

Chapter 511 Luo Lan's new friend

Luo Lan looked at the middle-aged man standing at the entrance of the villa. The other party was wearing a trim suit with his tie secured close to his chest with a golden tie clip. He had seen him before, but only in a photograph.

Zhou Shiji looked calmly at Luo Lan and asked, "Did you have to knock out an entire company of my soldiers if you were just going out for a stroll?"

"Haha, it's all a misunderstanding." Luo Lan laughed it off.

Luo Lan realized Ren Xiaosu already intended to let him come back here. Otherwise, Ren Xiaosu, who was known to be someone decisive, would definitely not knock the soldiers out but kill them all instead.

But if he killed these soldiers, there would be no way for the matter between Luo Lan and the Zhou Consortium to be resolved.

It seemed that Zhou Shiji also did not intend to further investigate the matter. As the neighborhood of Houguan Lake was quite important, there were many surveillance cameras around.

Someone had already pulled the surveillance footage from earlier. However, they discovered that not even the surveillance cameras could capture the attacker's image clearly.

What Luo Lan did not know was that Zhou Shiji's official residence was also in the neighborhood of Houguan Lake. It was just a simple house. Awhile ago, Zhou Shiji did not even hear any noise. He only found out about the big mess in the neighborhood after someone informed him Luo Lan had fled.

If this person had been here to assassinate Zhou Shiji, what would have happened?

However, Zhou Shiji did not seem to feel that this was the most important matter. He looked at Luo Lan. "Did you kill Zhou Xilong?"

"Of course not." Luo Lan was now in high spirits. "I have a flash drive that contains evidence that the director of the Public Order Division colluded with hitmen from the Anjing House. The corpses of the assassins responsible have also been found!"

Zhou Shiji took the flash drive from him but did not say anything for a long time. He pondered things before saying, "As expected of someone with Boss Luo's reputation. To think that you actually have such great influence in our Stronghold 73. We couldn't even find the assassins, yet you managed to do so."

This was obviously not a compliment. Zhou Shiji suspected that the Qing Consortium must have planted a large number of spies in the Zhou Consortium!

"That's really not true..." Luo Lan smiled in embarrassment and said, "It was all thanks to the help from a friend who happened to pass by. He was the one who helped to find the evidence."

"Then what's Boss Luo's purpose in coming to our Zhou Consortium?" Zhou Shiji asked noncommittally.

“To make friends!” Luo Lan chuckled and said, “It’s to make friends, of course!”

“Then why didn’t you come to me but Zhou Xilong? Am I not worthy of being your friend?” Zhou Shiji asked.

Luo Lan was embarrassed again. ‘Does Zhou Shiji not know how to carry a conversation? Must he always say everything so sarcastically? No, that’s not it!’

Luo Lan suddenly looked up at Zhou Shiji. “I thought Brother Zhou would be unwilling to be friends with our Qing Consortium.”

“How could that be?” Zhou Shiji finally laughed. “Of course it’s better to have more friends. The fewer enemies there are, the better.”

Luo Lan finally understood that Zhou Shiji was taking the initiative to form an alliance with the Qing Consortium. But why? Wasn’t Zhou Shiji the leader of the Zhou Consortium’s conservative faction?

The two of them did not waste any more time and went straight into the villa.

It was not until an hour later that Luo Lan finally realized that even though Zhou Shiji, a conservative leader, did not like the idea of dealing the first strike in a war, he understood the concept of self-preservation. He was willing to face war for the sake of protecting his consortium. There was essentially no conflict between the two positions.

Furthermore, he was actually very worried about the Wang Consortium.

When both sides had a common imaginary enemy, the conversation would go much smoother.

Zhou Shiji sat on the sofa and said calmly, “Although I didn’t like Zhou Xilong’s political views, he was still an important figure of our Zhou Consortium. So he can’t just die for nothing. A lot of people say the Anjing House is a righteous organization, and they only kill those who deserve to be killed. However, they do not have the right to be a judiciary.”

“I agree.” Luo Lan said with a chuckle.

Like Zhou Shiji, Luo Lan was not fond of the Anjing House either, because he might be on the Anjing House’s list of assassination targets at some point in time. Those in power utterly loathed a mysterious and powerful organization like them.

If the organizations had different standpoints, it would inevitably lead to differences and conflicts.

Was Zhou Shiji in the wrong? Of course not. Why should his Zhou Consortium get judged by others? It wasn’t like the Anjing House would be impartial enough to ensure that their judgment was not biased, right?

Was the Anjing House in the wrong? They wouldn’t think they were wrong either. Since there was no one to punish the rampant villains of this era, they would have to step in to punish them.

Ultimately, it was because there were no longer any fixed moral criteria in this era, and the judicial system had crumbled long ago.

The flash drive in hand, Zhou Shiji looked at Luo Lan. "Who gave you this audio recording? This friend of yours is really impressive. Why didn't you invite him along to our chat? I didn't expect the Qing Consortium would have a powerful character like him."

"Haha, he's not from our Qing Consortium." Luo Lan laughed it off and said, "And he should've left Stronghold 73 by now. As for where he's gone, I'm not sure either. But there's no doubt about whether he's powerful. At the very least, he's worthy of my admiration."

Zhou Shiji was clearly taken aback for a bit. Based on what Luo Lan had said, this mysterious uninvited guest was not a member of the Qing Consortium? Was he an independent powerhouse then?

...

At this moment, Zhou Yingxue was driving an off-road vehicle back to the black market. It was the vehicle that Wu Tong and the others hid in the wilderness. Now that Wu Tong had died, Zhou Yingxue and Ren Xiaosu would naturally take the car.

It would take at least three days to return to the black market from Stronghold 73 as the total journey was 678 kilometers. This was mainly because the condition of the roads was not good. Otherwise, they could have arrived back in a day.

Zhou Yingxue had a look at Ren Xiaosu, who was sleeping soundly in the front passenger seat next to her. She curled her lips and muttered as she drove, "To think that I'm the only person driving the entire way of the journey. How dare he claim that it's for my own good that he's not driving! Excuses! Men are all liars!"

"What are you mumbling about?" Ren Xiaosu's voice drifted over from the passenger seat.

Zhou Yingxue exclaimed in her head, 'Wasn't Master snoring just now? Was he pretending to be asleep?!' She quickly explained, "I didn't say anything. I was just complaining that the road's a little hard to travel on..."

Next to her, Ren Xiaosu reclined all the way back in the passenger seat and leaned back with his arms behind his head, using them as a pillow. He could not get any more comfortable than this. He suddenly asked, "Is your superpower only limited to producing those three types of seeds? Why does it feel so weak?"

Zhou Yingxue said unhappily, "Master, don't go too far with your criticisms. Aren't you a little too much for bluntly saying I'm weak?"

"Alright, you've driven for quite a while already. Find a place where we can stop for a break." Ren Xiaosu said, "I wanna see what you can do with your superpower."

Ren Xiaosu had not planned on forming a team with Zhou Yingxue for the long term, so he did not care about her superpower before this.

But since he decided to form a team with Zhou Yingxue and get her into the Anjing House, he had to get a better understanding of her superpower. He also had some other plans.

Chapter 512 Zhou Yingxue's superpower advancements

Ren Xiaosu recalled that Zhou Yingxue was the first floral supernatural being he had encountered since the "Rise of Gods" started. She could be considered a relatively rare type in this sense.

But even if she were a floral supernatural being, she shouldn't be this weak. Although she could produce three types of seeds, only one of them could be used for combat.

Ren Xiaosu thought that since Zhou Yingxue could control plants, would there be a possibility that she could continue to further develop this superpower?

Importantly, all supernatural beings always had room for improvement.

After the two of them got out of the vehicle, Ren Xiaosu asked in the woods by the road, "Tell me, how did you first awaken your power?"

Zhou Yingxue said, "During a secret mission, I fainted after I got shot at. After waking up from my coma, I realized I could produce a seed out of thin air."

Then Zhou Yingxue stretched her right hand out. A green glow continuously swirled at the tip of her index finger before finally "solidifying" into a seed.

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. "It can even be done like that? Why does it sound like your awakening process was so simple?"

Zhou Yingxue said in surprise, "No one said it has to be difficult for supernatural beings to awaken their powers. That's why some people say supernatural beings are Heaven's chosen ones, and that they awaken once the moment is right."

"Alrighty." Ren Xiaosu had never asked others about how they awakened their powers before. He only felt that his own process of awakening his power was very tedious. The awakening itself might have only taken one moment, but the problem was that he kept falling into a coma every night before that happened.

It was precisely because of this that the refugees in town claimed something was wrong with his head.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Can you communicate with other plants? Have you tried to before?"

