

First Order 531

Chapter 531 Dawn of a mutation

On the night the Qing Consortium completely lost track of the Experimentals, no one noticed a Japanese creeper vine growing in a winding fashion along a wall in the corner of Stronghold 61 where the battle between the A-rank hitmen and the Pyro Company took place.

That creeper vine had been planted a long time ago, and the walls of the residences on the road were already fully covered by it.

Whenever someone passed by here in the summertime, they would get a refreshing feeling just by looking at the lush, green walls.

On the day of the battle, some members of the Pyro Company's Dusk team had been killed under that wall. After they died, blood from their corpses seeped into the soil and mixed with the creeper vine's roots.

When night fell, a fat rat crawled out of the sewers and cautiously scavenged for food. It was attracted to the creeper vine where the scent of blood was still lingering from before.

However, the creeper vine seemed to come alive as it reached out a small tendril and attempted to touch the rat with its feeler.

The rat hopped two steps back in fear and looked cautiously at the creeper vine's feeler as though it were a human hand. But when the rat realized that it was only a plant, it became less wary and approached it again.

The creeper vine's soft feeler caressed the rat on its head, and it felt like the plant was very curious.

This was probably the first time it was seriously trying to understand this world in its own way. As the feeler caressed the rat's head like it was helping to scratch an itch, the rat squinted its eyes in enjoyment.

But a moment later, the creeper vine's feeler suddenly splayed open and spiked into the rat's body. In just an instant, the rat was pierced all the way through and dragged into the dense foliage of the creeper vine.

Before it died, the rat only had time to let out a squeak before falling silent. Meanwhile, the creeper vine spread across the wall still looked ever so quiet and beautiful.

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The tour group arrived at Stronghold 78 early the next morning. After getting their tires patched, they had immediately continued their journey. Just as Ren Xiaosu had guessed, the tour group reached Stronghold 78 before the vehicle recovery team even set off.

Fang Zhi finally took Zhou Yingxue's suggestion and purchased another two off-road vehicles to temporarily store their supplies and vehicle maintenance tools. He even hired a local mechanic at a high salary to follow the tour group.

They had really been terrified by the incident last night.

What if they had not encountered that "repair team" but an even more ruthless group of robbers? Fang Zhi knew all too well that if they were stranded in a wilderness without rules, most men would be very interested in laying their hands on the female singer, Li Ran.

When they arrived at the stronghold, Li Ran brought Zhou Yingxue along with her wherever she went this time, and the two women looked to be as close as sisters. If Ren Xiaosu did not know what it was really like behind the scenes, he would probably have fallen for it.

Li Ran took Zhou Yingxue to various events and banquets as she did not want Zhou Yingxue to have any free time for herself.

At the same time, since Zhou Yingxue was participating in the events with Li Ran, Ren Xiaosu would have to tag along as her "assistant."

At this moment, Li Ran proudly told Zhou Yingxue, "The main reason I came to the Zhou Consortium for a concert tour was to meet up with a movie director at Stronghold 73. I think he's filming a new movie soon, and if I manage to get the lead actress role, I'll push him to make you the supporting actress."

Li Ran's words made Zhou Yingxue roll her eyes. She knew that Li Ran was only trying to show off in front of her. Otherwise, she would not mention something like that for no reason.

However, Ren Xiaosu asked, "Are there still people making movies?"

"Of course. They're even in color," Li Ran said proudly.

Ren Xiaosu had only been living in the Central Plains' strongholds for a short while, so he did not know there were outdoor cinemas showing movies in many of the strongholds here. There were projectionists who would specially set up the screens and use a projector to play the movies.

Every time there was a movie screening, large groups of men, women, seniors, and children would gather in front of the screens, while vendors selling cigarettes, soft drinks, and edible seeds would come around to peddle their wares.

Such scenes did not exist in the Southwest and Northwest and only happened here in the Central Plains.

But when Zhou Yingxue was attending a banquet, she received some texts from the Anjing House. However, the mission this time was a little different.

"A large number of the Pyro Company members have already sneaked into Stronghold 73 and are accompanied by some Riders. We suspect the targets are searching for the Pre-Cataclysm site of a Pyro Company research lab. The location of the site is in the vicinity of East Lake.

“This is a very valuable lab that likely conducted research in the field of life sciences. A technological breakthrough was achieved before The Cataclysm, and the results can be deployed to a wide range of medical fields.

“There is no quota of participants for this mission. The reward for killing a member of the Pyro Company’s Midnight squad is 150,000 yuan, while each member of the Dusk squad killed will get a reward of 500,000 yuan.

“Only successful hunters will be eligible for the trials next spring.”

As they stood on the lawn outside the banquet grounds, Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue were stunned by the texts for this mission. Ren Xiaosu wondered, “Has the Anjing House ever assigned such a vicious mission in the past? This is as good as asking all of the A-rank hitmen to hunt down the Pyro Company members.”

Ren Xiaosu took out a C-rank cell phone he had recently stolen. To his surprise, he saw this phone had also received the same texts! So the Anjing House had issued this mission to everyone! Even C-rank hitmen were eligible to take part!

“The most ruthless thing about this mission is that it was sent as a group text.” Zhou Yingxue said, “The Anjing House definitely knows that many of their cell phones have landed in the hands of people with ulterior motives.... Master, I’m not insinuating that you’re one of them.”

Ren Xiaosu raised an eyebrow. “Go on.”

