

Chapter 471 White paper crane

The lumberjacks had to complete their tasks for the day before returning to the stronghold. In the meantime, Ren Xiaosu chatted with this group of workers while waiting for them to finish.

After Ren Xiaosu departed from the Razor Sharp Company without saying goodbye, he did not immediately venture deeper into the Central Plains from the Zong Consortium's territory. Instead, Ren Xiaosu headed south and found the place where the flood occurred. From there, he marched all the way eastward while looking for tracks of Yan Liuyuan and the others along the riverbank.

The valley had formed a new river channel. Almost every year, the landscape here would be different from the previous year. The river that flowed downstream from the snowy mountains was like time washing away the familiarity of what used to lie here.

As he followed the river, Ren Xiaosu even saw the settlement where his family used to live and the place where Yang Xiaojin taught him how to use a sniper rifle.

But times changed, and things were no longer as they used to be.

Ren Xiaosu did not manage to find any leads with regards to Wang Fugui and the others even though he was about to reach Stronghold 61.

One of the lumberjacks sighed and said, "Kid, you sure are lucky! You actually came out alive after getting lost in the mountains!"

Ren Xiaosu asked, "What's in the mountains?"

"There's a herd of boars in there." The lumberjack exclaimed exaggeratedly, "And they're especially ferocious."

Ren Xiaosu thought silently, 'Is this lumberjack referring to the herd I ate for dinner a few days ago?'

But he did not say anything and just played along, "Ah, that was a close call then. Fortunately for me, I didn't encounter them."

He asked the lumberjacks as he sat next to them, "Bros, do y'all usually work around here?"

"Yes." A lumberjack who just sat down to take a break said, "We're chopping down trees for the Wang clan and have been working in this area for the past few months. Years ago, we were logging in the north. However, the Wang clan said that we had to practice sustainable logging and should not chop down trees in the same area. So we got sent here instead. The place where we used to cut wood in the north is being replanted with trees."

Someone said with a smile, "Don't you find it strange? After all that effort to chop down the trees, they're replanting them? I wonder what on earth they're thinking."

Ren Xiaosu did not answer that question and continued asking, "Did you see anyone drifting down from upstream?"

The lumberjacks paused for a moment. "Are you looking for your family?"

"Yes."

"In fact, bodies often drift down from upstream, probably due to the war in the Northwest. But we haven't come across anyone who's still alive by the time they drift all the way here." A lumberjack shook his head. "This is the only river that we can still see bodies adrift on. Apparently, this river is formed by the snow melt from the mountains, so there's no carnivorous fishes in it. If it were the other rivers, any bodies would've already been devoured by the fish."

Ren Xiaosu's heart stopped for a while and he said nothing more. In reality, he had always been afraid to hear about the bad outcomes. But it did not really matter since he would continue to look for them.

Besides, it wasn't like these lumberjacks came here every day. Perhaps they might have just missed them? That was still plausible.

The lumberjack looked at Ren Xiaosu. "I'll tell you now that although the Wang clan doesn't reject those who flee here from the Northwest, nobody's allowed to enter the stronghold. So former stronghold residents like you should be mentally prepared to become refugees like us. You'll only be allowed to do menial work to support your family."

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Bros, I think y'all've gotten the wrong impression. I'm actually a refugee too."

When the lumberjacks heard that Ren Xiaosu was also a refugee, they turned friendlier and asked about the differences between refugees in the Northwest and those in the Central Plains.

In the end, the lumberjacks came to the conclusion that the refugees in the Northwest did not have a better life than them.

Although they were also tired from their constant busy lives, being a class lower than the stronghold residents, and distrusting their fellow townspeople, at least they did not have to worry about starving to death or eating moldy cornbread.

A lumberjack said with a smile, "After a busy day of work here, we can still head back to town and enjoy a bowl of hot lamb stew.[1] If we pay a little more, we can even get to eat a burger.[2]"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "The refugees here can afford to buy meat?"

"Haha, the lamb stew we have is only the broth, as if there's any meat in it. It's great that we can even enjoy meat broth."

Realization dawned on Ren Xiaosu. It truly was great to even have meat broth to drink.

In comparison, the Central Plains was indeed wealthier than the Southwest and Northwest. This was true since ancient times.

In the evening, the leader of the logging team drove back to town with a truckload of wood. As the workers sat on the wood in the back of the truck, someone asked Ren Xiaosu, "Did you ever meet Fortress 178's troops while you were in the Northwest? We heard from the stronghold residents who fled from the Northwest that the Fortress 178 troops are extremely strong, especially that company of soldiers who utterly defeated the Zong Consortium in the North. They even burned their granary!"

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "I've only heard about them. I haven't met them before."

"C'mon, tell us about 'em. Everyone in town's been discussing what's going on in the Northwest recently. It sounds even more exciting than the storyteller's tales."

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while and said, "I heard that the company of soldiers did not initially plan on crossing the river to the north, but they thought that it was not good to drag the war on for too long. As the saying goes, with great power comes great responsibility, so they felt that they had the obligation to cross the river to finish the war in the North. But even though the company is powerful, the most powerful one of them is still the supernatural being in their ranks. I heard that he's extremely brave, mighty, and handsome.... Later on, he headed north by himself to Stronghold 146. That battle was a storm.... By the way, he's that supernatural being y'all were mentioning earlier..."

As he continued relating the story to them, the lumberjacks got so engrossed they did not notice they were almost back in town. "Huh, we arrived so soon?"

But at this moment, a strong gust of wind blew past them. It seemed that there was something white flapping its wings in the sky, but it was pushed down by the wind. Ren Xiaosu felt that something was not right, so he jumped up from the truck and grabbed the white object with his hand.

When he opened his fist, he was surprised to see a small and exquisite paper crane. The paper crane looked alive and was wriggling its body and glaring at Ren Xiaosu.

Although this paper crane did not have any eyes, Ren Xiaosu had this bizarre feeling that the tiny little thing was really staring at him.

As the paper crane's wings were extremely sharp, Ren Xiaosu accidentally cut his finger on one.

When Ren Xiaosu let go of his hand in pain, the paper crane started flapping its wings again and tried to escape. But before it could fly out of his palm, Ren Xiaosu caught it again.

Ren Xiaosu unfolded it curiously. Inside the squarish white piece of paper, a message read, "The war in the north has ended. The Qing Consortium has signed an alliance treaty with Fortress 178."

'Is someone trying to relay this information to the Central Plains?' Ren Xiaosu wondered. However, even he did not know about the alliance between the Qing Consortium and Fortress 178.

Before he could figure it out, a lumberjack asked, "Why would that white paper crane suddenly fly here?"

The lumberjacks did not clearly see what Ren Xiaosu did with the paper crane. They just felt that it was a little strange to see it flying here.

Chapter 472 Robbery

"Maybe it was blown here by the wind," Ren Xiaosu said with a smile.

"Do y'all remember?" A lumberjack said in a low voice, "The storyteller in town once told a story about these white paper cranes. He said that a very mysterious organization likes to use paper cranes to relay information. Ren Xiaosu, is there anything written on it?"

Ren Xiaosu tightened his fist and said with a smile, "There's nothing on it. That storyteller must have made that story up. Why would anyone use paper cranes to relay information?"

"That's true." Everyone heard what Ren Xiaosu said and did not question him any further.

But Ren Xiaosu was actually startled to hear that. He had a feeling that the "mysterious organization" might just turn out to be real.

But how could an organization like this let him intercept their means of communication so easily?

Could it be a coincidence? Or was it intentionally arranged?

As Ren Xiaosu was cautious by nature, he would always delve further whenever he encountered something strange.

But he did not consider whether it would be a problem for anyone else to try to catch the paper crane. Perhaps they might even be killed by the small paper crane if they tried to catch it.

He intended to refold the paper crane as he wanted to see if it would try to fly off again. But after unfolding it, Ren Xiaosu realized he did not know how to refold it. He never learned something like this before. So Ren Xiaosu placed the piece of paper into his storage space.

The paper crane was probably the power of some supernatural being. Ren Xiaosu turned to look in the direction of Stronghold 61 as that was where it was flying towards.

Perhaps that supernatural being was at Stronghold 61 right now?

When they reached the entrance of the town, the leader of the logging team parked the truck and jumped out of the vehicle. He said to Ren Xiaosu, "A lot of people in town fled here from the Northwest. If you want to find your family, you can start looking for them here. If they're not here..."