Zhou Yingxue felt surprised again. "How can I communicate with plants when they don't have a consciousness?"

Ren Xiaosu frowned. Zhou Yingxue had already shown she had an affinity with plant life when his Potato Shooter did not automatically attack her. In that case, could she control other plants as well?

He said in seriousness, "Sit over here and close your eyes, then try to sense the plants around you."

Zhou Yingxue obediently sat cross-legged on the ground and closed her eyes. But less than a minute later, Ren Xiaosu heard a rumbling come from Zhou Yingxue's stomach.

Zhou Yingxue opened her eyes and looked at Ren Xiaosu with distress. "Master, I'm hungry."

Ren Xiaosu's expression darkened. "Close your eyes and get a proper sense of the plants. If you don't achieve any results, you can forget about eating!"

Ren Xiaosu had high expectations for Zhou Yingxue because he also possessed a floral power. Ever since he learned she was a floral supernatural being, he had always wondered if Zhou Yingxue could help strengthen his seeds.

As a matter of fact, the Potato Shooter was actually almost useless in combat. At most, it could be used to guard his home. However, it couldn't withstand a supernatural being.

He could not really treat the Potato Shooter as a food power, right? That would leave the Potato Shooter with no dignity at all!

Of course, if other supernatural beings knew about his superpowers, they would probably find it even more unbearable than him. All other supernatural beings basically only had one power. 'Since you already have so many other powers, what's the big deal if one of them is almost useless?'

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu saw Zhou Yingxue open her eyes. A green glow had once again formed at the tip of her index finger which she then gently infused into a jujube tree. The entire tree started sprouting new buds, and the originally green jujubes on the tree turned fleshier one after another. They even ripened into a reddish color.

Not only that, but the tree also started lowering its branches slowly. It was as though they were offering the jujubes to Zhou Yingxue.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Is this power something new?"

"Mhm." Zhou Yingxue happily took a bite from a jujube. "It's so sweet!"

"Is this the fucking time to eat jujubes?" Ren Xiaosu snapped at her. "So what power is this?"

"In the past, I thought that since plants don't have consciousness, they'd have no way to establish a connection with humans, so I never tried to do so before." Zhou Yingxue thought for a moment and said, "After you reminded me, I realize they felt familiar to me, and it's like they yearn for the green glow in my hand. After I infused the plants with that green glow, I could gain control over them, and they became stronger than before and can even change their shapes slightly."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly fished out a seed and handed it to Zhou Yingxue. "Infuse this with the glow again, then plant it personally."

A moment later, Zhou Yingxue repeated the same process with the Potato Shooter seed. Then, she buried it into the soil. In just the blink of an eye, some buds started sprouting out of the ground and grew into... a Potato Shooter that didn't look any different than before.

Ren Xiaosu was a little curious as he could still control the Potato Shooter. He did not lose his control over the Potato Shooter to Zhou Yingxue like what she had said earlier.

He looked at Zhou Yingxue. "Can you control it?"

"Yes." Zhou Yingxue sized up the Potato Shooter curiously. "What is this? It's like there's a lot of fruit hidden underground, and it can even spit them out at breakneck speed."

When Ren Xiaosu took back control of the Potato Shooter, he asked again, "Can you still control it now?"

Zhou Yingxue shook her head. "Not anymore."

She looked at Ren Xiaosu in surprise. Was this Ren Xiaosu's superpower? But it couldn't be! Ren Xiaosu did not have a superpower like this based on the intelligence reports. Could it be that Ren Xiaosu had two superpowers?

Of course, if she knew the truth, she would likely get very annoyed. Ren Xiaosu's superpowers did not only stop at two.

By this point, Ren Xiaosu had realized the Potato Shooter was a little different. After Zhou Yingxue had established a connection with the Potato Shooter and infused it with her power, it could be controlled by the two of them. Moreover, the most important difference was that it could now produce a 100 potatoes a day from its "magazine."

Was he really about to embark further down the path of agriculture?!

Zhou Yingxue urged the Potato Shooter to spit out a potato. She suddenly looked up. "So the reason you gave me so many potatoes to eat back in town was because this plant produces potatoes?"

"Ahem, wouldn't it be a waste if they're not eaten?" Ren Xiaosu changed the subject and said, "Alright, let's camp here for the night and set up the tent!"

Zhou Yingxue plucked a bagful of jujubes and ate them as she set up her tent. Her bulging cheeks made her look just like a hamster.

At this moment, a convoy of vehicles drove down from the north. However, it was made up of off-road vehicles that looked a little different than those commonly seen in the wilderness. For example, Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue had only driven either a green or a khaki-colored off-road vehicle before, while Luo Lan and his men traveled in off-road vehicles that were a solemn black. Things were different for this convoy that had appeared before them. It looked like the vehicles had been specially spray painted garish colors, and even the fitted tires were larger ones. The off-road vehicles had all been modified until they almost looked like dune buggies.

As the convoy approached, Ren Xiaosu could even hear the loud music coming from their vehicles. The young men and women in the cars were swaying to the beat of the music.

After the vehicles drove past Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue, they slowly turned back around. A group of young people got out and someone asked Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue, "Excuse me, is this the road leading to the Zhou Consortium?"

Ren Xiaosu looked up at them. As they were pretty polite, Ren Xiaosu answered, "Yes. You'll get to the Zhou Consortium by traveling south for about 300 more kilometers."

"Thank you." Then the young man who had just asked for directions returned to the car and was about to step on the gas to continue on their way. However, a girl in the car suddenly exclaimed, "Look at that jujube tree! The fruit's all so red and ripe!"

Ren Xiaosu quietly pulled his hood up and asked softly, "What's that logo on their vehicles?"

There was a white logo that was exceptionally eye-catching on the bodies of the garish cars. It was obvious that it was an image of a snow mountain.

Zhou Yingxue whispered, "That's the logo of the Qinghe Group. These people are from there. Reportedly, the snow mountain was designed by the founder himself after he conquered the highest mountain in the world."

Chapter 513 At least one of them is single

Ren Xiaosu watched silently as the group of young people got out of their vehicles and came over. Two men and two women headed straight for the jujube tree.

However, someone rather sensible came over to ask Ren Xiaosu, "Hi, can we set up our camp next to yours? We'll be a ways away and not intrude on your space."

Meanwhile, Zhou Yingxue barked, "Hey, that's my jujube tree!"

Someone wondered, "Isn't this jujube tree growing in the wilderness? When did it become yours?"

Actually, there was nothing wrong with this person's words. This wilderness did not look like it was a place where anyone lived, while the jujube tree was also wild. Therefore, Zhou Yingxue should not be able to lay claim to it.

However, a young man from the convoy signaled to the others to stop talking and said, "Things found in the wilderness fall into the first come, first served basis. Since they were the ones who discovered it first, we shouldn't touch it."

Ren Xiaosu was surprised these people were still quite polite and reasonable even though they looked like an ostentatious bunch.

He said to the person who came to talk to him, "Feel free to set up camp next to us. Just don't affect our rest."

Ren Xiaosu was a master of wilderness survival, so he had chosen the best location for their campsite. It had good ventilation, was spacious, was free of poisonous insects, and was also near a water source.

There was a clear river about a 100 meters away. It was so clear they could see the bottom of the river.

Other people might not be able to tell what was good about this campsite, but they would find it very safe and convenient to stay here.

This group of young people from the Qinghe Group moved to a spot about 50 meters away from them and started setting up their tents. They were chatting and laughing as they worked.

Ren Xiaosu observed the number of people in their group. There were five vehicles and a total of 17 people in all. This included nine men and eight women, so at least one of them should be single.

He raised his head and looked at Zhou Yingxue, who had climbed up the jujube tree, and wondered, "Whatever are you doing?"

Zhou Yingxue said, "I'm gonna pluck all the jujubes from the tree in case anyone is still thinking about them!"

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. Zhou Yingxue really knew how to live her life, and she looked especially like a calculating housewife. "Just take enough for yourself. It's no big deal even if you have to share some with others. Don't create unnecessary trouble when you're outside. You can't finish eating all of them in one night anyway."

However, Zhou Yingxue disagreed, "I can bring them with me and eat along the way!"

"Who do you think they are?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"I think they must be the offspring of the high-ranking officials of Luoyang City since they can freely enter and exit strongholds while bearing the logo of the Qinghe Group." Zhou Yingxue said nonchalantly, "Although the Qinghe Group hasn't expanded its territory in recent years, its business activities have widened considerably. The big shots of the Qinghe Group are not people like the director of the Public Order Division but those who hold important positions as business project directors."

"They don't look that old." Ren Xiaosu said, "They should be around 20 or so."

"Mhm, they might still be studying at Qinghe University," Zhou Yingxue replied absentmindedly.