“There should be one or two of the Anjing House’s cell phones in the hands of the various forces. Although they can’t receive the A-rank mission texts, they can still occasionally guard against the assassination missions targeting some of their important members.” Zhou Yingxue said, “Previously, someone from the Zhou Consortium was targeted through a B-rank mission, and all of their crimes were even listed. But before the hitmen could arrive, that person was arrested and interrogated by the Zhou Consortium themselves. So these group texts were sent out with the intention of reaching those forces. They’re hoping more people will show up and stop the Pyro Company.”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu nodded. “If it’s simply a mission to kill Pyro Company personnel, it probably won’t tempt would-be hitmen into joining. However, the lab research that can be sold at astronomical prices will be enough to change their minds. I’m afraid that the Zhou Consortium themselves will also be moved by the offer. After all, this lab lies within their territory. The texts emphasize the value of the lab, yet the Anjing House has not shown any interest in the lab research at all. Curious.”

This showed the Anjing House clearly knew there were people other than hitmen who had obtained their cell phones, but they just didn’t care. All they did was to ensure the A-rank hitmen were issued with cell phones that only they could access.

Actually, they had deliberately allowed others to obtain the cell phones so they could upset the applecart at the critical moment!

“But why would the Riders go with the Pyro Company to search for the site of the research lab? How did these two organizations get involved with each other?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

Chapter 532 Pyro and Riders

Ren Xiaosu’s impression of the Riders was still rather good. The Rider he encountered was very polite and relatively impartial when dealing with matters.

Ren Xiaosu completely agreed with the Rider’s decision on banning the students from gambling, because Ren Xiaosu knew too well what gamblers were like.

But why would a reputable organization like the Riders help the Pyro Company search for something?

Unless, of course, they had a common goal!

“Didn’t you say that the Qinghe Group’s been searching for their major shareholder’s heir? But they still did not manage to find him after this many years?” Ren Xiaosu asked puzzledly.

“Yes, this info has been circulating around for a long time, so it’s not a secret anymore.” Zhou Yingxue said, “But it seems that a lot of information has been lost due to The Cataclysm. After all, the Qinghe Group did not seem to have managed too well in the first few years after The Cataclysm, and the founder also sacrificed himself to ensure the survival of the organization.”

Ren Xiaosu muttered, “The heir of the founder couldn’t have ended up in a research lab of the Pyro Company, right?!”

Stressed, Zhou Yingxue said, “Master, let’s not talk about other things for now, and focus on this mission. Only those who manage to kill the Pyro Company’s members this time will qualify for the trials next year. How am I supposed to go to Stronghold 73 when Li Ran is keeping me close to her every day?”

When Ren Xiaosu thought about it, it dawned on him that this was really the case. Although they did not need to apply to do the mission this time, Zhou Yingxue could not leave for the time being. Moreover, Zhou Yingxue’s fingerprints were required to unlock the cell phone to take pictures of the targets and complete the mission. In other words, Zhou Yingxue would have to be present at the site.

Ren Xiaosu pondered it for a bit. “It’s fine, I’ll make a trip there and bring back someone for you to kill.”

Zhou Yingxue was shocked on the spot. “Master, can your ideas not always be so extreme? Stronghold 73 is more than 400 kilometers away from here. Are you just going to carry someone back for me to complete the mission?”

“What else can I do?” Ren Xiaosu glanced at her. “Do you have any better ideas? Don’t worry, I’ll think of other methods on my way there.”

“Master, be careful.” Zhou Yingxue said, “I’m afraid that all of the underworld criminals of the Central Plains will be trying to get into Stronghold 73 this time, and they can be a really mixed bag.”

“Mhm.” Ren Xiaosu nodded. “I’ll relay your message to them to be careful.”

Zhou Yingxue was confused.

With that, Ren Xiaosu did not waste any more time and headed right off into the darkness of the night.

Li Ran, who was dressed in an evening gown, walked out of the banquet grounds with a glass of champagne in her hand. Sparkling bubbles could even be seen fizzing in the exquisite crystal glass.

Walking over, Li Ran asked Zhou Yingxue, “And where’s he off to?”

“Oh,” Zhou Yingxue smiled and said, “I asked my assistant to head back to the hotel first so he can make the bed for me.”

“Hmph!” Li Ran turned around and walked off.

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Just as Zhou Yingxue had guessed, the entire underworld of the Central Plains was getting restless due to the actions of the Anjing House.

In just half a day after the group texts were sent out, the black market outside of Luoyang City had become half empty.

The mob bosses who had been forced to live in seclusion here successively sprang into action and left the black market.

After all, they would have to make more money to better enjoy life.

In the entire Alliance of Strongholds, it was said that one could get rich overnight by obtaining research data from the laboratories. Even if they only managed to get their hands on one page, it could very well fetch them enough to last a lifetime.

This was the data of the life sciences research the Pyro Company had been conducting before The Cataclysm. More importantly, the Anjing House claimed there was already a breakthrough in this field of research, so the implication was that it was ready for industrial application.

Meanwhile, the Zhou Consortium had started setting up checkpoints around Stronghold 73. They even planned to deploy two brigades of troops and station them outside the stronghold.

You could say they were taking this matter very seriously.

However, it would take time to mobilize the troops, and the two brigades would take at least three days to get here from the other strongholds. This military operation was not just a matter of sending out the troops, but also required the logistics lines to be ready.

But to the surprise of all the various forces, the two brigades were redirected to garrison at the Zhou Consortium’s stronghold in the farthest west before they could arrive at Stronghold 73.