He did not finish the sentence. What the team leader was implying was that if they were not here, they would probably be dead.

The team leader said, "I live on the west side of town. If you have nothing to do and want to earn some money, you can come to look for me in the western part of town. It just so happens that we have a lot of work recently."

“Thank you, bro, but I don’t think I need a job yet.” After thanking him, Ren Xiaosu started his search in town. He went looking for Wang Fugui and the others shack by shack.

The town here was huge and was many times larger than those he had seen in the Southwest and Northwest.

A lot of the escapees who fled here had already set up their shacks. Many of them had ashen looks on their faces with hints of despair.

A lot of these high and mighty stronghold residents were probably unable to accept that they’d suddenly become refugees. Some of them had brought along their money and thought they could continue to live a comfortable life when they got to the Central Plains.

However, all of the strongholds under the Wang Consortium had stopped accepting the Zong Consortium’s currency. When people came here to do business in the past, the Zong Consortium’s currency could be used. However, that was no longer the case.

It was as though the Wang Consortium firmly believed that the Zong Consortium would suffer a crushing defeat.

As such, these escapees were forced to pawn their gold jewelry in order to survive.

One of the stronghold residents was following a refugee and saying he wanted to work to earn some money for food. However, he was rejected by the refugee because he was too old and did not look like he was strong enough to do labor.

Some of the stronghold residents scolded these refugees for daring to look down on them. As a result, the refugees gave them a good thrashing and even spat on them.

Of course, some stronghold residents quickly accepted their fate and did whatever they could to trade for some food.

Although the refugees in the Central Plains had it better than those in the Southwest and Northwest, they still had to work in exchange for food. This was the ironclad rule that was constant everywhere.

...

Ren Xiaosu was disappointed that he could not find any trace of Wang Fugui and the others here.

At this moment, he was feeling a little lost. How was he going to look for Wang Fugui and the rest in this sea of people?

It was at this moment that a rat-faced worker from the logging team quietly approached Ren Xiaosu and said, “I’ve been following you around for some time. You haven’t found your family yet? That’s alright, I have some friends in this place. As long as you have money, they can help you locate them.”

Ren Xiaosu turned around and saw the lumberjack's eyes looked rather shifty. It seemed that the man had guessed that Ren Xiaosu had some money on him after overhearing the conversation between the team leader and him about not needing a job yet.

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "I'll be depending on you then. If you can find my family, I'll be sure to reward you handsomely."

"Follow me then. It's not convenient to talk here in town." Then the lumberjack turned around and led Ren Xiaosu out into the wilderness.

Before they could get far, Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "How much farther do we have to walk?"

"Hehe, we're almost there." As he spoke, the lumberjack arrived at a mound and whistled loudly.

Suddenly, three people emerged from behind the mound. The lumberjack looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a smile, "You must be carrying some money on you, right? Hand it over and we'll let you live."

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "How many escapees have you robbed using this method? I thought that the people here did not need to shut their doors at night? Wasn't there something known as artificial intelligence here?"

Wang Shengyin and Wang Shengzhi had said that in the territories controlled by their Wang clan, people did not need to close their doors at night because there was an artificial intelligence that could analyze criminal behavior extremely accurately. Only a few people could avoid getting caught after committing a crime.

But it didn't seem like that was the case now!

The lumberjack sneered, "That's only applicable in the stronghold. What does it have anything to do with us refugees? Hurry up and hand over all your money!"

"Alright then," Ren Xiaosu muttered. So it turned out the Central Plains were just like the Southwest and Northwest. There was also a clear distinction between refugees and stronghold residents.

The lumberjack's vision suddenly went black. Right after, he fell backwards with his chest hurting. The rusty metal knife in his hand dropped to the ground with a clang.

His three accomplices were no exception either as all of them suffered a sudden blow.

Ren Xiaosu put the four of them together and said nicely, "I'll ask y'all some questions. Well... I'd just like to find out more about the local customs and conditions here in the Central Plains. Don't be too nervous. Just answer the best you can."

These refugees who tried to rob Ren Xiaosu realized they had stubbed their toes on an iron plate! No, how could this only be an iron plate? It might as well be a fucking mountain that was several kilometers thick!

In this recent period, they had tasted the sweetness by robbing escapees who fled here from the Northwest. Moreover, the stronghold residents were very timid and would immediately cower in fear at the sight of a knife.

However, they did not expect to rob a superhuman today.

When Ren Xiaosu started questioning them, the exchange went on for the entire night. The four refugees in front of him nearly broke down from his interrogation. When day broke, he returned to town alone and did nothing but stand at the door of the only tavern in town and waited for it to open.

Not only was he hungry and looking for something to eat, he had also heard there was a storyteller here who brought up something about white paper cranes.

473 Listener

The town's tavern was only open for business at noon, so Ren Xiaosu returned here and waited. The refugees were up early and headed to the factories in groups to earn their keep for the day.

It was very difficult for refugees to save up money. They already earned very little each day, yet the consortium still operated shops that sold meat stew, alcohol, and tobacco, as well as had gambling dens all over town. The Central Plains did not ban alcohol, probably because of the relatively rich foods that were found here.

When it was time for the workers to go home, those entertainment shops would be advertising their businesses at their workplace entrances. After a hard day of work, everyone just wanted to reward themselves, so they would spend the money they had just earned.

In this town, there was always a place that pandered to their desires.

Zhang Jinglin once said this was a world meticulously designed by the consortiums. It seemed like he was not wrong at all.

People-watching the refugees, Ren Xiaosu recalled the days when he and Yan Liuyuan were still living in the town at Stronghold 113. Although that period was more difficult than now, it was still exceptionally wonderful in his memory, so much so that he would deliberately forget some of the suffering he had been through, forget about the time when he could not fill his stomach, forget how he was ostracized by others, and forget the feeling of falling asleep in fear.

Then, there would only be happy memories left.

Humans are optimistic creatures.

To this town, Ren Xiaosu was an unfamiliar face. But with the increased number of stronghold residents who had fled here from the Northwest in recent days, no one really cared about his arrival.

The stronghold residents who had fled here would hide in the corner and worry about their future lives.

Suddenly, a young woman ran out of the back door of the tavern with a notebook and pen in hand. She was looking for these escapees to ask them some questions.

Ren Xiaosu leaned in close to listen and discovered this young woman was actually asking the escapees from the Northwest about the war over there. She wanted to know how the war had started and if there were any heroic deeds that took place or any particularly powerful figures in it.

The young woman wasn't asking the escapees to tell her stories about the war for nothing, though. There would be a payment of one steamed bun for every story told as an exchange of equal value.

Although payment of a single steamed bun sounded really cheap, to these escapees who had no idea of how many meals they had skipped, this bun was worth their life, so they would say everything they knew.

A middle-aged man said, "Zong Ying, the commander of the Zong Consortium's front line this time, is still a very capable leader. He used a scheme to make Fortress 178—"

Interrupting, the girl, around 18 years old, shook her head and said, "Didn't the Zong Consortium already lose? I don't want to hear about the Zong Consortium's side of the story, I only want to listen to what Fortress 178 has done."

The middle-aged man blanched and his heart bled. He used to be a bureaucrat in the Zong Consortium's ranks, but as a result of losing the war, he had to drag his family away from his hometown. And, as if that wasn't bad enough yet, he now had to speak heroically of the enemy's deeds. Was this young woman here to fucking add insult to injury?

The young woman said earnestly to him, "If you don't have a story to tell, I'll just ask someone else. Grandpa is still waiting."

The middle-aged man quickly stopped her from leaving. "I'll tell you, I will! Besides, I used to be a high-ranking official, so I definitely know more details than anyone else. When Stronghold 146 was being destroyed, I was right there myself!"

The young woman was very happy when she heard that. "Really? Then quickly tell me about it. If it's interesting, I'll give you another steamed bun!"

When this middle-aged man heard he could get another steamed bun, he immediately started relating the story without a care for his previous status. He was afraid the other escapees would steal this opportunity from him.

Once he started, he droned on for more than two hours. Ren Xiaosu went next to them and listened. But as he kept listening, his expression became stranger.