Ren Xiaosu gave a heartfelt sigh. "I also wanted to attend uni in the past as I always felt that college life would be very peaceful."

The youngsters from the Qinghe Group went around looking for more jujube trees. Although there were quite a lot of them around here, they only managed to find those with unripe fruits. Someone even plucked one to have a taste, but it was so sour their face scrunched up.

Someone muttered, "Why has the jujube tree next to them matured?"

The young man who stopped them from plucking the ripe jujubes said with a smile, "Don't keep eyeing other people's things. What is yours is yours. What isn't will never be yours."

"Get outta here, Xu Zhi, that probably sums up the ideology of those in your Xu clan. Speaking of which, does your distant cousin, Xu Ke, really not feel tempted at all now that he controls the Qinghe Group?" a chubby boy asked with a smile.

"I don't know." Xu Zhi shook his head. "He has been a little reticent in recent years. No one really knows what he's thinking."

"What do you guys think is the relationship between that guy and girl? Are they a couple?" The chubster asked, "They don't look it. Although I can't see that young man's face clearly, he looks really young and might even be younger than us. The woman looks older and is probably around 25 or 26. Could they be siblings?"

"It's possible." Xu Zhi nodded. "But don't go and provoke them. Those who can travel through the wilderness alone can't be your average person."

The chubster said with a laugh, "What's there to be afraid of? We brought guns with us this time!"

Xu Zhi shook his head. "Guns aren't omnipotent, and we sneaked out this time. If you get into trouble outside and call Luoyang City for help, the school might even end up punishing you."

"So be it. I already have somewhere to go after graduation anyway." The chubster curled his lips. "My uncle wants me to follow him to the black market after I graduate."

"Your personality is quite suitable for the black market. Just remember not to cause any trouble. Currently, many superhumans are active in the black market. If you offend them, you'll still get into trouble even though you're from the Qinghe Group. Even if the Qinghe Group avenges you, it'll be some time after the first seven days of the mourning period," Xu Zhi said with a smile.

"Ptui, stop cursing me!"

Ren Xiaosu, who was at the other campsite, did not look at those young people as he felt he would not interact much with them. After he had found all of his lost friends, he would return to the Northwest.

Honestly, he still preferred to mingle with those gruff men in the Northwest after going to so many places.

Although it was a little tough in the Northwest and the living conditions there were bad, it was not something that bothered Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhou Yingxue and asked, "What are your plans for the future?"

Zhou Yingxue, who was munching on the jujubes, mumbled, "To make enough money to retire."

“It ain’t a peaceful world out there, so I’m afraid that you won’t have a chance to retire.” Ren Xiaosu sighed. Qing Zhen was a prepper. Since the Qing Consortium had made Luo Lan come here to the Central Plains, it showed that something big would happen within the Alliance of Strongholds soon.

Suddenly, Zhou Yingxue said, “By the way, I’ve been getting a feeling that something’s wrong with the plants recently.”

“Something’s wrong? What’s wrong?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“After I was able to sense them, I somehow feel like they have an extremely pressing thirst for nutrients. It’s like... they’re evolving.” Zhou Yingxue whispered, “It is a very vague feeling, so I’m unsure if that’s the case.”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He suddenly remembered the fish meat and bones he had dumped after eating in the Jing Mountains that disappeared later.

At times, he felt it might have been the Experimentals that took it. But if the Experimentals had to resort to eating leftovers, wouldn’t that be really degrading to them? More importantly, the leftovers were not enough for them to eat at all.

Now that he thought about it again, could it be possible that there was something wrong with that forest?

The Jing Mountains were probably the second region in the entire Alliance of Strongholds where creatures were starting to rapidly evolve. The first region was the area under the control of the Pyro Company.

Suddenly, the young man named Xu Zhi came over with a plate of fruit. He smiled at Zhou Yingxue and said, “Hi, may we trade you some jujubes for the fruit we brought?”

While speaking, he tried to take the opportunity to get a look at Ren Xiaosu. However, Ren Xiaosu kept his head lowered throughout and did not allow his face to be seen clearly.

Chapter 514 Uninvited gues

When Zhou Yingxue heard Xu Zhi say he wanted to trade their fruit for jujubes, she looked at his hands and was surprised to see grapes.

“I’ll trade with you!” Zhou Yingxue decisively took some jujubes from the vehicle for Xu Zhi.

Xu Zhi suddenly saw the Potato Shooter next to Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue. “What plant is this? Why haven’t I seen it before?”

Zhou Yingxue explained, “We don’t know what it is either. It’s probably just some mutated plant in the wilderness.”

Xu Zhi did not ask any further questions.

After Zhou Yingxue sent Xu Zhi away, she started eating the grapes happily. After she was done eating, she somehow felt like something was amiss. She suddenly looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, "Er... Master, would you like to have some grapes? If you want, I'll go and trade some for you...."

"I don't want to eat." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "You used to be a spy for the Yang Consortium, but look at..."

"I was only in charge of a small department that was responsible for monitoring Stronghold 88." Zhou Yingxue finished.

"Speaking of, why did you join the Yang Consortium's army?" Ren Xiaosu asked. He always had the feeling that Zhou Yingxue's only interest was to make money as she did not really seem like a bellicose person.

Zhou Yingxue explained, "I just wanted to earn some money. The Yang Consortium had found out about my awakening after my neighbor learned about it, so they recruited me and even offered me a very high salary. After I became a supernatural being, my physical fitness was much better than that of the other female soldiers. I'm also quick-witted, so I got promoted at a relatively faster pace. When I was still a normal soldier, my salary was already ten times higher than the others'. Later on, because of my skill in tracking, and the fact that I was female, I got transferred to the Intelligence Department."

"The Yang Consortium's benefits are pretty good." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "So in order to earn money, you started working diligently in the Intelligence Department?"

Zhou Yingxue changed the subject and asked, "When did you discover my identity?"

"I already knew when you first stepped into the library." Ren Xiaosu closed his eyes and continued resting.

Zhou Yingxue felt her face burn with embarrassment. She had not expected that he would so easily see through her disguise. However, she seemed to think of something and asked, "Then, Master, why did you ask me to jump rope with you?!"

Ren Xiaosu did not say anything. Zhou Yingxue raised her voice and said, "Master, don't pretend to sleep. Up until now, I still haven't figured out why you did that!"

But Ren Xiaosu was determined not to answer this question.

He did not expect that Zhou Yingxue would still remember that.

...

Compared to the quiet atmosphere at Ren Xiaosu's side, it was bustling over at the Qinghe University students' side. This group of students had sneaked out of the stronghold, so everything felt more beautiful, and even the air was much fresher.

It seemed that this was not the first time they had come out. Just then, Ren Xiaosu heard the sound of a gun being cocked, followed by squeals of adoration from the girls in the group. A male student was

deliberately showing off that he knew how to use guns in front of the girls and was thoroughly enjoying their admiration.

Since they knew to bring guns with them when going out into the wilderness, it meant these people also understood it was not very safe out.

However, Ren Xiaosu noticed these students probably did not have too many chances to practice firing a gun. This was because they did not have any obvious calluses on their hands.

Moreover, a person's shoulders and chest stance would be different from that of the average person if they frequently fired an automatic rifle.

Ren Xiaosu could probably be considered an expert in using firearms.

At this moment, the group of students were playing a game called "Truth or Dare." This was Ren Xiaosu's first time hearing of such a game. As many refugees were fond of gambling, a lot of gambling games such as poker would be played around town. The consortiums were also happy to see the refugees indulging in such activities that could make them lose their ambitions.

However, Ren Xiaosu had never come across something like Truth or Dare before. Although he had read a lot of books in Stronghold 88, none of them cared to describe a game like this.

The students had drunk a lot of the alcohol they'd brought with them from the stronghold. Seeing that Ren Xiaosu was ignoring her and pretending to be asleep, Zhou Yingxue sat by the campfire and looked at the students. Suddenly, she said to Ren Xiaosu, "Why don't we also play Truth or Dare?"

Ren Xiaosu still ignored her.

At this moment, it looked like a female student had been picked, and she chose "dare." As a result, the male student sitting across from her dared her to find a guy to kiss.

The content of the game involved all sorts of strange things. Some of them required the male students to dance like girls, and some required the girls to do the splits. But since all of them were just students, they did not go overboard.

The students were starting to drink more and more, but only Xu Zhi did not have any drinks. He also kept his automatic rifle close to his side.

At the beginning, the students were actually quite worried about drinking. After all, what if they got drunk while they were out in the wilderness?

However, the chubster boy next to Xu Zhi kept saying that it would be fine. He said he had been hanging out with his uncle in the wilderness for many years and claimed there was no danger at all.