This puzzled everyone a great deal. Was the Zhou Consortium planning to ignore the situation at Stronghold 73?

But there was nothing at Stronghold 74 in the farthest west. There was only a mountain range a 100 kilometers farther west of that stronghold, so why was the Zhou Consortium garrisoning their troops there?

Could there be anything more important than what was going to happen at Stronghold 73?

Of course, no one knew the Qing Consortium had already sent even more important intelligence to the Zhou Consortium.

As such, after the two brigades were redeployed to the west, the Zhou Consortium mobilized other troops to rush to Stronghold 73.

However, it did not matter to the underworld criminals. They were only concerned about where the Pyro Company's Pre-Cataclysm research lab was.

During the past few days when the Zhou Consortium was busily redeploying its troops, all kinds of criminal figures had entered Stronghold 73 through their own means before martial law was enforced.

As they did not dare to check in to the hotels, they could only hide in houses and quietly observe the situation from there.

Some of them were so pathetic they had nowhere else to go and could only hide in the spa center every day. They even had to make sure to avoid the patrols of Stronghold 73. After all, not everyone had a safe house in Stronghold 73.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was already tucking into his takeout hot dry noodles^[1] inside a safe house. This was the first safe house Wu Tong had arranged for them to rendezvous at during the previous mission.

This safe house used to belong to Wu Tong, but it belonged to Ren Xiaosu now. After all, Wu Tong was dead. Since the house was without an owner, Ren Xiaosu gladly occupied it as his own.

Ren Xiaosu did not find it difficult to get into the stronghold. However, he had observed something outside earlier. At some point, Ren Xiaosu felt the Zhou Consortium had even relaxed their inspection of the people entering the stronghold. It was as though they were deliberately letting this mixed bag of people into the stronghold.

But why was that? Did they intend to use these people to keep the Pyro Company in check?

In Ren Xiaosu's opinion, wouldn't it be much safer to just station the troops inside the stronghold itself? What was the Zhou Consortium planning?

A curfew had already been temporarily enforced within Stronghold 73, something that was still rarely seen in the Central Plains. Some of the strongholds here were even known to be sleepless cities, with bustling sights lasting throughout the night and into the morning.

After finishing his hot dry noodles, Ren Xiaosu headed out again. The Anjing House had appended more information about the mission and indicated that the Pyro Company had arrived in the vicinity of East Lake near Stronghold 73. Although they had lost track of their whereabouts, it was very possible the research laboratory was located right next to East Lake. However, it was likely the Pyro Company had not discovered the entrance of the research laboratory yet.

Ren Xiaosu was parkouring freely up on the roofs. Occasionally, he would notice there were also others up on the roofs looking at something.

Vanilla was walking with the elderly sugar painter in the shadows on the streets not far away. Dressed in his smart suit, he seemed wholly unrelated to the old man beside him.

The old man muttered, "There's too many formidable people this time. You should tell me in advance what the Anjing House is planning. I don't want to take too many risks."

Vanilla adjusted his tie and said with a smile, "With you and me working together, and the other Anjing House members supporting us, who would be a match for us in this stronghold?"

Chapter 533 A dark and stormy night Things were already stirring in Stronghold 73. The underworld criminals were hiding in the stronghold and waiting for their opportunity to strike.

As East Lake spanned a very large area, it would be impossible to pinpoint the research laboratory's location when the Anjing House only stated that it was in the vicinity of East Lake.

So everyone was just waiting for the Pyro Company to find the research laboratory's entrance before making their move to seize the research data.

Although the criminal underworld was no match for the members of the Pyro Company in a one-on-one battle, everyone knew there would be a lot of people involved when the conflict broke out. Furthermore, the A-rank hitmen from the Anjing House would be participating in the battle as well. Once the situation turned chaotic, as long as they could get their hands on some of that research data, they could sell it for a sky-high price.

However, the mob bosses still remained hidden in the spa center. It was not like they enjoyed soaking in the hot bath and scrubbing their backs, but that most of them had been placed on the watchlists of the various consortiums. If they were to go outside and get recognized by people, the Zhou Consortium might just arrest them on the spot.

It was not only they who were lying low. Even Vanilla and the elderly sugar painter, the Pyro Company, and the Riders were also hiding their presence in the stronghold.

Only Ren Xiaosu could openly take a night run around East Lake like nothing was going on.

Fortress 178 had already destroyed all the information that would visually identify Ren Xiaosu, while the Qing Consortium was also helping him keep secret, so it didn't matter if the people of the Central Plains had heard of his deeds. At the very least, they couldn't recognize him even if they met him by chance.

Ren Xiaosu seemed like an ordinary student in Stronghold 73 wearing his blue sportswear that looked just like a school uniform.

Besides, to be honest, even the intelligence personnel of the various forces did not suspect anything when they saw Ren Xiaosu running around East Lake at night. That was because everyone felt that no one would dare wander around so casually in this tense period.

Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu looked really young, like someone in his teens. No matter how they looked at him, he just did not seem like a ruthless person.

Hence, Ren Xiaosu got neglected by the various forces as they treated him like an invisible person in Stronghold 73.

While Ren Xiaosu was taking his night run, a cleaner nearby spoke into his earpiece, "He's likely a young resident of the stronghold, so we can eliminate him as a suspect. There's no signs of weapons hidden on him."

It was very easy for experts to tell if there were hidden weapons on someone, especially when a person was running. If they were hiding a dagger or a firearm on them, it would definitely not escape their eyes.

