from Green Cow Village?”

While Tan Xiong was speaking, he could hardly conceal his astonishment at all. It was a huge contrast from his usual image of steadfastness when he was striking iron.

Yue Qiang instinctively felt that this Green Cow Village might be

a very important place name inside the game. But before he could ask further, the blacksmith Tan Xiong continued, “Since your current physical strength is much improved than before, then you shall contribute your strength to our Yue State quickly.”

System Message: Tan Xiong has offered you a quest to assist in the defense of Yue Village. Do you accept?

Quest Background: Yue Village has at most three months before their survival will come to a decisive point. During such times, the more enemies are eliminated the better. Seeing that your strength has improved tremendously, the blacksmith Tan Xiong has offered you a quest with a cautious attitude.

Quest Requirement: Assist the villagers of Yue Village in resisting the foreign enemies. Protect the ‘Giant Crossbow’, so that it is not destroyed by the Zhao State soldiers.

Quest Reward: A weapon.

Warning: The difficulty of this quest is Dark Red. Difficulty: Extremely Hard!

Repeat! Warning: The difficulty of this quest is Dark Red. Difficulty: Extremely Hard!

Chapter 13: The Shabbiest Weapon

After the warning, the system provided an explanation regarding the quest difficulty.

There were five kinds of quest difficulty. In ascending order, they were: Green, Yellow, Brown, Dark Red and Skull. Among them, Dark Red difficulty meant that said quest's completion difficulty was incredibly high and will greatly challenge the player's ability and control. As for Skull level difficulty, the explanation provided by the system was: Impossible to complete.

On the surface, the categorization of quest difficulty was a little similar to 'World of Warcraft'. In this incredibly popular game, Yue Qiang remembered that brown color already represented a very high quest difficulty, and with exception to solo-classes and certain rare cases, red level difficulty was practically impossible without a team.

It was unexpected. The game had only just begun, and it already issued him such a difficult quest.

Out of curiosity he clicked the next page button. To his surprise, the quest actually had a continuation. Besides [Assist in the Defense of Yue Village], there were two follow up quests. They were: [Defend Yue State (Yue Village)] and [Face off the Enemy General]. Defending Yue Village was also a Dark Red level quest, and behind 'Take Down The Enemy General' was a huge skull.

What a terrifying difficulty.

He hurriedly typed inside the dialog box and asked, “What would be the punishment for failing to complete the quest?”

Tan Xiong said angrily, “If you fail your quest, then of course you die. If the country itself cannot exist, then why else will its subjects need to exist.”

Death upon quest failure, is it? Yue Qiang was thoughtful as he typed inside the dialog box at the same time, “In that case, can I not accept this quest?”

But the blacksmith Tan Xiong’s tone turned somewhat strange, as he said, “In truth, it is absolutely impossible to defend Yue Village whether or not you decide to join us. The only difference it makes is the time of our demise. However, to know the futility yet do it anyway is a warrior’s spirit, so let us fight until the very end.”

The NPC’s explanation of the quest raised a huge alarm inside Yue Qiang’s heart. His cursor had hovered between the two options ‘Accept’ and ‘Decline’ for a very long time, and yet he still couldn’t come to a decision.

This was because he had not been able to figure out one thing to this day, and that was the death penalty of this game.

If this followed the pattern of online games, then he would be revived at a nearby resurrection point after death. Then there might be a few minutes of debility or loss of equipment durability. However, the key issue was that Yue Qiang had not found a place

that looked like a ‘Resurrection Point’ anywhere in the village.

(T/N: referring to temporary debuff similar to say, ‘Resurrection Sickness’ in WoW)

The other possibility was that, if he treated it as a single player game, then the greatest characteristic of a single player game was the ability to ‘load and try again after you die’. That was how the infamous Save (Shame) / Load (Less) Method was born.

But he had tapped every button on the keyboard and still could not find the save game interface!

Screw it, I’m going all out! It’s just a Dark Red quest, isn’t it?

Yue Qiang gritted his teeth and selected ‘Accept’.

System Message: You have accepted the quest – Assist in the Defense of Yue Village. You have ten minutes to prepare. The quest will begin when the set time is up or the Blacksmith Tan Xiong is officially informed. Please ensure that you are fully prepared.

The system had actually made an exception and gave him some tips because of this quest. It appeared that this quest really would match the difficulty represented by its color.

As he stared at the quest reward – A Weapon, Yue Qiang suddenly

had a brainwave and typed inside the dialog box, “Brother Tan, this junior has nothing but himself, so how am I to resist the enemy? Why don’t you pay the quest reward ‘A Weapon’ to me in advance?”

The blacksmith Tan Xiong let out a hmph, and just as he was about to say something Yue Qiang quickly added, “This is all for the sake of our Yue State man. Who knows, maybe I’ll be able to kill a few more enemies with a weapon in hand.”

Yue Qiang had already seen through this blacksmith Tan Xiong’s ‘character setting’, and that would be he was ‘very nationalistic’, or should he say, ‘very village-istic’. With this information in hand plus this incredible dialogue system, he might be able to do something about it.

As he expected, after the blacksmith Tan Xiong supported his head with his enormous fist and thought for a while, he said, “Your words stand to reason.”

Then, a trading window appeared, and the blacksmith Tan Xiong traded a weapon into Yue Qiang’s inventory.

Yue Qiang hurriedly moved his mouse to check the item description.

Weapon Name: A Blackish Iron Rod

Characteristic: Weapon

Quality: Gray

Description: This is an iron rod used by the blacksmith Tan Xiong to poke at the furnace. It is blackish and covered in thick deposits of of black charcoal.

(T/N: fireplace poker)

Equippable Weapon Requirement: 13 Strength.

And that was it.

Yue Qiang froze for a moment before he gave it another read carefully. That really was the extent of the weapon's stat description.

What's going on? Where the attack value? Could it be that this weapon didn't even have attacking power? Right now Yue Qiang's heart was filled with a long string of ellipses. Discontented, he right click the blacksmith's avatar and checked his character status.

He wanted to know exactly how big of a difference the other party's weapon as compared to his own.

Sure enough; maybe it was because he had equipped a weapon, he could now see the blacksmith's equipped weapon.

Weapon Name: An Accurate War Hammer

Characteristic: Weapon

Quality: Green

Attack: 8 – 15

Damage per Second – 4.7

Equippable Weapon Requirement: 24 Strength, 16 Accuracy

Note 1: This is a double-handed weapon, but its maker Tan Xiong can wield it skillfully with one hand.

Note 2: Accuracy + 3

Note 3: There is a chance to trigger the Skill ‘Mad Demon’s Hammer’ when hitting an enemy with this weapon. Mad Demon’s Hammer: Swing the war hammer five times rapidly like a mad demon with additional accuracy effect. Accurately strikes at the enemy’s weak spots, and thus with each swing inflicts damage based on the enemy’s maximum health. If the wielder also has the Skill ‘Mad Demon’s Hammer’, +1 to said skill level.

Immediately Yue Qiang became inflicted with speechlessness. His weapon was practically thrash compared to this blacksmith NPC.

“Brother Tan, can I exchange for a slightly better weapon? This weapon you gave me doesn’t even have an attack value…”

The NPC very candidly agreed, “Sure, you can also choose something else.” Then, a trading window appeared.

There were three additional equipment inside the blacksmith's inventory. They were:

Blackish Wok. Note: The wok used by the blacksmith to cook. There are still uncleaned grease on it.

Blackish Shovel. Note: The blacksmith's kitchenware. It is chipped very badly due to a bad knock.

Blackish Brick. It was actually characterized as a concealed weapon. Note: The brick used to pad the furnace. A thick layer of charcoal dust is accumulated on the surface.

Yue Qiang very decisively turned off the trading window and said, "I suddenly don't feel like changing weapons anymore. That blackish iron rod is pretty easy on the hand."

The blacksmith Tan Xiong said, "Since you have a weapon now, you can start fighting."

Yue Qiang held the blackish iron rod in his hands. The system very realistically adorned a ring of black charcoal mark on his character's hand. He secretly made up his mind: Let this attack-less weapon be the witness of my true strength as a hardcore single player gamer.

Chapter 14: It Is Dark Red Difficulty

In light of the quest message provided by the blacksmith Tan Xiong, Yue Qiang arrived at the village's ice shop. Apparently, here lays the strongest weapon the village relied upon to resist the enemy – the Giant Crossbow.

While Yue Qiang didn't see even the glimpse of a crossbow, he did see, as expected, the little lady Gongshu Shaoyang at the ice shop. He said, "Would you happen to know where the Giant Crossbow mentioned in the entrusted quest is? And what do I need to do to assist in the defense of Yue village?"

"Actually, this house is the Giant Crossbow. It's just that I added some furniture on it since I normally live here. Just take a closer look and you'll figure it out. See, this is where the bolt is fixed."

When he paid it a closer attention, he realized that this house was a giant crossbow. It's just that there were many little parts added on top of it, and it was neigh unidentifiable without prior warning. An arrow and crossbow this big must be incredibly lethal. No wonder Tan Xiong had said that this was a cornerstone in the village's defense. Gongshu Shaoyang continued to explain,

"This giant crossbow is situated at the edge of the village, and it can defend a large circular sector area towards the front. As long as the Zhao soldiers attacked from the front, they would be within its attack range. The giant crossbow covers a wide range and is extremely powerful. Its only weakness is that its rate of fire is incredibly slow, and there will always be enemies who would slip through the net. Therefore someone has to go out of the village

and clean up the remaining enemies. This is also what you need to do in order to complete your quest.

The person who's completing this task outside right now is the hunter Tu Su, but he hasn't been back for two days already. You should make haste and assist him."

Yue Qiang affirmed and went out of the village's fence gate.

Outside the village was a gorge slanting downwards, and it happened to be an easily defendable terrain. There were no enemies to be seen anywhere, and the ground was littered with the dead bodies of Zhao soldiers. Enormous wounds inflicted by giant bolts could be seen on their bodies, and yet there were no bolts to be found anywhere on the ground. They must have been picked up by the village's patrols.

While he was thinking, an odd noise came from the woods behind him. Yue Qiang was using the first person point of view and thus could not see the scenery behind him, but the game's surround sound was so good that he could detect the anomaly behind him just by listening.

And Yue Qiang knew that the enemy had probably appeared.

Relying on his rich gaming experience, he did not turn his character around and instead acted to dash forwards. It took time to turn around, whereas a forward dash could mitigate incoming damage.

And yet he was still too slow. The borders of the computer screen displayed a touch of blood red color to display that he had been attacked from behind. A big red number popped up.

> – 37!

What happened?

Yue Qiang took a glance at the life gauge at the top left corner. He had lost a quarter of his health with this one hit. His total health added up to only 130 points.

He hadn’t even seen his enemy’s face.

Yue Qiang was even more afraid to look back now. He controlled his character and dashed forwards continuously, and while he was moving he did not forget to shake his mouse repeatedly from side to side. The game’s stereo was incredibly good and he could hear the sound of his enemy pursuing from behind and the sound of a weapon breaking through the air. It seemed that every hit had just barely missed the back of his head.

He did not look back until he heard the sound of the weapon striking against the ground before finally slowing down his footsteps and turned around. It was only now that he finally saw clearly the enemy’s appearance. It was an averagely built Zhao soldier holding a broken halberd in his hand and with a terrifying penetrating trauma on his left shoulder; though the wound was

dressed up already. A name was displayed above his head.

An Injured Zhao Soldier.

The name was in gray color.

According to gaming conventions, a gray name meant that the enemy was very weak.

(T/N: not to be confused with ‘gaming convention’; a conference/meeting about games)

Yue Qiang bit his lips. His strength is definitely ‘very weak’ alright; for him to take a quarter of my health with a single swing. This quest sure deserves its dark red color.

Even the most common among common soldier level mob – an injured one no less – had this much attack power. What kind of difficulty is this?

While swearing a string of filthy words in his heart, Yue Qiang’s cursor swayed to the top of the injured Zhao soldier. Instinctively he clicked, and a character profile actually appeared at the right side of the window.

I didn’t think I can observe the enemy’s stats directly.

He began reading as he backed away from the enemy’s attacks.

Character Name: An Injured Zhao Soldier

Class: Soldier

Strength: 16 (11 + 5)

Constitution: 15 (11 + 4)

?? : ??

?? : ??

Skills:

Vertical Strike LVL 2: Military combat skill. Striking downwards with the halberd from a fixed angle. Does 4 times Strength damage against a single enemy. Has a chance of triggering ‘Cripple’ effect.

Wide Sweep LVL 1: Military combat skill. Swinging the halberd from a fixed angle. Does minor damage to surrounding enemies. Has a chance of triggering ‘Knockback’ effect.

Well Trained LVL 3: Received good military training. Strength + 4, Constitution + 4,?? + 4.

Fighting Spirit LVL 1: Affected deeply by combat mobilization and will not be cowered by bloodshed. Increase Strength based on lost Stamina points. The lesser the Stamina, the higher the Strength.

No wonder. This Zhao soldier’s basic stats isn’t even higher than mine, but his skill bonuses are just way too OP. These military skills has practically doubled his combat abilities. That one attack that had taken 37 points of my health should be the result of his

first skill after deducting defense.

Luckily the game's combat skills could not auto lock on to the target. Relying on his good controls, he managed to dodge the soldier's next few attacks.

After missing a few cleaves in a row, the injured soldier grew furious. He no longer used the Vertical Strike skill and instead whirled his halberd about. But Yue Qiang could not dodge this kind of 360 degrees no dead angle attack.

A '- 19' number immediately popped up from his body.

He didn't lose as much health as last time, but his character's movement speed had suddenly slowed down. So a character's movement speed would slow down for a short time after inflicted with a 'Knockback' effect.

Now he could no longer rely on his control to dodge.

The moment the soldier saw that his skill's special effect had activated, he closed their distance in a few steps and did yet another vertical strike.

-39!

The border of his computer screen had turned a blood red color.

His remaining one third health just now had bottomed in an instant!

Am I going to die?

The thought flashed across Yue Qiang's mind, but his hands never stopped executing all sorts of evasive actions. His micro experience was rich and he had dodged most of the incoming attacks. But in the end, a few blows still landed on his character's body.

(T/N: slang for micromanagement in games)

The injured Zhao solder's normal attacks were weak. A few '-7s' and '-8s' popped up, and instantly Yue Qiang's health turned into an empty bar with barely a sliver of dark red color left.

Am I really going to die?

He suddenly recalled that the game did not have a save system. In that case, what would happen after he died? Even if he supposed this was an online game with real time save, he hadn't seen the trace of any other players at all.

Suddenly, Yue Qiang felt a powerful feeling inside his heart: It was probable that his in-game character could not be allowed to die. If he did, then an unimaginable consequence would happen!

The situation was extremely critical, and it was at this moment Yue Qiang increased his APM rapidly. All manners of keys such as

WSAD, Up Down Left Right, Space bar plus X number of jumps and squats were crackled across the keyboard by Yue Qiang. His APM had long since exceeded his average playing either King of Fighters or O2Jam, and with the mouse in his right hand he continuously fine-tuned angles and did his absolute best to minimize damage.

(T/N: action per minute)

His controls had exceeded its limit, and yet his HP continued to decrease slowly.

Suddenly, the system sent him a quick message:

> System Message: Your health has fallen below 10% in combat, but your control remains calm and adept. Automatically learned the skill: Pure Heart LVL 1.

Chapter 15: Combat

The skill he had auto-learned did not bring him any substantial benefits whatsoever. Yue Qiang glanced at it in a hurry – 'Pure Heart' – He didn't need to read the description to guess that it was a base level skill that had nothing to do with actual combat.

Worse, he was just a fresh character without combat skills at all.

That isn't right. I do have a skill!

That 'Run LVL 1' skill that he found incredibly misleading upon learning what it was.

Yue Qiang had tested out this skill before and it did have quite the movement speed. However, it also expended his stamina points really quickly. At the time he felt that it was useless beyond saving some travel time on occasion, but right now he was literally on his last ropes.

But it was still a skill after all. What if he could use it in combat?

Thinking to give it a try, he pressed down on the Run skill's hotkey.

I run, I run, I run run run!

The moment the skill was activated, he immediately felt that his

controls became a lot more agile. Coincidentally the injured soldier had smashed his halberd at his direction, and Yue Qiang quickly pressed Space Bar + Right and Down arrow key to dodge out of the way. Again it was different from the narrow escapes from before, and he actually put up a large distance between them.

Hey, my mobility has increased by leaps and bounds! I can't believe this running skill's title and description is this misleading; it is actually a lifesaving skill in battle! However, when he looked down again at the stamina gauge beside his avatar, he could see that his stamina was decreasing at an obvious rate.

A persistent type skill would continuously deplete stamina points. Moreover, when used in combat the rate of depletion would multiply!

Yue Qiang quickly tapped the hotkey again to turn the skill off temporarily.

Now he could settle down for the moment. If he could dodge an attack he would dodge it straight away, and if he could not then he would turn on the Run skill temporarily and increase his mobility.

From the beginning of the encounter he had been put in an extremely passive position. First a quarter of his health was taken away by a surprise attack, then an AOE Knockback skill plus a slowdown effect had beaten him to the point where he had only a sliver of health left. He had only survived through a series of calm and precise micro controls, years of gaming experience and improvisation.

(T/N: Area of Effect)

Moreover, the threat wasn't gone yet. Although he had been managing the usage of the 'Run' skill strictly, the stamina gauge was still decreasing at a slow rate. Once his stamina points had depleted and he could not increase his mobility at a critical time, he would still be dead at the end of things.

Yue Qiang dodged another one of the enemy's attacks, but an idea had suddenly flashed across his brain.

Don't I have a weapon still?

A blackish iron rod.

Because the iron rod had no attack power at all and it was just way too dangerous previously, he did not have a chance to counter attack with a weapon. But now that the situation had eased up a little, he could give it a little try.

Parrying was of course impossible. When the injured whirled his halberd the wind itself was stirred; so it was obviously very heavy. His iron rod would definitely be useless considering how thin it was. As for hacking; even if he did hack it on the enemy's face, what could this blackish iron rod do other than leaving a black mark and spoiling his face value a little?

Therefore, thinking to give it a try Yue Qiang clicked his mouse and poked it into the soldier's injured shoulder.

‘Poke’ was but a single word, and yet it had contained a series of Yue Qiang’s micros. He had to avoid the soldier’s halberd attacks at all times, and aim at the soldier’s injured shoulder while he was moving. He also had to control the attacking point of the iron rod at the same time he was clicking the mouse!

He had never experienced such a way of control.

This method of weapon manipulation in combat required incredible hand speed, and yet it was completely different from the way ‘Meteor, Butterfly And a Sword’ and ‘King of Fighters’ emphasized on complex combo chaining and rhythmic hand speed. It gave Yue Qiang a strange feeling.

It was as if he was really controlling that iron rod himself!

The only difference was that it wasn’t his own muscles that controlled the attack point and angle, but the mouse in his hands.

It looked like a perfectly ordinary poke, but it was a control far more gripping than the countless evasive actions Yue Qiang had pulled before.

A big number explocded from the soldier’s injured shoulder:

– 26!

There was even a line of explanation from the system at the back:

[Wound Attack! Ignores defense and deals double damage!]

It worked!

The soldier's health was at 114 / 150 at the first place, and after his attack had succeeded it had dropped by a massive quarter. Upon seeing this, Yue Qiang grew even more confident. Now, other than evading and dodging, he also had to use the 'Run' skill intermittently and most importantly control his weapon with care so he could score a 'Wound Attack' on the soldier's body.

This was because the iron rod had no attack power on its own. When it struck any other parts of the soldier's body it could only deal basic damage based on his strength value; which was almost nothing.

They had fought yet again for a little while, and the injured soldier's health had steadily declined. However, the halberd in his hands was swung even greater than ever. It was probably the effects of the skill 'Fighting Spirit'. Yue Qiang carefully dealt with it, and at last with much difficulty killed the soldier.

"You will die; you will all die!" The Injured Zhao Soldier spoke his lines before falling heavily into a pool of blood.

“Phew…” Yue Qiang let out a long breath.

System Message: Quest ‘Assist in the Defense of Yue Village’ is complete!

Despite having made a full preparation, Yue Qiang had severely underestimated the difficulty of this game’s combat quest. In just a short few minutes, he had walked the fine line between life and death at every moment.

This won’t work. I need to find out for sure what the game’s death penalty is. He thought to himself. The difficulty was way too high, and there was no telling when he might fall dead. He did not want to think that the ‘horrifying’ possibility he imagined might actually happen.

From the looks of it, the fitness club’s Luqiu Duanyi seemed to know something about the game, and yet neither side had acknowledged it openly. Maybe he should just get straight to the point the next time he went back there.

While planning, Yue Qiang walked to the Zhao soldier’s side and prepared to loot the body. Common sense dictated that the dropped equipment of a high difficulty quest and powerful opponent was also pretty good.

A looting window appeared on the screen. Other than a few Knife

Money, there was a blood stained letter and just a single weapon.

(T/N: Actual knife-shaped money that existed in China 2500 years ago)

Yue Qiang checked the weapon's status without a second thought. After all that blackish iron rod of his was just way too embarrassing.

Weapon Name: Zhao Army's Standard Halberd
Attack: 4 – 7 Damage per Second: 2.2 Equippable Weapon Requirement: 13 Strength, 13 Stamina Note: Zhao soldier standard weapon. 'Well Trained' Skill Level + 1

Although it was a far cry compared to the blacksmith's war hammer, it was still much stronger than his 'blackish iron rod'. Just when Yue Qiang was about to equip the weapon onto himself, the system sent him a message and said that the weapon was categorized under military standard weapons, and those who had not been trained under the Zhao State's system could not equip it.

He thought that the quest was going to be concluded with such a dismal reward, but to his surprise the system sent out a very long message:

System Message [Green]: You have acquired combat experience! Verifying difficulty level... the difficulty of the quest you have completed is Dark Red. Difficulty classified as Very Hard; acquire 40% additional combat experience. Verifying risk level... You have reached a state of near death in combat; acquire 30% additional combat experience. Acquired 170% combat experience. Total combat experience is...

340 points!

Combat experience? What's that?

Yue Qiang already knew that there was no experience system in this game – that was to say that characters could not level up by killing mobs. So what would combat experience be used for?

He instinctively felt that, since the system had given him such a long message, it was likely that this combat experience would be extremely useful.

Chapter 16: Run Skill Level Up!

The status window of the Zhao Soldier's body was still visible, and every stats and skills could be seen clearly.

Yue Qiang did not close the Zhao Soldier's stats window and read the system message first. When he finally turned around to take another glance at the body, he was surprised to discover that all of the Zhao Soldier's skills had dropped down to LVL 1. All four skills Vertical Strike, Wide Sweep, Well Trained and Fighting Spirit had all become level one.

Did that mean that when he died all his skills would be locked at level one, and all the experience required to level them up would be transferred to the player character?

In other words, combat experience was actually used to level up skills!

This was a real bargain alright.

From the battle just now, Yue Qiang had experienced deeply the power of combat skills. A single 'Vertical Strike' skill could actually deal four times Strength attack damage, and even after deducting defense it was still able to take a quarter of his health in an instant.

As for his somewhat joke-like 'Run' skill, it had saved his life many times during many dangerous moments and was an extremely useful life saving skill.

This ‘combat experience’ was just way more useful than the character leveling experience from other games.

Impatiently, he clicked his own character status screen and as expected, saw an option to enter experience at the bottom of ‘Run’ LVL 1. It didn’t take him too long to choose enter.

It was definitely the right choice to level up a lifesaving skill like this.

Following Yue Qiang’s mouse movements, the Run skill’s progress bar slowly filled up until finally, after expending 300 combat experience points, the Run skill was successfully upgraded to level 2.

340 combat experience seemed like a lot, but as it turned out, he had finished almost all of it leveling up Run alone. After making a rough estimation, he came to the conclusion that the amount of experience required to raise the Zhao soldier’s skill was 100 points, and the numbers of those skills were all pretty good.

To think that his Run skill would take 300 combat experience points to upgrade a single level! In that case, how good would its benefits turn out to be then?

System Message: Your ‘Run’ Skill has been upgraded to LVL 2. Stamina usage has decreased, and movement speed has increased.

Although it appeared to be a most simplistic explanation, Yue Qiang understood that his life saving ability had been increased by leaps and bounds. The reason for that was the game's combat system settings.

For an in-game enemy – take this Zhao soldier as example – his stats were only slightly higher than Yue Qiang's, whereas his skill bonuses was at a completely different level. If this was a different game, the enemy should've been able to wreck him in seconds through sheer stats difference.

But this game used a more realistic combat system and disallowed skills from locking down targets. This meant that there was a certain probability to evade attacks, and his Run skill, in a way, had increased his evasion probability. To level up this skill was to increase his strength by a huge and absolute margin. Especially for a micro player like Yue Qiang, if he had infinite stamina and was faced again with a level of attack just like that Zhao Soldier's, he would be able to achieve a near perfect battle.

And this was probably the biggest difference between a computer-controlled NPC and a player-controlled character.

This meant that the combat system itself was designed to be advantageous for the player. As long as the enemy did not have a similar type of skill or lacking in agility, Yue Qiang would be able to slowly grind down the enemy to death through stamina alone.

That was assuming that he had infinite stamina of course.

But even so, the intrinsic value of this Run Skill was impossibly huge. Now that he thinks of it, he had practically jogged out this life saving skill through three days of eating, sleeping, and non-stop running. Yue Qiang thought that it was pretty ironic.

Imagine if he did not have this life saving skill. There was only so much damage he could do relying on his Strength stat alone and an attack-less weapon. If he didn't had a solid foundation in gaming controls, plus that soldier happened to be injured in the first place and thus allowing him to score hits that ignored defense, he would still have lost at the end of the fight.

Yue Qiang did not want to think about this problem any longer, and he switched his attention to the newly acquired letter. Normally, such items would trigger a quest.

As he expected, the moment he moved the mouse on top of the item, a message popped up:

> System Message: A quest will definitely be triggered if you open this letter. Will you open it?

Without a doubt, the word 'definitely' was a warning as to the difficulty of this quest. Yue Qiang was very confident with his Run LVL 2 skill right now, so after a little bit of hesitation he chose yes.

It was a letter demanding their surrender. The contents were pretty simple though,

“We have gave many warnings to the Yue Family. This is our last. You are compelled to surrender the Ring of Earth in three months’ time, or we will slaughter the entire village!”

The signed name was ‘Zhao Yan’.

System Message: You have accepted the quest ‘Send the Letter’

The quest’s font was yellow in color, so it should be pretty easy. The quest description was also very simple; he was to deliver the letter to the village head’s hands and it would be done.

This was fine too. Although the system had stated that the quest ‘Assist in the Defense of Yue Village’ was complete, but he still hadn’t reported to the blacksmith Tan Xiong after all. A person should not do things by halves. Although he had withdrawn the quest reward ‘A Blackish Iron Rod’ beforehand, it wouldn’t waste too much energy to go back and converse a little.

Returning along the same route he used to walk over, he arrived in front of the smithy’s entrance. The moment the blacksmith Tan Xiong saw him, he proactively triggered a conversation.

“Done with the quest already, kid?”

“Yes sir. I took out an Injured Zhao Soldier, and I also found a letter to be passed to the village head.” Yue Qiang said.

“I didn’t expect someone your level to be able to kill an enemy.”

Naturally this was the time to flatter the NPC, and so Yue Qiang said, “All are responsible for the killing of our country’s enemies.” He paid special attention to call the Yue Village a ‘country’ every time he talked to the blacksmith Tan Xiong.

An ‘Mm’ of approval popped up above the blacksmith’s head, and he said, “The village head is just at the house over there. Go.” That was all he said after that, and there were no messages about additional quest rewards either.

Yue Qiang was not surprised however. He had experienced how stingy this NPC was long ago, so he didn’t hold any hope in the first place. Before he left, he offhandedly clicked at the blacksmith’s avatar and checked his stats. A row of skill labeled with ‘?’ earlier had been unlocked.

‘Heart of Mohist LVL 1’

There was neither a description nor usage about the skill. What a strange skill.

He did not give it too much thought and ran straight towards the village head's house. Along the way he passed by Gongshu Shaoyang's giant crossbow log house and very naturally greeted her. The young girl had always expressed to others warmheartedly, so even though she was just an NPC Yue Qiang got used to the habit of chatting up to her a little. Before he left, he again clicked her avatar offhandedly to check her status. Besides her Strength and Constitution she also had a very high 'Dexterity' value; reaching at 31 points. Other than a row of question marks inside her skill window, there was also a strange skill with no description whatsoever.

> 'Heart of Artisan LVL 1'

Yue Qiang paid some attention to this 'Heart of XX' skill. He was able to see this particular skill on both Gongshu Shaoyang and the blacksmith Tan Xiong only after he had completed and returned from his quest. Moreover, they were both lacking any sort of description whatsoever.

Was there a connection between the two?

Chapter 17: The Mystery Of The Ring Of Earth

Yue Qiang left the place and arrived in front of the entrance of the village elder's small house. He pushed open the door and entered, and was surprised to see the teacher Chen Zi Han inside.

As it turned out, Chen Zi Han was the village elder of Yue Village.

After acquiring the dialogue system Yue Qiang hadn't had the chance to talk with Chen Zi Han. Now that he ran into him, Yue Qiang quickly tapped out the dialog box and gave a few polite informalities.

"So it was you, Mr. Chen! This kid has truly been disrespectful for not paying a visit during the past few days. I have gone out of the village today, and it was all thanks to your sliver of refined energy that I managed to complete the quest. This kid feels the utmost gratitude and admiration towards Mr. Chen inside his heart."

It took him a ridiculously long time to type in every compliment that he could think of before replying. Chen Zi Han stroked his beard with great satisfaction and a rather pleased look before he replied,

"And then? Is that it?"

Yue Qiang blanked out for a second, "I beg your pardon?"

“Is that all you’ve got to say?”

Yue Qiang was dumbstruck. So this old man hadn’t enjoyed enough of the compliments and wanted to hear more…

He quickly changed the subject and jumped straight to business, “Teacher is most wise. Anyway, today I have gone downhill and killed an enemy, and I have seized a piece of letter especially for your reading. May teacher lend me your wisdom?”

“May teacher lend me your wisdom’ was a sentence that Yue Qiang learned while playing games. It was a very complimentary and traditional way of speech that roughly meant, ‘What do you think, Yuan Fang?’. Yue Qiang had thought that since the game was so realistic, he would say whatever that inflates the ego the best.

(T/N: A quote from the Chinese TV show, ‘Young Sherlock’ that evolved into a popular troll-like net term)

As expected Chen Zi Han was extremely satisfied upon hearing his words, and he received the letter before giving it a thorough read. Then, sighing pretentiously, a dialog box appeared beneath his avatar as he said,

“Do you know why the Zhao Army attacked our Yue Village?”

“This kid does not understand.”

“It is all for the ‘Ring of Earth’.” The teacher Chen Zi Han sighed again, “The Ring of Earth is a treasure under our protection for tens of years when it was passed to me. However, the Zhao State’s national strength is so powerful now that I am afraid our village may not be able to protect it any longer.”

This was the first time Yue Qiang heard someone bring up the term ‘Ring of Earth’ after he read the letter. Therefore he asked, “This kid has learned late. May I fearfully request to hear the wondrous purpose of this Ring of Earth?”

(T/N: A polite self-reference that means that he is lacking in knowledge)

Chen Zi Han did not answer and asked instead, “Do you know why everyone in our village – except you that is – has such strong constitution?”

Caught by surprise, Yue Qiang gave the thought a moment and realized that it was indeed the case. Be it the teacher Chen Zi Han, the blacksmith Tan Xiong, or the girl living in the giant crossbow log house Gongshu Shaoyang; they all had high strength and constitution. At first he thought that the game’s stats were set to twice the value of the average stat in the real world, but he changed his mind when he saw the Zhao soldier.

All of the Zhao soldier’s stats were quite similar to his, and the reason he reached an average high of 15 stats was because of the buff provided by the military skill ‘Well Trained’.

When Yue Qiang arrived at this point of thought he suddenly

came to a realization. Could it be that this treasure called the ‘Ring of Earth’ actually had the ability to increase a person’s stats permanently?

Seeing that Yue Qiang was deep in thought for a very long time, the village elder Chen Zi Han finally explained, “The Ring of Earth cannot directly increase a person’s ability around it. This is because everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, and there is also a limit as to how strong a person’s body can become. In order to break through this limit, they must have a corresponding realm and cultivation, and the Ring of Earth is able to enhance a person on a ‘realm’ basis to a completely new level!”

Reading these words, Yue Qiang thought carefully in his mind.

It wasn’t hard to understand the village elder’s words. The Ring of Earth was able to enhance the cultivation of a person’s heart, and the cultivation of a person’s heart determined their maximum stat value. Yue Qiang suddenly recalled that he also had a stat that had reached its absolute threshold; that ‘Charisma’ stat that wasn’t all too useful in combat.

At this thought, he quickly clicked the blue progress bar at the corner and checked.

His Charisma stat was still at 16 points, but its color had changed back from gray to black. It was now in an editable state again.

Did this mean that his charisma stat had broken through its limit?

Wait a second, that's it! While he was fighting against the Zhao Soldier; trapped in extreme danger and had not yet realized the true use of the 'Run' skill, the system had sent him a message, 'Automatically learned the skill: Pure Heart LVL 1'.

Because the situation then had been rather precarious and the system had not provided any additional explanation, he had nearly forgotten all about it when he was checking his rewards and combat skills. But now he had recalled it again.

According to Chen Zi Han's explanation, a character's cultivation of their heart was the determinant of their absolute limits. If that was true, then this 'Pure Heart' skill that he had learned in the brink of life and death was probably something far better than the 340 combat experience points he acquired!

Chen Zi Han continued, "Everyone in Yue Village has a deep attainment in the cultivation of our hearts. On the surface it appears that our personalities are rather defined, but the truth is that once your heart have reached a certain level, it will then affect your external temperament as well. For example, Tan Xiong's 'Heart of Mohist' gave him the personality of a callous person, and that little girl Gongshu's 'Heart of Artisan' made her attentive and warmhearted. The same goes with everyone else."

When Chen Zi Han had finished speaking, out of curiosity Yue Qiang clicked open his status and checked.

Again, he discovered that under Chen Zi Han's skill a line of '???'

question marks had been unlocked. It was called, ‘Heart of Tactician’.

So it would seem that everyone’s spirit had a different name. The ‘Heart of Artisan’ was still somewhat understandable, and he could guess that it could probably increase a person’s dexterity. But what about ‘Heart of Mohist’, ‘Heart of Strategist’ and his own auto-learned ‘Pure Heart’? What exactly do they do?

The teacher Chen Zi Han did not discuss about a spirit’s cultivation anymore and narrated on the ‘Ring of Earth’ instead.

“It was exactly due to the passive effects of the Ring of Earth that the people in our village are able to attain some level of results in the understanding of our respective spirits.” The teacher plus village elder Chen Zi Han said seriously, “And the cultivation of one’s spirit is the absolute condition to enhance our bodies beyond their limits.”

“The Ring of Earth is so important to us that Yue Village must protect it at all costs!”

After hearing his explanation, Yue Qiang could not help himself but ask, “And what may be the Ring of Earth’s background to have such a powerful ability?”

“Naturally.” Teacher Chen Zi Han said, “The Ring of Earth was originally just a simple iron ring. But then something happened, and it became our village’s most important treasure.”

At this moment the font of Chen Zi Han's words inside the dialog box turned thick and huge, "This something, was that it became a cow's nose ring."

A nose ring? A cow's nose ring, even?

Since when did a cow's nose ring can become a treasure?

"This cow is different." Chen Zi Han said, "This cow came from Green Cow Village."

Chapter 18: The Cow That Ate Tree Leaves

If a nose ring on a person was for the purpose of decoration, then on a cow it was to conveniently control it.

A cow was a very stubborn and disobedient animal. To ensure that it listened to orders, people would pierce a ring inside its nose. Since there were much nerve endings inside a cow's nose it would hurt a lot when the nose ring was pulled. Once it was hurt, then the cow would learn to obey.

All in all, the nose ring was a simple method culminated through actual practice by the labouring proletariat masses to control livestock. Yue Qiang knew about this.

But since when could a nose ring qualify as a 'treasure' and appear inside the game?

Moreover, judging from the village chief's attitude this thing was quite the high ranking treasure. Otherwise, there wouldn't be the whole village swearing their lives to protect this nose ring, people sent by powerful states to rob it and this whole war started all because of this one nose ring..

The nose ring came from the cow, and the cow came from Green Cow Village.

Yue Qiang suddenly recalled something. After he finished his training, he had run into the blacksmith Tan Xiong. At the time the NPC was extremely surprised to find that his constitution had

improved by leaps and bounds; thinking that he had met someone from ‘Green Cow Village’. Now that he thought about it, he believed that it would be an arduous task to enhance one’s constitution in a short amount of time. On the other hand, if he ran into someone from Green Cow Village, then it would be a simple thing to happen.

Here comes the question: Just what kind of a place is Green Cow Village?

On what basis that the blacksmith Tan Xiong thought that if Yue Qiang had run into someone from Green Cow Village, then it would not be surprising that his constitution was increased?

Without a doubt, the answer to this question lay with the village chief. Therefore Yue Qiang inquired respectfully, “For such a place to be named after something as common as ‘Green Cow Village’. What is this place?”

“I have never been to Green Cow Village myself; I’m afraid that even if you put together every single person in this world, you won’t find too many people who have gone to Green Cow Village.” The old village chief said. Then his tone took a turn, “But I have seen someone who came from Green Cow Village.”

Yue Qiang grew even more curious, “I wonder what kind of magical power do they have?”

“He wasn’t an adult. He was just a child; a little shepherd.”

Yue Qiang did not say anything and simply watched quietly at the village chief recounting. He too wanted to know urgently exactly how strong was this person from Green Cow Village.

“Back in those years, when I was still very young, I chopped wood at this mountain for a living. On that day I saw a shepherd holding a cow and walking in the mountains. There were many wrinkles on the cow’s skin; it looked to be a very old cow. I have never seen such an old cow before in my life. Therefore I walked forwards wanting to take a closer look at it. However when I walked closer, I heard the herding shepherd was speaking, and he seemed to be talking to the old cow.

He said, “You should listen to me obediently and come back to the village.” That cow seemed to understand human language and shook his head to express disagreement.

Then the shepherd said again, “In that case let us make a bet. If you can eat the tree leaves from the tall and huge trees of this mountain, then we will go out and play for a couple more days. I can even take off your nose ring to keep you from being uncomfortable. However, if you cannot eat the tree leaves of these tall trees, then you will obediently come back with me.”

The teacher Chen Zi Han paused for a moment before continuing, “You were young, young sir, and hence you do not know about this. The trees in this mountain are called gum trees, and they are very rare. Not only that this tree is tall, huge and tough, the most peculiar thing is that along the long distance between the floor and the crown, there is only one trunk and no other branches. You can imagine that even if that cow is

something special, how can an animal that can only bow its head and graze, how can it possibly eat the tree leaves that are a few hundred feet away?”

Yue Qiang quietly watched the screen as the old teacher Chen Zi Han said those words with a leisure and fascinated look. It was as if this was a true story and not a background designed by some game writer. Even he was somewhat curious about what the cow was going to do next. Chen Zi Han continued,

“The cow seemed to agree to the bet. Next, it leaned actually rubbed itself against the tree trunk as if it was itchy. It repeated the same thing on every gigantic tree, and in just ten minutes it had already rubbed against tens of trees. It is a strange thing to say, but all tens of tall and sturdy gum trees fell down in a crash after it had rubbed against them. It was as if that green cow was able to unleash infinite strength just by scratching its itch!

Then, the cow ate every single one of the leaves from the fallen trees. To this day this old me still cannot imagine how a cow’s stomach can consume so many tree leaves.

After that, the shepherd had no choice but to take off the cow’s nose ring in accordance to the bet. Then he saw me at the side and threw the ring carelessly towards me. At the time, I had also chopped a good amount of wood due to the many fallen gum trees.”

Finishing his story, Chen Zi Han pulled the topic back on the right track, “You must have seen by now the giant crossbow log house in front of the village. The main body of the giant crossbow

was built using the wood from the gum tree!”

Yue Qiang knew very well the strength and toughness of that giant crossbow log house.To think that such quality timber would fall in a crash after being rubbed by the cow from Green Cow Village just like that.

Following Chen Zi Han’s words, the reason why the current Yue Village existed; the reason why the tens of people inside Yue Village had a physical strength far exceeding that of a normal person was simply because of a bet between a passing by shepherd and his cow.

After finishing listening to the story, Yue Qiang did not limit himself to just shocking emotions. While he watched the dialog box beneath Chen Zi Han’s avatar, he had sunk into deep thought.

Did you know? No matter how realistically a game was made, it was still just a game in the end. If he did not consider the illusory yet all powerful magic of celestial beings, then the story Chen Zi Han had told him could still be explained. Moreover, the explanation was quite simple and could be clarified in just one sentence.

This cow, has stats.

Moreover, its stats must be pretty high. It was possible that its strength had to exceed 100 points to achieve what the elder had told him.

There was no doubt that this was a godly cow that had broken through the limits of a common cow. Maybe I can call it the Earthshaker?

(T/N: Yes, the author is totally referencing DotA's Earthshaker)

Now he could connect all the dots with this explanation in mind.

The people from Green Cow Village had an extremely powerful ability that would allow a person to break through their body's limits. This ability was so incredible that even an ordinary cattle could be affected to the point it could do what a normal man would normally view as a miracle.

Yue Qiang vowed in his mind that if he had the chance in the future, he would definitely visit this Green Cow Village and have a look. Perhaps only after he had reached that place that he would be able to find the true way to become stronger.

As of now, the foremost matter was without a doubt increasing his strength as much as possible in order to face the next chain of quests.

Yue Qiang did not forget that he had only just completed one 'Assist in the defense of Yue village' quest. There was yet a dark red and skull level quest waiting for him!

At this point he couldn't help but click the teacher Chen Zi Han's avatar again, and he realized that he was also able to accept these two quest from him. After a thought he quickly figured out why. This person was a village chief, and the letter delivery quest he

obtained after clicking the letter had also specified the village chief as the recipient.

Although this village chief's 'character design' was that of a person who loved being flattered, whereas the blacksmith Tan Xiong was a bit peremptory, but they both – or should he say every villager in the village – shared the same attitude towards Zhao State's invasion: They might not be able to resist the Zhao State and the village was soon going to be destroyed, but even then they would fight!

The question now was whether this skull level quest is a hopeless plot driven fight, or if it will change to dark red difficulty later as my strength increases. Regardless, increasing his strength sat at first priority and was more important than anything else.

"Does teacher Chen have any method that would swiftly increase my strength to teach me?" Yue Qiang typed and after a thought, added another sentence, "This kid wishes to contribute a greater strength towards the defense of Yue Village."

"I see that your previous method is quite good."

Yue Qiang smiled wryly. Bodybuilding, huh? He checked the time. Before he knew it time had passed swiftly. In that case he might as well go back and have a look, and he had a very important question to ask Luqiu Duanyi anyway. This question would be the one he thought during combat; the question about the game's death penalty.

After moving his game character back to the room carefully, only then he returned to the game's main menu. Yue Qiang gave his back a long stretch before he stood up, packed his stuff and got ready to go out.

He did not shut down the computer. He also did not notice the blue progress bar of the tricolor progress bars at the corner of the screen had progressed a little more.

Chapter 19: Goosebumps

When he got out, Yue Qiang received a strange phone call. The numbers looked a little familiar.

After he pressed the answer key, he was surprised to hear Rao Xiao Ting's voice.

"Hello Yue Qiang, I am the class beauty of our class Rao Xiao Ting. We haven't communicated for three days already."

Yue Qian was a little embarrassed. He was busy for the past two days and he did forget this great beauty of their class. He could only say, "You're right, we haven't talked on the phone in a while. How are you?"

"Yue Qiang, according to the principle that 'men contribute the effort as much as climbing over a mountain to chase women; women contribute the effort as much as lifting a gauze to chase men'. I believe that we may begin the next step. Let's start dating. Do you think this is a good idea?"

It's a little strange. Rao Xiao Ting doesn't usually speak like that, does she? For some reason, he kept feeling that her tone was a little strange, and yet he could not pinpoint what was wrong exactly.

"I have something private matters to deal with at the moment," Yue Qiang said, "Why don't I call you back once I've grown idle. Uh, I also think of you as a great girl."

Yue Qiang did not mean to friendzone Rao Xiao Ting. She was the class beauty and he was only a Diaosi. It was just that he had suddenly acquired some strange ability, and this ability itself was shrouded with many mysteries.

(T/N: in this particular context it means loser)

Although he had confirmed that the Charisma points that he obtained was real, for now he didn't feel like meeting up and so chose to delay the matter.

"Okay, Yue Qiang, thank you for your compliment. Then I'll be waiting for your phoning procedure." Rao Xiao Ting hung up once she finished speaking.

What a bizarre way of speech.

Although Yue Qiang had never been chased the other way around by a girl before, he also knew that while a girl might act somewhat strangely and incomprehensibly in many ways, he also knew that a girl would never alter the way she speaks, even though she might act somewhat strangely or incomprehensibly in many ways.

He did not ignore it like the past few times and instead thought about the matter carefully.

'Principle', 'step', 'procedure'... As Yue Qiang carefully recalled these keywords from his conversation with Rao Xiao Ting, he suddenly had the most terrifying feeling

The way the class beauty spoke was way too standard. It was just like the standard dialog mode, just like... a bunch of sentences automatically generated by a program!

He might be walking on a bustling street, but Yue Qiang was now completely covered in cold sweat!

He could not help but recall his gaming experiences for the past two days. The in-game NPCs' expression, speech and actions were all incredibly realistic and well done no matter how you looked at it, whereas in comparison Rao Xiao Ting's speech was too rigid, even if it was to be put inside a game!

Rao Xiao Ting seemed to be even more NPC than an actual NPC!

Yue Qiang could not stop himself from following this line of thought, but the more he thought about it the more frightened he felt. He unconsciously quickened his footsteps and he went straight towards the fitness club without even taking his meal.

That Luqiu Duanyi always seems to be hinting something at me when she speaks, but whenever I try to confront her, she always goes off topic... she must have known something!

About this game... it can't go on like this. I must lay things out in the open and get some information directly from her.

When Yue Qiang thought to this point he had increased his

footsteps yet again. He had run all the way to the fitness club but his breathing wasn't even too ragged.

What normally would have taken him half an hour on public transport to arrive at the city's business district, took only him twenty minutes this time.

Yue Qiang rushed up the building with neither a blush nor a racing heart and once again entered that magnificent top class fitness club. With a speed that surprised the workers, he ran through the hallway and arrived at the study.

The woman with the strange name and a figure that was too voluptuous sat at the exact same spot facing him with her back. It was the same thin waist, and same round butt as before.

When Yue Qiang walked to the entrance he wanted to ask loudly. And yet he suddenly realized that he didn't know when to start.

In fact, Luqiu Duanyi was the one who spoke first.

"How do you feel? Hmm, I mean your physical condition."Luqiu Duanyi very carelessly stretched her bag. It was the same sports bra plus sweat pants combination that revealed her smooth abdomen. She walked to his side and placed both her hands onto his shoulders. It was almost exactly the same incredibly sexy pose as before.

There was a most pleasant sight before his eyes, and yet Yue

Qiang was not seduced by it. It seemed that his 16 points of Charisma had completely assimilated into his body and increased his resistance towards women along the way.

"I feel good, and my body feels okay as well. But what I want to know even more is you..." before Yue Qiang could finish, his lips was covered up by a pair of delicate hands.

Luqiu Duanyi interrupted him and said, "You want to know what I know, am I right?"

Her words were a little wordy, but Yue Qiang understood her very well, "That's right."

"Okay. Of course I can tell you what I know, but before that, I want to know something first." Luqiu Duanyi pulled away from Yue Qiang's body and placed a seemingly very old book she was holding back on the rack, "Can you tell me the exact number after your constitution has increased? Yes, this is very important."

"The exact number after my constitution has increased?"

"That's right. For example, if your health was at 100 before, then how much has it changed after three days of training – can you give me this number?" Luqiu Duanyi looked rather meaningfully at him.

Yue Qiang said, "I think we can stop talking in circles now. I can tell you right away that my st -"

He didn't manage to say the word 'stats' before a delicate hand covered his lips once more. The owner of the delicate hand said in a soft but very firm tone, "What is your health right now, assuming that your previous number was at 100. Trust me, don't say that word. It is for your own good."

Once again the woman's body was pressed up close, and her gaze looked both deep and beautiful. Staring into her eyes, after a long while Yue Qiang finally said, "If we suppose that my health was at 100 points before, then it will be around 220 points right now. This is calculated according to the ratio you told me. A normal person's health would be around 160 points using this ratio."

Yue Qiang had used the figure before his training – which was 7 points – and after his training – which was 13 points – and given his answer after converting it into the ratio that was requested.

"How about your strength, then?" Luqiu Duanyi asked again. She seemed to be relieved as she gave Yue Qiang an encouraging smile.

"My strength did not increase too much. If I was at 100 points before, then it would be around 108 points right now."

After listening to Yue Qiang's words, Luqiu Duanyi whispered with a relieved look, "As long as it increases it's fine... as long as it increases it's fine..."

Yue Qiang couldn't hear her quite clearly and asked, "What did you say?"

“Nothing. In that case, let us begin your next training immediately.”

“Before that, there is something I need to ask you.” Yue Qiang said firmly. When he came here he had already made up his mind to question her about the things related to the game openly. Although she did not seem to bear any ill will towards him, and she had hinted repeatedly not to say any ‘words’ related to the game, in the end he could not hold it in any longer.

Rao Xiao Ting’s reactions had caused a chill to emerge from the bottom of his heart.

He must uncover the truth!

Chapter 20: Turing Test

“I cannot answer the question you want to ask me.” Luqiu Duanyi answered firmly.

“Why?” Yue Qiang asked loudly. He noticed that Luqiu Duanyi didn’t use the words ‘I don’t know’ and instead used the words ‘I cannot’.

“I just can’t. In addition, you must not under any circumstance mention those questions in your mind. Not in any circumstance, do you understand?” Luqiu Duanyi warned seriously, “This is so that I can... but more importantly it is for your own good!”

Yue Qiang grew impatient. He could sense from her words that she had hidden certain information, but what he was more concerned about was the truth behind this game.

At the beginning, he had thought that this was at best a super OP power; one that belonged to no one but himself.

But the class beauty Rao Xiao Ting’s reactions, and even those people who had, upon meeting, fawned over him during the night he went out to test his charm. they gave him a feeling that it wasn’t real. Now he felt it was more and more likely that his thoughts were true.

Listening to the firm rejection in Luqiu Duanyi’s tone, Yue Qiang sneered, “Do you think that I cannot confirm the truth on my own?”

He meant what he said.

He used the word ‘confirm’ and not guess, because the guess had been there since a long time ago.

The contents of this guess was really simple: What if Rao Xiao Ting was an NPC?

Let’s take a step further. What if, all those employees and hostesses he met when he went out on the first day were all NPCs?

This guess was too terrifying, and he did not dare to think that it was true. That was why he needed to confirm it.

There were other ways to acquire information other than through this suspicious Luqiu Duanyi woman.

The plan he first thought up was neither to speak to more people on the streets, nor meet up with the class beauty Rao Xiao Ting right away. The plan was a proper noun that he had learned when he attended a specialized course – the Turing Test.

Turing was a scientist, and he was incredibly famous in the field of computer science. In the past he had put forward a conjecture and thought of a way to test it. The rough content of the conjecture was: Artificial intelligence would definitely reach a level of intelligence that would be absolutely indistinguishable by humans.

The relevant test method was like this: In 5 minutes, if a computer could answer a series of questions posed by a human tester, and convince the tester that these questions were answered by a human, then the computer would pass the test.

The Turing Test was a representation of the test to see if an AI was truly intelligent.

Now, he would borrow this test and prove in reverse his own horrifying conjecture.

He hoped to disprove it, but he couldn't be certain.

"Since you refuse to tell me," While walking towards the bedroom Yue Qiang said, "Please excuse me for a few minutes before we start the physical training. I would like to make a phone call."

"Go ahead." She said and watched Yue Qiang entering the bedroom before shutting the door. Luqiu Duanyi had no plans to stop him, and in fact she even looked somewhat relieved. She whispered, "May you discover the whole truth as soon as possible."

Inside the bedroom.

First, Yue Qiang looked through some common questions that could be used to conduct the Turing Test in the internet. Some of the most common scientific questions that were posted on websites are as follows:

[Question: Do you play chess?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Do you play chess?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Please answer my question one more time: do you play chess?

Answer: Yes.]

In this case, then it was very likely that the questioner was just facing a computer.

On the other hand, if it was the below case:

[Question: Do you play chess?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Do you play chess?

Answer: Sure I do, haven't I just said that earlier?

Question: Please answer my question one more time: do you play chess?

Answer: Seriously, why do you keep asking the same question?]

If the answers were provided in such a manner, then it was very likely that the questioner was facing a real human.

At the moment, Yue Qiang's current mental state was extremely chaotic. Although he had 14 points in the Mind stat, he still found it difficult to calm himself down, because he wasn't about to test whether a computer had intelligence, but rather if a human was actually a computer.

It was very ironic.

He wasn't familiar with the person Rao Xiao Ting, and they didn't usually interact with each other. But she was a pretty girl, and she would attract his eyeballs a little more often than usual in class. The girl was very energetic and she smiled a lot; she would often be seen organizing some activities in class.

As Yue Qiang recalled his memories of Rao Xiao Ting in his mind, suddenly he felt that the memories were a bit blurry. He couldn't actually precisely remember her face or her actions. Logically

speaking there was no way he wouldn't remember such a pretty face like her!

Suddenly, he remembered Rao Xiao Ting's abnormal speech had shown its colors since the beginning. The first thing she said when she called him was, "I am the class beauty of our class Rao Xiao Ting."

He finally understood now why he thought that her speech was a little off. Who in the world would introduce themselves as 'class beauty XXX'?

Yue Qiang felt himself growing even more confused, and so he just stopped thinking, picked up his phone, swiped until he reached the last unfamiliar number – that was Rao Xiao Ting's phone number – and called.

The phone soon connected.

"Hello, I'm Rao Xiao Ting. Is this Yue Qiang?"

"It's me." Yue Qiang said while forcing himself to calm down for a little, "I would like to ask you a question, Rao Xiao Ting."

"Thank you for the phone call. Go ahead."

At this point Yue Qiang was terribly upset. He did not spend much time thinking and simply used the questions he found online straight away.

“Do you like me?”

“Yes.”

“Do you like me?” Yue Qiang immediately asked again.

“Sure I do… huh? Haven’t I said that earlier?”

“Please answer my question one more time: do you like me?” Yue Qiang asked for the third time.

“Seriously, why do you keep asking the same question?”

“It’s nothing. Thank you for telling me.”

On the other side of the phone, the tension that had strained Yue Qiang’s nerves to the absolute limits finally relaxed a little.

Thank goodness… this is the reply of a normal person. The stiff muscles in his entire body finally relaxed a little, but just as he was about to say something to lift the awkward tension, his back abruptly became drenched in cold sweat!

He had thought of a most terrifying possibility: If I was going to build an AI, would I be stupid enough to build a program that answers ‘Yes’, every time, and not install even the most simplistic ‘duplicate question detection algorithm’? Of course it would be

incredibly difficult to build a program that would answer exactly as a human would, but there were some tricks that could be used to achieve a similar result.

Obviously, one of the easiest ways to do so was to conduct an online search and download an online database.

It just so happened that Yue Qiang had seen the questions with the most amount of pageviews. He also remembered Rao Xiao Ting's answers clearly.

The way Rao Xiao Ting answered and the way the questions were answered on the internet were completely identical!

Yue Qiang slowly pulled the phone away from his ears and pressed the end call button.

Right now, the external shell of his phone were completely covered in the cold sweat from his palm.

Chapter 21: A Strange Fist

The bedroom door opened with a ‘Pak!’.

Luqiu Duanyi walked inside. She wore boxing gloves on both her hands, and there were two more sandwiched between her armpits. She looked at Yue Qiang and threw the boxing gloves right in front of him.

Yue Qiang was obviously still suffering from deep shock. He stared straight at Luqiu Duanyi and the focus in his eyes did not change whatsoever.

The two boxing gloves were thrown in front of his body before falling to the ground.

There were two muffled noises ‘Pak!’.

Suddenly, he asked loudly towards Luqiu Duanyi, “Do you like me?”

Luqiu Duanyi did not say anything. She walked up and punched him right away.

It was a very heavy punch.

Yue Qiang’s body twisted and was thrown back far, far away. But when he stood up once more, he had recovered himself a little.

He rubbed his temples hard and forced himself to calm down. It was almost a certain fact that there was definitely something wrong Rao Xiao Ting; it was just that he still could not completely confirm that she had completely turned into an NPC. For now, he did not notice anything akin to that even crazier notion that he had imagined in his mind.

Luqiu Duanyi's heavy punch was a most definitive proof.

At the very least, this voluptuous female fitness coach before him was definitely a real person.

Luqiu Duanyi's expression was very serious. She said, "Pick up that boxing gloves from the ground and follow me."

Yue Qiang followed her wordlessly; walking out of the bedroom and arriving at the study; then walked out of the study and arrived at an incredibly luxurious training room. Three days ago, Yue Qiang had only used the treadmill, and the training was all done inside the study. This was the first time he had seen that there were other training rooms inside this fitness club.

Its style was just as luxurious.

Luqiu Duanyi held the door open for him, and when Yue Qiang had walked inside she then closed the door and locked it carefully.

Now the two of them were the only ones left in this huge and

luxurious house.

"Pay close attention to what I'm about to say next." She said her opening speech, "Your time is very short, and that is why you must use every moment you have left to increase your abilities. Only by increasing your own strength, will you be able to understand everything and come to a solution."

Looking into Yue Qiang's eyes while saying the above words, Luqiu Duanyi repeated the last sentence again with great emphasis on every word, "Only by increasing your own strength, will you be able to understand everything and come to a solution!"

She waited for a moment until she confirmed that Yue Qiang had completely remembered these words. Only then she continued, "If you have no other questions, then we will begin the next stage of training."

"There is one last question." Yue Qiang pressed his lips, and the words leaped out from between his teeth, "What happens... after death?"

These four words were incredibly abrupt, and if it was any other ordinary person they might not have understood at all. But the woman had without a doubt understood his meaning. Her answer was also four words,

"You must not die."

Yue Qiang had also understood. He picked up the boxing gloves from the floor, wore it carefully onto his hands and said, “Let us begin the training then.”

He quietly assumed a pose and watched the woman standing not too far away.

At this point, he had basically put his trust in her. First, she was definitely not one to be seduced by his so-called 16 points of Charisma. Next, she probably did not plan to hurt him, because with her help his constitution had been enhanced in all aspects. Finally; also the most crucial point of the matter, was that, to this moment, she had not said any term that was even remotely related to the ‘Game’, yet she had continuously hinted at Yue Qiang through all kinds of ways about something. Even when Yue Qiang had asked the question, ‘What happens after death’ which was obviously referring towards the game, she had also provided a slightly clearer answer.

Yue Qiang speculated that she might be suffering from some kind of limitation that prevented her from saying any Chinese words relating to the ‘Game’. However, she herself had wished that he could unravel the truth on the entire matter as soon as possible.

(T/N: This may be confusing but just assume that the ‘Chinese’ part doesn’t exist. I’m keeping it in the translation because that is what was written by the author)

Therefore, Yue Qiang believed that the sentence that could make her repeat twice – to increase his own strength, must be a matter of critical importance. Not to mention that he had come to the fitness club to increase his strength in the first place.

“Let us begin then.” Yue Qiang had regained his calm completely and said solemnly, “How will our next training proceed? Or is it the same as before; fitness training, eating and jogging?”

Luqiu Duanyi said, “No. I will teach you a fist style.”

She spread her legs to stand at the same width as her shoulders; assuming the pose of a Zhan Zhuang. Once she assumed the pose, her temperament changed immediately. Her entire person had grown dignified and mature; it was as if a focused aura was about to burst out from inside her body.

(T/N: or Standing Post. A Chinese martial training method which involves standing in a certain way)

Then she struck out in a set of fist fighting techniques. The technique was so quick that it had reached an inconceivable level. Yue Qiang felt as if there were still leftover fist trajectories on his retina, and that his eyes were filled with shiny white fist shadows. Suddenly the set of fists had already been completed.

Yue Qiang was a little surprised by this. It could not have exceeded 2 seconds.

“So fast? And so little?”

When he said fast he meant her action speed. When he said little, it was because Yue Qiang felt that the time taken to complete this set of technique was way too short. It wasn’t even two seconds.

Forget about real life Tai Ji Quan or Xing Yi Quan, even Iori Yagami's Down, Right, Down, Left, A's animation would probably take three to four seconds, wouldn't it?

(T/N: Taiji Fist)

(T/N: Form-Intention Fist)

Luqiu Duanyi did not explain and instead repeated the technique two more times. The first time her speed was just as quick as before, and the second time it was slowed down many times – the whole set took around tens of seconds.

Once finishing the three sets of actions, Luqiu Duanyi withdrew her stance and stood straight, saying, "You will copy my moves just now. The ultimate level you need to attain is perfect imitation."

Seeing that Yue Qiang's confused expression, she asked, "What, do you think this is useless?"

Yue Qiang did think that it was useless.

It was pretty obvious too. How could this fancy so-called fist fighting technique possibly be useful in increasing his strength? Other than it was slightly faster than norm and that its movements were rather… aesthetic, what other actual use could it have?

Yue Qiang did not voice his doubts, but his expression fully illustrated this point.

Luqiu Duanyi suddenly said, “Do you still remember your food menu and work-rest schedule?”

He didn’t know why she suddenly bring this up and nodded subconsciously.

Luqiu Duanyi sat down cross-legged on where she stood and actually started explaining in detail under his doubtful gaze, “Let’s talk about your menu first. Every meal in your menu contained potato and yogurt. The reason behind this was that potato and yogurt complemented each other, and they could fulfill all of the human body’s need towards nutrition. Do you hear me? All of them. As for the rest of the food – be it the ones you recognized or not, or the ones that tastes good or bad – the goal is to specifically supplement the rest of the nutrients needed by your body. The most important reason is that you’ve eaten too many ‘hermit meals’ that it is a necessity to target your specific situation and remove saturated fatty acids; increase the nutrients for amino acids, vitamins, and trace elements.”

“Now let’s talk about your sleep practice.” Luqiu Duanyi’s tone did not have much ups and downs, and yet the content she spoke of made Yue Qiang’s eyes lit up, “The sleep practice that I’ve arranged for you has a scientific name called ‘polyphasic sleep’. It’s quite complicated to explain; you can basically understand this simply as splitting the entire sleeping period into 4 or 5 cycles. Da Vinci, who is a very famous artist, scientist and mathematician in history has the habit of sleeping polyphasically.”

“The basis of polyphasic sleep is the theory of sleep cycles. In fact you do not need to learn these; all you need to know is that the

human physiology is very suited for polyphasic sleep. Moreover, from the moment a person is born they had slept polyphasically; it's just that as they grow up they are slowly affected by the environment around them and eventually switched to sleeping at night. This is a very suitable training method for you, and I had even prepared that bottle of mineral water for you in case you couldn't fall asleep."

Listening to her narration, Yue Qiang had the basest of knowledge regarding the incredible change his constitution had undergone in the short amount of time. Although Luqiu Duanyi's words could not be fully trusted, it was at least a slightly more reasonable explanation to the phenomenon where his constitution had increased in a short amount of time.

"I hadn't told you all of these to make you understand the abstruse theory behind human health. I just want to tell you that all the things I made you do have a solid principle behind them. You simply need to do as I say."

And yet Yue Qiang wasn't the good student who would accept the 'I'll learn whatever you teach me' kind of spoon-fed education, and so he asked, "I can understand some of the eating and sleeping methods you said, and it is true they may have their scientific basis. However, if you're telling me that practicing this slightly longer than two seconds set of fist fighting technique could increase my st... constitution, I have to say that I cannot believe it at all."

"You have to complete this slightly-longer-than-two-seconds movement with absolute perfection.." Luqiu Duanyi said.

“And what’s the difference? If you want me to train this I might as well go to the park and learn Tai Ji Quan from an old man. Can I really increase my constitution practicing such a thing?”

“No.” Luqiu Duanyi said.

Yue Qiang was speechless.

Then she added another line after ‘No’ in a most serious tone,

“But it can increase your strength. Massively so.”

Chapter 22: Get Practicing!

Yue Qiang had a kind of unconditional trust towards this mysterious woman, which was why he chose to practice this fist style seriously.

The other reason was that she had said this fist style could massively increase his power.

Based on the assumption that Luqiu Duanyi could not say any term relating to the ‘Game’, Yue Qiang assumed that when she said ‘power’, she must mean ‘in-game ability’.

And to this day, there was only one thing he found that would swiftly and massively increase an in-game character’s power, and that was skill.

He had experienced it with his own eyes, the power of a skill.

A soldier who had about the same stats as him, and an injured one no less, could easily dispatch him within a minute relying on skills alone. If it wasn’t for that misleadingly titled but actually superb ‘Run’ skill, Yue Qiang would’ve been subjected to the game’s death penalty already. Although, to this point in time, he still did not know what the death penalty was,but it was definitely something that he was unwilling to try.

That was why he had practiced the punch very seriously.

This fist style was very likely a combat type skill.

Last time, after three days of jogging, he had acquired a Run skill after returning to the game. He hoped that this time, he would be as lucky as the last time.

In Luqiu Duanyi's hands, the set of fists would take about two seconds to complete. If it was purposely slowed down for practice purposes, then it would take about tens of seconds. The entire fist style included eight fixed movements and in-between connections.

On the surface, learning it didn't seem like too much of a trouble.

Yue Qiang had only used less than half an hour's time to grasp the eight fixed movements. If he were to slowly pose the eight fixed movements in order, then there would not be any problem at all. However, when he tried to execute them as fast as Luqiu Duanyi, problems arose.

He could not do it at all!

Although his every move was very practiced, and the posture he assumed was well positioned, he just could not connect them together!

The moment his punching speed increased, he would be met with all kinds of unexpected problem. He would trip, crash, feel uncomfortable all over, suffer temporary cramps...

When he tried to force it during the last attempt, he had even twisted his own knee.

…

With one hand leaning against the wall and the other on his own thigh, Yue Qiang moved with difficulty towards Luqiu Duanyi's study. He wanted to ask for her guidance.

This mysterious woman's study was extremely multi-functional. Not only did it have a desk for work, a treadmill for exercise, and a huge dining table for eating, it could even conjure all kinds of decor according to one's needs by bringing up hidden furnitures through automatic control. On the first day of Yue Qiang's arrival, Luqiu Duanyi had done just that by bringing up an extremely cool mini bar using a remote control.

Right now inside the study, there was a book placed on top of the work desk. It was the one that she often looked at. A few exquisite cuisines were placed on top of the white luxurious dining table. There was a space at the center; it seemed that not all of the dishes were up yet.

Luqiu Duanyi was nowhere to be seen.

With difficulty, Yue Qiang found a place to sit. Looking at the time, it should be time for eating as stated in the work-rest schedule. He arbitrarily picked up the book on the work desk. The book was covered with a bookjacket. He wondered what's inside it.

Before he could even flip it open, a beautiful voice came from behind him.

“It’s not a good habit to flip other people’s stuff without permission, okay?”

Yue Qiang hurriedly put down the book in his hands and turned around. He saw Luqiu Duanyi wearing an apron; a hanging bag hanging loosely at the waist, but it wasn’t enough to cover her amazing figure. She held a super large plate of sweet and sour fish in her hands. The colors were bright and the fragrance was overflowing.