Only then did the other students relent and drink some. At first, they only intended to have a little. But once they started drinking, they could not stop.

At this moment, another girl got picked and she decided to choose “dare.” However, maybe the girl who picked her had had a drink too many or was simply too excited with playing the game. She actually wanted her to go to Ren Xiaosu and kiss him!

When they usually played Truth or Dare, they would have the person who was picked go on the streets to look for a stranger to do the dare with. But right now, there weren’t really any other strangers around.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I don’t even know them,” the girl that had been picked said embarrassedly.

Someone jeered, “C’mon, it’s not like you knew those people on the streets when we were playing this in the stronghold.”

“Besides, you’re a girl.” A female student nudged her with her elbow. “He won’t be at a disadvantage, so what are you afraid of!”

That girl clenched her teeth. “Fine!”

After that, she walked over to Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue. But before she could get close to him, Ren Xiaosu had already opened his eyes and was looking at her calmly.

The calmness he exuded was like a silent rejection that made the girl playing the game subconsciously take a step back.

She wanted to tell Ren Xiaosu they were only playing a game and he only needed to let her kiss him, but she could not say it no matter what.

The girl turned around and left. When her companions saw her unsettled expression, they wondered, “What’s the matter? Why do you look so scared?”

A male student stood up. “Did they say something nasty to you?”

It looked like the students were all very loyal people.

The girl had to quickly say she was fine. She told them she was just timid and that the other party did not say anything to her.

At Ren Xiaosu’s side, after the girl turned around and went back to her campsite in a hurry, Zhou Yingxue said with a chuckle next to him, “Master, why didn’t you take advantage of her dare?”

Ren Xiaosu glanced at her. “I already have someone I like.”

Zhou Yingxue was stunned by his answer. He rejected all other people of the opposite sex just because he had someone he liked?

When Zhou Yingxue was still with the Yang Consortium, she had seen so many men who would take advantage of women whenever there was an opportunity. However, the young man in front of her was obviously very powerful, so powerful that she had to look up to him, yet why had his desires not grown in tandem with his strength?

That was how a normal person would be!

But true, Ren Xiaosu was not normal at all.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly said in a low voice, "If this group of people are on a trip to the Zhou Consortium, they'll get into trouble sooner or later. Not everyone will respect the Qinghe Group and the Riders. They'll be heading to their doom getting so drunk in the wilderness."

"The Central Plains aren't as dangerous as our Southwest and Northwest," Zhou Yingxue said with a smile. "In general, the wilderness here is much safer than ours."

But as though to confirm Ren Xiaosu's assessment, the sound of someone stepping on a twig in the forest reverberated. The others might not think much of it if they even heard it.

But for Ren Xiaosu, he was already starting to inspect his rifle.

Chapter 515 Kidnapping

Amid the din of the students, the sound of someone stepping on a twig would not be so obvious. Ren Xiaosu skillfully disengaged the safety of the automatic rifle in his hand and loaded it with a full magazine. Under the illumination of the campfire, the brass rounds in the magazine appeared extremely dense and heavy.

Ren Xiaosu looked up and was surprised to see that Zhou Yingxue had also taken her pistol out. "You heard that as well?"

"No." Zhou Yingxue said in surprise, "Heard what? I saw you taking out your gun, so I got mine out as well. Aren't we robbing these Qinghe University students? They look rather rich..."

Ren Xiaosu was confused. How did it end up as them trying to rob the students?!

He said in a speechless manner, "Be on guard. There's someone quietly approaching us. I wonder if they're coming after that group of students or us, but the probability of them coming after us is lower."

In Ren Xiaosu's opinion, they had caused such a big mess at Stronghold 73 recently. Although Zhou Xilong was not the ruler of the Zhou Consortium, he was still a significant figure.

Later, he even handed an audio recording to Luo Lan to help him. If Luo Lan had a slip of the tongue, it could be possible that the Zhou Consortium would come and hunt them down.

However, Ren Xiaosu felt it was unlikely this intruder was coming after them. That was because he felt that Luo Lan would not have a slip of the tongue, and this was a form of trust he had in Luo Lan's ability in handling matters.

Although that fatty could be quite frivolous, he was always dependable when it came to getting things done.

Zhou Yingxue whispered, "Should we help them if this uninvited guest is here for the students and a battle breaks out?"

"I'm not gonna help." Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "Only the fittest survive in the wilderness, so why should we help those who are unrelated to us?"

Zhou Yingxue curled her lips. "Master, you're really cold-blooded...."

The people lurking were getting closer and closer. As the campfire illuminated the forest, Ren Xiaosu could already discern some figures approaching within the shadows of the swaying leaves. There was more than one person!

"Pay attention to our surroundings. This is a group operation." Ren Xiaosu said coldly, "Be careful not to get surrounded. I estimate that there's around 10 to 20 of them."

However, Ren Xiaosu was slightly relieved to note that these people were really targeting the group of students. It was just that Zhou Yingxue and he had been dragged in.

"What should we do now?" Zhou Yingxue asked.

"Let's leave before they focus their attention on us," Ren Xiaosu said.

But before they could leave, Ren Xiaosu also heard footsteps come from nearby as well. In fact, this unit seemed to have already surrounded all of them.

Ren Xiaosu frowned. "They're a well-trained unit. Why would such troops appear here?"

It was clear that these uninvited guests were not some small-time bandits that got a spur of the moment idea about them but professionals who had set a premeditated ambush.

The squad closest to the students had already fanned out of the forest. It was clear they did not think highly of this group of students and were looking to capture them in one fell swoop.

However, the uninvited guests did not open fire. Xu Zhi was the first student to discover the enemy as he had remained sober.

But before he could pick up his gun, he realized several black muzzles were already pointing at him. He could not move at all.

Someone slowly walked up to Xu Zhi with a rifle in hand and kicked his weapon away. Then the other students were scared out of their drunken stupor. They still did not realize what was happening.

Someone quickly said, "Is there a misunderstanding? We're just normal students."

All of these intruders were wearing combat boots, IOTVs[1], and combat helmets. Their firearms were also relatively expensive M16A2s with an effective range of 900 meters. They were also equipped with night vision goggles and walkie-talkies on their helmets.

Bandits could not afford to buy a setup like that, nor would they even have access to buy it.

Ren Xiaosu was looking at the soldiers in front of him with great interest. Since they did not allow them to escape, he was forced to stay. He looked at Zhou Yingxue and asked, "Can you tell where they're from?"

"They're mercenaries," Zhou Yingxue replied. "They specialize in doing dirty work."

Since there were organizations like the Anjing House that upheld justice, there would be organizations specializing in dirty work as well. Of course, these organizations only used the most elite of soldiers for their deeds, so their members tended to all be infamous outlaws.

Ren Xiaosu nodded. He had really broadened his horizons after coming to the Central Plains.

He surreptitiously counted the number of people and found that there were 15 of them. This was less than the number of people in a platoon. However, their movements were extremely well-coordinated.

The leader of the mercenaries looked at Xu Zhi and handed him a satellite phone. "Call your father and tell him we want a 10 million yuan ransom in cash within seven days."

Only now did the students finally realize this was not a misunderstanding. The mercenaries had come prepared, and they were even professional kidnappers.

The male students who said they had guns and were showing them off earlier to the girls no longer dared to say any more. Some of them actually still had their pistols with them, but they did not even have the courage to draw them.

However, Ren Xiaosu thought this was normal. After all, the kidnappers were wielding a lot more guns than them.

Some of them even subconsciously looked at Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue. But when they realized the two were also being held at gunpoint by six soldiers, they immediately sank into despair.

Xu Zhi said calmly, "You want cash? You're brave enough to retrieve it?"

"You don't have to worry about how we're going to retrieve it." The mercenary said, "Since we've managed to gather so many people for the job, it'll be unacceptable if we return without making some money."

"If we pay the ransom, will you let us go back?" Xu Zhi asked.

"Of course, we're very trustworthy people," the mercenary said with a laugh.

"Aren't you afraid the Riders will go after you?" Xu Zhi asked again.

“It’s not like the Riders are working for your Xu clan,” the mercenary said with a sneer.

Those words surprised Ren Xiaosu a little. Were the Riders and the Qinghe Group not on the same side? It sounded like these mercenaries knew more about the inside story.

Xu Zhi gave it some thought and said, “Seeing that you people can follow us here and grasp our timing so accurately, may I ask who your informant is? Tell me, and I’ll immediately call my father. Look, I’m already in your hands, so can’t you fulfill this small request of mine?”

The mercenary leader was amused. He pointed at the chubster next to Xu Zhi. “We promised to give 2 million yuan to your good friend over here once the deed was done.”