There were many intelligence personnel scattered around the perimeter of East Lake. Everyone was keeping a close eye on this place.

A voice laughed into the earpiece. "I really wish I could warn these people to not jog at the lake for a few days. It's too dangerous here. But since we're not good people anyway, there's no need to reveal ourselves to help these stronghold residents."

The cleaner watched Ren Xiaosu's figure recede into the distance and said with a laugh, "Who cares if they live or die?"

The voice in the earpiece said, "I heard that a movie director will be coming to East Lake with a film crew to shoot a movie in a few days. I've never seen a film crew before."

The cleaner smiled and said, "What's the big deal about a film crew? What we're doing here is even more exciting than in the movies."

Although the cleaner did not try to persuade Ren Xiaosu to leave, another young man stopped him. This young man looked around 27 years old, and he said to Ren Xiaosu, "Please do not jog near East Lake for the next few days. It's about to get very dangerous here."

Ren Xiaosu said in panic, "Why? Is something going to happen?!"

The young man thought for a moment and said, "This place is no longer safe. A lot of criminals will be gathering here soon."

"Oh, alright, I'd better get back then. Are you from the Public Order Division?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"No." The young man shook his head.

After talking to Ren Xiaosu, the young man went over to persuade the old ladies who were practicing their plaza dancing in the plaza next to East Lake.

But the moment the young man opened his mouth, the old ladies started pushing him around. They said, "Why should we listen to you?"

"That's right, do you own this place?!"

"Who are you trying to scare by saying this place isn't safe? I'm warning you, lad, if you insist on saying that, I'll lie down[1] right here!"

Ren Xiaosu chuckled at the scene unfolding before him. But amid the pushing and shoving, he suddenly noticed a triangular red scarf fall out of the young man's pocket.

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback by the sight of this. He recalled what he saw back at the black market. Didn't the Riders usually cover their faces with a red scarf when they were carrying out their missions? Could this person be a Rider too?

Due to the possibility that this place could get dangerous, the other party was patiently urging residents to leave the vicinity of East Lake.

Why would an organization like them get involved with the Pyro Company? Just what were they searching for?

As the actors got ready to step onto the stage that was Stronghold 73, Ren Xiaosu believed a good show was going to play out soon.

But when Ren Xiaosu returned to his safe house, he was surprised to see a few texts had appeared on his recently acquired C-rank cell phone.

"Something was stolen from the library in Stronghold 73 last night. After a day of investigation, it was determined that the Pre-Cataclysm local histories and location map of Stronghold 73 had gone missing from the reference section of the library."

"Confidential files of Stronghold 73 were stolen last night. The missing data are the topography map and infrastructural changes caused by the tectonic movements at Stronghold 73 over the past 70 years.

"Based on our deduction, this should be the work of the Pyro Company. Perhaps due to the changes in the landscape, the Pyro Company still hasn't located the entrance to the research lab."

Because East Lake spanned such a large area, it would probably take a normal person several days to finish covering the entire distance on a night run.

Furthermore, the landscape had changed so much over the years that even the Pyro Company had to resort to stealing confidential files to slowly determine where the research laboratory was located.

Ren Xiaosu looked at his cell phone and suddenly realized the Anjing House must have placed a great deal of emphasis on the Pyro Company's plan this time. So they might as well join the fray and start dictating the rhythm of how things would develop. Their purpose was to share all the information they knew with everyone they could.

The Anjing House's goal was not the laboratory data. They were only looking to target the Pyro Company.

The Pyro Company would definitely have access to some of the Anjing House's cell phones as well, right? For the Anjing House to announce every move the Pyro Company was making, Ren Xiaosu wondered how bad it would feel when they saw their plans getting leaked?

Since Ren Xiaosu had nothing better to do, he headed to the largest spa center nearby to take a bath. He swore he was just curious to see what the underworld's mob bosses looked like and was not going there for anything else.

After registering at reception, Ren Xiaosu entered the male section and saw a group of mob bosses with tattoos sitting in a circle inside the bath. It looked like they were discussing something.

Ren Xiaosu carefully checked out the tattoos on these people with great interest. Some of them had tiger tattoos, dragon tattoos, and all sorts of fanciful decorative art on their bodies.

Although there were also normal guests at the spa center, they did not dare to get close to the group of burly, tattooed men sitting in the bath.

However, Ren Xiaosu went over and sat in the bath as though he knew them, and this rather dumbfounded the mob bosses.

Ren Xiaosu pointed at a twin koi tattoo on a man's arms and asked, "What does this tattoo mean? Does it bring you good luck?"

"No." The mob boss looked calmly at Ren Xiaosu. "I was born on a dark and stormy night 30 years ago on March 11th."

Just as Ren Xiaosu was waiting to hear a rattling story, the mob boss suddenly said, "So since my birthday falls on March 11th, I'm a Pisces."

Chapter 534 Doctor of the black marke

When the mob boss said that, Ren Xiaosu burst into laughter. His fucking horoscope sign was Pisces? So that was how they got their tattoos!

He looked at a mob boss with a tiger tattoo. "Then you must be born in the Year of the Tiger? And I'm guessing that other guy was born in the Year of the Dragon?"

Those mob bosses looked at Ren Xiaosu calmly before gradually feeling that something was off. "Who the hell are you!"

When they saw Ren Xiaosu did not even have a single tattoo on him from head to toe, it was obvious he was just a normal guy. The other regulars had run off to the showers, yet this kid actually dared to enter the bath they were soaking in?!