At the beginning, the middle-aged man was able to relate the story rather factually. He talked about why Fortress 178 wanted to start a war against the Zong Consortium and why the Zong Consortium had been provoking Fortress 178 in recent years. Truly, this middle-aged man was quite the eloquent speaker. His rhetoric was so good that it made people relish listening to him. There were some things that even Ren Xiaosu did not know about.

And then he touched on the actual war, from the attack on Mt. Guan and Mt. Dingyuan, to Shichuan Village being taken, to the Beiwan River being broken through, and finally Stronghold 146 getting destroyed.

All of those incidents revolved around Ren Xiaosu. While he was on the subject of Stronghold 146 getting destroyed, the middle-aged man started talking about how that mysterious young supernatural being had utterly crushed the entire Zong Consortium's combat brigade.

As the girl listened to the story, she wrote it down in her notebook. She wrote very fast, and the more she listened, the brighter her eyes became. She asked, "Is there really such a bold and powerful person in this world?"

"He's not just bold and powerful." The middle-aged man sighed and said, "I was inside the manor of the Zong Consortium's third house at the time. I saw with my own eyes how he wrapped himself in steel armor and managed to dodge three RPGs. After that..."

At this point, the middle-aged man suddenly looked at Ren Xiaosu and said in surprise, "Have we met before?"

The Zong Consortium had sketched a wanted portrait of Ren Xiaosu. Nearly all of the Zong Consortium's higher-ups had seen that portrait before. But as it was not the responsibility of this middle-aged man to catch Ren Xiaosu, he only took a quick glance at it. Now he felt a shocking sense of familiarity when he saw Ren Xiaosu. However, he could not recall where he had seen him before.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "I also fled here from the Northwest. We might've met there before."

"That's possible." The middle-aged man nodded.

Next to him, the young woman urged, "You haven't finished the story yet. Hurry up and finish the rest of it."

The middle-aged man was stunned. When he raised his head again to take another look at Ren Xiaosu, he realized he had already left.

Ren Xiaosu did not want anyone to recognize him yet. He felt it would be better for him to keep a low profile now that he had arrived at the Central Plains. Although the Central Plains were prosperous, the "undercurrents" of this place should be similar to that of the Southwest and Northwest.

He understood that although the war in the Central Plains had not yet begun, everyone already knew of the intentions of the consortiums here to fight for the Central Plains. He did not wish to get embroiled in these matters.

Furthermore, the Pyro Company was here. The Central Plains was the home field of the Pyro Company. In this place, the Pyro Company would no longer be as easy to deal with as before.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized the escapees were probably all former stronghold residents, and some of them were even formerly people of status. So then, why were there no refugees who escaped here as well?

But Ren Xiaosu realized his thinking was wrong. The escapees could only be former residents of a stronghold. In fact, they would also have to be high-ranking officials linked with the Zong Consortium.

The refugees in the Northwest were very welcoming of Fortress 178. Once Fortress 178 arrived in the Zong Consortium's territory, they would definitely lower the refugees' taxes and improve their living conditions. So why would any refugee want to escape from there? In fact, they probably could not wait for Fortress 178 to arrive.

As for the normal stronghold residents, they did not have to worry about the war affecting them at all. Only the high-ranking officials would worry about getting removed from the system!

After all, during the time the Zong Consortium was in power, the high-ranking officials caused quite a lot of trouble for the stronghold's residents and refugees. Ren Xiaosu had been to many strongholds, so he knew the Zong Consortium's officials were definitely not any better than those from the Li Consortium, the Qing Consortium, or the Yang Consortium.

At the thought of this, Ren Xiaosu cast aside his sympathy for the escapees. None of those who could come here despite their guilt would be good people.

The waiter in the tavern pushed open the creaking wooden door. Ren Xiaosu got up and walked in.

474 A cell phone

In truth, Ren Xiaosu had come to the tavern because he wanted to listen to stories.

When he got a rough understanding of the rumors surrounding the Anjing House, he suddenly heard an interesting but terrifying saying about how there was no one in this world the Anjing House could not kill.

This was an extremely secretive organization whose members were scattered and acted independently, yet it was also very powerful at the same time.

One of the more interesting stories about the Anjing House spoke about how the heir of a small consortium entrusted the Anjing House to assassinate his biological father in order to inherit the family business earlier.

In the end, after a week, the Anjing House said they had completed the mission. However, the heir realized his father was not dead yet. Hence, he angrily accused the Anjing House of being untrustworthy. He had already paid the fee, but the Anjing House had broken their promise. The fee was equivalent to five or six years of his savings as the heir of the consortium, and it was a huge sum that normal people would never get to see in their lives!

However, the Anjing House calmly replied to that consortium's heir, "You said you wanted your biological father killed. Your mother's bodyguard from more than ten years ago, who's also known to you as Uncle Wang, has been killed. He's your actual biological father."

Along with that reply, the Anjing House also sent a DNA paternity test report to the heir.

The heir of the consortium was stunned. What kind of a fucking twist was this? He did not even know when the paternity test was done, much less how the Anjing House could have learned of such a secret.

This heir apparent of the small consortium almost had a mental breakdown.

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether this incident had really happened, but he was very interested in the ability of the Anjing House to find people.

Furthermore, he had a long chat with the lumberjacks who tried to rob him yesterday and found out from them that there was even a rumor among the people that if you helped the Anjing House carry out a mission, you could choose not to be paid monetarily and get them to do something of equal value for you instead.

However, all of this was just hearsay. After all, they were just some rumors the refugees had heard, so Ren Xiaosu understood well that these rumors were most likely fabricated.

For example, there were now even rumors about him, the war hero of Fortress 178, being over two meters tall and not ever taking his eyes off his gun while sleeping. He was even known to be more inclined towards certain subjects.

What the fuck did it mean to be more inclined towards certain subjects?

Ren Xiaosu was perplexed. He could understand the basis of the other rumors, but who the fuck would spread rumors about him being more inclined in certain subjects at school? There was no fucking basis to that rumor at all! And what did that have anything to do with combat?

After the tavern opened for business, he went inside and ordered two dishes. Then he noticed the young woman, who had gone around earlier taking notes as she listened to stories from the Northwest, helping a blind old man towards a chair in the middle of the tavern.

Ren Xiaosu understood now that this young woman was the granddaughter of this storyteller. The reason why she was just now asking people to tell their stories was so she could collect more material for her grandpa.

Ren Xiaosu became even more interested in what tales the storyteller would weave. This was because, when the young woman was listening to the stories earlier, she would occasionally interrupt the middle-aged man to analyze the logic of what he said. Clearly, she was very particular about the veracity of the stories.

When the young woman saw Ren Xiaosu, she greeted him with a smile. Meanwhile, the tale that the storyteller narrated today was about the war in the Southwest, and the main character was Qing Zhen.

In the story, there was also a supernatural being who acted as the Qing Consortium's spy and helped to bring down the Li Consortium's Divine Arms Battalion.

Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips in satisfaction. Although he was no longer out there fighting wars, the legend of his deeds was still spreading to many places.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu felt that even though he clearly did not wish to get involved in those disputes, it was as though everything that happened in the Northwest and Southwest were somehow related to him.

Ren Xiaosu had come here because he wanted to listen to stories about the Anjing House, but he was not in a hurry to know. If this topic wasn't touched on today, he was fine with coming back again tomorrow to listen. The storyteller would definitely talk about it someday.

That night, after Ren Xiaosu left the tavern, he went to the grocery store closest to the stronghold to trade his gold for money. When he saw the owner of the grocery store, Ren Xiaosu felt as though he had seen Wang Fugui again. It was just that this owner was not as benevolent as Wang Fugui.

Ren Xiaosu decisively bought a brick house with the money he exchanged for, and it even came with a backyard too! Suddenly, the entire town was abuzz with news that a rich man had arrived.

Every day, Ren Xiaosu did not do anything other than dumping corpses in the morning and going to the tavern to listen to the storyteller from noon until night. The storyteller would only tell two stories a day, while there would also be a preview of what would be talked about in the next session.

The reason for dumping corpses was that his exchanging of gold for money had alarmed some of the ruthless people in town. When they saw that Ren Xiaosu was able to so generously afford a brick house, they started getting ideas to rob him.

There were constantly people climbing over the wall of Ren Xiaosu's house in the middle of the night. However, all of them would always disappear after that like rocks sinking into the sea.