Xu Zhi looked at the chubster next to him and shook his head. “You know they aren’t gonna pay you, right?”

All of the students looked at the chubster and found it a little hard to believe. They had never expected a spy would be among them. After all, they were all classmates! Then they remembered it was the chubster who persuaded everyone to drink. So it turned out that was a premeditated move.

The chubster said in panic, “It was my uncle who made me do it! I didn’t want to!”

The mercenary said with a smile, “Weren’t you the one who wanted a share of the money? That wasn’t what your uncle asked for.”

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. It seemed the Qinghe Group was no longer as united after so many years of changes to its internal management. Of course, he couldn’t pass any judgment on what really happened internally.

However, it looked like the mercenaries were going to silence everyone after this. That was because they were acting without the slightest scruple after taking control of the situation.

Chapter 516 Master, let’s call it a day

The mercenaries kept a close eye on the students by the campfire while their leader said into the walkie-talkie, “What’s the situation over there? Have y’all established the identity of that man and woman?”

“Not yet, they have no identification on them. We’re gonna do a body search to see if they’re armed.”

“Be careful and don’t screw up. Anyone who can venture into the wilderness alone is definitely unusual.”

“Then should we just get rid of them?”

The mercenary leader thought for a moment before saying, “Interrogate them first to find out why they’re here.” Then he added in a low voice, “If they’re nobodies, just kill them.”

Xu Zhi looked at the mercenary leader and said calmly, “If I get my father to pay you double, will you help me kill this spy over here and his uncle as well?”

The mercenary leader started to laugh. "And you won't pursue us after that? That's workable too!"

"Then let me call my father." Xu Zhi said, "I'll call him right away."

One of the mercenaries handed a satellite phone to Xu Zhi, who then took a look at the service provider and sneered, "To think this satellite phone was sold by our Qinghe Group too."

After that, Xu Zhi did not hesitate and dialed his father's number.

But to everyone's surprise, Xu Zhi said something quite different from what he had just expressed to the mercenaries. Xu Zhi said, "Dad, I've been kidnapped. The masterminds are Wang Baijun and his uncle, Wang Bingjun. You don't have to save me since they're prepared to silence us. Dad, please take care of yourself."

With that, Xu Zhi ended the call. The mercenary leader clapped and praised, "I've always heard that the people from the Qinghe Group are very tough. Today, I've finally seen it for myself and even witnessed an act of filial piety. But never mind that. As long as you're alive, your father will be more than happy to pay the ransom. All parents worry about their children. As long as they have a 0.01% chance, they'll surely give up everything to have you returned safely."

Xu Zhi pursed his lips and did not say another word. But at this moment, a dull cry of pain came through the mercenaries' radio. The mercenary leader immediately looked up in the direction of Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue. However, the campfire there was already extinguished.

Next to the embers, he saw that his fellow mercenaries had all dropped to the ground.

It seemed that while they were distracted by Xu Zhi's phone call to his father just now, that man and woman had suddenly sprung into action. In just an instant, his squadmates were overpowered without a chance to even shout for help.

What kind of people were they?!

Some of the mercenaries raised their rifles and slowly moved toward the other camp. However, the mercenary leader shouted, "Don't go over there! We can't afford to split up now!"

The mercenary leader felt a chill fall over him. Only superhumans could have such strong individual combat prowess.

At this moment, there were only nine of them left. If the mercenaries were to split up even further, they would only present their enemy with better opportunities to attack!

"Bring Xu Zhi along and kill the rest. We're pulling out of here," the mercenary leader said in a low voice.

But just as his words trailed off, a gunshot suddenly rang out from the forest, and a bleeding wound appeared on the chest of the mercenary leader. The mercenaries shouted in a panic, "It's a sniper! There's a sniper in the forest!"

Immediately after, another three members of the mercenary group were killed. The strange bullets that came from nowhere were like the breath of the Grim Reaper.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu discovered another advantage the black sniper rifle had. There was no muzzle flash produced even when it was fired in the darkness!

Usually, a sniper's position would get exposed due to the conspicuous flash of gunpowder bursting out of the muzzle.

Therefore, a sniper rifle that did not need to be manually reloaded and could even be fired without producing any muzzle flash was truly a godly weapon.

A mercenary shouted, "Stop firing! If you fire at us again, I'll kill these students."

But a woman laughed and said, "Go ahead, we don't know them anyway."

When the five remaining mercenaries tried to leave, some vines sprouted out of the ground and entangled them tightly. Not only that, but those vines silently sprouted further, slowly binding the struggling mercenaries before it wrapped around their necks.

A mercenary unsheathed a dagger and tried to cut himself loose from the vines, but another vine sprouted to hold his hand back. It seemed these vines were much tougher than he expected.

Ren Xiaosu muttered to himself how he had underestimated Zhou Yingxue's powers. The vines were not weak at all when it came to killing people. Although it would still be quite tough if they were used to deal with supernatural beings, they were very effective against normal people.

When those mercenaries were all bound up, Zhou Yingxue slowly emerged from the shadows of the forest. She giggled as she looked at the five mercenaries. "You wanted to kill me, huh?"

Xu Zhi looked at Zhou Yingxue in a daze. In the illumination of the campfire, Zhou Yingxue looked like a captivating fairy emerging from the forest.

Although she had just killed someone, the more violent her methods, the more her beautiful demeanor felt like a drug that men couldn't pull themselves away from.

Zhou Yingxue suddenly turned her head to Xu Zhi and said with a smile, "Well, I saved your life there. Since they wanted a 10 million yuan ransom, I suppose it's not too much that I ask for 2 million, right?"

The calm-looking Xu Zhi was suddenly flustered. "No, not at all."

"Then call your father and transfer the money to my account," Zhou Yingxue said with a smile.

Xu Zhi quickly picked up the satellite phone on the ground and made the call. "Dad, I was saved by someone. I don't know the identity of my rescuers, but they killed all 15 of the kidnapers. They are requesting for 2 million yuan as a reward."

His father said something on the other end, and Xu Zhi looked at Zhou Yingxue. "What's your account number?"

"Send it to anonymous account 1377799 of the Wang Consortium Bank." Zhou Yingxue was smiling even more happily now. "Although I can't check whether the money's been transferred, I believe the Qinghe Group won't cheat me of this small sum."

"No, we definitely won't," Xu Zhi said firmly. "May I know your—"

"If you're asking for my identity, forget it. We won't be meeting again anyway." Zhou Yingxue chuckled. She glanced at the chubster next to her who was still alive and said with a smile, "Do you want me to kill him for you as well? I'll charge 500,000 yuan for this kill.... Forget it, he's not worth that much. 250,000 yuan will do."

Xu Zhi said softly, "Thank you, but I have my own arrangements for this person."

"Alright then." Zhou Yingxue felt it was somewhat pitiful she had missed out on a deal. After confirming the five mercenaries had been strangled to death, she turned to the forest and shouted, "Master, let's call it a day!"

With that, Zhou Yingxue headed straight into the forest with swaying hips and disappeared into the dark night.

Dumbfounded, Xu Zhi stared at Zhou Yingxue's receding figure. He was thinking about something.

The other Qinghe University students were also in a daze. So many twists and turns happened tonight that their brains could not keep up with everything that had happened.

The recent scene of that female superhuman killing people had really terrified them. However, what was most puzzling was that she actually had a master.

In that case, could the master this female superhuman was referring to be that quiet young man from earlier?!

Chapter 517 The world outside Xu Zhi did not leave with his classmates in a hurry but remained quietly sitting in the same spot while waiting for rescue to arrive. During the wait, he held his automatic rifle closely and pointed it at the chubster who had betrayed him without letting up his guard.

The students sat by the campfire in silence. No one knew what they were thinking. The atmosphere around the campfire was no longer cheerful like before. Instead, it had become quite gloomy and depressing.

Someone suddenly remembered an interesting rumor from before. Apparently, an outstanding freshman had tried to woo a girl who had transferred to Qinghe University from another school. However, that girl said the students of their university all led a very sheltered life.

The rumored girl was Yang Xiaojin, and she had said, "You think that the president of the Student Council is outstanding because you guys haven't had a chance to see the outside world yet. The guy I like has never led a pampered life."

And that president of the Student Council referred to Xu Zhi himself.

Xu Zhi was an excellent student and a member of the Xu clan. Therefore, he had always been the most outstanding student in school since childhood.

When this rumor reached Xu Zhi's ears, he just laughed it off. However, a senior female student who admired Xu Zhi went to look for that girl and asked her, "You said that our Qinghe University students all lead a pampered life?"

But even in the face of being questioned, Yang Xiaojin still stuck to her answer.