After placing the fish about two-thirds angle on the dining table, the tableful variety of red-and-green dishes instantly became both perfect and harmonious; looking most inviting.

Luqiu Duanyi virtuously filled a bowl of rice for Yue Qiang and placed it in front of him. The she looked gently at her and let out a light smile.

Yue Qiang immediately feel weird all over.

Normally, this woman would be putting on either a straight face or a scowl; or in short, a very serious look all the time. On the occasion when she turned on her charms, it was also obvious that she was just playing with him.

But Yue Qiang had never actually seen her looking like this.

And he had to say, it was really good-looking.

Luqiu Duanyi was extremely well-shaped in the first place, and her feminine features that could not be restrained by her sports bra plus the perfect proportion and figure brought by years of exercising was tempting enough already. Now that she had put on even the virtuous appearance of a housewife, Yue Qiang nearly forgot where he was right now.

Thankfully, he recovered in the end.

“Not cooking according to the menu today?” Yue Qiang said.

“A change in flavor is needed sometimes.” The woman let out a soft sigh as if she had recalled something unpleasant. Her eyebrows wrinkled slightly, “Every bite taken is a bite less. We can’t always be eating those healthy but tasteless food, can we?”

Every one of this woman’s words seemed to be hiding something. It was a very uncomfortable feeling. He shook his head, scooped a large amount of rice and ate; pushing that feeling out of his mind.

Hmm... the dishes tasted really good. For the past few days, he had eaten mostly weird meals that were healthy but tasteless. Now that he was met with so much tasty food out of nowhere, Yue Qiang was feeling extremely happy.

Appetite and lust are only natural!

It wasn't until that he had finished the entire grand meal that he finally recalled that he still hadn't stated his business.

He hurriedly put down his bowl and chopsticks before saying, "There is a problem with that fist techniques you're making me practice." Then he explained the problem he had ran into. For example, it was all fine and dandy when he was practicing at the beginning, and it was also not a problem when he slowly posed the motions. But when he increased the speed in which he connected the motions, then he would feel wrong all over and had even sprained his knees.

Luqiu Duanyi listened to him seriously while nodding from time to time indicating that she had understood. It was only until Yue Qiang had finished that she said, "That's why I'm building you up."

Only then he realized that she was referring to the grand meal on the table.

Next, the woman slowly crouched down before him and came to beside his thighs. The smile on her face was very gentle. Her hands caressed around his knee area before she smiled once more, then abruptly exerted force into both hands!

Yue Qiang sucked in a breath through his teeth softly. It hurt a lot!

Withstanding the terrible pain, he moved his knee slightly.

Although it was still uncomfortable, his joint was already slowly regaining the ability to move freely.

This joint correction technique was very well done.

Luqiu Duanyi continued to crouch on the floor; helping Yue Qiang by softly massaging the sprained area. She was leaning very close to him, and because her head was lowered, her beautiful face was covered up by the soft and beautiful long hair pouring into his lap.

She asked softly, “Are you feeling better?”

“Much better.”

“You feeling pretty good right now?”

Of course it felt pretty good to have a beautiful woman crouching on the floor, massaging your legs and speaking gently towards you. Although it felt a little weird, Yue Qiang still answered after a moment’s thought, “Pretty good, yeah.”

“Then how about your tummy? Is it not a satisfying meal?” It was still the same soft voice and soft tone.

Yue Qiang said, “Pretty good, yeah.”

“Since your meal is finished, and your legs are fixed…” Luqiu

Duanyi's words abruptly jumped a hundred decibels halfway and rattled Yue Qiang's ears painfully, "Then move your ass and get to practicing now!"

So after half a day wasted, he might as well have said nothing. Looks like he could only practice harder and figure out a way on his own.

Chapter 23: Killing Style, One

Even though he had suffered before at the beginning, the degree of difficulty of this fist style still completely exceeded Yue Qiang's expectations.

He had practiced it for almost three months straight!

This was just unbelievably difficult.

At first it seemed average, but the more he trained the more he felt that this set of fist fighting techniques... made zero sense.

It was only all too easy to make a single move, but the moment he transited to the links that connected them it became so difficult that it was nearly impossible to complete. Moreover, she said that this fist style was supposed to be powerful? He couldn't see how.

If he supposed that could use this set of fist fighting technique in-game after learning it in real life, then the skill that corresponded with this technique would probably be a big fat zero.

It was just incomparable. It was far lousier than the skill that he had seen on that Zhao Soldier, much less the skills of the enemies that would appear in later quests such as the mini-boss Zhao Officer.

The only assessment Yue Qiang could give to this fist style was that it looked beautiful. When Luqiu Duanyi danced it was as if an

angel was scattering flowers across the land. During this period, she had checked in on him and even demonstrated it again a couple of times and corrected some of his moves. Her movements were beautiful and standard, but she did not provide any guidance whatsoever to Yue Qiang's main problem – the interlinking points of the fist style.

She did not even provide verbal guidance.

But even then, Yue Qiang could see the worry and urgency forming between her eyebrows.

Later on, he had also suspected that this was a method to train one's constitution through external exercise. Perhaps he could train his body's flexibility, balance and control through these high level connecting movements. That was why, on the fourth day of his practice, he had purposely cleared up some time to go back to his rented house, log into the Game, check his stats and verify his suspicions.

There were no changes in his stats whatsoever.

With that, he completely gave up and began seriously practicing this fist style without cutting any corners.

The good news was that the saying, 'diligence can compensate for lack of natural talent' was still applicable.

After over two months of hard work, he had finally completely

master the fist style.

On the same late afternoon he mastered the fist style, Luqiu Duanyi saw him off at the entrance of the fitness club while holding a soft and brand new martial arts uniform. She eyed him for quite some time, as if contemplating the right words to use before she finally said,

“There are a few things I need to remind you of.” She said, “The limit of the human body will increase whenever it reaches a certain fold. The approximation of this fold is 1.6. When you’ve surpassed your limits three times and arrived at the fourth fold, then you will be met with the true bottleneck and limit of the human body.”

Yue Qiang memorized her words carefully while thinking, is this your way of telling me how the in-game level division works?

She continued, “The second thing I need to remind you is: Pay attention to the color of the sea. It means how much time you have left.”

The color of the sea is blue, so that meant the color blue was how much time he had left. But what did it all mean?

Luqiu Duanyi was silent for a very long time. She walked beside Yue Qiang and leaned really closely to him. She thoughtfully straightened all the wrinkles on his clothes before finally saying, “And finally, take care of yourself. Don’t die.”

The moment she finished speaking, she then left Yue Qiang and swiftly walked back towards the top-class fitness club. Standing at the center of the reception hall and bearing a huge smile, she said loudly, “Our work is done! Time to go home!”

It was late afternoon; just the time when the customers were slowly starting to increase. However, following her shout, the people inside began to leave the machines and walked out of the fitness club one after another. In no time at all, all the customers had left. After that, the front desk receptionists, the janitor and even the female manager he had met that day left as well.

Yue Qiang was already on his way, but he witnessed all of this when he was going down the escalator.

Suddenly, as if recalling something very important, he swiftly ran back to the club.

Luqiu Duanyi was still at the hall. It was as if going off work at late afternoon was a very normal matter.

Yue Qiang walked beside her and said, “Can you give me your number?”

“Come on, you’re still so straightforward even when you’re asking for a girl’s number. You’re not gentleman enough.” Luqiu Duanyi teased with a smile before writing down her number at the back of his hand.

“Can I reach you?” Yue Qiang asked.

“It can.” She continued to say joyfully.

“Can I really reach you?” Yue Qiang asked again.

This time Luqiu Duanyi withdrew her smile gradually, and after a moment of careful thought she nodded resolutely. Then she added, “You definitely can. But please, be quick.”

Yue Qiang returned to his own rented house once more.

For the past two months he had spent almost all of his time in Luqiu Duanyi’s fitness club. He hadn’t played the game much in the first place, and this time he didn’t even log in for tens of days in a row. When he went back he specially bought a lot of cup noodles and water before leaving behind the store clerk’s seductive smile and extreme discounts.

Yue Qiang had a premonition that he would probably be playing the game for a very long time after this return. He would not be going back to that fitness club for a while.

While the real world grew more and more doubtful, his various speculations had instead decreased. Yue Qiang remembered Luqiu Duanyi’s words: Only by increasing his strength will he be able to understand everything and come to a solution.

Since it was the game that had brought all of these changes into

his life, then, naturally, he had to return to the game to see through and resolve these problems.

This was a very plain and very natural principle.

Yue Qiang pressed the power button.

It seemed that the speed in which he entered the game had increased even further. In the blink of an eye the character status screen was already before his eyes. After nearly three months of training his Strength and Vitality had both increased by 2 points and reached 15 points respectively.

As expected, it was no easy task to improve further on every success. In fact, there were more changes to the progress bars at the corner of the screen.

The red progress bar was still stuck at 0, and the green one had progressed just a little. The blue bar had progressed the further and had reached close to 30%. Yue Qiang suddenly recalled Luqiu Duanyi's advice: Pay attention to the color of the sea. It means how much time you have left.

Could she be referring to this blue progress bar?

After Luqiu Duanyi's advice, Yue Qiang had paid special attention to these things. He carefully recalled the number of times these colors had appeared during a system message. The red color ones had almost never appeared before, and the green one had only

appeared once after he activated the ‘Run’ Skill. On the other hand, the blue system messages had appeared the most frequently.

It seemed that the blue progress bar would gradually increase as he completed more and more quests.

This was especially true when it came to hidden quests. Other than displaying a blue color font, the system had even specifically labeled the word [Blue] behind ‘System Message’.

However, Yue Qiang did not view the blue progress bar as merely a achievement tracker of sorts.

Other than displaying the percentage of quests he had completed, it was very possible that it had a different function; something like a timer of sorts. When the progress bar had reached 100%, there would then be a sudden and massive change.

Perhaps this change had already begun.

But it was pointless to think about it. He could only complete as many main quests as possible.

He clicked the ‘Enter Game’ button and returned to that familiar room.

Anxious, Yue Qiang immediately opened his character status screen first before anything else. As expected, there was a new skill below ‘Run’ LVL 2.

“Killing Style, One!”

Skill Description: Swiftly unleash eight completely different styles of punches in a row towards the front. This skill will consume Stamina to use. This is a fist style designed specifically to kill, however it seems that that the eight fists do not flow well into one another as if it contained some great flaws. It can deal two to eight times the damage based of the Strength value.

The fluctuation range of the might of this Killing Style, One seemed to be a bit huge. As compared to the Zhao Soldier’s ‘Vertical Strike’ skill; which dealt a consistent damage of 4 times Strength value, this new skill of his didn’t seem too strong unless he could really deal 8 times the damage.

Forget it. Regardless, he would only know the true might of the skill after he tested it on the battlefield. While thinking, Yue Qiang swiftly exited and arrived at the village chief’s house.

For the past two months he had come back frequently to login to the game, and it was mainly for the two latter two quests of the quest chain, ‘Assist in the Defense of Yue Village’ and ‘Take Down The Enemy General’. The last time he came back, the two quests were still in an inaccessible state.

They were very close to the time limit of three months now. Yue Qiang clicked Chen Zi Han’s avatar once more and checked the quests. The two quests’ release status had changed and was now accessible.

Chen Zi Han looked as aged as ever, but his expression was slightly different from his slightly jestful arrogance from before. It was closer to that of solemness of a priest who was about to be martyred; as if today would be the last day of his life.

It was still the same system message inside the dialog box, but now there was a kind of solemness that flowed from it.

> Chen Zi Han: “The quest ‘Assist in the Defense of Yue Village’ has been activated. Do you accept?”
>
> Warning: The difficulty of this quest is Dark Red. Difficulty: Extremely Hard!
>
> Do you accept?

“Yes!”

Chapter 24: Skill Evolution

This time however, the quest introduction wasn't done through reading the quest system, but listening to Chen Zi Han speaking directly to him through the dialog box.

Inside the screen, Chen Zi Han bristled and said, "The Zhao Army had suddenly disappeared ever since that last offense three months ago. However, the invisible pressure that the Yue Village endured has only grown larger and larger. Today, we shall see if the children of Yue Village can protect their own homes!"

"Our people have made many preparations for this day, and you, Yue Qiang, what you will need to do is to hold a deserted mountain path that leads to the village alone. This mountain path has been abandoned a long time ago, but our enemies have also been making preparations for quite some time. We cannot rule out the possibility that they have discovered it. We are lacking in manpower, so the ones who will defend this abandoned mountain that leads into the village will be you alone."

"When this is over, if you and I are still alive, then I will give you... two slivers of refined energy as your quest reward."

Yue Qiang turn delighted. I guess this is how an NPC describes quest reward. Two slivers of refined energy is two free distribution stat points. Good stuff.

It took him three months of hard practice to finally increase his Strength and Stamina by two points each. Now, if he completed

this quest then he would get two stat points, and they could be freely distributed too.

He suddenly recalled that the last time he earned a stat point from this old man was because he completed a hidden quest. So if he had completed this quest 'perfectly' as well; such as pushing back the enemy and keeping everyone alive; would it still be possible for him to acquire the hidden rewards? Yue Qiang asked Chen Zi Han the question in gaming language.

"The enemy is too strong. It is nearly impossible for all of us to survive." Chen Zi Han said, "If we really can overcome this crisis, then what will be the harm if reward you all available refined energy?"

> System Message: If the quest is completed with all villagers surviving, acquire twice the amount of stat rewards!

I like this message!

After some effort, Yue Qiang finally found the abandoned mountain path mentioned by the quest message. The foliage here was a bit thick. Just as Yue Qiang had hidden himself behind a tree, he saw two men equipped in the look of a Zhao Soldier sneaking over.

These two fellows' facial muscles were extremely stiff. It was practically incomparable to the expressive and lively appearance of

the NPCs in the village.

The first thing he should do was of course, right click his targets and check their status.

Character Name: Zhao Soldier

Class: Soldier

Strength: 18 (12+4+2)

Vitality: 18 (12+4+2)

Training: 60%

?? : ??

There was a new Training stat as compared to the injured Zhao Soldier last time. The system did not give out any textual explanation except the number 60%.

In terms of skills, both soldiers had five skills. Other than the four that he already knew, there was also a new skill:

Cooperative Combat LVL 2: Military middle rank skill. Able to coordinate well with friendly forces. When nearby a friendly force acquire +2 Strength, +2 Vitality.

This was basically one of the various buffs inside the game.

The mobs were full of buffs, but he, as the player, was completely ‘naked’. Yue Qiang stared at the various parentheses and plus signs behind the enemy soldiers’ stats and sighed helplessly.

However, before he could lament about anything, the two soldiers actually started running towards the location he was hiding in.

How was it possible? They were so far apart and he had hidden himself so well. There wasn’t nearly enough hate to trigger a combat okay. How did they find him out? Could it be the act of checking one’s stats would be discovered by the enemy?

Yue Qiang ran right out of his hiding spot. He had been found out anyway, so he might as well come out and fight.

Aiming at the soldier that had rushed slightly faster, he pressed the key of his newly learned skill and unleashed it at the enemy.

“Killing Style, One!”

His character immediately threw out eight punches in an instant with his bare hands. After getting hit by his first punch, the soldier that had rushed out prematurely backed away in a slump. The rest of his seven punches had struck nothing but air.

– 13!

A tiny red text popped out. It had only taken off not even one tenth of the soldier's HP.

The might of his newly learned skill was surprisingly weak. Yue Qiang could hardly believe it. He chased forwards and unleashed yet another 'Killing Style, One'. This time, other than the sixth punch, all remaining seven had missed.

– 12!

The damage was actually even lower than the first time.

Naturally it was impossible for the two soldiers to just stand there like a post and get beaten, so they began attacking from both left and right sides. Yue Qiang hurriedly activated Run LVL 2.

I run, I run, I run run run!

But this self-learned Run skill was extremely useful. His stamina depleted very slowly, but the evasive effect was top notch. Both Zhao Soldiers' attacks had only slashed thin air.

Seeing that the both of them couldn't hit him, Yue Qiang attempted the skill again a few times out of disbelief. Each time he

could only hit a single punch, and the remaining seven would completely whiff and hit air. There was a time when the two enemies were too close to him, and his one skill attack had actually hit both of them as they dropped 11 points of health respectively.

This wasn't scientific!

(T/N: The chinese way of saying this doesn't make logical sense)

The Run skill he had trained for three days was this useful, and yet not only the skill he had trained for three months was extremely niche, it was... it was even lousier than that attack-less Blackish Iron Rod the blacksmith had gifted him!

Since Yue Qiang had placed the utmost expectations on this skill, he had not equipped the iron rod. Of course couldn't bear to throw it away either so he had left it inside his bag. Seeing that the situation was going badly, Yue Qiang had no choice but to reassume his old trade.

While he attempted to click open item window, he was too nervous that he clicked open the character status window instead. He saw the skill 'Pure Heart LVL 1' that still did not have any skill description above the skill 'Killing Style, One'.

This skill could not be used at any time, but it kept giving Yue Qiang an enigmatic but powerful feeling. It was at this moment that an idea suddenly flashed across his head, and he dragged that 'Pure Heart LVL 1' above 'Killing Style, One'. But this almost charade-like action had brought forth a surprising change.

While controlling his character to continuously dodge the attacks, he saw two encouraging lines of text beneath the screen.

System Message: Under the effects of ‘Pure Heart LVL 1’, ‘Killing Style, One LVL 1’ has completed a skill evolution! You have lost the skill ‘Killing Style, One LVL 1’.

System Message: You have learned a new skill ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One LVL 1’.

Normally speaking, a skill which name had been separated to two parts had pretty powerful effects.

That Yue Qiang suddenly had the idea of dragging a skill to another skill wasn’t groundless. While he was practicing Killing Style, One at the fitness club, he had always been troubled at the part where he had to unleash the eight punches continuously. The fist style was obviously powerful, and yet when he used it it felt very strange, so that meant that there must be a step or two that he wasn’t performing correctly. So when he suddenly saw the skill ‘Pure Heart LVL 1’, which was useless but gave him the feeling that it was pretty powerful, he came up with this crazy idea.

Speaking of which, when he got the chance, he should try modifying ‘Run’ with ‘Pure Heart’ as well. Moreover, he should use ‘Pure Heart’ to modify any new skills he might learn in the future.

As for now, naturally he should test out this newly acquired skill ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One LVL 1’.

Yue Qiang dragged the skill over to a hotkey and pressed it with anticipation.

Chapter 25: Sergeant

The way the skill was unleashed was different from Yue Qiang's expectations.

At first, he had thought that the process would be clicking a hotkey and watching a skill animation. But contrary to his expectations, a large Fuxi Hexagram had appeared on his targeted Zhao Soldier and completely covered the little area on his body. A pointer was jumping here and there inside the diagram in every direction; blinking until Yue Qiang's eyes were a blur.

After pondering over it for a moment, he thought he understood.

This probably meant that he should aim at the pointer with his cursor and click on it.

This new skill had an incredibly huge degree of freedom and control. In principle, the pointer meant the bearing of the his enemy's weak point at this very moment. He would maximize the damage dealt to his enemy by attacking the bearing where the pointer was located inside the Fuxi Hexagram.

The diagram was very small and the pointer was moving rapidly. It would be very difficult to accurately click the pointer with the cursor.

However, Yue Qiang had been gaming for many years and his hand-eye coordination was pretty good. The first time he clicked, he had only missed by a pixel.

– 35!

This damage was acceptable.

Once the cooldown was up he used it again, and this time he had locked onto the pointer's position and clicked the cursor accurately and agilely.

– 107!

Great damage! Yue Qiang himself was surprised by the damage he dealt. He counted quietly in his mind: his Strength value was at 15 right now, and 15*8=120. No wonder! The moment the pointer's position was clicked he would deal 8 times the damage based on his Strength value! Even after minusing defense it was still over 100 points of damage.

What a powerful skill!

The Zhao Soldier's HP that was still at a relatively healthy state just now had instantly dropped more than half a bar in an instant. The animation of the HP dropping massively was very similar to the animation in 'King of Fighters'. Yue Qiang felt thrilled to the very bones watching it.

It took both effort and concentration to unleash this skill, so Yue Qiang accidentally took a ‘Vertical Strike’ skill from another enemy and lost 32 HP. But in comparison to the massive amounts of damage he dealt back towards the enemy, this minor hit was negligible.

Suddenly he felt childish and took out the weapon ‘A Black Iron Rod’ from his backpack. Then he jabbed it at the head of the Zhao Soldier who had been beaten silly by him.

A black mark was imprinted onto the poor guy’s head as a small – 8 number popped out. Yue Qiang very easily completed the kill.

There was a reason to use the iron rod and not his skill.

The skill ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One LVL 1’ depletes too much stamina. He had only used it two times and he was left with only 50 or more stamina points in his stamina gauge. Although stamina would regenerate over time, he could not wantonly consume it. He must preserve a certain amount of stamina for the life saving skill Run LVL 2.

The other reason to use the iron rod was that although the weapon was black and did not have any attacking power at all, it had a super satisfying body hit sound effect. And not only did it have an awesome impact feel, the feeling when you jab an enemy and leave a black mark on their body was just as great.

Besides that, Yue Qiang also had another idea. He had researched many ways to use this iron rod and he discovered that this toy’s

usage was very similar to the long spears of ancient warfare. You just jab with them, right? Plus this game's degree of freedom was so big that it was probable that weapon use also had a proficiency level. If he was proficient with using this iron rod now, then in the future, he would not need to train his proficiency again when he got a long spear or pike type weapon.

Also, he checked the weapon stats of a long spear once and found out that even the weapon stats of the most basic level of Zhao Soldier was pretty good.

After taking out an enemy, the other Zhao Soldier's morale had decreased immediately.. It looked like the 'Cooperative Combat LVL 2' buff had lost its effect.

Yue Qiang suddenly had an idea. Was it possible to chat with the enemy?

He opened the dialogue system and typed, "I hid pretty well at the beginning. How did you find me?"

"We have the blessing of our lord Sergeant's skill and can discover enemy troops who are secretly spying on us."

So that's how it is. It looks like that lord 'Sergeant' he speaks of is a mini boss type of character.

Yue Qiang did not type anything else and with his blackish iron rod fought against this remaining enemy. He was now a lot more

practiced with the usage of every skill. His iron rod attack was always able to strike at the enemy's wounds and deal true damage that ignored defense and he only needed to use his 'Run' skill to avoid the enemy's 'Vertical Strike'. As for the normal attacks; those that dealt – 8 or – 9 was negligible even if he really couldn't avoid them.

The most important thing now was to wait for his stamina to regenerate.

Yue Qiang had not forgotten that this quest's difficulty was Dark Red!

He had escaped death by the skin of his teeth when he completed the quest the last time. Although he had returned with enhanced Strength and Vitality, plus an incomplete version of the skill 'Killing Style, One', the system still recognized the quest difficulty as Dark Red. That must mean that there were some powerful enemies that hadn't appeared yet.

It might very well be this Sergeant spoken of by the Zhao Soldier.

He slowly played a war of attrition against this Zhao Soldier, and as he watched his stamina slowly regaining to near full he finally threw out a 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One LVL 1'. This time he had made full preparations, and when the Fuxi Hexagram had appeared his eyes were almost glued onto the screen.

As the cursor swiftly and accurately hit the pointer, yet another – 120 that popped out.

He had successfully killed the Zhao Soldier.

The Zhao Soldier's body collapsed heavily, and while he died a dialog box appeared, "Damn it, to think that the general had sent us here. If we were to attack the Muo Family's Great Camp..."

Before he could finish the name of his avatar had turned from Zhao Soldier to Zhao Soldier's Corpse.

Yue Qiang didn't pay too much attention to his words and straight up looted the body.

Unsurprisingly, there wasn't anything good. Other than a few scrappy knife money, both their weapons were Zhao Army's Standard Halberds. It wasn't a bad weapon, but Yue Qiang couldn't equip it anyway so he was too lazy to look. What he was concerned for now was the amount of combat experience he could get.

The last time he had taken down an injured soldier, and this time it was two healthy ones. He should get quite the amount of combat experience.

After he was finished looting the bodies, both their skills had returned to level one as expected.

System Message: You have acquired combat experience! Verifying difficulty level... the difficulty of the battle you

performed is Average; acquire 0% additional combat experience. Verifying risk level… there is no danger whatsoever in the battle you have performed; acquire 0% additional combat experience. Your combat experience gain rate is 100%. Total combat experience is…

60 points!

Yue Qiang was stunned. He knew that there was such a thing called ‘combat experience gain rate’ in this game’s combat experience. The more powerful an enemy was, the greater the danger his character faced, the more additional combat experience points he would get.

(T/N: some of you may notice that the above message is not consistent with chapter 15; but that is the author’s mistake and not mine lol)

It was true that he didn’t face any sort of danger in this battle, but even then it shouldn’t give only 60 combat experience points.

Plus, these two Zhao Soldiers also had an additional ‘Cooperative Combat’ skill.

Yue Qiang read through the system message log thoroughly once more, and finally he found a small line of bracketed text.

(System Message: Subsequent combat experience from killing the same type of enemy will be one tenth of the standard value)

So that's how it is. This puts an end to the loophole of leveling up skills infinitely, Yue Qiang thought. It looked like he might need a different way to swiftly increase his own skill levels.

He closed the quest status window and lifted his head to observe. Not too far away, a man walked slowly towards him.

A name was listed above his avatar: Zhao Sergeant!

This fellow's stoutness was comparable to the village's blacksmith Tan Xiong, and it wasn't a completely defenseless coarse clothing that he put on, but a leather armor.

The speed in which he was rushing over wasn't quick. There was even a line inside the dialog box beneath his avatar saying, "So you're the one who killed my two subordinates?"

Judging from his spirit, this enemy's stats probably far exceeded the two Zhao Soldiers.

This was probably why 'Defend Yue Village' was classified as Dark Red difficulty.

Yue Qiang hurriedly moved his cursor over to his avatar and right clicked in attempt to check his stats.

However, after he clicked, surprise appeared on his face.

Chapter 26: The Hunter Tu Xu

Yue Qiang was very surprised, because he could not actually see the Zhao Sergeant's status.

This was the first time he encountered this situation. He once thought that every character's status in this game could be viewed, and those that could not would be marked with question marks. Now that he looked at it, it was either that the sergeant had a special skill that allowed him to hide his own status, or that his stats were just too high. He would not be able to check his status due to the rank difference between them.

The one Yue Qiang was worried about was the latter situation, because this Zhao Sergeant's HP bar was just way too long. It was more than three times the length of the HP bars of the two dead Zhao Soldiers.

Did this mean that his Vitality was over 50 points?

Vitality represented the amount of health one had. For example, he currently had 15 points in Vitality, and so his health was at 150 points. Besides that, Yue Qiang also had a stamina gauge. Both his skills required stamina to unleash, and the value of his stamina gauge was also 150 points. Yue Qiang did not find a stamina gauge on any other NPCs, so it was likely that it was something only a player had.

He remembered Luqiu Duanyi reminding him before that once a human body had broken through 4 times, it would've reached its

true limits.

Could it be that this enemy's power had already reached such a level?

It was at this moment a battle message had appeared at the corner of the screen.

> Battlefield Message: The Zhao Army's siege against Yue Village has officially begun!
>
> Battlefield Message: The Zhao Army has set fire to the mountain, and all information regarding the wooden traps that were pre-laid in Yue Village has been invalidated!

There were more battlefield messages after that. Yue Qiang browsed through them roughly, and in summary, they stated that the Zhao Army's attack was incredibly fierce, and the small squads including the hunter Tu Xu and the doctor Ming Que had withdrawn from their ambush locations in advance. The situation wasn't optimistic at all for Yue Village.

Yue Qiang looked at the enemy before him again. This abandoned mountain path he was guarding was only part of the battlefield. He might have taken care of two enemies over here, but his situation was still not looking good. There were only tens of people in the entire Yue Village; the NPCs would definitely not be able to send reinforcements to aid him.

Remembering that this quest difficulty was dark red, Yue Qiang immediately turned very cautious. His middle finger hovered above the hotkey for ‘Run LVL 2’, ready to dodge skills at a moment’s notice. Then, his index finger pressed down on another skill hotkey as he threw out a ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’.

Let’s test out his powers first.

Because his mind wasn’t stable, he had missed the Fuxi Hexagram’s pointer by two pixels.

– 17!

Shit, I missed. Moreover, this mini boss’ defense seemed to be slightly higher than a normal soldier’s. Yue Qiang controlled his character to rush forwards, and just as his cooldown had finished he unleashed yet another ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’. Since he was close up with the enemy this time it was easier to aim, and the mouse cursor happened to caught onto the moving pointer.

As the skill activated, Yue Qiang’s character threw out eight swift punches at the enemy. The order of the eight punches wasn’t the order he had practiced before, but the order the system had rearranged according to the enemy’s weak points and had unleashed as appropriate. A series of banging sounds later, a huge number leaped out.

– 102!

If this damage had fallen onto a normal Zhao soldier, it would be enough to take off more than half their HP. But the Zhao Sergeant before him had only lost a fifth of his health.

Is his Vitality above 50 points?

Yue Qiang calculated in his mind, but he did not dare to use his big move any longer.

The cooldown of ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’ wasn’t long, but its skill accuracy rate was a huge problem. With Yue Qiang’s eyesight and hand speed, he could only guarantee about half the hit rate.

Moreover, he needed to conserve some stamina to unleash Run LVL 2 as well.

He would rather suffer one or two skills if it meant keeping his stamina at a slightly higher level. He had prepared himself for a long term battle and to grind down the boss slowly.

Yue Qiang realized that this game didn’t seem to have the concept of mana. This stamina gauge derived from his Vitality stat was somewhat similar to MP, except that he could not drink potions to recover stamina. He could only wait for his body to regenerate it bit by bit.

The Zhao Sergeant was also beginning to counter attack at this time. His weapon was also a Zhao Army's Standard Halberd, and his combat skills were almost the same as a Zhao Soldier's. Yue Qiang had more combat experience now. He would reserve his Run skill and use it to dodge out of the way only when the enemy had activated the 'Vertical Strike' skill. He could dodge the normal attacks just by relying on the arrow keys and jump, crouch, sidestep, slide and so on.

He had only suffered a single normal attack and lost 28 HP after fighting him for a short while.

If he hadn't learned the Run skill, then he would probably die after taking just one 'Vertical Strike' skill. If he hadn't learned 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One', then it would be a dream to take down this enemy before him with his pitiful attack power and Strength value. But now, he could actually grind down this guy slowly while waiting for his stamina to regenerate.

It looked like he should put more points into Vitality in the future. The sum of this stamina gauge was just too important.

Although he would be able to kill this boss with difficulty through various skill combinations, Yue Qiang was still not satisfied. His goal was to complete the quest perfectly and so obtain the two additional points of refined energy from the teacher Chen Zi Han.

It was just too difficult to increase one's stats. He needed to grasp

onto every opportunity.

It was at this moment new battlefield messages had appeared again below the screen.

The hunter Tu Xu is struggling!

The doctor Ming Que is struggling!

When he saw the two messages, Yue Qiang suddenly recalled the famous hack-and-slash game ‘Dynasty Warriors’. The biggest headache he encountered when playing Dynasty Warriors at the highest difficulty was that his friendly NPCs had perished first before him and thus causing the mission to fail. He was now facing a similar situation.

As long as he slowly grinded this Zhao Sergeant to death with his skills, he would be able to complete this quest. But he wanted to complete this quest perfectly, then he could not lose a single man.

In the end, Yue Qiang decided that he would try to save the village NPCs. There was another reason other than his original wish to acquire the additional reward of a perfect quest completion.

These NPCs were just too much like real people. Each one of these NPCs had good stats and incredibly complex skillsets. The balance design and skill complexity had far exceeded most online games. In other words, if the NPCs in this village were to be placed

into an online game in the real world, they would all be pretty awesome players.

Their combat capabilities were not the only thing. These NPCs also had a rich expression system and comical dialogue system. Everyone had their own personalities and character settings. He was even more familiar with say, the girl from the Gongshu family or the decadent doctor, Ming Que, who totally looked like he sold quack medicine, than his own classmates.

Yue Qiang had the feeling that, if he was to allow these NPCs to die just like that, it would be... not right.

He couldn't tell exactly what was wrong either, but it was wrong nonetheless.

The fire in the forest was growing fiercer and fiercer. Yue Qiang retreated as he fought and slowly grinded down the Zhao Sergeant's health while preserving his own. At the same time, he carefully searched at every corner of his screen. Suddenly, he saw the hunter Tu Xu's figure.

The robust man was standing beside a river embankment and pushing against a huge rock with all of his strength.

Yue Qiang saw it clearly, and felt a little bitter on the inside.

The hunter's back was already lit up by the forest fire, and a very tall flame was burning from it.

Through the game's excellent sound effects he could even hear the hissing sound of his flesh burning.

The river was right beside him, and yet he did not jump down to extinguish the flames behind his back.

His attention was put completely on the huge rock before him. He was using every bit of his strength in the attempt to push the huge rock away.

What exactly was he trying to do?

Chapter 27: Give Me Your Treasures, Doctor Ming Que

Yue Qiang closed his eyes before reopening them again, quietly lamenting the game's scenario.

He finally understood what the hunter Tu Xu wanted to do. He also understood why he ignored the fire on his body and ignored the fact that he was standing right beside water, all for the sake of moving that huge rock first.

The Zhao Army had chosen to set fire to the mountain from the beginning. Not only did it destroy the various wooden traps around Yue Village, it had also sealed the villagers' evacuation routes. There might not be many people inside the village, but every one of them had incredibly high stats. After they were split apart by this fire, they had no choice but to struggle on their own.

Among them, the hunter Tu Xu was the closest to the river. The Yue Village had a dam on this river. Obviously, if the dam was breached the river water would overflow, and the fire set off by Zhao Army would definitely be greatly contained.

The hunter Tu Xu had come out to destroy the dam in attempt to let loose the river water and extinguish the flames. Then he was discovered by the enemy.

The four or five Zhao Soldier's corpses scattered on the ground was obviously done by him, but he had also suffered grievous injuries and his back burning with a huge fire. Even from afar, Yue

Qiang could see the numbers – 3s and -4s representing burn damage popping out from the hunter Tu Xu's body.

If he was to jump down the river and extinguish the fire on him, he would definitely be washed away by the river water with his little remaining strength. He might be saved by the rushing water, but all the people inside the village would not be able to escape the fire. In that case at least half or even more people would die.

On the other hand, if he used every bit of his energy to push away the rock and open a gap, then the river water would overflow over the entire mountain. As long as his health hadn't completely diminished yet, he simply needed to lie down on the ground and the fire would naturally be extinguished.

Yue Qiang instantly figured out the meaning behind his actions.

That's right, this guy was an NPC. The core of an NPC was their programs, and the calculation of these programs were... incredibly precise.

By precise, it meant acting to act in a way that would maximize one's interest. Going from this point of view, this NPC's actions perfectly matched the Yue Village's and his own interest.

But still, Yue Qiang felt a little strange.

That was because he was way too familiar with this scene.

Since he was small, Yue Qiang was educated in political classes about heroism. He was very sensitive towards these kind of scenes where someone laid down their life for a cause. This was totally the game version of Dong Cunrui detonating himself to take down a bunker, or Huan Jiguang throwing himself on a machine gun to block enemy fire.

At the moment he was still being chased by the Zhao Sergeant. Originally he planned to save up his stamina for a big move, but he couldn't take care of everything at this point.

He clicked the Run hotkey, and with the swift depletion of his stamina as price, he arrived with incredible speed towards the hunter Tu Xu's side and assisted him in digging out the huge rock from the dam.

The surging river water poured out immediately. The scene was just like watching the Yangtze River bursting on TV.

The hunter Tu Xu immediately sat down on the floor, and as the water surged up, the flames on his back were extinguished instantly.

He said, "It is fortunate that you have come to help and dig open a hole in the dam, young sir. This is a great service you have done."

Yue Qiang did not have the time to type words and dialog with this NPC at the moment. He glanced back once to look at the Zhao Sergeant behind him. The time had had bought with Run LVL 2 was too little, and the guy had caught up to him yet again.

Without even bothering to speak, Yue Qiang had left immediately.

That's because he saw the system message: You have succeeded in rescuing the hunter Tu Xu and completed the hidden quest 'Release the River'. If you succeed in saving the doctor Ming Que as well, you will complete all hidden quests.

And so he seduced the Zhao Sergeant and swiftly left the area.

After a moment of running, he saw two half health Zhao Soldiers surrounding Ming Que beneath a towering great tree. Ming Que's health was already at the black; his health bar was so short that you could not even see the red.

Naturally Yue Qiang did not dare to delay any longer as he turned on his Run skill and joined the fray. Let's help share some aggro first. Just when he was thinking if he should use all of the stamina he had saved up earlier, the doctor Ming Que suddenly began to speak.

What a personality. Your health is at the black already and you're a doctor. Quickly heal yourself instead of talking.

Ming Que entire body was plastered with dog skin plasters. It was an incredibly unique outfit. But now, all those dog skin plasters were all over the ground, and the few remaining plasters hanging

on his body were splattered with many bloodstains. He looked absolutely terrible. The doctor said, “Don’t leave, young sir Yue!”

Yue Qiang found it a little strange. He was here to help him in the first place; he wasn’t sure what he meant by that.

The doctor Ming Que said again, “This old one has a book composed by a famous Fang Ji Practitioner titled ‘Neijing’. If you can save me young sir, the this old one is willing to present you this book.”

(T/N: something like a doctor)

(T/N: or ‘Inner Canon’)

Right now Yue Qiang was busy fighting against the two low health Zhao Soldiers with his blackish iron rod and could not spare the effort to pull out a dialog box and type words. He thought to himself, Oh, so this NPC is scared that I will refuse to save him and tries to entice me with a reward. He must have eaten too many kickbacks when treating his patients.

Yue Qiang did not reply and continue fighting the two Zhao Soldiers.

Seeing that Yue Qiang was still not speaking, the doctor Ming Que said again, “Fine, I also have another book composed by a famous Fang Ji Practitioner titled ‘Waijing’. If you can save me, young sir, then this old one is willing to present you both masterpieces.”

(T/N: or ‘Outer Canon’)

Yue Qiang thought, huh, looks like the old man has quite a lot of treasures. At this point he had already accumulated enough stamina to take out one of the enemies with a ‘Killing Style, One’, but when he heard Ming Que’s words he held himself back.

Let’s put it on hold for the moment. Seems like the old man still has some treasures left.

He reequipped the iron rod and stabbed heavily onto an enemy, acting like he had used all his strength.

A – 6 number jumped out.

Yue Qiang smiled wickedly. This damage ain’t bad.

He freed one of his hands and typed, “Oh elder Ming Que, it’s not that I don’t want to help you, but I just don’t have a good weapon and hence cannot match against this Zhao Soldier. Whatever shall I do?”

Ming Que said hurriedly, “It’s okay, it’s okay. This old one may not have a good weapon, but I still have a Goldmaker Pill. It can increase the sharpness of any weapon. This old one am willing to present you this Goldmaker Pill, young sir.”

Seeing that it would still take some time for the Zhao Sergeant at afar to catch up to him, plus this doctor Ming Que didn’t seem too heartbroken about the gift, Yue Qiang continued to wave his

blackish iron rod and leave -7s and -8s on the enemy's body while replying in embarrassment, "Elder Ming Que, it's not that I'm not doing my best to kill the enemy, but alas woe is my power. Maybe I should retreat temporarily..."

The doctor Ming Que, a man used to a decadent lifestyle, was already at the brink of death at this point. Hearing Yue Qiang's words, while stomping his feet and gritting his teeth and putting on a look of the utmost heartache he said, "If you will promise to save this old one, young sir, then this old one is willing to present you a pill. This pill has been refined by a famous person and can increase a sliver of refined energy for the consumer. It is a treasure of the highest quality."

It was at this moment that – after saving up his stamina for such a long time – Yue Qiang immediately fired two 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One's in a row and took out the two Zhao Soldiers in an instant.

Before Ming Que's long face had even disappeared, Yue Qiang had already right clicked his avatar and selected the trading option.

Seeing the look of surprise on Ming Que's face, Yue Qiang pulled out the dialog system and typed four words happily,

"Give me your treasures!"

Chapter 28: Goldmaker Pill

Yue Qiang was sure that, if the doctor Ming Que was a real human and not an NPC, he would definitely die from anger.

Just now, he had faked the appearance that his attacks were weak. At first the doctor Ming Que thought that Yue Qiang wasn't willing to save him, then he thought that Yue Qiang did not have the ability to save him. Then, after he had taken out four items in a row, this Yue Qiang had eliminated all the enemies within a matter of seconds.

System Message: You have acquired the item 'Goldmaker Pill'

Item Description: Refined by a famous Fang Ji Practitioner. It can increase a weapon's attack power when reforged into with that weapon.

System Message: You have acquired the items 'Inner Canon' and 'Outer Canon'

Item Description: 'Inner Canon' and 'Outer Canon' are both famous literary work written by a famous Fang Ji Practitioner. It contains the detailed explanation of the body's network, the refinement methods of a variety of pills and other Fang Ji techniques. It is ranked seventh out of the top ten classic literatures and is incredibly rare! 16 points of Mind is needed before the entry level of both books can be learned.

System Message: You have acquired the item ‘Nameless Pill’

A sticky-looking pill that looks extremely worn. It is said that it can increase one free distribution stat point (please use at your own risk).

Not a bad haul!

Looks like this dialogue system was really useful. He had extorted four treasures out of doctor Ming Que while he was in danger. Great profit man, great profit! Yue Qiang felt no guilt from capitalizing on another person’s needs whatsoever. He’s just an NPC after all, wasn’t he?

Looking at them closely, the item he was most interested about was actually the two books ‘Inner Canon’ and ‘Outer Canon’. He hadn’t found anything resembling a martial arts esoterica or theurgy after playing this game for so long, you know. These two books might have ordinary titles, but they were obviously related to the study of human network. Since the game had looked so realistic, it was improbable that he would learn a powerful technique or esoteric or something in a flash of golden light like in other games. It was very likely that he would have to read the books to acquire a skill!

Moreover, when Yue Qiang first entered the game, his quest wasn’t to perform a combat quest or anything, but to learn the ‘Analect’! He literally typed more than 400 sentences from the ‘Analect’ before he successfully completely a hidden quest. This also caused him to pay extra attention to ‘book’ type items in this

game.

There was still a ‘Gui Gu Mathematics’ in his bag that he didn’t read. He wondered what kind of amazing effect it would have.

He had also learned a new information at the same time he received these books: there was a top ten classic literatures leaderboard in this game.

In other games, leaderboards such as weapon and equipment, technique, class and even beauty were incredibly common, but a book leaderboard was quite rare. He wondered what kind of pleasant surprise reading a book that could only be read with special stats would give?

Other than these two books, he also regarded that ‘Goldmaker Pill’ that could increase a weapon’s attack power significantly. At worst, he could still increase the attack power of his blackish iron rod. One might well say that its attack power had skyrocketed from nothing to something.

As for that pill that he had originally looked forward to, said to be able to increase one free distribution stat points, Yue Qiang actually hesitated whether he should consume it immediately.

Even the system itself had given out the message: ‘please use at your own risk’, not to mention the string of rather lousy adjectives… Never mind. Let’s put it in the bag first.

While Yue Qiang was examining his blackmailed trophies, the doctor Ming Que also did some simple treatments to his wounds. Right now, his health had regenerated less than half a bar and reached a yellow health status. He was definitely a doctor type NPC alright.

On the display screen, Ming Que had stood up and wanted to walk away immediately at first. But then, he suddenly came to a halt.

He grew interested in Yue Qiang's weapon, 'A Blackish Iron Rod'.

"I am afraid to ask, young sir, but have you gotten this blackish iron rod from the blacksmith Tan Xiong?" Ming Que said with half-baked, ancient-not-ancient classical chinese characters.

"It is so. This is the favor I have gained from the blacksmith Tan Xiong after I have completed the matter he requested me of." Seeing that the NPC had suddenly let out a most interested expression, Yue Qiang himself had taken note immediately. Could it be that there were yet some secrets behind this weapon that was without any attack power?

However at this moment, Ming Que suddenly said nervously, "Careful young sir, the enemy is here."

Yue Qiang hurriedly turned around. He was so engrossed in examining his items and trophies that he actually forgot that there was still a mini boss character chasing him relentlessly from behind.

The mini boss Zhao Sergeant was definitely not an easy mob. If Yue Qiang was to fight with him head on one-on-one, there would be no chance of victory at all. Even now, he was simply relying on his recently upgraded skill Run LVL 2 to be able to contend with him calmly. Moreover, he guessed that this mini boss' Agility stat must be very low or the same as him: so pitiful that he did not have an Agility stat at all.

While the Zhao Sergeant chased Yue Qiang all over the map, the doctor Ming Que watching from the sidelines popped out a dialog box,

"I see that young sir is having a hard time fighting against the Zhao Sergeant. Why don't you lure him to the giant crossbow log house at the village entrance, and with the giant crossbow's powerful might kill him in one go?"

Yue Qiang thought that it was a good idea. The old man might look wretched, but he was still pretty good at coming up with ideas. He sneaked a glance back at the doctor in the thick of combat, but realized that the old man had run off with unbelievable movement speed. When he vanished into the distance, he even left behind a shrinking dialog box,

"I see that young sir's footwork is extremely masterful, and believe that you will be able to stall this Zhao Sergeant. This old one shall leave ahead!"

This cowardly NPC!

Eh, forget him. Yue Qiang was going to kill mini boss and loot some equipment anyway. And so he ran while stopping at times baiting the mini boss towards the direction of the giant crossbow log house.

The giant crossbow was getting closer and closer. He could see from far, far away the mounted giant wooden bolt already. Yue Qiang noticed that a whisper in purple font suddenly appeared at the bottom of the screen:

Gongshu Shaoyang whispered to you: “Young sir, you did well. Has the enemies at the abandoned mountain path been eliminated?”

To think that this NPC could even whisper to a player. Yue Qiang was gradually getting used to the many surprises in this game, as he typed swiftly and replied to the girl Gongshu.

You whispered to Gongshu Shaoyang: “That’s not all; I have also saved the hunter Tu Xu and the doctor Ming Que. It’s just that this Zhao Sergeant is too strong, and with my current abilities I can only barely contend against him.”

Gongshu Shaoyang whispered to you: “That’s all right, you have already completed your mission above expectations.”

“Thank you for the compliment. So…”

“I will control the giant crossbow to attack the Zhao Sergeant behind you. When the time comes you must avoid the line of fire between the giant crossbow and the enemy!”

“Roger that!”

“In addition, the amount of time taken to prepare the giant crossbow every time it fires a crossbow is incredibly long. This time it’s a rush, and the shot cannot be fully prepared. The shot will only have half of its original power. Therefore, if the giant crossbow could not kill the Zhao Sergeant in one blow, then you will still have to deal the final blow.”

Could a crossbow bolt with only half its power still instakill the mini boss? If so, then how much attack power would a fully powered giant crossbow has?

Yue Qiang continued to bait the enemy at the front, while paying close attention to the chat window at the corner. Before long, a message appeared at the bottom:

Gongshu Shaoyang whispered to you: “Haste!”

This was the command to launch the bolt!

Chapter 29: Zhao Yang And The Sudden Cutscene

Yue Qiang used his fastest speed to activate the Run skill, then leaped madly to the sides to dodge out of the way. There might not be any changes to be seen on the screen, but he knew that the bolt must be travelling at high speed right now. If he could not see it even with this game's super high FPS, that meant that the bolt's travelling speed must have reached an unbelievable rate!

Yue Qiang ran sideways for a little while longer until he felt that it was safe. Only then he turned back to look.

The Zhao Sergeant had been nailed on a tree trunk by the crossbow bolt!

The giant body of the bolt had pierced through him from the left side of his chest and out of his back, causing a huge, bowl-shaped wound. The crossbow bolt stayed inside his body. The arrowhead was deeply embedded into the tree trunk, and only the tail portion of the long arrow was exposed on the outside. Moreover, the bolt did not shudder in the slightest.

This meant that the crossbow bolt was extremely tough, and nailed its target very firmly.

The mini boss still had more than 400 HP left, and yet it was taken down to barely a sliver of health left after suffering a direct hit from the bolt!

It was just a single shot, and yet it contained such terrifying power that it was able to achieve such an effect, even from such a distance. Moreover, he remembered Gongshu Shaoyang's words that this particular shot was only half of the giant crossbow's full power.

It was practically an OP existence.

Yue Qiang walked beside the Zhao Sergeant and easily took his life; dealing the final blow.

Before he died, he said, "Damn it, to think that the general had sent us to attack Yue Village, but there is only a Ring of Earth or something. If we are to attack the Muo Family's Great Camp, then perhaps we may have had a chance to avoid death. How regretful..."

The Zhao Sergeant didn't manage to finish his sentence before he dropped dead. His vital point was pierced by a huge crossbow bolt and he had received defense ignoring damage. Although the man was dead, blood continued to pour non-stop in large amounts from the wound.

Suddenly, Yue Qiang felt a little frightened.

There were just too much blood.

He wore a blood spattered military uniform. Since the ground

was jagged, the pouring blood formed many little blood pools on the floor.

Normally in an MMORPG, once an enemy died and looted, it would turn invisible and disappear. Even if there was a bit of bleeding effect it would stop where it's appropriate.

Meanwhile, the death effects on this Zhao Sergeant – although similar – had definitely outdone those foreign R-rated war films. The degree of blood and violence was even more realistic than those films. Even though he knew that it was fake, it still made Yue Qiang very uncomfortable.

Never mind that the other effects were given more attention to detail, but do they have to make the death effects this realistic as well? Sigh.

He didn't know why, but suddenly a thought entered his head: What if the same thing happens if I die?

The moment he thought this, his entire body reaching to loot the body began to shake.

Wait a second, his last words seem to be similar to the two Zhao Soldiers I killed earlier. They both said that, 'if we had attacked the Muo Family's Great Camp and not Yue Village' they would blah blah blah. In fact, this guy had given out even more information.

A chance to avoid death?

Is this the hint to the implied hidden quest has given to me?

Yue Qiang felt that his mind was much more refreshed. There was no longer any doubt. He was almost certain that this was a quest. Otherwise, there was no way that the final dialogue of a grunt or a mini boss would have the same key word, ‘Muo Family’s Great Camp’.

He made up his mind to seek out more information about this quest later on. This game was too difficult, and there were just too many mysteries to be solved.

If only there was something like a game manual, or an official game website. That would be great.

The many thoughts aside, he should still check out the mini boss’ rewards. He right clicked the Zhao Sergeant’s body and clicked to loot the body. He swept a brief glance and noticed that there were three items, but before he could check out exactly what they were, his attention was drawn by a line of system message at the bottom of the screen.

> System Message: The Zhao Army General ‘Zhao Yan’ has arrived on the battlefield!

The line of text was displayed with shiny fonts. Its font was extra bright, extra thick, extra large and very, very striking.

This wasn't the only system message either. A message quickly followed after it, and then another. They were all in shiny font.

> The Zhao Army General 'Zhao Yan' has appeared at the edge of the battlefield 4000 feet away from you!
>
> The Zhao Army General 'Zhao Yan' has appeared on the battlefield 2500 feet away from you!
>
> The Zhao Army General 'Zhao Yan' has appeared on the battlefield 1500 feet away from you!

At this moment, Yue Qiang was just hovering his mouse over the Zhao Sergeant's weapon to check what its stats were.

In the blink of an eye, this Zhao Yan had covered more than half the distance on the battlefield, and judging from the system message, his target, was him!

Yue Qiang had not forgotten the name 'Zhao Yan'.

The first time he saw this name, it was from the letter to demand surrender that he had seized from 'The Injured Zhao Soldier'. Zhao Yan's signature was on it, and the letter had even triggered a 'letter delivery' quest. At the time, he had already guessed that this guy was probably a Boss level quest on this battlefield.

Now, the boss had appeared, and he could very accurately estimate his speed judging from the line after line of blinking system messages.

His speed definitely far exceeded his own!

There was no longer any time to hesitate.

While cursing under his breath that this game's difficulty was insane, Yue Qiang swept the three items into his item window at his top speed and without even glancing at them, activated Run LVL 2 immediately. He began running madly towards the village literally with his life depending on it.

Judging from Zhao Yan's displayed speed, it was absolutely impossible for him to solo this Boss. His only hope was the village's giant crossbow. This was the only entrenched weapon that was powerful enough to have a chance at damaging the Boss.

Yue Qiang ran while aiming an eye at the system messages at the corner.

Zhao Yan was still closing in on him rapidly. 1000 feet, 700 feet, 400 feet...

He could already see the clouds of dust flying swiftly towards him from afar.

The second the distance indicated by the system message had turned zero, the second the Boss had arrived in front of him, he would die even if it was a careless normal attack. He did not doubt this in the slightest.

At the same time, the whisper that he had been waiting for all this time had arrived.

Gongshu Shaoyang whispered to you: The preparation for the full powered Giant Crossbow Log House's crossbow bolt is complete. Young Sir Yue, when I give the command, dodge to the side and avoid the line of fire.

Yue Qiang quickly typed, "Got it."

Gongshu Shaoyang began to count down:

"Thunder!"

"Earth!"

"Heaven!"

Yue Qiang knew that, other than indicating the relative positions on Bagua, the words also represented numbers. If he was to convert them to modern terms, then it would be the same as the countdown of the launching of a rocket; 'Three', 'Two', and 'One'.

Obviously, Gongshu Shaoyang had purposely counted three times so he would have the time to dodge beforehand. The moment she said ‘Heaven’, Yue Qiang immediately controlled his character and made an abrupt turn to the side!

“Haste!”

When the final command had been unleashed, Yue Qiang felt as if his heart was at the back of his throat. He could not help but turn around, hoping to see the full power version of the bolt, and even better know if the bolt would be enough to take down the Boss.

The instant he turned around, Yue Qiang saw a black screen.

He immediately froze on the spot.

Excluding the joke possibility that his computer had gone down, the only other possibility was... Am I dead?

Yue Qiang remembered the pool of blood so big that it was a little scary, when the Zhao Sergeant died. He remembered the way the game had entered his computer, remembered everything and anything, and finally remembered at the end his own assumption regarding the game’s ‘death penalty’.

He could feel his palms covered in cold sweat.

He closed his eyes tightly, then opened them again once more.

Forcefully pushing away the thought to restart the game, he stared carefully at the computer monitor in attempt to seek out other possibilities.

He was not disappointed.

A change gradually happened on the monitor.

The top and bottom part of the screen were covered with two rectangular-shaped, black boxes, whereas the middle part had gradually brightened. It looked incredibly similar to the opening scene of a movie.

Could it be – is this –

Yue Qiang wiped the cold sweat in his palms and stared with wide open eyes.

That's right. This was a cutscene!

And he, was present inside the cutscene!

The scene playing out on the screen was exactly the part where the Zhao Army General was riding a horse and brandishing his spear, ready to take his life.

In the cutscene, Yue Qiang had dodged unceremoniously into the bush beside him. The warhorse General Zhao Yan had ridden on

arrived as swift as the wind, and as quick as lightning. He raised a huge sword singlehandedly high up in the sky. He simply needed to drop it lightly, and he would be able to end Yue Qiang's life.

At this moment, Gongshu Shaoyang's bolt had also arrived. In an instant the scene was slowed down an infinite time. The sweat flowing down the warhorse and its flying mane was nearly completely still in slow motion. However, that crossbow bolt continued to travel extremely quickly.

This powerful contrast between stillness and action had demonstrated the crossbow bolt's incredible speed even more.

The bolt had arrived in front of Zhao Yan. It would seem that this Zhao Army General would be killed by the arrow.

Zhao Yan's every motion was perfectly clear in slow motion. There was a gleam at the corner of his eyes, and he captured the trace of the bolt that was about to disappear in the blink in an eye. It was at this moment he lifted slightly the other hand that he hung down at the side. The tip of his fingers was blocking directly in the path of the bolt's aim, that was the center of his chest.

The crossbow bolt was extremely quick, and his fingers were extremely slow. However, amidst the twisting animation effects his fingers had pinched the centermost area of the crossbow bolt; the arrowhead and also the sharpest end of the bolt.

The cutscene had came to a complete still at this moment. The calm Zhao Army General, the bolt floating three inches away from

his body but could not proceed any further, and Yue Qiang in front of the horse. Together, they formed an incredibly impactful scene.

Then, the scene regained its normal speed. Zhao Yan continued to maintain his one-handed, bolt pinching posture without moving, but the warhorse beneath him had bore the powerful impact of the crossbow bolt completely. It retreated hundreds of feet before it finally absorbed the crossbolt bolt's impact entirely.

At the end of the cutscene, there were deep and long horse hoof marks etched on the ground. After that, everything returned to darkness following a fade-out effect.

Chapter 30: Solving The Mystery (1)

Yue Qiang had always thought that his psychological resilience was very good.

The fact that the Game's system gave him 14 points of Wisdom was a proof of this point.

But right now, he felt like he was going insane.

On the monitor, the short but impactful cutscene had already ended, and the screen had returned to the title screen. The interface looked as clean as ever. The red, green and blue tricolored bars sat quietly at the corner. The red was at zero, the green was filled only a bit, and the blue progress bar that was originally at 30% progress rate had advanced until just at 50%.

The two big words 'Enter Game' was right beside the blue progress bar.

Watching the familiar interface, Yue Qiang felt absolutely awful.

Should he click that 'Enter Game' button? He didn't know.

He didn't know what was going on when a cutscene had appeared out of nowhere while he was fighting against the Boss. He didn't know why his heart would race inexplicably every time he was about to die in game. He didn't even know if he would return to that battlefield and be killed right away by the horse riding, spear

wielding storyline Boss if he pressed that ‘Enter Game’ button!

He didn’t know anything.

Right now, Yue Qiang was feeling so uncomfortable, extremely irritated that he even felt like smashing the PC apart.

In truth, this feeling wasn’t borne just now. From the moment he was forced into contact with this game, this feeling of being kept in the dark had always been there. When he realized that the class beauty he knew Rao Xiao Ting might be an NPC, this feeling had once reached its maximum limit.

It was Luqiu Duanyi’s explanation that helped him forget those jumbled thoughts forcefully, and returned back into the game.

She remember her saying: Only by increasing your own power, will you be able to solve everything.

But there had always been a voice in his heart asking himself a most simple question, but he didn’t know how to answer it at all:

When you have learned that the people in the real world are slowly turning into rigid NPCs, how can you still be playing games so calmly?

At the time, Yue Qiang’s answer was: A woman who held no ill intentions towards me had told me that, by increasing my power, I would eventually understand everything. But he really could not

hold in that unbearable feeling any longer. As a normal person, he had the most basic common sense and judgment. However, everything that had happened up to this point had long exceeded the realm of common sense.

Perhaps what I need right now is a ‘Game Manual’? Or maybe I need to register at ‘The Game’s’ official website and get a real grasp of the game’s context?

Yue Qiang’s thoughts boiled as he sat in front of the computer desk. Suddenly, the words ‘official website’ sparked a forgotten memory.

A long time ago, he once posted a thread on a famous single player game forum and consulted the users very obscurely for some information. Too many things had happened since then that he had forgotten about this matter.

He hurriedly took out his mobile phone in attempt to seek out that thread. While searching, he made up his mind: If he couldn’t figure out what the hell was going on, he would rather smash the entire PC and stay away from this game forever.

After logging into the forum, he flipped through pages for a long time before he finally found the thread he had sent three months ago. With a shivering finger, he tapped inside.

“Rich guy at the second post, any plans to donate us some money?”

“The poster below me has no d.”

“The fifth poster will definitely know the answer.”

“You shitty spammers, I will @moderator to ban all of your spammer IDs.”

“You shitty spammers, I will @moderator to ban all of your spammer IDs + 1.”

…

There were tens of replies in the thread, and they were all spams, copypastas or raffle posts. When he glanced all the way to the bottom, he actually couldn’t find any valid information at all.

Suddenly, Yue Qiang realized something, and he clicked ‘Go Back’ to check out the other forum threads. The usual quality threads such as new game reviews, 100% saves, walkthrough summaries, bug reports and so on had completely vanished. The forum was pretty lively, it’s just that all of them were spam threads.

They were all forum spams!

He then searched through the previous threads by time, and realized that the quality of the threads had fallen in a stair steps downtrend. Moreover, the turning points of this stair steps matched the progress of the blue progress bar perfectly!

Now, the game's blue progress bar had just reached 50%, and this single player game forum was completely dead.

Is this the truth behind The Game?

Yue Qiang did not lose hope. There were still many ways he could test this.

The first and foremost method he could think of was of course, calling Luqiu Duanyi. He was unwilling to make the call for the longest time, but right now he could not even bear to wait another minute. He had lost all of his patience.

Once the phone had connected, Yue Qiang immediately pelted her with a torrent of questions, "What's with the sudden cutscene inside the game? What will happen if I die inside the game? What will happen if the blue progress bar reaches 100%? What's going on with everyone around me seemingly turning into an NPC? Can you just fucking tell me what the fuck do all of these mean? Tell me! JUST TELL ME!"

Yue Qiang shouted loudly like he was venting; shouted all those questions he had kept inside his heart a long time ago one by one. He remembered very clearly that Luqiu Duanyi hinted to him that he must not say 'any' Chinese text related to The Game. However, he simply couldn't hold it any longer.

While Yue Qiang was waiting for a reply from the other side, his eyes were staring at the computer monitor. However, it was at this

moment he realized something frightening.

The blue progress bar that was perfectly half-filled previously was rising at an incredible rate!

Every time he said a term that was related to the game, the blue progress bar would steadily rise by a few percentage points. Now, the blue progress bar had stabilized at 70%, and sat very close to 100%.

Is this why she wouldn't let me say those words? Yue Qiang thought. But he couldn't care about that any longer. Right now there was only one thought in his mind, and that was to find out the truth of these matters!

On the other side of the phone, Luqiu Duanyi spoke up. Her environment was very noisy. She seemed to be selling something in a supermarket, and Yue Qiang had to wait for a while before he could get a reply.

"Have you seen the first cutscene?"

"Yes." Yue Qiang answered.

"Then, the blue progress bar had exceeded 50%?"

"Yes." Yue Qiang answered again. When Luqiu Duanyi said these words, the blue progress bar did not continue to increase. It seemed that the progress increment triggered by these terms was

one-time.

“In that case,” Luqiu Duanyi said. Her voice was just as pleasant as ever, but somehow it had turned a little numb, “I have mailed the ‘Game Manual’ to you. Read it well. The rest falls in your own hands.”

‘Game Manual’? Mailed to me?

While Yue Qiang was in a stupor, he suddenly heard a ‘Ding’ sound inside his head. He had heard this sound many times during the past three months.

It was the sound of a system message.

In the past, the sound had came from the computer speaker, but now it had appeared directly inside Yue Qiang’s head.

> System Message [Red]: Luqiu Duanyi had sent you the item ‘Game Manual’.

> System Message [Red]: You have acquired ‘Game Manual’. The manual can only be read inside the game, and requires level 1 cultivation of the heart to enable viewing of the basic pages of the manual. Verifying the cultivation of the heart... the Player possesses ‘Pure Heart LVL 1’. Verification passed. ‘Game Manual’: Entry Level unlocked.

As the system spoke out the message word by word, line by line inside his head, Yue Qiang noticed that a book-like item had appeared on the title screen before he knew it. It was very small, very clear, and looked exactly the same as the cover of the book Luqiu Duanyi would pick up and read every time.

Is this the game manual?

He moved his mouse to click the book, and opened the first page.

The first page was blue in color. On top of it were the big, bolded words:

The blue progress bar, represents the world’s conversion rate.

Chapter 31: Solving The Mystery (2)

Yue Qiang slowly read through the unlocked portion of the manual, and finally gained an understanding in many things.

The blue progress bar represented the ‘World’s Conversion Rate’.

In this game, anything the character did can increase this ‘conversion rate’, such as killing mobs, chatting, and even dying. It’s just that the conversion rate of normal actions were extremely low, and performing quests – especially hidden quests – would greatly increase the conversion rate.

The blue progress bar ‘World’s Conversion Rate’ was very helpful inside the game. For example, when the conversion rate had exceeded 10%, it would become possible to activate the hidden quest to acquire the dialogue system. Once this hidden quest was completed, it would become possible to chat freely with the NPCs. More than just information, it would also become possible to obtain additional rewards through certain skills, just like how Yue Qiang had blackmailed 4 treasures consecutively from the doctor Ming Que.

As the world’s conversion rate continued to increase, a character would be able to make more and more choices inside the game. The degree of freedom and possibility of obtaining ‘Special Stats’ would become higher and higher as well. The explanations regarding ‘Special Stats’ and a whole host of related questions were also provided at the back of the manual. For example, Yue Qiang’s actions were limited inside the house when he first started the game. If he touched the door, a dialog box would be triggered

informing him that he had been limited inside the house. This was the situation he would face when the degree of freedom was limited at 0%. With 70% degree of freedom now, not only he could walk out of the door, he would also be able to jump out of the window, and even use his newly acquired skills to blast away the house before leaving. He could do almost everything just like in the real world.

Essentially, what the blue progress bar affected was the game's degree of realism. This could be seen from the obtaining of information, the increasing degree of freedom, and even the NPC's intelligence and many other aspects. As the progress bar increased, the Game's world grew closer and closer to the real world.

However, that was not all.

Since the blue progress bar was explained as the 'World's Conversion Rate' inside the game manual, it meant that as the Game's world was slowly converting into a realistic world, the opposite was also happening at the same time.

This was the source of Yue Qiang's fear: The real world was gradually being turned into a game.

Even if the conversion had already happened for real, he still could not accept it.

But it wasn't something he could avoid. From the moment Yue Qiang dropped all 8 free distribution stat points into his Charisma, his life had irreversibly changed.

The more and more formulated speech and tone of the class beauty Rao Xiao Ting, the unadulterated admiration of the waiters and waitresses in consumer sites, the dead silent single player game forum on the internet... Everything pointed in the same direction – the entire world around Yue Qiang was gradually losing its life; the living, breathing energy that animates the very soul.

The game manual did not provide a direct explanation, but the two words ‘Conversion Rate’ were already the best explanation.

He could almost be certain that this game was gradually and continuously extracting something from the real world; something like ‘Life’ itself and injecting it into the Game’s world. The blue color represented the progress rate of this extraction process.

If the extraction progress reached 100%, what would happen?

Yue Qiang felt pins and needles on his scalp. The explanation given by the manual regarding the ‘Blue Progress Bar’ was only so much, and then he couldn’t help but recall even more memories, such as the one time when Luqiu Duanyi had once told him to, ‘Pay attention to the color of the sea. It means how much time you have left’.

He could now completely confirm that the thing she mentioned back then was without a doubt the blue progress bar. Then what about the time he had left? If the progress had reached 100%, did that mean that the Game would turn completely real, and the real world turn completely into a game? Or would something even

more unimaginable happen?

Yue Qiang thought rapidly when he suddenly realized something. Why did that woman, Luqiu Duanyi, seem unaffected by the conversion process?

The biggest doubt of this woman was that she knew how to learn the skills inside this game! One would be that seemingly joke-like Run skill, and the other would be that initially incomprehensible, but massively powerful when applied Killing Style, One skill.

Without her, Yue Qiang would have died in the game's first quest a long time ago.

Luqiu Duanyi had appeared in Yue Qiang's world seemingly out of nowhere. Now that he thought about it, there were only too many illogical points about that high class fitness club in the first place; most of all was that woman herself, of course. In that case, then what was her background then?

He could not figure out the answer, so he decided that he might as well set aside these questions and continue reading the rest of the 'Game Manual'.