But before they could question him further, they suddenly heard a din outside. Everyone turned around to look and were surprised to see someone helping a wounded man in.

One of the mob bosses frowned and asked, "What happened?"

The person supporting the big man replied, "We ran into our foes. We won a lot of money from them back at the black market, but they were too scared to do anything to us there. Unfortunately, we bumped into them here and they attacked us. He got slashed twice!"

"Let me see." The mob bosses got up and lifted the wounded man's shirt to see two deep cuts, one each on his chest and back. As the wounds were very deep, it did not look too favorable for the injured man.

One of the mob bosses sighed. "Bro, we can't get you to the hospital here in Stronghold 73, so I'm afraid that your wounds can't be treated. Don't worry, we'll take good care of your wife and kids."

The big man's face was deathly pale. "But I think I can still be saved..."

"If you go to the hospital, wouldn't our presence in the stronghold be exposed?" one of the bosses said. "When that happens, the Zhou Consortium will capture all of us. Have you forgotten that we kidnapped some members of the Zhou Consortium two years ago? If we get caught, we'll definitely pay with our lives. Don't worry, we're loyal brothers and definitely won't let your wife and children starve to death."

The wounded man rolled his eyes before losing consciousness.

However, a voice next to them said, "I can save him."

Everyone turned around and saw Ren Xiaosu walk over in a bathrobe through the steam. "I can stitch him up and treat his wounds with a secret ancestral remedy. I guarantee that he'll fully recover within three days. However, I suppose it's not too much to ask for 500,000 yuan in exchange for saving his life, right?"

"No, not at all!" The wounded man regained consciousness. "I have money!"

Upon hearing that, Ren Xiaosu pretended to walk over to his locker to retrieve the black medicine and a sewing kit. The mob bosses were all stunned when they saw what Ren Xiaosu was holding in his hands. "Isn't that a sewing kit used for patching up clothes?"

"Why are you being so picky at this point in time?" Ren Xiaosu raised an eyebrow. "If it can save a life, that's a great outcome."

While speaking, he started stitching up the wound with the sewing kit. As anesthetics weren't used, the big man was in so much pain he nearly went into shock.

The mob bosses looked at one another. They knew they definitely couldn't go to the hospital while they were in the Zhou Consortium's stronghold. But over the next few days, there would probably be even more wounded people coming in, and even a minor wound could prove fatal.

If there were really a "shady doctor" like Ren Xiaosu around, it might just prove to be a blessing for them. However, the mob bosses decided to wait and see if this person were really capable of treating injuries first.

Seeing how Ren Xiaosu remained calm at the sight of blood gushing out while stitching up the wound, the mob bosses were convinced that he at least had guts.

After suturing the wounds, Ren Xiaosu took out the black medicine from his bathrobe and applied it onto the wounds. The big man's pale face rapidly regained a pink glow, and he was no longer sweating.

"How is it? Are you feeling better?" asked one of the nearby mob bosses.

"It's not painful anymore! It really isn't painful!" the big man said in astonishment. He turned to Ren Xiaosu and said, "Thank you so much, young man!"

"Gratitude received from Zheng Hongning, +1!"

Immediately, everyone looked at Ren Xiaosu. Someone smiled and asked kindly, "Young man, how can we address you?"

"Y'all can just call me Dr. Ren," Ren Xiaosu said with a harmless smile.

"Look, why don't you come more often to the spa center during this period? We'll cover all of your expenses here. In return, we only ask that you help treat anyone who comes in wounded. And not to worry, we'll still pay for the treatment accordingly!"

During the conversation, the wounded man had one of his men bring a gambling chip over. He said, "This is a chip from the casino in the black market outside of Luoyang City. We normally don't keep our money in the consortiums' banks, and we don't carry cash around since that's inconvenient. However, you can still easily exchange this chip for cash at the black market's casino."

Ren Xiaosu had a look at it and was surprised to see a "500" engraved in gold on the chip. It looked like this chip was worth 500,000 yuan.

The biggest denomination of chips used in ordinary casinos was usually 10,000 yuan. He did not expect that the spending power in Luoyang City's black market would be so great they even had to specially cater to these mob bosses with 500,000 yuan chips to carry around and easily make transactions with.

This was as good as the currencies issued by the banks, with the casino chips the choice of currency for them.

Ren Xiaosu took the chip and examined it. At certain angles, he could even see a strange pattern on it moving around.

Next to him, one of the mob bosses explained, "This is a laser engraving technique used for anti-counterfeiting purposes. The engraving is encrypted and only a specific instrument can decrypt it."

Ren Xiaosu smiled. "Sure, I'll accept it. How about this? I won't be coming here frequently, but if anyone requires medical attention, you all can just place a red cone at the entrance. When I see it, I will rush over as quickly as possible. Don't worry, there won't be any problems."

Ren Xiaosu wondered how he ended up as a doctor of the black market.

After this incident, Ren Xiaosu somehow became the most popular person in the spa center. Furthermore, ever since a wounded person came into the spa center, the place had ceased business operations, stating that renovations were in progress and they would not be open for business during the duration.

On the third day, when Ren Xiaosu saw a red cone at the entrance, he walked into the spa center. However, it turned out no one was wounded this time. The burly man who had previously been wounded looked at Ren Xiaosu in embarrassment and asked, "Dr. Ren, can you please restitch me?"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "Why do you request that?"