Now that Xu Zhi thought about what the girl had said, he realized he used to be really sheltered. However, he started wondering what kind of guy the girl admired was like. Was he as strong as that young man he just met?

But while thinking about that, his mind couldn't help wandering towards Zhou Yingxue's image. The woman who had saved him suddenly appeared in his memories, exuding an alluring but dangerous aura. How could a woman like her be someone else's maid?

Four hours after Ren Xiaosu left with Zhou Yingxue, a convoy suddenly arrived. Xu Zhi got up and said, "Dad, why'd you come here personally?"

Xu Zhi's father took a look around. When he found that the students were all fine, he said with a smile, "I'm here to pick you up."

Xu Zhi asked, "What about Wang Baijun's uncle, Wang Bingjun?"

"He's been apprehended. Is this fat boy Wang Baijun?" Xu Zhi's father smiled at his subordinate next to him and said, "Bring him back and lock him up in jail with his uncle. Don't let him out ever again. By the way, Little Zhi, where's the people who saved you?"

Xu Zhi felt somewhat lost as he looked in the direction where Zhou Yingxue and Ren Xiaosu had disappeared off to. He said, "They left after killing the kidnapers."

"Do you know their identities?" Xu Zhi's father frowned.

"I don't know." Xu Zhi shook his head. "They didn't have any identification on them and I didn't even manage to get a clear look at the young man's face. But if I see them again, I can definitely recognize them."

That was because that young man possessed a unique aura that was calm yet full of strength.

...

After the students were rescued, they took a short, one-week break before returning to school. The incident in which Xu Zhi, the president of the Student Council, was nearly kidnapped in the wilderness was already spreading.

After all, there were many other students present at the time of the attempted kidnapping. It was just like a legend in a story for the students who experienced it, so they would brag to their classmates without restraint. Moreover, Xu Zhi did not say they could not talk about it.

Details of the matter spread very quickly in school. As Xu Zhi was the protagonist of the story, and being the president of the Student Council, it naturally attracted a lot of attention.

Furthermore, Xu Zhi's unyielding attitude towards the kidnapers was unanimously praised by his classmates. Not anyone could remain calm while being held at gunpoint and facing certain death.

The girls who admired Xu Zhi felt they had not fallen for the wrong person after all.

After this incident, Xu Zhi became somewhat famous within the Qinghe Group. Disregarding whether he was capable or not, at least he was a bold person.

But Xu Zhi's matter merely served as an embellishment to the story. The other students were more interested in the man and woman who had rescued Xu Zhi.

Rumor had it that Xu Zhi was saved by a female superhuman. When she emerged from the forest, she looked as graceful as a swan, while her eyes sparkled like limpid autumn waters.

She was capable of controlling plants that helped to trap the mercenaries in place before strangling them to death with the vines of the plant.

After what she did, everyone seemed to have forgotten about Zhou Yingxue's hogging of the ripened jujube tree and other similar matters. They could only remember the sight of her killing those mercenaries.

However, this was not the main focus of the story. The main point was that she actually had a grandpa.

A student who was listening to the story wondered, "What's the big deal about having a grandpa? Isn't that something very normal? I have a grandpa too. I call my father's father 'Grandfather,' while my mother's father is called 'Grandpa...'"

The student telling the story was dumbfounded. "I'm not fucking referring to 'grandpa.' I'm talking about the 'master'[1] in a master-servant relationship! This female superhuman's master is very young. In fact, he might even be younger than us."

The students listening to the story now understood. "Oh, I see! You meant master!"

To these students who were still living in an ivory tower, the story itself was already legendary enough. A mysterious young sniper leading his maid around in the wilderness would always arouse the yearnings of many people.

The male students all hoped to be that young sniper. Sprawling drunk while in a beauty's lap, holding the world's power while sober. Just the thought of that made them extremely excited!

Meanwhile, the girls felt it would be quite romantic to follow such a young man and wander the world.

Of course, the story also made these students who lived in an ivory tower understand the outside world had become mystical and dangerous.

Yang Xiaojin was also listening to the story. All the girls in the classroom were discussing it with great enthusiasm, but only she was sitting quietly in the corner.

A female student said excitedly while chatting, "Wow, a sniper! That young man must be very handsome, right? For someone as powerful and mysterious as him, even I would like to be his maid as well! Although that might sound pretty feudal, it still feels pretty nice."

Of course, they did not know that Yang Xiaojin, who was sitting beside them, was actually an existence that felt like the top of the pyramid to other snipers.

A girl spun around and asked Yang Xiaojin, "Xiaojin, since you're from outside of Luoyang City, can you tell us what it's like out there? Is it really as dangerous as they put it?"

Yang Xiaojin calmly looked at them. "It's a little more dangerous than what they described."

To someone like Yang Xiaojin, it seemed there were not many secrets left in this world. Therefore, the world was 10,000 times more dangerous to her than what the eyes of these girls could see.

Kill or be killed.

A female student said with a smile, "Xiaojin, you said that you don't like guys who lead a pampered life. Then what about that young sniper?"

Yang Xiaojin said, "I already have someone I like."

After saying that, Yang Xiaojin continued taking notes with lowered head as she prepared for the lessons today. Since the paper crane she had been waiting for did not arrive yet, she could only put her concentration on her studies.

The girl next to her muttered, "Then I'm sure that the person that you like is not as powerful as the young man we're talking about."

Chapter 518 Rich overnigh Zhou Yingxue returned to the black market by herself. She and Ren Xiaosu had arrived on the outskirts of the black market together. However, Ren Xiaosu said it would be too eye-catching for a man and woman to go back into town together.

This black market was, after all, under the control of the Qinghe Group. If Xu Zhi had the intention, he could definitely find them as they had such distinctive features.

But that was only the secondary concern. Actually, it would not be a big deal even if Xu Zhi managed to find them. However, Ren Xiaosu had used a sniper rifle when they rescued Xu Zhi's group, so it would be bad if the Zhou Consortium were to link this to Zhou Xilong's assassination.

The Zhou Consortium was a well-known consortium in the Central Plains. If they wanted to take revenge on someone, it would surely not be trivial.

Even after Zhou Yingxue returned to the black market alone, she still stayed in the hotel every day and rarely left her room. If she had to go out, she would wrap herself up very tightly.

As it was already a month into fall, no one would really get suspicious even if she wore thicker clothes with a silk scarf and sunglasses.

After hiding in the hotel for several days, Zhou Yingxue finally couldn't stand it any longer. She wrapped herself up in disguise and headed to the bank at the black market to check her account.

She concealed herself so tightly because Ren Xiaosu told her the consortiums would certainly not let go of any vital information they could get and would set up surveillance cameras in hidden places.

After arriving at the bank, Zhou Yingxue was stunned as soon as she went in. She saw two people wrapped up even tighter than her standing in front of the automated teller machine.

When she saw them keying in numbers with a sense of familiarity, she believed they must have been here on more than one occasion. When Zhou Yingxue saw that veterans like these were also guarding against the consortium's banks, she wondered if Ren Xiaosu could really be right.

Zhou Yingxue keyed in her anonymous account and password at an ATM and noted there was four million yuan in it. Of that amount, one million yuan was received from the previous mission she had accomplished, while another one million yuan was the reward for assassinating Zhou Xilong.

This showed the Anjing House had already recognized the completion of that last mission and that she had gained the opportunity to ask for their protection once.

The remaining two million yuan was paid by Xu Zhi who promised it for saving his life.

When she keyed in Wu Tong's account and password, Zhou Yingxue's eyes lit up. There was 5.3 million yuan in Wu Tong's account!

Frankly, Zhou Yingxue really did not expect Wu Tong to be so rich. But upon thinking about it, Wu Tong was considered a very experienced A-rank hitman. And with the Zhou Consortium's internal resources readily available for him, he could easily carry out his missions there.

So it was normal he had earned so much money.

After checking Wu Tong's account, Zhou Yingxue got lost in thought. After all, she now had 9.3 million yuan in her hands. This amount of money could last her for the rest of her life at any stronghold, right?

Then should she continue leading such a dangerous life?

Based on how Ren Xiaosu had reacted, he would not hunt her down to the ends of the earth even if she absconded with the money. In that case, what else did she have to worry about?

Her purpose for deliberately staying in the bathroom of the restaurant for half an hour the previous time was just so she could see how Ren Xiaosu would react about the money. Actually, what she was most worried about was getting hunted down by Ren Xiaosu.

That young man made her feel like he was a massive mountain she could not conquer. In fact, it felt like she could not even muster up any resistance against him. If the two of them really became enemies, Zhou Yingxue would definitely escape rather than think about how to fight back.

“Should I leave or not?” Zhou Yingxue had experienced such a struggle recently. She initially thought that she could accept remaining as a maidservant to that young man, but after seeing such a large sum of money, she still felt tempted by it.