Clicking the mouse and turning over a page, the second page of the manual explained the meaning behind the green progress bar. Its explanation wasn't as simple and easy to understand as the blue progress bar; there were many spots that displayed '??'.

The system's explanation to these '?' was that his cultivation of the heart wasn't enough and thus, he couldn't read them.

It looks like I must increase the level of the cultivation of the heart before I can obtain more information. This may be one of the reasons why Luqiu Duanyi had told to increase my power as soon as possible. While thinking, Yue Qiang began to research carefully the unlocked portions of the page.

The system's explanation towards the green progress bar was like this:

The green progress bar, represented the activated functions, skills and stats.

There were two activated functions, and they were the dialogue system and realistic combat system. There were also a whole list of question marks at the back indicating that the remaining information was at an unviewable state.

There were three activated skills, and they were:

Run LVL 2

Break Fist – Killing Style, One LVL 1

Pure Heart LVL 1

There were no '?' labeled at the back. Instead, there was only a

small ‘Turn Page’ button at the side. It was very possible that the skills to be added under this page were not fixed, and were based off the skills that the Player could freely learn. Since there were infinite possibilities, they were displayed using an automatically incrementing ‘Turn Page’ method instead of ‘?’.

There were only five activated stats, and he had memorized these a long time ago: Strength, Vitality, Wisdom, Wealth and Charisma.

There was also a subcategory under the explanation of the activated stats. There was only one slot activated under the subcategory, and that was ‘Stamina Gauge’.

Yue Qiang’s expectations towards this set of stats was also the greatest. The reason was simple. The increment, and even the extension of his stat options was the true key to increasing one’s power in this game! His previous assumption that he wasn’t just fixed to 5 stat options, and that they could be slowly expanded had also been confirmed.

If an NPC could have 6, or even more stat options, then on what basis he, as the Player could only have 5, especially when Strength and Vitality were the only combat-related stats he had. The remaining three did not appear to be much useful right now.

As for the activation of additional gauges under the subcategory, could he perhaps assume that a character could activate more than one gauge in this game?

If this is true, does this mean that as long as I discover the right

method, I have the opportunity to activate the Rage gauge, energy gauge, MP gauge, blood pool gauge etc. and even the legendary internal power gauge?

Chapter 32: Solving The Mystery (3)

If that was truly the case, then the choices that could be made in this game, no, this game world would be endless.

Right now, the only combat stats that Yue Qiang owned were Strength and Vitality. The Stamina gauge was also the only gauge he had right now. But as the game progresses, the potential for improvement and development were endless.

There were also some explanations and options behind the stat gauges.

Strength: Strength will play a huge factor in deciding the strength of your bare-handed attacks. Many bare-handed attack skills are directly connected with Strength. Strength also plays a slightly smaller factor in calculating Defense.

Vitality: Vitality determines the amount of Health Points (HP). Vitality 10 = HP. Vitality also plays a small factor in calculating Defense. Player is detected to have activated the Stamina gauge. The Stamina gauge's value is calculated by Vitality. The calculation is: Vitality 10.

Basing off the explanations, both Strength and Vitality stat were related to plenty of combat data and were the absolute basic stats.

There was also a draggable option beside the stats. They were attributes that he had collected thus far. They were:

Tactics (Collected from the Village Elder Chen Zi Han). Usage unknown.

Dexterity (Collected from Gongshu Shaoyang). Usage unknown.

Accuracy (Collected from the Blacksmith Tan Xiong). Usage unknown.

The system automatically detects that your cultivation of the heart as level 1. Based on the level of your cultivation of the heart, you are able to freely add the collected stats into the character stats window and transform them into your own fixed stat. For every level up of the cultivation of the heart, one attribute may be added.

I knew it!

To think that this game could be played like this. Not only could he earn many freely distributed stat points, he could also freely control his attributes. In this case, wouldn't he be able to develop his character in his own style?

Detecting... The system detects that your learned Heart skill is 'Pure Heart'... The maximum amount of attributes you can add is increased by 1.

System Message: You can now add two attributes as your own fixed stats.

I can add two additional attributes to my stats!

When Yue Qiang saw this line of system message he was shocked yet again. It would seem that that ‘Pure Heart LVL 1’ he had learned in the brink of death was an exceptional boon.

The addition of an acquirable attribute was most definitely a tremendous increase in power. If he could throw in a ‘Mana’ attribute and learn a Pyroblast or something, wouldn’t he able to one-shot someone from afar? What if he added another agility attribute then? He should be able to switch jobs to a Bowman and shoot Fire Arrows, shouldn’t he? What if he learned a Rogue’s Poison after that? Could he shoot Fire Poison Arrow? How big of a damage increase would it be if he could combine physical, nature and poison damage all together as one?

And these were just his careless thoughts. If he were to organize them and do some research into the chaining of skills, he could probably create a lot of strong combinations.

Since he had these many choices to choose from, he should actually refrain himself from making a hasty addition right now. He should enter the game and do some basic research.

There were also two messages at the end of the stats’ explanation. It was related to the addition and collection of stats.

The Increase of Attributes: The initial value of newly added attributes into the character’s fixed stats is 10 points.

The Collection of Attributes: Attributes can be collected directly from the character by increasing favorability or when the Charisma stat has suppressed the character to a certain degree. It can also be studied through books. The rarer the book, the more valuable it is, the better the collected attributes are.

So this is how it is. He finally understood the greatest use of the book type items in this game – to collect all kinds of precious attributes!

Then there were only two things left for him to do right now. One would be to collect plenty of rare character attributes such as Intelligence and Mind – which are attributes that almost certainly exist – or those that he only assumed but were very likely to exist such as ‘Ethereal Form’, which was a common attribute in other games that ignores physical attacks. There might even exist a type that increases stats by X-fold – errr, let’s name it Berserk – It was not an impossibility!

Another thing that should be paid attention to was the game’s leveling system.

There’s no such thing as character level up in this game, so naturally, stats could not be acquired from said level up. In that case, acquiring information on how to obtain stats had become the most important priority as of now. The methods he knew were completing a hidden quest, and of course, there was also the possibility that the sticky pill he blackmailed from the doctor Ming Que could increase his stat points as well.

Other than these two methods, it would be best if he was to

search for a stabler way to acquire freely distributed stat points. This was probably the most important subject at the latter stage of the game.

The Game Manual's explanation of the green progress bar stopped here.

Yue Qiang thought as he clicked to skip the second page: No wonder the green progress bar was increasing so slowly. There are actually so many independent choices inside it. He wondered what would happen when the green progress bar had reached 100%.

While thinking, he had flipped to the third page.

The third page of the 'Game Manual' explained about the red progress bar.

There was far less content in this page.

Red Progress Bar: Represents the degree of solved mysteries in the Game.

The red progress bar stopped at about 10%. There was only one line of text with no supportive explanation whatsoever. There was also nothing that could be controlled or dragged in the entire page. In comparison to the previous two pages, this third page was very simple.

There were three options beneath this line of explanation.

1: Acquire the ‘Game Manual’.

2: Unlock the first ‘Cutscene’.

3: Learn about the Game’s death penalty.

There were only three lines of text.

Yue Qiang stared at the screen and fell into deep thought.

From the words ‘Degree of Solved Mysteries’, this text was probably explaining the truth contained inside the Game. From the very beginning when he added 8 points into his Charisma, to realizing that the Charisma stat could be brought over to the real world, and later on analyzing step by step, proving and guessing until he finally acquired the ‘Game Manual’ now. He had learned a lot of the Game’s relevant content.

However, all this content only added up to about 10% of the game’s solved mysteries.

If he was to make a conclusion from this perspective, then the whole mystery hidden behind the game would be completely unimaginable by the current him.

Yue Qiang did recall something very urgent when he read the second and third option.

The game's main storyline!

If his guess was correct, then the questline he was currently performing: to Assist in the Defense of Yue Village -> Defend Yue State -> Face Off the Enemy General, was definitely the main questline. After all, even a cutscene had appeared.

Judging from the scene described in the cutscene, Zhao Yan – also the Boss of the quest 'Face Off the Enemy General' – was about to kill him, but was met with the giant crossbow attack by Gongshu Shaoyang instead.

Yue Knew knew about the giant crossbows' power. The bolt's shaft was at least three to four times thicker than a normal feather arrow, and the average Zhao Soldier would either be hurt if they even brushed against it, or die instantly upon solid contact. Even at half its strength, it had taken off three to four hundred HP instantly when it struck the Zhao Sergeant's vital point. It could be said to be an existence that harvests lives as easily as harvesting wheat.

However, this Zhao Yan had actually stopped the bolt with only two fingers in this cutscene.

Just how powerful was this Boss going to be? Was this what it meant by Skull level quest difficulty?

He did not forget that his game progress had 'temporarily' paused due to the cutscene. The moment he entered the game,

whether he would enter a safe environment or face the big boss' giant sword was a complete mystery.

The third option was the Game's death penalty that he already knew.

He clicked the 'Display' button once. The screen showed the result that he had expected a long time ago. It was a single word:

Death.

Chapter 33: The NPCs All Know How To Whisper

There’s nothing to hesitate about. The game must go on!

Back when he was playing single player RPG games, he would often run into ‘Hopeless Boss Fights’. The protagonist would be killed by the Boss no matter what they did after entering combat. The worst part? In the case where he wasn’t relying on a walkthrough, he would often waste some precious pills or medicines or single use item only to find out later that it was a hopeless battle…

Remembering what happened earlier, Yue Qiang was seventy percent sure that that battle was a hopeless boss fight. To begin with the Boss was way too powerful. This game was not a Xianxia world where Nascent Souls were littered everywhere like dogs, but a realistic, historical world. The ability Zhao Yan displayed had probably reached the level where he could fight a hundred enemies on his own!

Next would be the increment of a character’s power. Yue Qiang had not found any methods inside the village that could directly increase a character’s power. All of his stat points were acquired through hidden quests, and his skills were learned either on his own or from that mysterious woman. The only other bit of relevant info was a ‘Ring of Earth’ that could increase the level of a Heart skill, but up till this point he hadn’t seen even a hair of the ring yet.

As an old time single player gamer, Yue Qiang could very

responsibly claim that no one could've done better than him under this kind of situation.

Therefore, the probability that the encounter with the super Boss Zhao Yan was a sure lose battle demanded by plot was over seventy percent.

The reason he carried out these analysis and not enter the game rashly was because the game's death penalty was far too cruel. He had to exercise the utmost caution, and then some more.

Right now, the blue progress bar had reached 70%. When he left-clicked the 'Enter Game' button, Yue Qiang felt as if he was in a dream.

If he said earlier that the game's graphics was realistic to the point where it could rival original movies when he first began to play this game, then the complementation between graphic effects and first person POV now had already reached the level described in ads by the most advanced VR manufacturer in the world.

After the fade-in and fade-out effects were over, he realized that he was no longer on the battlefield.

He had returned to the small room at the beginning of the game. It was the small room where Chen Zi Han had taught him 'Analects'.

There were dozens of NPCs gathered inside the small room. Yue

Qiang silently counted the numbers, and discovered that most of the village's NPCs were here barring three people: The girl from the Gongshu family, the doctor Ming Que, and an old farmer named Qu Zhongqiu.

Have they all passed away?

The person standing closest to him was the village elder Chen Zi Han. He said to Yue Qiang, "Thank goodness, the young sir has awakened."

Yue Qiang typed, "I seemed to have fainted earlier? What happened?"

Immediately, everyone in the room began to voice their concerns towards Yue Qiang. Yue Qiang was a young student of a rich family and was not loved by the villagers for the longest time. However, not only did he intercept the enemy's letter and killed the Zhao Soldiers and Zhao Sergeant during the recent war against Zhao State, he had even successfully saved the hunter Tu Xu and the doctor Ming Que. Everyone had changed their views towards him. For a time the whole screen was filled with dialog boxes, and they were so densely packed that he couldn't read anything.

Chen Zi Han made a throat clearing motion and said, "Why don't this old man explain things to young sir."

"Originally, a great man like Zhao Yan would find it beneath him to participate personally in a battle as small as the siege of Yue Village. However, young sir is extraordinarily courage and

resourceful to cooperate with the village's giant crossbow log house to kill many enemy soldiers. That is why a man of the level of general was forced to don his armor and attend to the battlefield himself. However, the moment he joins into the battle, it also meant the war is over."

"Young sir must have seen it with your own eyes the effects of a powerful war weapon at the level of the giant crossbow on Zhao Yan." The village elder Chen Zi Han let out the hint of a bitter smile, "He is a general level character after all. It is without a doubt a fantastical dream to hope to defeat his army."

"What happened afterwards?"

"You were too close with the general at the time, and the situation too dangerous. The hunter Tu Xu and the blacksmith Tan Xiong had charged out immediately to save you. As a result all three of you were struck by Zhao Yan's AOE skill. You were sent flying away with no way to tell if you are dead or alive. Tu Xu and Tan Xiong were also knocked back quite far away and bled a lot of blood."

Yue Qiang glanced at his health bar, and only a small quarter of HP was left inside it. It was probably because he suffered that AOE skill.

"Although the general Zhao Yan's power is formidable, he had not killed the three of you right away. He ordered his subordinates to drag you back into the village, and then pen up everyone in this small house." Chen Zi Han said, "Since then, more than six hours have passed."

Yue Qiang suddenly recalled the letter to demand surrender, and the reason Zhao State had garroted Yue Village. He could not but ask, “And the Ring of Earth?”

“It has been turned over, naturally.” The village elder let out a bitter laugh and answered, “This old man had believed himself to have some knowledge after reading over ten thousand volumes of books. However, the strength of the general Zhao Yan’s heart seemed to be incredibly powerful. He only looked me in the eye once, and I have submitted the Ring of Earth without any resistance whatsoever. It is a truly shameful thing to bring up.”

This old man said while shaking his head continuously, feeling endless regret towards his own actions.

“So you’re saying that the entire Yue Village has become the Zhao army’s prisoners?” Yue Qiang said.

“That is correct.”

“Why had he not killed us directly?”

“In his original words, ‘the killing of one’s life is a sacred matter. I will need a reason to kill someone.” The village elder Chen Zi Han said.

“How about Gongshu Shaoyang, Qu Zhongqiu, and that doctor Ming Que who sells dog plasters? Were they killed, or…”

“Ming Que is treating the wounds of the injured Zhao Soldier. Qu Zhongqiu is preparing rice for them. As for the girl from the Gongshu family… Zhao Yan wants to build an outpost at this place and has taken apart a large majority of the village’s houses. He wants Gongshu Shaoyang to help design the base and barracks; the usage of timber… This Zhao Yan sure knows that everyone in the Yue Family has their own unique trade!” This time however, it was the blacksmith Tan Xiong who had spoken up. His tone was ill, but looked rather helpless as well.

“How I wish I could meet that bastard and slaughter him this moment!” He swung an angry fist on the table, causing it to shake incessantly.

The stalwart blacksmith was covered in blood. His injuries were very severe, and the artificial limb made of log was dragged below him in a sorry state. He appeared battered and exhausted.

After listening to everyone’s recount, Yue Qiang turned silent for a moment before he stood up and headed towards the door.

“Where are you going, young sir?” Chen Zi Han hurriedly stopped him with a shout.

“I want to that Zhao Yan with my own eyes. I was sent flying by this guy, so I didn’t catch his face.”

“It’s best if you don’t go, young sir. That Zhao Yan is a little…” The village elder Chen Zi Han carefully picked his words, “He’s a

little neurotic. He may very well do something crazy."

"It's okay. He hasn't killed anyone at this point, has he? I'm just going to catch a glimpse, that's all." Yue Qiang said.

"In that case," The village elder Chen Zi Han said, "Then allow me to pass over the previous quest rewards first. We have successfully defended Yue Village before Zhao Yan's arrival, and no one has died up till now. Therefore this quest is still valid."

If the old man hadn't brought it up Yue Qiang would have forgotten about this matter. He walked over to receive the quest. However, something unexpected happened. On the surface, Chen Zi Han had given him a quest reward, but underneath, a single line of text appeared not in the form of a dialog box, but a purple colored whisper.

"There are ears behind walls, therefore I have chosen this method to speak to young sir about a most critical matter. You must remember it well, young sir!"

Yue Qiang took heed, "Please speak."

Chapter 34: The XXXX System And 'Libido' Stat

Chen Zi Han secretly whispered to you, "The way of speech such as the one we are using right now can only be done under the premise that both parties possess the cultivation of the heart. This way of speech is different from norm, and thus will not be overheard by other people."

Yue Qiang understood that this was probably the game world's way of rationalizing 'Whisper'. After all, if even the NPCs in this game could whisper, then the fact that it had a logical explanation behind it was nothing to be surprised about.

Chen Zi Han whispers to you: "What this old man is trying to say is, we are not cornered into a dead end yet. If young sir can escape this place by yourself and bring reinforcements the Mo Family's Great Camp one hundred kilometers away, you may very well be able to save us all!"

The Mo Family's Great Camp? Yue Qiang felt like he had seen this name somewhere.

"Although everyone in the village is prepared to face their deaths a long time ago, we also left some leeway to deal with this kind of situation. In my opinion, young sir is equipped with both courage and resourcefulness. You are the best candidate to break through this situation."

Like hell I'm courageous and resourceful; you gave me this quest

simply because I'm the player. Yue Qiang thought. However, he suddenly noticed an important fact from the old man's words. Could this courage and resourcefulness be some kind of hidden stat attributes? He wondered if they had any connection with his Charisma. Perhaps this courage and resourcefulness and other imaginary concepts were in fact included under Charisma.

Chen Zi Han continued to instruct Yue Qiang by whisper, "On the surface, I am passing you the quest reward. There is also a letter that I've written myself in this quest reward. Pass it to the Camp Chief of the Mo Family's Great Camp when the time comes. He will know what to do."

After sending these whispers, a dialog box appeared above Chen Zi Han's head, "Young sir has killed many enemies. This old man is very pleased…"

The old man went on to speak many streamlined quest lines pretentiously, but his eyes had glanced sideways at the house's entrance non-stop. Someone was probably guarding outside, and these words were all spoken for the benefit of the guarding Zhao Soldiers. His gaze went back and forth; he had even winked at Yue Qiang after finished glancing at the window, filled with glee that was unlike his age.

This game is seriously getting more and more real, I can't believe it can even reflect the NPCs pitting their wits against each other. Looks like the blue progress bar mentioned in the 'Game Manual' was no joke at all.

While nodding and responding to the village elder Chen Zi Han's

words, he opened the quest reward window at the same time.

There were two extra freely distributed stat points other than the original two of the reward. The explanation stated that he had acquired these through successfully helping the two NPCs completing their quests and not losing a single person from Yue Village, so now Yue Qiang had received a total of 4 freely distributed stat points. He did not plan to use these stat points immediately. After all, there was the potential to expand his stat attributes in this game. Right now what he needed to do was gather more information and plan out his next upgrade carefully.

There was also a letter in the quest reward. It was the letter handwritten by Yue Village's village elder.

System Message: This item can trigger a quest. Will you open it?

He definitely could not open this right now.

Yue Qiang placed the letter into the deep end of his backpack and headed towards the door.

When he pushed open the door and went out, he realized that it the sky was already filled with bright stars.

It was late at night.

Every time he logged into the game and exited the house, Yue Qiang had the illusion that he was transported into another world.

The sceneries inside the computer screen were growing more and more realistic and attractive. Although he was now a prisoner and his house had become a prison, this realistic beauty remained just as lovely as ever.

Perhaps it was because the blue progress bar had filled up some more.

Right now, there were two fully armed Zhao Soldiers standing at the left and right of the door. Their gazes were even and their faces were expressionless. They did not show any visible reactions other than laying their halberds horizontally across the front of the door, indicating that he could only stand in front of the entrance.

Their attentions were not paying any attention to the front door in the first place. Instead, they were using indifferent expressions to mask their concentrated and even gazes.

Yue Qiang curiously followed along the lines of the two Zhao Soldier gazes and discovered a most interesting thing.

The opposite of his small house was the house where the blacksmith Tan Xiong once stayed in before. It was bright inside, and four or five shadows could be seen moving about through the straw curtain of the window. This was the spot the two Zhao Soldiers had fixed their eyes on most intently.

From the looks of it, this is...

At a time like this, it is not sufficient to just rely on one's eyes.

Yue Qiang turned the knob on his speakers by a full round.

Instantly, waves of cheeks blushing, heart thumping erotic sounds reverberated throughout Yue Qiang's small rented house.

"Come on, hubby..."

"Oh doctor, your servant only has one piece of cloth left..."

"Your little girl is willing to service you from top to bottom in order, what do you think hubby hmm..."

...

Yue Qiang was speechless. He never thought that this game would have a XXXX system. This game sure knows how to watch out for the 'welfare' of its players. The two soldiers standing beside him, who could only listen but not see with their own two eyes, were probably feeling pretty blue on the inside. When he looked closer, Yue Qiang noticed that one of the soldiers was even drooling from his mouth.

(T/N: If you still don't get this, it's Adult)

There had always been more men than women in an army camp, but the fact that this person in the house could actually enjoy a 1vN meant that he had quite the backing. Could he possibly be Zhao

Yan?

It was at this moment a male voice rang out from the inside, “Kiss here, no, here, oh, no, gentler, not too much strength…”

Then there was yet another round of coy and flirtatious cries.

It was not Zhao Yan.

Yue Qiang had heard the Boss general’s voice on the battlefield and the cutscene before. His voice was most definitely not this… imbecilic.

There was another new development inside the house. He could vaguely see the man’s posture inside the house through the silhouette shone onto the straw curtain by the lamp light. The guy seemed incapable of resisting against the women’s seductions and his own burning passion any longer. Lifting his gun and ready to enter, he grabbed two round objects in front of him with his hands, and straightened.

The voice of a woman moaning for dear life escaped the confines of his speakers at the perfect moment.

…

Three seconds later.

…

Two voices rang out of the speaker. One was the satisfied panting of a man, and another was the dissatisfied panting of a woman.

On their side, Yue Qiang and the two Zhao Soldiers who were guarding the door matched eyes unanimously. Then they shook their heads at once and let out several sighs.

He must admit that the game's visual or audio effects were outstanding. Yue Qiang was all ears when he pushed open the door, came out and ran right into such a blood boiling scene, but he couldn't have possibly known that the man had last only three seconds despite the show of a potential 1v3 or 1v4. He couldn't help the well of helplessness gushing up his heart.

A few minutes later, the man had finished tidying himself and walked out of the house.

He walked out of the door and arrived at the center of the small village path. He stretched his back greatly facing towards the sky before a dialog box appeared atop his head, "Today's efforts ain't bad. I have lasted yet another second longer."

With a blazing heart of gossip Yue clicked the man's avatar and checked his stats.

The character had a lot of stats and a lot of skills, but Yue Qiang skipped through all of them. He saw the line that he most wanted

to see, and exploded into uncontrollable laughter.

This guy had a rare stat. The stat was called ‘Libido’. Its stat value was:

1.

Chapter 35: Do You Dare To Steal Something

The quarter pump chump looked towards Yue Qiang's direction and said to him, "Come over and chat, will you?"

The two Zhao Soldiers guarding the door hurriedly lifted their halberds, "The prisoner is not allowed to move around unauthorised!"

But the quarter pump chump waved his hands to indicate that all is fine while staring fixedly at Yue Qiang. It was as if he noticed that he had something good on him.

"What have you called me over for, my lord?" Yue Qiang said honestly. He was standing under low eaves right now*, so why not take the opportunity to flatter the other party.

*A variation of the Chinese saying, 'You have to bow your head under low eaves', meaning that one should submit when he is under another's authority.

"I have a feeling that you carry a heavy responsibility with you. Let me think. If I have not guessed wrongly, that this quest should involve escaping Yue Village, am I right?"

Yue Qiang's heart skipped. The village elder's unopened letter was with him right now, and it was true that the quest 'Escaping Yue Village' could be activated after he had read said letter. It was a main quest even. In that case, how did he found out?

“Don’t worry.” the quarter pump chump said carelessly, “I have a quest for you to perform as well.”

“You came out earlier, so you must have seen everything that happened while I was inside the house. Yes, that’s right, this is a little embarrassing to speak of; after all the time I lasted is a little short.” the quarter pump chump did not appear to be embarrassed at all. In fact he wore an incredibly proud expression, “My hard work allowed me to increase the duration by 50%, but since the base duration is too short the effects aren’t obvious – the total duration has only risen by a second… that is why I would like you to help me.

There is a pill beside General Zhao that can increase its user’s libido. I would like you to help me steal it.

In return, the quest reward I will give you is this: I will assist you in escaping Yue Village.” the quarter pump chump continued, “There are now hundreds of Zhao Soldiers crawling on this one fifth acre of a village. If you are without my help, then there is absolutely no way you can escape this place.”

Suddenly, the situation had turned a little interesting.

First, this suddenly appearing quarter pump chump was incredibly silly. He openly publicized the fact that he lasted in bed for only three seconds, and even that it was upgraded from the original two seconds. Next, his status was very high. The fact that he could carry with him three or four women in a military camp

filled with men was by itself a symbol of his status. Then, it would appear that his relationship with General Zhao Yan wasn't too friendly, or he would not have issued a quest to steal from Zhao Yan and help Yue Qiang escape.

"So? Have you considered?"

"Can you tell me why you're doing this? I am just a captive, and you are a high-ranking official in this camp." Yue Qiang typed and asked.

"I am not a high-ranking official. I am just a trader. My name is Ai Qian." The quarter pump chump Ai Qian said, "He fights his war, and I do my business. We may walk together, but we have no relations to each other whatsoever. However, I have been watching out for that pill of his a long time ago. I used everything I can think of but he is just unwilling to trade it to me. I can't trade it with my items, nor is my Progress Points of any use to him either. So I had no choice but to use this approach."

(T/N: The characters are not right, but you can read it phonetically as 'Love Money'. Very appropriate)

"If I am discovered while I steal the item, I will be killed, won't I?" Yue Qiang asked again.

"Of course." Ai Qian answer was very straightforward, "You're a captive anyway. There's no telling when Zhao Yan will be in a bad mood and kills you anyway, and he is always in a bad mood. Therefore it is better for you to cooperate with me."

Yue Qiang did not answer immediately. Instead he clicked Ai

Qian's avatar again and checked his stats. Ai Qian very obviously detected Yue Qiang's peeping, it's just that he very generously waved a hand and allowed Yue Qiang to read to his heart's desire.

Character: Ai Qian

Class: Trader

Strength: 10 (Ordinary)

Vitality: 9 (He has always had some minor illness. Never major, but ailments constant)

Incomplete Charm: 29 (The Man-God in women's eyes, the Diaosi in men's eyes)

Wealth: 81 (Rich enough to rival a State)

Libido: 1 (You don't need me to tell you this)

Skill:

?? : ??

Keen Eye LVL 1: Able to identify the true value or usage of an item.

Talk Nonsense: Advanced Skill of Dialogue System LVL 2

?? : ??

Greed Clouded Heart LVL 2

?? : ??

?? : ??

Unlocked Memory Rate: 3%

There were a lot of suspicious points on Ai Qian. All of his actions and manners were completely disjointed from the army camp's atmosphere, almost as if he had appeared out nowhere. Moreover, while it was normal for an army camp to be outfitted with a quartermaster, it was incredibly strange to select a trader who obviously had a certain level of intimidation on the soldiers.

Besides that, Yue Qiang had also caught on to some particulars: One was the concept of 'Progress Points' which the trader had mentioned just now; two was a 'Greed Clouded Heart' that was very likely a Heart skill and at level two no less; and finally, the most suspicious 'Unlocked Memory Rate' which did not have any system explanation whatsoever.

Yue Qiang did not spend too much time thinking about these information. Right now, the most important thing to consider was still his next step at the moment.

The villagers had told him to escape to Mo Family's Great Camp, but they did not say exactly how to. Obviously, the NPCs in this village could hardly defend themselves right now, so even if they could help him their assistances would be very limited. On the contrary, this Ai Qian had given him the opportunity at just the right time!

"How are you going to help me escape?"

"You will know when the time comes." Ai Qian said confidently, "That aside, I seem to notice that you have a blackish iron rod with

you?”

This guy; he could identify my quest, and he could identify my weapon as well. What a useful pair of eyes he has. Wait a second, I seem to remember that the doctor Ming Que also told me that this iron rod is not quite as simple as it seems, did he?

Ai Qian said again, “I have an ability. I can identify broken items and return them to their original form, and I feel that the stats of your iron rod should be pretty good. If you complete your quest, then I will give you a complimentary reward and help you identify this iron rod.”

Keen Eye LVL 1! He sure knows quite a lot of things. In that case… let’s do this!

“Alright, issue the quest then.”

“Yep, off you go.” Ai Qian said.

“Huh? Aren’t you going to issue me a quest?” Yue Qiang asked curiously. After all, this Ai Qian’s appearance was way too suspicious, not to mention that he also had a skill called ‘Talk Nonsense’. If he said that his quest reward or even the whole thing was bullshit, then that would be terrible. Yue Qiang still felt that the quest window provided by the system was more reliable.

“I am incapable of issuing a quest.” Ai Qian said, “Don’t worry, I will definitely keep my promise. I am waiting for that pill that can

increase one's libido, you know."

"Alright." Yue Qiang did not have much of a choice now anyway. He listened to Ai Qian explaining things to him in detail, "Zhao Yan is already asleep at this time. Once you have entered the house, you may search around his big sword. The small box holding the pill should be right beside it. I have gone into his house to search for it once, which is why I know this."

"Why didn't you steal it yourself then?"

"Because I'll be executed if I was found out, duh." Yue Qiang watched the dialog box that popped above Ai Qian's head and felt his heart to grow chilly.

Ai Qian led Yue Qiang to the front, and before he left he did not forget either to give a short explanation to the two Zhao Soldiers on watch, "I am taking this captive to witness our Zhao State's rigorous military discipline. We will be back right away."

Once finished, the duo quickly arrived at the entrance of the house the village elder Chen Zi Han once lived in. The oil lamp inside the house was lit, and there was a small gap between the door. An on and off snore resounded from within.

"This is the house. Go quickly, I will keep a lookout for you." Ai Qian said with the trace of a wicked smile.

Chapter 36: Crap, There's Another Person Beneath The Blanket!

Yue Qiang could not shake the feeling that this quarter pump chump Ai Qian had appeared too unexpectedly, and while he was speaking, it was as if he had placed a trap just waiting for him to fall in. But even with such a premonition, he still wanted to give it a try. He had his own ideas as well.

Since the village elder had given him this quest, it meant that they should have the ability to help him escape from this place. It's just that there was just this something that was missing in between escaping from this place and running with his tail behind his legs to the Mo Family's Great Camp and call for help.

And that thing, was called value.

Yue Qiang did not know how powerful the Mo Family's Great Camp was, but he had personally experienced Zhao Army's strength already. A sergeant alone could chase him throughout the whole mountain, and he could not measure at all their general Zhao Yan's true strength. He did not know what kind of place the Mo Family's Great Camp was, but if they were to come over to help strike at the Zhao Army – even if they did win – it would not be without a price.

And what did he have that was worth the Mo Family's Great Camp to make such a sacrifice? The village elder's letter? This thing would probably not be useful in a situation like this. That was why Yue Qiang had thought of that other item.

The Ring of Earth!

When Ai Qian had requested him to help steal something for him, this crazy idea suddenly appeared in Yue Qiang's mind.

He would steal the Ring of Earth as well while he was stealing that pill!

This was the only treasure described by the village elder Chen Zi Han that was valuable enough as a chance to exchange help from the other party!

The main reason Zhao Yan's army had attacked Yue Village was for the Ring of Earth, so the protection around this item must be very tight – it might even be kept right beside Zhao Yan. Originally, there was not the slightest bit of chance that he could steal it, but because of Ai Qian's sudden appearance, he was now given such an opportunity.

Even if the risks were high, he must grab hold onto this opportunity!

Yue Qiang pushed the door and entered the house.

He first clicked the X key to crouch down, then used the cursor to click at the bottommost area of the door. He dragged the cursor upward a small distance before finally pushing his way in.

This was the experience he acquired running in and out often from his rented house: if he pushed the door directly, it would give out a ‘creak’ noise and very easily alert the person inside it. By controlling his cursor to lift the door a little before pushing it forwards, he might be able to eliminate this noise.

This little bit of control from Yue Qiang was a complete blind act. He had just subconsciously did it feeling that, since the game was so realistic, the method to eliminate the creaking noise of a wooden door – something that would only happen in real life – would be reflected inside the game as well.

And he guessed correctly.

There really was not a bit of noise when he opened the door.

He controlled his character and took very, very slow steps into the house.

He was very familiar with the village elder Chen Zi Han’s house. The bed was at his opposite, and the desk was at the right.

The person on the bed was sleeping with his back facing towards him. Although he couldn’t see the face, but from the person’s stalwart stature it was obvious that he was Zhao Yan. There was a huge sword on the writing desk. It was the same huge sword that was swung at him during the day. The blade of the sword was shining; not only was it unnaturally sharp, it was obvious that it might be enchanted with some good effects or magic as well. Right beside the huge sword was the box Ai Qian had mentioned about.

Yue Qiang slowly walked forwards and lightly grabbed the box in his hands.

The whole stealing process had been incredibly easy without the slightest bit of incident whatsoever. Yue Qiang knew that the quest was completed, and all he needed to do now was to obediently return to Ai Qian. He would acquire a more convenient method to complete his main quest, with an extra opportunity to get his weapon appraised as well. He had already profited much from this endeavour.

However, he did not retreat. Instead, he shifted a few slow steps forwards.

A ring the size of a normal bracelet was revealed beneath Zhao Yan's pillow. This ring was filthy with rusty stains all over it. It looked incredibly dirty and perfectly ordinary.

However, when Yue Qiang saw this ring his eyes gradually narrowed into slits.

Zhao Yan's sheets were very clean, but this ring was very dirty. However, this very dirty ring did not dirty the very clean sheets.

This wasn't the game artist being lazy or a pixel error. What appeared to be an inconspicuous detail had actually affirmed the suspicion in Yue Qiang's heart even further.

This was definitely the Ring of Earth! Even though he had not seen it with his own eyes before, but if it was just a common item, then who would put it beside their pillow?

Yue Qiang's feelings were a little excited.

The stealing of the Ring of Earth was the additional reason he had agreed to steal for Ai Qian, or should he said that this was the true reason he had entered this house.

It's just that things appeared to be a little difficult at the moment.

The table was quite far away from the bed Zhao Yan was sleeping in. He had confidence not to be discovered from this distance, but he couldn't be sure if he was any closer. In film and television works, an expert at Zhao Yan's level all had a very mystical sixth sense that allowed them to sense anything unusual near them. If the sleeping Zhao Yan was awakened from his bed, then the only ending that awaited him was an instantaneous death.

Yue Qiang decided to give it a try. He was a player who walked on tight ropes for many years after all. He was very familiar with this kind of thrill.

He had arrived beside the bed. The main view of his screen had been locked onto Ring of Earth all this time. The line of sight was incredibly close, and Zhao Yan's stalwart body was displayed at the edge of the screen. Yue Qiang knew that, his monitor was the equivalent of his game character's eyes, and he heard that experts would react when they were stared at by someone else's eyes! Yue

Qiang had deduced everything inside the game as if it was the real world, so he was being very cautious.

Right now, he had arrived beside the bed, and his hands were not more than one meter away from the ring. However, it was at this moment Zhao Yan had turned around in his sleep!

He had switched from facing Yue Qiang with his back, to sleeping face up to the ceiling.

Thank goodness that his eyes were closed.

Yue Qiang felt cold sweat appearing in his palm. Even his mouse was a little wet already. After seeing that Zhao Yan's eyes had remained closed, he let out a breath inside his heart, controlled his character and got ready to take the Ring of Earth.

While he was performing this action, the perspective of his screen shook once mildly. Yue Qiang casted a glance with the corner of his eyes and saw something terrible –

There were actually two people on Zhao Yan's bed!

There was yet a naked woman right beneath his blanket! Both of his hands were put on the top and bottom of the woman's body in the posture of a sideway hug. Since Zhao Yan's body was stalwart and he was lying sideways earlier, therefore he had completely covered up the woman's delicate body just now. Now that he was lying flat on his back, the woman's body was exposed to the open.

This woman obviously had a hard time earlier, so she was awake and her eyes were open.

Therefore, the current situation was that Yue Qiang and the woman were staring at each other with the stalwart Zhao Yan in between them, and Yue Qiang's hand was less than a foot away from the Ring of Earth.

In real life, Yue Qiang sucked in a deep breath.

This was absolutely thrilling alright.

If this woman cried out then Zhan Yan would awaken and he would die.

Yue Qiang was desperate at this point. The Run LVL 2 he had prepared all this time was instantly activated, giving his character much movement speed and agility. Pressing the few hotkeys that controlled his weapon, he steadily and swiftly controlled the aim of his iron rod and clicked once accurately with his cursor.

He perfectly unleashed his skill through the set of flowing micro.

The blackish iron rod tapped at the woman's Qishe Point* just right.

(*The superior border of the clavicle between the sternal and

clavicular heads of the sternocleidomastoideus muscle.)

When Yue Qiang had activated his Run LVL 2, his movements were both very swift and accurate. As for the Qishe Point, it was something he learned back when playing a single player game called 'The True Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber'. Pressing this point could help treat hiccups and stretch the vocal cords, causing anyone's speech to turn into a stretch of air. The Qishe Point was roughly at the point above two collarbones, or the depression right beneath one's neck.

(T/N: The 'True' here is basically like the 'Shin' Sangokumusou 6 in Dynasty Warrior series)

Yue Qiang had controlled the iron rod and tapped accurately at this point of the woman's body.

Almost at the same time, one of the hands Zhao Yan had put on her body kneaded once. It appeared to an unconscious motion in his sleep.

And so the woman let out a pant instead.

This had saved Yue Qiang's life! This was because the woman would pant once when the iron rod had tapped on her Qishe Point, and when Zhao Yan's hand had kneaded at a certain part of the woman's body, she would... also pant once...

Thig bought Yue Qiang some time. It was also just a pant's time.

After this pant's time, the woman was still going to scream! He was still going to be discovered!

Therefore Yue Qiang had no choice but to gamble once more.

He controlled his character, moved half a step to the side, and lifted the candlestick.

Chapter 37: Selling Fake Meds

Of course, he wasn't going to do whatever that you're thinking when he grabbed the candlestick.

He was just making yet another gamble.

The initial plan was to steal the little box with the pill and escape. It was just that desire was the root of all evil that he thought of stealing the Ring of Earth. It was already scary enough that Zhao Yan had suddenly turned around on his bed, and it was even more unexpected that he was hugging a wakeful woman in his sleep.

Yue Qiang had relied on his excellent microing skills to buy himself a breather's time. Then, with a clear head he made no attacking movements whatsoever. He did not have a sharp weapon in hand; there was no way he could've killed this woman without alerting Zhao Yan. In truth, his action of controlling the iron rod to tap the woman at her Qishe Point was already incredibly risky.

If she was to scream or attempt to wake Zhao Yan, Yue Qiang had absolutely no way of stopping her.

Therefore he could only think of a way to stop her from crying out in the first place.

And the way Yue Qiang used was to grab the candlestick and hold it beside his face, illuminating it. The rest, was left to god's will.

The lighting inside the room was very dark, allowing only for blurry vision. With the candlestick's weak lighting illuminating Yue Qiang's face, the woman would be able to identify his facial features.

She saw Yue Qiang's face, and so her second scream turned into a pant instead. That was not all. She even grabbed Zhao Yan's other hand so that it would sink deeper inside her*.

Yue Qiang knew, that he had won the gamble.

He lightly put down the candlestick, lightly picked up the Ring of Earth, and lightly stepped away from the house. Yue Qiang no longer let out the slightest noise, but the woman's panting behind him had grown slightly more intense instead.

Yue Qiang did not recognize this woman. However, he reckoned that she might very well recognize him.

He first betted on the possibility that this woman was not Zhao Yan's original favorite concubine. Then, he betted again on the possibility that this woman was captured from the folks nearby by Zhao Yan for sexual relief purposes. Finally, he betted on the possibility that the woman would probably recognise him as a member of Yue Village and know that he was a native in this village. If his bets were correct, then this woman might very well help him.

Yue Qiang and the people of Yue Village were one people, whereas the Zhao Army were invaders. If this woman was forced,

then she would definitely be unwilling to aid the invaders.

That probability that these guesses would all be correct was just too low, and yet Yue Qiang had no choice but to gamble because he had no other way to use.

The fact was, he did win the gamble.

The woman had not cried out in that situation, and the incredibly fearsome and courageous Zhao Yan had not woken up this entire time!

Yue Qiang seriously doubted if he actually had a Luck stat somewhere on himself, with extremely high numbers no less.

When he walked out of the front door, both his hands were drenched in cold sweat.

He grabbed the box with the pill in his hand, then kept the stolen Ring of Earth into his bag.

The trader Ai Qian was waiting for Yue Qiang outside the entrance. Seeing that he had safely exited and holding a small box in his hand, he immediately beamed with delight and reached out for the box.

Yue Qiang controlled his character to take a step backwards and lifted his blackish iron rod.

“Let’s have your quest reward first.”

Seeing Yue Qiang’s actions, the trader Ai Qian let out a smile, “You’re pretty cautious, aren’t you? It is hai shi (between 2100 to 2300) now, and still too early. When it is chou shi (between 0100 to 0300) yi ke (refer next paragraph), then I will lead you out of the camp. Now then, you can give me the item.”

Yue Qiang knew that by chou shi yi ke ke meant two thirty in the morning, but he still wasn’t moved and typed, “I”m talking about the other quest reward.”

“Alright alright. Really, I’m telling you, the condition to use the skill ‘Talk Nonsense’ is actually pretty strict…” Ai Qian muttered while receiving the iron rod and examined it closely.

There was no flash of golden light that turned iron scrap into a legendary item, but Ai Qian’s gaze did grow weirder and weirder. He continuously rubbed the iron rod with his hands, and before long his palms were filled black charcoal. Speaking of which, this was a curious matter, but from the moment he received this iron rod it had been dropping charcoal ashes non-stop, and even after using it for such a long time, it was still as ash-covered as ever.

Ai Qian tinkered with it for a long time, and the expression on his face appeared somewhat unreadable. After a long while, he returned the weapon to Yue Qiang and said, “I thought that I could increase the iron rod’s toughness and strength by a bit, but it appears that this is actually something quite rare.”

“You used your Keen Eye?”

“Hmm, but my Keen Eye skill level is not enough. I can only do this much.” Ai Qian said.

Yue Qiang hurriedly took the iron rod and checked its stats once more:

Item Name: An Iron Rod
Characteristic: Weapon Quality: Green
Skill: Weapon Equippable Skill: Basic Jabbing Skill LVL 1 Basic Jabbing Skill LVL 1: After prolonged use, you have mastered the usage of this iron rod. When jabbing an enemy, deal damage equal to twice the amount of your Strength value. The cooldown of this skill is very short. Tenacity (Passive): This is a tough weapon. Even under great pressure, it will only bent but not break.
?? : ??

?? : ??

Description: This is an iron rod used by the blacksmith Tan Xiong to poke at the furnace. It is blackish and covered in thick deposits of black charcoal.

Equippable Weapon Requirement: 13 Strength

A total of four skills were appraised, with two that were identifiable and two that were still in a hidden state. The weapon still did not have any attack power, but its potential growth didn't look bad. That Tenacity skill especially looked of little to no value, but in this realistic game, there was no telling if it might actually be of great use.

"Your iron rod is extremely rare, and my Keen Eye actually did not help out too much at all. It simply worked as a kind of opportunity for your weapon to become more powerful. If you truly want to unleash its true strength, you will still have to use it more often."

"However, it is still a weapon without attack power." Yue Qiang sighed.

"Attack power? What's an attack power?"

"Nothing." Yue Qiang passed the pill in his hand to Ai Qian.

The pill's name was a Sticky Pill, and he had checked its stats a long time ago. It gave Libido + 2, and minus two points from a random attribute. It was obviously nothing good, and yet Ai Qian had eaten it without the slightest hesitation the moment he received the item. Then, a swift transformation took over him. His originally handsome face had turned a little sallow. Right clicking the fellow, he discovered that his deducted attribute was Vitality.

Vitality: 7 (Overindulgent)

Libido: (You don't need me to tell you this)

Poor guy.

The fellow cheered. He obviously felt the changes in his stats. He lifted his feet and raced straight into his own house; there were three beautiful women waiting for him inside, you know.

Yue Qiang followed him into his house with obvious disregard for civility.

"What did you come in for?"

Yue Qiang neither answered nor looked at the three beautiful women inside the house. He thrashed around his backpack for a while and took out three items. They were: blackish wok, blackish shovel and blackish brick.

"Help me appraise these three items as well." Yue Qiang said.

“I charge a fee for any appraisals.” Ai Qian looked at the three women inside the house and appeared incredibly restless.

“I don’t have knife money, and I know even less about Progress Points. However, I have another one of that kind of pill.” Yue Qiang said while taking out yet another pill, “Wanna trade? It can increase your libido.”

Chapter 38: Add Friend

After Ai Qian entered the house, he had jumped impatiently towards the three women at once. But when he suddenly heard from Yue Qiang that he had more meds, he immediately turned around and asked, “You have more meds? Where? Show me!”

Yue Qiang very calmly took out yet another pill from his inventory. It was sticky and potholed all over just like the one taken out from Zhao Yan’s room.

This pill was the one he swindled from the doctor Ming Que. Since the pill’s description was rather bizarre, he hadn’t dared to eat it since the day he acquired it. Now that he realized that both pills looked very similar to each other, and that Ai Qian had Keen Eye, he thought that he might as well put it onto the table.

Ai Qian’s eyes immediately brightened, “Good stuff! Give me this pill.”

“Why so hasty; help me appraise these three items first.”

This place was the blacksmith Tan Xiong’s old home. Yue Qiang remembered clearly that Tan Xiong had given him three additional choices back when he had completed Tan Xiong’s quest. At the time, they had all appeared to be incredibly comedic weapons. However, if this blackish iron rod could have such amazing stats, then these three items should not be too lousy either. If there was any items with hidden stats at all, then it would’ve been totally worth it!

Yue Qiang had always been been rather meticulous when playing games. He had memorised the situation at the time, and since he had run into Ai Qian, it was the perfect moment to utilize him.

The trader was thirsty beyond words, and so he snatched over the blackish wok, the blackish shovel and blackish brick and appraised them swiftly.

(T/N: thirsty for sex, if you don't get it)

The results quickly came out. The three weapons had become:

Cleaned Wok, Cleaned Shovel and Brick That Can't Be Cleaned No Matter What.

Yue Qiang passed the pill to Ai Qian while feeling a bit sore. He had obviously suffered a loss this round.

At the end of the appraisal the pill had become: Freely Distributed Stat Points + 1, Random Stats – 1. Ai Qian dropped it under his Libido without the slightest hesitation, and this time the stat that he lost was Strength.

Yue Qiang shook his head repeatedly at the sight. He would never accept having his stats randomly deducted even if he was beaten to death. It would be barely acceptable if his Charisma that was deducted, but if it fell onto his Strength or Vitality, then it would be a total loss. However, Ai Qian wore a look of great satisfaction. Perhaps the only way to describe him was that he was as lecherous

as a bonobo.

He kicked Yue Qiang out of the house and had gone back in ready to resume his business, but then he turned back and said, “I’ll gift you one more information for eating your great supplements twice in a row.”

“Speak.”

“I see that you are in urgent need of equipment-like items. After you escape during midnight, head north until you reach a marketplace. There will be people selling all kinds of equipment, including ones that are like your iron rod.”

This information was pretty useful. Yue Qiang memorised it.

“Also.” Ai Qian said again, “Let’s add friends. If you have any new supplements in the future, don’t forget to leave one for your buddy, yeah?”

Yue Qiang was speechless. This Ai Qian seriously thought that he was a fake meds seller.

Resigned, he typed ‘Ok’.

System Message [Green]: Friend System activated.

Friend System: You can become friends with in-game characters.

Friends can speak with each other through ‘Whisper’. If the distance is too great, Progress Points will be spent to use Whisper.

Meanwhile, Ai Qian had long since returned with great haste back into the house.

Yue Qiang opened the friend list and was about to add Ai Qian’s name in it. However, he made a surprising discovery. There was another person in the friend list!

He rubbed his eyes. Yep, his eyes weren’t deceiving him. The friend list was just activated, and one minute hadn’t even passed by since its activation. Ai Qian should be the only friend he had right now, so where did this other friend come from?

This sudden appearing name was grey in color. It might mean that this person could not be contacted for the time being. The name consisted of three words:

Luqiu Ning.

It was a very unfamiliar name.

But there was a very familiar surname.

He immediately recalled the female fitness coach whose figure was so hot she had no friends*. After all, this surname was simply too rare. Not only had he never heard of it in real life, even in historical games or movies the compound surnames were all like

Dongfang Ximen, Nangong Beigong and so on. He had never seen a surname quite like this one.

*A Chinese way of exaggeration.

Was Luqiu Dianyi and Liuqiu Ning the same person? Or was it pure coincidence?

Also how did this Luqiu Ning come to be in my Friend System?

Wait a second, a Friend System!

Yue Qiang suddenly recalled a very serious question.

This is a single player game, isn't it? Shouldn't... a Friend System exist only in multiplayer online games? Yue Qiang was feeling a little stupid right now.

From the beginning up to this point, this game had featured the extremely clear pattern of a single player game. Plot, quests, and even cutscenes had appeared in this game. Yue Qiang had never thought of the possibility that this might be an online game, and the easiest proof of that was the fact that he had not encountered any other players at all. If a game that only had one player wasn't a single player game, then what was?

That wasn't all. His own reality had almost turned into a single player game.

When Yue Qiang thought thought up to this point, he abruptly threw down his mouse and keyboard. In an instant he had leaned backwards on his chair while breathing heavily.

It had been three months since he played this game. For three months, every moment of his life was spent thinking about this game. Even though he had realized the changes that was occurring in the real world, it was as if something was controlling him and causing him to subconsciously not consider everything that was happening in the real world. It was only until he had connected the two terms ‘reality’ and ‘single player game’ that he abruptly awakened.

That’s right. It seemed that playing this single player game was all that he did in real life now.

It had been three months since he attended school, three months since he met his classmates, three months since he returned home. Exams, living expenses, running to the streets and peeking at pretty girls... those very familiar terms of the past had suddenly become incredibly foreign.

Yue Qiang suddenly realized that he hadn’t approached anyone in the real world for a very long time now. His mind hadn’t even turned once in that direction at all.

If any regular person had run into such a situation; such a bizarre change in real life, wouldn’t their first reaction be recounting it to his classmates, asking help from his family, or getting the people’s

police when in trouble?

(T/N: This is how China's police are called)

What about him? Other than surfing a bit on the internet and making some assumptions with the Turing Test, he did nothing else and continued playing the game. It was only up till now, up till this very moment that he realized that his behavior was incredibly abnormal.

Before I knew it, I was playing a single player game, huh? Be it in real life, or inside the game?

He shut his eyes hard while rubbing his temple with his thumb forcefully. It was only until his temple was red that he stopped. He went blank staring at the grey-colored name on the screen for a while. Suddenly, he picked up his phone and began flipping through his contacts.

He hadn't used his mobile phone much at all for the past three months. There were neither harassment calls, nor insurance sale harassment messages, nor phone calls from his friends. There were only the few calls he had made himself.

There was one conversation between him and the class beauty Rao Xiao Ting, but he couldn't find it in his phone. Then he discovered that his mobile phone had deleted it automatically after a month passed. He had never saved Rao Xiao Ting's number at all!

There was another call log from Luqiu Duanyi. He had purposely saved this woman's number.

After watching the grey-colored name ‘Luqiu Ning’ in the friend list on the screen again for a while, he tapped the number and called.

“I want to ask you something.” Yue Qiang said.

The melodious voice on the other end of the phone did not answer him. Instead she replied with a question, “How much is the progress bar? The one that is blue in color.”

Chapter 39: Rage Gauge

When speaking with Luqiu Duanyi, Yue Qiang always had that feeling that he was kept in the dark. Every time he took the initiative to ask a question, she would often answer it with yet another question. This question was often very important as well, one that he would slip into without knowing until he forgot what he wanted to ask in the first place.

Therefore this time, he seized the initiative decisively.

“Answer my question first.” He said loudly, “Is this game a ‘Single Player’ game?”

“I need to know how much is your progress now…”

Yue Qiang was not moved by her question. He continued to question closely, “Is this game a single player game or not, or should I say, are there any other players in it?”

The voice on the other side turned silent for a while. In the end she answered Yue Qiang’s question.

“This is a single player game.” Luqiu Duanyi’s voice slowed down, “This is an absolute single player game that only belongs to you.”

A game that only belongs to me… Yue Qiang seemed to sense something from these words. However, he swiftly refuted her

loudly, “But…”

“There are not buts.” Luqiu Duanyi’s tone picked up her usual pace once more, “This is a single player game. That’s all. Why, have you seen an online multi-player game that comes with a ‘Game Manual’?”

“But…”

“Have you seen an online multi-player game that comes with a ‘Cutscene’? One that includes you, the player?”

But…”

She let out a cold humph and asked again with a somewhat ridiculing tone, “Then, have you seen an online multi-player game that is free of charge?”

When Yue Qiang heard this, he answered very straightforwardly, “I’ve never seen an online multi-player game that is free of charge.”

“Therefore, you are playing a single player game.” Luqiu Duanyi concluded, “Alright, now tell me quickly what is the rate of your blue progress bar.”

The woman’s arguments were complete sophistry, but he was no longer able to question anything else out of her right now. He looked at the bottom corner of the screen and said, “It’s over 70%,

but not by too much. It's about 73 or 74 percent."

He had mentioned the changes of the progress bar earlier during his last call with her. Time hadn't passed too much since then, but for some reason the woman had stressed about this matter repeatedly. He was about to say something more when she took the lead and said, "Dangerous, it's too dangerous... this progress is already too much."

Luqiu Duanyi stressed with the utmost gravity she could muster, "Yue Qiang, for the next period of time, you must absolutely follow the plot development to the letter. Try your best not to change any plot or trigger any hidden quest whatsoever. Moreover, the most important thing is that you must reach the Mo Family's Great Camp and learn that skill before the blue progress bar hits 100%. Otherwise, you will never have the chance again when it reaches 100%!"

These were the words that contained the largest amount of information Yue Qiang had ever heard from her.

At the same time, the blue progress bar had progressed tremendously along with several keywords – especially the two keywords 'Mo Family's Great Camp' and 'Skill' – and reached 78%!

What came after those words was long silence. But Yue Qiang's head was in a complete turmoil.

He recalled the past where every time he tried throwing a question at Luqiu Duanyi, she would either respond with silence or

switch to another topic. The one time she spoke the most was the time she had sent him the game manual through an inexplicable method. At that time, the blue progress bar had increased tremendously because he spoke words that were relevant to the game first. This time, the blue progress bar had increased by a lot again after Luqiu Duanyi had spoken the words that were related to the game.

Was she trying her best to suppress my blue progress bar all this time?

“I can’t say anything else. We’ll talk more after you got out of that place.” Luqiu Duanyi said.

“Wait, where do I go to learn whatever skill that is?”

A series of noise came from the other side of the phone. It seemed like she was working as a saleswoman at a mall. At any rate, it sounded like an incredibly chaotic environment. After a while, the environmental noise grew even louder, and a series of static noise rang out of the earpiece. Then it was followed by a ‘du – du – du –’ disconnect tone.

Yue Qiang hung up.

So, he needed to suppress the blue progress bar’s elevation and reach the Mo Family’s Great Camp before it reaches 100%, was it?

It was convenient then that the main quest coincided with what

she said just now.

Yue Qiang returned to the NPC's house inside Yue Village. The moment he walked through the door, the village elder Chen Zi Han had already hurried over to him with a worried look, "Are you safe, young sir? You were gone for quite a while? This old man was seriously worried."

"It's fine."

"That's good. Now, please listen to my plan to escape the village and head to the Mo Family's Great Camp, young sir. The village are ready to create a commotion when it is deep at night so you may use to confusion to escape. We may lose four or five people during the process, but young sir must absolutely not come back to save us. All you need to do is to run away from this place. The exit at the northern side is the easiest to walk out of."

The village elder Chen Zi Han finished explaining his plan, and was ready to take one step further and explain it in better detail. Yue Qiang hurriedly typed, "I helped a strange trader in the Zhao army camp to complete a quest, and he said that he can help me to escape."

Chen Zi Han's expression was serious as he asked in a low voice, "Can this person be trusted? In my opinion, it may still be a better idea for the village to go out and cause a commotion in order to aid your escape. Even if we lose several people..."

Yue Qiang said, "There's no need. This man may be a little

strange, but his status in the Zhao army camp is rather high, and he does have some capabilities as well. The village simply needs to wait here at ease for me to return with reinforcements."

The village elder Chen Zi Han still wore a hesitant expression.

Yue Qiang knew that this NPC did not dare to answer him because he was cowardly and someone who valued his face greatly. Therefore he typed again, "Teacher, you still have a lot of strength in your command, and a rich wealth of knowledge and experience. If you are to perish under the Zhao Soldiers' halberds because you caused a commotion, it may be a difficult thing to pass away in peace."

The village elder Chen Zi Han let out a sigh pretentiously and agreed to Yue Qiang's suggestion. He took out an oilskin bag from his lap. There was a small bag sewn with a layer of special grass knots inside it. He tore open that bag and took out a roll of bamboo slips inside it with a solemn look and said,

"This old man had studied over ten thousand books for the past couple of decades, and acquired some insights of my own. I have recorded all of them onto this book. If I cannot assist young sir in the escape plan, then this old man shall present this book to young sir in hopes that you may learn something after you have studied it completely."

The teacher Chen Zi Han's demeanor was incredibly serious. Yue Qian too accepted the book with a solemn face.

He now knew that these book types item were incredibly important in this game. He clicked the book and discovered that it wasn't converted automatically by the system into navigable book pages like the time he was filling in the missing blanks of the 'Analect' at the start of the game. Instead, the roll of bamboo slips unfolded slowly to display many clear ink writing.

The first word on the bamboo slip was the word 'Shi*'. The font of the word was huge and full.

*In this context, you may interpret 'Shi' as 'Warrior'.

The first line of the text was, 'The commander of the forces of a large state may be carried off, but the will of even a common man cannot be taken from him'. It was exactly a line that he once filled in the blanks in the Analect.

He read line after line of words on the bamboo slip. At the beginning, he was still feeling pretty normal. But gradually, he began to feel a tremendous energy that emanated from every word. They arrived in front of his character, and even pierced through the computer monitor and entered his heart.

The contents of this bamboo slip was very normal. It talked about the spirit of literati officialdom, some famous quotes from the Analect, and some of Chen Zi Han's own insights. However, as he continued to read, Yue Qiang actually became fascinated by the text. It was as if he could read between the lines literally and saw Chen Zi Han's great efforts in building the village and caring for his farmland; readily throwing himself into combat in the face of powerful enemies. This book was like a picture that displayed that

spirit of his to absolute vividness.

The Chen Zi Han displayed inside the book was no longer that little old man who overly valued his face and wielded a scholarly pride. Instead he had become a warrior; a warrior who does not fear death.

After finishing reading the entire text, Yue Qiang's gaze fell once more on the large 'Shi' word at the beginning of the book.

It was a vigor and forcefulness that penetrated through its own medium.

Was this what you call 'the spirit of literati officialdom'? He remembered that the 'the spirit of literati officialdom' his teacher had talked about in class was different from the one presented in this bamboo slip, and yet he could feel it in his very bones that feeling of walking bravely into one's death.

Suddenly, he recalled the time he first entered the game. At the time the NPCs in the village had long since learned that the news that the Zhao State would invade Yue Village, and yet not a single one of them had thought to escape. They were all of the same mentality where they thought it would be worth it they took an enemy down with their own; profit a life if they took down two. He thought he could understand them better now.

"Have you learned something, young sir?" Chen Zi Han asked, "Originally, young sir should not be able to read this book with your current abilities. However, this old man can feel that the

distance between us is slowly shortening and disappearing completely. Therefore if I may ask young sir boldly: Have you... learned something?”

Yue Qiang quietly looked at a line of text that had appeared on the screen: Observe ‘Shi’, and know ‘Rage’.

> System Message [Green]: You have learned ‘Shi’. Through Chen Zi Han’s explanation and your own inspiration through self-reflection, you have successfully activated the Rage Gauge.

He murmured to himself: I knew that Gauges need to be unlocked with books...

The system message slowly faded away. Without hesitation, he typed inside the dialog box and replied to Chen Zi Han, “Yes!”

Chapter 40: Progress Points

Yue Qiang opened his character stats and checked the description for the Rage Gauge.

> Rage Acquisition: When a character is attacked or when they are attacking, Rage will be generated. Besides that, when HP is below 30% Rage will be generated continuously. The closer the character is to death, the faster the generation of Rage.

> Rage Gauge: A gauge that is acquired only through a special method. The initial value of Rage is 0, and the maximum value is the character's Strength * 10. The usage of the Rage Gauge is differentiated into 2 types. The character could deplete rage to either use a special skill, or increase the power of a skill. The more Rage is depleted, the bigger the effect.

The first usage method was not too different from the Rage in the other games he had played. He hadn't learned any skills that depleted Rage yet, it wasn't something he could use for now.

The second usage method was a little rare. Increase the power of a skill by injecting Rage into it... This one's very practical. It provided him a way to combine multiple gauges and maximise his combat strength.

Rage was very powerful, and it had greatly increased his power.

This was the conclusion he obtained after a simple analysis.

And yet, Yue Qiang had a bad premonition.

Normally, it was very difficult to increase one's power even in a game that didn't put much emphasis into game balance, and hard didn't even begin to describe the level of obstacle he had to surmount to increase his strength in this game. Super hard was more like it. It had taken him three months of practice in real life for him to obtain a fist style that could only be described as slightly stronger inside the game.

But now, he had obtained this Rage Gauge without paying any price whatsoever.

Although there was foreshadowing and Chen Zi Han's explanation, but he still felt that this increase in ability was a little too easy.

This was the Rage Gauge we're talking about!

In other games, only a warrior could own this gauge, and only it. The warriors who had Rage – especially those whose meter was completely full – had extremely terrifying close combat abilities. Going by this logic, there's no way this game's Rage would be too lousy.

But in contrast to this logic, the process in which he obtained this skill was too easy.

He had only read a book and spent a very short amount of time.

Not only that, Chen Zi Han had specifically clarified that with Yue Qiang's current abilities, he would not be able to learn this book. And yet he did through Chen Zi Han's assistance.

There were two possibilities. One was that something was off with the game balance. The chances of this possibility was infinitely close towards zero.

The other possibility was that the quest he was about to face, the quest to head towards Mo's Family Great Camp and summon reinforcements was far from just delivering a letter. This was after he had increased the chances of the quest's success after stealing the Ring of Earth.

Yue Qiang clicked the item 'Chen Zi Han's Letter' and triggered the quest.

System Message: You have accepted the quest 'Request Aid'.

Quest Background: Yue Village has fallen completely, and as captives the Yue Villagers wishes for you to ask for reinforcements from the Mo Family's Great Camp.

Quest Objective: Bring ‘Chen Zi Han’s Letter’ to the Mo Family’s Great Camp to request aid. Bringing along plot-related items or other valuable items could increase the quest’s chances of success.

Quest Reward: Already obtained.

The question description consisted of only a few lines, and very simple. He had already obtained the quest reward, namely the Rage Gauge he had acquired under Chen Zi Han’s assistance. But there was a problem. Yue Qiang did not discover the difficulty indicator relating to this main quest. The font color of the text was white; the same as the average text color.

The system could not provide a quest difficulty. Does this mean that its difficulty is... uncertain? Or does it mean that the risks of this quest is incredibly variable?

Seeing that he had triggered the quest, Chen Zi Han walked forwards and said, “Since young sir has already accepted the quest, then we may get ready for the departure now. This old man wishes young sir a smooth escape and good journey.”

The time was almost up.

Yue Qiang pushed opened the door, exited the house, and discovered that the quarter pump chump Ai Qian was already waiting for him outside the door. The two Zhao Soldiers who were guarding the entrance lifted their halberds as if it was part of their

routine, “Prisoners are not allowed to go outside!”

Ai Qian walked over all smiles and cheers and used the same ‘I am taking this captive to witness our Zhao State’s rigorous military discipline’ excuse and led Yue Qiang away with ease.

The duo, one at the front and one at the back, walked past the house of the blacksmith Tan Xiong, the house of the village elder Chen Zi Han and also the temporary residence of the general Zhao Yan, and the northern entrance of the village. Along the way they did see many patrolling Zhao Soldiers, but none of them came forwards to stop them. Yue Qiang had gotten out the village so easily that it was as if he was on a road trip.

A few hundred feet away from Yue Village’s northern entrance, Ai Qian felt that they had come far enough and came to a stop first. He stared at Yue Qiang’s backpack as if his eyes could see through it.

There seemed to be only two things in Ai Qian’s eyes. One was women, and the other was backpacks. Moreover, his eyes were incredibly sharp. Yue Qiang always felt that he could see through his backpack and read the items inside it.

He walked over and came very close to Yue Qiang. He even patted his shoulders and said, “You seem to have a lot of books with you.”

Yue Qiang’s backpack really did have quite the number of books. Other than the few books that he could not learned yet, he now had an additional handwriting from Chen Zi Han titled ‘Shi’. He

now fully understood exactly how useful books were. It was definitely beneficial for him to collect as many of them as possible.

"Are you interested to buy one more from me?" Ai Qian said mysteriously, "Remember that market I told you before? I got a great book from that place. Come, trade with me."

Once finished, he brought out the trading system and quickly put a book inside.

Yue Qiang hovered his mouse over the item and read:

'Alluring Melody in Lady's Chamber'?

Yue Qiang went blank for a moment. Although this book wasn't as famous as 'The Story of the Western Wing', 'Erotic Ghost Story 3' and so on, it was still of the most well written eroticas among ancient texts. While he was zoning out, Ai Qian had already withdrawn the book.

"Excuse me, I accidentally grabbed the wrong one since I had too many." Without looking embarrassed in the least, Ai Qian calmly put up another book and said, "This is the book that I want to trade with you."

This time, the book title was even more bizarre: 'The Philosophy of Cockroaches'.

He clicked into it and gave it a rough look. Its contents were

huge; there were a few hundred pages in total. In general, it was something like an inspirational babble. It mainly talked about how the lovelorn, contemporary women should fight back with a will as tenacious as a cockroach blah blah blah so on and so on. Such books could be easily found by the buckets at stalls and rental bookstores.

(T/N: Or fortune cookie comments for the sarcasm)

"So? It's useful, isn't it. This is yours for only 50 progress points."

"But why would I need such a book?" Yue Qiang was completely uninterested in the book's comments, but he was extremely interested it its origin. He pretended that he did not want the book, but in truth he was already sure that he would buy it for himself.

The reason was that this was a modern book.

Ever since he entered the game, every book he came into contact with were ancient books. Maybe it was coincidence or something else, but the authoring of every book he came by were either during the Warring States Period or earlier. There were no exceptions.

As the saying goes, there is no fire without smoke. Even if he couldn't research anything for the moment, there's nothing wrong with keeping it in his backpack. As for the 'progress points' Ai Qian mentioned, this was the third time he brought it up already. Yue Qiang saw that there were two types of trade currency at the

bottom of the trading window. One was Knife Coins. He had a dozen of them; taken off the bodies of the Zhao Soldier. The other was progress points. He had 97.

Progress points... should be very easy to earn. I think. While Yue Qiang thought, he selected to confirm trade.