The burly man, Zheng Hongning, took off his clothes, revealing his chest. "Look, my chest was supposed to have a dragon tattoo on it, but you stitched it up crookedly..."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the big green dragon on his chest in silence. He noticed the dragon's head and neck didn't quite match up.

Zheng Hongning said anxiously, "A tattoo represents our reputation, and a severed dragon's head doesn't look auspicious either. Doctor Ren, do you provide any aftersales service or something?"

"See, that's why I said that people in your choice of industry aren't suited to get tattoos. Since all you do is fight and kill, it requires more effort to stitch the wounds." Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "I'm a black market doctor, so refusing to provide aftersales service has always been our principle."

Zheng Hongning was stunned. However, he couldn't do anything to his benefactor. He thought of having to soak in the hot springs bath with his brothers later on, and every one of them sported those realistic tattoos while his was a dragon with a severed head...

At this moment, another burly man who was wounded got carried in. When this wounded mob boss saw that Ren Xiaosu was also here, he was overjoyed. "Dr. Ren, please hurry up and treat my wounds."

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "I previously quoted 500,000 yuan for my service, right?"

Even though the wounded man was in tremendous pain, he still nodded his head quickly. "Yes! I can afford to pay!"

"How about this? I'll offer you an additional service. Pay me 50,000 yuan more and I'll stitch you up with your tattoo intact." Ren Xiaosu had come up with a new business idea.

The wounded man glanced at the severed dragon's head on Zheng Hongning's chest and immediately nodded. "50,000 yuan? Deal!"

Zheng Hongning looked at Ren Xiaosu suspiciously. He could not help but feel that Ren Xiaosu had deliberately stitched his wound up crookedly. This black market doctor was indeed shady. He would do anything just to earn money!

Chapter 535 The Anjing House declares war

Other than a few underworld mob bosses getting into fights inside Stronghold 73, it seemed like nothing else was really happening. Meanwhile, the Anjing House kept sending out texts to stir up the situation every day. However, the Pyro Company had still not found the entrance to the research laboratory.

As long as the research laboratory's entrance was not found, no one would attack the Pyro Company in advance.

After all, everyone wanted to get their hands on the data from that research laboratory.

If anyone tried to kill the Pyro Company members at this moment, they would probably be stopped by others, too.

Some people even speculated the Zhou Consortium was also probably waiting for things to happen as it seemed they were turning a blind eye to this matter.

The Zhou Consortium's troops had started to set up camp outside the stronghold, but there were no signs of panic in the stronghold as the criminals just continued to lie low.

It was the calm before the storm brewing in the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu would take a stroll to the spa center every day without worries before heading for a night run around East Lake.

The older women were still plaza dancing in the plaza, but the Rider who tried to persuade them into thinking this place was unsafe was nowhere to be seen. This matter even got on the news in the stronghold: "Breaking! Young man attempts to stop ladies from plaza dancing but was threatened with extortion claims."

When Ren Xiaosu was treating the mob bosses' injuries, he asked, "Why don't y'all just stay quietly inside the spa center? If you keep picking fights like this, I'm afraid that all y'all will end up crippled before the Pyro Company can locate the research lab's entrance."

The mob bosses already knew Ren Xiaosu was no ordinary person. After all, none of them had ever come across a miraculous medicine in the world that could heal deep wounds like theirs within three days.

However, those mob bosses laughed and said, "Don't worry, with your treatment, we can recover from our wounds within three days. But they can't! If we just keep on fighting them, they'll eventually die first!"

Ren Xiaosu pondered for a moment. So there were many wounded people on the other side as well, huh? Um... can I ask which spa they're at?"

After all, there was money to be earned.

One of the mob bosses was left speechless for a long time. He looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, "We'll pay you an additional one million yuan to not treat their injuries. You might not know this, but our feud with those bastards goes back a long time. To be honest, we even had thoughts about giving up on getting the lab data when we encountered our foes here in Stronghold 73. We really just want to eradicate them so badly."

"Alright then." Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips.

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu really did not regard these mob bosses as potential enemies. After all, he had forced his way into a stronghold and even fought against an entire brigade. He really didn't think these so-called underworld mob bosses were a threat to him.

These people were really not his match, nor were they worthy opponents for him.

The core of this world was still the consortiums, as well as the powerful forces built around supernatural beings.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while and said with a sigh, "I still think y'all should be more rational. It's better to wait for updates from the Anjing House, then go and seize the lab data."

After all, Ren Xiaosu would be happier to see the situation descend into chaos instead of two criminal organizations kill one another. They did not even fire their guns or go to the hospital because they were afraid of getting arrested by the Zhou Consortium.

How boring!

However, a mob boss said, "Dr. Ren, you don't understand the situation. We used to be the local power here at the Zhou Consortium's strongholds, but due to the other party's sneaky schemes, we were forced out and had to seek refuge at the black market outside of Luoyang City. You think we wanted to leave our homes? Now that we're back, of course we're seething with anger when we see our foes again. You're a doctor, so you don't understand how brutal the fighting and killing in this wild world is. There's vengeance on our minds. If we don't take revenge, outsiders will start looking down on us."

Ren Xiaosu thought about it carefully. After much thinking, he felt he would earn money too slowly if there was only a patient or two coming in every few days.

He turned to the mob bosses and said with a grin, "Then what about this? How much will you pay me if I help y'all wipe out the local power here?"

The mob bosses suddenly looked at one another. The young man in front of them had such an innocent smile, but the words he said gave them the chills.