These people were all very secretive in their actions. A lot of people only realized the ruthless people in town seemed to be lessening after they had been missing for a few days...

At first, nobody thought much of it. Slowly, the atmosphere in town became much more peaceful when the ruthless people who often liked stealing from others started going extinct.

There were also some ruthless people who sensed that something was amiss and decided to run away. They felt like someone was secretly hunting them down in this town.

This rumor was spreading around the town: "Someone is purposely hunting down the ruthless lawbreakers."

Initially, Ren Xiaosu still had to trade his gold for more cash. But after killing so many of the ruthless people, the money he had on hand started increasing instead of decreasing.

Since Ren Xiaosu was not a good person either, he did not feel bad about spending this ill-gotten gains.

And to his surprise, he found an old cell phone on one of the people.

Although the cell phone was very basic and worn-out, it was not enough to stop Ren Xiaosu's curiosity for new stuff.

Ren Xiaosu had also seen an instructional manual for a cell phone from before The Cataclysm in the Yang Consortium's library. However, he had never seen an actual cell phone before and only had experience using a satellite phone.

The cell phone did not have a charger, and there was nowhere in this town where it could be charged. However, this problem did not stump Ren Xiaosu since he had the nanomachines.

As he waited for the cell phone to finish charging to turn it on, a glimmer shone in Ren Xiaosu's eyes. This was the first time he had come across such a "high tech" daily necessity.

However, after studying it for a long time, Ren Xiaosu realized this device only had the functions of sending and receiving text messages, as well as taking pictures. But who would that refugee be sending messages to? The mailbox was empty, and so was the photo album.

Or could it be that the refugee who had it previously was only holding onto it but had never used it before?

He went outside and asked around. Some refugees said some of the Wang Consortium's big shots in the stronghold had been using cell phones for a long time now. Ren Xiaosu did not think too much about it and assumed the refugee had gotten it from robbing the escapees.

As the number of people looking for trouble decreased, Ren Xiaosu was finally able to calm down. He started to concentrate on listening to all of the stories that were told, such as the Pyro Company secretly capturing supernatural beings, or the Qinghe Group in the Central Plains that had a method to create supernatural beings. As long as one could complete eight mysterious challenges, they could unlock the genetic code to awaken their power. However, no one in the outside world knew what these eight challenges were.

475 Lamb stew

There was another supernatural organization called the Riders that operated under the Qinghe Group, but the Riders did not participate in the competition for resources and had been searching for something for more than a 100 years now.

Then the storyteller touched on the Saboteurs and spoke of how it had quietly changed from purely fighting against the use of nuclear weapons in its earlier years to having different aims now that the group had gone through some reorganization in its ranks.

The customers in the tavern were all old-timers, so they had heard many stories from the storyteller before. Therefore, when stories were repeated, they would appear uninterested and only focused on drinking.

Only Ren Xiaosu was listening attentively from the beginning til the end. Some of the customers beside him could not help but wonder who he was. This was because the spending level at this tavern meant that not anyone could come here just because they wanted to. Now that a rich man had suddenly appeared in town, everyone would definitely pay a little more attention to him.

However, they realized Ren Xiaosu would just sit there alone and listen to the stories being told every day. He did not try to interact with them at all. The esquires in town were all thinking to themselves that he was probably some family member of the Zong Consortium that had escaped the war and that it was only a matter of time before his pockets were emptied.

Ren Xiaosu listened to the stories every day, and his life became unusually peaceful. But one day, he received a text message on the old and worn-out cell phone he carried around. "Stronghold 67, C Rank. Takers, please reply."

This text was very perplexing, so Ren Xiaosu did not bother with it. He was just using the cell phone as a camera, and he found it quite novel.

Ren Xiaosu used the cell phone to take pictures of the beautiful sunset. When he saw the sumptuous lamb stew in the tavern, he took a picture of it as well. He thought that when he got reunited with Liuyuan in the future, he could show him the pictures and let him know what the legendary lamb stews were like.

The stew in the tavern was different from those sold at the market stalls in town. It was slightly more expensive but also had meat.

After ordering the stew, the waiter in the shop would even give each customer two flatbreads and let them break it themselves. The easier they tore, the better.

Some people said that if you didn't break the bread yourself, or if you didn't do it properly, the chef would secretly spit in your stew.

On this day, Ren Xiaosu came to the tavern and realized the storyteller was not there. Curious, he asked the waiter, "Where's the storyteller?"

The waiter smiled and said, "You must not know since you're a new customer. The old man doesn't come here every day. He occasionally takes a break too; when depends on his mood."

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that this wouldn't do. He was looking forward to listening to more stories. Hence, he resolutely asked the waiter where the storyteller lived and went to knock on his door to make him go to the tavern to tell his stories.

The old man was stunned as well. "Young man, I'm only in the storytelling business because I don't want to work in a factory. You showing up at my door now suddenly makes me feel like I'm back in the days when I was still working at the factory before I went blind."

Ren Xiaosu felt a little embarrassed by his words. However, the old man sighed again and said, "When I heard that you were showing up at the tavern every day, I thought that it was because you were interested in my granddaughter. But now it seems like you just really want to hear my stories. Tell me then, what stories would you like to hear? We won't be going to the tavern today. After all, I might not tell the stories that you want to hear in front of so many people."

The young woman next to him turned a little shy and hid back in her room. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He suddenly realized that although this old man had blindness of the eyes, his heart was not affected.

This world was really a strange place. Some people were not blind, yet they could not see the truth of things.

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he did not bother hiding it anymore. He bluntly said, "Grandpa, I want to hear stories about the Anjing House."

The storyteller smiled. "That's not something a normal person should hear about."

"Do you feel that I'm normal?"

"You're right. You're not normal at all. I'll tell you then."

Although the Anjing House had not been established for that long, it was an exceptionally mysterious organization since its inception. Their extraordinary strength was not self-proclaimed. In all these years, there were indeed no missions the Anjing House could not accomplish.

Only the world's best hitmen could get a chance to join the Anjing House. Not only would the Anjing House assign missions to these hitmen, but it would also ensure their safety and provide them with facilities.

"That yarn about the Anjing House killing the biological father of the heir of a small consortium, the one about that Uncle Wang, did it really happen?" Ren Xiaosu asked curiously.

"It was a real incident." The storyteller nodded with a smile.

"So does it mean that by completing a mission for the Anjing House, I can get them to help me do something of equal value? For example, to help me find someone?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Yes." The storyteller smiled and said, "So you're not looking to have someone killed for you but just looking for a person instead?"

"If I want to kill someone, I can do that myself," Ren Xiaosu said calmly. A certain aura of arrogance belied the way he spoke.

But the storyteller did not take it to heart. He only sighed. "Times have indeed changed."

Ren Xiaosu asked again, "Do you think that the Anjing House is a good organization or an evil one? I'm not trying to judge them or something, but since I need their help to find some people, I have to at least know if they are dependable."

Ren Xiaosu was worried he might end up compromising Wang Fugui and the others' safety by getting the Anjing House to look for them.

The storyteller thought for a moment and said, "All these years, the Anjing House has always had a very clear criteria for the people they kill, and their targets were also deserving of death. Many of them are the radical members of the main factions in various consortiums, while the important figures of the conservative factions are usually protected through missions that seek to kill hitmen who target them. However, due to the extremely high price of that, the Anjing House has rarely handled such missions personally in recent years."

"They don't personally handle the missions? Then who do they get to do it?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned.

“They hire some of the hitmen who are waiting for the trials.” The storyteller smiled and said, “The Anjing House dispersed a bunch of cell phones a few years ago, and it’s said that the phones can only send and receive text messages and take pictures. The purpose of sending and receiving texts is for the Anjing House to issue missions and wait for interested hitmen to accept them. The mission details include the mission rank and hitmen rank that can accept it. As for the camera, that’s necessary for taking pictures of the body after the mission’s been completed. The pictures are automatically sent to the Anjing House.”

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he was absolutely taken aback. Cell phones?! Cell phones that could only send and receive text messages and take pictures as well? Using text messages to take on missions, and the missions are even ranked?

Didn’t he have one just like that in his hands?!

However, the old man said that after taking a picture, the cell phone would automatically send it over to the Anjing House....

Ren Xiaosu recalled the lamb stew in his photo album and suddenly fell deep into thought.

The people at the Anjing House probably did not think they would receive a photo like that either.