After all, Ren Xiaosu would be getting 80% of the money when he returned.

Zhou Yingxue walked out of the bank while gritting her teeth and muttering to herself, “Why does he have to take such a large share of the money? Seriously, I wouldn’t be caught in such a dilemma if I could just get another 10% more!”

But when Zhou Yingxue was about to leave, she hesitated again, because no one had ever given her any sense of security like Ren Xiaosu had in this chaotic world.

By following Ren Xiaosu, things would be totally different. She could munch on melon seeds comfortably even while standing on the roof of a building.

To be honest, Zhou Yingxue believed that as long as Ren Xiaosu was around, any missions could be completed and she would not have to be put in danger at any time.

After all, Stronghold 73 might not necessarily be tougher than Stronghold 146, and that young man was someone who had destroyed a stronghold before.

A sense of security was simply too important in this chaotic world. Or rather, it was really too important to Zhou Yingxue.

Moreover, her master was also quite a nice person. Although he looked unfeeling on the surface, he had a warm heart. If something happened to her someday, Ren Xiaosu would definitely save her, right?

With those thoughts, Zhou Yingxue involuntarily walked back to the entrance of the hotel. Zhou Yingxue sighed, “Since I’ve already come back here, I should just wait patiently for Master to return...”

The feeling of being a maidservant wasn’t too bad after all.

All of a sudden, Zhou Yingxue felt much more relaxed. She turned around and ran to the black market’s casino.

She had earned some money, so she needed to spend it now!

But when Zhou Yingxue went into the casino, she only exchanged for 500 yuan’s worth of chips. She held the five small chips in her hands and looked around for a long time but did not really sit down at any tables to play.

Not for any other reason, but because she could not bear to part with the money. What if she lost?

In the end, Zhou Yingxue traded the chips back for money and returned straight to her hotel room to soak in the bathtub. The casino staff rolled their eyes after she exchanged the chips without playing at all.

Just after Zhou Yingxue left, Vanilla of the Anjing House stood at the casino's entrance and smilingly said through his micro-earpiece, "She doesn't look like someone who would double-cross her teammates. I don't think there's any problem with the mission at Stronghold 73. Moreover, the Zhou Consortium also claimed they killed four of the hitmen, so everything matches up."

But a voice rang out through the earpiece, "I still think there's something suspicious with this A-rank hitwoman. After all, her teammates all perished for both the missions she was involved in."

"Then let's observe her again when we get a chance next time. I'm off to carry out another mission now," Vanilla said.

Right now, Vanilla was dressed in a black suit and tie, and he looked like any other handsome young man out there. In fact, one might even mistake him as the most popular gigolo of a host club, the type older women liked the most.

"By the way," Vanilla suddenly asked, "what about the D-rank hitman that caused a lot of trouble at Stronghold 61? No, he should've been promoted to C-rank, right?"

Someone said through the earpiece, "It seems that person has disappeared."

"Is it possible the person used other people's cell phones to carry out the missions? Check if there's been any similar situations recently," Vanilla said.

It would have been fine if they did not check, but the person in charge of assigning the missions at the Anjing House suddenly realized a similar situation had also occurred during the previous D-rank mission assignments at Stronghold 73. No one managed to complete it even after a long time, and those who accepted the mission had all disappeared!

Vanilla was a little puzzled by this. "Could that troublemaker have gone to Stronghold 73? The distance between the two strongholds is way too vast. Could that D-rank hitman actually be Zhou Yingxue?"

"That's not the case. We had our people investigate and sought eyewitness accounts. They said the troublemaker's a young male individual."

At this moment, Zhou Yingxue was still unaware she was almost targeted by the Anjing House. Ren Xiaosu was right about it after all. If they wanted to lead a better life in this chaotic world, they would have to be even more cautious.

Chapter 519 The wild world

Ren Xiaosu had already returned to the town outside of Stronghold 61. When he first got to the Central Plains, he started off from here. He even bought a house and planted some Potato Shooters in the yard.

As soon as he went into the house, he saw the corpses of several people lying on the ground just as he had anticipated. They were all killed by the Potato Shooters when they leaped into his yard while he was away.

Ren Xiaosu sighed. Now that this place had become the haunted house of the town, it would probably be a little difficult to sell it away.

After cleaning up the house, he headed straight to the tavern.

When he arrived there, the storyteller was telling a new story again. Ren Xiaosu pricked his ears up to listen and was surprised to hear it was about Xu Zhi's rescue in the wilderness.

The storyteller said, "My dear listeners, you might not know that the world's been getting stranger lately. That mysterious young man in the wilderness is traveling the lands and upholding justice with his maid in tow..."

After entering the tavern, Ren Xiaosu was smiling as he ordered a bowl of lamb stew from the waiter. Xiaolu was sitting in a chair next to the storyteller, but it seemed like she did not notice Ren Xiaosu at all.

Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. Had they forgotten about him after he had been away for just a few days? Even the waiter was acting like he had never seen Ren Xiaosu before.

Just as he was about to take his usual seat by the window, he realized a woman wearing a black cap was already sitting there.

He had encountered this woman before and nearly even mistook her for Yang Xiaojin!

The woman was still dressed in a trim combat uniform and a pair of combat boots. As these were steel-toe combat boots, normal women would not want to wear them.

Ren Xiaosu did not say anything and just chose another table to sit down at. He realized the reason why Xiaolu, the storyteller, and the waiter were pretending not to know him might have something to do with this woman's presence.

Was she a supernatural being? Ren Xiaosu was not very sure, but he could confirm that she was sure to be someone with a powerful background.

But why would a woman like her appear here in town?

As usual, Ren Xiaosu carefully tore the bread into tiny pieces for half an hour as he listened to the storyteller praising him through his storytelling.

Throughout, the woman wearing the black cap remained silent and did not look up at Ren Xiaosu once. She only cared about drinking but did not seem to get drunk no matter how much she drank.

Ren Xiaosu left after eating his lamb stew. It wasn't until evening that he heard a knocking on his door.

He walked up to the door but did not face it directly. Instead, he hid behind the brick wall next to it and asked, "Who's there?"

“Me.”

It was Xiaolu’s voice.

Ren Xiaosu opened the door slightly and Xiaolu agilely squeezed in through the opening. “Did you see that woman wearing the cap?”

Ren Xiaosu nodded.

“Ever since she came here, my grandpa specifically ordered me and the waiter to pretend not to know you if we see you again.” Xiaolu said, “She’d been here once before and even paid a visit to my grandpa’s house. However, I don’t know what they talked about as Grandpa told me to go and buy a bottle of soy sauce for him.”

Xiaolu finished her sentence in a single breath as though she were afraid Ren Xiaosu would misunderstand her. After all, she had pretended not to know Ren Xiaosu during the day.

Ren Xiaosu nodded and said with a smile, “I thought that y’all had forgotten me. But who on earth is that woman? She actually made your grandpa that wary?”

“Well, I’m not too sure. I only know that she’s a very powerful superhuman.” Xiaolu said, “Have you been on a mission recently? Why’d you go away for half a month?”

“Mhm, the location of the mission was a little bit far,” Ren Xiaosu replied.

“Was it a mission concerning the Zhou Consortium?” Xiaolu asked.

Ren Xiaosu just smiled and did not answer her question.

However, Xiaolu asked again, “Do you know how to use a sniper rifle? Are you that person with the maid?”

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. “What sniper rifle?”

He realized Xiaolu and the storyteller had already guessed the person was him. However, they were not too sure because the operation was extremely secretive this time.

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, “Do I look like someone with a maid?”

“That’s true; you’re still by yourself.” Xiaolu nodded, feeling reassured. “Then will you still come by the tavern tomorrow?”

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. “With that woman around, I shouldn’t be appearing at the tavern so often while her identity is still unknown. I’ll be leaving tomorrow.

“Where are you going?” Xiaolu fluttered her lashes.

“I’ll be going to the black market at Luoyang City.” Ren Xiaosu did not hide it from her.

“Will you still come back?”

“Yes.” Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, “I still have a house here. If that woman leaves, throw a bunch of weeds into my yard, and I’ll get the message.”

“Alright then, I’ll head back home now. You’d better be careful.” Xiaolu sounded sad. In fact, she would have liked to have gone with Ren Xiaosu to see the world, but she knew her grandpa would get very angry if she did.

After saying that, Xiaolu squeezed through the opening in the door again and disappeared off into the darkness. Only Xiaolu’s scent still lingered in the house. Before coming over, she apparently applied some perfume on herself. It smelled pretty good and was not one of the inferior perfumes sold in town.

Xiaolu returned home looking down. The storyteller snapped at her, “Where have you been?”