Ai Qian appeared very satisfied and said, “Alright, you have now shaken off the identity of a captive, and wherever you go from here on out has nothing to do with me. I still need to get back to my girls. Speaking of which, that great supplement you gave me is seriously useful. It increased my time by over tens of seconds, haha...”

The fellow walked towards the direction of Yue Village while speaking. It wasn’t until he was sure that Yue Qiang couldn’t see him that he withdrew the smile on his face.

“50 progress points. This is definitely a great haul.” He soliloquised, “Should I save it to exchange more information, or should I use it directly... let’s just use it directly and unlock some memories.”

“50 progress points can unlock 5% Unlocked Memory Rate. So my current Unlocked Memory Rate will be 8%.” Ai Qian gradually closed his eyes, and when he opened them once more, there was a trace of realization in his eyes, “I see... I see...”

...

Inside the room of the village elder Chen Zi Han.

Zhao Yan, who was lying on the bed had sitted himself up a long time ago.

He grabbed the dim candlestick with one hand, while the other remained on the woman's body. The woman's expression was terrified, whereas Zhao Yan's expression was calm.

"I am curious." He said, "Why didn't you scream? Logically speaking, when a human shadow suddenly appeared from the darkness, it should at least frighten you womenfolk, shouldn't it?"

"Why would I scream? Why would I want to wake you up? If you're awake, then you will kill him!" The woman said.

"You know him?" Zhao Yan put on a surprised look.

"He is a person of Yue Village. He is someone who protects us, whereas the whole lot of you are invaders! Invaders!" The woman's voice was extremely shrill due to her fear.

"He is a person of Yue Village alright. But he seems to be a little different from others." Zhao Yan said seemingly to the woman or himself, "The people of Yue Village all had the basic cultivation of the heart under the prolonged influence of the Ring of Earth. This, I know. However, the Ring of Earth most definitely could not give birth to a cultivation of the heart like Pure Heart. This, I am very curious about. Also, why did time seem to stop for a moment when

I was going to kill him on the battlefield? It seems that something has happened while I raised my great sword."

One of Zhao Yan's hands continued to hold the candlestick, but his other hand had left the woman's body. From the bottom of his pillow, he took out a rusted ring. This ring was about the size of an arm, and its shape and appearance was shockingly identical to the Ring of Earth Yue Qiang had stolen.

The woman said in fear, "What's going on? The ring he took was a fake?"

"No, the Ring of Earth he took was real. However, so much time has passed that all the spirit energy inside the ring were practically exhausted. What I have here is a replica." Zhao Yan smiled and explained, "After all, the ratio of certain components could only be known after comparing to the real goods."

The woman was so shocked she could not say anything already.

"Come to me!" Zhao Yan's voice abruptly turned loud.

A person gradually exposed himself. Shockingly, he did not come from outside the house, but from within. He had been hiding at a corner inside the house all this time until this very moment.

"There are two things that you must do immediately. The first thing is to track down the person who just entered this house by following to the clues that I have left on the Ring of Earth. But do

not kill him. Just keep a tight watch and report anything amiss at any moment. The second thing would be to send some men to scout out the Mo Family's Great Camp and that hill, and tell them that we have accomplished our mission here at Yue Village. Only by performing all three plans at once that we are in line to achieve our ultimate goal."

That human shadow answered in acknowledgement before turning around to head outside.

"Wait." Zhao Yan said lazily, "Do help me do just one more thing."

He pointed to his side, "Take out the corpse."

The woman's corpse was dragged out of the house. Before anyone realized it, a pitch black palm mark had appeared between her breasts.

Zhao Yan had already killed her.

Chapter 41: 0.3

According to Chen Zi Han's explanations, the Mo Family's Great Camp was at a faraway place to the north of the village. After he went out of the village, he continued to walk northwards over a very, very long distance. The sky was now grey bright. He had used an entire night to cover only more than half of the whole journey. He calculated inside his heart. He should be close to the Mo Family's Great Camp now.

Along the way, he did not see any living being. Not only did he not meet any Zhao Soldiers, even the usual wild animals who were active at night were all completely gone.

It was only until now that he saw three common Zhao Soldiers running towards his way.

These three enemies were obviously not from Yue Village because their direction wasn't right. When he thought of the last words of the enemies he eliminated before, he thought that Yue State might have sent two separate units to assault the village and Mo Family's Great Camp. They might have sent even more than that.

These three soldiers did not have full HP, and they also appeared to be extremely frightened. They did not look like they were patrolling at leisure at all. With two at the front and one at the back, the trio was running really quickly towards the underbrush Yue Qiang was hiding in.

It was only when the distance was closed that Yue Qiang was able to see clearer that the three soldiers weren't harmed whatsoever. It was just that their uniforms were extremely disheveled and there were a lot of dry grass on them. There were also scratch wounds that were caused by tree branches. Their imperfect HP were due to these little wounds scratched by the tree branches.

The three Zhao Soldiers seemed to be escaping in panic from something behind them. They looked battered and exhausted; in great contrast of the well-disciplined impression they had left Yue Qiang earlier. Yue Qiang felt that it was a little strange and did not rush out immediately. Instead, he did his best to widen his vision and look towards the distance.

He didn't spot anything out of the ordinary.

Forget it, let's deal with these three enemies first.

Yue Qiang waited very patiently for his chance. Among these three Zhao soldiers, the first two got closer and closer towards him. He did nothing even when they had ran up till the underbrush he was hiding in, and ran past him.

His aim was to divide and conquer them respectively. Obviously, catching that lone guy at the back was easier than facing the duo upfront.

Crouching carefully inside the underbrush, he fired a long prepared 'Break Fist – Killng Style, One' he had long prepared at the third Zhao Soldier when he passed by. He had been

accumulating this technique for some time now and he was full of energy. He struck out decisively at the pointer when the Fuxi Hexagram was triggered.

– 108!

He hit his enemy and shaved away more than half of his enemy's HP. The surprise attack was a success!

At the same time, his skill had gone into cooldown. Yue Qiang equipped his weapon, the blackish iron rod in a very short time and began using his newly learned skill 'Basic Jabbing Skill LVL 1' expectantly.

He hadn't learned this new skill on his own, but through the appraisal of his weapon. The power of this skill was average, but it had a very interesting description. The system had given out the explanation that this skill's cooldown cycle was 'very short'.

Yue Qiang corrected his aim with the mouse and threw out his skill with the tap of a hotkey.

At the same time, his in-game character made a jabbing motion from an extremely tricky angle. Yue Qiang's control on the aim of his weapon was rough at best, but as if his Basic Jabbing Skill had a life of its own, it automatically jabbed at the spot he had just smashed his fist into.

– 15! [Ignore Defense]

Yue Qiang stared at that – 15 number and went blank for an instant. Then he looked at the cooldown indicator of his skill.

The cooldown cycle was actually done already. It didn't even take half a second.

What a powerful skill. He calculated in his mind, and threw out yet another Basic Jabbing Skill. Another – 15 had appeared without exception.

I jab, I jab, I jab jab jab…

In less than four to five seconds, the unfortunate enemy had already fallen to his attacks. His 'Killing Style, One' had just finished its cooldown cycle just now.

This Basic Jabbing Skill is really powerful, Yue Qiang thought. If he did it the old way, he would have to perform a series of extremely complicated micro movements to inflict a wound: he would need to control his character's movements, posture, sidesteps and mouse aim all at the same time, and more importantly put all of his focus and concentration into the task. Even at the peak of his control, there was no guarantee that he would actually hit, and it was incredibly tiring.

Meanwhile, this ‘Basic Jabbing Skill’ had no such flaws whatsoever. He had unleashed his skill over five to six times, and he was able to inflict a wound almost every attack. The only thing to regret about was that its stamina usage was a bit high; about 10 points for every attack. The amount of stamina he exhausted after 5 jabs was about the same as 1 ‘Killing Style, One’.

In terms of pure damage value, this skill appeared to be incomparable to the fist style. However, Yue Qiang had played games for a long time, and he knew about the practical value of this skill.

Basic Jabbing Skill LVL 1 had high hit rate and constant damage output, and the most important thing was that it had a short cooldown. If he gradually increased his Strength in the future, and if his iron rod could level up to the point where he had a tiny bit of attack power, then the practical value of this skill would multiply several fold.

The appraisal of this weapon was not a loss.

Yue Qiang kicked the Zhao Soldier’s corpse to a side and gripped his iron rod firmly. He came face to face with the two Zhao Soldiers who had just recovered themselves.

He was very confident with himself.

He was no longer that him who just entered the game and got owned hard by an Injured Zhao Soldier. He now had both weapon and skill, and even if he faced three enemies at once he had the

confidence that he could take them all out easily.

Yue Qiang had used his swiftest methods to take out the Zhao Soldier. Other than eliminating the enemy forces swiftly, the other reason he did it was to test out his Rage Gauge.

Every time he jabbed once he would acquire 5 Rage Points. He had jabbed many times in succession, unleashed a 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One' and even suffered an attack just now. His Rage points had already reached 40 points and above.

This Basic Jabbing Skill was actually a way to accumulate Rage swiftly as well.

Yue Qiang had not yet learned a skill that could be unleashed through Rage, but Rage had another usage in this game, and that was to inject it into a skill and increase its power.

He put the iron rod back into his backpack and took step after step towards the two Zhao Soldiers.

The soldier who was closer to him let out a weird 'Wah!' shout and pounced towards him. At the same time, he heaved the halberd he had lifted downwards.

Yue Qiang was long prepared for the attack. In an instant, he activated 'Run LVL 2' and dodged out of the way easily before arriving at the enemy's back. Then he tapped the hot key for 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One' that had just finished its cooldown

cycle at the other Zhao Soldier at the back, looking still somewhat in a daze.

While he was controlling all this at the same time, he had also injected all 40 and more points of Rage into this skill.

Let me see the effects of Rage then.

He fired out a ‘Killing Style, One’.

> – 147!

The struck Zhao Soldier immediately dropped from full HP to a sliver of health!

By rough estimation, every point of Rage could increase about 1% of the skill’s power. This level of increase was a little scary alright.

Yue Qiang easily took out the second enemy, before turning around and went full melee on the last Zhao Soldier. It wasn’t that he wanted to toy the enemy like a cat on mouse or show off his microing skills, but because he… ran out of stamina.

The skills that he had learned were pretty powerful, but they also depleted stamina really quickly. Two Killing Style, One plus five or six jabs was enough to completely deplete his stamina. He had no choice but to display his microing skills against the last enemy, and

after using a bit of time, he finally took out all three of them.

As usual, he looted the bodies. Other than a little combat experience, Knife Coins and three weapons that he could not equip, there was also something new.

He had heard about this thing from Ai Qian several times, but he never managed to figure it out.

> System Message: You have acquired Progress Points. The number is 0.3 point.

Yue Qiang stared stupidly at the number 0.3.

Why is it so little?

Chapter 42: What Is The Enemy?

Yue Qiang did not know what Progress Points were used for. His own 97 Progress Points had come out of nowhere, which was why he didn't mind it even after giving out 50 Progress Points. As the saying goes, easy come easy go, and since he was set on collecting info about the game, he didn't think that trading the Progress Points for a strange book was a bad deal.

However, when he saw the number 0.3, he thought that there was a likelihood that he was duped.

These three enemies weren't easy to deal with. Even though he lost almost no HP at all, his Stamina was completely depleted and he had to rely on his microing skills to at the end to finish the job. But after cleaning up a wave like this, he had earned less than half a Progress Point only? Really?

While pondering, Yue Qiang saw yet another two Zhao Soldiers at the edge of his screen running towards him. They wore the same panicked looks, but the degree of panic seemed far worse than the three escaping fellows from before.

Yue Qiang was currently standing at the center of three dead Zhao Soldier bodies, and appeared to be incredibly gaudy. The two Zhao Soldiers didn't really seem to notice Yue Qiang and kept running – fleeing – without pause.

Yue Qiang hovered his cursor onto one of the Zhao Soldier's heads to check their stats. This action would raw their attention,

but he did it anyway since the two enemies were so terrified that running was the only thing left in their minds.

Character Name: Extremely Panicked Zhao Soldier

Class: Soldier

There were many rows of attributes and skill descriptions just like what he had seen before. What's different was that they had a new debuff called 'Extreme Panic'.

Extreme Panic: This person is suffering from extreme panic, and their mind is extremely fragile.

The three dead Zhao Soldiers from before had also appeared to be very panicky, but these two new enemies seemed to be completely scared out of their wits.

Warily, Yue Qiang looked towards the duo's backs, and just like before he discovered nothing whatsoever. He took a few steps forward, planning to kill one soldier and leave the other alive so he could utilize the dialogue system and question about the situation.

Both waves of enemies had appeared consecutively in the same panicked state. Something was obviously amiss.

He walked towards the front while holding a 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One' in readiness. His Stamina had recovered a little during this short period of time, and it was just enough for him to unleash the skill one time. He was just going to do just that when a strange

noise resounded from his speaker.

The noise was very low-pitched, but it lasted a very long time.

He could distinguish that the source of the noise was incredibly far away, and yet he didn't know how the noise had come to be.

It was a little like the boom of a thunder, and a little like the boom of a drum, and yet it wasn't completely identical to either of his guesses either. In short, it was a very, very low-pitched kind of noise.

This wasn't that the noise was so low-pitched that it could not be heard, but rather it was a frequency so low that it caused a person to feel impossibly irritated. It was like a tickler that tickled the sole of one's feet until their very heart felt ticklish, anxious, and then irritation. The only noise Yue Qiang knew that could cause someone to feel as irritated as sitting of a carpet of needles was the ear-splitting noise of friction, but he never thought that such a deep and low-pitched noise could also cause the same extremely uncomfortable reaction.

(T/N: something like the sound of fingernail scraping across a chalkboard)

As this particular noise resounded, the two Zhao Soldiers suffered a massive shock as if they had seen the very end of the world. Their faces instantly turned pale white, and every muscle in their faces began to twist and tremble.

The noise continue to spread outward, causing the two Zhao

Soldiers to grow even more terrified. They both pressed their hands on their heart and rolled continuously on the ground, crushing many shrubs along the way. Then, the duo actually starting foaming at the mouth, and after a wave of intense seizure later, their legs straightened and they both died in unison!

They had actually died of fright!

Yue Qiang did not dare to act rashly now. He carefully swiveled his perspective and observed his surroundings carefully. At the same time, he controlled his character to hide behind a big tree.

He had very bad premonition about this.

According to his earlier calculations, this place was not too far from the Mo Family's Great Camp. He should have entered their sphere of influence already. If things went smoothly, then then he might run into a disciple from the Mo Family's Great Camp and be able to submit the village elder Chen Zi Han's letter to them later. Regardless of whether the Mo Family's Great Camp were willing to send reinforcements to Yue Village, it could be said that he had completed the quest, not to mention that he still had the stolen Ring of Earth that could increase the quest's chances of success.

Yue Qiang had also thought of another possibility. Judging from the word fragments of the dead Zhao Soldiers, it was possible that the Zhao Army had launched an attack against the village and the Mo Family's Great Camp at once. This meant that the battle might already be over, and that one of the two sides had obtain victory when he arrived at the camp later.

Since the ones who were running away were Zhao State soldiers, did that mean that the people of the Mo Family's Great Camp had obtained victory?

But if that was the case, then why did he not see anyone from the Mo Family's Great Camp who were pressing home the attack? Also, how could one explain that noise that had scared a well-trained Zhao Soldier to death?

The situation before him had already exceeded Yue Qiang's imagination.

He hid himself behind the big tree and observed closely the direction where the terrifying noise came from. He dared not move a muscle.

Before long, there was yet another person who had fled over from that direction.

This person was garbed in a combat leather armor that only a Zhao State junior officer was qualified to wear. He held a Zhao Army's Standard Halberd in his hand. Yue Qiang remembered clearly that he was chased all over the place when he first fought this level of mob, and in the end he had only defeated it with the help of the village's giant crossbow. Although he was much more powerful than he was before, he would still have to exert some effort to defeat the enemy single handedly.

However, the Zhao Sergeant he encountered right now was

heavily injured. There was a massive wound ranging from his chest to his lower abdomen. It was as long as an average human's forearm, and as deep as a finger. The sergeant pressed his hands against the massive wound, but he could not keep the blood from spilling through his hands no matter what. As Yue Qiang watched the sergeant running towards his direction, his enemy's long health bar shrank swiftly in an obvious rate.

Even though he had suffered such grievous injuries, the sergeant's running speed was still very quick. Suddenly, he tripped over something on the ground and fell head first towards the front. Then he rolled several times on the ground before finally crashing to a stop face-up beside Yue Qiang.

The sergeant had fallen to his death.

He had very few HP left in the first place, and although the trip had only taken only single digits of his health bar, it was enough to kill him straight away.

Of course, the true cause of his death wasn't the trip, but that massive wound of his.

Yue Qiang squatted at the side and gained a clear view of that wound.

It wasn't a single wound at all!

There were four wounds in total!

Four straight lines had penetrated the Zhao Soldier from his chest to his lower abdomen in a merciless fashion. His flesh had been completely torn open. His muscles weren't the only thing that was ripped apart; the four lines had even cut his ribs into several pieces! Mutilated flesh and blood lined the path of the four straight wounds, and fresh blood had drenched the man's clothes completely. It had only looked like a single, massive wound when seen from afar.

Yue Qiang knew the strength of this Zhao Sergeant. With his current abilities, even if the Zhao Sergeant had stood at the same spot without moving, he still would not be able to deal such terrifying damage.

Just how powerful was the person who had dealt this damage?

Or should he say, was it even a person who had dealt this damage?

Yue Qiang recalled the low-pitched, terrifying noise from before once more. Suddenly, an assumption popped into his mind when he combined the thought to the four terrifying straight lines. What if the thing that had dealt this damage wasn't a human at all?

Chapter 43: Mo Family's Great Cave

Cautious, he did not take a step forwards any longer.

Although the forest had regained its quietness, the floor of bodies and blood stains, the unnatural quietness of his surroundings, and the unspeakable appearances of the Zhao Soldiers' death all caused Yue Qiang's nerves to be strained to the max.

While hiding behind this tall, thick tree, he slowly shifted his perspective to observe every corner of his surroundings little by little.

By now, it was already daylight, and the sun shone very brightly. Yue Qiang was at a lowlying land with lust forest. Not far away, some of the trees were chopped cleanly at the waist, and there were branches jutting off the cut surface. They looked a little like roadside trees that were trimmed by sanitation workers. These jutting branches were pretty lush already; some of them was about the size of an arm even. Yue Qiang reckoned that a very, very long time had passed since these threes were chopped.

The mark of chopped trees continued on and off all the way to the foot of a faraway mountain. That direction also happened to be the same direction where the Zhao Soldiers had escaped from.

The foot of the mountain was very far away, and Yue Qiang could barely distinguish that there was something there that was different from its surroundings. But he could not make out what it was.

Perhaps the residents of the Mo Family's Great Camp had chopped the trees here a very, very long ago, and then built their great camp at the foot of the mountain? In that case, he should arrive at his destination as long as he followed this path.

Yue Qiang did not head along the path immediately. Instead he stayed at the same spot and made some preparations. There were a few methods that he hadn't planned to use at first, but all signs were pointing towards a situation that was already very dangerous. He could no longer hold back; he must go all out if he was to survive.

He clicked open the character window. Previously, he had obtained 220 combat experience points from the quest 'Defend Yue Village'. After killing three enemies just now, he had obtained yet another 90 combat experience points. The two Zhao Soldiers who died of fright and the Zhao Sergeant who tripped himself to death did not give him anything, however. He had only looted 40 plus Knife Coins from their bodies.

Currently, he had a total of 310 combat experience points. After a moment's thought, he made his first attempt by dropping 100 experience points into 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One LVL 1'. After all, he had no way of knowing exactly how much combat experience was needed to level up the skill.

The result was that the 100 combat experience points had increased less than a tenth of the skill level up progress bar like a clay oxen that had plunged into the ocean, never to be seen again.

Is it very difficult to level up a fist style at the level of an ultra move? Looks like it'll be impossible to level up Killing Style, One before this crisis is over. Yue Qiang did not lose heart and put yet 100 combat experience point into 'Run LVL 2'. Then he discovered gloomily that this skill wasn't all too different either. It took 300 combat experience points to level up from level 1 to level 2, and it would take at least seven too eight hundred combat experience points to level up from level 2 to level 3.

He only had 110 points left, and there was no way he could level up these two skills, so he thought that he might as well dump everything under 'Basic Jabbing Skill'. Instead, a message popped up: Combat experience cannot be used to upgrade skill carried over by equipment!

Bloody hell, it's so stupidly hard to level up in this game! It's bad enough that characters don't have levels already, but skills take so much experience to level and it's impossible to farm some random mobs and level up either.

Yue Qiang cursed on the inside, conserved his remaining 110 combat experience points and quickly adjusted his feelings. Thankfully, the ways to become stronger in this game were pretty diverse. He still had a Goldmaker Pill that he swindled from the doctor Ming Que, and now was the time to use it. He wanted to leave it for a better weapon at first, but since his very ugly-looking iron rod appeared to have some potential to be tapped, he might as well use it right now.

He dragged the Goldmaker Pill from the item window to the blackish iron rod. After a while, a message appeared.

System Message: Your weapon has gained a ‘Poison’ attribute. A poison effect will be applied and damages the enemy over time when attacking the enemy.

Poison coating? This is a core rogue ability, man. Poison attacks were reserved mainly for boss fights in many games, so this skill had appeared at just the right time. However, didn’t the item description say that the Goldmaker Pill increases a weapon’s attack power? Why did it turn into a secondary ability instead?

Yue Qiang looked at his blackish iron rod. The weapon was already ugly in the first place, and after it had merged with the white-colored Goldmaker Pill, the tip of the iron rod turned into a weird mix of colors that was neither black, nor white, nor grey. It was about as ugly as you could imagine.

This was the first time he saw a weapon that had plenty of ability effects but added no attack power whatsoever. As for the secondary poison damage, he couldn’t figure out why it appeared after the iron rod had merged with the Goldmaker Pill despite wondering about it for a long time, so he had no choice but to set the matter aside.

After he was done with his weapon, the last and most crucial thing he needed to do was to assign the 4 free distribution stat points he hadn’t used. He hesitated for a long time between the two attributes Strength and Vitality, but still could not make up his mind.

Strength could increase his attack power and boosted the damage of his skills by a lot; Vitality could increase his HP directly, and his Stamina gauge was the critical determinant as to how many skills he could unleash. Both these attributes were incredibly lacking right now.

In a fit of anger, Yue Qiang closed the window entirely.

He decided to continue conserving his points.

Worst comes to worst I can still run away with Run LVL 2. I refuse to believe that the monster this time is that hard to defeat!

After sorting out his thoughts one more time, and preparing just about everything that needed to be prepared, Yue Qiang finally began to move towards that direction.

Along the way, there were many Zhao standard weapons scattered all over the place, and torn rags hanging from the shrubs. However, he did not see any living human or creature at all. When Yue Qiang arrived at the foot of the mountain, he came to a stop.

This was a relatively open place, and there was a cave not far away from the foot of the mountain. The cave was incredibly big and incredibly tall. There was no telling how deep it went. The outer edge of the cave was filled with many arbors built from many round logs. Judging from the logs' width and species, they matched the chopped trees he had seen along the way perfectly.

A huge log hung above the mouth of the cave. This log had been chopped vertically to reveal a smooth and flat surface. Four ancient character were written on it:

Mo Family's Great Camp!

Could it be that this so-called great camp is actually a mountain cave?

Yue Qiang carefully made his way inside through the cave entrance. He had just arrived at the entrance before he saw a bloody scene that would remain unforgettable for the rest of his life.

Corpses.

The corpses of Zhao Soldiers were everywhere.

There wasn't a passage inside the cave entrance, but a hall. Scattered inside it were twenty to thirty corpses. Almost none of these corpses were completely intact; they were either missing an arm, a leg, or both. Blood splattered all over the floor, dying the soil into a deep red color.

Although these corpses were all mutilated one way or another, they all shared an eerily common trait. Every one of their spines were broken!

Every one of their backs were twisted at a bizarre angle. It was

easily imaginable how much pain these people had suffered before their deaths looking at their mangled bodies lying face up or down on the ground.

From near to far; from outside to inside. The corpses were everywhere.

It was literally unimaginable what kind of power was needed to create such a terrifying and hellish scene.

The corpse of a Zhao Soldier closest to Yue Qiang had his arms torn apart and his back broken in half. There was a terrible wound at the side of his body, and this wound was exactly the same as the one he found on the Zhao Sergeant's body. Four deep straight lines could be found on the body!

Yue Qiang sat in front of his computer and muttered to himself: Is is that thing again? Just what is that thing?

It was at this moment a girl's voice resounded:

"It's a tiger."

Chapter 44: The Girl Wrapped In White Bed Sheets

The sudden female voice that rang out in this bloody site nearly caused Yue Qiang to jump out of his seat. He hurriedly turned his head towards the direction of the voice and found a girl sitting on a small, open space.

Her eyes were closed.

She was an incredibly beautiful girl. Yue Qiang could very responsibly say that he had never seen such a beautiful girl be it in a movie, anime or a game. It was difficult to imagine how radiant her beauty would be once she opened her eyes, if she was already this beautiful with her eyes closed. But this still wasn't the main point.

The main point was that she was wrapped inside a big, white bed sheet, it was loose enough that her round and mellow shoulders and a calf was left in the open. She did not appear to wear anything else inside.

Her skin was snow white, and the bed sheet was also snow white.

Her being was incredibly dissonant with the grey dark cave and the bloody dark red tones of this place. The blood in the surroundings did not touch the white sheet at all!

This girl had appeared abruptly at this place!

Yue Qiang had looked around the hall once when he first entered the cave. There was definitely no one at that spot before!

The current situation was simply too bizarre, and his nerves were strained to the max since a long time ago.

However, the girl continued to close her eyes with a calm expression on her face.

“It’s a tiger.” she said, “Judging from the murder scene, every one of these bodies have a broken spine. Some of these wounds were direct bone fractures at the center of the spine. They were obviously caused by massive impact – probably the result of a horizontal slap of a tiger’s claw – and you can see obvious bite marks on some of these wounds. Large felids, especially tigers, are most proficient at attacking their prey from the back after pouncing, breaking its back and dragging it to the ground. The wounds happens to verify my assumptions. It’s just that this tiger is so powerful that it breaks a person in half with just a single slap!”

When the girl spoke her eyes were closed the entire time. Yue Qiang could not fathom how she could possibly observe and learn the bodies on the ground and the details of the wounds so clearly. Yue Qiang actually could not point out any mistakes from her observation and analysis for a time.

“Who are you, how did you appear in this place, and…”

“You can call me Yin. As for the rest, I believe there are nothing more important than analysing the current situation right now. Although I wish to know very much about your circumstances as well.” The girl with only a single character in her name said with her eyes still closed, and her tone calm, “The second reason I deduced that these are the actions of a tiger is smell. Tigers are extremely territorial and will not any other living creatures to enter their territory without permission. They will mark their territory with their excreta, and even the thick stench of blood in this hall right now cannot cover that powerful, spicy odor. Therefore…”

“This place isn’t a hall in a cave at all. This is a tiger’s den!”

Yue Qiang was sitting in front of a computer, so of course he couldn’t smell anything. The half-log with the words ‘Mo Family’s Great Camp’ was hung outside the cave, and there were also artificial features inside the cave, and yet Yin had called this place a tiger’s den. This would have been hard to believe, but hearing her analysis and seeing the ravaged site, he found himself believing a bit that this was done by a tiger.

However, could a mere tiger have such unbelievable prowess? You must understand that these people were all Zhao Soldiers, and there were more than twenty of them in total! Yue Qiang even identified two Zhao Sergeants wearing leather armor amidst the bodies.

“It was a tiger who had committed these atrocities from the beginning to the end. This is deduced from the distribution of the bodies on the ground.” Yin continued, “If these twenty plus

soldiers believed that they could beat the tiger, then they would without a doubt gather as a group and attack it in unison. However, the bodies are scattered at nearly every corner of the hall. This means that the soldiers had given up on resistance completely and fled in every direction. But the tiger killed too quickly, and it needed only an instant to kill one person. Some of the soldiers may have escaped outside, but these remaining twenty were completely slaughtered without any resistance at all!”

Yue Qiang bit his lips and observed the girl. Yin’s... observation was incredibly thorough. She had nearly deduced everything that happened previously based on the traces left behind at the scene alone, and her thinking process was bold but not illogical. He just wondered how she managed to ‘see’ so clearly with her eyes closed.

Yue Qiang was close to believing everything she said, but there was still a hint of doubt in his mind.

It was still the same question as before.

It was just a tiger. Could it really be this powerful?

Yue Qiang had never seen a tiger before; he had never even seen one in the zoo before. His impression of tigers came mostly from games, such as a level one mob was a wild dog and a level two mob was a mangy wolf and a level three mob was a wild boar and a level four mob was probably a tiger. To him, a tiger was nothing more than experience points and health bars. The other half of his impression came from allusions such as ‘Wu Song Fights The Tiger’.

In Water Margin, Wu Song had soloed the tiger and came out with a successful KO. Originally he had even planned to use his staff as a weapon, but had accidentally swung it on a tree branch and broke it in half. In the end, Wu Song fought the tiger in melee combat and took it down. Besides that, there were also the story of Li Kui slaying four tigers, Zhu Hai scaring a tiger to death so on and so on. In conclusion, Yue Qiang's impression of a tiger was that it's very weak.

"The reason you kept quiet for so long is because you do not believe that a tiger can be this strong, do you?" There was a trace of mockery in Yin's tone, "If you ever saw a real tiger, even one that is kept in the zoo, you will understand exactly how impossible it is to beat a tiger to death with one's bare hands."

"This tiger's prowess may be exceed your usual tiger, but the difference will definitely not be too great either. This is because a tiger has absolute dominance over man in a fight!"

"If you still do not get it, then you may take the difference between weight classes in combat sports as reference. Skill and combat style may be very useful in unarmed combat, but the biggest deciding factor is without a doubt body weight. A 70 kg boxing champion might be very powerful, but he would have nearly no chance of victory if he was matched up against a 100 kg boxing champion. Moreover, the weight difference between a human and tiger was not just thirty, forty percent, but three, four times the difference. With such a massive disparity between weight and speed faster than a human's, the difference between strength is naturally even bigger than before. In a head-on confrontation, there is almost no chance a man can defeat a

healthy and mature tiger at all."

But Yue Qiang still had some doubts about the matter, "If this is really a tiger's doing, then I have one more question to ask. Why did the wound left behind by a tiger claw is in the form of four straight lines? According to my knowledge, the number of claws a tiger has should be five at the front and four at the back, shouldn't it? Unless it attacked using its enemies using its rear limbs?"

"Your knowledge is passable, but your observation skill isn't thorough enough." Yin said coldly, "You only saw the number of straight scratch marks, but neglected the distance between them. Other than scratch mark caused by the dew claw at the farthest side of the paw, there should also be four evenly-spaced straight wounds as well. However, the actual situation is that there were only three scratch marks, and the distance between two of them happens to be exactly twice the average distance between two claws. From this we can deduce a very obvious fact, and that is this tiger has an injured claw and cannot exert its full strength. That is all."

Yue Qiang was utterly won over at this point. This girl's observation and deduction skills were practically godlike. To think that she could deduce so many information based on the limited circumstances on-site. If they really ran into a tiger later, and if the tiger's condition was really as she said...

He had just thought up to this point when his eyes immediately grew wide. Looking towards the back from Yin's shoulders, he could see a crouched, dark shadow moving with incredible speed towards the front, and it was now no more than ten meters away

from Yin's back already. Its back was slightly uplifted in the exact posture of a pounce, and Yin still hadn't realized it one bit.

She said, "So the problem now is..."

"The problem now is that you're about to die!" Without thinking, Yue Qiang activated his Run LVL 2 and rushed forwards.

Chapter 45: Tiger Hunting (1)

There was a large, crouched shadow behind Yin. Its back was slightly raised, and it was about to ambush the completely unaware girl. It did not let out any noise. The girl wrapped in white bed sheets was completely unaware.

Yue Qiang was facing the girl, so he could see everything clearly. It really was a tiger!

The tiger was still more than five meters away from Yin, and he was only less than two meters away from her. It would appear that he was not too late.

Yue Qiang's idea was to activate his Run skill, carry her with his fastest speed and dodge the tiger's attack. His reaction and control were very quick, and he was much closer compared to the tiger as well.

Ever since his Run skill had leveled up, it was faster and more useful as well. He had touched the girl's body, and he only needed one more action to free her from the attack.

It was at this moment he felt the computer screen abruptly turning dark.

It was the tiger's pounce!

Its gigantic body covered up the sunlight shining in from the cave

entrance. A smelly wind swept by.

He failed to capture the tiger's actions at all. It was undoubtedly five to six meters away from Yin just now, and yet, in just the blink of an eye, the tiger had leaped into the air and enveloped both Yue Qiang and Yin beneath it within its area of attack.

Yue Qiang was still extremely calm. Years of gaming had given him a fine mentality, and he knew that he would definitely fail to dodge the attack if he backed away now. Therefore, he inputted a series of fast and accurate micros to grab Yin's hand quickly before pulling her to the side.

It was incredibly swift control already, but it still wasn't enough.

Yue Qiang himself had gotten out of the tiger's area of attack, but the girl's thigh was swiped by the edge of the tiger's claw.

The white sheet wrapped around Yin's body was torn to shreds. A fountain of blood sprayed out from her thigh and her HP was swiftly decreasing. The claw had probably struck an artery.

It was just a single swipe by the edge of a tiger's claw!

After the tiger came away empty-handed, it quickly readjusted its direction and faced the duo. There was a momentary standoff between the two parties. It was only now that Yue Qiang finally got a clear view of the tiger's appearance.

It was extremely fearsome!

Even though he was staring at it through the monitor, even though he knew that it was just a tiger that existed inside a game, Yue Qiang still felt his hair stand on end and his palm slightly clammy from cold sweat. Suddenly, he understood a little why Yin had told him that if he ever faced a real tiger, he would know exactly how impossible it is to beat a tiger to death with one's bare hands. Those data and textures of a tiger in the old games were absolutely shit compared to the real thing. It was only thanks to this game – so realistic that it was nearly a reality – that a tiger's true prowess was displayed in full.

It had incredibly high strength, and he must not allow it to touch him, for any contact meant death. Its speed was twice his own even after he activated Run. It was good at ambushing its prey, and had accrued many years of rich fighting experience... Yue Qiang thought that it wasn't unjustified at all that these twenty plus Zhao Soldiers had perished under this tiger's claws.

It was only thanks to the slight range advantage just now that he barely managed to save Yin. But now, they were too close to each other. If that tiger had leaped towards them again with the same speed from before, then Yue Qiang had zero confidence that he could save the badly injured girl at his side.

He threw a glance to the floor beside him with the corner of his eyes. Yin continued to sit on the floor with her eyes closed. The white bed sheet wrapped around her body was already torn apart and stained with some blood and dust due to the previous attack. Her entire injured leg was exposed on the outside; naked and

bleeding. She sat while propping herself upright with a single hand. She appeared a little weak and fragile.

Just when the tiger's second attack was about to arrive, just when one of them was absolutely going to die in the tiger's jaw, Yin suddenly opened her eyes.

Her eyes were huge and her gaze was bright.

She stared at the tiger with deadly quiescence. The gaze carrying with it the breath of death shot straight into the tiger's eyes as if it had a solid form of its own!

Yue Qiang could hardly believe it when he stared at the tiger and saw that both its eyes were tightly shut and bleeding just because of Yin's momentary gaze.

The tiger had gone blind!

Yue Qiang had absolutely no idea what kind of attack this was, and in this realistic game world, he could not imagine what kind of attack it was either. Of course, he didn't have the time to think about these things either. He knew that the tiger would definitely rampage at all directions after its eyes were blinded by Yin.

Without any hesitation, he activated his Run skill once more and retreated while carrying Yin again, and again.

Sure enough, after the tiger went blind, it immediately went

berserk. A ferocious aura exploded from its body as the tiger began attacking its surroundings indiscriminately in a frenzy. The few nearby corpses on the ground were instantly grinded into minced meat.

Yue Qiang retreated seven to eight steps rapidly towards the back, before moving sideways for a distance and just avoiding the wave of attack by a hair's breadth. The tiger's rampage at its original spot did buy the duo some time and space in safety, however.

"I have no strength left in me any longer." Yin sat weakly on the floor with closed eyes. She spoke quickly with a soft voice, "The tiger will rampage for a little while longer. You can take this opportunity to leave quickly through the cave entrance."

Yue Qiang went blank for a short while before typing swiftly, "What about you then?"

With her eyes closed, Yin tilted her head slightly to the side and thought for a moment before speaking softly, "My memories seemed to be broken, and I cannot remember anything that happened before this. I can only vaguely remember that I seemed to be seeking death for a long time, but was not granted that wish. This is great, though. My chance to die has arrived."

Yue Qiang went blank again, not really understanding what Yin was talking about. The girl did not explain further, and instead began to analyse the current situation with a soft voice. It was the exact same tone as her calm deduction from before, "Tigers are extremely smart animals. It might be blind now, but its hearing

and sense of smell is still around. If you hesitate any longer, you will not be able to walk away. You can press close against the cave walls and creep out quietly. I can even help you by creating some noise here.”

Yin’s words and tone was gentle and kind. They completely lacked the massive fear that a person should have when they were about to die. It sounded just like a daily greeting like ‘hey, the weather’s great have you eaten’. But the more she acted like this, the more Yue Qiang felt that something wasn’t right.

Just what kind of person could put life and death behind them?

He hesitated for a short while whether to take the girl with him. After all, it would slow him to take a person with him, and it might generate noise that would expose their concealment. However, this little bit of time he took to hesitate had caused him to lose the chance to escape alone.

The tiger at the other side had already recovered from its manic state. Relying on its amazing animalistic instinct, it slowly but accurately walked towards the direction where they were hiding.

Yue Qiang no longer had anywhere to escape!

Chapter 46: Tiger Hunting (2)

If Yue Qiang faced a healthy tiger head on, he would have no chance of victory.

Back when he hunted enemies in the past, he had always relied on Run LVL 2 to provide him the extra agility needed to avoid most damages. Although the tiger was heavy and huge, its agility was even higher than Yue Qiang after he activated that skill. Its eyes might have been blinded by Yin through some unknown method, but its terrifying strength and reaction speed still gave Yue Qiang no opening whatsoever to exploit.

The tiger closed in slowly but resolutely towards them. Yue Qiang could only pull Yin with him and retreat again and again. Very soon they were backed against a cave wall with nowhere else to run.

Yin continued to close her eyes, but she could sense everything that's happening right in front of her. She suddenly asked with a strange tone, "I see that you're empty handed all this time. Why don't you try that weapon behind your back?"

Yue Qiang was cautiously controlling his character to shift backwards and could not afford a third hand to type and respond.

"Is it because that the weapon is not sharp enough that you chose not to use it?" Yin said thoughtfully, "Your weapon seems to be coated with heavy metal poison, and it was forged not too long ago. Its effects should be pretty good. If... if you can hit the tiger's

injured eyes again, then maybe you just might have a chance to survive this.”

Heavy metal poison? Is she talking about the Goldmaker Pill I just used?

Yue Qiang’s mind spun rapidly. At first, the reason he did not use his iron rod and readied his fists instead was because that the attack power of his iron rod was just too low. He might as well be scratching the tiger’s itch. On the other hand, his fist style was powerful and deadly. He could deal more damage in a single hit before spending more time contending with the tiger. However, there was a problem. It he used his fist style, then the distance between the tiger and him would become incredibly short. If he was unlucky, and the tiger managed to touch him even once, there was a high probability that he would die right away.

But he remembered now that Yin had reminded him.

It’s doable. Regardless, I’ll really be fighting with my life on the line this time.

He equipped his iron rod and threw a Basic Jabbing Skill at the enemy.

He missed its injured eyes and jabbed the bridge of its nose instead. It slid towards the side.

It was just one attack, but the tiger had already found out Yue

Qiang’s position.

It did not pounce at him, and instead extended a front paw and slapped the iron rod hard towards the side.

The iron rod abruptly bent under the strike, but it did not break from the center. Yue Qiang knew that the iron rod’s passive ‘Toughness’ had played its role, but he himself was hurt from the attack!

– 23!

> You are jarred by the tiger’s paw! You are no longer able to grip your weapon steadily, and your accuracy has decreased!

He could no longer decipher this tiger’s strength at all. He lost 23 health just from the aftershock damage transmitted through the iron rod alone, and he was even gifted a minus accuracy debuff from it. If this tiger paw was to slap onto a person’s body, it would definitely result in an instakill. No wonder it was able to break all those soldiers’ spines in half!

If that’s the case, then let us fight to the end!

Yue Qiang’s own courage was drawn out by the battle, as he controlled the iron and jabbed repeatedly at the tiger’s eyes.

I jab, I jab, I jab jab jab!

While he was controlling his character to attack, he still had to keep an eye on the tiger's claw attack and dodge out of the way. Thankfully, although the tiger was extremely swift and agile, its blindness caused its attacks to lose purposiveness, allowing Yue Qiang to evade every one of them.

After jabbing six, seven times in a row plus countless evasive actions, just when he thought he wouldn't be able to dodge the tiger's next attack no matter what, the most beautiful words in the world appeared at the bottom of the screen:

> Wound attack! Deal 15 damage!

It was an insignificant amount of damage, but what Yue Qiang looked forward to was the poison damage that would happen after the successful attack. He did not stay and rolled twice in a row to the side and ran far, far away. The screen spiraled twice before coming to a stop, and when he looked at the tiger again, he realized that its health bar had turned to green and was falling continuously. That was the sign of a poisoned enemy!

It works!

A series of – 11s and – 12s began to pop up above the tiger's body in dense rows. The place Yue Qiang struck was the tiger's eye sockets; the wound that was created due to Yin's attack. This wound was

very close to the brain, which was probably why the poison damage was beyond his expectations.

After suffering this attack, the tiger let out a terrible earthshaking roar. Although it was poisoned and its vital spot was severely damaged, its life essence was not harmed and thus it continued to rampage at every direction.

Yue Qiang made up his mind on the inside.

I'll need to gamble my life one more time! Otherwise we'll all be dead.

His mind began planning an even crazier idea as he looked at less than half full stamina gauge. Resolving himself, He scooped up his iron rod and charged forwards.

Yin, who had been sitting by the side suddenly acted. She abruptly tore apart the white bed sheet wrapped around her body, revealing a large amount of skin at the same time she tore down a large piece of cloth, causing a loud ripping sound.

The tiger's attention was instantly drawn to the sound of tearing cloth.

Yue Qiang knew that Yin was trying to increase even a sliver of chance of success for him, even at a great risk of her own life. He no longer hesitated and charged towards the tiger at top speed.

It was still the same iron rod and the same location. He stabbed the iron rod deep into its eye socket!

– 45!

It was an extra deep wound attack!

In the face of grave danger, his hit became unbelievably accurate, and he actually managed to strike deep into the tiger's eye socket in one hit.

Yue Qiang did not stop there; hitting the iron ron into its eye socket wasn't his final aim. Without any pause whatsoever, he followed up with a slap at the back of the iron rod with every bit of strength he got!

The iron rod was already embedded deep within the tiger's eye socket, and it sank a few centimeters deeper again from this position.

These lethal few centimeters allowed the iron rod to enter straight into the tiger's brain!

The fearsome beast was on the verge of death with a pair of blind eyes and a poisonous iron rod deeply embedded in its eye socket. It had gone crazy and lost its mind already.

In its madness, the tiger used its greatest strength to slap horizontally at the iron rod with its paw!

Right now, one end of the iron rod was gripped tightly in Yue Qiang's hand, and the other end was embedded deep inside the tiger's brain. But this slap sent the more or less sixty kilograms Yue Qiang flying, whereas the other end of the iron rod ground the tiger brain into a gruesome mess.

The tiger had actually killed itself!

Yue Qiang was sent flying seven or eight meters by the tiger's final strike prior to its death, and when he landed he had less than 50 HP left.

It was ultimately a hard fought victory.

From the beginning to the end, the entire battle absolutely did not take more than a minute. During this period, Yue Qiang was never struck directly and suffered only two aftershock damages, but he had already lost more than half his HP. If the tiger wasn't blinded from the very beginning, the only fate that awaited him was only instantaneous death. Even then, thanks to a fierce and tenacious resolution, a rich microing experience, and the perfectly timed reminders from the mysterious girl and calculation, he finally, just barely, took out a dangerous enemy.

After the final strike, he let go of the mouse and keyboard in his hands and did not move for a long time.

Although his body wasn't exhausted, the tension on his mind was in no way lesser than had he faced a tiger in real life.

He rested for a full half minute without moving before he finally picked up his mouse and zipped it across the screen aimlessly. When the cursor hovered onto the tiger's corpse, the cursor changed appearance to indicate that there were items that he could take.

When he saw the change in his cursor, Yue Qiang suddenly froze for a second. He didn't know why, but suddenly moved the cursor to hover over the girl instead. He right clicked and stopped at the character status option.

Compared to checking the rewards he got from killing the tiger, he was a lot more curious about this girl with obvious eccentricities who had appeared in this cave abruptly.

Yue Qiang did not check straight away, because he knew that in this game, the act of checking another person's stats would be known by the other party. That was why he typed and asked first, "Can I see you?"

Yin tilted her head and made a confused expression.

Yue Qiang no longer said anything and clicked open her status.

Name: Yin

Class: Patient

He skipped right through the usual stats and scrolled to the very bottom of the window. There was an option there that he was most concerned about:

> Memory Unlock Rate: 0%

It was at this moment many thoughts flashed across Yue Qiang's mind.

Memory unlock rate again, is it?

Chapter 47: Go Inside

Outside the Mo Family's Great Cave.

There were a few corpses at this place. They were all Zhao bodies.

A dark figure gradually appeared on the flat lands. He wore a Zhao Army uniform, but his attire was different from a common soldier or a sergeant. Three black feathers decorated the shoulder area of his uniform.

He crouched on the ground and counted the number of corpses carefully.

"One, two, three, three of them had bled to death. Two of them were actually frightened to death, and we even lost a sergeant... did something unexpected happen?" the figure muttered to himself, "It's good that I came. Master Zhao Yan truly has prodigious foresight..."

The dark figure no longer bothered with the corpses on the ground as his figure slowly faded, blurred, and finally vanished. The direction at which he vanished was exactly Mo Family's Great Cave.

A new message had appeared on Yue Qiang's monitor:

System Message [Blue]: First stage of Quest ‘Request Aid’ is complete.

The content of the quest ‘Request Aid’ was to reach Mo Family’s Great Camp and seek help. Just moments ago Yue Qiang had killed a boss by a hair’s breadth, and the message he got indicated that he had just finished the first stage. Unless he was mistaken, this seemed to mean that a more powerful enemy would be coming after him very soon?

Wait… what’s with this blue color?

Right now, he was incredibly sensitive towards colored system messages; this colored messages were usually much more important than the normal messages. Green color meant the activation of a new system, stats or skills, and red meant the decryption rate, which was still at a very basic level. However, the color blue was different.

The blue progress bar represented the conversion rate, and this thing was incredibly deadly. His blue progress bar was already seventy percent at this point. He remembered that Luqiu Duanyi once reminded him that, from now on, he must suppress the progression of the blue progress bar as much as possible and thus acquire more time from it. Obviously, this meant that to him, the slower the blue progress bar rose, the better.

He looked at the corner of the monitor and found that the blue progress bar sat at exactly 80% right now. Obviously, this quest had caused the progress bar to grow a little more and reached 80%.

This time, the system had even made an exception to warn him after the progress bar had reached 80%. This probably meant that something important was about to happen.

Yue Qiang surveyed his surroundings and quickly noticed a change.

There were no HP bars.

Everyone's HP bars were gone.

When he hovered his mouse over the tiger's corpse earlier, it had showed a dark grey and empty health bar. The rest of the Zhao Soldiers' corpses also had empty health bars, whereas the girls with her eyes closed wrapped in bed sheets had more than half of her health left. But after this system message had appeared, all of the HP bar had vanished from the screen.

When Yue Qiang noticed this change, he very naturally recalled the time he first played the Game. At that time, he was astonished by the weird combination of the game's ridiculously realistic graphics and ridiculously simplistic UI. He had tapped every key on the keyboard but found only the character and item windows. Options such as resolution or save/load or shadow or background depth etc were completely missing, much less the on off button of a health bar indicator.

Health bar was something that was on by default from the moment he played the Game until now.

However, when the blue progress bar had reached 80% right now, the health bar indicator had suddenly turned off by itself.

The result of missing health bar was of course, a more realistic game.

When he first played this game, he simply felt that it was very realistic. But as his game time increased, he could clearly feel that the level of realism was gradually increasing. The first indicator was the NPCs' growing intelligence. From the beginning where he could repeatedly converse with Chen Zi Han a dozen of times, to the point where the NPCs could make independent decisions of their own, before finally arriving at characters such as the righteous and heroic Hunter Tu Xu and the perverted and cowardly doctor Ming Que. The NPCs' behaviors and character had grown vivid and defined over time. They weren't this realistic from the beginning.

This was a gradually changing process.

The more prominent evidence was when the progress bar had reached 50%.

After the cutscene had begun, an incredibly unforgettable character had appeared before Yue Qiang – Ai Qian. His incredibly high charm and incredibly weak libido was a combination that very few people could forget, and this person did not look like an NPC at all. Moreover, Ai Qian also had an attribute that was different from other NPCs – Memory Unlock Rate 3%.

While recalling the memories, Yue Qiang's eyes could not help but stare at the ridiculously beautiful girl before him. Yue Qiang refused to believe that she was just an NPC even if he was to be beaten to death. Forget that she shared the same attribute with Ai Qian 'Memory Unlock Rate 0%', just based on her deductive skills and ability to distinguish all kinds of details to make out the truth, and the cool-headedness she displayed such as the miniscule detail where she tore the bed sheets to create a noise alone, there were probably no more than a few people in real life who could pull off such a thing, much less an NPC.

These changes hadn't appeared abruptly. They had gradually become prominent as the blue progress bar increased.

When the two characters, Ai Qian and Yin appeared before him, these changes had reached a point where he absolutely could ignore them no longer.

If he wanted to try discovering the cause behind these changes, there was a question he could ask first.

This question was also a very easy question to ask.

Ai Qian and Yin. Were they players?

Or in other words, was this game truly a single player game? Could there be other players in the world who encountered similar circumstances like Yue Qiang? Did they start playing the Game for baffling and unaccountable reasons, discovered the tri-colored progress bar, and as they continued playing the real world grew

more and more fake and the game world grew more and more real?

Would there be someone else who experienced the same thing?

Was the girl in front of him this ‘someone’?

It wasn’t difficult at all either if he wanted to know the answer.

He just needed to ask her.

And so Yue Qiang typed, “I have a lot of things to ask you.”

Coincidentally, Yin had also chosen this moment to speak. Her voice was very nice, “I have forgotten everything, so I have a lot of things to ask you too.”

“Me first.” Yue Qiang typed swiftly, “Who are you, where did you come from and, how did…”

Before Yue Qiang could finish typing the sentence, he was interrupted by Yin. After all, typing was in no way faster than speaking.

“Let me speak first, because I am sure that what I’m about to say is more important than yours.” Yin said flatly. Her voice was nice but her tone gave no room for doubt, “Maybe what I’m saying is a little hard to bear, and my tone may be a little harsh, but the most important thing right now was to solve our problems. On this

point, I believe that we are of the same goal."

"I am able to analyse you very easily during the short few minutes of our contact. You are well-versed in combat, and the fact that you were able to overturn an absolutely disadvantageous situation and kill the tiger proved that you are of great prowess. As a man, your great prowess will make you very popular."

Hearing Yin's praising him at the beginning, Yue Qiang knew that none of these were the important points. Yin would definitely be talking about his flaws now, and she would definitely follow up with a 'But'.

"But." Yin continued, "You are incredibly stupid."

"You obviously had the chance to use me as bait just now and attack the tiger while it was killing and tearing me apart. It would definitely have a much higher chances of success than your blind attack of yours before." There was no change in Yin's intonation whatsoever. It was as if the act of using her as bait was but a most normal idea, "Let me tell you this. If you used me as bait and seek out an opportunity to attack the tiger, then you have at least fifty percent chance of survival. But the chances of your deluded attempt to save me and keep the both of us alive was definite lower than 10%!"

"50% versus 10%. You have made a most unprofitable decision. If it wasn't because a ridiculously good luck where all kinds of coincidences just happen to fall into place, we would both be dead just now!" Yin concluded, "You are a person whose mind would grow hot and become unable to see through a situation when in

combat. Therefore you are a very stupid person.”

Yue Qiang wanted to retort at being called stupid for saving her life, but he was interrupted yet again.

“Since your strength is commendable, but your brain isn’t too bright, you just need to listen to what I say from now on. Time is of the essence, and I have no time to answer your questions one by one right now. I can see that you are very surprised to see me, and in truth I am just as doubtful about this place, you, and even myself. But these aren’t urgent questions right now; they are questions that can be postponed and processed later. Right now, we must first take care of the most urgent problem. Then we can sit down and have a slow and nice discussion about the things you wanted to ask me.”

Not urgent?

Yue Qiang subconsciously looked at the screen, and he suddenly noticed that system message that hadn’t yet faded away completely.

The first stage of boss… That’s right. This was just the first stage of the boss fight! There was probably another boss beyond the first! The boss at the back was the truly urgent matter right now!

“All kinds of signs points towards the fact that there is another tiger in this place! Moreover, this tiger is probably even more powerful than the one you killed!”

“Another tiger? But how did you know…”

“That’s because you do not know how to observe.” Yin said swiftly, “First, the tiger you killed is a female. This can be observed from the hair around its face, eyes, forehead and other traits. A female tiger normally had a lot less hair around their facial area than male tigers, and the distance between their eyes are also narrower. Most people would think that it’s about the same, but close observation allows one to very easily differentiate it. Not only that, this was a female tiger whose heat period isn’t completely over yet! This is a most critical intelligence.”

“Tigers are solitary animals, but when they are in heat, a female tiger would temporarily undergo a period of ‘marriage’, and right now, these two tigers are in pairs. This is just the first point. The second point to note is time: Have you noticed? The sun is about to fall, and a tiger’s hunting time normally starts at the evening. We really are very lucky… Both you and I had arrived around evening, and at this time the female tiger is the only one at home while the male tiger had gone out to hunt for food!”

“If we let down our guards now, when the male tiger comes back we will truly be dead!”

Yue Qiang quietly praised Yin’s observation skills. He himself had known about the boss only after receiving the system message, whereas this girl had confirmed this through observation and deduction alone. She even confirmed that the boss was probably a male tiger.

“I have one more tiny question.” He said with a hint of

hopefulness, “What if this male tiger is a heartless bastard, and the two tigers are already divorced?”

The girl did not answer. What answered Yue Qiang was another voice.

It was a very low, very deep, very uncomfortable voice that sounded a little like the rumble of thunder, or the sound of someone hitting a drum.

Yue Qiang had heard this voice once when he was outside. It was very low, but a very loud voice.

This voice was the voice that had frightened the Zhao Soldiers to death just now. At the time he only thought that the owner of this voice must be very scary, but now, he knew exactly what it had made this sound.

A tiger’s roar.

“A male tiger would only let out such a roar during its mating season. The furthest range of this roar is more than two kilometers! Judging from this tiger roar, I’m afraid that the source of this roar is more than two kilometers away... this is an incredibly powerful male tiger!” Yin said.

Yue Qiang might lack in common sense, but he had watched a few episodes of Animal World. In Animal World, a male tiger’s body was often much bigger than a female’s, and if they barely

escaped death fighting this female tiger alone, if an even stronger tiger came after them… there was zero chance of victory, man.

The difficulty and reward of this battle isn't proportional. Is there really a need to fight this battle?

Wait… why don't we check and see if this female tiger can give out some rewards.

"Give me a moment to loot the body." Yue Qiang said and quickly headed towards the tiger's corpse.

"Loot the body? What do you mean?"

Yue Qiang did not answer and touched a hand on the tiger's body. There were no equipment drops, and he obtained only 4 progress points. The system had not given any explanation about progress points, and anyway after a cutscene they just dropped whenever a monster was killed. It's just that the amount was few little. Even a tiger like this had only dropped 4 progress points.

The reward of this loot was questionable.

Logically speaking, the harder a quest was, the richer the reward for completing it would be. Either this 4 progress points was a lot already, or it was the other more probable possibility: When this quest was completed in full, there would be a special reward!

A super reward that would make up for its difficulty!

Yue Qiang recalled the past closely when he played the game, and suddenly he remembered that the system had given him a message before.

Moreover, this type of message had happened twice.

It was during the quest to ‘Defend Yue Village’. When he killed the two Zhao Soldiers, the soldier seemed to resent greatly the fact that he was sent to attack Yue Village. It was as if Mo Family’s Great Camp had some great treasure he could obtain, if he was sent to attack that place. After killing off the Zhao Sergeant, the Sergeant had said even more directly that ‘if we are to attack the Mo Family’s Great Camp, then perhaps we may have had a chance to avoid death.’ This wasn’t a hint but a straight answer already.

Yue Qiang had a guess about this game’s death penalty, and this guess was already doubly verified by Luqiu Duanyi and the Game Manual she sent to him. Therefore, if the reward for this quest was something that could ‘avoid death’, then it would definitely be something that could make up for this difficulty. After all, no matter how big a reward, he must first have the life to use it.

Although looting the tiger’s body only gave him progress points, this possibility was still very real. When he completely finished this quest, the system would give him through a certain method the reward to ‘avoid death’.

This was a very probable assumption!

Therefore what he needed to consider how was whether it was worth gambling his life on a quest with an infinitely close to zero chances of success, for a reward that allowed him to ‘avoid death’.

Yue Qiang had been silent for a while after looting the female tiger’s corpse.

Sitting at the side, Yin gave him a short moment before asking, “What are you thinking?”

“I am weighing whether it is better to escape now, or stay here and wait for the bigger prey.” Mentally speaking, Yue Qiang wanted to make the gamble. The game’s combat and sense of control was something that he had enjoyed all this time. It’s just that the game’s risk was just too high that he must give everything serious and careful consideration.

“In fact, you do not have too much choices to begin with. I know what you’re thinking: Before the tiger is back, leave this tiger den immediately, and if you can’t beat it just avoid it is all.” Yin analysed coolly, “But in truth, a tiger’s activity radius reaches between 20 to 30 kilometers. A more powerful tiger’s hunting radius can reach even further, and combining that fact with the tiger’s speed and hunting ability, there’s absolutely no way you can avoid the tiger’s pursuance.”

“Then your plan is…?”

“I do have a better plan that can raise this nearly 0% chance of victory to 50%.” Yin said confidently, “The way to survive isn’t to

run out of the cave, but to go deeper inside it!”

Chapter 48: Connecting The Clues And Yue Qiang's Hidden Strength?

Yin continued to add, "The moment I woke up, there were corpses everywhere around me, which was why I didn't see what was outside. But this does not obstruct me from making my deduction. Looking at this hall and the artificial marks above the cave walls, this was obviously a place where human lived in, and likely not a tiger's den from the beginning. You came from outside, so tell me: are my assumptions correct?"

Yue Qiang did not know what to say any longer. He had a feeling that Yin would know everything without needing him to say anything at all. He was the real blind person compared to this girl who had shut her eyes all this time.

Still, he answered after a moment of silence, "The exterior of this place looked like it was manmade. There were also the four words 'School of Mo's Great Camp'."

"That's good. The School of Mo. This is School of Mo we're talking about. Do you know what the words 'School of Mo' mean?

"During the warring states period, their philosophy of logic and rational thought aside, the School of Mo's craftsmanship was more or less at the same level as specialised craftsmen. According to my assumption, this School of Mo's Great Camp we're at right now has most likely been abandoned! After it was abandoned, this place was used by the tigers and turned into a tiger's den, and these dead soldiers on the floor should have come to seize a certain research findings. As a result, they discovered that the School of Mo's Great

Camp was abandoned a long time ago, and while they were camping here and searching for its remaining secrets, they ran into the tigers who had made this place their homes instead. That is why… they were all met with this tragic death!”

Yue Qiang closed his eyes and slowly recalled everything she said one more time.

It’s connected. Everything has been connected. It was as she said. Only her version of explanation could’ve perfectly explained everything that had appeared before him right now!

Yin’s words had connected everything into one string of events.

The School of Mo’s Great Camp had always been this place. Moreover, they were guarding a valuable treasure that might very well be at the same level or higher than the Ring of Earth in his hands right now. This treasure’s function might be the ability to ‘avoid death’ that he had guessed earlier. Later on, for some unknown reason the people of the School of Mo’s Great Camp had abandoned this place, and so this place slowly fell apart and was later taken over by the tigers and got turned into a tiger’s den.

On the other side of things, the Zhao Soldiers’ attacks had obviously happened at the same time: Zhao Yan had led his men to assault Yue Village, successfully obtained victory and gained the Ring of Earth. There should also be another Zhao Army that was attacking the School of Mo’s Great Camp during this time. It was just that the people sent by the Zhao State to this place weren’t strong, and were possibly led by only two or three sergeants. When they saw that this place was already abandoned, they grew careless

and were all killed by the tiger.

Yue Qiang rearranged the thoughts in his mind before saying, “Now there are two problems we have to face. Where is the treasure the Zhao people were looking for? And how are we going to take out that more powerful tiger?”

“These are both one problem, actually.” Yin said, “Haven’t I told you earlier? We just go inside.”

Yue Qiang circled around the area while touching the stone walls. He said doubtfully, “How? Everywhere’s a stone wall…”

Before he could finish, Yin, who was holding herself up against a wall earlier, stood up and slapped at an unknown part, opening up a passage from a completely unassuming tough stone wall. The passage opened slowly while making creaking noises. There was a tiny dot of flame very far away inside the passage. It looked a little like an eternal flame*.

*a flame, lamp or torch that burns continuously for an indefinite period.

Yue Qiang was completely dumbfounded by the sight.

“How did you know there’s a switch around here?”

“There are some ancient books that recorded in detail the layouts and patterns of the School of Mo’s discipline of mechanical

engineering.” Yin shrugged, “I have read more books than most.”

With Yue Qiang at the front and Yin at the back, they moved into the passage.

Compared to the front hall of the mountain cave, this passage was a lot more refined. Not only were there more wooden supports in the surroundings, there were also some simple patterns and images on some of the wooden beams. These images were obviously structured; they should be certain markings unique to the School of Mo. Some places not only had pattern engravings, but also unusual colorings.

The duo walked inside this passage and did not speak. Yue Qiang walked at the front of the group, but all he thought of was Yin at the back.

This girl was outrageously beautiful. She was very calm, and her rational thinking was very good. She was completely fearless of death. Her eyes were eternally closed, and yet she could see everything around her. Is she really a player? If she is, then why is she so different from him, the real player? Why is Ai Qian not a player then? Why do they both have a Memory Unlock Rate, but not me?

The girl walking behind him suddenly extended a hand and pulled Yue Qiang’s character.

“I’ll be holding onto you while walking. I can no longer see the path ahead of us.” Yin said, her voice as calm as ever, “Hitting that

female tiger just now has taken me too much strength. I need to rest a little and recover some strength to find the mechanism."

Hearing her words, Yue Qiang's pulled his thoughts back to the imminent danger. They were still in danger. Even if they entered the passage, the male tiger would return at any moment.

He was most definitely not a match for the male tiger. In fact, the reason he managed to defeat the female tiger was largely thanks to Yin, whose skill had blinded the tiger's eyes.

"That skill of yours earlier, the one where you open your eyes and shoot something from it to blind the tiger. Can you use it another time?"

"Skill? You mean to say the Eye of Truth?" Yin said, "Absolutely not. I can barely see the path right now. My current strength can only be used to find the mechanism. If I can find that mechanism, then we may yet have a chance at killing this stronger tiger. This definitely has a much higher success rate than your idea of running right out of the cave."

Yin said while leaning against Yue Qiang and walking with great difficulty. Her legs were injured in the first place, and because she had to tear a large piece of her bed sheet to create some noise earlier, she looked a little shabby. However, her expression was as faint as ever, lacking any sort of awkwardness or difficulty whatsoever. She grabbed onto the bed sheet on her body with one hand to keep it from falling, and held onto Yue Qiang with the other to continue walking. Suddenly, she seemed to realize something and came to a stop.

The hand that was holding to Yue Qiang was withdrew and placed onto a jutted spot on the cave.

“This should be it. This is a switch. If I press this, then the place we passed through where its color was different would drop down an extremely heavy huge rock that will be sufficient to squash that tiger to death!”

Yue Qiang looked at the jutted switch and began quietly calculating the probability that this device was active.

“Of course.” Yin said, “if this device doesn’t work, we will have to depend on you beating the tiger to death in close combat.”

While the duo was facing each other quietly, they heard yet another sudden tiger roar. As compared to the previous roar, this one was obviously a lot closer. As the distance closed, the pressure and threat brought by the tiger’s roar also became a lot stronger.

If the mechanism did not work, and Yin’s skill could not be used, then the idea of killing the male tiger that was even more ferocious than the female tiger in melee was absolutely nothing but a pipe dream.

Yin turned her head around with her closed eyes facing towards Yue Qiang’s direction. She said, “If I’m sensing this correctly… you should have some hidden strength in you?”

Chapter 49: Rare Attribute – Cockroach?

Yue Qiang did go all out and hold nothing back during the fight against the female tiger just now. However, he also had some hidden strength left in him, and that was the four freely distributed stat points he hadn't used.

His very first idea was that with a powerful escape skill like Run LVL 2, running away was a possibility and a choice even if he ran into enemies that he could not defeat. But contrary to expectations, he ran into a tiger who dumped its stats into Agility. It was nearly impossible to escape the claws of such a big felid. His victory in the end was thanks to his gaming experience, Yin's assistance and a certain amount of good luck; it actually did not have much to do with his stat distribution.

In a battle where both sides shared nearly the same prowess, the tiny bit of difference brought about by stats could decide who had the upper hand and who didn't. However, since he was facing a tiger; a monster that had exceeded him by an entire level, factors other than stats had become the main keys to victory instead.

Yue Qiang's hesitation was due to the fact that, even if he added all 4 stat points into Strength or Agility, he might not necessarily be able to beat the female tiger, much less the male tiger outside that might very well be even more powerful.

Also, how did Yin know that he still had 4 freely distributed stat points left?

“My eyes are different from others; I can see the origin of many things. But let’s talk about something else. I believe that you have to use all your strength in the battle later, because it is probable that that male tiger is incredibly swift that this mechanism may not necessarily be able to kill it. Start preparing anything ability you have or any equipment you need for this battle.”

Yin’s words did remind Yue Qiang about something.

He still had a lot of books in his backpack! It would be a terrific boon if any of these books contained some powerful skills or something that could instantly increase his combat power. Reading these books usually required a particular special stat at a very high number, but with Yin’s ‘Eye of Truth’ skill, they might just be able to crack these requirements.

The Eye of Truth, man. The skill’s name alone was obviously a lot more better than Ai Qian’s Keen Sight.

All the books in his backpack, be it readable or unreadable, were all taken out by Yue Qiang. There were ‘Shi’, ‘Analect’, ‘Gui Gu Mathematics’, ‘Neijing’ and Waijing’.

Yin immediately threw the ‘Analect’ to the side. Her gaze stayed a little longer on the other four books that required certain stats to view before she finally spoke, “That ‘Analect’ is useless, but the remaining four books are very useful, especially ‘Neijing’. The pill making method of pills that could permanently increase one’s physical strength seems to be recorded inside it. However, even with my Eye of Truth it is incredibly difficult to read them. It seems that certain requirements need to be met before one may

read them without any difficulties whatsoever. Our time is too short right now, and we do not have the time to research it either. Do you have anything else?”