“Haha, how magical,” Ren Xiaosu laughed awkwardly.

The old man continued, “After completing a series of missions, you can rise from D rank to A rank. Only then will you be qualified to participate in the formal trials to join the Anjing House.”

Ren Xiaosu suddenly wondered, “Grandpa, how do you know about all this? Normal people don’t tell others these stories, right? So how true is all of that?”

The storyteller paused for a moment, then said with a smile, “How do you think I lost my eyesight?”

Chapter 476 Please don’t send pictures of lamb stew again

Ren Xiaosu had gained a lot of knowledge by finding his way to the storyteller’s house. At least, he realized what the old cell phone he had “picked up” was used for. Furthermore, he was also able to learn a bit more about the Anjing House.

Ren Xiaosu returned to his own house and turned on the cell phone again. After hesitating for a while, he sent a text message back to the other party. “Accept mission.”

He hesitated because he did not know what kind of future he would face after sending this text. Today’s events would bring about a change in his life once again.

The other concern he had was that Stronghold 67 was quite far away from Stronghold 61, so it would take him some time to complete the mission.

But this was probably the best way for him to find Wang Fugui and the others now, wasn’t it? Based on his strength alone, it would truly be very difficult to find them in such a vast sea of people.

Perhaps he could have used Wang Shengzhi's influence to look for them by frankly explaining the situation to him, but Wang Shengzhi knew exactly who he was and knew very well how Zhang Jinglin viewed Ren Xiaosu. Therefore, it would be hard to guarantee that the Wang clan would not get any other ideas from this relationship.

But the Anjing House did not know who he was. He would be anonymous to them, so there would still be some room for a buffer.

While Ren Xiaosu was thinking about all that, the old and worn cell phone lit up. It was a text from the other party: "The holder of this cell phone has not reached C-rank yet. Unable to accept mission."

Ren Xiaosu froze. It turned out that all the thinking he did had been for nothing since he was not even allowed to accept the mission.

He looked at the cell phone in his hand in disbelief. Was the previous owner of this phone a pig? The phones were dispersed a few years ago, so why was the previous owner still a D-rank?

Besides, the Anjing House was also really odd. 'Since you already know that I'm a D-rank, why are you mass sending me a C-rank mission?'

But before he could cool off, the other party sent him another message. "Please don't send pictures of lamb stew again."

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. Well, alright then! He would just have to continue waiting patiently.

Ren Xiaosu still went to the tavern every day. If the storyteller was there, he would listen to the stories he told. If the storyteller did not go, he would just sit there and read. This humble tavern actually started exuding the feeling of a library because of Ren Xiaosu's antics.

As for where the books came from... well, he had been to Stronghold 88's library, after all, so there was no reason for him to return empty-handed since he had entered a treasure trove like that!

And with Stronghold 88 already destroyed, Ren Xiaosu felt he had actually helped save a great wealth of human knowledge!

Didn't they say that people in the Central Plains could get rich overnight if they discovered research from a lab? This meant humans still valued knowledge.

Most of the research found in labs were either completed or about to be completed technologies. Once a consortium found it, they could immediately open up a new field of technology. So even though the research could be sold for money, the books in Ren Xiaosu's possession might not fetch sky-high prices.

After Ren Xiaosu's visit to the storyteller's place, when the storyteller met him again in the tavern, it was as though that meeting never took place. Both parties kept quiet about it in tacit agreement.

Instead, it was the storyteller's granddaughter who became closer to Ren Xiaosu. Sometimes, when she went outside to pry for more stories, she would come back and tell them to Ren Xiaosu in detail before telling the storyteller.

The storyteller was not angry about this either. He just vaguely hoped that Ren Xiaosu could receive a mission soon and then quickly scam.

The days passed, and the number of stronghold residents who fled here from the Northwest decreased. All those who should have escaped had already escaped. Those who did not manage to escape in time would have been dispatched by Fortress 178.

Some of the escapees gathered together and went to block the gate of Stronghold 61 every day, saying that they wanted to make a political appeal to the Wang Consortium. They also said they used to be people of status and that the Wang Consortium should not treat them like this.

It wasn't that these refugees were stupid, but that they really had no other choice.

Many of these escapees had brought their families with them. Their entire family was going hungry, but they had already sold off everything that they could. Therefore, being so starved and unable to take manual labor, this was the only option left.

At the beginning, the Wang Consortium did not even want to bother with them. After all, 90% of these people were former Zong Consortium officials who did not even know how to use technology.

Some of them were originally in the field of technology, but after holding their elevated positions for so long, they had already lost relevance. Therefore, to the Wang Consortium, they were completely useless.

Later on, the town administrator felt it would become a problem if these people blocked the gate day in and day out, so he simply ordered for them to be beaten up.

Only then did the escapees start behaving.

Some of them started performing manual labor, while others continued to think of crooked ways to survive.

And so, the refugees in the town of Stronghold 61 were very happy. Seeing that these former stronghold residents were worse off than them, they were all gloating on the inside.

There were even some refugees who went to make fun of the families of these former officials. Although they did not really dare to be too harsh, it was still quite an unbearable sight to watch.

In the evening, Ren Xiaosu returned home after having dinner at the tavern. While he was doing some reading, there came a sudden knock on the door.

Ren Xiaosu walked over to answer the door. When he opened the door, he held his black saber in one hand behind his back. The nanomachines in his body were also getting restless and ready to form the armor at any moment.

However, when he opened the door, he saw a beautiful, middle-aged woman standing outside of it. The woman seemed to have specially cleaned her face and hurriedly put on some makeup with cosmetics brought over from the Northwest. She had even changed into a beautiful qipao.

Ren Xiaosu asked calmly, "Anything the matter?"

The woman asked softly, "Can I go inside and talk?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu rejected her.

The woman did not expect Ren Xiaosu to be so difficult. She got a little anxious and said, "We're all escapees from the Northwest, and I'm from Stronghold 146 as well. Since we were all fellow Zong Consortium residents, can you let me trade for some food?"

In these recent days, Ren Xiaosu was living the most comfortably among all the escapees. Of course, in the eyes of the other refugees, Ren Xiaosu was just a refugee like them, as even he had said so himself.

Therefore, when the other escapees found out that Ren Xiaosu was leading such a good life, they started getting ideas about him.

Ren Xiaosu raised his eyebrows. "Trade with what?"

"With myself," the woman said through clenched teeth. She spoke while deliberately posing her body so that Ren Xiaosu could see her legs under the slit of her qipao. The woman had maintained her figure really well.

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "I suggest that you quickly go home and change out of these clothes. It can get quite dangerous when it turns dark." Then he slammed the door shut.

A man's voice rang out from behind the door. He lowered his voice and asked, "What happened? Is he not interested?"

The woman, who felt rather humiliated by all this, sobbed, "What kind of husband forces his wife out to sell herself?"

The man said angrily, "Then what's the point of having you as my wife? Or do you prefer that all of us wait until we starve to death?"

Chapter 477 First come, first served

Ren Xiaosu's lifestyle did not change because of the attention he was getting from the escapees. When you got hungry, you would just have to work and find ways to survive. This was the worldview he had been inculcated with since childhood. No one owed you a living, and you had to rely on yourself for everything. Although life in town was very cruel, as long as you were willing to work, there would always be a way to survive.

In the end, the beautiful woman did not manage to get anything from Ren Xiaosu. However, she seemed to be filled with humiliation and anger as she presented herself to a provisions store owner in town.

The boss had a mouth full of yellow teeth and did not wash his hair and feet. If this were the past, the woman would not even have looked at him.

But surprisingly, even though she had presented herself to someone, she still secretly gave the food she had received to her husband who scolded her earlier. This puzzled Ren Xiaosu a little.

But there were too many strange things in this world that Ren Xiaosu did not have the time to waste on.

This woman was not the only one. There were also many other escapees who tried to seek help from Ren Xiaosu. They all hoped Ren Xiaosu would offer them a bite on account of them being fellow former Zong Consortium residents.

The escapees even discussed with each other to see who used to be from the same stronghold as Ren Xiaosu, and whether they had seen this young man around before. This way, they might just be able to get closer to him if there was an acquaintance who could link them up.

But slowly, the escapees realized none of them knew Ren Xiaosu at all...