But wasn't this young man a doctor?

Someone laughed and said, "Dr. Ren, don't joke around. They have guns. We're not using ours only because we're worried about getting arrested by the Zhou Consortium. But if it really comes down to it, we'll still fire our weapons. That's not something that a doctor like you can handle, so don't underestimate us."

Ren Xiaosu raised his eyebrows and did not say anything further.

Just as Ren Xiaosu thought that such peaceful days would last for a while, the Anjing House sent out another extremely important text.

"The Pyro Company's safe house has been identified. It's located in the neighborhood at Swan Lake, and they have a total of 40 members in the stronghold. The number of Riders in the stronghold is currently unknown. The location of the research lab is suspected to be in the original East Lake Tunnel, and the Pyro Company is still trying to locate the research lab's entrance."

These were the exact words in the text. The mob bosses in the spa center rubbed their hands in glee as they were originally from this stronghold. Ren Xiaosu wondered, "East Lake Tunnel? Why haven't I heard of this place before?"

"You don't know about it, do you?" One of them said with a smile, "The East Lake Tunnel is Pre-Cataclysm infrastructure here in the stronghold. Apparently, the tunnel passes through the north and the south of the lake and shortened the travel time between both places. As the tunnel was very sturdy, it remained in use for many years after The Cataclysm. However, the main structure was damaged by an earthquake over a decade ago. Although there was no water seepage, people said that it was in danger of collapsing. As such, the Zhou Consortium sealed off the East Lake Tunnel completely."

"The Zhou Consortium did not make any repairs to that tunnel?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Of course not. The various consortiums are busy developing their weapons and military capabilities, and their basic construction capabilities are far worse than the Pre-Cataclysm times," one of them explained. "However, that tunnel runs for a very long distance. Why would the lab be hidden in it?"

"It's so fucking dark in that tunnel, and there are many emergency passageways that only maintenance workers are allowed to enter. Who knows if the lab might be hidden underground behind one of those doors? It seems that the Pyro Company was also very secretive with what they did in the past." One of them sighed.

Ren Xiaosu packed his stuff and headed out of the spa. He did not have time to waste with this group of mob bosses anymore. At this moment, there were probably already countless criminals heading towards the East Lake Tunnel.

This text was like a declaration of war by the Anjing House on the Pyro Company: “We have already found you and kinda know where your lab is. Many people are rushing over there right now, so are you going as well?”

“If you don’t turn up, with so many people on our side, they’ll definitely locate your lab first. If you show up, you’re gonna have to face all these enemies.”

It was very late at night now. Due to the curfew, there were no longer any pedestrians on the streets of Stronghold 73. The entire city looked deserted.

As Ren Xiaosu walked down the dark streets where even the street lights were turned off, he knew this silence would not last for too long. It would get rowdy beyond belief in Stronghold 73 tonight.

A gunshot rang out in the distance, and the report was like the prelude to a midnight feast under the night sky.

Chapter 536 Biding his time

The night was like an overcast cloud hanging over the entire stronghold, and under this dark cloud, many people were making their way over to the East Lake Tunnel in a hurry.

In the dark of the night, the pitch-black East Lake was like a giant magnet drawing in speckles of iron dust inside the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu had guessed many underworld criminals would turn up this time, but he did not expect so many.

But upon further thinking, it rather made sense. Ignoring the other forces that had turned up, just the A-rank hitmen from the Anjing House alone would already number in the dozens. After all, only those who successfully killed members of the Pyro Company this time would qualify for the Anjing House trials next year.

Ren Xiaosu reckoned that at least half of all the Anjing House’s A-rank hitmen had shown up this time.

However, the closer Ren Xiaosu got to East Lake, the more he felt that something was off. According to Zhou Yingxue, the Pyro Company was not an organization that was easy to deal with. How else could they control eight strongholds in a place like the Central Plains?

Would a large organization like them allow their plans to get disrupted so easily?

Furthermore, why did this research laboratory have to be located in an abandoned tunnel of all places?

There were originally three entrances to the East Lake Tunnel. But according to the mob bosses at the spa center, two of these entrances had been sealed off. Hence, it was impossible to get in without resorting to a violent skirmish.

There was only one tunnel entrance left, after all, and it was even in an airtight space and at the bottom of the lake.

If the tunnel were to collapse, it would be hard for those who went in to come out alive since there would be nowhere to escape to.

Looking at the fanatical eyes of those who were making their way towards the East Lake Tunnel, Ren Xiaosu slowed down.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu heard someone whispering a short distance away, "Isn't that the young man who went for those nightly jogs?"

Ren Xiaosu spun around and was surprised to see a man in a cleaner's uniform he'd seen before. After all, it was rather eye-catching to see someone wearing an earpiece while doing cleaning.

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled at that time. He wondered which organization this person who was pretending to be a cleaner was from. Did he really think no one would notice he was wearing an earpiece?

But Ren Xiaosu simply ignored them. Rather, he was surprised when he turned around and saw a man wearing a director's vest leading about a dozen people with cameras and equipment on their shoulders. They were also rushing towards the East Lake Tunnel like the others.

He was probably what they called a "movie director," right?!

The director was running and shouting at the same time, "Move quickly! Don't miss out on capturing the most exciting scenes. When these scenes get edited into a documentary about superhumans, I'll be famous!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Someone was even trying to film a documentary on superhumans?

A moment later, Ren Xiaosu saw a familiar figure running extremely quickly in front of him. Ren Xiaosu felt that he looked quite familiar, but he could not remember who it was.