The two books ‘Neijing’ (Inner Canon) and ‘Waijing’ (Outer Canon), which he had swindled from the doctor Ming Que, were ranked seventh in the top ten classic literatures leaderboard. Yue Qiang had high expectations towards them. Contrary to belief, although Yin did not possess an ‘Intelligence’ stat, she was barely able to read it with the ‘Eye of Truth’. This was incredibly good news.

However, the highest priority right now was still dealing with the crisis before them. Yue Qiang went through his backpack again when suddenly, he discovered yet another book.

This was the book which he had gotten from Ai Qian for 50 Progress Points, ‘The Philosophy of Cockroaches’. On first glance it appeared to be an incredibly comedic and completely valueless inspirational babble type of book. For whatever reason, he handed out this book, “Can you check this book for me?”

This book was very thick, and it was made from paper. In this world where all books were made in the form of bamboo slips, it gave off a constant disharmonious feeling.

Yin accepted it.

Her eyes were closed tightly as usual. She held that very thick, and very comedic-looking ‘The Philosophy of Cockroaches’, but

did not open it. After a while, Yin's face looked even more languish than before. With a look of utter exhaustion, she returned the book back to Yue Qiang.

"How is it, this book?" Yue Qiang asked.

When he traded with Ai Qian, he did not realize how hard it was to acquire Progress Points. Now that he finally knew after killing some mobs, it made him feel a little anxious.

This was a book that was exchanged with 50 Progress Points!

"This isn't a book." Yin said. Her voice revealing a terrible exhaustion. It appeared that reading this book took a lot of strength out of her, "This seems to be a kind of... energy? I don't know what it is. I've cracked the thing sealing it from outside, so give it a try."

Yue Qiang took the book back from Yin. The book's appearance did not change, but he received a system message instead.

System Message: You have acquired the Attribute Book 'The Philosophy of Cockroaches'. Using this book will give you the attribute [Cockroach]. Will you use it?

A skill book?

This plaything, is actually a skill book?

It’s not just any skill book either. It’s a book that can increase one’s attribute unique only to this game!

He hurriedly checked the explanation for [Cockroach].

> Stat Information [Cockroach]: Possess exuberant vitality like a cockroach. This stat decides the recovery effect of all gauges. It multiples the recovery rate of the Health Gauge, Stamina Gauge, Rage Gauge and ?? Gauge. The base stat of the Cockroach attribute is 10.

This was without a doubt, a rare stat.

In this game, there were only two kinds of base stats, Strength and Vitality. Everything else was a fantastic oddity of every description, not to mention that most of their functions were a complete mystery, such as his Wisdom, Charisma, Wealth; and the ones he collected such as Tactics and Dexterity; and that Libido and so on.

But Cockroach was different. The system had stated very clearly the rare stat Cockroach’s function very clearly: Increase the recovery rate of all gauges.

This was a classic combat purpose stat!

If someone was to say that Strength and Vitality determined on the whole the offense and defense aspect of the game, then this ‘Cockroach’ skill which he acquired by accident determined Yue Qiang’s endurance.

This was an incredibly practical stat.

The increase in the rate of health recovery indirectly increased Yue Qiang’s ability to survive, and this was incredibly important in this game where death was forbidd’en. More Rage points equaled higher frequency of powerful skills, not to mention that the recovery rate of his stamina directly determined how many skills Yue Qiang could use at a time.

It could be said without any exaggeration that the stat Cockroach had increased Yue Qiang’s overall combat capability in all aspects.

Stats was something that could be increased through the distribution of freely distributed stat points! If he added 4 stats under the stat Cockroach, it would be the equivalent of adding both Strength and Vitality at the same time.

He only needed a simple analysis to come to the conclusion that this was definitely a stat of great value!

He selected ‘Use’ right away without any hesitation.

Yue Qiang opened his character status screen, and discovered

that his attributes had changed from 5 to 6 now. He now had an additional attribute other than Strength, Vitality, Wisdom, Wealth and Charisma.

> Cockroach: 10 (You are physically pretty fit. Your body is exceptional in terms of endurance and resilience)

He added the four freely distributed stat points under Cockroach and selected ‘Confirm’. Now his status was:

> Cockroach: 14 (You have an exuberant vitality that is close to a cockroach’s)

Cockroach is an ancient species that has lived over billions of years on Earth. The system’s explanation towards his 14 points of Cockroach lent Yue Qiang a bit more confidence towards the upcoming battle.

At the side, Yin looked very curiously at Yue Qiang. She was incredibly curious about the change brought forth by the book on Yue Qiang. However, a frown soon appeared on her face.

“It’s here.”

Then, she spoke again right after.

“It’s coming real quick.”

Yin was as expressionless as ever, but her tone held a trace of heaviness. Yue Qiang held his breath and concentrated. He had also heard that noise.

It wasn’t a tiger’s roar, but the sound of a tiger’s feet stepping against the ground.

Tiger loved to ambush their prey. Their paws had incredibly thick meat pads that allowed them to walk almost soundlessly on the ground just like a house cat. This was also why that female tiger from before was able to launch a surprise attack at Yin without her noticing at all. But this time, they were inside a cave passage.

They were deep inside the belly of a mountain. The air was humid, and there were shallow pools of water in some hollows on the ground. The sound of a tiger paw stepping into water might be very soft, but it was incredibly clear in this silent cave.

The male tiger’s ambush attempt had been exposed.

Yin continued to close her eyes, but she now wore a heavy expression on her face. Facing towards the corner of her passage, she placed one hand on the jutted switch.

Plop, plop. The sound of footsteps on water grew closer and

closer. The moment the tiger charged through this corner, she would press the switch, and the giant rock would immediately fall from above.

Yue Qiang unconsciously held his breath.

A huge tiger's head appeared at the very end of his field of vision. What followed after was its strong and magnificent body. It was more fearsome than the female tiger from before. Yue Qiang could clearly sense the pressure emanating from the king of beasts.

It was at this moment Yin decisively activated the mechanism.

A giant rock abruptly fell from the cave roof. It fell straight towards the tiger's head and looked to smash it to death!

Yue Qiang stared dead-eyed at that particular position, but he immediately followed up with a regretful stomp of the feet.

"Dammit!"

Chapter 50: The Tiger Loses Its Tail

This male tiger was incredibly quick!

Just when the tiger was a hair's breadth from being squashed by the huge rock, it lowered its body and pounced forwards.

The male's tiger body was huge, but extremely nimble. The charge took it about four or five meters and away from the rock's impact zone. However, although it managed to save its head and body by the skin of its teeth, its tail did not escape the huge rock that had fallen from the sky. Its forward momentum was powerful, but since its tail was trapped beneath the rock, the tiger flew up diagonally instead.

Then, a roar followed.

Even when the tiger was one or two kilometers, its roar was both powerful and forceful, much less now when the beast was right in front of him. The roar was extremely unpleasant and grating on the ear; even the puddles on the ground inside the passage were rippling from the roar. If it wasn't for the urgency of the situation, Yue Qiang would've pulled the plug on his speaker already. Yin got it even worse, crouching on the ground and covering her ears in pain.

Thankfully, the tiger's tail was trapped beneath the rock, preventing it from moving about.

Without its agility, the greatest obstacle to victory for Yue Qiang,

even a fierce tiger was nothing but a lump of moving experience points.

This was the perfect opportunity to beat the cur while it's drowning!*

*meaning to attack something or someone while they're impaired by a certain predicament.

Yue Qiang equipped his iron rod, activated his Run skill and charged forwards.

It was only when he closed the distance that he was able to sense the tiger's ferocity more clearly. Its body was at the least twice as big as that dead female tiger. The tiger pounced forwards repeatedly, but because of its trapped tail, it was forced to stop midway every time.

Naturally, Yue Qiang would not let got of such a golden opportunity. He placed himself just outside the tiger's attack radius and attacked continuously.

He was in a fine position, literally and figuratively.

Both the tiger's claws and teeth were just out of reach of him.

The male tiger's attacks were extremely ferocious, and its aura was extremely shocking. Its claws contained the force of a thousand cattie*, and Whenever it grazed the passage and cave

walls it was always able to knock off some stones and bits of wood.

*The catty or kati, symbol 斤, is a traditional Chinese unit of mass used across East and Southeast Asia; equivalent to about 600 grams.

Yue Qiang's iron rod might be slightly ugly and weak, but it had one point of advantage.

Length.

In view of the situation, Yue Qiang lost his urgency completely and jabbed the tiger with his iron rod again and again. The beast's HP bar was gone, but more and more blood flowed out of its body and its injuries grew more and more severe. Moreover, the iron rod was imbued with poison damage. As long as he ground it down slowly, he could definitely kill it without taking any damage.

Just as Yue Qiang schemed to fight his protracted battle to the end, the male tiger's tactic changed.

It retreated backwards continuously until it reached the furthest end of the corner. Then, it pounced forwards abruptly!

This pounce was different from the countless pounce it did earlier. It was both stronger and faster. Yue Qiang heard a loud, shredding noise and...

The tiger's tail was torn apart!

One must understand that a lizard losing its tail and a tiger losing its tail were two completely different things. A tiger's tail contained more than twenty vertebrae, and it was as huge as a human adult's upper arm! Because of the tiger's struggle to break free the thick tail was torn apart.

The choice it made was no different from that of a powerful man grabbing his own left arm with his right and pulling it right off his shoulder!

One could see just how vicious this tiger was.

The male tiger let out a terrible howl in great pain. Now that it was free, its claw slapped down down Yue Qiang as quick as lightning!

Yue Qiang activated Run LVL 2 without the slightest hesitation, but he still failed to dodge the blow.

It was just too fast.

The event where the tiger had pounced towards Yue Qiang, waved its claws and passed by him had all happened nearly in an instant. Yue Qiang immediately realized right after that his left arm was bent at a bizarre angle.

His left arm was broken.

This one attack alone had disabled his left arm. Right now, the blue progress bar had reached 80%, and everyone HP bar including his own were now in an invisible state. But the concept of HP was still there, and this fact was reflected from the various warning signs displayed on the screen. This single strike had taken away more than one third of his health.

The tiger did not plan to give Yue Qiang any breathing room at all. After being camped by Yue Qiang for such a long time, its beastliness was fully brought out. It adjusted its posture in an incredibly short amount of time before turning around and swiping once more!

If he was struck by this Yue Qiang would be flattened into a meat patty immediately.

He retreated rapidly in the face of danger and just barely avoided the attack. However, he failed to dodge the hidden tiger claw.

His chest and stomach was torn open with an ugly noise.

As a claw swiped across Yue Qiang's chest and stomach, a huge amount of blood instantly gushed out of the wound as the monitor abruptly changed into a dark red color. Yue Qiang knew that this was the warning sign that his health had fallen below 30%.

The tiger's near instantaneous pounce and swipe had brought Yue Qiang to the brink of death, whereas Yue Qiang's continuous jabs had only depleted a bit more than half of the tiger's HP. The situation was extremely ominous.

The only thing left that was worth Yue Qiang's expectation was the fact that his Rage gauge was filled in an instant.

During the previous stage of the battle, he had put all forty to fifty points of his Rage into his Basic Jabbing skill. Now, he put the iron rod back into the backpack instead.

He had lost the range advantage anyway, and the poison damage from the iron rod was still ongoing. In that case, this was the time to battle it out with his fist style!

His fist style was a lot more damaging than his jabs! But all the same, using it in close range also meant a much greater degree of danger.

Yue Qiang himself was slightly pissed off from the battle.

Without any hesitation, he tapped the hotkey for 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One' and injected all 150 points of Rage into the skill. Then, he clicked the correct position in the appearing Fu Xi Hexagram with unprecedented speed.

In fact, he almost didn't need to aim at all.

When Yue Qiang had unleashed his punch, the male's tiger humongous head was already close in front of him. Its round, bulging eyes couldn't be more than half a meter away from him, and his fist fully empowered by Rage just happened to strike in

between the tiger's eyes above the nose.

When the fist fell, Yue Qiang himself was thrown backwards by the tremendous impact of the two clashing forces.

His vision was very chaotic and dancing all over the place while he was in air. But Yue Qiang's head remained very clear, and he knew that he was on the winning side of the clash. He had pushed himself out of the range of the tiger's chomp with the impact, and the Killing Style One fully amplified by Rage was fully dealt to the tiger!

100 points of Rage could more or less amplify a skill's damage by 100%, and this particular punch had struck the indicator of the Fu Xi Hexagram perfectly and was amplified with all 150 points of Rage. It was capable of dealing 20 times the damage of his Strength value!

He had grounded more than half of the male tiger's HP previously, and with this punch and the continuous poison damage, it meant that he still had the chance to overturn the tide and obtain victory!

At the same time, Yue Qiang's newly acquired stat 'Cockroach' began to show its effects. His HP, Stamina, and especially Rage were recovering at a tremendous rate.

Rage already enjoyed an improved growth rate when his health was below 30%, and when the rate was amplified further by the Cockroach stat it could be said to be growing at a flying rate.

Yue Qiang unleashed ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’ for another two times consecutively, and with the amplified recovery rate brought by Cockroach he had the ability to an extra unleash Killing Style, One, and this was when Run was still active.

Not only was his Stamina recovering swiftly, his HP was also recovering continuously. Without Cockroach, Yue Qiang would have had to dodge continuously to avoid the tiger’s attacks and be unable to return any blows at all. When his Stamina was depleted, he would then be slaughtered easily. However, with the stat Cockroach, not only was his Stamina’s recovery rate slowly catching up to his usage rate, even his health had recovered past the safety line where he could take another blow and not die instantly from it.

In the end Yue Qiang took a full claw to his calf, but he also found the opportunity to use ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’ to eliminate this vicious beast once and for all!

Victory, belonged to Yue Qiang!

After a series of extremely trying micros, Yue Qiang was finally able to relax as he slowly controlled his character to walk towards the male tiger’s corpse.

Now he could finally verify if this ridiculously difficult quest had a reward that was as ‘rich’ as he had imagined!

Chapter 51: S/L

At the front hall of School of Mo's Great Cave.

A shadow gradually appeared at the center of the littered corpses. He wore the military uniform of the Zhao Army, and the shoulder area of the uniform had three black feathers.

The shadow's movements were unusually quick, and he swiftly passed by the Zhao Soldiers and Zhao Sergeants while using a very unique method the investigate the bodies on the ground. Finally, he arrived in front of the dead female tiger's body.

"A rare fearsome beast..." He muttered.

This female tiger was completely unhurt except for its two eye sockets where a huge amount of blood flowed. In fact, one of the eyes were completely mashed, and the red and white mix of blood and brain matter dripping out from it appeared incredibly terrifying.

This shadow stood at the spot for a long time before he turned to look at his surroundings. There were smooth cave walls all over the surrounding of the front hall, and on occasion he would glimpse certain devices made out of sparse wood. There was only one place that stood out of the rest.

It was an incredibly deep and quiet-looking passage. There were even tiny sparks of flames inside.

He confirmed his surroundings one more time before raising his feet and headed towards the passage. His shadow gradually faded and disappeared.

Right now, Yue Qiang had just finished looting the tiger's body. Other than 6.5 Progress Points, he did not find anything else.

Weird. Shouldn't there be an item drop after beating the boss?

"If you're looking for something," Yin said, "you can continue towards the front."

Hearing her words, Yue Qiang adjusted his vision and looked towards the front of the passage. They had almost reached the end of the passage, and there was a small room not far away. An eternal flame flashed inside with a deep color.

He controlled his character to stand up and walk beside Yin, holding the incredibly weakened girl up. In fact, he himself was incredibly weak; his HP was still at an incredibly low point. It was only thanks to his newly acquired Cockroach stat that he managed to recover a bit.

Yin suddenly said, "You were almost certainly dead just now."

Yue Qiang was silent.

When the tiger's tail was trapped by the giant rock, Yue Qiang thought that the battle was already won. But he did not think that the tiger would be so fierce as to have the resolution to cut off a part of its own body! If he was given a knife and put into the same situation, then Yue Qiang might have done the same thing. But this tiger did not have a knife; it literally tore apart its tail, which was as thick as a human arm by force.

It was only now when he recalled it that he was able to get a sense of exactly how dangerous the situation was just now.

"I did not think that your ability to recover is this powerful." Yin said, "I can especially feel just how powerful your life force is when you were near death. You also seemed to have certain methods that could increase the power behind your fist style. The closer you are to death, the stronger it becomes. Am I correct?"

It was true that during the most dangerous moment of the battle, Yue Qiang had relied on his HP, Rage, Stamina and powerful recovery to just barely win by the skin of his teeth. He typed, "If you hadn't appraised that skill book for me just now, the corpses on the floor now would have been you and me."

"Skill book?"

"It's that book 'The Philosophy of Cockroaches' that you appraised for me just now." Yue Qiang typed.

Yin did not say anything any longer. The duo continued onwards

along the passage. The passage was very short, and they quickly entered the small room.

This was a little room with very simple decorations, and the only thing conspicuous was the table at the center of the room.

There were two clumps of light overflowing with light on top of the table.

Yue Qiang hurriedly walked forwards. He had been wondering about the quest's reward for the longest time now. There had only been a simple system message notifying him that the second stage of the 'Request Aid' quest was completed just now, and he did not know if the quest would have a third stage attached to it. But no matter how he looked at it, these two clumps of colorful light on the table should be very important.

Would this be the key item he guessed could 'avoid death'? Was it a pill that could resurrect a dead person and give flesh to bones, or a peerless art that would give way to reincarnation?

He walked forwards and examined them closely.

To his surprise, these two clumps of lights were actually made of wooden logs!

The logs were placed on an old, decrepit table that looked like it was about to fall apart. There were four pieces of log at the top, left, right and bottom corner of the table. Two of the logs were

dark and lightless, whereas the other two were radiating with a gentle, rainbow light.

After he entered the game, every item Yue Qiang had encountered were confined and explainable within the realm of science. Some could even be explained within the realm of ancient technology. But these two shining logs had exceeded his recognition.

Yue Qiang went closer to take a look. The two shiny logs were put at the top and bottom corner of the table. The logs were about the size of a bag of instant noodles. They had a common rectangular shape, and there were some small cracks on them. It was through this cracks that the faint rainbow light had flowed out. It was an incredibly gentle light. The left and right logs looked exactly the same as these logs, but was lightless and appeared incredibly dim.

He picked up one of the shining logs.

At the same time, a few system messages appeared at the bottom of his screen.

[System Message: You have acquired the key item ‘Save/Load Module’.

Save/Load Module: A wooden module radiating with a rainbow light. It can save the entire previous state of the living user perfectly.

Method of Use: Use the Save/Load Module by inserting Progress Points. Within a certain time limit, it will return the user to its strongest physical state. It can be used before the user is about to receive fatal damage.

Time Limit: Every 1 Progress Point can increase the time frame to use the Save/Load Module by 2 hours. The maximum time limit will not exceed 3 days. This limit varies between different life forms.

Usage Count: 1 time(s)]

The system explanation had appeared rather complicated, but its function could be rounded down to one simple word: Resurrection!

Yue Qiang stared blankly at the system message for the longest time and did not move. Yin walked beside him and asked, “What did you find?”

“I found the truth.” Yue Qiang finally let out a long sigh after a period of drawn out silence. He typed, “This is a Save/Load Module.”

He slowly closed his eyes and fell into deep thought.

The S/L system did not exist in this game, but what he did not expect was that the game had actually given him this S/L item in the form of a reward at the very end of this quest!

Save/Load, was a function that only a single player game would have. Its function was very simple. It allowed a player who accidentally died in the game to start over. If this was a local single player game, there might even be a short, ‘Why don’t you try again, great hero?’ animation prompt. In online RPG games, there was absolutely no such thing as a ‘Save/Load’ system, because every player’s data would be synced to the servers in real time, which could also be seen as a real time save.

One very important aspect of real time save was that every player’s choice was one-off and irreversible. A chance to start all over again did not exist!

Whether a game allowed saving and loading was one point of reference to determine if a game was a single player game or multiplayer game. Yue Qiang had never been able to find the option to save or load, which was why he was slowly suspecting if this was really a single player game. It was also the reason for the question he asked Luqiu Duanyi earlier.

But now, he actually found the S/L function in this place!

Ignoring the other potential functions, the two words ‘Save/Load’ alone was enough to make him consider many things.

“Save/Load function? What is it for?” Yin asked.

Yue Qiang was feeling a little agitated at the moment, and thus did not realize the oddity in Yin’s question. He typed a simple

reply, “It is an item that can resurrect someone from death.”

After he finished typing the simple line of words, a dialog box appeared on the screen yet again.

However, this dialog box was not Yin’s since she had been speaking with her mouth all this time. Of course it wasn’t Yue Qiang’s as well.

The dialog box came from the direction of the passage. It said, “Resurrection? That’s, some good stuff.”

A shadow slowly appeared in thin air after the dialog box.

From nothing, to reality.

Chapter 52: Talk Much, Die Quick

The shadow wore a Zhao Army uniform. The shoulder area of his uniform was painted with three black feathers.

He wore the hint of a contemptful smile on his face. He looked pleased at himself as if he had every situation well under his control.

“I will introduce myself.” He said, “I am grandmaster Zhao’s subordinate scout. My name is Zhu Huai.”

While he spoke this Zhu Huai shook his clothes pretentiously, putting on a most carefree appearance. Compared to him, both Yue Qiang and Yin cut a sorry figure. Yin could only stand by leaning against Yue Qiang, and the latter hadn’t even recovered over 20% of his HP up yet.

He had fought through multiple consecutive battles, and he was literally a hair’s breadth away from death during the struggle against the two tigers. At the time, his nerves were extremely taut. When he acquired the quest reward ‘S/L Module’, he relaxed so much that he actually did not sense someone coming from behind them.

There was no doubt that this fellow was an enemy, and from the looks of it he wasn’t an easy enemy either.

“These two monsters are incredibly formidable, and yet they still died in the hands of a small fry like you. Moreover, you have

suffered grievous injuries while killing them. It looks like I have arrived at exactly the right timing." While speaking as if he was a calm general unruffled in the midst of chaos, Zhu Huai closed in slowly towards Yue Qiang. His face wore a leisurely smile, but he gripped a small knife in his hand.

Yue Qiang knew that he was in a bit of a pickle.

When he saw Zhu Huai's Zhao Soldier uniform, he only needed to ponder for a moment to figure out the whole picture.

Why was he able to escape the Zhao Army's watch so easily even though he was obviously a captive? Even if he had the assistance of that strange Ai Qian, he still had escaped the enemy's watch a bit too easily. The only explanation was that Zhao Yan had let him leave on purpose.

There was no such thing as friendliness towards one's captive during the war of two States at all. If he himself would not give up on the experience points that were surrendered to his hands, then on what basis must the enemies of this game capture but not kill their enemies? This was the first point. The second point was the sheer risk of his act of stealing from Zhao Yan's residence. Not only did he take away the quest item, he even took the opportunity to steal the Ring of Earth beneath Zhao Yan's pillow as well!

He once calculated carefully the Zhao Army General Zhao Yan's true strength. If he assumed that the Zhao Soldier's strength was 1, the Zhao Sergeant's strength was 3, and his own strength after the culmination of three months of hard work and all sorts of good luck was around 4 or 5, then Zhao Yan's strength was at least 50!

Moreover, his strength could only be more than 50, and his upper limit being an unknown figure. To this day, he still could not imagine exactly what kind of ability one must possess to be able to catch a giant crossbow bolt with just the strength of two fingers, while looking like he still had unspent strength that he didn't use.

Now then, here comes the question: Would an elite at General Zhao Yan's level really had not noticed him at such close range?

At the time Yue Qiang merely thought that he was lucky, but after meeting this scout he knew now that it was nothing more but a delusion. Zhao Yan must have sensed him since a long time ago. He was simply too lazy to bother, or putting on an appearance. His true aim was to send someone to follow him and check out the happenings at School of Mo's Great Camp. In fact, his aim might even be the 'S/L Module' in his hands!

That was why this scout named Zhu Huai had appeared, and during the moment he was about to acquire the final quest reward no less.

He had to say that Zhu Huai's timing was impeccable. He must have followed his tracks all the way up to this point.

"You know, I actually quite admire your courage." Zhu Huai continued to close in slowly, "Back in the room, you knew that grandmaster Zhao can kill you with a single finger. Yet you still dared to steal from him."

"You were there?"

“I wasn’t just there, I saw everything clearly from the start to finish.” Zhu Huai smiled and said, “Not only do you have quite the skill on a battlefield, your improvisation abilities are also quite impressive. You actually managed to figure out all sorts of ideas to prevent that woman from screaming. Otherwise, grandmaster Zhao would not have been able to continue pretending anymore.”

“It is thanks to you that we realize the abnormal situation in this area. It is also thanks to you, that we do not need to face these two terrifying beasts ourselves. I have no idea how you manage to take down these two tigers. I would not have the confidence to succeed at all if I was you.”

Zhu Huai continued to speak, but he never slowed his approach either. Just as he walked to a point that was very close to Yue Qiang, he suddenly made a turn and kicked right at Yin!

Yin was already severely injured due to the female tiger’s attack. Later on, she forcefully used the Eye of Truth to damage the enemy and appraise his items, so she was now incredibly weak. There was no chance she could have avoided Zhu Huai’s kick at all, and so she fell sideways on the ground and rolled far, far away. The white bedsheet wrapped around her body was also torn to shreds due to the crushed rocks on the surface of the ground.

“It would be fantastical to think that your strength alone was enough to kill the two tigers, so I thought that the little girl might hide some tricks up her sleeves. But I suppose I overthought things.” Zhu Huai continued to smile leisurely and approached Yue Qiang once more.

Every since Zhu Huai had appeared abruptly in this little room, Yue Qiang made almost no moves at all. He simply listened to Zhu Huai chattering and taunting incessantly, and even when the man had sent Yin flying away with a kick, Yue Qiang merely frowned a little and continued to make no moves at all.

However, when Zhu Huai reached about three meters away from him – which just happened to be the maximum attack range of the iron rod – Yue Qiang moved.

He neither used ‘Killing Style, One’, nor used Basic Jabbing Skill.

He typed a few words:

“Do you wish to escape death?”

Once he was done typing, Yue Qiang then decisively tossed out a small log at Zhu Huai. The item he tossed out was the dim wooden log.

Yue Qiang had prepared for this strike for a long time.

This Zhao Scout Zhu Huai had appeared from behind his back, so there was a huge possibility that he never saw the ‘S/L Module’s’ true appearance and only heard about Yue Qiang and Yin’s discussion. Even when the scout showed himself, Yue Qiang had consciously blocked the rainbow light emanating from the small wooden log.

Zhu Huai had heard of Yue Qiang and Yin's discussion. Therefore he extended a hand and attempted to catch the small log flying in the air. This movement would split Zhu Huai's attention and slow him down.

Therefore, this was an opportunity.

If Yue Qiang wanted to kill him, then he must create such a deliberate opportunity. He did not know how powerful this Zhao Scout Zhu Huai was, but he must prepare for the worst and do his best to increase his chances of victory.

When Zhu Huai reached out to grab the log, Yue Qiang also used the fastest speed in his life to equip the iron rod.

Right now, his HP was still below 20%, which was why his gauge was recovering continuously and thus at full bar. His stamina bar was also full.

He activated Basic Jabbing Skill, and Run LVL 2 to increase his speed at the same time before stabbing out with his fastest speed.

His attack immediately scored a penetration damage!

The iron rod had actually pierced right through the scout Zhu Huai's right chest and exited through his back. The force of his attack still did not fade as it nailed Zhu Huai right onto the ground!

Contrary to expectations, Zhu Huai's defense was unbelievably weak.

Yue Qiang came to realization instantly. This scout Zhu Huai was a kind of assassin class personnel. His close range damage was extremely deadly, and his agility was pretty high as well. Judging from the way he appeared, he probably had some sort of concealment skill as well. But in contrast, his defense was also far weaker than an average soldier's. He could not see Zhu Huai's health bar, but from the single jab of his iron rod alone he could more or less guess that this guy's defense and health was probably incomparable even to a normal Zhao Soldier's!

If this scout was given enough space to hide and time to lurk, then he could probably take out several Sergeant level people on his own. But seeing that his condition and Yin's were terrible, and he was afraid that Yue Qiang would employ his 'S/L module' item to regain his strength, he had appeared beforehand and actually gave Yue Qiang the opportunity to fight head-to-head instead.

In reality, Yue Qiang's face-to-face combat prowess was pretty amazing already.

He nailed his opponent to the ground with a single Basic Jabbing Skill. Then he immediately followed up with a fully Rage enhanced 'Break Fist – Killing Style One'! It was nearly impossible for him to miss a fixed target in close range.

There were no popping numbers. The system no longer gave out a numerical indicator for damage.

Yue Qiang blew his head off with a single punch.

After he walked over and picked up his iron rod, he then arrived at Yin's side and supported her. He typed, "Those who talk too much, usually die quickly as well."

Chapter 53: You Are Playing A Game, Aren't You

Yue Qiang's close combat ability now was already pretty amazing.

Although there was no leveling system in this game and his stats weren't OP, his skills had quite the compatibility with one another. Killing power, movement, attack power, and recovery... the basic elements required in close combat were already all there. They propelled him from a person who nearly died when he first ran into a Zhao Soldier level enemy to someone who could now single handedly beat down three Zhao Sergeant level enemies alone.

The real factor that enhanced Yue Qiang's combat strength and allowed him to unleash all sorts of combination skills was in fact, the realistic fighting system.

If he attacked an enemy's vital spot, such as a tiger's head, then he might be able to kill it in one shot. He could also potentially deal penetration damage to an enemy with weak defense and nail him on the ground. The many and varied attack effects and meticulous control allowed him to deal far more damage than what the superficial numbers suggested. This was also why Yue Qiang was able to win from a position of weakness multiple times.

He looted the scout Zhuo Huai's body. The drops he got were 1.1 Progress Points and an accessory: Black Bracelet.

Black Bracelet: Equipping it will cause the user's figure to become difficult to identify. The effects are even better in a dark environment. There was also a short text at the back: Green Cow Village Market – Deng Fang. Quality comes only from Deng Fang.

The reason the scout Zhu Huai had appeared soundless just now was probably to the merit of this item. Although there were no stat enhancement whatsoever, it was an excellent equipment for ambush purposes.

Yue Qiang put on the bracelet and went blank staring at his own pathetic assortment of equipment. He had killed a lot of mobs up to this point, and this was the first time ever a mob that he killed had dropped an equipment (that he could equip). Moreover, it was an equipment that did not give any stats at all. Does this game really have no equipment that can directly increase one's stats?

He glanced at Yin once. The girl's white bed sheet was even more damaged than before, revealing many places that shouldn't be revealed. There were also a lot of dust and dried blood on them. After glancing a couple more times, he controlled his character to strip Zhu Huai's clothes.

"Um... You can tear the white bed sheet around you and wrap your wounds a little; there's a wound on your leg that's still bleeding. Then you can wear his clothes." Yue Qiang said.

"I realized that you really like to loot bodies. You looted a tiger, and you looted a soldier as well." Yin accepted the clothes and

turned around. She pulled all of the torn white bed sheets around her body and tossed it at the side. Then she put the large-sized Zhao Scout uniform on herself. The hem of the upper outer garment nearly reached her knees, and the pant waist was three sizes too big. She first tore a few clean fabric from the white bed sheet and bandaged her wounds simply, then wrung the rest of it into two long shreds. One shred was used as a belt, and the other was wrapped around her chest. It covered the huge gaping hole in the uniform caused by Yue Qiang's earlier stab.

In Chinese, the gaming term 'loot' can be read as 'gropes' as well.

Yue Qiang quietly watched her change at the side.

When the girl had abruptly appeared, she was wrapped around a white bed sheet, and now she was wearing a tattered military uniform three and four sizes too big. None of them fell under the normal category of clothing. However, no matter how odd her clothings were, the foundation of her beauty was still the same. She was very beautiful.

Very, very beautiful.

The process of a woman changing was a long one. In his boredom, Yue Qiang clicked open Yin's character stat since he had nothing to do, and because there were no urgent issues this time, he was able to read it in greater detail.

Name: Yin

Class: Patient

Strength: 8 (grey font) A strange illness prevents Yin's strength from rising in any way.

Stamina: 8 (grey font) A strange illness prevents Yin's stamina from rising in any way.

Intelligence: 25 (Yin has analytical abilities that far exceeds the common man) (rare attribute)

?? : ??

Skill:

Plague of Grave Illness LVL 1: A strange illness prevents Yin from increasing her basic stats in any way. This skill will automatically level up, and as the level rises, Yin's stats will continue to drop further.

Eye of Truth LVL 1: Yin's unique skill (A sub skill that can be expanded further)

*Passive Effect 1: Take damage when opening one's eyes. The amount of damage increases along time.

*Passive Effect 2: Can see the object directly in front while one's eyes are closed.

*Passive Effect 3: The power of all of the active effects of Eye of Truth are directly affected by Intelligence.

*Active Effect 1: Gaze. Unleash an absolutely accurate attack at a close range target. This attack cannot miss, and its attack power is directly affected by Intelligence (This skill requires the user to open their eyes).

*Active Effect 2: Unravel. Capable of unraveling any forms of

complications. The level of difficulty that can be unraveled increases along with Intelligence.

Power of the Heart LVL 1:

?? : ??

To Live Through Death LVL 1:

Memory Unlock Rate: 0%

Yin's character stats were many and complex. The one that drew his attention the most was without a doubt the 'strange illness'. The effects of this illness seemed incredibly scary, and worse, it wasn't a continuous debuff, but a skill that can be leveled up. Even more scary was the fact that the skill seemed perfectly capable of leveling up on its own.

Yue Qiang suddenly understood a little why Yin's expression was so calm when she told him that he should have used her as bait. He wondered how she was infected by this illness – or should he say, this skill Plague of Grave Illness LVL 1 – and what kind of story she had.

"Are you finished reading?" At this time, Yin had already finished changing into her clothes and making some simple bandages around her wounds. She continued to look incredibly weakened, but her expression was calm, and she seemed utterly incapable of feeling pain at all.

"I'm done. You..."

“If you’re done, then I would like to ask you about a few things. We both have questions of our own before, but they were postponed due to the urgent circumstances earlier.” Yin said slowly.

In order to preserve her stamina, Yin curled up and sat while holding her knees. The clothes on her body were too huge, causing her to look weak and delicate. She brushed her hair to the back and waited quietly for Yue Qiang’s arrival while closing her eyes.

Yue Qiang walked beside her and sat down. Now that he was close, he could clearly see every detail of her face. Yin was extremely beautiful. It’s just that her complexion was a little pale; the kind of delicateness only a patient would have. Originally, he had a lot of questions that he wanted to ask as well, but after considering the girl’s powerful observation and analytical abilities, and the 25 Intelligence stats gave out by the system, he chose to let her ask first.

“I have a lot of questions.” Yin said, “But these questions all originated from some basic questions... I realize that your combat abilities are terrific, but there is always a kind of disharmony every time you move. For example, when you walk, run and jump, no matter what kind of terrain you’re on, the extent of your movements and the strength you used every time are incredibly constant... can you explain this?”

Yue Qiang watched the computer monitor quietly. His two hands were placed on the keyboard and he had tapped out the dialogue box. And yet, he didn’t know how to answer her.

Of course there was an answer to this question. There were only so many hotkeys on a keyboard, and even if he found far more methods and hotkey tied to his character's movements than there were in other games, some amount of lifelessness and stillness was inevitable.

Yin waited for a short while, and seeing that he did not answer her, she continued to speak, "Why do you speak so little, and your tone is always exactly the same? Why is there no difference in the time lag between every word you speak at all?"

Yue Qiang could only continue to stay silent; he was only using the dialogue system to type words was all. Could it be... Suddenly, an incredibly strange emotion fleeted through his heart. This feeling, was a little like... fear.

Yin did not stop talking and instead continued to ask, "Then, I would like you to help me explain a few terms."

"This item. You call it a 'Save/Load Module'?" Yin pointed at the wooden log overflowing with rainbow light.

"Yes."

"Can you tell me what 'Save/Load' means?"

Yue Qiang fell silent. He did not know how to explain it.

Yin did not give him the time to explain it either. She continued

to ask, “I realize that you really like to loot bodies. Can you explain the two words ‘loot bodies’ to me?”

Yue Qiang suddenly felt immeasurable sense of dread. He abruptly bolted away from his chair, stood up and circled behind his monitor to take a look. There was nothing there. Then he returned to his seat dejectedly, and it was just at this moment Yin asked her final question, “Can you explain the two words ‘skill book’ to me? I remember you uttering that term when you passed over that ‘The Philosophy of Cockroaches’ to me.”

“You do not speak, and you wear no expression as well. In that case… it would seem that my guess is correct.” Yin said calmly.

“You are playing a game, aren’t you?”

Chapter 54: Game Character, Game Player

‘Are you playing games’ was something mom always said when he was young. At the time, he would hide in his own little room playing games, and his mom would show up unannounced from time to time to check him out. If he was doing his homework, then his mom would praise him; if he was playing games, then his mom would throw the phrase above and followed it up with a long bout of criticism.

This was a very common phrase.

However, this very common phrase had suddenly become not so common, because the person who was saying it... was inside a game.

Yue Qiang felt wrong from head to toe.

This feeling was a bit like... it was a bit like playing King of Fighters in single player mode using the character Yagami against the CPU Kusanagi. Kusanagi did not taunt Yagami, but instead taunt him outside the monitor and said: Can’t even chain a triple Aoibana? Just watch me kick your ass!

No no no, the analogy was unsuitable. If he was to describe this feeling from Yin’s point of view... then it would be like his mother entering his room unannounced and discovering that he was playing games instead of studying. She did not criticise him, and instead say: You’re a bunch of meaningless data, so I might as well delete you. Then he, the data, was deleted completely from the

world without leaving behind a trace.

That was it!

Yue Qiang closed his eyes firmly and shook his head hard in attempt to flush out the absolutely terrible feeling. He forced himself to calm down and placed both hands back on the keyboard. He typed a few words, “Yes, I am playing a game.”

“Truthfully, I am a bit scared as well.” Yin went silent for a long time before saying, “This fear comes from the unknown.”

When Yue heard from the girl behind the screen that she was a bit scared as well, he didn’t know why, but his fear suddenly faded quite a bit. From the moment the girl had appeared in a sudden, to the moment when all their enemies were dead, the girl had always faced every situation with a calm expression no matter how dangerous it was. Even though she was met with several sure death situations, she was so calm she did not appear like an ordinary person at all.

However, at this moment, when the girl had admitted openly that she too was a little scared, Yue Qiang realized that she really was just a little girl, and a delicate one that needed to be looked after no less. At the very least, this girl really seemed like a real person; far more than anyone he had met in the real world.

A human that was most human-like, was instead inside a game.

Inside the game, Yin continued to sit on the floor in a fetal posture, closing her eyes somewhat helplessly and saying, “I do not know why I am suddenly in this cave. I do not know anything that happened before I arrived to this place. When faced with imminent danger, I can only use every energy I have to resolve it. But once everything is over, and I’ve settled down, I would feel… an indescribable sense of loneliness and fear.”

She continued, “It’s not just that. When I realize that everything about you is in slight dissonant with this world, when I realize that you may… be a person from outside the world, this fear grew even worse.”

Yue Qiang could feel her loneliness. It was very easy for him to imagine himself standing in her place and understand her feelings: to appear for an unfathomable reason within a cave full of corpses, with no one or nothing familiar around to hold on to; to not remember anything that happened to herself, with her one and only temporary teammate indirectly verifying her assumptions that she was inside a game, and that she may turn into a bunch of data at any moment… there was no way one wouldn’t feel that kind of loneliness and fear once they’d settled down.

As for Yue Qiang himself, this feeling was even more tangible.

That’s because the real world he’s in was far less realistic than the game itself.

He sat in front of the computer, controlling his mouse and keyboard and operating his character to live and explore inside the game’s world. Every person inside the game was very interesting,

and very realistic. Moreover, they were only getting more and more realistic.

Yue Qiang blanked out for a little.

It was at this moment Yin spoke up again, “I think that you have met with a very difficult, and perhaps even very terrifying problem in that world. Am I right?”

Yue Qiang was quiet for a long time before he typed and responded, “Yes.”

“Do you have any way of solving it?”

“I… do not have a clue.”

“I think that the cause of this change must be the game, am I right?” Yin’s tone was just as leveled as before. She analysed calmly, “Although the entire world has undergone a change, and this change far exceeded an average person’s imagination, but there should always be a cause to every effect. If you do not have a clue, then why don’t you start at the source of the change and search slowly. As you said earlier… the world I am in, is in fact a game to you. Then the key to this problem must be inside the game as well!”

The key to this problem must be inside the game as well. It wasn’t the first time Yue Qiang heard about this.

That mysterious fitness coach Luqiu Duanyi had once reminded him about something similar, and her advice had been even more specific than Yin's, "Only by increasing your own strength, will you be able to resolve everything". These were her words. Not only that, Luqiu Duanyi had even helped to increase his stats massively and learn two very powerful skills. As compared to Yin, Luqiu Duanyi seemed to know a lot more, but it's just that she couldn't say anything because she needed to suppress the blue progress bar.

Yin did not have such concerns because she was inside the game already. Moreover, she was a very smart girl.

"Do you have any ideas?" she asked.

"I think... that I might have been hypnotised, or even better, I may just have been dreaming all this time. Once I wake up from the dream, or once the hypnosis is over, then I will wake up and realize that everything is just a friend's joke after all."

Yin shook her head seriously, "That is an absolutely impossible explanation."

"Whenever something strange or illogical happens, it is an incredible irresponsible behavior to explain it off as a dream or hypnosis." Yin gave emphasis to her tone and said, "The occurrence of any phenomenon must have a reason behind it. If it cannot be explained, then either it is very possibly due to insufficient reserve of knowledge, or more commonly, the lack of sufficient information."

“The change originated from this game, so the clue to resolve this problem must appear inside this game as well.” Yin said with certainty, “Tell me about this game. Perhaps I may be able to help you find some details that you missed. Then we may be able to walk out of this dilemma.”

“Alright, from the moment I enter this game, I have been doing this main questline…” Yue Qiang began to describe his experiences inside the game in detail. His explanation was incredibly detailed, and he without reserve, he talked about the game’s super realistic graphics, sound effects, equipment, skills, NPCs with personalities, way to raise one’s strength… everything.

Yin listened quietly throughout the explanation, and from time to time she would nod her head. After he was finished, she said, “You explanation is very detailed, and from some of the things you said, I should be able to make a lot of deductions. Among them, the one I am most interested in is the term you spoke of at the beginning – realistic. Can you describe exactly how realistic this game is?”

“Very realistic. I cannot find any trace of pixels or textures, and in fact, I suspect that if I have a microscope right now, I may be able to see the bacterias on the ground.” Yue Qiang pondered for a moment before giving out his opinion.

“You are playing on a computer, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Has the computer been restarted?”

“Mm.”

“Although there are still plenty of questions, I can basically assume that the place I’m in, that is the place behind your screen, should be a real world. At the very least, I don’t need to worry that I will become a rootless data and vanish the second you pull the plug on the computer.”

This was the only explanation. Yue Qiang closed his eyes, and pondered.

Yin’s deduction that ‘the game is a real world’ was also something he had been guessing all this time, and at this point, he could almost completely confirm this assumption already. However, there were still many things that could not be explained.

“If we assume that this place is a real world, and that your computer has become a device that connects your world and the game world, this train of thought can definitely answer a lot of questions clearly. However, there is a very critical question that cannot be ignored!”

“This question is,” Yin let out a long breath, “your main quest!”

“It is absolutely inexplicable for a main quest to appear in a real world.” she said, “To use your real world as an example, it is very normal for everyone to go to school, go to work, and live their

everyday lives. There's absolutely no chance that something like a main quest demanding XXX follow a bunch of clues to defeat a certain boss and dominate the entire world to appear out of nowhere. On the other hand, 'main quest' is something that will only happen inside a game."

Yin's words were irrefutable. She took the train of thought a step further and said, "Games can be split into many kinds. Is it possible, that this 'main quest' can happens inside an 'online game'?"

Yue Qiang thought over this question and said with certainty, "Not possible. An online game is actually something like a fantasy world. There will be all kinds of NPC issuing quest to search for treasures, explore the world and so on, but there does not exist an absolute main quest. The closest thing to it may be the so-called 'World Quest', but even that is just an event where the players of the entire server are gathered to beat a World Boss. In reality, the only main quest in an online game is leveling up."

"But you said that the characters of this game cannot level up."

Yin said with a positive tone, "Therefore, this game should be a single player game. Only a single player game would have a clear cut main quest, and when the main quest is completely finished, then the game will also end!"

"And you, are the only player of this single player game!"

The only player, the only player... Yue Qiang quietly muttered

these three words inside his heart. Suddenly he asked, “What about you? Why aren’t you a player?”

“I am definitely not a player.” Yin said without any hesitation, “I know what you want to ask. I am definitely not the kind of player whose consciousness has slipped into a certain game world, but their body’s are still somewhere outside. I… I am different from others. If it really is that kind of situation, then I will know it.”

“If you’re not a player then…”

“Look inside the game. I believe that there will be other people who cannot remember anything just like me. However, I believe that a player like you should be one and only.” Yin continued to say, “Therefore, let us continue to complete your main quest. I can almost be certain that finding other people and acquiring more information is a part of the main quest.”

“The main quest? Alright then.”

Chapter 55: Point Of Time Confirmed

There was another person Yue Qiang met that was similar to Yin. It was that trader in the Zhao Army, Ai Qian.

By ‘similar’, he meant that they shared the same attribute: Memory Unlock Rate. That guy’s memory unlock rate was 3%, which was slightly higher than Yin’s 0%.

Other than that, the duo also shared another common point: They all showed some traits of modern people.

Yin might not remember what happened to her, but she could understand the gaming jargons Yue Qiang revealed to her. As for Ai Qian, he might be mingling within the Zhao Army’s camp, but he gave off a feeling that separated him from other people. Moreover, this guy also had an item that was obviously of a modern era. It was an inspirational babble type book called ‘The Philosophy of Cockroaches’ aimed at a niche market.

Yue Qiang had a premonition that as Yin and Ai Qian’s memories were gradually unlocked, the truth behind the game would slowly float to the surface as well.

Wait a second, Ai Qian... I think he mentioned about a trading market not far away to the north of Yue Village.

While Yue Qiang was pondering, Yin spoke, “Therefore, your problem is to seek out the main quest, whereas my problem is to attempt recalling what happened to me before, which is to unlock

the memory unlock rate you mentioned earlier. The common point between these two problems is that they both need a location where a large amount of information can be sought for!”

“About that, I have just the information.” Yue Qiang said and told Yin about the trading market.

“If it’s titled a market, then there must be a lot of people, and the more people there are, the more information we can get.” Yin said agreeably, “There should be three types of people in this game. One is this world’s NPC characters, which are the majority of the population; next would be a player like you, and you should be the one and only; and finally there are people like me, who have this ‘memory unlock rate’ attribute. This assumption should be correct.”

“Besides that,” she continued, “Don’t you think that the difficulty to survive in this game – or should I say, this world – is a little too high? From your description, nearly every one of your battles were close calls, and the two tigers especially – I cannot find another explanation but a ridiculous amount of good luck to explain the fact that we actually manage to beat them with just our strength alone. Therefore, I am sure that you must have missed something earlier in the game. For example, what are Progress Points used for, and how exactly do you raise one’s stats!”

“You must have missed out on some important ways to increase one’s strength!”

Suddenly, Yue Qiang felt that it was a truly lucky thing for him to have met a girl like Yin. What was a confusing mess of problems

was – okay, it was still a confusing mess of problems, but with her logical analysis alone, they had at least found some clues to be used from it. It might still not be able to solve their problems completely, but at the least they had a couple of ideas about the solution now.

Stats, and Progress Points. These things had appeared multiple times as the game progressed, but he never really paid them any real emphasis from the beginning until now. He had been playing all this time with the attitude of a superior elitist, attempting to surpass the obstacles through meticulous control alone.

Now that he thought about it, the battles he experienced earlier were too risky, and his answers to them were too irrational.

“Alright, then let us head to that trading market immediately.”

Yue Qiang helped Yin to her feet, and before he left he did not forget the other ‘S/L Module’. This item was his biggest reward this trip; it was something that could save his life. He picked up the other S/L Module growing with rainbow light and put it into his backpack. When he successfully put the two modules into his backpack, to his surprise a series of system messages were triggered.

System Message: The third stage of the Quest ‘Request Aid’ is complete. Quest ‘Request Aid’ is complete!

‘Save/Load Module’ has been collected!

New Quest ‘Search and Investigate’ has been triggered!

Quest Background: You have received the village elder Chen Zi Han’s quest to request for aid, hoping to seek help from the School of Mo’s Great Camp. However, to your surprise you find that the place has already turned into a tiger’s den.

Quest Objective: Gather information, and through various people investigate the cause behind the change of the School of Mo’s Great Camp.

Quest Reward: The requirements have not been met yet.

Note: A new quest chain has been triggered.

This was great news, since their goal to seek out the truth behind the game and the main quest had coincided with each other. It would seem that their trip to the trading market was now set in stone.

Yue Qiang investigated the surroundings one more time, and after finding that he missed nothing, while supporting Yin, they slowly left behind the small room.

…

Not long after they left, a family suddenly appeared inside the small and dark room.

The way they appeared wasn't like how the Zhao Army Scout Zhu Huai had appeared gradually from the shadows. In fact, it was rather similar to Yin's condition, where they were just abruptly there.

This was a family of three. The husband and wife were dressed sumptuously. The husband was holding the wife's hand. One of the wife's hand was completely intertwined with her husband's, whereas her other hand was holding a baby. The husband looked at the bloodstains and corpses on the floor and frowned, seeming slightly worried that the blood stench would affect the baby. He said to his wife, "I'll go out and have a look around."

He returned quickly, and with a slight frown said to his wife, "There were a lot of dead soldiers out there. There's also a dead female tiger. It has also exceeded its limits just like this male tiger corpse. They probably used the S/L Module."

The wife did not seem to care too much for these things, and simply looked tenderly at her child. The blood stench in this air was a little thick, and the baby began to cry loudly after smelling it.

Seeing this, the wife hurried untied her clothes and revealed a swollen breast. She pressed the baby's mouth to her nipple, and while shaking her body slightly and swinging her arms rhythmically, she sang a children's tune softly,

“Two old tigers

Two old tigers

Run very fast

Run very fast

One of them has no eyes

One of them has no tail

Oh how strange

Oh how strange”

(T/N: The above song translation belongs to Sammy Li Wei Long from this link. I am borrowing it here, and I do not own the song or the translation in any way whatsoever)

After drinking the milk, the baby slowly fell asleep within the wife’s lap. The husband stood beside his wife and tenderly put her clothes back in order, saying, “the baby slept?”

“Mm.” The wife answered softly. She continued to swing her hands gently, and the baby slowly fell into sweet slumber inside her arms. She abruptly lifted her head and said with a hint of worriness to her husband, “Is the point of time confirmed?”

“We can basically ascertain that we are at the end of the Warring States Period. The people who died outside were all wearing clothes unique to the Zhao State.”

“Then… how much longer can we live?” When the wife said this, her tone was a little distant.

“It is not important how much longer we can live, really. What’s important is the hope that our child can live on.”

“Mm, you’re right. As long as our child lives, it is fine.” The wife slowly leaned into her husband’s lap and no longer said anything.

Her husband was also quiet as he inhaled twice swiftly, still appearing to find the blood stench in the air a little hard to breathe in. He waved his hands, and after he made some sort of unknown movements, a bubble-like thing appeared in the surrounding and wrapped gently around the family of three.

“Anyway, let’s go find the others first.” He held his wife’s hand gently, and slowly led her towards the passage’s exit.

Their footsteps appeared slow, but they were gone in the blink of an eye.

Before them, the corpses that might have frightened the child, including the tiger corpse without a tail and the tiger corpse without an eye, had turned into green smoke all of a sudden…

… and vanished.

Chapter 56: Trading

Before Yue Qiang left, he took the tiger's broken tail with him. This broken tail didn't look like much from afar, but when he gripped it in his hands, it was thick and heavy. He put it into his backpack before saying to Yin behind him, "Considering how powerful these two tigers are, I suddenly recall that there are two used S/L Modules on the table. Can it be that these two tigers have used them?"

"That's very possible. If these two tigers have used the S/L Modules before, then it indirectly proves one thing: it is possible for them to acquire Progress Points, and the amount they got should not be too low." Yin said, "This will explain why these two tigers have powers that exceeded a normal tiger's limits. Moreover, there's also another question regarding your strength, that is your stats. I sense that you have a rare stat, and at quite a high value as well. However, it seems that you can't use it for combat?"

The moment Yue Qiang heard Yin's description, he immediately knew what she was talking about.

When he first entered the game, as it turned out he had a rare stat – Charisma.

At the start of the game, he had 8 freely distributed stat points, and he had casually dropped it all under Charisma. He didn't think much of it at first, but now words could not describe how regretful he felt of his actions. That was 8 freely distributed stat points. If he dropped them all under a combat related stat, fighting mobs

would've been infinitely easier.

As for Charisma points, he had no idea what they could be used for at all...

As he shook his head slightly and wore a bitter smile at the same time, a thought came across his mind. The game system should not give out a meaningless stat, and one that was crowned a 'Rare Stat' no less. Maybe I haven't discovered the real use behind Charisma yet?

While thinking, he typed a line of inquiry and asked tentatively, "Um... what do you think of me as a person?"

Yin looked a little surprised. After cocking her head slightly and giving it a thought, she said, "Your appearance and image are very average, and there is an unspeakable sense of vulgarity and abjection to you. However... you feel trustworthy. This feeling is a bit contradictory."

I feel trustworthy? Is that the meaning behind Charisma? Still doesn't seem likes it's useful though.

While speaking, the duo walked for a very long time before they finally exited the tiger's domain. Then, they continued to traverse for a very far distance and ran into a few scattered hunters, before finally figuring out the general direction of the trading market.

According to those hunters, this trading market had a very

guileless name called: Green Cow Village Market.

No matter how you looked at it, the name gave off a low class and peasant feeling. But there were no other places where a great amount of people were gathered in this vast area.

After walking again for a very long time, they finally arrived at their destination.

This was a valley. There were several vertical streets inside it, and from the layout, it appeared to be the kind of old town made for tourism purposes. There were a lot of people inside the market, and it was plenty noisy. From time to time, all kinds of people would go in and out of the entrance. A large green stone was erected at the valley entrance, and five large words were written on it: ‘Green Cow Village Trading Market’. There was also a small line beneath it stating, ‘Honor Bound, Fair Trade’.

There was an old man with a white beard at the side. On one hand he held two baoding balls, and on the other he fanned a very strange-looking bamboo fan. He sat on a rocking chair and basked himself in the sun, looking very comfortable.

Yue Qiang found the sight interesting. He was just about to reach the entrance and enter the market, but he was stopped by the old man.

“Admission fee is 100 knife coins.” the old man holding the folding fan said.

100 knife coins for just an admission fee? Isn't that daylight robbery? Yue Qiang had only earned a bit more than 100 knife coins after playing the game for such a long time, and now more than half of it was gone in an instant. In the end, he steeled his heart and passed out the coins.

The old man beamed at the duo, and his gaze hovered on Yin a little longer than Yue Qiang. He watched her from head to toe, and from toe to head multiple times. After glancing at Yue Qiang again, he said, "Never mind. I'll just accept 68 knife coins from you. Go in."

"This is nice. He saw your beauty and gave us a 30% discount right away." Yue Qiang said.

"I think it's because of that Charisma stat of yours." Yin said, "68 over 100 is equal to five eighths. Your charisma is at 16 points. If this old man isn't affected by your Charisma, 10 over 16 is also five eighths... don't you think it's too much of a coincidence?"

I have no idea how the author counted this but according to the text it should be 62.5.

"Your math is quite learned..."

The duo chatted randomly as they entered the market. Originally, Yue Qiang had planned to roam around gather information with a carefree attitude, but his attention was quickly attracted by a certain person. This because because the person was just too eye-catching in this market.

It was a man selling black bracelets at a stall beside the street. What's eye-catching was that his bracelets weren't arrayed on the stall for purchase, but worn on both his arms instead.

Yue Qiang immediately recalled a news he had seen before. There was a man who attempted to smuggle Swiss watches and wore all fifty or so watches on his arms when passing through the customs. He wore long sleeves to hide the goods, but he was ultimately discovered by the police. The picture in the news when the fellow was found out showed that he wore more than twenty watches on each of his arms. It was very comedic, and left him a very deep impression.

This bracelet selling man before him was more or less the same!

There were at least seventy to eighty bracelets packed densely together on both of his arms. Moreover, they were all black in color. From afar, he would look as if he had worn black armor on both his arms. There was also a white cloth erected beside the fellow, written with a trembling scrawl of words: Deng Fang's products, quality guaranteed.

There was no doubt that this bracelet selling fellow was Deng Fang.

Yue Qiang thought that this fellow was extremely interesting. While holding in his laughter, he walked forwards and asked, "Hey there, brother. I wonder if you can tell me how much is your bracelet, and what effects does it have?"

When he was close, he discovered that this Deng Fang's looks was incredibly simple and honest, having what would one call an honest fool's look. Seeing Yue Qiang's approach and inquiry, and noticing that he was followed by a girl of amazing beauty, his face immediately blushed bright red as he stuttered, "My bracelets can take you into the ground and above the skies; overturn a river and upset a sea. All nine-nine eighty one of my bracelets are completely unique and of infinite variation. You want to know what effects they have? Then please observe these five big words then." (minus ten thousand ellipses of pauses and stammers)

After finally stammering these words with great difficulty, he stretched his arm and pointed it at the trembling scrawl of words on the white cloth beside him, 'Deng Fang's products, quality guaranteed'.

The second he stretched his arm, the bracelets on his arms immediately bumped into one another and causing all sorts of ringing noises. It was incredibly similar to the sound of a waste collecting aunt sweeping clinking glass bottles.

Yue Qiang could hardly hold his cheer as he listened to the advertisement script, and even the calm-looking Yin wore a faint smile on her face.

He walked forwards and said, "Can you tell me exactly how much this bracelet costs?"

"My brother Deng Yuan told me that I should ask for 500 knife coins, even though it costs only 100." Deng Fang said righteously, "Many customers would try to cut down the price after all."

This Deng Fang was so cute Yue Qiang wasn't sure what he should say anymore. After laughing on the inside for a while, he asked again, "Why do you need to wear all... nine-nine eighty one bracelets on your arms? Isn't it... heavy?"

"My brother Deng Yuan told me that if the bracelets are displayed on the stall, then they would all be duped away in a minute." Deng Fang said honestly.

This Deng Fang was a weirdo, and his brother was even more interesting. Yue Qiang said again, "Then I suppose that your selling lines and that five words on the white cloth are written by your brother, Deng Fang?"

"That is true. My brother Deng Fang is extremely smart..."

Before he could finish, Yue Qiang took a bracelet off his arm and asked, "Can you help me appraise this bracelet?"

This was the spoils he got when he took down the Zhao Scout. It was black in color and had a passable passive skill as well.

The honest fool Deng Fang accepted it and examined the bracelet for a while. Then, he spoke up suddenly, "This bracelet... t-t-this bracelet is made by my deceased teacher, and is a lot more precious than all the bracelets I have on my arms. Where have you gotten this, young sir?"

Yue Qiang did not answer him.

This Deng Fang might look very foolish, but the bracelets he wore on his arms actually did not look like fakes. From where he stood, he could see that they were very well made, and some were even glowing with a faint light.

This fellow might be a little challenged in the head, but he did seem to know his trade.

After considering for a moment, he suddenly took out yet another bracelet.

This bracelet was green, and there were many simple and unadorned rust spots on it. It looked incredibly dirty. It was the Ring of Earth. Somewhat solemnly, Yue Qiang passed over the Ring of Earth and said, “My brother, can I trouble you once more to appraise this bracelet?”

The moment Deng Fang saw the Ring of Earth, his expression immediately turned serious; far more serious than when he saw Yue Qiang’s black bracelet for the first time. He examined the Ring of Earth closely and repeatedly for a very, very long time before he finally returned it to Yue Qiang.

“I am lacking.” Deng Fang said honestly, “I doubt even my brother Deng Yuan can see for what it is. If there is one person in this market who can identify this bracelet’s origin, then he can only be my grandfather.”

“Your grandfather?”

“Didn’t you see him when you come in? He sits on a rocking chair, and holds a bamboo fan in his hand always.” Deng Fang said.

Chapter 57: Earning Money To Buy You Clothes

Yue Qiang led Yin away from Deng Fang's bracelet store, avoided the crowd and found a slightly secluded place to talk.

"Let's seek out that old man at the market entrance." Yin said, "When we passed by earlier I already felt that he wasn't normal. Coincidentally, this bracelet seller Deng Fang agrees with this, so we should be able to acquire some information."

"I don't think we're in a hurry." Yue Qiang said, "We can walk around the market for a little longer. Right now I'm actually slightly interested in Deng Fang's brother, Deng Yuan."

He wanted to gather a bit more information and make some preparations before meeting the old man at the market entrance once more. The reason for that was the trading market's name.

Green Cow Village.

This wasn't the first time Yue Qiang heard the name 'Green Cow Village'. In fact, he had heard about it several times back at Yue Village. No doubt that the place behind this very backwater name was something that's beyond his imagination.

The treasure his village had protected for tens of years, and sought after by a powerful Boss like General Zhao Yan himself, was in fact nothing more than just a nose ring once used by a cow in

Green Cow Village. Originally, he thought that he would not be able to come in touch with such an extraordinary existence at his current level, but he did not think that his destination would have a name that's called 'Green Cow Village Trading Market'.

"I think we can walk around the market for a little longer and gather more information. That brother of Deng Fang, Deng Yuan seems to be a know-it-all type of character, so I think we can talk to this Deng Yuan first." Yue Qiang said, "Plus, we need to buy you a new set of clothes. Not only this military uniform is way oversized, it's completely torn up, not to mention that it's empty on the inside..."

"If you are not afraid to spend money." the girl said.

Yue Qiang continued to lead Yin around the old town, and they quickly discovered their target, Deng Yuan.

Their target was simply too eye-catching. He was impossible to miss even if they tried.

As compared to Deng Fang's desolate stall, Deng Yuan's was obviously a lot more crowded. His business skills were obviously superior, with a large group of people surrounding his stall and a white cloth beside it as well stating, 'The Venomous Yuchang Blade That Surpasses Zhuan Zhu'*.

*Zhuan Zhu is an assassin in the Spring and Autumn period. He killed King Liao with a dagger hidden in a fish, and the blade was hence named 'Yuchang (Fish Belly)'.

Although his writing was as ugly as ever, in terms of loftiness, it was far better than ‘quality guaranteed’.

The Yuchang Blade was a legendary weapon that was rumored to be able to cut through gold, jade and steel like they were mud. In the hands of the assassin Zhuan Zhu, it took the life of a King of State and became very famous.

Yue Qiang’s curiosity was piqued as well, as he pushed his way through the crowd with Yin and looked.

There was a fellow inside the stall who looked like Deng Fang, but was incredibly shifty-looking. What he held in his hand was... a fish bone.

Yue Qiang stared blankly.

If he remembered correctly, the Yuchang Blade was named the way it was because it was hidden inside a fish’s belly, and not because it was made out of a fish bone. Plus, a fish bone was limp, brittle and uncomfortable to wield. Could it really be used as a weapon?

Yue Qiang was even more curious now and paid close attention. While holding the head area of the fish bone, Deng Yuan circled around his small stall once and said,

“Look well, my dear customers! My Venomous Yuchang Blade is

a masterpiece that exceeds the Yuchang Blade wielded by the assassin of the previous dynasty, Zhuan Zhu!”

Deng Yuan clasped his fists together and saluted the people wherever he went, looking wickedly pleased with himself, “This fish is extraordinary. It hails from the place of profound ice ten thousand depths beneath the western sea. It is cold and poisonous, and I, the untalented one commissioned a master to use seven-seven forty nine days to finally catch it, and then spend eight-eight six four days to finally refine it into one Venomous Yuchang Blade. This blade is extremely rare, and it will sell for only two thousand knife coins today!”

Once Deng Yuan was finished introducing his fish bone, he continued to clasp his fists and saluted at all directions.

Yue Qiang was completely dumbfounded by his words, when Yin suddenly closed in behind him and spoke in a low voice, “It looks a little like the bone of a bighead carp. I saw it selling at the fish stall just now...”

Both praises and doubts came from the surrounding crowd. A peddler that looked rather rich asked, “May I know exactly how is your blade venomous?”

The wicked pleased look on Deng Yuan’s face grew even more profound as he caught a thin, old dog that was so starved that it was literally skin and bones, saying, “Please observe that this is a strong and healthy mastiff, my dear customers (he raised the thin, old dog into the air and showed it off everywhere). However, I only need to stick my Venomous Yuchang Blade in its mouth before this

mastiff will suffocate and die in no time."

Deng Yuan let go of the old dog once he was done speaking. The old dog that was about to be starved to death sniffed the fishy smell on the bone, quivered, and immediately jumped forwards to bite off a fish bone. Before long, the old dog began to pant repeatedly. Then its limbs went stiff, and it passed away.

The surrounding crowd clicked their tongues in wonder at the sight.

"It truly is extreme poisonous. This dog may not be all that strong and healthy, but it died in no time at all."

"It is true that it passed away very swiftly."

"Did you guys not notice that the fish bone is missing a fork..."

Yin, whose eyes were still closed and standing behind Yue Qiang closed in again and said in a low tone, "It probably choked on the fish bone, and choked to death..."

The peddler he voiced his doubts earlier looked extremely surprised by the turn of events and said, "Truly, a rare treasure indeed. I will buy it." And then he bought the fish bone.

Is it Yin and I having a keen eye, or are these people too stupid?

Yue Qiang looked closer and found that the peddler had bought the fish at 2,400 knife coins.

A thought flashed across his mind, and Yue Qiang clicked Deng Yuan's avatar to check his stats.

The ability to check one's stats seemed to have been blocked off partially by the system as well. Now, he could only see Deng Yuan's stats, but not his skills. Very soon, Yue Qiang found the line he wished to see.

> Charisma: 12 (A fellow with a silver tongue)

Yue Qiang made a simple fractional calculation in his head and nodded on the inside as if he realized something.

On the other side, the crowd quickly dissipated after Deng Yuan had sold his Venomous Yuchang Blade. He did not leave the market, and instead bought yet another big fish from the fish stall and waited quietly for a while. Then he switched to another street, put up his sign 'The Venomous Yuchang Blade That Surpasses Zhuan Zhu' and restarted his business once more.

Yue Qiang had been following behind him with Yin all this time. When he saw this, he came to a decision and said to Yin at his back, "Do you know how to write?"

“Yes. Are you planning to…?” Yin asked curiously.

“Help me write down a few words then.” Yue Qiang did not answer her question and instead ordered directly, “Write down the six words, ‘Genesis of Bane, God of Spears’.“

Yin pulled a cloth from her body, wrote the words and passed it out to him.

Yue Qiang accepted the written cloth, found a bamboo stick and strung the cloth on it. Then he arrived beside Deng Yuan’s stall, and plunged the stick right beside Deng Yuan’s.

Yue Qiang’s bamboo stick was just a little taller than Deng Yuan’s, and his cloth was just a little longer than Deng Yuan’s as well.

“What are you doing?” Yin grew even more curious. This position was too close to Deng Yuan’s, and the other party’s eyes were already looking at him strangely.

“Earning money to buy you some clothes.” Yue Qiang took out his blackish iron rod and displayed it at the place that caught the most eyes, saying casually.