Not in their wildest dream would they have expected that Ren Xiaosu was not from the Zong Consortium at all. Rather, it turned out he was actually the supernatural being who destroyed Stronghold 146 all by himself in the deep of night.

When the escapees finally stopped pestering Ren Xiaosu, he received a new text on his cell phone. "Stronghold 62, D-rank. Any takers, please reply."

He had finally received a D-rank mission. Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little touched. He immediately replied, "Accept mission."

The moment he sent it out, the other party replied with a new text. "The target is Ma Dewei, a manager at the sand plant outside of Stronghold 62. He once killed nine refugee workers. Reward: 20,000 yuan."

The text was simple, and there were two pictures attached as well. One was Ma Dewei's picture, and the other was a blueprint of the plant.

As for how to use this information to kill Ma Dewei, that would be up to the hitmen themselves.

Ren Xiaosu realized the organization behind this cell phone was probably also trying to protect the hitmen by assigning them specific ranked missions. It was to prevent the weaker hitmen from foolishly sending themselves to their deaths.

The missions that D-ranks could receive would not even require them to enter the strongholds, and the targets were just factory managers.

Legend had it that it would be extremely costly for the Anjing House to undertake a mission. However, this referred to the missions that were undertaken by the actual members of the Anjing House. But according to the storyteller, people like Ren Xiaosu were extras who would not even pass the trials to join the Anjing House.

Ren Xiaosu immediately set off for Stronghold 62. His current location was about 190 kilometers away from the target, so it would probably take around three to four hours to get there if he were to use the steam locomotive to travel in the wilderness.

Even now, Ren Xiaosu had to be a little cautious when driving the steam locomotive. As such, it would be better to travel there on foot in case he were seen by others along the way.

In the tavern, the guests were all puzzled when that youth who usually sat by the window did not appear today.

The storyteller's granddaughter asked the waiter curiously, "Did he come by today?"

"I didn't see him." The waiter shook his head and teased, "Why, Xiaolu, you miss him?"

The girl named Xiaolu rolled her eyes and kicked the man in the ass. "Go and get the steamed buns for me. My grandpa's making me go out to get more stories."

"Alright!"

The customers in the shop were starting to get used to the young man sitting in the tavern every day. Now that the young man had suddenly disappeared, they found it a little difficult to adjust to.

Some people even wondered if he had spent all his money already. After all, not even an esquire living in town could handle coming to the tavern every day.

Speaking of which, that esquire dressed really poorly too.

Xiaolu was bored stiff as she stood by the window where Ren Xiaosu often sat. She was leaning her arms on the windowsill and waiting for the waiter to bring the steamed buns to her.

In this town, only she and her grandpa knew that Ren Xiaosu was not an ordinary person. In fact, he was even the most extraordinary kind there was.

...

Ren Xiaosu slowly walked into the town at Stronghold 62. He smiled and asked around if there was any place near Stronghold 62 that he could get some work to do. He told the people he approached that he had been starving for several days and wanted to look for a factory where he could do some manual labor.

The people in town were used to this. There were many refugees like Ren Xiaosu who wanted to look for a factory to work at.

Someone told him that if he wanted to fire bricks at the brick kiln, he could go north; if he wanted to carry ore from the mines, go west; and if he wanted to scoop out sand, go south. Any of the other factories required people with craftsmanship and would only take those who were skilled, so it would not be feasible to head to those places to earn money.

Ren Xiaosu nodded and thanked the person. Then he walked south. He looked up at the sky. It was only noon now, so there was no need for him to rush. It would be better if he carried out the assassination at night.

He had once killed a factory manager. Wang Congyang's elder brother, Wang Dongyang, had died to his hand.

It was really easy to kill a factory manager. Although they were armed with guns, Ren Xiaosu could even ignore it if it were just a pistol...

But this did not mean that Ren Xiaosu would rush over recklessly and kill the target. He still hoped he could do it safely by always staying undercover.

In the wee hours of the night, Ren Xiaosu, who had been resting in a patch of bushes in the wilderness, suddenly opened his eyes.

He walked toward the factory with cautious footsteps. When he reached the outer wall of the factory, he leaped over it and went inside.

In the dead of night, no one noticed an uninvited guest had broken into the factory.

Ren Xiaosu hid in the shadows and calmly watched the patrolling refugee workers pass him by. They did not even seem to have realized Ren Xiaosu's presence at all.

After they left, Ren Xiaosu quietly climbed up the building. But when he reached the fourth floor, he was stunned. This was because he saw through the window that Ma Dewei was already lying in a pool of blood.

What the fuck!

Ren Xiaosu was dumbfounded. He had come all the way here and had been hiding in the bushes all night, but the mission target had already died?

Wait. Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized he might have missed out on something very important. He recalled the process of accepting the mission. Since the text for the mission was sent out as a group message, it meant a lot of people could receive the message. So a lot of people could accept it!

Ren Xiaosu sent a text. "Has someone completed the Ma Dewei mission? Wasn't I the one who accepted the mission?"

In the end, the other party replied, "First come, first served."

Ren Xiaosu felt a throbbing pain in the back of his head. He would actually have to steal away the mission from others?!

Then why the fuck did he go through all that effort to stay low? Wasn't that just troubling himself for nothing?!

Chapter 478 Path of the Hitman

Ren Xiaosu returned to Stronghold 61's town angrily and waited for further missions to be assigned through the texts. When Xiaolu saw he had returned, she even asked quietly if the mission had been completed.

How was Ren Xiaosu supposed to answer? Was he supposed to say his mission was intercepted by someone while he was hiding in the bushes?

For the next half a month, he received a total of seven missions through the cell phone. However, five of them were to be carried out in strongholds too far away from Ren Xiaosu.

He would never make it there in time.

As for the two missions that were nearby, one of them was to kill an esquire in town. This mission was easier, but the reward was relatively low as well.

The other one was to kill one of the town's administrators. As the difficulty was similar to that of killing a factory manager, the reward was 20,000 yuan as well.

However, without exception, every time Ren Xiaosu arrived at the scene, he would discover the mission had already been completed.

This made Ren Xiaosu even angrier. Where were the promised five completed missions within two months? And what happened to moving up to A-rank quickly?

Initially, Ren Xiaosu thought the hardest part of the assassination missions would be the killing. But now he finally understood the hardest part was to be the first to finish a mission.

The threshold for a D-rank mission was so low that even some of the refugees and ruthless townspeople could do it. This meant that any random person could easily snatch a mission from him.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if there would be fewer people trying for the missions as the ranks went up. After all, the higher the rank, the fewer hitmen there would be.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu received a new text. "The target is Zhao Yanbo, the former warden of Stronghold 146's prison. He bullied female prisoners while he was still in office and has escaped to the town outside of Stronghold 61. Reward: 20,000 yuan."

Then a photo of Zhao Yanbo was sent over. Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. Wasn't this person the middle-aged man who had forced his wife to offer herself to him?

Ren Xiaosu got a pleasant surprise. He had already made three trips in vain in the past half a month. It was only because he was too far away from those targets that others could get to them before him.

This time, the assigned mission was right next to him!

If someone else went ahead and stole his mission again this time, Ren Xiaosu swore to himself that he would start eating while doing a handstand!

It was evening, and the townspeople were already back in their shacks. The number of people on the streets was starting to lessen.

Ren Xiaosu changed into his attire and even put on a cap as he walked out of his house.

Zhao Yanbo had been living quite well recently. Although it was not as good a life as he had at the Zong Consortium, at least he would not starve to death with his wife secretly bringing food back to him.

This person had no other pursuits in life anymore. He hid in the shack every day and would secretly ask his wife for some money from time to time to buy alcohol.

When Ren Xiaosu located Zhao Yanbo, he was merely hiding in his shack and drinking some alcohol.

However, Ren Xiaosu was not in a hurry to make a move yet. Instead, he hid in the shadows not far away and waited there quietly.

Three hours later, someone suddenly sneaked in from outside of town. He took out an old phone and checked the text. But just as his phone lit up, he heard someone behind him say cheerfully, "Here on a mission?"

The hitman was shocked. He tried to turn around and swing his sword at whoever said that, but before he could turn around, he was knocked unconscious by a knifehand strike.

Ren Xiaosu squatted down and took the cell phone away from the hitman. He sneered and said, "How dare you try to steal my mission? I'll see how you can steal it away now without your cell phone!"