“I... I went out to gather more stories,” Xiaolu replied.

“You were totally unsettled the moment he came back to town. Did you go and look for him?” The storyteller pulled a long face. “I’ve told you so many times that this sort of person is very dangerous, and it’s even more dangerous for you to hang around him.”

“Grandpa,” Xiaolu said pitifully, “I want to go out and see the world.”

“I think you just want to be his maid!”

“There’s nothing wrong with that!” Xiaolu said stubbornly.

The storyteller was stunned for a moment. He said with a sigh, “You’re still young, but he’s someone who has walked into that power vortex. I won’t allow you to be with him.”

“But I’m also very strong,” Xiaolu said, unconvinced.

“You should listen to more stories first to understand just how dangerous this wild world is,” the storyteller said earnestly.

“But why?”

“Because what’s most dangerous about the world aren’t the firearms or superpowers out there, but the people. You have to learn what the true nature of this wild world is,” the storyteller said with a smile.

“OK, so how long do I have to listen to these stories?” Xiaolu sat at the table and placed her chin on her hand as she stared blankly into space.

“Another year. Another year and I’ll let you venture out,” the storyteller said.

Then the storyteller heard Xiaolu folding some paper next to him. “What are you doing?”

“I’m folding paper cranes,” Xiaolu said with a smile.

The storyteller felt a tinge of despair in his heart. What the hell!

Before Ren Xiaosu returned to the town at Stronghold 61, the storyteller had been hoping the cap-wearing woman would quickly leave. With someone like her coming to listen to his stories every day, he was under too much stress!

It was not that he was afraid the woman would pose a threat to him. After all, there was no conflict of interest between the two of them. However, that woman knew too much, so he could no longer make up the stories as he liked anymore.

And now, he hated Ren Xiaosu more than that woman.

The storyteller really hoped Ren Xiaosu would leave as soon as possible and not to return to Stronghold 61 again to harm his granddaughter.

Chapter 520 A pack of lies

It took seven days for Ren Xiaosu to return to the black market. No one knew where he had been during that time.

But when he was checking in to the hotel, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see someone wearing a Pyro Company logo on his chest walk out from the elevator and leave the hotel.

Honestly speaking, Ren Xiaosu nearly started a fight right there in the hotel when he saw that small flame on the other party's chest. After all, Ren Xiaosu had subconsciously deemed the Pyro Company as his enemy after such a long time. However, Ren Xiaosu managed to get ahold of himself. After all, this was the black market.

He went upstairs and entered his room. After a while, Zhou Yingxue came knocking on his door. Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhou Yingxue with an ambiguous smile and said, "You didn't leave after seeing all that money?"

Zhou Yingxue curled her lips and did not answer the question. She wrote down an account number for Ren Xiaosu and said, "Master, your 80% share has been deposited into this account."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded and took the piece of paper from her. "I won't exploit you either. You can deduct any expenses incurred from this account while carrying out the missions. After all, your mother is still sick. By the way, do you have enough for her medical bills?"

"If I say that I don't have enough, are you gonna give me another 10%?" Zhou Yingxue stared blankly at Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "If you don't have enough money, I'll take you to accomplish more missions."

"Then forget it." Zhou Yingxue sat down on the couch and muttered, "I still want to rest for a while longer."

“By the way, I saw someone from the Pyro Company in the hotel lobby earlier. How’d they get into the black market?” Ren Xiaosu wondered, “And they even wear their logo around so blatantly?”

Puzzled, Zhou Yingxue looked at Ren Xiaosu. “Shouldn’t that be very normal?”

“Normal?” Ren Xiaosu was stunned. “Shouldn’t the Pyro Company be hated by everyone?”

“Only supernatural beings think that way.” Zhou Yingxue said, “The Pyro Company doesn’t capture normal people, and they’ve only been going after supernatural beings in recent years. As they usually carry out their operations in secret. Many supernatural beings don’t even know about it.”

“But the Pyro Company is also very tyrannical in their ways. Doesn’t that irk people?”

“Of course it does! But aren’t all consortiums the same?” Zhou Yingxue said, “Moreover, the Pyro Company has quite a few strongholds under their control and is such a dominant power as well. Other than the Anjing House and the Saboteurs, no one would really want to offend them.”

Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized it was his previous experience in the Southwest that gave him a negative impression of the Pyro Company. It was mainly because Yang Xiaojin wanted to attack the Pyro Company that he subconsciously placed them on his blacklist.

He finally realized there wasn’t much of a difference between the Pyro Company and the other consortiums in most people’s eyes.

Zhou Yingxue said, “Besides, the Pyro Company has always regarded this black market as a hub. I heard the Pyro Company’s on good terms with the Qinghe Group, and it seems the relationship between the two founders was great. Therefore, the Pyro Company has always been an ally of Luoyang City all these years. Furthermore, the Pyro Company has never gone after any supernatural beings within the Qinghe Group’s territory before. As such, a lot of supernatural beings came here to the black market to avoid the Pyro Company’s attempts at capturing them.”

“Aren’t they afraid that the Pyro Company will make a move once they leave the black market?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“It seems that the Pyro Company has really not resorted to something like that in the black market before,” Zhou Yingxue answered.

“What’s the relationship between the Pyro Company and the Qinghe Group?” Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled.

However, none of this seemed to have much to do with him. He would still kill the members of the Pyro Company if he encountered them in the wilderness anyway. After all, the Pyro Company had attacked him on more than one occasion.

Ren Xiaosu cast a sidelong glance at Zhou Yingxue. “What’ve you been up to in the black market the past few days? You didn’t go out to show off, right?”

“No.” Zhou Yingxue said, “I’m not the sort of person who likes attention.”

Yet Ren Xiaosu saw the large, new diamond ring on Zhou Yingxue's right index finger she had just bought and the jade bracelet on her wrist.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "You didn't go to the casino?"

"No." Zhou Yingxue shook her head. "My father went into heavy debt because of gambling, and if it weren't for that, my mother would've had enough money to treat her illness when she fell seriously sick. When she passed away..."

Zhou Yingxue stopped abruptly mid-sentence and the room fell silent.

Ren Xiaosu stared blankly at Zhou Yingxue. "Don't speak yet. Let me think it through. Back when we were at Stronghold 88, you said that you wanted to go home to save your mother. Then, when I encountered you again later, you said that you wanted to make enough money for your mother's treatment. But now, you're saying that your mother has passed away..."

"I misspoke..."

Ren Xiaosu said with a dark expression, "Do I look gullible to you?"

Zhou Yingxue quickly squatted down next to Ren Xiaosu and started massaging his legs. "Master, wasn't it only because I was afraid you would kill me? What else could I have said? What's the matter with a weak girl like me telling some lies to others...."

Ren Xiaosu looked up at the ceiling in a speechless manner. Indeed, no one in this world could be trusted anymore. Back then, he had thought Zhou Yingxue was quite a filial person, so he let her off.

Ren Xiaosu had never met his parents before nor mentioned it to anyone. But that did not mean he did not miss them or find it regretful. Therefore, when Zhou Yingxue mentioned she wanted to save her mother and pay off her medical bills, his heart softened.

However, only now did he realize Zhou fucking Yingxue could lie without batting an eyelid! So this was what a spy was like!

But what else could he do now? Should he kill Zhou Yingxue? He did not have to go that far, right? After all, she had been addressing him as her master for quite a while.

Ren Xiaosu stared at Zhou Yingxue. He even suspected she had deliberately misspoken so she could lay out all her cards on the table as she was sure that he would not do anything to her.

Ren Xiaosu asked angrily, "What else have you lied about, huh?"

"Nothing else." Zhou Yingxue quickly shook her head.

Just as Ren Xiaosu was about to say something, Zhou Yingxue's cell phone off to the side suddenly lit up. A new text message had come in. "Escort Mission: Provide protection for a female singer from

Stronghold 62 for the duration of her concert tour spanning 37 strongholds. The employer requests that the mission be entrusted to a female superhuman. To all interested female superhumans, please sign up and verify your gender by taking a selfie. The reward is 2 million yuan.”

Ren Xiaosu was surprised. This was the first time he had seen an escort mission be issued. He asked Zhou Yingxue, “Have you seen a mission like this before?”

“Yes,” Zhou Yingxue nodded. “The previous one was to protect the Zhou Consortium’s Zhou Shiji. But the strange thing is that escort missions are usually requested by an employer, yet there are no employers when it comes to assassination missions. It feels like the targets in the assassination missions are people the Anjing House themselves want dead.”

This mission gave him a sense of *déjà vu*, and anticipation suddenly filled him. Was this female singer a member of the Saboteurs as well? If so, couldn’t he find Yang Xiaojin this time?