Chapter 58: Street Stall, Notice Board

Yue Qiang only had one objective, and that was to earn some money. On one hand he wanted to buy clothes for Yin, and on the other there were many simple equipment in the market that could only be purchased with knife coins. While the effects of these equipment might be lacking, it was still a lot better than running around naked. The first thing he needed to do was to buy a simple armor for both him and Yin. That was why he thought to earn money.

By coincidence, he saw Deng Yuan's way of business, and when an idea flashed across his mind, Yue Qiang decided that he would undercut Deng Yuan's business for himself.

A careful selection process happened behind the chosen location of Deng Yuan's stall. First, he needed to put some distance between his current and his previous location to avoid running into the same customers. Moreover, he needed to wait until all the circumstances felt right before restarting his business once more.

Just like before, he put up the white cloth with the words, 'The Venomous Yuchang Blade That Surpasses Zhuan Zhu's', took out a huge fish bone, and even found a feebler old dog than the one before. However, when everything was set to commence, Yue Qiang appeared.

It must be said that Yue Qiang's act of stealing one's stall space was very provocative.

It was obvious he was undercutting his competitor.

When the surrounding crowd saw that two weapon selling stalls were laid out at this place, they slowly gathered over and began gesticulating at them.

“Hey there, old chap. Who do you think sells the better weapon between these two?”

“Ah, brother, your observation skill still needs a little bit of training. It is obvious that that blackish iron rod is far better than the other.” A scholarly looking person said while swaying his head back and forth.

“How can you be so sure?”

“You may listen closely to my words. To know if a seller’s goods are of quality, one must first observe their shop sign. Look, the sign of the left stall selling fish bone writes, ‘The Venomous Yuchang Blade That Surpasses Zhuan Zhu’. We will ignore how much truth lies behind this claim, and observe these words alone. Just based on the fact that the words are chicken scratch, the syntax is wrong, and the comparison is biased, I will give him a solid 0 star rating. Now we look again at the right stall selling an iron rod. He writes, ‘Genesis of Bane, God of Spears’. His syntax is fine, and his reconciliation is fair. The calligraphy of these six words are straight and parallel, mellow and full; thin but not flattering, strong but not stiff. I will go as far as to say that this is a rare top grade calligraphy. From these two advertising signs alone we can see clearly who is the better among the duo.”

The scholar gesticulated and commented at the two stalls with clear and logical arguments. Setting aside whether he was actually right or wrong, his performance was enough to attract a huge crowd of ignorant people to stand and watch.

Yue Qiang was pretty amused. Now he even had someone advertising for him for free.

Seeing that his insights were agreed upon by others, the scholar grew even prouder of himself.

"'Buy not, before judging the seller'. This is the indisputable words of wisdom the sage of the ancient past have imparted us. Look, my friends. This fish bone seller at the left looks perverted, shifty, slumped and hunchbacked. It is obvious at first glance that he is no decent person. Moreover, he is even followed by an old dog that's about to starve to death. The ancient sage once said, 'what dog there is, what man there is'. You may imagine the moral standing of this fish bone seller just from this old dog's appearance alone."

"Now, let us look at this iron rod seller once more. His stature is lofty, and his appearance is powerful. He may be of average countenance, but he has a sweet and virtuous lady behind his back. The ancient sage once saw through the mystery known only to heaven and said before they levitated heavenwards, 'A man's worth can be measured by the beauty index of his woman'. Based on this alone, it can be proven that this iron rod seller is much more reliable than the fish bone seller."

The surrounding crowd nodded their heads repeatedly. They all felt that this scholar's words were rather sound.

One person asked, "If I may be so bold as to ask, the term 'beauty index' sounds rather profound. May I ask how it should be solved?"

Another person asked, "I wonder who is this ancient sage of such ability, speaking truths and gems at every turn? Can you enlighten us on this, scholar?"

Seeing that everyone was flattering him highly, the scholar put even greater effort into making a show of himself.

He took out a a bamboo slip from his lap and said, "Do you want to know how 'beauty index' is explained? Do you want to know what other words of blood, sweat and tears the ancient sage have to offer? Then hesitate not and buy my 'Quotes of The Ancient Sage' right away! This book is originally priced at 500 knife coins, but now it is only sold for 198! 198! 198 knife coins is not expensive at all, and if you don't buy it, you're a fool and a loser who can't become a king or marry a bride! If you buy my 'Quotes of The Ancient Sage', then a meteoric rise to become scholar officials is no longer a dream!"

Ever since Yue Qiang set down his stall, he had been watching the scholar perform from the start to the end.

At the beginning, Yue Qiang could almost believe that the scholar was a helper that he hired after hearing him talk so many good

things about him. But in the end, he was yet another person out to market his product. That being said, this script and method... he can't help but feel that the style was similar to 'Jiangnan Leather Factory's Boss and His Sister-In-Law'.

Seeing that this scholar was harmless, and his own curiosity was at its peak, Yue Qiang hovered over his cursor and clicked the man's avatar to check his stats.

Character Name: Hui Shi

Class: Scholar

Stats: (Stats are hidden and can no longer be seen)

Skill:

?? : ??

Duel of Words Against the Group of Learned LVL 1: A silver tongue with a strong grasp of knowledge, capable of quoting classics and articulate eloquently with no effort at all. Stats required to read book type items is decreased.

Heart of Name and Reality LVL 1:

Memory Unlock Rate: 2%

On the other side, the local trader Deng Yuan was in a rather awkward situation.

This was the place he had chosen for himself, but he was first taken advantage of by Yue Qiang, then had his popularity completed robbed away by a scholar. When he saw the current situation, he hastily shouted in a loud voice, still using the same promotion script as before.

However, the professional marketing script that was still very useful just now had lost its effectiveness. No one in the crowd were even looking at him. A small minority of the crowd were curious about the scholar's 'Quotes of The Ancient Sage', and the large majority were attracted by Yue Qiang's Genesis Bane God Spear a.k.a blackish iron rod.

"If I may be so bold as to ask, where have you gotten this spear?"

Yue Qiang said, "A blacksmith in a small village gifted it to me."

"This blacksmith must be a mastersmith who has retired himself from the world. Young sir is truly fortunate."

Another person asked, "Since your God Spear is called the 'Genesis of Bane', then it must be extremely poisonous. Is it possible to ask for an immediate demonstration?"

Yue Qiang agreed on the spot and scraped some dull and gray, black-and-white mix of dust from the iron rod. Then, he grabbed the old dog at the back and fed the dust down its throat. Before long, the old dog perished on the spot. (Deng Yuan: That's my dog!)

The surrounding crowd clicked their tongues in wonder.

“There is indeed truth behind the one that dares calls itself the genesis of bane. This toxicity is oh-so-acute.”

“It looks ordinary, but it hides its secrets inside. This is truly a great weapon.”

Another person asked Yue Qiang, “May I know how much your Genesis Bane God Spear will fetch?”

Yue Qiang typed unhurriedly, “The poison dust is for sale. The spear, isn’t.”

Hearing how imposing Yue Qiang’s words were, the surrounding crowd immediately discussed among themselves spiritedly once more.

Deng Yuan’s face was blue with anger when he noticed that all of the crowd’s attention were sucked away elsewhere. Even more infuriating was that the dog he prepared for his own demonstration was snatched away by Yue Qiang as well. He no longer shouted, and instead took out a public notice from his lap and roared once at Yue Qiang, “Hey iron rod seller! Do you dare accept this public notice?”

Public notice?

Deng Yuan continued, “I’ll stop my business today, but would

you dare agree to a gamble and see who can finish the quest listed on this public notice first? If you managed to finish the quest first, then not only would I pack and quit right away, I will gift you with 2000 extra knife coins as compensation. But if I finished the quest first by luck then, huhu, I'd like to see if you can leave this market alive!"

When Yue Qiang heard this, he clicked open the public notice curiously. The public notice was actually a quest.

> Quest Title: Tiger Hunting.
>
> Quest Background: It is said that there is a ferocious tiger doing evil in the mountains a few dozen of miles away and has heard countless villagers and hunters. Braves are hereby called to hunt down this ferocious tiger. If the hunt is a success, then a thousand knife coins and a piece of equipment will be rewarded.

The man waited until Yue Qiang was finished reading the public notice before saying, "So? Do you dare make a gamble with me? I'd like to see if your iron rod is better, or my Venomous Yuchang Blade is fiercer!"

Yue Qiang grew amused when saw the contents of this public notice. If this wasn't what you call jumping into the line of fire, then what was? He purposely paused and put on a hesitant look before typing, "This isn't fair, is it? If you lose, you only lose 2000 knife coins. If I lose, I have to lose my own life. Unless, you add

another 2000 knife coins…”

“Why not!” Deng Yuan roared.

The man hardly finished speaking before Yue Qiang snatched over the public notice and accepted the quest at top speed.

although the author didn’t write it, Yue Qiang probably returned the public notice to the guy after reading it.

> System Message: You have accepted the quest: Tiger Hunting.
>
> System Message: You have completed the quest: Tiger Hunting.

The feeling of accepting and finishing a quest instantly was the best.

He took out the tiger’s tail about the size of an arm from his backpack and said, “Tiger, you say? It just so happened I killed something like that along the way.”

Chapter 59: That Old Watchman Again?

When Yue Qiang took out the tail that was as thick as an arm, everyone around him was stunned.

The people whispered among themselves, “This brightly colored tiger tail is so long and thick. It may really be the tail mentioned in the public bounty!”

Someone could not help but walk forward to ask, “If I may be so bold as to ask, where did this length of tiger tail come from?”

“It is cut off a tiger after I killed it inside a tiger’s den.” Yue Qiang typed leisurely, “Even with my strength, victory did not come without much risks. In the end, it is thanks to the unique poison of my Genesis Bane God Spear that I finally killed it after much difficulty.”

“Did you have another helper, young sir who has killed a tiger?”

Yue Qiang paused for a moment, and before he could reply a row of words suddenly appeared on the screen.

Yin whispered to you: “Don’t mention me.”

Like I need you to tell me that... While Yue Qiang thought, he typed and answered, “Helper? Of course there was a helper.”

When the person who asked the question heard that Yue Qiang had a helper, he instantly let out a sigh of relief. He obviously did not quite believe that a normal person like Yue Qiang could take out a wicked tiger with a notorious, long notorious reputation, “Where might this helper be right now?”

“There was a helper, but it was not my helper!” Yue Qiang purposely paused for a moment before saying, “What, you can’t be thinking that this delicate woman behind me is the helper, can you?”

Yue Qiang purposely kept his listeners on tenterhooks before finally saying, “The one who had a helper isn’t me. It was the tiger!”

“There was not only a male tiger inside the tiger den, but also a female tiger that was just as fierce!”

The surrounding crowd looked extremely surprised. Seeing that the mood was more or less set, he began typing slowly and describing the entire tiger hunting process in a most exaggerated fashion. The main point of the story was how ferocious the tigers were, and how effortless it was for him to take out both tigers during the process. At the end of the story, he did not forget to add, “My strength is what it is. The main reason I won is because of the powerful poison of my Genesis Bane God Spear.”

The whole storytelling was at least the length equivalent of an 800 words essay.

Seeing the surrounding masses' surprised expression and Deng Yuan's gloomy expression, he felt that his sales pitch was very successful.

"Therefore, please feel assured and buy my poison powder."

Yue Qiang's iron rod might look unremarkable, but it was in fact pretty peculiar in many ways. The layer of black charcoal on the iron rod could not be scraped clean no matter how hard one tries, and after the weapon had merged with the doctor Ming Que's Goldmaker Pill this black color now had some gray to it. However, this characteristic still remained.

Very soon, he had sold plenty of poison powder and earned a couple hundreds of knife coins.

The people who bought the poison powder left in perfect contentment, and the surrounding crowd gradually dissipated over time.

Deng Yuan was still standing at a distance, and his face – so dirty that it was gray, undernourished and perverted-looking – had blushed into a dark red color. Suddenly, he walked over while holding a large amount of money,

"Young sir Yue, I, Deng Yuan am a man who can accept his defeat! However, I only have about 2000 knife coins with me right now, and I am unable to gather the full sum at the moment..."

“There is no need to act this way, brother Deng.”

Yue Qiang walked to his side, and seeing that there was no one around to hear them, typed to Deng Yuan and said, “I am ashamed. Although you and I are here both to earn dirty money, I do in fact feel pretty bad to rob your business like this. It is just that I am seriously in need of money right now, and if you look behind me you will notice that my girl did not even have clothes to wear. This is why I have no choice but to employ such an unwise plan. Please empathise with us.”

Deng Yuan was actually unable to react for a time when he heard Yue Qiang’s words. It was only after a while had passed when he finally said, “What I earn may be dirty money, but there is nothing more important to a merchant than a promise! Since I made a bet, then I must be held responsible for it! Please wait for a moment, my brother Deng Fang still has some knife coins with him…”

“No need, no need.” Yue Qiang took the 2000 knife coins off Deng Yuan’s hands without any hesitation before turning him down gracefully, “No one has an easy time in this trade. We shall part here then.”

Once he finished typing, he took Yin with him, turned around and left just like that, leaving behind Deng Yuan with a complicated look on his face.

There was a reason behind Yue Qiang’s refusal of the additional 2000 knife coins. The main reason he did it was to show the other party goodwill. While his actions might not necessarily bring forth immediate benefits, it could turn out to be something during

future activities. As the saying goes, don't burn your bridges since you'll never know when you'll need them, and in this infinitely realistic world, there was no harm in being as careful as possible.

Moreover, he was no longer lacking in money right now. He had won 2000 knife coins from the bet, earned almost 1000 from selling the poison powder, and a 1000 knife coin quest reward which he didn't know where to conclude and receive just yet. No matter how he looked at it, he was now a well off person with 4000 knife coins with him, so he might as well earn 2000 knife coins less in exchange for a favor.

While pulling Yin with him, Yue Qiang hurriedly walked towards the front. He was very interested in that eloquent scholar earlier since he had the 'Memory Unlock Rate' that he was curious about.

While following behind Yue Qiang, Yin suddenly said, "Do you know what you did was very immoral?"

"Hmm?"

"I am talking about the way you treated Deng Yuan just now." Yin explained, "What you did was like... you went on a road to rob someone, and not only you robbed every coin off his body, you wanted to rob his underwear as well. Then, when the victim had taken off his underwear and handed it to you, you said, 'I am a robber with standards, so put your underwear back on and leave'... Do you really think the victim is going to feel grateful to you for doing this? That Deng Yuan guy's feelings are probably what I just described."

“It’s still better than running around bare-assed without an underwear, right?” Yue Qiang said.

The duo continued to chase after the scholar.

It was at this moment a small commotion happened on the streets. A number of soldiers clad in armor were searching everywhere for a beautiful woman. Their uniforms were indistinct, and it was impossible to make out the soldiers’ nationality. Whenever they saw a young woman, they would approach them and examine them closely, hence causing quite a bit of confusion on the streets.

Yue Qiang turned around and stared at Yin’s beautiful face for a long while. Then, he wiped a handful of black charcoal from his clothes and wiped it on her face and stuffed all of her long hair into the oversized uniform. Finally, he grabbed a dirty rag off the streets and wrapped it around Yin’s head. After a series of messy cover ups, the girl’s beauty was finally not as obvious as it was before.

“Lower your head when you walk.”

Yin lowered her head and asked softly, “Where are we heading now?”

“Let’s chat with that old man at the market entrance. He may be just a watchman, but he is pretty unusual. I’m sure that you’ve sensed it as well. Also, Deng Fang said that he can appraise the

treasure in my possession, so we definitely have to visit that old man at least once." Yue Qiang said.

"Do we go now?"

"We're not in that much of a hurry. Now that I am rich, let's buy some clothes and equipment and get ourselves ready first. Of course, the most urgent thing right now is to catch up to that scholar." Yue Qiang walked swiftly while typing, "I can see other people's stats, and although the system seems to be gradually blocking off this function, I can still see quite a bit of things. That scholar, you, and the other person I met earlier all had stat 'Memory Unlock Rate'. It is not easy to run into someone with this stat, so we must meet him and ask him about it. Moreover, don't you think the way he speaks is a little... incompatible with this game?"

The duo spoke as they walked, and they soon caught up to that scholar. Yue Qiang patted his shoulder once, and the scholar turned around to find that it was Yue Qiang. He greeted him, "So it is the young sir Yue who had killed the tiger. What enlightenment has you come to shed, young sir?"

Yue Qiang pressed the backspace button. He suddenly wasn't sure what to say.

He couldn't ask directly if the scholar had lost his memory, could he?

After thinking for a moment, he ultimately decided to ask the less

significant questions first, “The reason I stopped you, brother, is to check something with you briefly. Do you know where I can receive the reward for this tiger killing public notice?”

“Ah, so you want to receive a reward. You should seek out the old man at the market entrance.”

Chapter 60: The Scholar, Hui Shi

The market's old man sure had some long arms alright, having the responsibilities of guarding the door, appraising items and issuing quest rewards...

Right now, the streets were still pretty chaotic, and Yue Qiang invited the scholar into a shop to drink some tea. When he entered through the door, they just happened to run into a number of armor-clad soldiers who were searching for beautiful women coming out of the store.

The soldiers saw that both Yue Qiang and the scholar were males, and they were followed by a woman behind them. The woman's head was lowered, and her eyes were shut. Her face was dirty and unclear, and her clothes were extremely filthy and ragged. So they let the trio in without troubling them.

Once inside the tea house, the scholar sipped his tea and asked, "Young sir Yue must have something to inquire of me?"

"That is correct. I would like to know... I would like to know if you sold out on your 'Quotes of The Ancient Sage'?" Yue Qiang was still speaking circuitously.

Seeing that he had a new buyer, the scholar immediately turned spirited, "That is correct. The book's original price is 500 knife coins, but it is now only 198 knife coins! It is only 198 knife coins, and you absolutely deserve it! If you can't buy it with 198 knife coins..."

Yue Qiang cut him off, clicked open the trading system and tossed 500 knife coins to the scholar right away.

“Here’s 500 knife coins. I’ll be purchasing this book.”

When the scholar saw this, he immediately beamed with joy, “Young sir Yue is a man of traditional etiquette and heroic chivalry. You are truly the model to our people.”

The preliminary work should be enough now. The reason Yue Qiang had acted in such a roundabout fashion and gave out so much money for free was simply to increase the fellow’s favorability towards him.

“I am here to consult you on a certain matter, my brother. I wonder… I wonder if you’ve been feeling as if there is something you cannot remember?”

Finally, Yue Qiang asked the critical question he wanted to know. He had a premonition. If he could completely unlock the mysteries behind this Memory Unlock Rate, then he would be able to uncover the truth behind this game!

He waited quietly for the scholar’s answer after he finished typing the line.

Contrary to his expectations, the scholar did not hesitate at all and say, “Yeah, I have.”

“Other than the things that had happened recently, I couldn’t remember almost everything from the past except for a feeling of great pain. I can only remember that my past life was extremely painful. Perhaps that is exactly why I chose to forget about it.”

Extreme pain? Choosing to forget one’s past because of extreme pain? While considering his words and putting it together with the information he had collected in the past, Yue Qiang suddenly recalled the this fellow’s Memory Unlock Rate was at 2%. It was a number far better than Yin’s 0%, which indicated that she had forgotten everything. And so he asked again,

“But you must be able to recall something from the past. Maybe something like fragments of your past life?”

“I do remember some fragments, but the one I remember the clearest was still some ad messages. It would seem that I was a merchant in the past. I may not quite understand what these phrases mean even though I say them frequently, but they do come out of my mouth smoothly.” The scholar grinned, “And they are useful, aren’t there? You, at least, spent 500 knife coins to buy my book.”

Yue Qiang was unwilling to give up just yet. He was still thinking of squeezing more information out of the scholar, “So, what life fragments exactly could you recall?”

The scholar frowned, and slowly he began to wear an expression of recollection on his face. However, the more he reminiscent, the

more sorrowful he looked. In the end, not only did his expression change, his back bent and his shoulders pulled unto himself, gradually curling into a ball. His eyebrows were tightly locked against each other. At first, he pressed his fingers painfully against his temple, and in the next instant began pounding his own head heavily with his fist.

He used quite a bit of strength, and there was a series of pounding ‘Dong! Dong! Dong’ noise every time his fist connected to his head.

Yue Qiang never thought that a mere recollection could inflict so much pain to an optimistic and cheerful-looking man who was just cracking a joke a moment ago! The scholar’s transformation from joy to pain was so swift that he nearly had no time to react at all.

When the scholar raised his head once more, his eyes were swollen as if he was holding back tears, “Don’t let me remember them anymore, that… Cough cough… cough cough…”

He abruptly began to cough intensely before spitting out a huge clot of phlegm. Then, he drained all the tea before him before he finally and gradually regained his cool.

“Sorry, I truly do not mean to bring up the pains of your past.”

The scholar waved his hands, “I did not in fact recall anything specific. It’s just that everytime I think about the past, I would feel a terrible and inexplicable pain that penetrates deep into my bones. Before I could recall anything at all, I already feel so unwell

that I could die.”

“It is no bother. I have caused you trouble, my brother.” Yue Qiang was helpless. It would seem that he had come to a temporary dead end. Suddenly, he recalled that he still had a system function that he could use, “You and I seem to be kindred spirits, brother. Why don’t we become sworn bro… become friends?”

The scholar said, “Young sir Yue is a tiger killing brave, and I, your little brother very much admires you. We shall swear an oath and become swo… become friends.”

Yue Qiang added the scholar’s name into his friend list. His name was called Hui Shi.

After Hui Shi bid Yue Qiang and Yin goodbye, he had basically regained his calm. Before he left, he said to Yue Qiang, “I am not sure if it is useful, but I believe that I should tell you this, brother Yue. I was feeling too unwell just now, but now that I’ve recovered, I did remember some things of the past. In the past, I seemed to live in a metallic jungle where there are big and tall houses at every direction tens and hundreds of miles away. The vast buildings could only be described as countless. Moreover, every one of these buildings were built with materials that were like the godly tiger hunting weapon you wield. This scene may last for only a split second in my mind, but it may be the truth, or it may just be an illusion that I experienced in extreme pain.”

“I shall bid you goodbye then.” Hui Shi said.

Countless buildings? Metallic jungles? Wasn't that a modern metropolis? Yue Qiang fell into deep thought.

In that case, was Hui Shi a player then? Then what about Ai Qian? Was he a player as well? And Yin too? But shouldn't a player be like him, sitting in front of a computer and playing through a mouse and keyboard? Also, what's with that extreme pain that he revealed just now?

While he was thinking, Yin suddenly said softly from behind his back, "I have felt the pain Hui Shi has described before. When I first appeared in the cave, I do not remember anything from the past. However, there was an extremely terrible pain in my heart. It is a kind of pain that came from nowhere, and it is so terrible that I felt for a moment that even the decapitated corpses were better off than I am. It is only after some time had passed that this feeling gradually faded."

Hearing Yin's words, Yue Qiang suddenly recalled the first time they met. At the time, the girl of closed eyes had calmly analysed how the situation would turn out had he used her as bait. At the time, he had thought that she was just a girl of some eccentricities, but after seeing how painful the scholar Hui Shi was, to the point he could not wait to crack open his head and die, he finally understood just how amazing Yin was.

"Are you okay now?" He asked somewhat worriedly.

"I'm fine." Yin said calmly, "However, there is something that I need to remind you of."

Yue Qiang noticed the seriousness in her tone, “Tell me.”

“‘Hui Shi’ was a person who once existed in real history. He may not be too famous, but he was recorded in the history books. I just happened to recall him.”

‘Hui Shi was a knowledgeable and eloquent person, and he was a representative of the School of Names. The historical period that he lived in was… the Warring States Period.”

Chapter 61: That Old Man Again

After sending off the scholar Hui Shi, Yue Qiang was ready to discuss with Yin about the peculiar traits of the scholar. After all, they should be able to glean a lot of information from this discussion. However, the situation had changed, and yet another group of soldiers entered the teahouse to capture beautiful women.

This time, it was different from before in that these armor clad soldiers were no longer just setting their sights on beautiful women. In just a moment's time, they had already marched away two unattractive and slightly plump women away.

He took a glance at Yin. The girl behind him had an elegant countenance, and even though her eyes were closed, her head was bowed, and her face was smeared with a couple of lines of black dust, her beauty was still too prominent.

While holding her hand, Yue Qiang sneakily led her out of the back door, "I wonder why these soldiers are searching for women wantonly. At any rate, let's be a bit more careful. I think that spending money on a helmet that can cover the hair and the face completely would be safer."

The duo followed stream of people flowing through the streets, and they quickly found a store that sold equipment and armor.

Yue Qiang briefly browsed through the equipment sold at this shop. There were no weapons, although the variety of armor was more complete. There were leather armors, armguards, belts, long

pants, boots, helmets and so on. A full set of equipment would cost him a thousand knife coins at best.

There was a problem though. None of these equipment gave stats.

They were all gray equipment, and their descriptions were more or less something like this: XXX provides a certain degree of protection to XXX body part. Not only did they not add to stats like Strength or Vitality, even their basic protective functions had turned into a kind of flavor text.

There was an equipment called ‘Shabby Leather Armor’, and its item description was: Light, can increase a small amount of defense and reinforce the protection at the chest and the back area. Can effectively withstand arrow damage.

There was another equipment called ‘Boots’, and its item description was: Can reduce the fatigue of long travel and stamina exhaustion. There was also a line of note that stated: Please choose a pair of boots that fits the size of your feet, or it will increase your fatigue instead.

The more Yue Qiang read, the more cringe he felt.

After browsing through all the items briefly, Yue Qiang asked the boss of this armor shop, “Don’t you have any better equipment to sell?”

Mentally speaking, especially from a gamer's mindset, he would rather spend 2000 knife coins to buy a single equipment that could be used for a very long time, than a full set of very shabby equipment that cost only 1000 knife coins.

"Customer, what exactly do you mean by better equipment?"

"Of course I mean those green and blue and... er, I mean those equipment of more excellent handicraft that enables a person to move their body freely." Yue Qiang attempted to use a way of speech that was more suited for this era, "Mm, the price is negotiable."

In MMOs and Chinese-made games, equipment rarity and rank is usually classified by color: Gray (Common), Green (Normal), Blue (Rare), Purple (Epic), Orange (Legendary).

He mainly wanted to check out of the game had any equipment that added to one's stats at all. If there was, it was absolutely worth getting for a few thousand knife coins even if it was just a point or two.

In most games, money was almost always the most worthless item. On the other hand, combat prowess was the true root of it all.

"Customer, I do understand what you mean. However, my stall is small, and the equipment you wish for, I do not have. And not only do I not have these equipment, you will not be able to buy them in this market, or even the blacksmith stores of every trading zone in the entire Zhao and Yan borders either."

Not available, huh? Yue Qiang was not surprised. On the contrary, he was now even more attentive than before. Since the small trader had said that he did not have them, then there must be some other place that they could be bought.

“May I know where I can buy these types of equipment and armor then?”

“You are lucky, I suppose. There is just one person in this place who sells the armor that you speak off. Watch my hand gesture, and follow this path.” The small trader answered him while pointing, “Turn a corner at the end turn left turn right go to the end and turn a corner again…”

“Slowly, slowly! How do I go again?”

“Customer, it’s fine if you do not remember. How did you enter the market just now?”

“From the entrance.”

“Then you simply need to return to said entrance.” The small trader said, “When you reach the entrance, find an old man holding a folding fan and iron balls. You will be able to buy from him the equipment you ask for.”

That old man again, huh?

He sure has a hand in everything…

“I’d like to add one more thing.” The small trader said again, “The things he sell are very expensive, and he does not accept knife coins.”

In the end, Yue Qiang bought a helmet that could cover one’s face, and a broad leather armor for Yin to put on. When the girl’s face and and body was completely covered up, she finally did not look much like a female any longer.

They returned to the entrance after making many turns through the market. The old man who accepted his 100 knife coins payment was still laying on the rocking chair, holding in one hand two iron balls and in the other a folding fan. The iron balls he kept turning in his hands, and the folding fan he fanned slowly as a leisurely aura assaulted Yue Qiang’s senses.

Yue Qiang had Yin stand behind him before he walked forwards alone and greeted politely, “Good day, senior.”

All the clues indicated that this old watchman was the true final boss of Green Cow Village Market, which was why Yue Qiang’s mannerism was exceptionally respectful.

The old man smiled at the duo, his gaze lingering a bit longer on the girl behind Yue Qiang. After examining them for a while, the old man said four words,

“You passed the line.”

Yue Qiang was confused.

“It costs 100 knife coins to enter the market each time. You have come out, but you will definitely be going in again later, so I’ll still have to take 100 knife coins as admission fee from you.” The old man said, “Same rule. I’ll take only 68 knife coins from you.”

This final boss is pretty interesting, I see.

Yue Qiang examined the old man from top to bottom once more. In every aspect, the old man fitted very well the image of a master hiding among the commoners. His beard was snow white, and his face was filled with wrinkles. A kind smile appeared often on his face, and from time to time, he would secretly glance at the beautiful girl behind him like an old pervert. No matter how you looked at it, he was the perfect image of a top class master having retired to the common world.

After a moment’s hesitation, Yue Qiang ultimately paid 68 knife coins obediently.

“This young one has some questions to ask his elder.” Yue Qiang obediently paid his respects the traditional way, and changed his way of greeting into an ‘elder’.

“What do you want to know?”

Quite a lot actually. After some thought, Yue Qiang decided to take out the Ring of Earth first from his backpack. This item was absolutely one of, if not the most mysterious item of them all, and it wasn't an item that needed to be appraised, but 'explained'.

From the village elder Chen Zi Han, Yue Qiang learned that this item could enable a normal person to acquire a basic level Heart Skill. A Heart Skill was a conundrum on its own, and the origin of this Ring of Earth was pretty mysterious to begin with. He especially wanted to know if this awesome-looking old watchman of the market could tell him anything about it.

"Please assist me in appraising this bracelet, elder."

Yue Qiang played a little trick and did not mention the name 'Ring of Earth' directly. Instead, he described it vaguely as a bracelet basing off its shape to see how the old man would react to it. In other words, he wanted to see if this old man was the real thing.

"My lad, this is no bracelet." The old man continued to say smilingly, "As for its function..."

The old watchman fetched over a green cow from nowhere, before clipping the ring right onto its nose.

Pak!

"It's just a nose ring."

Chapter 62: Progress Point Trading System

The sound the Ring of Earth made when it was clipped onto the cow's nose was unusually fitting. It was as if the ring was supposed to be clipped on the cow's nose to begin with. The green cow originally appeared anxious and irritated, but after it was clipped with the nose ring, it immediately turned obedient. It glanced once at Yue Qiang, and there was fury inside it.

There was no mistake. Yue Qiang could clearly feel the cow's current emotions right now.

Holy cow, this is definitely no ordinary cow.

He immediately recalled the story of the Ring of Earth the village elder Chen Zi Han had told him. There was the young Chen Zi Han, a green cow and a shepherd boy in the story.

Chen Zi Han was now an old man, but this watchman was not young either.

Could this one man and one cow be the one who had indirectly founded Yue Village?

After a momentary blank, he finally said, "May I know if you are..."

"Do not ask questions easily, for you have to pay for their answers." The old watchman said smilingly.

Yue Qiang directly took out the remaining 2000 knife coins from his pockets and pushed all of them to the front. Right now his brain was completely filled with questions, and he just could not hold himself back at all, “I still have a lot of knife coins on me right now. May I know what kind of payment do you accept for questions?”

“I don’t take knife coins.” The old man said.

“You don’t?”

“What I accept as payment, most people do not have.” The old watchman said smilingly, “But I see that you do have them, and quite a lot too. Let’s see. You have… 58 of them in total. It’s quite a lot already. If you are just looking to ask questions, there is plenty that you can ask.”

58? Yue Qiang felt that this number was a little familiar, and he opened his item window to give it a glance. Then, he realised that it was the number of the Progress Points he owned!

It was the Progress Points he had no idea what to do with.

It was the Progress Point where he had a lot initially, but gained very little from hunting mobs.

It was the Progress Point where he used 50 of them to exchange for a skillbook.

Yue Qiang said, “Do I need to use Progress Points to ask questions?”

“Progress Points? This is a good name. It is very fitting. That’s right, you do need to pay Progress Points to ask questions.” The old man said, “There is one thing I have to remind you. Progress Points can be used for other things as well, so you should consider carefully before deciding how you should use it.”

Once the old watchman finished saying this, a menu bar appeared besides his body. Yue Qiang opened the menu impatiently, and when he read it closely, he was immediately shocked.

The menu bar was incredibly complicated. There were 11 main options in total, and most of these options could be further expanded. After browsing through it briefly, he discovered that it contained nearly all of the information he wished to know.

Progress Point Trading System:

1) Information

2) Freely Distributed Stat Points

3) Stat Attributes

4) Skills

5) Strengthening Type Equipment

6) Unknown Items

7) Books

8) Designs

9) World Trends

?? : ??

?? : ??

Yue Qiang watched the nine main options and the two question-marked options for a very, very long time.

Nearly every option in this list was what he hungered for!

Take the second option, Freely Distributed Stat Points for example. The reason he spent so much time experimenting with all sorts of possibilities was to complete the hidden quests in the game and obtain that measly one or two point of freely distributed stat points.

Even better was the Stat Attributes option, which was a system that he had only ever seen inside this game. Excluding the rest, there was no doubt that his newly acquired ‘Cockroach’ stat alone had saved his life.

Skills spoke for themselves. He hadn’t met even a single skill trainer up to this point, and every skill he currently had was learned from the real world.

Next was the line ‘Strengthening Type Equipment’. It was most likely pointing at the excellent equipment that could vastly

strengthen one's physique which he desperately needed right now.

As for books, books were most definitely an important content within this game. The several times where he managed to increase his strength were realised through books, and his potential in the future could only be realised through the collection of books as well.

As for Unknown Objects, Designs, World Trends and the two question-marked options, he wasn't sure what they were at the moment. But judging from how important the first few options were, they could scarcely be of little value!

Everything on the above could be exchanged with Progress Points!

Everything!

If he had enough progress points to exchange everything in these options, then wouldn't he be able to do whatever he wanted in this world?

Yue Qiang clicked open the second option 'Freely Distributed Stat Points' tentatively, and found that one freely distributed stat point would take 15 Progress Points to exchange. Right now he had two freely distributed stat points.

Yue Qiang could never have imagined that something as precious as freely distributed stat points could be exchanged freely at this

place.

He then clicked the third option, ‘Stat Attribute’.

There were plenty of useful stat attributes such as Tactics, Intelligence, Agility, Accuracy and so on. He even saw the stat attribute he currently owned, ‘Cockroach’. Most of these stats were expensive items that could only be exchanged with at least 100 Progress Points, and rare stats were even more expensive. For example, his ‘Cockroach’ would’ve cost 200 Progress Points to exchange! In this case, it would seem that he had profited big time by exchanging a skillbook with the stat for only 50 Progress Points.

Next was the Skill option. The categories in the Skill option were many and varied, and he nearly couldn’t finished reading them all in such a short time. Yue Qiang kept scrolling through the list with his mouse, and yet it took him a long while before he finally finished going through all of them. The amount of skills in this list was far bigger that he imagined.

Some skills were very cheap, and some were very expensive.

With his remaining 58 Skill Points, it was possible for him to purchase some pretty good skills.

A lot of the skills required Mana to use, and the ratio of the rest were more evenly distributed. Among them, there were Stamina, Rage, Inner Energy and even Life Energy. Yue Qiang had even discovered some extremely exotic Gauge names such as ‘Corpse Aura’, ‘Magnetism’, and ‘Machine Points’. These were gauges that

were almost never seen in other games, and the skills they commanded were just as weird.

Since there were just too many skills, Yue Qiang was currently in a completely confused state. After calming himself down for a little, he ultimately decided to exchange the skills he could use with his current Gauges.

Since Yue Qiang's close combat ability was pretty strong right now, and he had a female companion who seemed to be a hybrid of the strongest and weakest abilities, he was inclined to pick a supportive skill. Of course, there was no need to rush through the trade right now. He had all the time in the world to consider things slowly.

Just as Yue Qiang was about to click the next option, 'Strengthening Type Equipment', the old watchman spoke.

"It will probably take a very long time if you wish to finish reading all of the options seriously. What I would suggest you is to do whatever that's important right now and confirm the situation that you'd be facing in the future. Then you can come to me again and exchange what you need with the Progress Points. I believe this is the more logical choice."

Hearing his words, Yue Qiang slowly recovered from the initial shock when he first saw the menu bar.

It was as he said. Although he did not know how he acquired so many initial Progress Points, judging from the single digits he got

from killing that tiger, it must be ridiculously difficult to obtain them. Therefore, he absolutely must not waste them carelessly.

In that case, planning what he should exchange in accordance to what would happen in the future in the main quest became very important.

As for his current main quest...

Yue Qiang took out the long and thick broken tiger tail and passed it to the old watchman, “I have a public notice, and it says here that I can exchange 1000 knife coins and an equipment for killing the tiger?”

The old watchman accepted the broken tail and casually fed it to the green cow, and it actually ate it raw. The bloody scene surprised Yue Qiang to no end.

“It’s not a problem if you give me the tiger tail, but I will not be the one who give you the knife coins and equipment.” The old watchman said.

“Why’s that?”

“Because I’m not the one who put up that notice.”

Just as he was about to ask where he could find the person who put up this public notice, the old watchman stretched a hand and pointed.

Yue Qiang turned his view, and saw that a whole group of soldiers had arrived behind him. These soldiers were all clad in armor and of unknown nationality. They were exactly the group of people who were looking everywhere for a beautiful girl just now. The leader of the soldiers came forward – first saluting the old watchman with polite respect – before saying to Yue Qiang, “Young sir Yue, our Lord Ai has requested a meeting with you. He says that there is something important that he needs to discuss with you.”

Although the leader of the soldier was speaking to him, his eyes never strayed away from Yin behind his back.

It would appear that these armor clad soldiers had planned from the beginning to search for Yin, so it would be rather impossible to avoid them. Yue Qiang made a rough estimation and thought that he might be able to escape with Yin if he kept Run LVL 2 on. After all, these people could not possibly be faster than the tiger.

He glanced back at the old watchman again. The old man had returned to his rocking seat and continued to bake himself under the sun. He teased the green cow from time to time and appeared to be incredibly carefree and content.

It should be safe…

The soldier had said that it was ‘Lord Ai’ who invited them. There weren’t many people with the surname Ai to begin with, and he only knew one such person in this game, and that’s Ai Qian

from the Zhao State army camp.

Although this interesting trader had always been protected by many soldiers, and they were supposed to be on opposite sides of two factions, in reality there was no grudge between the two of them. Plus, after going through so many things, he had plenty of questions that he wished to ask the trader right now, and this was without mentioning that he was a person with the attribute ‘Memory Unlock Rate’.

“In that case, we will accompany you to meet him.” Yue Qiang said.

He brought Yin with him and left together with the armor clad soldiers.

At the same time he answered them, a new system message appeared:

> The first stage of the quest ‘Search and Investigate’ is complete!
>
> Quest Background: You have talked with various people in Green Cow Market and acquired sufficient information. Moreover, you have reconnected with the trader Ai Qian as well.
>
> Quest Objective: Proceed with the investigation of the great

change behind the School of Mo's Great Camp.

Quest Reward: Requirement has not been met yet.

The second stage of the quest 'Search and Investigate' has been activated!

Chapter 63: What Is The Corpse's Surname?

While following the armor clad soldiers, Yue Qiang and Yin discussed their current situation through whisper.

"So you received a new notification about the main quest?"

"Yeah, it notified be that the first stage of 'Search and Investigate' is complete. We've accumulated enough information and we've activated the second stage of the quest." Yue Qiang said.

"What else did it say?"

"It says that I've reconnected with the trader Ai Qian. Er, this Ai Qian is the one I told you before, the one who also has a Memory Unlock Rate." Yue Qiang answered.

Yin pondered for a moment before asking, "The 'Request For Help' quest you completed earlier when you came to School of Mo's Great Camp was issued by Ai Qian, correct?"

"No, Ai Qian seems incapable of issuing quests. However, it was thanks to him that I managed to escape from Yue Village."

"Then before you came out, did you know that the School of Mo's Great Camp is actually a big cave, and that it was abandoned for such a long time that it became a tiger's den?"

“No.”

Yin pondered for yet another moment before she told him her analysis, “In that case, we probably overlooked something when we’re at School of Mo’s Great Camp. After all, the place was titled a ‘Great Camp’. Even if it had been abandoned, it should not be this small. If I am not mistaken, then the caves and passages we saw might very well just be the outer layer of the School of Mo’s Great Camp.”

“That is only the outer layer?”

Yin said, “I checked when I walked out of the cave. The top of the cave entrance was engraved with the words, ‘School of Mo’s Great Camp’. So here’s a problem: Why would a mere artificially renovated cave with at most a single passage inside be called a ‘Great Camp’ and not a ‘Cave’? The only explanation to this is that the cave is nothing more than the School of Mo’s Great Camp outer fortification.”

Yue Qiang did have such a question in his mind when he first entered the cave. Now that Yin had officially brought it up, her explanation that it was just an outer fortification did make more sense.

“This can also explain why the main quest kept revolving around the School of Mo’s Great Camp. You should know that in the ancient times, the School of Mo is not just a school of learning.”

“Oh?” Yue Qiang was immediately grew somewhat interested in

the topic. His understanding of the School of Mo was not deep, and a portion of his limited knowledge came from reading in-game backgrounds. He only knew that the School of Mo was very accomplished in terms of wooden devices and constructions, and not much of anything else.

"To begin with, the School of Mo is not a school, but a very tight organisation." Yin explained things simply for Yue Qiang, "Other than the six major States and smaller States during the warring period, the School of Mo can also be seen as an independent and very powerful organisation. You can absolutely view them as China's earliest organised crime syndicate!"

"Organised crime syndicate?" Yue Qiang was now completely surprised by the revelation.

"Unlike other schools, the School of Mo is an organisation with tight management and rules that are criminal in quality. According to historical accounts, the founder of the School of Mo, Mozi is first an extremely powerful martial artist, then a philosopher and scientist. It has clear organisational structure and tight discipline, and each generation's leader has incredibly high prestige. A School of Mo's disciple is hardworking, disciplined, unwavering and patient. They are strong, but their core ideologies of 'impartial care' and 'rejecting aggression' kept them from being an aggressive organization."

"With the School of Mo's strength during the Warring States Period, it would not be difficult for them to construct a town-sized fortification inside the mountain. While it is named 'School of Mo's Great Camp', what's strange is that there are no

corresponding structures to be seen in the place. Not only that, there were no tenements, drinkwares or construction works, and most importantly, no one to be seen anywhere at all. This is obviously highly irregular, so the only possibility left is this." Yin said, "The cave is not a part of the great camp. It is merely an outpost, or a defensive structure. The real School of Mo's Great Camp should be hidden behind an entrance inside the cave that we had not discovered previously."

"Furthermore, I'm guessing that this future quest may very well be for us to go back and discover the true School of Mo's Great Camp." The duo spoke while walking.

Hearing this, Yue Qiang actually grew interested in the School of Mo's martial arts. It would be pretty great if he could learn some martial skill for free in the great camp.

They followed the armored soldiers to a luxurious building, and after walking through the door, they unsurprisingly saw Ai Qian.

From the first moment Yue Qiang saw him, he felt that the trader seemed to become more... on edge than before. The expression on his face could be described with the simple word, 'excited'. Like a pervert who met a beauty, or a miser who robbed a treasure, his entire being was in an incredibly excited state.

Ai Qian carelessly tossed a bag of knife coins on the table beside Yue Qiang. There was also a set of standard issue military equipment on the table.

“This is your reward for killing the tiger.” He rubbed his hands and said excitedly, “Now, are you interested in doing an even bigger venture with me?”

Yue Qiang listened with considerable interest to his words. The fellow himself could not issue a quest, so what Ai Qian was saying right now was probably a quest background of sorts.

“You killed the two evil tigers inside the cave of the School of Mo’s Great Camp and left directly, didn’t you?”

“That’s right.”

“In reality, those tigers are simply guarding the treasures deeper within the great camp.”

Treasures deeper within the great camp? It would seem that Yin’s guess was pretty much spot on. He asked Ai Qian, “How did you know this?”

Ai Qian produced a beast skin secretively and showed it to them. There was an exquisitely drawn drawing on the beast skin, and the drawn drawing was the full body portrait of an incredibly beautiful female corpse. She lay flat inside a coffin with shut eyes, and there were all kinds of treasures that filled her surroundings!

There were gold, silver, ornaments, wine-jars, precious stones and so much more. Every treasure known to man of the most valuable kind were there, laid around her corpse in many circles.

“Do you know what this means?” Ai Qian said a with a tinge of insanity, “This is an entire capital city’s worth of wealth! No, it should be an entire small state’s worth of wealth!”

“I don’t care about anything any longer. I have no intentions of completing the so-called mission or reclaim my lost memories. Everything in the past is too painful, but the present and the future is infinitely beautiful. I only want wealth and women! I want an incalculable wealth that is equivalent to that of an entire country!”

“The woman drawn inside this picture is the School of Mo’s previous generation’s Juzi. She is now dead, and the great camp she stayed in during her previous life became her final resting place. It is only until recently that I received reliable information that the great camp she died in is exactly the one where you killed the tigers! With her death, this great camp now has turned entirely into a tomb!”

The position of a Mohist leader

“So what do you think, young sir Yue, tiger hunting brave. Are you interested to take me there and grab all these riches for ourselves?”

The trader Ai Qian spoke loudly to no one in particular, his excitement completely out of control. Yin listened quietly as she stood at the side, but when Ai Qian brought up the terms ‘mission’, ‘memory’ and ‘painful’, she frowned slightly and appeared to be thinking about something.

Meanwhile, Yue Qiang was looking curiously at the drawing drawn on the beast skin. At first, he didn't really care about the quest too much. After all, no matter how much wealth there was in this world, to him, they were nothing compared to Progress Points. He was simply curious about Ai Qian's behavior and the origin of the beast skin drawing.

But suddenly, his eyes narrowed.

He began to look closely at the beautiful female corpse of the drawing.

The artist of this drawing was very skillful. The female corpse's lines were soft, vivid and realistic. Even in the real world, the woman had tall, firm breasts and a slim waist that was a match of the figure of a fitness coach. If she wasn't sleeping inside a coffin, she could've been mistaken as being asleep.

But Yue Qiang's eyes only narrowed further. He even crept closer to the point where his eyes were about to stick against the monitor, just to get a better look at the female corpse.

Yue Qiang suddenly clicked the backspace button and typed quickly, "I accept this quest."

"That's not like you. Why have you accepted the quest so decisively this time?"

Yue Qiang did not answer him immediately.

The reason he accepted the quest was not for the treasures inside the coffin. It wasn't even for the main quest.

After keeping silent for a moment, he typed out a question, "This previous generation juzi of the School of Mo... What's her surname?"

"Who cares about a dead person's surname? Although, if I remember correctly, her surname is... Luqiu?"

Chapter 64: I Want To Know

Yue Qiang was literally going to blow his top.

From the beginning until now, every main quest felt like there was some conspiracy happening behind the scenes. He retraced his memories once in his mind, and discovered that he had never received any filler quests such as hunting ten wild boars, skinning diseased wolves and making wolf pelts, sending letters and running errands etc. It was as if there was an invisible string that tied every quest together.

It was only when he saw the female corpse's face that he realised that this string did not involve just the main quests, but the fitness coach he met in real life as well.

When Yue Qiang asked for the surname of the last generation's Juzi of the School of Mo, he already guessed that this female corpse had a connection with the fitness coach who taught him his skills.

The reason for that was likeness.

Luqiu Duanyi's appearance was uniquely beautiful, and she had a super recognisable figure to complement that appearance as well. It was very difficult to forget someone like her after the first meeting.

He could not say why, but the picture on the beast skin was extremely realistic and lifelike. It did nothing to conceal the female corpse's beauty at all. Both the female corpse and the fitness coach

was extremely beautiful, but the problem was that they were too much alike.

So here's the question. Were they the same person? Could it be that anyone who died inside the game would escape into reality? Or...

Yue Qiang felt that his brain was getting confused.

He asked Ai Qian, "This surname truly is rare alright. Can you explain it in detail?"

"Luqiu is a surname from Zou State. Zou State had not existed for long, and it was quickly eliminated not longer after it founded itself. That is why this surname is so rarely seen these days. What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Yue Qiang answered casually.

It was now absolutely imperative that he accepts this quest. While it might seem that the mysteries he needed to solve had increased in numbers as the main quests progressed, he had acquired just as many new information as well. With enough information, it was only a matter of time until he deduced the whole picture.

This was just like solving a difficult Sudoku puzzle. At first, one could only fill in the numbers tentatively through calculation and deduction, but once a third or so of the blanks had been filled and

confirmed to be correct, then it was simply a matter of finishing the rest of the blanks smoothly in one go.

Ai Qian continued to speak, “I’ve made ample preparations for this operation. I spent a lot of money and outfitted an entire squad of soldiers with the latest armor, and I paid them enough to deal with all sorts of unexpected circumstances when the need arises. Young sir Yue, you are a tiger hunting brave, and your strength appears to be much improved from the last time I met you, not to mention that you’ve actually been to the Great Camp personally. You are the core strength of the entire operation. For this, I’ve even hired many, many beautiful women from the streets. At first, they were unwilling and reluctant when I initially took them in, but they were quickly subdued by my charm the moment they saw me. Right now, I am feeling both physically and mentally great. We can go right away.”

Yue Qiang glanced once at the disheveled bed behind Ai Qian. It would seem that a certain function of his was greatly improved after consuming all kinds of pills. He shook his head slightly and got ready to depart.

Behind him, Yin who had been quiet all this time suddenly picked up the exquisite beast skin picture from the table and said, “A School of Mo’s disciple is both disciplined and frugal. According to my knowledge, they would not accumulate wealth. If I may venture a question, are you sure this information is correct?”

Ai Qian paid no heed to Yin at first.

Yin’s current clothing was funny and completely out of place,

and she was wearing the kind of helmet that could cover up her face entirely. She wasn't tall either, so she had no presence at all following behind Yue Qiang. But the moment she spoke, Ai Qian's eyes immediately lit up like a pair of light bulbs.

The first reason was because her voice was too pleasant to hear and attractive. The second reason was the sound logic behind her words.

The School of Mo might not be poor, but they were not a particularly rich organisation either. So where did this coffin filled with treasures that could rival a state's wealth come from?

"The information is absolutely authentic, and the location just the same. I can guarantee this." Ai Qian said, "As for the reason, perhaps the School of Mo had always been accumulating wealth in secrecy in preparation for some great movements? Of course this is just my guess, but there is no doubt that there is a treasure hidden inside the School of Mo's Great Camp."

"If you are this sure, then I will refrain from saying any longer. Now, my second question." Yin asked again, "Just why did you wish to obtain this treasure? You are already extremely rich. Obtaining this treasure is at best adding to what you already have in the first place. Moreover, in the process of obtaining this treasure, it is entirely possible that you will be met with the School of Mo's legendary traps and devices. You are a trader. Every choice you make is calculated on the basis of gains and losses. I wish to know the real reason that you would choose to do business at a loss."

Ai Qian was utterly shocked by her words.

At first, he was simply surprised to learn that the person following behind Yue Qiang was a girl. Then, he was surprised to see Yin deducing so much information just from his words alone.

“Alright.” he said, “To tell you the truth, I’m just trying to find some excitement in life.”

Ai Qian circled around the square table once and took a close look at Yin first. Her eyes were the only thing that was exposed outside the helmet, and it was even shut tight. After staring for a while, all he could garner was that her skin was tender, and her eyebrows were picturesque. Then, he circled to the opposite side of the table and said to Yue Qiang,

“Do you remember? I traded you for 50 Progress Points. Now that I think back, I really shouldn’t have used it to unlock my memories. I might as well have exchanged for a few Libido points with the old man at the village.” He shook his head and sighed with a rather regretful look, “It’s a waste; it was all a complete waste. All there’s in the memories were pain, and the more I recall, the more painful I felt. Now it has even developed to the point where it became an actual headache. In that case, I may as well seek out some excitement and do something grand before my memories are completely restored.”

“Really, I just want to find some excitement in life.” he concluded, “Right now, the only thing that could excite me is bigger wealth and prettier women.”

He stretched out a hand and waved away the air in front of him as if he would chase off that painful feeling. He said to Yin, “Speaking of which, I am very curious about you. You are different from those normal people on the streets. In fact, you are rather similar to me. You seem to know a lot of things as well.”

“And you.” Ai Qian arrived in front of Yue Qiang once more and asked as if he was talking to himself, “You seem to be different from all of us. You give me a very strange feeling, and yet I cannot exactly say what it is that’s so strange.”

Yue Qiang did not say anything.

You feel that I’m strange? Well, that may be because that I am just a player.

Of course, he wouldn’t reveal this on his own. After all, while Yin might be able to guess that he was from a world outside the game, it didn’t mean that everybody else could.

“Before we depart, we need to consider carefully what we want to exchange from the village’s old man. So let us meet up at the entrance later.” Then, Yue Qiang led Yin away from the luxurious house.

Along the way, he asked the girl, “Why?”

“What why?”

“Why did you choose to come with me and explore the School of Mo’s Great Camp? You have no reason whatsoever to go.”

“What about you then?” Yin did not answer immediately and countered with a question.

Yue Qiang gave it a moment and answered seriously, “The world I’m in… has undergone an extremely weird transformation. I’m sorry, but I would like to keep it from you a little while longer. Anyway, I found a clue about this transformation from the beast skin picture Ai Qian showed us. I want to know what’s going on, and I want to know how to… solve it.”

He chose his words carefully and gave her his answer. Then he asked again, “So, what about you? You knew that it’s dangerous, and with a head like yours, even if you can’t recall what happened in the past, you should be able to live relatively safe and sound relying on your intellect alone.”

“Just like you, I wish to know.” The girl said seriously.

“It may be very dangerous, and I know that I may become as painful as Hui Shi, or slightly mad like Ai Qian. But I still want to know.”

“I just, want to know.” she said.

Firm determination leaked from her indifferent tone.

Chapter 65: Where Are The Corpses?

There was a lot to exchange from the old watchman.

Take equipment for example. Among them, Yue Qiang saw an extremely famous sword called the ‘Zhanlu Sword’, which was said to be forged by the master artisan Ou Yezi and was of peerless might, capable of piercing all defenses and inflicting wound damage with every hit. The Progress Points needed to exchange it was 500 points.

Although just like before, it did not have any attack power value, the special effect of inflicting wound damage with every hit alone was worth the price.

Since the game had employed a near realism combat system, if an attack by this sword hits a vital spot, then it might well result in an instant kill! An instant kill that ignored HP no less!

Previously, Yue Qiang had used this exact trick to kill a ferocious tiger. If this sword was really as it stated, capable of inflicting wound damage with every strike, then it was definitely more than worth its price.

Other than weapons of extreme power such as this sword, there were also more average weapons such as Bronze Sword and Ring-Sword, and there were all kinds of armors and accessories as well. After viewing for some time, he concluded that his iron rod might be free, ugly, and incomparable to those godlike weapons, but it was still much better than the average ones. One might say that it

was extremely cost effective as well.

So he decided not to change his equipment for the moment.

Then he briefly glanced through skills several times. He immediately saw Yue Maiden's Sword Style at first glance, and the swordplay description was pretty domineering: This swordplay was a war type swordplay which the Yue State's Yue Maiden had learned while staying together with a white gibbon. It was used to kill generals and pierce horses, and was useful no matter what the circumstances. It would take 300 Progress Points to learn it.

Besides that, there were many more skills that existed only in legends. Most of them were extremely expensive, and they normally cost more than 100 Progress Points. God knows how many months or years would it take if he could only farm those Progress Points required from the Zhao Soldiers.

He even found the choice to level up Heart skills! However, Progress Points were not the only requirement to improve them. He needed the item 'Inheritance', and the option would only be available in half a year's time.

Yue Qiang etched the memory into his heart and continued scrolling downwards.

Suddenly, he discovered a very interesting skill.

Hunyuan Jin LVL 1: A fair and moderate skill. Hunyuan Jin

allows the conversion of a particular gauge's points into another gauge. This includes the 'Life' gauge, the 'Rage' gauge, the 'Stamina' gauge and the '???' gauge. The conversion ratio is dependent on the gauge value and skill level. This skill requires the Wisdom attribute with a value of 12 and above. Total Progress Points required is 50 points.

It could neither increase one's stats, nor increase a gauge's max value. At first glance, it was nearly useless, and did not need much Progress Points.

However, Yue Qiang's eyes had lit up upon seeing it.

This skill fitted the current him just nicely.

To begin with, he now had two gauges, the Stamina and the Rage gauge that enabled him to use skills. However, he did not actually have many skills, and all of them depleted the Stamina gauge only. He did not even have a skill that uses his Rage gauge. So although Rage did enhance the effects of his skills, it was a little wasteful. But if he learned this Hunyuan Jin, then he would be able to fully utilise this Rage gauge.

More importantly, with Hunyuan Jin, he would be able to convert all of this gauges into HP!

This was a Healing skill in disguise!

Although he could guess that the conversion ratio of the other

gauges to HP would not be too high, but any skill that could increase one's HP in the battlefield was an absolutely good skill.

If he acquired Hunyuan Jin, then his basic system of skills would almost be complete.

He would have multiple gauges, skill power buffs, healing, and rapid gauge recovery. It could be called a positive cycle where his combat power became 1+1 resulted in far more than just a value of 2.

Alright, let's get 'Hunyuan Jin' then!

Yue Qiang paid out 50 Progress Points.

There was neither a golden flash over his body, nor any kind of protective halos that surrounded his body. Just like when he learned the skill 'Cockroach' from before, there were no special effects whatsoever.

The old watchman left his recliner and walked towards him smilingly. Then, he extended a hand and slapped Yue Qiang's head once!

A system message quickly followed: You have learned the skill Hunyuan Jin LVL 0.

This way of skill learning was extremely odd. Also, why was it level 0?

Yue Qiang then read the message on the screen once more and opened the character screen. He discovered that the skill's technique was LVL 0 and not LVL 1. There were also something like a proficiency level behind the skill, stating that he could only level up this skill through repeated practice or combat experience.

He wasn't too worried about this though. He had accumulated quite a bit of combat experience after the previous few battles. It was just enough to level up Hunyuan Jin to level 1.

As you know, it wasn't easy to learn a skill in this game. Tan Xiong once said that he must train hard if he wishes to increase his strength, and if he somehow did it without harsh training, then he most likely ran into someone from Green Cow Village.

Wasn't this old man a watchman from Green Cow Village?

After casually passing down a skill to Yue Qiang, the old man then handed him a rectangular bamboo piece. The bamboo piece was thin, long and as translucent as jade. There were some patterns etched on the bamboo piece that he did not understand.

System Message: You have acquired the rare item 'Inheritance'.

Inheritance: A bamboo token used to authenticate one's identity. Using the key item 'Inheritance' will grant the player one chance to enter and study in Green Cow Village.

"You've returned this stubborn cow's nose ring, and although it rightfully belonged to me in the first place, I am not without blame for that incident. Now that I've given you an 'Inheritance' from the village, we no longer owe each other from now on." the old man said.

Yue Qiang put the bamboo token with great care into his backpack. When he reconvened with Ai Qian and his ten armored soldiers and then departed towards the School of Mo's Great Camp, he was still thinking about the old man.

The watchman of Green Cow Village Market, he said? He seemed to be nothing more than a trading NPC with an overly comprehensive trading content. But if there was one thing he did not understand, it would be why the system had not provided a more official-looking trading spot. If the NPC's existence was purely for the sake of providing a trading option to the player, then the developers could have put him at the starting village even if they chose not to omit this function from the system overlay, couldn't they?

Perhaps this old man wasn't under the system's jurisdiction then.

If that really was the case, then the fact that the old man could acquire so many equipment, rare attribute and items on his own

meant that his strength must be immeasurable, not to mention that he was nothing more than a watchman. Just how powerful was the village behind him, Green Cow Village?

While pondering these questions, the group of people reentered School of Mo's Great Camp after a long march.

The second they entered the cave, Yue Qiang, walking at the foremost of the group, immediately paused on his feet.

The cave was different from he last remembered.

The time the duo came back and forth the cave did not exceed a day, and when they left, there were at least twenty or so bloodied Zhao Soldiers and female tiger littered around the area. The scene had been ugly to say the least.

But now, the entire cave appeared incredibly empty.

All of the corpses; both human and tiger were completely gone.

The cave was extremely clean.

Not only did the corpse completely vanish, even the dark red blood that flowed everywhere seemed to have grown a lot fainter. The blood traces on the ground was so faint that it was as if the slaughter had not happened yesterday, but ten years ago.

It was as if the corpses had been... burned by some super high temperature flames and evaporated completely.

And this had all happened in just a day.

That was not all. When he went outside the cave again and checked the surroundings closely, he neither saw any corpses nor any marks that indicated that the corpses were dragged away.

Yue Qiang looked at Yin once, and the latter shook her head at him. The same question flashed across their hearts at the same time.

Where are the corpses?

Chapter 66: Isolated

Yue Qiang had a bad feeling about this. The corpses' disappearance was just too unnatural.

This was not a martial-based world. Most of the skills, powers, equipment and many other factors in this world could barely be explained through science if they were converted into the real world.

However, the complete disposal of a full floor of corpses where even the bloodstains were evaporated to thin air would be a very difficult phenomenon to explain.

Unless... the person who did this owned a power that surpassed a normal human's limits.

After taking everything into account, the only person who had reached such a level was the Zhao Army General, Zhao Yan. The smiling old watchman who was responsible for Progress Point trading also gave off a feeling of unfathomable depths, so he might be another person of extraordinary power as well.

However, it would seem that there was now a third person with powers that exceeded the human limits.

From what he already knew, it would seem that such people were considered to have surpassed human limits only because they had a particular attribute that had exceeded 40 points. On the whole, they weren't actually too powerful. However, Yue Qiang knew

very well that their strength lay on the fact that their limits were completely unknown and indecipherable. It was possible for him to deduce from the interim cutscene that the general Zhao Yan must have over 40 points of Strength. But what was the exact number of his Strength? It could 40 or 50 points... or it could be 100 or even 200 points!

How powerful was 200 points of Strength? Yue Qiang could not imagine it at all. If 15 Progress Points could be used to exchange for a single freely distributed stat point, then 3000 Progress Points would be needed to increase a particular attribute to 200 points.

What was 3000 Progress Points? If he counted it per normal soldier, then he would have to rack up a body count of thirty thousand before he could accumulate such a number. This was akin to sending a single man to fight against a supersized army!

Of course, Progress Points might not be the only way to increase one's stats, and the comparison of thirty thousand versus one man was a little exaggerated, but it also reflected just how rare it was to run into a person with such strength.

A person like this could probably wave a hand casually and annihilate all of the corpses. If he ran into someone like this... no, if this person went up against him on purpose or worse, tried to kill him, then there was no way that he would survive at all.

Yue Qiang closed his eyes and considered this for a moment. In the end, he opened his eyes and decided to give it a shot.

High risks equalled high reward. The same goes with high difficulty.

If the person who destroyed these corpses wanted to be his enemy, then he would be already dead. Since he was still alive, it meant that this person might have destroyed the corpses for other reasons. Therefore, Yue Qiang ultimately decided to continue with the expedition.

It was at this moment Ai Qian said, “According to the information I got and the analysis I made along the road, this place is definitely the entrance of the School of Mo’s Great Camp. There is also no doubt that the coffin, the riches inside the coffin and the female corpse is here. If you have searched through the small room at the end of the path carefully, then you might have discovered the path to the true great camp for real.”

Ai Qian ordered four of his soldiers to guard at front hall of the cave before leading the remaining six into the passage with Yue Qiang and Yin.

As expected, the tiger’s corpse had vanished as well.

The bloodstains on the floor had disappeared as if a janitor had washed them just like the front hall of the cave. Without a closer examination, it was almost impossible to identify the dark red bloodstains mingled with the soil and rock bits that proved that there was the body of a huge tiger here yesterday.

They hadn’t walked for long when the armored soldier scouting

at the front reported,

"Lord Ai, there is only a small room at the front with no other exits. We have searched through the small room carefully and discovered an entrance at the bottom of the wooden table at the center of the room. Please come and have a look, Lord Ai."

I thought it would be something like this.

Yue Qiang glanced once at Yin before hurrying forwards into the small room.

The wooden table that was once used to hold the S/L modules at the center of the room had already been overturned to reveal a deep, dark hole at the bottom. There were some dug soil and stones at the surroundings.

Looking from outside the hole, a ladder could be seen stretching all the way towards the bottom. The inside of the hole was pitch black, and it was impossible to see what was down at the bottom.

Yue Qiang turned around and glanced once at Yin, "Can you sense what's down there?"

Yin's eyes were closed the entire time, but she had the Eye of Truth and was able to see what's before her. Yue Qiang wasn't sure how the skill worked, which was why he asked Yin about it.

"I can't." After a momentary pause, she answered, "There seems

to be a… strange energy that's preventing me from doing so."

Without a second choice, they could only send someone down directly to scout out the area.

He wondered what lay at the bottom of this hole. Would it be the true School of Mo's Great Camp, or a deathly still School of Mo's necropolis that awaited them at the end of the tunnel?

When the three armored soldiers had descended, they kept at a certain distance from each other. Neither too far nor too close, it was just the right amount of distance where they could reinforce one another or cry for help if something unexpected were to occur.

Yue Qiang listened to the three soldiers' footsteps from above the hole. There were no signs of disorder thus far.

"We have reached the end of the tunnel. There is a passage up front."

"It's very dark. We can't see anything in front of the passage. Up there, mind lending us a few torches and ropes?"

Ai Qian agreed. He looked at a soldier and motioned for him to take three torches and head down. Suddenly, he looked at another soldier and said, "Wait. You, yes, you go down with him as well. Both of you will tie a rope to your waists and stray not too far apart from each other. You'll be able to help each other and it'll be safer."

The two soldiers went down the hole as well.

The five soldiers at the bottom – three at the front and two at the back – continued to walk deeper into the passage. From time to time, the reports ‘clear’ and ‘all good’ would ring from the bottom.

After sending a total of five soldiers to scout the path ahead with great caution, Yue Qiang, Ai Qian and Yin finally reached the bottom of the hole through the vertical ladder as well. For some reason, Yue Qiang kept feeling that something was wrong.

They had two groups of people scouting at the front, and they could also see the faint light of the torches from the corner of the passage. Still, he couldn’t help but feel that something was wrong.

Perhaps it was exactly because that they were at such a place that ‘normal’ was the greatest abnormality of them all?

Right now, Yue Qiang, Ai Qian and Yin were right beneath the entrance, and just ahead of them were the two soldiers on standby. Further ahead around the corner were the three soldiers and the reflected light of the torch.

Suddenly, the light vanished.

The reporting voices of the three soldiers also came to a spontaneous end as the sounds of three armors hitting the ground, ‘thump, thump, thump’ rang from around the corner. It was

incredibly jarring in this quiet environment.

The three soldiers at the front had lost all signs of activity in an instant.

Ai Qian felt a little unwell under the pressure and tension of the atmosphere. He yelled loudly, “You three at the front, report!”

A long time passed, but there was no answer.

Yue Qiang could see that Ai Qian’s face had turned a little ugly from the torch’s light.

They had lost three people in an instant without a sound, and the worst thing was that they had no idea how they died. There were neither sounds of combat nor cries of help. The three soldiers had vanished just like that.

The two soldiers with ropes tied around them looked a little scared, as one of them said, “Lord Ai, do you think we should... go back?”