He happily looted the money the hitman had on him and threw the cell phone into his storage space. He was finally able to vent his anger after wasting the past half a month.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not kill the person because he was unsure if this hitman was evil or not. At least this hitman was here to kill someone who was an actual villain.

After he finished up, Ren Xiaosu dragged the hitman over to the side and continued waiting in ambush patiently.

As long as no one replied to the mission assignment text message with a picture of Zhao Yanbo's death, then this mission would not be considered complete, and there would constantly be new hitmen coming here.

Currently, Zhao Yanbo was still unaware of what was happening outside because of him.

Ren Xiaosu was filled with a sense of frustration after having waited for half a month for nothing. He wanted to vent this frustration, but the people who had stolen the missions had already left the crime scene. Even if he wanted to blow off some steam, he did not know who he could vent to.

Now that the assigned mission area was right next to him, he could easily carry it out without any trouble.

Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu felt he could not always have others stealing his missions away. So how should he solve this problem?

Ren Xiaosu's thinking had always been different from others. Everyone else would try to treat the symptoms of their problems, while Ren Xiaosu would look at the root of the problem. Wouldn't it be better to solve it by taking care of those people who created the problems for him?

Today, all he needed to do was wait patiently and knock out the hitmen who responded to the mission. Afterwards, he would just have to take their phones. That way, wouldn't he be the only hitman left in this vicinity?

After that, he could do whatever missions he wanted, and he could even do them whenever he wanted!

In fact, he could even pick and choose which missions to take. If the mission was too troublesome, he could totally ignore it! 'I want to keep a low profile too, but I can't!' Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu nearly laughed out loud.

This was perfect!

That night, the mission to kill Zhao Yanbo remained incomplete. More and more hitmen arrived at his door, but all of them were taken out by Ren Xiaosu.

Although the other hitmen also had problems related to finishing a mission first, they never once thought of Ren Xiaosu's method. It was simply impossible for them to carry out.

These hitmen who answered to the mission were only D-ranked. They had not even seen a superhuman before, so they weren't a match for Ren Xiaosu.

These people were basically D-ranked because they could only get to D-rank. After all, not everyone could complete five missions within two months. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was only stuck at D-rank because he did not manage to complete any of the missions until now!

But not everyone was like Ren Xiaosu. Even though he had already become a legendary supernatural being in the Northwest, he was still meddling in these low-level missions here.

If the other hitmen knew about this, they would definitely curse Ren Xiaosu for being shameless.

In one night, Ren Xiaosu had already taken away five cell phones from other hitmen. He estimated there should still be some more hitmen in the stronghold controlled by the Wang Consortium, so as long as he continued seizing cell phones, he would get to pick any mission he wanted one day.

At dawn, Ren Xiaosu decided to stop waiting. He went straight to Zhao Yanbo, who was sound asleep, and twisted his neck. He did not have any reservations killing these Zong Consortium lackeys.

After Ren Xiaosu took a photo of the scene, he received a text as expected. "Mission accomplished. You have a time limit of two months, a total of 60 days, starting today, to advance to C-rank. Mission reward of 20,000 yuan to be transferred to the anonymous account 1583850 in the Wang Consortium Bank. The password is 666666."

As the sun rose, the sky brightened and the red glow of dawn followed.

Ren Xiaosu finally let out a sigh of relief. His Path of the Hitman had finally begun.

Chapter 479 The paper crane appears again

In a certain house, someone curiously muttered, "There seems to be a problem with the D-rank mission near Stronghold 61."

"What's the problem?" a shrill voice asked from close by. "What problems can there be for a D-rank mission?"

"In the past, these D-rank missions would be completed not long after they got assigned. Look, the average completion time is four hours, but the last two missions were only completed after a day."

"Eh? Is that true?" The other person went over. "Oh, it's really true. One took 21 hours, the other one took 23 hours. What's going on here? Are there no qualified account holders around Stronghold 61?"

"That can't be. There were a total of 11 qualified account holders who accepted both missions."

This meant 11 hitmen must have accepted the missions. But even with so many hitmen taking on the jobs, problems were still encountered.

"Could it be that these two missions' targets were harder to kill? Which missions did you assign?"

"They were both very simple D-rank missions. The goal was to clean up some of the more corrupt Zong Consortium officials. What's more, they aren't protected by any bodyguards." The person who started this discussion asked doubtfully, "Could something have happened?"

"Then who completed those two missions?"

"It's that dumbass who sent us pictures of lamb stew."

"Pfft." The person next to him burst into laughter. "It must be a newly qualified account holder, and he actually managed to complete the missions smoothly too?"

"That's not the case either. He did take a few missions before. But perhaps because he was too far away from them, he did not manage to complete those missions. I think this qualified account holder should be in the town of Stronghold 61."

"Report this to the boss." The person next to him said as he chewed on a cracker, "Put this information into the latest mission summary report. Although D-rank qualified account holders are not that big a deal, we should still let the boss know."

"Sure."

The person beside him suddenly thought of something. "By the way, did those people who accepted the missions at Stronghold 61 take on any other missions after that?"

"Let me see." The first person who spoke was surprised to find that all the qualified account holders that had gone to Stronghold 61 to carry out the missions had disappeared without sending another text.

He was puzzled. Could they have taken a break? So they did not take any further missions for the time being?

However, among the 11 people, there was someone who was still taking missions without fail. Even if the targets were far away, he would still attempt it.

"This won't do. We have to inform the boss as soon as possible."

...

During this period, Ren Xiaosu did not do anything else. He just peacefully remained at the small tavern and waited for new missions to be assigned before going "fishing."

The thought of going to the other strongholds to complete missions had also crossed his mind, but they were way too far away and he was not at all familiar with the places. He might as well stay here for now and familiarize himself with the organization behind the cell phones.

In just half a month, he had already collected more than ten cell phones in his storage space. But to his disappointment, in this same time frame, the other party had only issued two missions related to Stronghold 61.

In this duration, more than a dozen missions related to the other strongholds were issued. But due to the distance and his unfamiliarity, Ren Xiaosu did not venture there.

Ren Xiaosu made a rough calculation. If he could only advance to C-rank after completing five missions in 60 days, then the missions related to a single stronghold would definitely not be enough for him to achieve that. After all, assassinations could not keep occurring in the same stronghold over and over.

'I would have to take this step by step,' Ren Xiaosu thought.

At this moment, he received a new text on his cell phone: "The target is Zhang Cenran, the former Director of the Taxation Department of Stronghold 144. He escaped to the town outside Stronghold 61. Reward: 20,000 yuan."

Ren Xiaosu was delighted. This was someone else he was familiar with. He did not expect that the Anjing House would keep sending out missions to kill these officials like they had something against them.

But based on the previous mission assignments, the organization behind the cell phone would always write a summary of the evil deeds committed by the person they wanted killed, as though to lessen the guilt of the hitmen. Meanwhile, the D-rank missions were mainly focused on the factory managers who bullied the people or some extremely terrible town administrators.

But Ren Xiaosu did not quite understand. Would anyone really pay to have these people killed?

He did not understand the reason and went to ask the storyteller. In the end, the storyteller said, "My guess is that the missions assigned to the account holders of these cell phones were all issued by the Anjing House themselves. After they accept the incredibly well-paying missions that required superhumans to complete, they pay a portion of it to the superhuman who completes it and uses their own part of the commission to maintain the mercenary hitman system. This acts as their assassin trial selection and, at the same time, eliminates the targets they want to kill."

As for what their exact purpose was, only they themselves knew.

Ren Xiaosu did not want to think too much about it anymore. He headed straight to the shack where Zhang Cengran was living. This was the third time he had to carry out a mission at Stronghold 61. By the time he was done with it, there would probably be no more cell phones left in the area, right?

When he was about to reach the shack where Zhang Cengran was living, Ren Xiaosu took a careful detour to deliberately observe the surroundings.

Although it was easy to deal with a former fat cat like him, what if something unexpected happened?

As a result, Ren Xiaosu saw a tiny white paper crane sitting atop a pole next to Zhang Cengran's shack.

It was already dark. If Ren Xiaosu had not seen a thing like this before, he might not have noticed it at all.

The paper crane was facing Zhang Cengran's shack, and Zhang Cengran was currently sleeping on the inside.