Ai Qian hesitated for a moment before saying, “Let’s do it this way. You, keep the rope with you and walk to the front. While you scout ahead, the four of us will hold the rope and walk right behind you. But don’t go too deep once you’ve passed the corner, and stop the second you see the three soldiers at the front. At the least, we must know how they are doing right now... when we go back, I’ll increase your reward fivefold!”

The soldier did not want to obey the command initially, but when he heard that his reward would be quintupled, he ultimately steeled himself, clutched the rope and walked to the front.

And so the group of four followed followed behind the soldier and watched him turning around the corner and continuing forwards. From time to time, he would report his current condition.

When Yue Qiang and the others turned around the corner as well, they immediately saw an eerie sight.

The soldier ahead was saying, “All clear. Wait, I see them…”

Abruptly, his body crumpled without warning before he could finish his sentence. A loud thump resounded throughout the passage ceaselessly.

Yue Qiang felt every hair stand up on his body. They had lost someone again without knowing why at all. Just like before, there were no signs of any attacks whatsoever. It was almost as if the soldiers grew tired and fell asleep on the ground!

The torch at the front was extinguished as the soldier fell on the ground. The passage was now pitch black, and nothing could be seen.

It was at this moment rapid footsteps resounded from behind

their backs!

Yue Qiang abruptly swiveled the camera around and prepared himself for battle. He would not be caught off guard the stuff of nightmares were to come after them. However, what he saw was no nightmarish monster.

The person who ran hurriedly towards them was the soldier they left inside the room above them. Just like the four soldiers in the main hall, The soldier was left there so he could reinforce them if anything unexpected occurred. However, the soldier had climbed down the vertical stairs, turned around the corner and reached them in a fluster.

“Lord Ai, something terrible happened, something terrible happened...” The soldier said while catching his breath, “The passage outside, that is the one that’s connected to the front hall, it’s suddenly closed off!”

The passage that connected to the front hall was the passage Yin first discovered at the very beginning.

Once that passage was closed, it meant that they could go nowhere but forwards!

Just when they thought that there would no longer be any surprises, they suddenly lost four soldiers and had their retreat path cut off as well!

The tension in Yue Qiang's heart had reached its absolute maximum, and right now he felt like a taut string that would snap given just another push. But before they could digest the shock something strange happened yet again!

The armored soldier who rushed over to report the situation, and the armored soldier who was holding the end of the rope suddenly crashed at the same time!

The trajectory of their fall was incredibly clear beneath the torch's light. One second the soldier was still reporting the situation, and the next his knees suddenly gave out as he collapsed on the floor. The other soldier at the end of the group was still gripping the rope tightly when he collapsed onto the ground.

The last two soldiers had died without any warning just like the first four soldiers before them.

Yue Qiang saw everything as clear as day, and yet he could not see any trace of an attack at all.

In just a few minutes' time, Yue Qiang, Ai Qian and Yin were the only ones left within the passage.

They were completely isolated.

Chapter 67: Intelligence (1)

A single torch was all that's left burning in the passage.

The flame flickered and swayed as if it would extinguish at any moment.

Even now, the noise of the two armored soldiers falling to the ground was still resonating in the passage. They wore heavy metal armors and full protection helmets. Their equipment was heavy, and the speed at which they fell on the ground was so quick that it was as if an invisible force had pulled them towards the ground. An incredibly loud and ear-piercing noise was generated when the heavy armor crashed against the soil and stone, resounding ceaselessly within the narrow and deathly still environment.

They did not know how the first three armored soldiers died. But Yue Qiang was staring dead eyed at the last two armored soldiers when they died, and still he couldn't figure out the reason behind their deaths at all.

The last armored soldier who came in to notify them about the situation was especially eye-catching. One second he was reporting to them, and the next his eyes suddenly became flat and lifeless before he dropped directly on the ground and passed away. It was almost as if his HP were completely drained in an instant.

Yue Qiang dared say that if health bars could still be displayed, then the armored soldier's full health bar must have turned gray dark in an instant!

If they had been attacked by some powerful, invincible enemy then it was at least a known factor. However, he could not find any signs of such an attack at all.

Right now, Yue Qiang was still relatively calm, but Ai Qian had already lost control of his composure.

Through the fire's reflection, he could see that the trader's face had turned ashen. His fingers were shaking uncontrollably in fear. Suddenly, Ai Qian ran beside a fallen armored soldier, raised his leg and kicked his body with everything he got. The soldier's body did not move even a millimeter, but Ai Qian was grabbing his foot in abject pain and hopping all over the place like a rabbit.

This should've been an extremely comedic scene, but somehow Yue Qiang could not find it in himself to laugh.

"Relax, I haven't gone crazy. I know very well what I'm doing." After hopping around for a little, Ai Qian decided that he might as well sit on the ground and did just that. He continued to rub his sore foot, "I'm just so scared that I just had to use the pain to compose myself. Otherwise, I would scare myself to death before the real threat had even arrived."

"I was thinking of living the rest of my life in hiding after this expedition, but I forgot that man often dies during their one last time." Ai Qian sighed and said, "Alright, from the looks of it all three of us are going to die here, so we may as well beat around the bush no longer and speak the truth. Honestly, the speech of this

world is really uncomfortable to use…”

“You.” Ai Qian pointed a finger at Yue Qiang and said, “I believe that there are a lot of things that you can’t recall just like me, don’t you? In other words, you are also an amnesiac, correct?”

Yue Qiang’s mind went blank. Was he trying to…

“And you.” Ai Qian then pointed a finger at Yin, “You should also be an amnesiac. All three of us are amnesiacs, am I right?”

Yue Qiang hesitated for a moment, unsure as to how he should answer him. The one who took control was Yin as she answered unhesitatingly, “That’s right. We are both amnesiacs.”

“That’s right, I knew it.” Ai QIan slapped his thighs before looking back towards Yue Qiang, saying, “Now that I think about it, it’s hilarious how both of us are talking in riddles and acting that night at Yue Village. We were obviously did not belong this world, and yet we kept pretending and spoke in the ancient language. You traded me Progress Points and you spoke about quests or something, and for some reason I actually didn’t catch on until sometime later and thought that you’re… I can tell you that I felt like an idiot back then. Maybe it was because I lost my memories?… Sigh, never mind. Now, let’s talk about you, my beautiful lady. It is way easier to determine if you’re an amnesiac. From the moment you took off your armor and helmet on the road, I already knew that you are definitely not of this world… After all, how can there be such a beautiful woman in this world?”

He spoke quickly and his logic was a little off, but Yue Qiang understood more or less what he was talking about.

Basically, Ai Qian guessed that both Yue Qiang and Yin were amnesiacs, and he narrated on how he came to that conclusion.

Ai Qian let out a long sigh of relief once he finished his words. It would appear that he had a hard time keeping these words inside his heart, and now that he had spoken them he was feeling much better.

“So, that’s basically it.” he said again, “There are no one else from this world here, so let’s exchange some information. If I die, I would at least like to die knowing than not, you know? What do you guys think?”

“C’mon, speak, you all. Don’t just let me speak to myself.” Ai Qian said loudly, “Do you know how scary it is that my voice is the only thing resounding in this kind of environment, and you guys are not talking?”

Yue Qiang had long had a feeling that everyone in this world who had the Memory Unlock Rate were modern people. However, this assumption wasn’t exactly foolproof. For example, Yue Qiang himself had an intact memory. For example, the scholar Hui Shi was a character that truly existed in ancient history, and let’s not forget that he was controlling his character through a mouse and keyboard, whereas Ai Qian and the others were completely teleported into the world itself, so on and so on.

If they were seated inside a comfortable environment with a table, a wine jar, and a plate of peanuts, then they could discuss this in leisure and sort out all the information.

But the current situation forbad them from doing so.

They had lost six out of nine men for some unfathomable reason, and their way out were cut off as well. Ai Qian had obviously given up on hope to choose to speak of such things in this dangerous situation.

But he was not Ai Qian. Yue Qiang's thoughts were simple: Set aside all other problems until the hurdle was passed! It was just way too cowardly to give up before they even met the dungeon boss!

"We can talk about this once we get out of here." Yue Qiang said, "What we need to do now is to one, think of a way to leave here alive, or two, grab the treasure, solve the mystery, and leave here alive!"

"Leave here alive? That's impossible!" Ai Qian suddenly yelled, "Don't you guys feel it? Every since I came down that ladder, my head is spinning and my entire body is screaming in discomfort. If I haven't kicked that armor and hurt myself I might have fainted already!"

"I just wanted to earn some riches and live, but as it turns out I'm going to die here today." he continued, "So just take a seat and let's talk about things. Let us know everything there is to know before

the darkness devours us completely and kill us."

Ai Qian looked like he had completely given up. He didn't even think to consider how the armored soldiers were killed. He was simply sitting there while rubbing his foot with one hand and massaging his temples with the other.

At the side, Yin hadn't said anything every since she said, 'We are both amnesiacs'. She went closer to a body and pushed it gently. Then she cocked her head and appeared to be in deep thought.

Suddenly, she spoke, "We are not going to die. Let us go on."

Both Yue Qiang and Ai Qian looked towards her at once. The fact that she would say such a thing in such a bizarre situation could only be described as strange. While Ai Qian was looking at the beautiful girl with some measure of disdain, Yue Qiang actually half believed her words. After all, Yin's powerful observation skills left him a strong impression, and it might just be that she had noticed certain details and discovered the true cause behind the armored soldiers' deaths.

"Their deaths are not worthy." Yin said calmly before walking beside Ai Qian and taking the torch from him. Then, she continued deeper into the passage and said, "It's fine now. Let us continue."

"Hey, woman." Ai Qian shouted at her from the back, "There are two bodies beside your feet right now, and three more not far ahead of you. I'm not taking a step forwards if you don't tell me what's going on!"

“I can do that. But can you follow my words?” Yin turned around and choked him indifferently with words.

“Tell us.” Yue Qiang also typed.

Seeing Yue Qiang’s response, Yin nodded slightly and walked up to a body. She said, “First, we will assume that all these occurrences can be explained logically. This will be the foundation of what I’m going to speak later.”

Chapter 68: Intelligence (2)

A dark passage, a swaying torch, a calm voice.

Yin had been very calm from the beginning until now. Even when the six armored soldiers had died in succession, causing Ai Qian's face to be ashen with fear and Yue Qiang to feel a bit of panic after the incident, she was still very calm.

"Fear, comes from the unknown."

"The reason you fear death isn't because you haven't died before, but because you did not know what would happen after death."

"The reason why you fear the situation right now is because you do not know how these six people have passed away. If you know it, then you will not fear it."

"If as the unknown is broken, then you will have no fear." Yin said facing towards Ai Qian, "You do not know how these six people have died, and so you thought an unknown, irresistible power has killed all of them. That is why you are afraid. You are afraid that this unknown power will kill you just like it killed these six people."

"Therefore, if I tell you what this power is, then you will no longer be afraid."

"Is it very complicated? It is, before you know the answer. But it

will not be after you know the answer.”

Yin continued to speak to Ai Qian with an unusually polished explanation, “There is a very, very huge magnet underground. That is all.”

“These six soldiers were attracted to the ground and killed by this giant magnet.”

When Ai Qian heard this answer, he froze on the spot and could not say anything. A while later, he suddenly said, “Are you kidding me? A magnet?”

He laughed really loudly and used a slightly exaggerated expression to ridicule her. He pointed at Yin with his finger and said, “After all that padding, after so many words, you tell me that a magnet killed them. Are you serious?”

Yin was very calm in comparison to to Ai Qian’s exaggerated expression. She did not turn angry because of his taunts and said with an indifferent expression, “Why can’t it be a magnet?”

“That’s my question. How did you come up with an answer as ridiculous as a magnet?”

“That’s because the corpses on the ground are very heavy.” Yin explained, “It doesn’t move when I push it or when you kick it with all your strength. Even if these soldiers were a lot heavier with the armor, something like this should not have happened.

Therefore, the only explanation is that these soldiers were attracted to the ground by a kind of force. Ironically, these armors are the latest steel armor, so it is only natural they were attracted to the ground and killed."

When Yue Qiang heard this, he shook his head on the inside. At first, he thought that Yin had made a huge discovery, but he never thought that he would hear the word 'magnet' coming out of her mouth. This explanation was truly without unfounded.

When Ai Qian heard her, he refuted her straight away, "Please explain how this magnet managed to kill them then. Even if it was true that the soldiers were attracted to the ground, how exactly did they die from just this? You can't be telling me that they killed themselves from the fall, can you?"

"With your knowledge, it will probably be very difficult for me to explain this to you without raising a few examples."

"I will speak of something easier for you to understand. A carrier pigeon." Yin said, "A long, long time ago, China had already discovered that carrier pigeons could recognise the way back home over an extremely long distance. It did not manage the feat through memorising road signs, but through sensing the direction of the earth's magnetic field to determine its path accurately. There is an organ at a carrier pigeon's beak containing a large number of particles of iron that can detect even an extremely weak magnetic field. For example, the relatively weak magnetic field on the earth's surface was enough for a carrier pigeon to find its way."

"The reason I raise this example is to describe how magnetic

fields can interact with living organisms."

"Later on, several hundred years ago, scientists had taken their experiments one step further and observed the effects on a living organism after it was put into an artificial magnetic field that is much stronger than the earth's magnetic field. The results were shocking. When the strength of the magnetic field exceeds a certain degree, it would have extremely distinct effects on a living organism's blood circulation, enzyme activity, and the neurotransmitter of a nervous system. A strong magnetic field can cause a living organism to become excited within a certain range, but once this limit is exceeded, it will cause a living organism to fall into coma, and even death!"

"To put it simply, I believe that the reason you feel dizzy, nauseous, and uncomfortable all over is due to the excessive strength of a magnetic field."

After listening to Yin's full explanation, Ai Qian thought for a moment before saying, "So, you're telling me that the force that killed these soldiers is actually a very, very powerful magnetic field, is it?"

"Yes."

"Not only did this magnetic field attracted the six soldiers' armor to the ground, it has also killed their brain cells. That is what you mean, right?"

"Yes."

Hearing Yin's admission again, Ai Qian let out a cold laughter before asking, "Then my next question will be this: Why are the six soldiers the only ones who were killed by this powerful magnetic field?"

Yue Qiang had also listened to Yin's full analysis and thus held such a doubt as well. After all, while it isn't illogical to explain this phenomenon through something as illusory as a ghost, when a scientific approach is applied it was only inevitable that one would run into holes that could not be explained.

Therefore, the hole in this explanation was, why would a magnetic field go round a corner?

Why would the magnetic field kill the soldiers but not them, even though they're within the same range?

"Of course a magnetic field couldn't go round a corner." Yin's tone was perfectly unchanged, "However, another example is needed for me to answer your doubts."

"Let me give you an example. If you speak loudly in an empty, moderate-sized room, an echo would be generated. Moreover, if the room is moderately sized, the echo and the original sound may overlay and become even louder than the original sound. The magnetic field phenomenon can be explained through a similar way as well. These armor and helmets that you've prepared meticulously for these soldiers also happen to be the direct cause of their deaths. This is because these sealed up metal happen to act as

magnetic amplifiers as well.”

“Amplifier?”

“Just like how voices inside a room are amplified, the magnetic field inside a metallic body is greatly amplified as well. The reason you are nauseous and dizzy, but not dead yet is because the magnetic field hasn’t reached a critical limit yet. However, these armored soldiers are different. The magnetic field they endure is so powerful that it had exceeded a human’s limit! That’s why their fates aren’t dizziness or nausea, but death!”

“That is why I said that these soldiers’ deaths are not worthy!”

“They only died because you’ve equipped them with the latest helmets and armor!”

The explanation was extremely lengthy, and if Yin decided to use professional terms they might not necessarily be able to understand her. However, Yin’s explanation was superficial, and her examples were all taken from daily life. Therefore, they’d more or less understood her explanation.

What had felt like a complete joke now felt like a true possibility after Yin’s explanation!

Yue Qiang thought through the entire theory from beginning until the end and almost thought it impeccable until he suddenly found another problem.

He asked, “But why had they died so suddenly? If there really was a giant magnet underground, then the discomfort should be gradual the deeper we journey into the underground, to the point it becomes intolerable. This process must be gradual. So why had it occurred so suddenly?”

“That’s why it’s an amazing trap.” Yin said, “If it’s a trap, then of course it wouldn’t be set in a way that you’d detect it beforehand. Otherwise, how can it possibly be called a trap?”

“Therefore, the magnetism of this magnet must be changeable. When necessary, its magnetism will grown incredibly powerful, but it most cases it is just a normal magnet.”

“I can think of only one object that fulfills this requirement.”

Chapter 69: Intelligence (3)

“And the only object that satisfies this requirement is electromagnet!”

“When an electromagnet’s current is high enough and transformed quickly, it can generate a permanent magnet far beyond the norm in an instant. There is no doubt that the thing buried underground and killed these people through invisible means was an electromagnet.”

Yue Qiang literally confused by this point; now there was even something like an electromagnet in her explanation. However, if they wanted to explain this phenomenon through scientific means, then electromagnet truly was the only way left to go. Plus, he happened to recall whatever remained of his physic knowledge he learned during high school that an electromagnet’s magnetism was far higher than a normal permanent magnet. Still, there was one question left...

Yin spoke up before he could voice the question, “I know you want to ask: if this truly is electromagnet, then where did this ‘electricity’ come from? After all, the invention of electricity is quite late in human history.”

“This question can actually be answered quite easily. For one, electricity is not invented, but discovered. Electricity is a very common natural phenomenon in nature, and humans can very easily generate electricity through friction or water wheel. To put it simply, it is entirely possible for the ancients to convert mechanical energy to electrical energy.

“The reason why electricity could not be used in a broad-scale is not on its generation, but storage.”

“The storage of electrical energy?”

“That’s right. The storage of electrical energy is an old and difficult question that has only been solved only a few hundred years ago. It was solved only when capacitors were researched during the recent decades. This is why the ancient times did not have electricity. However, electric generation has never been a problem, and sometimes electricity can be generated even when someone is changing clothes during a dry winter.”

“Coincidentally, what we’re facing now is a situation where electricity does not need to be stored. The trap will work as long as the electricity is discharged. The biggest possibility is that there is a very powerful device underground that could store mechanical energy and convert it instantly into huge amounts of electrical energy. These electricity is then conducted through circular-shaped iron conductors and transformed into a powerful magnetic field. Thus, the invisible murder is achieved!”

Yin concluded her theory and asked Ai Qian, “Do you understand now, after I’ve taken so much time to explain the whole matter from beginning to the end?”

Judging from his expression, Ai Qian probably did not understand what Yin was saying, but it was likely that he believed her now.

This fellow was obviously the kind who skimped on his daily studies. Thankfully, while Yin used quite a lot of proper nouns, she also raised a lot of examples to explain her theory. Ai Qian may not understand those names and terminologies, but he did understand the basic examples.

After listening to such a long deduction, Ai Qian found himself incapable of voicing an objection!

He actually could not find any holes in her theory at all!

Therefore, going by this logic, it was entirely possible for a magnetic field to kill someone! It was also the only explanation left that could explain this phenomenon!

For a long time, Ai Qian wasn't able to say anything at all. In the end, Yin said, "So, let us keep going then. As long as you don't touch those armor, you should be fine."

Ai Qian stood up and walked to the front. Unlike before, he now had some real confidence and hope in him right now.

It was as Yin said. Fear's greatest source did not come from an invincible enemy. It came from the unknown.

When Yin had pried open this principle and kneaded it into a pulp*, this unknown had also become a known thing.

*a figurative way to say analysing something minutely from every angle

As long as something was known, then they could avoid it through scientific methods.

The known gave way to progress, and it also helped Ai Qian recoup some of his lost confidence. Right now he looked much better than he was before. At the least, his hands were no longer shaking and his face had recovered some of its colors.

Yin picked up the torch and walked together with Yue Qiang at the front. Right now, Yue Qiang was recalling the series of deduction she had conducted, and the more he thought the more he was impressed with her. Naturally, he never heard that the School of Mo's Great Camp had such a trap inside them, but what was most impressive was that Yin was capable of analysing the minute details and through her deductive skills alone, discover the truth of the matter. That was the most terrifying part of them all.

If he had the chance, he was looking forward to come back here in the future and digging open the underground to see if there really was a super powerful instant magnet built from ancient devices and technology.

He had a feeling that the possibility that it existed was as high as 100%.

While thinking and walking, a Whisper appeared on the display.

Yin whispers to you: “Did you believe it?”

“What believe?”

“Everything I said just now.”

“It sounds perfectly logical, so of course I believe…” Yue Qiang’s typing hands suddenly paused in mid motion. If Yin asked like this, then that meant…

As expected, Yin’s next Whisper revealed a huge twist.

“I lied to him.”

What what what? What’s going on?

Yue Qiang stared stupidly at the four words ‘I lied to him’ for a long time. Yin’s explanation had involved all kinds of physics knowledge and scientific history. As a lousy student who only knew how to play games, Yue Qiang had absorbed the theories she spoke in a I-don’t-get-it-but-it-sounds-really-cool attitude. But just when he thought he was about to be completely brainwashed by Yin, she suddenly said: I lied to him.

Just what on earth was going on?

“It’s like this.” Yin continued to Whisper, “9 out of 10 of what I said is true, but there is only 1 thing that I lied about. The

molecular dynamics theory of electromagnetism states that ‘a conductor with a cavity can perfectly insulate the transference of electromagnetic wave in a vacuum environment’. Therefore, the iron armor and helmet these armored soldiers are wearing can reduce a magnetic field’s effects on a living organism, but absolutely not the other way around!”

What what what?

So after all that effort spent the explanation was fake all along?

“The reason I used sound and echo as an example is to mislead him to believe that the helmet and armor can amplify a magnetic field. However, in reality there is absolutely no way that’s true!”

So that’s how it is! Yue Qiang thought carefully as he swore inwardly. He might as well have returned all of his knowledge back to his physics teacher. But then, another question troubled him as he typed and asked, “Then what for did you make such a long-winded explanation?”

“I have three objectives in falsifying my explanation.”

“Number one, to help the trader Ai Qian steady his mind. You may not notice it, but Ai Qian is a person who fears death a lot. On the outside he appears to be very excited and has jittery hands, and these are all signs of nervousness. After he came in, his expression changed constantly, proving that he is a very emotional person and thus, extremely susceptible to emotional troubles. Three out of nine of us are left in this place, and our retreat path has been cut

off as well. The current situation is about as dangerous as you can imagine. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that we ensure every member is alive and capable of fighting! I cannot leave him here and let him throw his life away. Even if he is to die, he must die a worthy death. In the worst case scenario, he must walk ahead of us and become the bait and the scout. He can die after he shows us his value! This is the first reason I did it.

The second reason is that both you and I know that this world is just a game. This creates a problem. It is only logical that an illogical phenomenon happens in this world! It would truly make no sense if everything in this place can be explained through scientific theories! But Ai Qian does not know this. He thought that this is a normal functioning world, so the best way to bolster his confidence is to explain his fear through science. I told him from the very beginning that fear comes from the unknown. It is only after I've explained everything in the simplest and most scientific way that the unknown is his mind is finally dispelled. Science is the firmest faith after all. By doing it this way, he is finally able to pick back up some of his confidence and be useful in the combat that we are bound to run into sooner or later. This is the second reason.

But the most important reason is this: there is an experiment that I'd like to conduct. Although what killed the six soldiers was most certainly not some powerful magnetic field, there were still many ways this could've been done such as poison gas, or poison needles that are as thin as hair et cetera. It is only all too easy to kill someone without any trace since we are in an ancient time that we are not familiar with. Anything and everything can happen here, and some may even completely exceed our expectations. In my opinion, the more likely way these six people were killed is a Confusion type skill."

“Confusion type skill?”

Yes, a Confusion type skill would be able to better explain why only these six people have all died, and the three of us are still alive. The three of us share a common point, and that is that we all have a Heart type skill. These six soldiers however, do not. There is no doubt that a Heart type skill gives us added resistance against Confusion type skills.”

“My Heart skill is ‘To Live Through Death’, whereas yours is ‘Pure Heart’, which is also a kind of Heart skill that is learned while drifting between the lines of life and death. However, Ai Qian’s Heart skill is different from us. While his Heart skill may be at level 2, it is just ‘Greed’. That is why he is suffering more from the trap than us, to the point where he is so dizzy and nauseous that he became a little paranoid. That is why the two of us are almost unaffected at all.”

“Therefore, my third objective is for him to have him follow us and check if there are any stronger Confusion type skills waiting for us at the front. We will make Ai Qian open the way for us!”

“This, is my true thoughts!”

After Yue Qiang listened to Yin’s full explanation, he fell into a deep and long silence.

There were countless thoughts spinning in his mind, but they ultimately converged into just two words. They were:

I give!

Chapter 70: I Didn't Attract These Mobs

Yue Qiang beckoned Ai Qian from the back.

The trader was looking a lot better than before. At the very least, his complexion was looking closer to normal now.

"So." Yue Qiang said, "The current situation is clearer than it was before now. There are a lot of unexpected dangers in this place, but they are all within understandable boundaries. Therefore, let's tell each other our respective combat abilities so that we'll be prepared to divide our tasks when we face the enemy later."

"I'll talk about my abilities first." Yue Qiang said, "The abilities I've learned in this world are basically all close combat abilities. My 1v1 abilities are okay, and I can fight for a reasonably long amount of time."

"I can only attack once, and after my attack I will fall into a state of extreme weakness." Yin said, "However, my attack will never miss, and it deals tremendous damage."

The duo briefly explained their abilities before facing towards Ai Qian at the back and waited for him to speak."

"As for me..." A Qian appeared a little hesitant, "Actually, I was fully prepared before I came here, but all of my preparations were spent on my ten soldiers. I'd selected them from the Zhao Army Camp after great consideration, promised them a hefty reward, and even equipped them with the latest iron armor and helmet and

well forged weapons. But I didn't think that they would all die before they even saw the enemy's shadow."

"Do you have any abilities that could save your own life then?" Yue Qiang asked.

He did not choose to right click and check his stats immediately, and instead chose to ask Ai Qian directly. This was because the system seemed to be slowly blocking out the ability to check another's stats, and among the attributes and abilities he had seen on Ai Qian before, many of them were displayed with question marks. Therefore, it was actually better if he asked him directly.

"I do, but..." Ai Qian continued to look very hesitant. It wasn't the kind of hesitation that stemmed from his need to keep his secrets. He actually looked like he was just embarrassed, "After I arrived at this world, I mastered a skill that can allows me to attract females strongly towards me. And this also includes... mosquitos."

When Yue Qiang heard this, he immediately feel a great curiosity.

An attraction ability that crosses the line between species?

Yue Qiang recalled his memories. Ai Qian seemed to have an attribute called 'Incomplete Charm' that had a pretty high value. Not only did the system purposely noted that the attribute was 'Incomplete', it even described its effects as incredibly effective on females. In that case, was there a skill among the ones that were

blocked out with '??' that was related to this stat?"

"Can your ability protect your life?"

"I'm not sure..." Ai Qian hesitated for a moment. He himself did not seem confident with his abilities, "I basically earned all my money on this world by relying on women. Mm... let me demonstrate it to you."

While speaking, Ai Qian closed his eyes for a moment before quickly reopening them once more.

He was still the same person as before, but something seemed to be different now.

Ai Qian's looks were leaned towards the handsome side, and Yue Qiang garnered that even without any Charm his looks were definitely more than capable of attracting the opposite sex.

To put it more bluntly, he had a handsome face that could make a man jealous.

Now, the trader looked even more handsome after merely closing and opening his eyes once. When Yue Qiang saw his face, he suddenly had an impulse to smash it into a pulp.

The reason for that was because he looked way too beautiful right now. If he put a long wig on his head, he would definitely look like an absolute babe.

His looks had obviously not changed in the slightest, and yet he somehow managed to double his Charm stats after blinking once.

Yue Qiang subconsciously threw a glance at Yin.

The girl still looked as calm as ever, and her attention did not waver from Ai Qian. However, she did shift her gaze slightly upwards.

“And this is basically how it is. After I entered this state, any woman who saw me would basically jump at me like they’ve gone mad. That’s not all though. The reason I carried Cinnamomum with me as a mosquito repellant is because I easily attract mosquitos to me. I heard that all blood sucking mosquitos are females, so…”

Seriously? Yue Qiang was speechless. This was literally an enhanced, male version, and species ignoring AOE Charm spell.

“In short, as long as the enemy is a girl.” Yue Qiang thought after he typed that his choice of words wasn’t very proper, so he changed it, “As long as the enemy is a female, you can take care of them, right? That’s why you say this is your life saving ability?”

Ai Qian nodded, “More or less, yeah.”

“It is a very bizarre skill.” Yue Qiang thought for a moment, “If we are in a society, then this skill has literally infinite usage

against a woman. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like it'll be useful in such a place."

Their ultimate objective – the coffin – did have a woman inside it, but of course a dead woman wouldn't come back to life and attack them just because Ai Qian had used his Charm skill. Quite the contrary, what Yue Qiang was worried from the beginning until now was the Mo Family's legendary devices and traps.

After he had heard Yin's long winded explanation on magnetism, he suddenly had a more logical thought:

Why did the Mo Family lay down an electromagnetic device in this place? Could this be a disguised form of a disarmament trap? The Mo Family was known to have built their fame and fortune on wooden traps. The idea of disarming an enemy through magnetism before beating them with wooden traps didn't seem like a bad idea at all.

After all, Yin had said that her earlier theory that magnetic fields could kill people was a complete con. In that case, since the Mo Family had spent so much effort to lay down these magnetic devices, then there must be something else waiting for them at the back. This theory was logical in his opinion.

He whispered to Yin and communicated his thoughts. Yin agreed with him before whispering, "The traps are a problem. The Confusion type skill I mentioned earlier is also a problem. However, it would seem that there is a third problem as well."

While Yin spoke, her gaze was focused at the top of Ai Qian's head.

The passage right now was extremely silent. In this utterly soundless environment, Yue Qiang suddenly heard a very soft rustling sound that sounded like droves of something moving across a surface.

Using the weak lighting of the torch, Yue Qiang looked towards the three soldiers who had died first furthest away from them.

Some black shadows had shown up on top of the three corpses!

These moving shadows were about the size of a fist, and they were many in number. There were a dozen of them on every corpse, and as they moved continuously the exposed parts of the corpses began to turn red in color.

These red colors were blood seeping out of the corpses!

Yue Qiang subconsciously moved his character a few steps backwards. As he continued to listen to the soft, rustling sounds, he suddenly realised what these fist-sized moving black shadows were.

They're spiders!

They're huge spiders!

They’re spider feeding on the soldiers’ corpses!

Since the corpses’ armor were polished real bright, the reflected light illuminated these black shadows. However, the corpses were quite far away from Yue Qiang’s group. Who knows if these spiders crawling towards them from places they could not see?

Yue Qiang suddenly recalled Ai Qian’s male version Charm skill. If he remembered correctly, this skill crossed the line between species, right?

If he remembered correctly, all blood sucking spiders were female spiders, right?

“I didn’t attract these spiders…” Ai Qian’s quibble was weak and unconvincing. Yue Qiang had already equipped the iron rod and pulling the duo backwards into a flying run.

Yin continued to focus her gaze at the top of the passage, and while they were backing away she suddenly warned Yue Qiang, “His head!”

Yue Qiang subconsciously looked at Ai Qian’s head, and through the light of the flames he saw a bright, thin thread dropping down from the ceiling. It was falling extremely quickly!

The end of this thin thread was a fist-sized black shadow, and the end point of its fall was none other than Ai Qian’s head!

Chapter 71: Attraction

This was a wet and dark underground environment. It was very logical that creatures such as spiders would exist in a hole within a hole like this one.

The problem was that this spider was too huge.

If Ai Qian's Charm skill had attracted female mosquitos, then it was a minor nuisance. If it had attracted normal-sized female spiders, it wasn't a big problem either. However, the attraction of such giant-sized spiders was absolutely lethal!

The spider that jumped straight at Ai Qian's head looked a little larger than even a human human head after it had extended all eight of its limbs. Its speed was tremendous and its aim was flawless. It deserved its title as an insect hunter.

Yue Qiang once watched about this giant-sized spiders from Animal World. Not only a creature this size could hunt the average insect, it could even hunt a small bird. Moreover, spiders in general had poison glands in them, so he did not doubt in the slightest that Ai Qian would die the second the spider descended on him.

His iron rod was already equipped beforehand. He activated the skill Run and Basic Jabbing present within the iron rod at the same time.

His move was both swift and timely.

An instant before the giant spider would land on top of Ai Qian, the iron rod pierced through its body and saved the trader's life.

Yue Qiang did not dare to pause to check his handiwork. With his quickest speed, he tossed the skewered spider towards the far distance.

The spider's corpse fell on the ground with a pop noise.

The ground was completely dark, and it was impossible to see their surroundings at all. However, when the spider's corpse landed on the floor, a series of soft rustling sounds immediately rang from that area. It was exactly the same sound as the dark shadows made when they were feeding on the soldier's corpses.

It was obvious that the dead spider was consumed by its kind the second it landed on the floor.

While pulling at the duo and retreating swiftly, what Yue Qiang was thinking inside his mind was surprisingly not the situation before him: My iron rod isn't attracted to the ground. Does that mean it's not made of iron at all, or is it made from other rare metals?

He swiftly retreated to the vertical ladder area and climbed back into the small room above in the order of Yin, Ai Qian, and Yue Qiang.

After killing yet another two fast crawling spiders, the trio used the table and blocked off the hole.

“I’m not sure what to say about that Charm of yours.” Yue Qiang said, “There are at least one hundred of those giant spiders inside that hole. If they were spread out I might have been able to kill them one by one with my iron rod, but obviously that’s a moot point now. They’re all gathered beneath this wooden table. We don’t even know if they could eat through the wood and crawl out. If they could, we’re all going to die here.”

Ai Qian looked a little embarrassed; the appearance of these spiders was absolutely his fault. He stood up and said, “Let me check outside and see if the road truly is completely sealed off.”

He quickly returned.

“The whole thing collapsed.” he said, “They’re completely sealed by rocks. There’s absolutely no way we’re getting out there.”

“So we don’t have a choice then.” Yue Qiang said, “Either we are trapped here until we die, or we remove the table and kill a few spiders before getting eaten alive by them.”

Ai Qian looked a little loss as to what to do in this desperate situation, but Yin spoke up, “Actually, I think this is a good thing.”

Both men looked surprised by her statement.

“This is a good thing?”

“Mm. A good thing.” Yin said, “At the least, we can defend this small room for a short amount of time. If Ai Qian hadn’t used his Charm ability just now, we would’ve travelled deep into the passage just now. When the time is right, those spiders would have crawled out from every direction and cut off every path of retreat. Now that is certain death!”

Yue Qiang gave it a brief thought and noticed that it was as she said.

The reason they managed to escape back to this room was purely because the spiders were too far away. However, if they had travelled deep into the passage and was forced to deal with attacks from every direction, then Yin and Ai Qian would absolutely perish. He might be real fast, but in a situation where the floor was completely littered with spiders, it only takes a bite before he was dead as well.

“You used your Charm at a good time.” Yin said encouragingly before continuing to analyse, “So now we have two choices. One, we break through the sealed passage and leave through the front hall. However, since it was completely sealed, we cannot use this method. The other choice we have is to kill every spider that’s blocking our way and reach our destination, that is the deepest area of this great tomb.”

“The problem is how to kill them though.”

“We use fire.” Yin said.

Her tone had been calm without any emotional fluctuations at all. She sounded like she was saying, ‘let’s eat some fried julienned potato tonight’. However, the method she provided was both simple and effective.

“There are a lot of wooden beams used to support the cave walls in the passage behind us. Since the whole path had been sealed off, it’s no longer a problem even if we take them all apart. We’ll light them all up and burn these spiders to death.”

“A spider this size is most definitely the strongest existence of the food chain in this underground cavern environment. There are a hundred or more of them down there, so I can say with almost absolute certainty that every spider within the passage had surfaced to the open. This is perfect opportunity to eliminate them all in one fell swoop so that we don’t have to watch our backs at every moment while fighting against other enemies.”

Yin’s talking speed was slow and without hesitation, giving off the impression that she was figuring out a way to save money, “We have a sufficient supply of both wood and oxygen in this place, so we do not need to worry about suffocating. We even have a torch to use as a fire source, so this isn’t a problem as well. To be honest, we are really lucky to be able to use Ai Qian’s ability and coincidentally lure out the biggest hidden threat inside the cave and eliminate it. Otherwise, there’s an extremely high likelihood that none of us will survive when we are attacked by spiders from every direction.”

When Yue Qiang went through Yin's thought process inside his mind, he suddenly discovered a problem, "It's true that we can burn the spiders to death, but how exactly are we going to do it? Do we toss the ignited wood into a group of spiders? While we may be able to burn a portion of them to death like this, the ones that survived are still more than enough in number to kill us. After all, the second this table is removed, the spiders would charge at us from everywhere."

The more he thought about it, the more he thought that it was a huge problem, "If we surround the cave entrance with wood and light them up with fire, we could guarantee our safety for a while. But these spiders aren't stupid either. They could totally wait until we're out of wood before charging out into the open. Your method won't work like this!"

"It will work." Yin said before making a show of hand towards the seated Ai Qian beside them.

"The solution of our problem is on you. Please use your Charm ability once more."

"Let us see if your Charm will attract these spiders so much that they would rather throw away their lives to consume you!"

Chapter 72: Spiders Leap Into The Flame, And Dig Their Own Grave

A spider was a savage and carnivorous arthropod. It was bloodthirsty, brutal, and very smart as well.

A spider who knew how to make webs would use all sorts of ways to camouflage their predatory actions. They could singlehandedly take out insects that were bigger than them. Some spiders did not make webs, but their size was generally quite big. This type of spiders mainly relied on their large size, sharp mouthparts and deadly toxin to eliminate their prey through brute force.

Yue Qiang wasn't entirely ignorant about these eight-legged arachnids, and in this game these spiders were obviously amalgamations of both stated advantages above. Not only were they huge and capable of spitting threads, there were more than a fucking hundred of them!

The sound they made alone was enough to make one's scalp feel numb.

After they had set up the fire ring around the cave entrance, they moved the wooden tables away and looked inside.

Yue Qiang could not help but feel goosebumps on his skin.

The sight was just too scary.

The walls of the vertical hole was filled with densely packed fist-sized spiders. Their long legs, black hair, dark and bright colored stomach were as clear as day underneath the fiery light. It wasn't a question whether their stomach were filled with poisonous liquid.

It was often said that the unseen fear was the scariest, but Yue Qiang would have preferred not to see these monstrous creatures at all. They were both scary and disgusting.

"Quickly!" He urged Ai Qian behind the fire ring.

Ai Qian's expression looked even paler than he was. The trader opened his shut eyes, and in an instant he released his unique Charm ability once more. From Yue Qiang's point of view, Ai Qian's face seemed to be retouched with a softening effect, causing his already somewhat handsome face to become impossibly pretty and flirtatious. A gentle, charming and lovely aura seemed to spread to the surroundings.

If Ai Qian was a girl then Yue Qiang had nothing to say, but he absolutely wasn't. He had no idea how Ai Qian managed to learn such a ridiculous ability after he entered this world.

While holding back the urge to push Ai Qian into the hole and feed the spiders, Yue Qiang stood beside him and be on guard with his iron rod.

The spiders at the vertical hole who were gradually forced back by the heat wave before had begun to grow restless again after Ai Qian had activated his Charm ability.

Then, the first spider ignored the fire ring and climbed out of the hole!

Its incredibly ugly, rubbing front limbs indicated that it really wanted to charge right at Ai Qian. However, it was also afraid of the burning flames.

Seeing that the spider didn’t charge immediately at him, Ai Qian activated his Charm ability once more!

This time, the skill was obviously more powerful than before. It also exhausted more energy as a hint of paleness appeared on Ai Qian’s pretty and flirtatious face. His eyes watched the big black spider that lead the way firmly.

Spider was a very smart animal, and its genes and instincts granted it powerful survival abilities. However, Ai Qian’s skill generated an attraction that could surpass the difference between species from an inexplicable plane and seduced the spider.

In the end, the big black spider acted. Its eight limbs crawled swiftly as it pressed forwards courageously into the flames!

Then, it was burned into barbeque spider meat amidst crackling sounds.

Several smoke tendrils appeared above the flames. A mix of yellow body liquid and black poisonous liquid spread out on the

ground.

As the first spider charged towards the flames and killed itself, the remaining one hundred or so spiders behind it gradually did the same. They began launching wave upon wave of attacks on Ai Qian before they were burned to death in succession. Yue Qiang kept adding wood to the fire ring while he hid behind it. Beside him, Ai Qian's face was completely bloodless and shockingly white. It would seem that this skill could only be activated for an instant, and the price for activating it continuously was extremely huge.

At first, Yin was standing beside them as well. But when she saw the green smoke appearing above the flames, she hurriedly tore a few cloth strips from her clothes and covered everyone's mouths and noses.

"The smoke is poisonous; the cloth would not hold it back for long. We need to leave here as soon as possible." She explained briefly.

After hearing her warning, Yue Qiang realised that his HP was dropping at a gradual rate. It's just that his many enhancing stats and OP recovery attribute 'Cockroach' ensured it dropped very slowly.

But Ai Qian wasn't him. This poor handsome bastard looked like he was suffering from kidney deficiency*, and his pale white face also became dyed with a sheen of green because he sucked in poisonous smoke for a while.

*also a sarcastic way of saying that someone fucked/mastrubated too much

Thankfully, the spiders were all dead.

All one hundred or so large spiders had charged to the flames due to Ai Qian's Charm and dug their own graves!

Their corpses formed a small hill.

Right now, the small room was filled with poisonous smoke caused by the burning spiders. Yue Qiang's attributes enabled him to preserve a good amount of mobility despite the poisonous environment, but the other two people did not look too good.

While holding one person on each hand, he circled around the huge pile of spider corpses and arrived at the vertical hole. Then, they entered the cave once more.

The poisonous smoke were drifting upwards and not downwards, so going down was the better choice of the two. This was similar to lying on the ground and crawl away to escape the poisonous smoke caused by a recent fire.

Their path of retreat was cut off anyway. Only by moving forwards would they have a sliver of a chance at survival.

The trio continued forwards while feeling like they were given a new lease of life. Yue Qiang looked at the extremely weakened Ai

Qian and typed, “We lured out an unbelievable amount of spiders and killed them all. If they most definitely could kill all of us if they crawled out at once before we set up the trap, and even if we didn’t move the table away, we would have been trapped inside the small room to death… You scored a great merit this time.”

Ai Qian shook his head and said nothing; he still hadn’t recovered from the encounter earlier. The man simply inhaled greedily the air inside the cave in attempt to thin out the poisonous smoke in his lungs as much as possible.

Yue Qiang then glanced again at Yin. The girl hadn’t spoken up for the entire time. She only walked forwards silently.

A thought suddenly appeared in Yue Qiang’s mind. She can’t have predicted this from the beginning, can she?

First, she predicted that there would be a spider pack from the dark and wet underground environment. Then, she beat around a super large bush and came up with a fake theory where magnets could kill people to restore the trader’s confidence. After that, she used his Charm skill to take out all of the spiders. When she discovered the spiders, she had come up with the idea to burn them all almost instantly. The flexibility of her mind, and the decisiveness of her decisions… most importantly, everything had turned out exactly she had planned like a written script. The more Yue Qiang thought about it, the more shocked he became.

Seeing that Yin was still silent and seemingly thinking about something, he asked secretly, “Did you predicted this from the very beginning?” then he told her his assumption.

“No, and that’s impossible.” Yin answered, “Perhaps the two of you were too anxious just now, which was why you failed to come up with the solution. Setting this aside... right now I’m thinking about another thing.”

“Another thing?”

“Mm. Don’t you feel that this environment is a little strange? That passage outside has a giant rock trap, clues about the mechanisms of this place, and even a device that can completely cut off a path. But why haven’t we encountered more man-made obstacles even though we’re approaching the heart of this place?”

Ah, so this is what Yin had been thinking this whole time. Yue Qiang continued to listen.

“I am more inclined to believe that the spiders in this cave is a natural breed. It’s just that the unusual environment caused it to evolve to that size. They are probably not a defensive measure set up by the School of Mo’s Great Camp. After all, if that woman’s corpse really is somewhere in this place, then she would have been eaten by the spiders! Therefore, we must be on guard from now on. This is because the real defenses of this camp haven’t appeared yet!”

While listening to her words, Yue Qiang continued to raise the torch high and stared towards the distance as best he could. Although he couldn’t see too far away, his vision was no longer enshrouded in complete darkness.

A fist had appeared at the end of his vision!

A wooden fist!

Chapter 73: A Fist That Knows Martial Arts

It didn't seem too appropriate to describe the thing at the end of his vision as a fist.

That's because it was too huge.

It was literally as huge as the blacksmith Tan Xiong's steel hammer.

Plus, since the torch wasn't bright enough, he couldn't see what was behind the fist for now. Was it a person? A mechanic beast? Or something even more terrifying?

Yue Qiang was fully on guard as he stared closely at the direction it came from.

The fist approached very swiftly. Under the torch's illumination, its full appearance was revealed.

It really was just a fist!

There were neither tall mechanic person nor terrifying mechanic beast. There was only a single feast!

The back of the beast was a thick wooden pillar connected to a four wheeled vehicle. The four wheeled vehicle's body and wheels were all made of wood, and it travelled very steadily in this narrow

and winding passage. It swiftly approached Yue Qiang while fetching the fist.

He did not see anyone who's driving the vehicle, nor did he know why the vehicle could even move, not to mention its speed.

It was obvious that this thing wasn't friendly though.

The super large wooden fist approached them with incredible speed before launching a fist directly at Yue Qiang.

Now that it was closer, naturally they got a better view of it. The wooden pillar connected to the fist was not a whole object, but rather one that had many well made joints. Its joints were performing a complex activity, causing the fist at the front to launch a simple but severe attack.

The four wheeled wooden vehicle moved extremely quickly, and the super large fist moved extremely quickly as well. Together, they drew an oppressive wind and charged right at Yue Qiang.

When Yue Qiang had discovered the fist on this four wheeled wooden vehicle, he had already been fully on guard. Although the fist was coming at him quickly, its direction was fixed, so it wasn't hard to dodge out of the way. Originally, he planned to sidestep the attack calmly, but to his surprise the wooden fist's trajectory changed again in mid-charge!

This change completely exceeded his expectations!

The four wheeled vehicle travelled swiftly along the narrow corridor. The wooden joints of the vehicle creaked constantly, and Yue Qiang could hear its gears turning and its levers changing. As the noise sounded, the fist's trajectory also changed and became elusive.

It was as if it had transformed into an actual human fist!

That wasn't all. Yue Qiang discovered in alarm that he was very familiar with the fist's trajectory.

This trajectory was the beginning motions of the ultimate skill he relied upon, 'Killing Style, One'!

What was different was that Yue Qiang had controlled the skill 'Killing Style, One' through the affection of his muscles. He even took nearly three months to get used to the movement. Meanwhile, the sudden, incoming fist used wooden joints to spur the fist's activity, and wooden gears and levers to adjust its direction.

The principle of action might be different, but the form of the fist style was nearly the same.

His own 'Killing Style, One' had been processed and evolved by his heart skill 'Pure Heart' into 'Break Fist – Killing Style, One'. Although its power was increased tremendously, there were still flaws in his skill. Meanwhile, the wooden fist in front of him might have been driven by inanimate objects, but it was even more

powerful than his evolved ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’!

For an instant, Yue Qiang could only see afterimages of the fist all over his screen!

His skill was to punch out from one of the sixty four directions he was provided with, whereas this wooden fist actually covered every sixty four directions at once!

This was a mechanic fist that knew martial skills!

It was also obviously higher level than the martial skill he learned.

The fist had enveloped his entire body, and it was probably impossible for him to dodge out of the way.

Yue Qiang knew that his life or death would be decided in an instant. He locked onto his chance, took a step forwards and jabbed with his iron rod.

His step and jab were not performed without consideration.

The fist might be coming at him quickly, but it was ultimately just a fist and not a blade. If it was a blade that cut into his vitals, it could probably deal a ‘Wound Damage’ and instakill him, or cut off his limbs. However, it was ultimately just a fist, and a wooden one no less. At best it would send him flying and cause internal damage. In a game, even internal damage was just the equivalent

of losing HP. As long as it didn't kill him instantly, he would be able to recover slowly through 'Cockroach'. Anything could happen after that!

When he controlled his character to make a step, he wasn't stepping on the fist but the four wheeled vehicle that was driving the fist.

The fist was coming at him too quickly, and he couldn't avoid it. He didn't plan to anyway. The huge fist slammed solidly into his chest. At the same time, Yue Qiang's foot also stepped onto the car and bought him a cushion. He was immediately sent flying by the fist and lost more than half of his HP. However, he wasn't killed instantly, so there was no doubt that this one step had dispelled quite a bit of force from the attack.

Before Yue Qiang flew backwards, he had also made another movement. It was a jab!

The jab's angle was extremely tricky.

His aim wasn't the big fist, but the joints controlling its movements behind.

The fist was obviously tough and durable at first glance, and there was no way there would be any effect had he jabbed it with the iron rod. On the other hand, the joints must have been precisely made to be able to control the fist to come up with such a complex movement.

Things that were precise were normally very fragile as well.

This jab was also one of Yue Qiang's gamble. Just like how a human's joints were easily injured, if the fist could be made to move in such a complicated manner, and its gears and levers were completely wooden made, then the complexity of its internal mechanisms must have exceeded one's imagination. He couldn't deal with the fist, but he could at least try to damage the joints at the back, right?

That was what Yue Qiang thought. That was also what Yue Qiang did.

The instant he was sent flying by the fist, he aimed at a crooked area of the wooden joint and jabbed his iron rod at it fiercely.

I jab!

The fist that smashed into his chest took more than half of his HP. However, it also gave him an excessive amount of Rage, and when he jabbed at the joint he also injected all of his Rage into it.

Yue Qiang's current movement could be said to have exceeded the limits of his reaction. In reality, he wasn't able to do anything else before flying backwards in a flashy fashion and slamming into a wall. There was a huge sound of impact, and the second impact damage instantly dropped his HP from full to a sliver!

But it was fine as long as he didn't die!

While his character was sent flying by the wooden fist, it didn't stop him from examining this mechanism.

The jab with the iron rod had obviously caused a huge effect.

After the mechanism had sent Yue Qiang flying, it instantly lost its earlier agility. While it moved as fast as it was before, it now travelled shudderingly and randomly like a headless fly straight into the corridor's walls. After a loud crashing sound, the vehicle utterly broke apart!

The entire battle did not last more than three seconds, but Yue Qiang felt as if he had gone through an entire day.

If any one of his movements were out of position, if he hadn't taken that step, he might've been killed instantly instead of left with a sliver of HP. Supposed that he had jabbed the iron rod into the wrong place and did not hit the joints, then the vehicle driving the fist might continue to charge at him and follow up with a second punch.

This game... It had been several times already that these battles were all or nothing, life or death. This was totally different from throwing fireballs at each other before chugging pots to recover oneself.

The question came after the thrilling dismantling of the wooden fist.

How on earth was this wooden mechanism controlled?

Also, this thing was just a fist. No matter how elaborate it was, how could it possibly know a fist style?

The key was that this fist style was none other than the ‘Killing Style, One’ he had learned in the real world. Moreover, he had learned this fist style from that mysterious woman, who was also supposedly at the end of this passage.

Yue Qiang did not move while he was pondering these problems. He was severely injured, so it was somewhat difficult to move swiftly.

It was at this moment there was the sharp sound of something breaking through the air!

The sound was incredibly sharp, and it had sounded almost exactly the same time when the wooden four wheeled vehicle had crashed. The sound grew from soft to loud.

Yue Qiang’s barely calmed heart rose to his throat again.

He had heard this kind of noise twice in the game.

The first time, it was when when the Zhao Sergeant was killed at Yue Village. The second time happened inside a cutscene.

The source of both these two noises were Gongshu Shaoyang's giant crossbow!

The first two times, the giant crossbow was aimed at his enemies. But this time, it was aimed at no one but himself!

He knew very well how powerful the giant crossbow was. Even if he was in perfect condition, even if he was to use every skill in his arsenal, he would absolutely not be able to dodge it, not to mention the terrible state he was in now.

He stared closely at the screen. As the air howled, he felt like he could see the tip of the giant crossbow bolt carrying death right towards his body. There was no longer anywhere he could hide from it.

It was at this moment Yin moved beside him.

She had opened her eyes!

Chapter 74: Eye Of Truth And The End Of The Tunnel

Yue Qiang had a deep impression of Yin's skill.

This was because her skills were all very special. First, she had a skill that gave her sickness and did not count as a debuff. Moreover, the higher the skill's level, the weaker she became. God knows where she got such a strange skill design.

Her other skill would be her Eye of Truth.

Most people's skill could be fully explained in at most one or two lines. But this Eye of Truth actually had a few active effects and passive effects. In fact, if he remembered correctly this was a skill that could be further expanded.

It was this skill that caused Yin to close her eyes constantly and radiate a very special kind of beauty.

Yue Qiang could remember clearly the first time she opened her eyes.

She was so beautiful that it shook him to the core, but she was also so terrifying that it made him tremble in fear.

The ferocious, savage tiger's eyes bled just because it stared once at her. At the time, he did not quite understand yet how the skill

worked in principle. But now that Yin had opened her eyes once more, he finally did. The principle behind the skill's function was very simple.

Anything she set her eyes on will be killed absolutely!

He finally understood the meaning behind that one line in the skill description, "Unleash an absolutely accurate attack at a close range target. This attack cannot miss."

If she could see her target, then she could hit it with her skill!

The base damage of this skill might be incredibly low, and it might not even be able to break mechanical car's joints just now, but the upper limit of this skill's power was infinite.

Take, for example, a person's eyes or trachea beneath the throat. Any weak spot could be hit as long as it could be seen.

If it wasn't for the fact that this skill had way too many harsh limitations and requirements, Yin could almost be said to be an invincible existence.

The bolt sped across the air.

It would nail Yue Qiang to the wall and kill him in the next instant.

It was during this critical moment when Yin opened her eyes once more.

She only needed to look once.

There were neither gorgeous skill effects, nor cool skill animations. The head of speeding bolt tilted just a little.

Then, the tail of a bolt appeared on Yue Qiang's screen.

The shaft of the bolt was at the left of his vision.

He could not see the bolt's head.

But he could hear it entering the wall beside him with a 'thud' noise.

He gradually rotated the screen and saw the giant crossbow bolt's full appearance.

The bolt lay just a finger's breadth away from his head. The bolt's head had fully entered the tunnel's stone wall and sank several inches deep. One could see just how powerful the bolt was when it was fired.

When he looked towards Yin once more, the girl seemed to have closed her eyes again and slowly sitting down on the ground. She appeared to be severely weakened.

Just like before, it would appear that she could use this skill only one time.

In comparison, Yue Qiang's condition was actually slightly better than hers. His stats and skills made sure that he would be able to recover to an okay state as long as he wasn't killed instantly. By utilising his newly learned 'Hunyuan Jin LVL 1' and converting a portion of his Stamina into HP, his health was finally restored to a safer position.

He walked to Yin's side and typed, "This place is too dangerous. I managed to find some way to cope with the mechanical fist, but if there was another one of those crossbow bolts one of us was definitely going to die here. At any rate this tunnel is just too dangerous."

"It is dangerous alright, but don't you think that the attacks just now are more like a trial than an actual death trap?" Yin said.

"A trial?"

"A trial it is. Judging from the environment, the master of this tomb doesn't seem to be aiming to kill us here. If the mechanical fist you took apart just now were attached with sharp blades, or if the crossbow bolt just now contained poison gas that would explode on contact, there's no question that you would've been killed already. Moreover, the mechanical fist did not come at us in droves, and not more than one giant crossbow bolt was fired. Perhaps it was just testing our strength or verifying our identities."

That was a possibility.

Yue Qiang fell into deep thought.

He stared at the mechanical fist that had shattered into a broken pile on the floor and connected it to the fist style that was used just now. The technique behind the fist style was obviously far superior to his own evolved ‘Killing Style, One’. While on the surface the disparity appeared to be due to the mechanism being faster and stronger than he was, Yue Qiang had been practicing this fist style for almost three months. He knew very well that the difference between the mechanical fist and him lay not just in strength and speed alone, but also technique.

The feeling that he was enveloped from all sides; the feeling that he could not dodge no matter how he tried was absolutely due to the difference of skill level. If only he could learn this somehow.

That being said, it was the female fitness coach who taught him his skill had been helping him all this time. The mechanisms and traps in this tunnel did not appear to have been activated to the fullest either. In that case, if they walked to the end of this tunnel, then...

Yue Qiang had a feeling that their mission would definitely bring them some real rewards.

Suddenly, Ai Qian spoke from behind him.

Ai Qian hadn't been able to recover from his exhaustion after using his skill all this time. In fact, after he re-entered the tunnel, his complexion had only worsened further. It was at this moment he spoke up suddenly, "I feel even worse than before. Could it be that we haven't left that magnetic field something's area of effect? This place... I feel like everything I see in this color is in blood red color. I'm experiencing a feeling of extreme irritation..."

When Ai Qian spoke his words were disjointed. A sickly green was mingled into the pale white color of his face, making him look extremely terrible. Yue Qiang glanced once at Yin and recalled her guess about a confusion type skill.

Both Yin and him weren't affected due to the type of their heart skill. However, Ai Qian's symptoms had only worsened as they continued deeper into the tunnel. He was starting to develop delusions as well.

Perhaps this was also a proof that supported Yin's theory that this was a 'trial'; only a person with a heart type skill could be immune to this confusion type skill. On the other hand, anyone who did not have a heart type skill like Yin and him would either die right away like those soldiers at the tunnel entrance, or suffer pain, misery, and even develop delusions like Ai Qian.

Seeing Ai Qian's terrible complexion, Yue Qiang walked over and typed, "Brother, I have a way that can make you feel a little better."

“What is it?” The trader hit his own head in pain while asking.

Yue Qiang arrived by his side and knocked Ai Qian out with a good old punch.

“You’ll feel better if you’re out for a bit.”

Then, he continued forwards while dragging Ai Qian on the ground with one hand and supporting Yin with the other. The trio quickly arrived at the place where the giant crossbow bolt was fired. It was also the end of the tunnel.

To their surprise, there was a small log house at this place. From outside, it looked especially similar to the giant crossbow log house Gongshu Shaoyang controlled at Yue Village.

The small log house was embedded deep into the tunnel walls. The door of the log house was half-closed.

Yue Qiang carefully pushed the door open with an iron rod. He thought on the inside: All of the unknowns should have an answer after the door was opened.

Chapter 75: 2 Beast Skins, 1 Bamboo Scroll

While holding the door with the iron rod, Yue Qiang slowly moved towards the front. As the door's angle widened further and further, he felt like something had emerged from inside the room.

It seemed to be a kind of gas that was both noiseless and colorless. But he could feel it all the same.

It was a gas that invigorated the mind.

Since the moment he climbed down the vertical stairs, he felt as if he was becoming more and more clear-headed. This was especially obvious when he was facing against the mechanical fist. He had performed a series of meticulous control that he would never be able to do under normal circumstances.

It was an incredibly shocking revelation.

Although his game character might be inside an underground tunnel, the real him was sitting right in front of the monitor in his house. While his game character might be poisoned, wounded, put to sleep and experience all kinds of sensations, Yue Qiang himself could only watch and listen with his senses.

However, right now in front of the monitor, he could truly feel that invigorating feeling working through his body.

As the wooden door opened, a sensation that was like a blowing

spring wind emerged from inside.

Yue Qiang sucked in a deep breath, feeling his brain and mind becoming clearer and smoother than ever before.

His vision had been focused right at the door of the wooden house, and as the gas gushed out from inside his field of view gradually widened towards his surroundings. First, he saw the entirety of the wooden house, which looked almost like the giant crossbow log house at Yue Village. Then, he saw the shut-eyed, serious-looking Yin and frowning Ai Qian who seemed to be in pain even when he was out cold. Finally, his field of view continued to enlarge until he saw the surrounding stone walls and the tunnel's very structure. Finally... he saw the fringe of the monitor.

I'm playing a game right now...

The number and alphabetic keys on the keyboard beneath his left hand felt very familiar. He would not tap a wrong key by mistake even if he did not look at them, and speaking of which, it seemed like his gaze hadn't moved away from monitor's screen for a very, very long time, had it?

And how long is a very, very long time?

He glanced once at the computer table. It was scattered with six or seven packs of consumed instant noodles. There were bits of condiments and plastic wrappings everywhere.

Did he seriously eat so many packs of instant noodles after he came back?

That's strange. He did not remember tearing open a package or boiling water at all...

It was only when he saw the mess that he realised that he had actually eaten so many instant noodles. His nose had also chosen this occasion to suddenly became functional. The smell of mixed condiments, grease, and cold noodles that were left aside untouched for a long time mingled with each other and entered his nostrils. If he had eaten this many bags of instant noodles, then it had probably been two or three days...

His field of view widened again, and he saw the collapsed dustbin on the floor. The garbage inside the dustbin had fallen out and become scattered all over the floor. Judging from the direction it was pointing after it had toppled, he had probably knocked it over by accident when he was going to the toilet.

But when did he go to the toilet?

Unbelievable. He could not remember the occasion at all. It did not leave an impression in his mind in the least.

What was the time when he came back to his house? It was probably when the blue progress bar was at 50%, was it? What was the date today? What month and day was it?

Why did he subconsciously begin to count the days using the game's time?

Right, what month and day was it again?

He subconsciously picked up his handphone and took a glance, but he discovered that his handphone had ran out of power and shut down already. With a stupefied look, he picked up his charger to recharge the phone's batteries. Then, he blanked out.

Countless questions suddenly popped into his mind. On the surface, these questions appeared to be perfectly normal: When was the last time he ate, did he go to the toilet, had he slept and so on. But the problem was that he did not have an impression of either of those things at all.

It wasn't like he never became so absorbed in games that he skipped meals and sleep, but at the very least he would remember to eat, sleep, and ask his schoolmates to fake his attendance in class.

But this time, he literally just forgot everything.

Even stranger was the fact that the forgetfulness had felt like the most natural thing to do. It was as if it was natural to be fully immersed inside a game.

Why did he suddenly 'wake up'? Why did he suddenly recall that he was 'playing a game'?

“Are you okay?”

The sudden voice caught Yue Qiang off guard and made him shiver uncontrollably.

Then, his mind caught up and he realised that it was Yin asking for him inside the game.

He put his fingers on the keyboard and typed a few words, “Nothing. I just suddenly recalled something.”

“I saw you stop moving all of a sudden. Did something... unexpected happened ‘over your side’?”

Yue Qiang understood her meaning. When Yin said ‘your side’, she meant ‘his world’.

But how could he say yes?

The correct answer was that the unexpected had always been around from the beginning until now. It’s just that he was slowly losing the ability to realise that he was just ‘playing a game’ as the progress bar continued to increase. His attention were completely absorbed by the game, and every time he played his game time had increased gradually. Judging from the amount of instant noodles he ate, he had probably played for three days straight this time.

He had neglected the fact that he was ‘just playing a game’ for a very long time. That was what was truly unexpected.

Or maybe he should say that the unexpected had become a normal part of his life, and the problems he should’ve noticed under normal circumstances were overlooked instead. That, was what you called unexpected.

This condition of his had continued for two or three days straight until...

It was until the moment he pushed opened the door that he was finally and fully jolted to wakefulness.

There was something behind the door that had cleared up his mind!

Is it her?

Yue Qiang pondered.

Ai Qian continued to lay unconsciousness as he was dragged. As the door swung inward further, the unconsciousness trader’s eyebrows became tightly locked and his handsome face also became somewhat distorted. He seemed to be in even more pain now, even though Yin and him were perfectly fine. Perhaps this was the effects of the confusion type skill? Perhaps it was she who was using this skill?

They should check out the room first.

The wooden house's door was now fully open. It was pitch black inside.

Yue Qiang raised a torch and walked inside.

The decor inside the wooden house was extremely simple and empty. There was a coffin laid at the center of the room. The coffin's cover was not fully shut, and there were extremely faint smoke emerging from the gaps. The wooden house was very small, and the thin smoke covered every corner of its space.

"It's not a poisonous smoke." Yin made a simple conclusion, "It's a gas that invigorates the mind."

"It is for us, yes. But it is not for him." Yue Qiang added. Right now Ai Qian was looking even more in pain, and even his body was beginning to spasm unconsciously. Yue Qiang put him at the entrance and entered the house with Yin, arriving in front of the coffin. He raised the torch closer.

The coffin looked exactly the same as the picture on the beast skin.

Exquisite carvings, delicate patterns. It was no different from the coffin drawn on the beast skin. What was different was that there were two beast skins and a bamboo scroll on top of the coffin's cover.

Sharing tacit understanding, neither Yue Qiang nor Yin had opened the coffin immediately. Instead, they picked up a beast skin each.

The beast skin Yue Qiang picked up was drawn with an extremely fine-looking little man. This little man was drawn colorfully and vividly. It looked like it would jump out of the skin at any moment. The little man looked like a normal man, and the only difference was that it had sixty four arms!

Speaking of which, it was strange that the sixty four arms appeared to be unusually distinct on the beast skin, even though they should be densely packed and incredibly scary. Yue Qiang immediately recognised that the sixth four arms were arranged according to the Fuxi Hexagram.

It seemed comedic that a man could grow sixty four arms, but on this beast skin the oddity appeared immeasurably harmonious and dignified. The instant he opened the beast skin, an imposing and vigorous aura instantly erupted and pressed down on Yue Qiang so heavily that he couldn’t breathe!

He had faced this aura no long ago.

It felt exactly the same as when he was going up against the mechanical fist.

When he looked at the top corner of the beast skin again, he found three large, ancient characters written on it:

Killing Style, Evolved!

This was a skill book!

By this point there was no need to describe how precious a skill book was. Yue Qiang used to doubt the existence of such items until he held it directly in his hands and saw the system message, “You have obtained the skill book ‘Killing Style, Evolved’. Click and use to learn ‘Killing Style, Evolved LVL 0’. Learning this skill requires the prerequisite ‘Killing Style, One’” that he finally believed it completely.

What was even more deserving of notice about this skill book was its prerequisite. He had learned the skill ‘Killing Style, One’ from real life; he had learned it from the mysterious fitness coach Luqiu Duanyi. Now, he had encountered the mechanical fist that knew the ‘Killing Style, Evolved’ technique and discovered the evolved version of ‘Killing Style, One’ on the coffin’s cover. Perchance if he opened the coffin he would discover… Luqiu Duanyi’s corpse?

Holding the other beast skin beside him, Yin could hardly hide her shock despite her calm appearance.

With a slightly urgent tone, she said, “This is ‘A Complete Solution to the Two Schema Makeup of a Mechanism Power System’!”

He knew why Yin had appeared this astonished. Only a person of rich knowledge would have greater understanding as to the

importance of a knowledge based item. Yin had proven her excellent knowledge since her appearance one way or another, so an item that could cause even her to lose control must be extremely precious. It might even be more precious than the skill book in his hands.

That said, if these two beast skins were already this precious, then what could possibly be recorded in the bamboo scroll at the center?

Yue Qiang carefully picked up the bamboo scroll.

It wasn't actually too appropriate to call it a 'bamboo scroll' since it only consisted of four bamboo slips. The four bamboo slips were connected together using simple straws, and only the first bamboo slip had words on them. The remaining three bamboo slips were blank. There was a small, unremarkable triangle at the end of the last bamboo slip, and Yue Qiang had noticed it immediately.

The reason for that was because he was very familiar with this tiny triangle.

This thing... looked a little like the little triangle in a dialog box which you clicked to continue a conversation!

A blank bamboo scroll and a small triangle... Could it be that this wasn't a functionable item but a dialog box?

If this dialog box needed to be expressed in the form of a bamboo

scroll, then only one possibility was left – this dialog box was used to converse with the dead person inside the coffin!

A dead person could not speak. Therefore it was understandable that one needed to use a dialog box to speak with it...

To hell with this! As if to converse with a dead person through a dialog box was in any way normal!

Yue Qiang pushed aside all these questions and pulled away the unlatched coffin cover directly!

Be it a donkey or a horse, he'd take it for a walk all the same!*

*meaning that he would face whatever comes at him

The scene after the cover was opened was exactly the same as it was drawn on the beast skin.

There was a woman's corpse surrounded by many priceless jewels and ornaments. Although her eyes were closed, she almost looked like she was just taking a nap. She had an amazing body at the level of a fitness coach, and her face looked just like Luqiu Duanyi's.

This, was a still image.

It was both beautiful, and eerie.

The woman in the coffin did not show any signs a corpse should have at all. Her skin looked as elastic and glistening as condensed cream, and her complexion was just like a normal human's, except a little paler than normal. But this only enhanced her beauty further.

Yin stretched out a hand over the corpse's nose to test for any signs of breathing, then touched her chest for a little while. After a long time, she said, "She's dead. There's also an extremely small possibility that she is in a very deep sleep. But if we say that she's dead, there is no way to explain how her body was preserved so perfectly."

If this body really was Luqiu Duanyi's, then what's with the female fitness coach he met in real life? When he thought up to this point, he looked towards his charging phone. He had Luqiu Duanyi's number in it. Besides that...

Yue Qiang picked up the bamboo scroll that only had four bamboo slips. He tapped the small triangle at the final bamboo slip.

While the game could no longer be described as a normal game in any way at all, he was still using a keyboard and a mouse. Therefore, he would use gaming logic to understand her!

His action worked.

The second bamboo slip was supposed to be blank, but now a line

of ink-colored characters slowly appeared on it. It said: Please treat my corpse well. This is my final gift to you.

The line of characters slowly disappeared. Then, another four words appeared:

I am Luqiu Ning.

Chapter 76: Who Are You

Yue Qiang did not know Luqiu Ning, and he did not recognise the woman lying inside the coffin either. However, her every feature was identical to the female fitness coach Luqiu Duanyi he met in real life.

Any normal person would've had the thought that 'they are both the same person'.

For instance, Zhang Dapang and Zhang Dazhuang might not share a relationship with each other since there were plenty of people whose surname was Zhang. But if it was a strange surname like 'Luqiu', then it was only normal to guess that they share a relationship with each other or were actually the same person.

Plus, it wasn't like he wasn't familiar with the name Luqiu Ning.

A long time ago, when he first activated the friend system, Luqiu Ning's name was there already. It's just that her status display was in gray color. At the time, he thought that it was because they were too far apart and thus could not communicate with each other. Now it would seem that it was because Luqiu Ning was dead.

Yue Qiang shook his head and refocused his attention onto the dialog box.

He did not attempt to type anything and communicate. This was something a corpse left behind, and it was likely that the words on the bamboo scroll were merely stored using certain methods by

Luqiu Ning. He could read, but not communicate with her.

After pressing the triangular shape once more, the bamboo scroll continued to display lines of characters in Song font.

“I have no way of knowing who you are, but if you’ve seen this bamboo scroll, then it must mean that you are that person.”

“The attraction formation could disarm every person’s weapons, and the mechanical fist could only be broken by a person who is familiar with the Killing Style fist technique. The soul confounding gas can kill any person who does not have any heart type skill from long distance, and cause anyone with the Hundred Schools of Thought’s heart skill to fall into pain and unconsciousness. Only those who have learned a heart type skill on their own can arrive here while maintaining their consciousness.”

“Therefore, since the moment I leave these words behind, I can predict that the only one who will pick up this bamboo scroll, is you.”

“You are the only person who can come to this place. There will not be anyone else beside you.”

There were three people in Yue Qiang’s group, and beside him Yin was fine just like he was. However, Ai Qian was leaning not far away against the door and had fallen unconscious and in pain just as the bamboo scroll said. It would appear that the heart type skill he and Yin possess were extremely rare.

The bamboo scroll had predicted wrongly in this regard, but it did not stop Yue Qiang from looking more and more shocked at all. Cold sweat began to seep slightly out of his palm as he pressed the tiny triangle continuously.

It was you who is behind all this…

This thought was due to the words displayed on the bamboo scroll:

“There are no ‘main quests’, and there will no longer be any ‘system messages’ in the future. After all, these things don’t exist in the first place. They were originally things I have created them at the last moment to help you. However, this is as far as I can do since there is just too little time.”

“Every main quest you went through is me helping you to get used to this world as soon as possible.”

“Thank goodness, and really, thank goodness you are a seasoned gamer, and you managed to survive several fatal situations. I know that you are relying on a relic level keyboard and mouse to control your character; perhaps I should have given you a… before the cutscene happened, I can see what you were doing… Every time you are about to die, I am more anxious than you are. After all, while you are playing you are fully concentrated, I am the one who has to endure the fear and panic while I watched you from the back. If you had died, then everyone’s efforts and hard work would’ve all been for naught.”

“You really would die if you had died inside the game.”

“Luckily, you are a very smart person and have discovered this point. You have acted very carefully, and your control is excellent. I was both very happy and very afraid, but ultimately, you managed to reach here alive. You managed to see my corpse.”

“This is truly a lucky occurrence. As long as one is alive, then there is still a little bit of hope left. If you had died as well, then the only thing left is infinite pain and despair.”

When Yue Qiang finished reading this line, he sucked in a deep breath before slowing exhaling.

You were here when I was playing the game.

You knew all of it.

He had played the game simply relying on his long years of gaming instinct. Now that he thought back, there were many times – no, almost every quest he went through was unbelievably dangerous, and nearly forced him to a dead end. If he didn’t happen to learn a new skill or receive a new hint every time, he might have died a long time ago.

What shocked him even more was that her telling him that she was the one who issued him the main quest!

There were no main quests or system messages in the first

place… it was all issued by her to help me.

This was a main quest! This was a world that was akin to a literal game otherworld. If she could issue quests in a place that was pretty much a real world on its own, then what exactly was her true identity? Even then, the despairing emotions she divulged between her words: ‘Wasted’, ‘failure’, pain’. Words that represented negative emotions jumped out one after another. Didn’t this mean that there was something that even she could not go up against…

He subconsciously looked towards the corpse inside the coffin. Her expression appeared to be both beautiful and tranquil, but Yue Qiang could imagine that her feelings were definitely otherwise when she was leaving behind these words.

The text continued to appear line after line slowly.

“The purpose of every main quest is for you to obtain a reward. It is not… that I do not want to send this rewards to your item screen directly. I only know that certain game characters and certain places might have these items. What really gladdened me was the fact that you are not a player who relies on auto-pathing and leaves your character to level up on its own. You have taken the initiative to seek out many hidden quests and made many exploratory efforts in the process. Your attempts allowed me to secretly and unobtrusively issue quests to you. In reality, you have survived up to this point through your own efforts. I wish that you will not disappear like I do.”

“Among the rewards you have obtained, what you will not

normally receive in a normal game are: S/L Module, Pause Module, 97 Progress Points and School of Mo's Killing Style Fist Technique."

"Progress Points is extremely difficult to obtain. The reason you had 97 initial Progress Points is because the game manual converts every 1 percent of your three progress bars into 1 Progress Point."

"As for the Pause Module, I am referring to the first bamboo slip on this bamboo scroll. When you use it, the game world can be paused for an hour's time. It can also ensure that your time 'over there' remains unchanged as well... This is a bug. I could've done better, but I was never a smart person, so it is what it is. You may need to use this Pause Module some time later."

Yue Qiang could read no further.

Every information on the bamboo scroll; every information Luqiu Ning left behind caused perilous waves to ripple through his heart. With every passing line, he could not help but think 'so this is how it is' again and again in shock. All of these 'this is how it is' eventually gathered as one to form the biggest question: Just who is she?

The bamboo scroll did not disappoint him. It did not attempt to answer him in a roundabout and secretive manner. It answered the question Yue Qiang had thought for a long time but was unable to ask in the simplest of manners.

"I am the game's art designer." deep traces of ink appeared across

the bamboo scroll.

There was another line:

“I am not… I am just the game’s art designer. And I have done the best I could.”

Chapter 77: Home

A.D. was an abbreviation. The more accurate description would be a game art designer.

It could also be comprehended simply as those who draw.

In a normal 2D or 3D game, there would be illustrations, there would be character portraits, and there would be all kinds of textures. For example, the creation of a single character might use up to several thousands of polygons. Although the created object now had the shape of a human, in an image processing program it was still displayed as clumps of lines, or should we say a complex polygon object. It was only after textures were added that this polygon object appeared to be somewhat human.

The source of these textures could be found on the internet, put together and polished, but to do it well one must polish by drawing with a pen or clicking pixel after pixel.

An art designer was also responsible for many other works. Art designing as a post was very tiring.

However, right now the most important thing was the meaning behind the term ‘art designer’ itself.

Yue Qiang could not help but think further with the term as the starting point, and the more he thought the more scared he became.

There was an art designer in this game?

Did that mean that every scene in this game was drawn?

They were not real? They were all drawn?

What about the people? A person's face, a person's body, every miniscule movement, and even a floating hem of a clothes were all drawn then? Yin next to him, Luqiu Ning inside the coffin, the out cold Ai Qian and even his own game character were all just textures?

The first thing Yue Qiang did when he entered the game was to research the game's textures. He used a very simple method to verify this, and to zoom into the image. He got out of the room he was in and made his character crouch on the floor. Then he inspected the ground and was able to see even an ant's nest. He could see the tiny insect swiftly moving its six limbs and transporting food. At the time, he already thought that this was absolutely not a game that could be created with just textures.

However, when he saw the ink marks stating 'A.D.' on the bamboo scroll, his faith collapsed.

All of these are drawn?

Yue Qiang subconsciously tried to touch Luqiu Ning's body to see if it was an image or a corpse of flesh and blood that could be

touched. Then, before he knew what his brain was thinking, he suddenly had the thought that he might as well touch himself rather than touch her. Therefore, he raised his hand and touched his own face.

There was the tactile sensation of flesh and blood.

Thank goodness, it isn't a drawn image...

...

That's not right!

He was touching himself!

Not the character inside the game!

He then touched himself with his hand again, then reached out to touch the display monitor. The monitor hadn't been wiped for a very long time, and his hands were covered in dust after the action. It was a little dirty.

Yue Qiang stared at his dust covered fingers.

He zoned out.

This was the second time. This was the second time he noticed

that he was ‘playing a game’ after he entered the small room. He knew that this must be the effects of the so-called ‘Soul Confounding Gas’. Rather than confounding him, the gas made actually awakened him and enabled him to think through the meaning of the word ‘A.D.’ with a slightly clearer mind.

If there was an A.D. in this game, then was there a screenwriter as well? There would also be a data designer, a planner, a tester and perhaps, even a… producer?

But this game was obviously an otherworld.

He could not believe at all that this game was just a game!

Also, what about his own world? What would happen to the real world?

At this point, Yue Qiang suddenly thought of something he should have figured a long time ago.

He could’ve chosen NOT to play this game!

As long as he stopped playing, the game’s blue progress bar would not have increased, and everything that happened afterwards would not have happened!

What if all he did was add that 8 Charisma points? What if he did not even click the ‘Enter Game’ button after he added the points? Then the blue progress bar would forever stay at 0. He could toss

the computer into the thrash can!

Then, he could use these additional 8 Charisma points and live a beautiful life. He would be successful in every endeavor in the real world. What a wonderful scenario that would've been...

He should've known!

He should've absolutely figured this out a long time ago!

Yue Qiang wasn't smart, but he wasn't a stupid person either. It was such an easy conclusion to arrive at; such an easy decision to make. It would have occurred to any normal person, so why not him?

The critical point was that it never occurred to him. During the few moments he did experience such an epiphany, he quickly dumped all his concentration back into the game.

It was only at this moment, when his in game body had entered the small room and was assailed by the Soul Confounding Gas that he finally noticed these problems one after another.

He gaze finally left the monitor momentarily. He saw the phone he charged while his mind cleared up for a moment.

He had a thought that had no relation whatsoever to his current situation, but was absolutely normal to arrive at.

Perhaps, he should call back his home?

It was late at night outside, and his room was pitch black. The dim light of the monitor illuminated him. His handphone was plugged into the USB charger, and computer case was blinking in a way that indicated that the phone was charging.

He really should call back to his home. But would it actually be effective? He felt an uncontrollable urge to call back to his home, but he was stricken with fear at the same time.

He was afraid that he would hear a busy signal.

My real world... my real world...

Yue Qiang lightly pressed the mouse button, and the bamboo scroll displayed the few words as if it shared a mutual understanding to this thoughts...

“Your real world... I would like to tell you something about ‘your side’...”

Once upon a time, Yue Qiang longed eagerly for the answer. He had asked Luqiu Duanyi this question many times in the real world, but she did not tell him about it. He understood that she did not tell him to suppress the blue progress bar’s progress, and he did not blame her for it. He still wanted to know the answer, though.

Now he was given another chance, but he was afraid to know.

Contrary to expectations, he was scared to know the truth now that he was close to it.

It had been a long time, and he had guessed that answer. However, he did not wish for that answer to turn into the truth, transform into ink marks and appear on the bamboo scroll. He wished to hear a whitewashed, comforting answer.

Even though he knew that the Soul Confounding Gas in this place could cancel the imperceptible influence that he had been receiving, returning him to normal and making him think as a normal person and ask the questions a normal person should have.

He suddenly didn't feel like asking.

He was afraid that his home would be gone.

The bamboo scroll did not answer his wish. The ink marks gradually unveiled the truth:

"Your real world, is not real! It has never been real from the very beginning!"

"From the moment you allocated all 8 freely distributed stat points to your Charisma, your entire life has changed!"

“Where you are right now is not your home at all! It is just…”

When Yue Qiang saw the word ‘home’, the tremor in his heart reached its absolute limit. When he saw the word ‘not’ before the word ‘home’, he felt as if something soft inside his heart had been stirred a little.

He roared out with the loudest voice he could muster inside the quiet, small rented house:

“IT IS!!!”

Then, he raised his leg in agitation and sent the computer case on the floor flying. He kicked it so hard that it was smashed into pieces!

The computer’s power cut off.

The sound of the computer fans stopped.

The electric socket let out a ‘bang’ noise, and spat out the electric sparks that indicated that it was now broken.

But the monitor was still glowing.

Inside the game, Yue Qiang trembled as he held the scroll.

Chapter 78: I Want To Go Home

Yue Qiang had become strong.

He had thoroughly smashed up his computer case with a single kick. This was something he could not have done with his previous strength, but now he could easily do it.

The connection between the computer case and the PC and broken apart. The power board also broke. However, the display continued to stay lit.

It was still that world, and it was still that small room. Inside the room, he was holding the bamboo scroll and shivering slightly.

He shook his mouse and touched his keyboard for a bit. He discovered that both external peripherals that were connected to the computer case could be used. However, the blue progress bar on the display had taken a huge leap forwards before he knew it!

95%.

A computer that could work without its CPU, a display that could light up without electricity...

Is this what it meant by 95%?

After Yue Qiang had kicked out the computer case like he was

venting, he sank his entire person on the chair and panted slightly, feeling a little bit calmer than he was before.

When he touched the mouse earlier, he had clicked once. Therefore, another line of words appeared on the bamboo scroll, “I know that you might not believe it, and this isn’t something that any normal person could believe. Therefore, you can go out to take a look or make a call. Test it however you want to. This is the moment the ‘Pause Module’ made for... Use it. If the progress bar reaches 100%, it can no longer be used.”

Test it? Alright!

The in-game Yue Qiang took out the first bamboo slip, and then the scene inside the display suddenly froze. Objects, people, and himself included did not move even a single jot, and at the same time a timer of one hour began to count down on the display.

Yue Qiang felt a trace of weariness.

How should I test this?

It was night outside. The night sceneries of the city was both familiar and strange. He had already forgotten how long it had been since he last saw a normal night scenery. However, right now it still seemed to be quite normal.

Everything inside the rented house was very normal. A messy arrangement, a whole floor of smelly socks. Everything of

everything was normal.

So why was it not the real world?

Should I go out and take a look?

Should I... He did not want to think of that option of calling his home. He simply walked out of the door while subconsciously grabbing his phone.

The door was the usual dim black color. It opened up with a ‘creak’. It hadn’t been used for a very long time. It was the familiar stairs outside the door, very familiar; he used to pass by them every day he went down to buy cup noodles. But at the same time, it was also very strange to him. After all, he really hadn’t come out in a very, very long time.

The stairs deep in the night were silent. Of course, there was no one else around here.

Should I knock on the neighbor’s door?

If he could disturb a sleeping person, that would be a good thing too.

Right now Yue Qiang wasn’t thinking about anything. He simply wanted to see a living person.

He knocked on the door.

Dong-dong-dong.

There were three knocking noises, and some echos were generated amidst the stairs of the deep night. There was neither a voice asking ‘who is it’ nor the sound of slippers hitting the floor coming from inside the door. There was nothing.

But a voice appeared in his head:

“This door is locked.”

Of course I know this door is locked, of course I know… Yue Qiang muttered to himself. Then, as if he had gone insane, he kicked the neighbor’s door with the strength he used to kick the computer case just now, causing a loud bang. Then, he raised his head and looked above him, shouting, “I don’t need you system to tell me that!”

He ran out of the stairs and arrived on the streets.

There was no one in the neighborhood at night. No one.

At first, he was walking slowly. Then, his walk turned into a run, and he ran faster and faster as if he had automatically activated Run LVL 2. He ran unusually fast, all the way to the city center and the most bustling pedestrian street of the entire city.

There was still no one.

All of the shops were closed.

On the bustling street illuminated colorfully by neon lamps. The street was bustling. The street was empty. There was only Yue Qiang.

And immeasurable loneliness.

He found a very small corner and crouched down. He curled up tightly in that corner and buried his head deeply to his knees.

A few unclear and very soft words jumped out of his mouth. It sounded like, ‘I want to go home’.

Then, he took out his hand phone.

Woodenly, he flipped through those seemingly familiar numbers which he had not contacted for a very, very long time. He stopped at the number displayed under ‘Home’, wanting to call out but changed his mind abruptly and flipped through his contact fiercely before pressing on Luqiu Duanyi’s phone number, ringing it out.

It actually connected.

It was clamorous on the other side of the phone.

Just like the previous few calls, the woman sounded like she was selling something.

Right now Yue Qiang was feeling a little confused. He didn't know what he should ask; what he should say. And so, he waited quietly. A while later, when the clamorous noise gradually subsided, Luqiu Duanyi's voice rang from the phone, "I'll go to your place... ten days later."

The call was hung up.

Yue Qiang did not mind the ten days later too much. He did not think of the connection between the two women sharing the same surname 'Luqiu' in the real world and the game. He wasn't even thinking much about the game. In this night, the abruptly awakened Yue Qiang simply wanted call back his home.

He just, suddenly wanted to call back his home.

He wanted to finish all available options before calling back his home. He knew that this was procrastination. He wanted to procrastinate forever if possible. But the other options he could do were very few.

He was afraid, but after so much time, he could not delay this any further.

His house number was a landline. There were eight numbers.

Yue Qiang had even purposely added an area code at the front before calling.

It was a busy tone. It was the anticipated busy tone.

Once twice thrice four times five times six times...

He turned off his phone, turned on his phone, once twice thrice four times five times six times, then called no longer. He started to call other people's phone: his classmates, his friends; then his relatives; then fire department, emergency rescue, police...

They were all busy tones.

Then, his phone ran out of battery and shut down.

Yue Qiang tossed his phone into the dustbin and returned to his house.

He sat in front of the computer, and waited.

The countdown had ended. Then, he fingers paused on top of the keyboard for a very long time as he very, very slowly typed a couple of words letter by letter.

It wasn't directed at the corpse. It wasn't directed at Yin, who was looking at him with slight concern either. It was directed at himself. He felt that he would go crazy under pressure if he did not

type these five words. They were:

“I want to go home.”

A while later, he tapped the backspace key. His hands were still placed on the keyboard, and he wanted to type another four words. However, he thought that the four words he was about to type was too embarrassing; the kind of embarrassment that was so terrible that even his grandmother’s family had heard about it*. He felt incredibly ashamed at himself, but if he did not express these four words in some ways, he couldn’t help but feel that something was lacking.

*a kind of saying that means extremely embarrassing

In the end, he did not type out the four words.

He turned off the dialog box and closed his eyes. But a teardrop slid disappointingly out of his eye socket. As a young man over twenty years old, as a man, as a person who never called back to his home, and hung up unbelievably quick every time he received a phone call from home, these few words squirmed between his lips instead.

He felt ashamed. He felt embarrassed. His voice was a little soft and trembling, but he still said it in the end. It was four words:

“I miss my mum.”

Chapter 79: Disappear If You Lose, Start If You Win

“Yue Qiang.” the one who spoke was Yin, and her tone was gentle, “There are words on the bamboo scroll. Why don’t you keep reading, okay?”

Yue Qiang calmed down slightly, but his desire to return home only grew stronger. The girl beside him did not offer him any consoling words. She had simply reminded him softly about the words on the bamboo scroll. This was actually the best comfort she could offer.

He knew, that the bamboo scroll would definitely tell him the way back home.

Lines of ink marks appeared on the bamboo scroll:

“If you wish to go home, then you must first end the game.”

“Once the game has ended, everything will be shattered, and the player of the game can return to the real world.”

“However, you are not yet the player of this game. This is because the game hasn’t truly begun yet.”

“The game will truly begin when the blue progress bar hits 100%.”

“The game begin logo was a cutscene.”

“You probably still remember that during the first cutscene at 50% progress, you escaped Zhao Yan’s killing blow by luck and did not die. Ten days later during the second cutscene – also the point where the progress bar hits 100% – you will be killed by Zhao Yan in a cutscene! The way you will die is… by having your head crushed. Once you die, your identity as a quasi-player will be deprived, and everything related to you will disappear. It’s a complete disappearance, and not just a simple death.”

“I know these, because the cutscenes were drawn by my own hands.”

“I am not… but I am at least an A.D. There are some tricks that I can rig. During the first cutscene, I secretly changed some things and saved you. As a result, I have turned into a corpse not long ago. Therefore, during the second cutscene, that is the cutscene where the progress bar reaches 100%, you must rely on yourself completely to live.”

“The cutscene… is definite. But it can also be changed! If you can kill Zhao Yan in the 100% progress bar cutscene, you will be able to live and become a true player!”

“This game will also officially begin when the progress bar reaches 100%!”

“Before I die, I drew a portrait of myself on an animal skin. I love

this portrait a lot. By coincidence, this animal skin portrait had gotten outside. By coincidence, it fell into the trader Ai Qian's hands. Again by coincidence, it was seen by you. I feel like this was mysterious good luck protecting all of us. You have come here and obtained the gift we left for you. I believe that you can definitely alter the cutscene, obtain the qualifications to become a player in this game, and kill Zhao Yan!"

Yue Qiang clicked the little triangle repeatedly. Carefully, he read through the ink marks on the scroll word by word.

So he wasn't the player of the game yet. He hadn't acquired the qualifications to become a player. He would be killed by Zhao Yan in a cutscene during the latter cutscene. Therefore, if he wanted to live, if he wanted to go home, he would have to alter the cutscene and kill Zhao Yan.

The road home... was very far.

The bamboo scroll then talked about another method to go home.

"When the game ends, everything will be shattered, and the player can return to reality. This is confirmed to be one way to return to reality. Besides that, there may also be a better way: There is a book in the game that is ranked second of the top ten classic literatures of the world, '...'. This book has no name. If you used this nameless book, then you will be able to return directly. However, there is a prerequisite to this, and that is you must survive until the game begins!"

Survive until the game begins… become a player…

“The cutscene shall begin ten days later. You must ready all of your preparations. I hope that the things I leave to you will be useful.”

“For this time, I have locked the blue progress at 95%. In reality, calculating by the many information I have left behind, the blue progress bar should have exceeded 100%. However, I have found a loophole and used it to suppress the blue progress bar’s advance. Therefore, you can relax with the knowledge of these information and know that the progress will not reach 100% right away.

The last 5% of progress can be maintained for at most ten days. Ten days later, when the progress has reached 100%, the cutscene will unavoidably arrive. You make full preparations before that happens!”

“I cannot tell you any more information. There are many things that I still haven’t told you, but I believe that you can learn them slowly after you enter the game, and resolve them.”

“Every one of us, wishes you good luck.”

“Finally, please treat my body well. This is my final gift to you.”

Lines and lines of ink appeared, and lines and lines of ink disappeared. When the final word ‘gift’ gradually faded, the small

triangle that signified that there were still content at the back finally disappeared as well.

The bamboo scroll had answered too many questions, but it also left behind too many questions.

Why did the world he was in turn out this way? Was Luqiu Ning and Luqiu Duanyi the same person? Also, what was the objective of this game?

There were plenty of ellipses inside the bamboo scroll, and there were the words ‘I am not’ before every ellipse. Had she purposely omitted the text, or was it wiped away by some kind of existence? Who was us? And why did you help me like this?

Countless questions appeared in Yue Qiang’s mind, and vanished.

But no matter what, he could feel that Luqiu Ning meant him well between the words of the bamboo scroll. This was enough.

Moreover, for the first time he had a clear sense of an objective ever since he entered the game!

Alter the cutscene! Kill Zhao Yan!

For all this time, he had been on the passive and receiving end, and there were multiple times where he just barely escaped death. The most oppressive thing was the ever present scent of conspiracy, the kind that enveloped the sky, no, the outside of this

box. The oppressive feeling that wrapped all around him was so terrible that he was unable to breathe!

It was only now, until the moment when the progress bar had reached 95%, until after he learned so much information that he found an objective. Alter the cutscene, kill Zhao Yan.

These were things that he could grasp within his own hands! These were things he could do his utmost and realise through hard work!

This was very good.

Yue Qiang slowly exhaled, but clenched his fists tightly.

At this moment, he rediscovered that feeling he used to have when he was playing games a long time ago. It was the feeling where he failed an obstacle, found the reason, failed again, tried some more, practiced his controls, and practiced his reactions. It was the feeling where he surpassed an obstacle again and again, gripping the fate of his character firmly within his own hands.

He did not have any strong point. He just loved to play video games. He did not have anything that was worthy to be boasted of, but he was very serious when he played games. No matter how hard the game was, he would dare to attempt.

He would win.

He would win through his own efforts.

This time, it was the same.

The only difference was that it was just a teeny bit harder, and that he had only one chance.

So losing meant disappearing, and winning meant game start, was it?

Then let’s give it a try.

Chapter 80: Strength Classification

“Is that Zhao Yan the one you told me before; the person who almost killed you in a cutscene?” Yin asked.

“Yes, he is.”

“Is he very strong?”

“Mm.”

“How strong is he?”

Yue Qiang pondered and did not answer immediately.

He only had a rough concept of the classification of strength belonging to the characters in this game world.

If this was a normal Xuanhuan world, then the division in strength might be Tiandi Xuanhuang, the first line of the Thousand Character Classic; or Nascent Souls or Gold Cores cultivators rising in power through overcoming calamities. Maybe it could even be something like Battle Monarchs, Sects, Supreme, Saint or Emperors? In general, the division in strength was obvious at first glance, but it was obviously not the case in this game.

The problem was that the strength division in this game wasn’t

carried out by levels; something like level 5 would roll right over a level 1 character, or be rolled by a level 10 character. It was because this game did not have levels at all in the first place.

At the beginning, he thought that the crucial factors that determined a person's strength was the two attributes Strength and Constitution.

For example, he himself had once wracked his brain and attempted all kinds of methods to complete hidden quests and obtain additional freely distributed stat points. Now, both his attributes Strength and Constitution had reached 15 points, and his combat attribute 'Cockroach' had also reached 14 points. His overall strength could be considered pretty good already.

Moreover, he could defeat Zhao Soldiers who had stronger stats than him through the combination of skills and better controls.

Therefore, on the surface the comparison of strength in this game was similar to the real world. One could not find out the outcome between two dueling combatants beforehand through the analysis of certain data.

This situation was slightly similar to conjecturing a duel between Bruce Lee and Mike Tyson. Since they were not born in the same era and had never met each other, one could only guess the outcome of a duel between the duo through conjecture.

If we were to compare the stats between the duo, Bruce Lee weighed only 60 kg whereas Mike Tyson weighed as heavy as 100

kg. Height wise, Mike Tyson was ten centimeters taller than him. If we account the rest of the factors such as strength, endurance, match experiences etc, Mike Tyson also held quite the advantage. Just based on statistics alone, there was almost no chance Bruce Lee could defeat Mike Tyson.

However, as a fellow compatriot, Yue Qiang had always assumed – or rather wishfully thought that – anything could happen in actual combat. What if Bruce Lee could awaken his inner power? What if he could use all kinds of dirty tactics such as stabbing the eyes, crushing the balls or throwing sand in a fight without rules? Bruce Lee might not necessarily have no chance of winning at all.

Therefore, the reason Yue Qiang likened this example was because he thought his current situation was slightly similar to a fight between Bruce Lee and Mike Tyson.

Through the information on the bamboo scroll, he knew that he engage Zhao Yan in a battle and be killed with a blow to the head.

Looking at statistics alone, Zhao Yan was the one and only super boss he had encountered in this game. Stat wise, Zhao Yan undoubtedly had overwhelming advantage. It was as advantage so huge that even Yue Qiang himself thought that it was logical for him to be killed in a cutscene.

But still, there was the possibility of an upset.

The basis of his confidence was the near real combat system.

Yue Qiang's skill, stats, gauges and abilities had great synergy with each other. It greatly improved his hidden strength. His true combat power was a lot higher than the 15 points of Strength and Constitution displayed on the stats screen. Besides that, he had excellent control, and the fact that his skills would not be interrupted by pain was also added merit in combat.

WIth so many merits, he could say somewhat confidently that he could beat an opponent at the blacksmith Tan Xiong's level. You must understand that the blacksmith Tan Xiong had 27 points of Strength, and he had a couple of good skills and stats as well.

As long as the enemy hadn't exceeded human limits, he would more or less be able to contend against them.

Therefore, the most crucial problem right now was that Zhao Yan's Strength attribute had obviously exceeded human limits.

By how much, was the question.

This was also the question Yin had asked at the beginning, that was how should Zhao Yan's strength, or rather, how should the rank of strength in this game world be described.

He recalled that Luqiu Duanyi once told him that the moment a certain attribute had exceeded 40 points, it would be the equivalent of passing through a threshold. There was an immeasurably wide chasm between exceeding 40 points, and not exceeding 40 points. On the stat screen, 41 and 39 might only be 2 points apart, but there was absolutely certain factors that

restricted that 39 from ever reaching 41, and as a result prevented it from ever beating 41.

Perhaps he would be able to utilise various factors to his advantage and contend against enemies that were below 40 points of stats in combat. But if he wished to beat Zhao Yan, who had over 40 Strength points... he would have to think of another way.

“Do you have any good suggestions?” he asked Yin. This girl was very smart, and she had a very thorough mind. Perhaps she had some other ideas.

She closed her eyes and thought for a moment. The she said something unrelated to the topic, “I also have Progress Points.”

Yue Qiang was confused. They had been deliberating about strength all this time, so how did Progress Points come into the equation?

Yin explained to him, “Just now, I used the skill ‘Gaze’ to change the trajectory of the giant crossbow bolt. I have also obtained 0.5 Progress Points as a result of that. I think that you have also obtained some Progress Points while you jabbed a few spiders along the way and took out that mechanical fist, am I right?”

Yue Qiang checked for a bit, and he discovered that he obtained 2 Progress Points from taking out the mechanical fist, and 0.2 Progress Points from jabbing two spiders to death along the way. So his remaining Progress Points from before had increased up to 10.2 Progress Points.

“This is it.” Yin said, “According to your words, Progress Points is a somewhat common reward that had appeared after the introduction of the first cutscene. Moreover, it could be used to exchange for certain things with the old watchman at Green Cow Market. Do you remember? Attributes and skills are not the only thing that can be exchanged there. The very first line of the things can be exchanged is ‘Information (Inquiries)’!”

“What does this have to do with estimating Zhao Yan’s strength and increasing my own strength?” Yue Qiang asked in puzzlement.

The mission back then was rather rushed, so he did not pay too close attention to the options inside it. The options provided were extremely complicated, and just skills and items alone had too many items to read. He only remembered the name of the first option, but he did not expect that Yin would remember it so clearly.

“Mm, it is very much related.” Yin explained, “Information (Inquiries) actually works both ways! What does this mean? This means that not only can we use Progress Points to exchange what we want from the old watchman, we can also use some important items, or even information, to exchange for Progress Points from him!”

Exchange for Progress Points? After Yue Qiang thought over it for a moment, he asked, “This doesn’t seem likely, does it?”

“It is very likely, or this system should be called a Progress Point

Conversion System, and not a Progress Point Trading System."

Yue Qiang still did not quite get Yin's meaning, but the girl's speech gradually picked up in speed, "You may not yet realise how important this is. It is extremely important to obtain Progress Points in this game, so any method that can be used to obtain Progress Points is extremely important!"

Yin held up the 'A Complete Solution to the Two Schema Makeup of a Mechanism Power System' drawing and gestured, "Do you still remember the 'Design' option in that trading system? All of the design type items in that system are extremely expensive, but they are obviously not as good as the design blueprint I'm holding right now. What if I exchanged this design blueprint for Progress Points?"

Yue Qiang slowly turned serious. He was starting to get what Yin was trying to say.

It was very difficult to obtain Progress Points through the normal way, but it was relatively easier to obtain Progres Points through this method instead.

And it so happens that Progress Points was an important method in increasing one's strength.

"It so happens that Progress Points is an important method in increasing one's strength!" Yin said swiftly, "With enough Progress Points, we will be able to meticulously arrange the skills we need to learn and increase our strength. We will be able to

approach quickly that so-called ‘human limits’. More importantly, we will be able to trade for information from the trading system!”

She continued to speak, “How strong is Zhao Yan? How powerful is power beyond ‘human limits’? This is the only way we can earn a sufficient amount of Progress Points to measure Zhao Yan’s strength and increase your own.”

Yue Qiang roughly understood her meaning.

If they looked at the bidirectional principle of the trading system, then the amount of content that he could use to exchange for Progress Points in any combat had increased by more than twice it initially appeared to be! This was extremely important in a case where Progress Points was so hard to obtain. Moreover, designs were in fact a type of intellectual value, so they totally could copy the content of the design one time and acquire a huge influx of Progress Points for free.

This was the most important point!

“The importance of this Progress Point Trading System may exceed even my initial expectations.” Yin said while pointing at Luqiu Ning in the coffin, “She must have an internal reason for purposely investigating and seeking out a main quest to issue to you.”

“Therefore, what we need to do right now is to seek out that old watchman. He must have a way to help us survive this crisis!”

Chapter 81: Taking Advantage

Before Yue Qiang left, he did not forget Luqiu Ning's body.

From the very beginning, the bamboo scroll had hinted at him that the 'body is the tinal gift'. At the end of the bamboo scroll, the hint was repeated once more. He remember this very well.

Although he wasn't sure what this body was used for at the moment, there was no way he's leaving it behind.

But... was he going to take it away along with the coffin? And what about the jewelries and treasures inside the coffin?

If this was a normal game, then this problem was easily solvable. He only needed to toss it into his backpack. However, his backpack in this game was quite literally a backpack made of cloth, and its capacity was extremely limited. Other than some key items that he had saved, the items that took up the most space in his backpack was in fact his books.

In the past, Yue Qiang had attempted to store very heavy or very large items into his backpack. His attempts had all failed without an exception.

Should he just carry it out like this? Yue Qiang walked before the coffin and touched Luqiu Ning once. He did not have too much hope in him.

Then, a miracle happened.

Luqiu Ning's body was gone.

When he hurriedly clicked into his item window and checked the items inside his backpack, he found that there was an extra item as he expected it to be: Luqiu Ning's body.

The items in his backpack were accurately reflected on the main interface of the game. The more bamboo scrolls and books there were inside the backpack, the more stuffed it became. However, despite the fact that it could accurately reflect the image of several added books, the backpack did not change at all when Luqiu Ning's body had appeared in it.

This could only be explained as Luqiu Ning performing some 'setups' on her body while she was still alive.

Regardless, he must take her body away despite not knowing what use it might have at the moment.

As Luqiu Ning's body was put inside the backpack, the Soul Confounding Gas that was spread inside the small room all this time slowly disappeared.

Yue Qiang was starting to feel that his head had become a little heavy, but the fainted Ai Qian by the door had quickly awakened.

He saw the coffin.

By now, Yue Qiang had already stuffed the two beast skins and the bamboo scroll into his cloth made backpack. Luqiu Ning's body had also been stored into his item window through a strange way. But there were still many items that he did not manage to put away in time.

For example, the jewelries and treasures inside that coffin!

There were all kinds of gold and silver made products, bracelets and earrings, wine goblets and jewels, currency of various vassal states, exquisite looking shells, and pearls of various colors. Almost all of the ancient wealth that one could imagine were there.

Ai Qian's eyes immediately lit up.

In the first place, his original objective was this coffin of treasure.

He said quickly, "This treasure is all mine! Don't you touch it!"

Yue Qiang was dumbfounded. His eyes had become fixated on the treasure, and he had forgotten all about the injuries on his body, the various strange atmosphere and the environment. In reality, Yue Qiang did not think that the currency items in this game otherworld was all that important.

After all, the point of playing games was either to raise one's PK or PVE levels. If this was WoW or some other classic online games,

then these gold coins could be used to exchange some point cards. The top gear and important leveling items in smaller online games or browser games were almost all calculated through RMB. As for game unique currency... considering how widespread auto scripts were used these days, in game gold coins and the sort simply did not have too much value. Those truly valuable items could not be purchased by in game currency, and they either dropped in high difficulty quests or were exchanged through RMB.

Therefore, he did not think much of the coffin of priceless treasures.

But Ai Qian didn't seem to think that way.

Yue Qiang recalled his Greed Clouded Heart LVL 2 once more... Was this a Heart skill, or was it something that purely described one's character?

"I'm telling you." Ai Qian's eyes shone, and his pale face swiftly reddened because he had used his Charm skill. The mingling colors of sickly pale white and excited red gave him the appearance of a dying flash. Yue Qiang wondered a little if this fellow would die just like that.

"I'm telling you that these treasures are all mind because of... eleven reasons!"

"Number one: I am the one who found the treasure map, so the treasures should all be given to me!"

“Number two: I have equipped my ten soldiers with the best equipment, so I am very poor right now. So the treasures should all be given to me!”

“Number three: I am handsome, so the treasures should all be given to me!”

…

Ai Qianqian blurted out non-stop a bunch of pretty ridiculous reasons, and the short version of the story was that all of the treasures should be given to him. Originally Yue Qiang did not plan to take the treasures anyway, but when he saw Ai Qian being so desperate, a thought suddenly crossed his mind.

This trader still has quite a lot of value left to be squeezed out of him!

For starters, the spiders just now were probably counted as his kills, so he should have quite a lot of Progress Points on him. Since killing a spider earned the killer 0.2 points, then a hundred spiders or so should be worth 20 points minimum. 20 Progress Points was a sizable amount, so he must rip it off the trader’s possession no matter what!

Moreover, his Memory Unlock Rate was higher than norm. He should obtain more information on the Memory Unlock Rate from him as well.

Yue Qiang waited for Ai Qian to finish his voluminous speech of eleven reasons before typing unhurriedly,

“Nope.”

Ai Qian was stunned. His lying, scummy, profiteering mouth had never failed in every endeavor, but in front of Yue Qiang it was... completely useless!

“We’ve saved your life several times since we entered the cave. Naturally, you can’t spend if you don’t have a life. Therefore, although you are our employer, although you are the one who found the treasure map and the one who hired those armored soldiers, we should at least split these money between us evenly.” Yue Qiang typed.

It was at this moment Yin’s Whisper suddenly appeared on the screen, “You can hold onto my portion. Also, we need to ask him a bit about...”

Yue Qiang replied, “I know, don’t worry.”

Ai Qian said, “T-this is unfair, this...”

“Do you want the remaining two portions of treasures?”

“I do!”

“If you do,” Yue Qiang lay down a trap, “then exchange it with Progress Points.”

When Ai Qian heard this, he immediately let out a sigh of relief and said, “Alright, sure. I’ve killed more than a hundred spiders just now, and every spider is worth 0.1 points. That is a total of 10.7 Progress Points.”

“Bullshit. A spider is worth 0.2 points. Did you forget that I killed one earlier?”

Black lines cut across Ai Qian’s face. Lying and being caught redhanded on the spot was a pretty embarrassing thing, “Alright, it’s a total of 21.4 Progress Points. It should be enough to exchange for two portions of treasures, right?”

“No, it is not enough.” Yue Qiang said, “It can only exchange for one portion of treasures. You will have to tell us everything relating to your lost memories to trade for the last portion.”

Ai Qian gritted his teeth. He was on the losing side this time.

Previously, he had traded with Yue Qiang at Yue Village once, and he had earned 50 Progress Points at the time. His impulse got the better of him and he used them to unlock his memories. Not only did he not unlock anything important information at all back then, he had to lose even more Progress Points now. However, since Yue Qiang had told him that he could trade the remaining one third of the treasure for those information, then it was still worth it.

“There aren’t actually any content that is worth recalling.” He bit his teeth and said, “The two of you haven’t unlocked much of your memories, I’m sure. I can give you this information for free. The first few percentages of the memory unlocks are all feelings! I can only recall that my past experiences were extremely painful, but I cannot recall anything at all about the content. I only remember some extremely fragmented scenes and scattered terms with zero actual effect at all such as ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’. Unless you can accumulate enough progress points to unlock a large amount of memories at once, unlocking memories is a pure waste of points otherwise!”

Pure waste, huh? This information was pretty important. Yue Qiang looked at the girl with her eyes closed beside him. At first, he was planning to split a portion of Progress Points to Yin to unlock some of her memories if he turned out a little rich later. But now it would seem that he should save the thought temporarily until he could become a super upstart with several hundred points under his belt.

“Your information is not valuable enough. Therefore, you need to exchange it with something else.” Yue Qiang lay down another trap before saying, “For example, do you have any information related to the Zhao general Zhao Yan?”

His wording was very casual, but his hard was lifted up to his throat.

This was the question he wanted to know the most, because it was directly related to his life ten days later!

Yue Qiang knew that human decisions often followed inertial thinking. He had exchanged blows with An Qian for several rounds and slowly relented on the second portion of treasures and half of the third portion of treasures. Therefore, going by inertial thinking, Ai Qian most definitely would want to obtain this last half of the third portion of the treasure.

This was just like a browser game seducing its players to spend money step by step. First, the game would gift countless equipment, ingots and all kinds of stat rewards for free so the players would gradually get used to the feeling of spending money. When the free stuff were all used up, the players would experience a large sense of discomfort, hence leading up towards the final objective – allowing players to recharge with cash.

The players actually understood that browser games were extremely boring. However, they would still spend the money due to inertial thinking. This was an inertia in terms of decision making.

Yue Qiang's method was more or less the same. First, I give you the second portion of treasures. Then, I give you half the third portion of treasures. So, would you want to have the final half portion of treasures?

Of course you want it, don't you?

In reality, what he cared the most weren't the questions he asked at the beginning. It was the final few questions that he cared about

the most.

He remembered well: When Ai Qian first appeared, he was already an officer in the Zhao Army! How did he manage to get to such a rank? And why did he leave the Zhao Army later on and work solo?

A person at his level must know something related to Zhao Yan. Moreover, these information might very well play a huge role in the duel between Yue Qiang and Zhao Yan!

This final question was the question he had kept in store until now!

“Just talk about anything.” Yue Qiang typed, “For example, let’s talk about Zhao Yan’s combat strength, maybe?”

Chapter 82: Slaughtered Pig For The Child As Promised (1)

Title refers to the story of Mengzi's mother slaughtering pig for her son although she was not capable of affording the expense, so as not to deceive him and thus teach him the wrong moral lesson while he was still young.

"Let us put away the treasure and talk along the way. If you wish to know about General Zhao Yan's strength, you must first understand a core issue." Ai Qian said before emphasising the five words that came after slightly, "The upgrading of one's Heart."

The upgrading of one's Heart... Yue Qiang quietly repeated the words inside his heart. At the same time, many extracts of information came afloat in his mind.

If there was one skill in the game that he did not quite understand, then it would be without a doubt the Heart skill.

This was the only skill that he had comprehended completely on his own, but it was also the easiest to learn. At the same time, since it was a skill that could only be learned by maintaining maximum calmness when he was about to die, it could also be said to be a skill with the strictest learning requirements.

If his Wisdom wasn't as high as 14 points, he one hundred percent would've died inside the game and in real life. If he had failed to make a comeback kill with the last of his HP... There were too many ifs. If any one of these ifs were not achieved, he would not have been able to learn this 'Pure Heart'.

However, while the learning requirements of a Heart skill was so strict, this ‘Pure Heart’ did not display sufficient combat strength that reflected said strictness.

It did not increase his Agility stats like the Run skill, nor did it increase his survival capabilities like Cockroach. It did not provide a choice of promotion like Hunyuan Jin either. It was as if this Heart skill was simply lying there in his skillset quietly and looking completely unremarkable.

No, wait. He did upgrade his skill ‘Killing Style, One’ with his Heart ability before. But that was it.

The upgraded ‘Break Fist – Killing Style, One’ was quickly replaced by the newly acquired skill book ‘Killing Style, Evolved’.

Was this mysterious Heart skill so weak?

Yue Qiang turned his head and looked at Ai Qian. He saw that the man was putting away the treasure after telling him that with great care.

He did not give up on even a single knife coin. Although the various multi-colored pearls, exquisite shells and other treasures were much lighter and a lot more expensive than a knife coin, Ai Qian still took everything that he could see without missing out on a single thing. He carefully inspected every corner of the coffin and used the torch to illuminate the gaps between the wood of the coffin. In order to take a knife coin wedged between two pieces of

wood, he did not even notice that the torch had burned some of his his hair.

This level of stinginess was practically insane.

To him, these knife coins were obviously small changes among small changes, but still he wasn't willing to let go of a single one.

While carrying big and small bags of treasure, Ai Qian wheezed and walked at the furthest back of the group. Yue Qiang walked at the front while taking Yin with him, but he was thinking of Ai Qian's skill on the inside.

The trader also had a Heart type skill: Greed Clouded Heart LVL 2.

This was a strange title that was no less stranger than his own 'Pure Heart'. Moreover, what was even more important to note was that it was a level 2 Heart skill.

Yue Qiang had inspected many people's stats since he started playing this game. He had never since a level 2 Heart skill.

How could a Heart skill be upgraded?

Yue Qiang's expression was a little heavy when he recalled Ai Qian's miserly actions. It was the kind of miserliness that compelled him to trade in every treasure from Yue Qiang even though he was obviously suffering a loss, going so far as to use a

precious resource like ‘Progress Points’ without any hesitation.

“Do you know what is the relation between Heart skill and one’s strength?” Ai Qian climbed up the vertical stairs before sitting down on his butt while panting heavily due to exhaustion. He said in broken sentences, “Do you know how… a Heart skill can be upgraded?”

“Heart skill is not a skill.” Ai Qian said, “Heart skill is a ‘belief’.”

“The power of belief…” Ai Qian’s voice slowly turned deep and low. He seemed to have become engrossed in his memories, “Didn’t you ask me what I recalled after unlocking my memories? I basically remember nothing from my past, but everything after that was just like yesterday. I can tell you that. I am sure that you will have a direct understanding of Heart ability after you’ve finished listening to my story.”

“It’s been many years since that day. That day, I had suddenly appeared in a wilderness wetland. There was no one around me. The only possession I have was a surgical knife. I was covered in a big white cloth…”

“W-what? Wait wait wait a second.” at first Yue Qiang was still thinking about that Heart skill, but when he heard of the big white cloth his thoughts instantly became jumbled, “What do you mean you suddenly appeared… and you’re covered in a big white cloth? A white cloth??”

This was fucking awkward.

He very naturally thought of Yin.

Back at the Mo Family's Great Cave, Yin had also appeared into existence abruptly and without any prior signs. These two people both had Memory Unlock Rate and spoke modern vocabulary. Therefore, it was not strange that Ai Qian had also suddenly appeared in this world.

However, what's with being covered in white cloth?

If it was a girl like Yin, the fact that she only had a white bed sheet wrapped around her and nothing else on the inside would naturally draw many wonderful fantasies in one's mind. But if the same happened to a man...

Yue Qiang could only feel goosebumps all over his body.

"Skip this part and get to the point." Yue Qiang typed swiftly, afraid that there would be other weird circumstances at the back.

Yin hadn't said anything for the longest time while she sat behind Yue Qiang. However, she suddenly whispered him at this moment, "Pay attention to the time he said, 'many years ago'. This game may have existed a lot longer than we had imagined."

Yue Qiang noted his understanding and continued to listen to the trader's tale.

Ai Qian no longer brought up his bed sheet and jumped straight to the main subject, “When I had suddenly appeared in a wilderness wetlands, it was both dark and raining like the monsoon season. I had two skills with me, and they are Keen Eye LVL 1 and Greed Clouded Heart LVL 1. At the time my situation was extremely miserable. I walked for a very far distance, but wasn’t able to find any food at all. I was completely wet and covered in soil and dust. I thought I was going to die. In reality, I could have died at any moment.”

While he listened to Ai Qian’s unlucky business, Yue Qiang could not help but cast a glance at Yin. When she first appeared in this place, she was surrounded by dead bodies and trapped in danger too.

By comparison, the village he was in was practically heaven.

“I didn’t eat anything for a whole day and night. At the time, I almost couldn’t even walk. Thankfully though, I finally reached an uninspiring market.”

“I saw a mother in ragged garment using a worn out loom to spin clothes while carrying an extremely skinny kid with her. I touched my surgical knife and felt energy returning to my body.”

“I hadn’t eaten anything for a whole day and night, but most importantly I was too cold. The rain never stopped. It was as if the sun would never show up again. The dark, rotten, moldy smell of the remain soaked into every inch of my body, causing me to feel chilled nearly all the way down to my marrow. I am a young man. I still have some strength. I want to wear clothes. I want to feel

warmer.”

“I do not have money. But I have a knife.”

In the dark tunnel illuminated by a flickering torch, Ai Qian told them his experience when he first arrived in this world word by word. Before he knew it, Yue Qiang had already grown engrossed with his story. He nearly forgot that Ai Qian was in fact, talking about the upgrading of Heart skill.

Ai Qian’s voice wasn’t high-pitched, nor was it manic. However, somehow that calm tone of his was slowly causing a sense of fear. Yue Qiang could not help but imagine the scene at the time according to Ai Qian’s words: Beneath a cold and dark sky, inside an uninspiring market, there was a pair of skinny mother and son, and a pitiful but craving trader. The trader had a knife in his hands.

Suddenly, he placed his hands on the keyboard and attempted to type the question, ‘You killed them?’. But in the end, he did not ask.

He felt that the atmosphere was a little scary.

“I did not kill them.” Ai Qian said.

“That kid, helped me raise my Heart skill by one level.”

Chapter 83: Slaughtered Pig For The Child As Promised (2)

Originally, Yue Qiang thought that Ai Qian was going to keep talking about his survival story, but he didn't think that he would say that the 'child helped him raised his Heart skill by one level'.

This was a Heart skill! The most mysterious and confounding Heart skill!

Yue Qiang himself had accrued many strict requirements before he finally self-learned a Heart skill, and now Ai Qian was telling him that his Heart skill leveled up just because of a skinny kid?

Moreover, judging from his description the kid was obviously an original inhabitant of this world at the bottommost level of society no less, incapable of even feeding themselves to full. From Ai Qian's use of adjectives such as 'worn out' and 'skinny', he could imagine just how difficult the mother and son's lives were.

Yue Qiang did not type anything. He listened quietly to Ai Qian.

"I was very cold and very hungry, but I still have some strength in me. I did not possess the money of this world, and my thoughts were basically to walk over and threaten them with the knife so that they will give me some dry and comfortable clothes to wear, and some meat to eat. However, when I sneakily walked closer to them, I overheard their conversation."

“To the side several dozens of meters away from the mother and son, there was a butcher slaughtering pigs. The pigs’ cries were very terrible, and so the child asked his mother, ‘What is the butcher doing?’.”

“The mother was busy spinning cloth, and she answered without thinking, ‘he’s slaughtering pigs and cooking some pork for you to eat’.”

“The child was very happy after he heard this. His limbs were thin and small, but his stomach was a little swollen. It was obvious that he had been malnutritioned for a while. So when he heard his mother say the words, ‘cooking some pork for you to eat’, his eyes lit up so brightly that even his tall cheek bones did not appear as sharp any longer.”

“However, the mother’s face looked bad when she finished saying the sentence, ‘cooking some pork for you to eat’. At the time, she had answered without thinking because she was busy with work. There was no way the butcher would cook pork for her child, and the poor mother did not have the money to buy pork from the butcher either.”

Ue Qiang asked, “But what does it matter? If the mother said something wrong, then she can just randomly make up another reason and deceive the kid.”

“They key is that the mother did not lie to her child. She put down the work she was doing and walked before the slaughtering butcher, saying, ‘please give me some pork. I would like to cook them for my child. However, I do not have the money to buy your

pork, so please accept my loom as the collateral.”

Ai Qian repeated every word the mother said slowly.

From the moment she heard of the mother and son and the loom, Yin had been wearing a pondering look on her face.

At first, Yue Qiang didn’t quite understand the point of the story. But when he slowly and carefully thought through the story once more, he eventually figured it out. Then, shock and heartfelt respect rose from the bottom of his heart.

This mother’s actions were very difficult to comprehend, but also very impressive!

She had said the wrong thing, and her child believed it to be true and was now waiting happily to eat pork. In order to not break her promise with her child, she had used a worn out wool to exchange for the meat!

Was this what the proverb ‘one must be a man of his word and resolute in his work’ meant?

To a person of this world, or should he say to this mother, was ‘promise’ such an important thing?

Was it more important than even the worn out wool that was the livelihood of the whole family?

Or was her actions not for the meat, and much less for some sort of personal ‘moral fastidiousness’, but only to educate her child using the right method?

Yin frowned slightly when she had heard the story. She seemed to have thought of a different matter.

Ai Qian paused for a moment before he continued to talk what happened next.

“I was holding a knife, and I had walked very close to the duo, ready to charge out at any moment. I did not think that the mother would actually use a worn out wool in exchange for meat just for the sake of not breaking her promise with her child. Perhaps the two of you deemed her actions to be highly admirable, but to me it was just a good opportunity.”

“Fresh pork; delicious pork…”

“Having starved for a whole day and night at the wild, covering myself with naught but a wet white cloth, experiencing the kind of cold and suffering that no man or woman who never experienced it could possibly imagine…”

“A bowl of meat… a bowl of meat that could fill my stomach, and warm my body… forget a ‘promise’, I would use anything I have in exchange for that!” his voice was still deep and calm, but Yue Qiang could hear a most primal and unconcealed desire to live from his tone. It was a kind of desire that could push one to kill

anyone in order to ensure their own life.

"This was a good opportunity. This was a very good opportunity to me. I was not in a hurry. I was patient."

The mother had exchanged a very, very large piece of pork using the worn out wool. Then, she took the kid and left the market, returning to her own shabby straw house. I stealthily followed them from behind, watching their skinny bodies walking slowly back into their house. I waited patiently until the pleasant aroma of meat came from inside. The mother had gone out to do something after she finished cooking the pork. I knew my opportunity had arrived, and so I walked into the house while wielding my surgical knife.

"My thoughts were very simple. I want meat, and I want clothes. The child's mother wasn't around, and the child was the only person in the house. I had strength, and I had a knife. If he isn't willing to give me the bowl of meat that represented his entire family's wealth, if he isn't willing to scour me some clothes, then I would kill him."

"I would kill him! I would kill him directly! That was what I thought when I went in."

Ai Qian then smiled self-derisively at this point, "But God seems to have made a joke at my expense."

Yue Qiang quietly listened to the latter half of the story. The plot of the story wasn't complicated. This trader had abruptly

descended upon a strange world without a coin in his pockets. He had endured both cold and hunger, and had reached the brink of collapse. Even if he really did something like committing murder for food, it was understandable.

“Could you guess what the child told me? He told me three words.”

“‘Here, eat this’.”

“I was holding a knife. The knife was perhaps shaking a little in my hands. He had spoken before I could even extend the knife and threaten him. He told me to eat it.”

“The child’s reason was this: You are hungrier than me, and you are colder than me. If you don’t eat, then you will die.”

The self-derisiveness on Ai Qian’s face grew thicker.

“He hadn’t given me the meat because he saw the knife in my hands!”

“He saw the knife, but it was as if he hadn’t seen the knife at all!”

“The only reason he gave me the bowl of meat, was because I was about to die!”

Ai Qian closed his eyes, and the self-derisive laughter finally

escaped his throat. His listeners could not laugh, however.

"Then, I saw his eyes. He knew that I was going to rob him of his meat. He knew that I was going to kill him. I know that he knows! But he still did it anyway. He did it not because of my threats, but because it was what he was going to do in the first place."

"His eyes were very bright. His cheekbones were a little tall, a little thin, and a little dark, accentuating the brightness in his eyes even more. When I saw his eyes, I thought that he was a sage."

"But he was just a boy. He wasn't even well versed with the affairs of life. In that moment however, he was a sage."

"He hadn't done it due to moral demands, but because it was what he believed should be done in the first place, just like how his mother believed that one shouldn't break a promise in the first place. It wasn't moral."

"This was instinct."

Ai Qian finally discarded the calmness that he had maintained all this time, looking a little agitated, "I did not eat, and I did not ask for clothes. I ran away. When I saw the child's eyes, I felt as if there was something similar to a flame burning inside my heart. It was as if it was trying to burn my entire chest into ashes. Then, my Heart skill leveled up just like that."

"I did not realise any grand principle from this incident. I simply

figured out something very simple: I want to earn money, and only by earning enough money would I not starve to death, or freeze to death."

"After my cultivation of the heart had risen, my talking skills seemed to have improved by a lot as well. I have also automatically unlocked 3% of my memories. It would seem that I was a pretty good trader during my previous life. I returned to that uninspiring market, sought out that butcher and used my talking skills to swindle a job and a meal from him. After that, I survived."

"As for the mother and son, since then they had..."

"Moved away, correct?" This time the speaker wasn't Ai Qian, but Yin who had been listening quietly all this time.

"How did you know?" Ai Qian asked.

He sounded a little surprised.

He had just escaped the atmosphere of his own story, and suddenly he heard Yin predicting his words before he said them. At first he did not think much of it, but upon careful thinking he felt very afraid.

Meanwhile, Yue Qiang was already used to Yin astonishing people every time she spoke. He cast a glance at the girl as she explained, "Not only did I know that the mother and son had moved away, I even know that they were not an original

inhabitant of this uninspiring market. The mother may appear to be in a state of poverty, but she was in fact a well read talented woman of a noble family. She had left with her child only because a market environment was noisy and not suitable for the child's upbringing, and not for other reasons."

Ai Qian was stunned.

He did not say anything, because what he learned later after he swindled a job from the pig butcher was exactly the same as Yin's words.

So... how on earth did this girl whose eyes were forever shut know about this?

"The reason I know, is because I have heard of the first half of your story before." Yin said, "That young boy is addressed differentially by later generations as the 'Second Sage', whereas his mother is addressed differently as the Sage's Mother, Lady Duan Yi of Zou State."

"About the first half of your story, there is a specific expression used by later generations to describe educating one's child the right way. This expression is called, 'slaughtered pig for the child as promised'.

"This incident happened during the Warring States period, and during the second move during the three times she moved houses."

“That little boy, will grow up to become the Mencius we know.”

Chapter 84: Heart Ability

Mencius was a lot more famous than the less known Hui Shi.

Mencius, the man who was given the title Second Sage in the teaching of Confucius and Mencius was very famous even in modern times for his vast number of literary works, disciples, and depth of thought. Even a lousy student like Yue Qiang had heard of the great master of Confucianism, Mencius' taboo name. While the parable 'Slaughtered Pig For The Child As Promised' wasn't widespread, Yue Qiang did remember the expression 'Three Moves by Mencius' Mother' that was taught by teachers since kindergarten.

The focus of Ai Qian's story was that he had only taken one glance at child Mencius before his Heart ability level was increased!

This was the part Yue Qiang paid attention to the most.

The Heart ability. Its exact use was unknown, the universal method to obtain it was unknown, and the method to level it up was only cracked a little. It could basically considered unknown too. The one thing they did know about it was coincidence.

All sorts of coincidence.

On the surface, Mencius only needed to glance at the trader once to increase the trader's Heart ability. However, Qian's fear in between the lines of life and death, his struggle between morality

and survival, and an extreme level of coincidence should've been factored as well.

If someone were to say that a normal skill could be leveled up through combat experience, and the upgraded version of the skill could be learned from a skillbook, then a Heart skill was the complete opposite in that a universal method to acquire a Heart skill could not be found at all. It was all luck.

Originally, Yue Qiang thought that he should not spend this much effort on figuring out a skill that didn't have any sort of explanation at all. However, from the information he learned up to this point, he began to feel more and more that Heart skill was the true foundation skill that decided one's strength.

Moreover, this strength did not refer to combat-related aspect alone.

"Do you know what's the relation between a Heart ability and strength?" Ai Qian used himself as an example, "The most direct reflection of this relation is that I'm rich now."

"Ever since my Heart ability has ascended to a new level, I've gotten rich."

"I was a worker under the butcher at the market, and in just a few months time I had become a small business proprietor myself. Another few months' time later, I had become a large business proprietor. Then, I became the richest man in town."

“On the surface, the reason I turned rich is because I’m miserly, I resort to petty tricks, and I know how to scheme. However, I know that is all false. It is thanks to that young boy’s one glance that I am everything I am today. My Heart ability had increased after he cast a glance at me, that’s all.”

“When my Heart ability had climbed a level, I felt as if my entire being had attained some sort of enlightenment. When I do something, I would experience a kind of intuition... I do not need to think to know what I should do to achieve a certain goal. My code of conducts obeys the meaning represented by my Heart completely.”

“I feel that everything I did is right. Everything I did is to obtain greater ‘profit’ and ‘desire’ for me, and this feeling where my choices are auto-selected is pretty great.”

Yue Qiang could not quite understand Ai Qian in this regard.

He could imagine it if Yue Qiang were to say that the Heart affects one’s combat strength. However, it felt a little far-fetched to tie the Heart and one’s ability to do business; Ai Qian’s fortune and his Heart skill together.

However, when he related this to Ai Qian’s conducts and deeds, he suddenly felt that he understood what he meant a little:

Ai Qian’s Heart skill was ‘Greed Clouded Heart LVL 2’. Here, ‘profit’ and ‘desire’ were a part of them.

When Yue Qiang first met Ai Qian at Yue Village, he remembered clearly that he was a person of very strong ‘desire’. This ‘desire’ was so strong that he had chosen to consume a pill without hesitation even when he knew that it would only increase his libido at the cost of his Strength and Constitution. This wasn’t a choice that a normal person should be making at all!

Or rather, Ai Qian’s Heart skill had made the choice for him!

Later on, even though Ai Qian knew very well that this cave contained an immeasurable amount of risks, he still decided to bring Yin and him along to this place in search for precious treasures. This was the maximum reflection of Ai Qian’s pursuit of ‘profit’. He was willing to use his own life as a bargaining chip in order to exchange for the greatest ‘profit’.

This included the action where Ai Qian had burned his own hair in search for knife coins within the gaps of the coffin. Every action he made had adhered to his own intentions. His natural movements had made him appear a little crazy to the point where you could even call him a nut job.

However, one could not deny that his actions were in harmony with his thoughts too.

This was harmony in madness; harmony in abnormality.

It was the Heart ability that had tied this two things together in a strange fashion.

Was this what a Heart skill truly meant?

If this is the case then… Yue Qiang recalled all of the Heart skills he had seen up to this point inwardly. He recalled the village elder saying that, ‘a Heart skill would imperceptibly influence the external expression of one’s temperament’. For example, Gongshu Shaoyang’s ‘Heart of Artisan’ gave her a meticulous and patient expression in norm. She was very skilled when she worked as a smith, but she looked a little like a carefree and passionate dummy when treating people. Meanwhile, the blacksmith Tan Xiong’s ‘Heart of Mohist’ made him rather irritable. The hunter Tu Xu was righteous, and the doctor Ming Que was cowardly…

His thoughts returned to the present. What about his own Pure Heart?

Literal wise, the skill ‘Pure Heart’ was almost impossible to decipher. He himself had not felt any improvement in term of his thoughts. Could it be that he didn’t feel the changes brought by his Heart ability because he was outside the game?

When he thought up to this point, he looked at Ai Qian once more. The trader’s gaze was trained on Yue Qiang’s character as his eyes swept up and down. His eyes looked very sharp, and it made Yue Qiang recall his skill ‘Keen Sight’.

“Your Heart ability… Your Heart ability is this?! Interesting, how very interesting!” Ai Qian wore an incredibly curious look on his face after he cast several careful glances at Yue Qiang.

“Most average people’s Heart ability had a simple and common name. There are very few people only whose Heart ability had special titles. For example, both ‘Heart of Mohist’ and ‘Heart of Artisan’ were pretty common Heart abilities.” Ai Qian said even as he continued to look at Yue Qiang curiously, “I’ve arrived in this world for many years, I have the Keen Sight skill. Although there aren’t many people who possess an uncommon Heart ability to begin with, I have seen many kinds of Heart abilities over time.”

“Among them, your Heart ability is the most special of them all!” Ai Qian suddenly pointed a finger at Yue Qiang and declared unhesitatingly, “I have only seen a Heart ability identical to yours once in my life here!”

A strange feeling rose from the bottom of Yue Qiang’s heart.

He suddenly thought that the trader before him was a little mysterious.

He felt a little nervous.

To be frank, he hadn’t thought highly of Ai Qian all this time. To begin with, this trader did not have any combat skills, and looked a little deranged. So far, he was a burden in this three man team, and he had fainted before he even touched the little wooden house’s door. However, he had gradually revealed a bit of his unusualness after he talked about his long experience just now.

His story was especially unusual. Ultimately, everything he said could be concluded with one term:

Heart Ability.

Right now, Yue Qiang's primary mission was to survive the battle against Zhao Yan ten days later. Therefore, improving his own strength was his most urgent objective right now. He had long since thought that Heart ability was a very strange skill, and the more he listened to Ai Qian's long story, the more he felt the importance of Heart ability.

This was especially true since he had no idea what his Pure Heart was used for.

Now, he suddenly heard from Ai Qian that those who possessed a Heart ability was already very special, and his Heart ability was the most special type among these very special group of people.

He was long since prepared to hear that his Heart ability was the most special among all. After all, he had a feeling that this was a single player game since a long time ago. However, he was now suddenly told that someone shared the same Heart skill as him. This made him a little curious. He wanted to know who was the person who shared the same Heart ability as him.

"Do you want to know who had the same Heart ability as you do?" Ai Qian said, "You've seen this person before, actually."

I've seen him before? A big question mark flashed past Yue Qiang's mind.

“You’ve fought him once, and you’ve stolen things right beneath his eyes too.”

“He is Zhao Yan. He is the Zhao State’s Yan Campaign Great General.”

“His Heart ability is the same as yours! His Heart ability is also Pure Heart!”

“The level of his Heart ability… is level 2!”