The situation gradually turned weird. The paper crane was staring at Zhang Cengran while Ren Xiaosu kept his eye on the paper crane...

Ren Xiaosu was quite sure he had not spotted any paper cranes during his previous missions. It must have been his recent actions that had attracted the attention of the other party, so they wanted to see who the one causing trouble was.

However, he was also quite sure this paper crane's feedback was not immediate. Why else would there be a need to send messages via notes? It would have been more direct to just talk to it instead.

Furthermore, he had also caught a paper crane before. Since that paper crane had seen his appearance before, if it could transmit a message immediately, the other party would probably have tried to capture him long ago.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu decisively activated Shadow Door and grabbed ahold of the paper crane.

The paper crane was caught off guard. When it was grabbed, it tried to spread its wings to cut Ren Xiaosu's finger. With the sharpness of those wings, a normal person would most likely get their fingers cut off. But this time, Ren Xiaosu had learned his lesson and moved even faster than it could react. He immediately threw the paper crane into his storage space once he grabbed ahold of it.

Now, there were two paper cranes in the storage space. The first one had even been unfolded back into a piece of white paper.

Wouldn't gathering a 1,000 paper cranes bring good luck to the person he liked? Ren Xiaosu's thoughts started running wild.

On this mission, Ren Xiaosu couldn't get any new cell phones, probably because he had already wiped out all of the qualified account holders of the cell phones nearby.

Chapter 480 The boss

Ever since Ren Xiaosu completed the mission to assassinate Zhang Cengran, he did not leave his yard for two days straight. He even planted five Potato Shooters in the yard to prevent anyone from sneaking up on him.

But to Ren Xiaosu's surprise, everything seemed normal even after he caught the paper crane. The other party still deposited the reward money into his anonymous account, while further missions were still systematically sent to him as usual. Nothing had changed at all.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little pained about the five gratitude tokens he had spent. He even thought of setting up a stall in town to start selling potatoes.

Honestly speaking, Ren Xiaosu would definitely lead a very good life wherever he went, and neither would he need to do any farming. He could just plant a few Potato Shooters in his own yard, and it would not only prevent thieves, but he would also have potatoes to sell every day. He would have no worries about having no money to spend.

The reason why he could sleep with peace of mind every day was due to the existence of the Potato Shooters. Even though they might be weak, supernatural beings would still grimace in pain if they were not careful. As for the average person, needless to say, their bones would at the minimum break if they got hit.

Ren Xiaosu unfolded the second paper crane in the yard, but there was nothing written on it. This disappointed him a little.

The supernatural being who controlled the paper cranes probably did not care about losing one or two of them, right?

As he unfolded it, he was also paying attention to how the paper crane was folded. After all, he wanted to see if the paper crane would come back to "life" if he refolded it again.

When he finally felt that he understood how it was folded, he encountered a common issue faced by all craftsmen:

The eyes: "Alright, I got it!"

The brain: "No, you don't!"

When Ren Xiaosu reached the tavern, the storyteller was sitting calmly in his chair and relating the story of Qing Zhen's encirclement operation of the Experimentals to the customers. No one knew where this news had come from, but it was said the Qing Consortium had already driven the Experimentals out of

the strongholds in the south. The former residents of the Li Consortium's strongholds were even praising how good of a person Qing Zhen was, as though they had already forgotten that he was actually the biggest winner of the war in the Southwest.

However, the Experimentals still remained a potential threat. That was because no one knew where they would move to after taking refuge in the mountains.

At this moment, Ms. Xiaolu was sitting in Ren Xiaosu's usual spot. When she saw Ren Xiaosu, she waved happily at him and asked, "Where have you been to the past two days?"

"I was just sleeping and lazing around at home," Ren Xiaosu explained with a smile.

"Oh." Xiaolu did not probe further. She had a new red hairband securing her braided hair at the back of her head. "Grandpa is telling a new story today that he just heard about. He said that there's also many people escaping the Southwest. However, those escapees are much worse off than the Zong Consortium's escapees. Their journey of escape hasn't been smooth at all, and many of them were killed by wild animals that roam the mountains. Apparently, some people ran into the Experimentals, and only a few of them survived the encounter."

When he heard about the Experimentals again after such a long time, Ren Xiaosu recalled how threatening they were in his encounter with them back in the Jing Mountains. He felt that Qing Zhen had at least handled this matter correctly.

Regardless of the war, they would have to deal with these unreasonable creatures first.

Then Ren Xiaosu asked, "Xiaolu, do you know how to fold a paper crane?"

Xiaolu's dainty face turned red in embarrassment. "Who would take the initiative to ask for paper cranes from a girl? Shameless!"

After saying that, Xiaolu ran out to the backyard of the tavern with her pigtail swinging behind her.

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

When the storyteller heard their conversation at the side, he was furious. How dare this young man try to flirt with his granddaughter in front of him!

Ren Xiaosu felt helpless. He truly wanted to learn how to fold paper cranes. Didn't they say that all girls knew how to fold them?

With that thought in mind, he felt that the supernatural being who could control the paper cranes was quite like a young woman.

However, Ren Xiaosu felt he had to go out to find a place to lie low for a bit during this period. After stealing so many cell phones, even a fool could probably guess that something must have happened to those D-rank hitmen at Stronghold 61.

Moreover, he could not help but to go into hiding after intercepting two of the paper cranes in succession. Otherwise, who was he going to seek justice from if they came down to attack him?

Ren Xiaosu bade the storyteller farewell. When the old man heard he was leaving, he looked quite happy.

But when Ren Xiaosu said he would still be back after some time, the old man's smile immediately disappeared.

After all, Stronghold 61 was the nearest stronghold in the Central Plains from the Northwest.

Ren Xiaosu went home and changed into a set of clothes he did not usually put on. Then he headed straight out of town with his head kept low.

Just as he was about to walk out of town, he suddenly saw a girl wearing a cap and dressed in a neat combat uniform walking towards him. Ren Xiaosu subconsciously wanted to call out Yang Xiaojin's name as he got extremely excited at that moment.

But he immediately realized that something was off. The other party was not a girl, but a woman. Judging from her figure and appearance, she was a mature woman who was about eight years older than Yang Xiaojin. She was probably around 28 years old.

Furthermore, Yang Xiaojin usually only donned sports outfits and rarely wore the combat uniform of the military. Although the cap that Yang Xiaojin usually wore was not brightly colored, it was not dark-colored either. But the cap this woman had on was simply black in color.

What left Ren Xiaosu a little puzzled was that he felt a strange sense of familiarity from the woman. Perhaps she had a certain demeanor that was similar to Yang Xiaojin. But upon careful observation, Ren Xiaosu realized there was a difference. This woman's demeanor was far more rational and cold than Yang Xiaojin. It was like she had seen the ugly side of the world.

Ren Xiaosu walked past her with his head lowered and quickly left the Stronghold 61 town. He felt that if he didn't leave now, he might be targeted.

After Ren Xiaosu left, the woman turned around and looked suspiciously at his back. But she quickly turned around again and continued on her way.

She came to the outside of the shack where Zhang Cengran had been killed. By now, the corpse in the shack had already been removed and buried by the townspeople under the orders of the town administrator.

The woman frowned as she looked up at the electric pole the paper crane had previously been sitting on. No one knew what she was thinking.

Then she lowered her head and took out a cell phone similar to the one Ren Xiaosu had and sent out a text. "From now on, forward all information regarding 1583850's missions to me directly."

"Yes, Boss."

1583850 was referring to Ren Xiaosu's anonymous account number.

The woman walked towards the tavern where Ren Xiaosu often hung out at. It might have been a coincidence or maybe she went there on purpose, but she happened to sit at the window where Ren Xiaosu usually sat.

As soon as she entered the place, the storyteller, who was sitting in a chair in the middle of the tavern, suddenly said with a smile, "If y'all want to hear about the aftermath, please join me at the next session."

After he said that, the storyteller called Xiaolu over and said, "Let's go back home. I'm tired today."

The woman wearing the black cap also got up and left. She walked to the door of the storyteller's house with a sense of familiarity. The storyteller smiled at Xiaolu and said, "My dear, please go and buy a bottle of soy sauce. We don't have any left at home."

Xiaolu did not say anything. She just turned around and went out the door.

The woman looked at the storyteller and asked, "Did anyone strange recently appear in town?"

The storyteller smiled as he shook his head. "No."