Wait a minute! Wasn't that fucking Wang Congyang? How could he forget someone so important? He had copied the Steam Locomotive power from him, after all.

But what was this guy doing at Stronghold 73?

By the time Ren Xiaosu wanted to catch up to him and give him a good thrashing, Wang Congyang was already nowhere to be seen. Ren Xiaosu didn't know where he had gone.

When Ren Xiaosu reached the entrance of the tunnel, he was greeted by the sight of overgrown wild grass everywhere. As it was already late fall, the vegetation here was starting to wither.

Ren Xiaosu lay in the tall grass and did not rush in rashly. However, he saw the underworld criminals flick on their flashlights one by one and rush straight into the tunnel.

When the people at the back saw those at the front rushing into the tunnel, they didn't think much and followed in right behind them.

It was beginning to get very chaotic as hundreds of people gathered from nearby. Nobody had much time to process what was happening, and most of the people were only thinking about the astronomical prices they could get if they managed to get their hands on even a page of laboratory data.

Only a minority could remain calm like Ren Xiaosu.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not lie idle either and summoned his shadow clone. But he was cautious this time and manipulated the shadow clone into putting on his clothes. After pulling the hood over its head, it even put on a white mask for additional security.

Yang Xiaojin had reminded him about this in the past. Since he did not want to expose the fact that he had a shadow clone, he had to disguise it as a person.

At this moment, the shadow clone looked just like a normal human being with the clothes and mask on. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu pulled his own hood over his head and lay quietly in the grass.

Then Ren Xiaosu saw the film crew he had left behind earlier finally arrive at the tunnel entrance. These people were really bold. Was this a place normal people should be coming to?

The director said, "It's right here! Set up the equipment quickly!"

The dozen-odd members of the film crew got down to work. Some of them set up the cameras while others laid out the dolly tracks. Someone even brought a camping chair for the director to use.

A person in the film crew said, sounding somewhat afraid, "Director, will it really be safe here? My wife's about to give birth. I don't want anything to happen to me..."

The director barked, "Hey, don't jinx it! Don't you know that you shouldn't say such things in our line of work?"

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

Nearby, one of the crew members said hesitantly, "But the people here are all very dangerous."

The director said scornfully, "This is art! Do you know what art is? Without the spirit of dedication to art, how are we supposed to make a wonderful documentary?"

"Director, you never said anything about making a documentary before. We've always been shooting commercial films," a crew member muttered.

"Great ideas are often born in a split second." The director said proudly, "Think about it. The world has already started changing, hasn't it? Has there been anyone who's made a documentary about real superhumans before? At the most, we've had real superhumans getting cast in movies! But think about what we are doing now! We're going to present this magical, wild world to the audience to show them what the real world of superhumans is like! Don't you guys think this idea is so exciting it'll make people sleepless? Once the documentary is completed, my name will go down in history!"

Off to the side in the grass, Ren Xiaosu curled his lips. He could only hope the film crew would stay away from him and his shadow clone. As for filming the documentary, they would first have to survive before they could talk about that.

Watching more and more people heading into the tunnel, Ren Xiaosu stayed stationary. After all, his goal was to capture a member of the Pyro Company for Zhou Yingxue to complete her mission, not get his hands on some laboratory data.

Right now, Ren Xiaosu only wanted to help Zhou Yingxue join the Anjing House. He would be happy just to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, while the laboratory data was probably worth a lot of money, those who managed to get their hands on it would still have to make their way out from the only exit, wouldn't they?

As such, Ren Xiaosu felt that there was nothing wrong with him biding his time out here.

Chapter 537 East Lake caves in

The film crew had set up their cameras to face the entrance of the dark tunnel. As more and more people headed inside, a growing number of people also started gathering and lying in wait in the thicket outside.

Surprisingly, the director grabbed his microphone and went around interviewing some of the people lying in the grass. It looked like he was searching for supernatural beings within the crowd.

But when he skipped past Ren Xiaosu, someone asked the director, "Why didn't you interview that young man just now?"

"He doesn't look strong at all. I can tell at a glance that he's not a superhuman," the director said.

Then the director spotted the shadow clone not far away from them. When he saw the shadow clone in the white mask, his eyes lit up. "Hurry up, let's interview him. That man looks really strong!"

Ren Xiaosu was left speechless as he lay in the grass. The initially tense atmosphere was suddenly mixed with an element of absurdity due to the arrival of the film crew.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu saw the mob bosses he had made friends with at the spa center run over. Seeing that they were about to enter the tunnel without even thinking, Ren Xiaosu couldn't help himself from stopping them. "Zheng Hongning, get over here!"

Zheng Hongning was pleased to see Ren Xiaosu. "Dr. Ren, you came here too? Why didn't you go inside?"

Ren Xiaosu beckoned to them. "Don't go inside yet. Let's just watch for a bit."

"What's there to see? If we watch any longer, all the research data will be seized by others," Zheng Hongning said.

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "Do you think it's that easy to get ahold of the research data? Just wait and see. Those people who manage to get their hands on the research data will still have to exit from the tunnel through here anyway."

Upon Ren Xiaosu's observation, Zheng Hongning facepalmed. "Oh! That's true!"

As they spoke, another several dozen people joined them in the overgrowth outside the tunnel.

What Ren Xiaosu found curious was that he did not see anyone from the Pyro Company and the Riders enter the tunnel since he got here.

Could it be that the Pyro Company and the Riders had given up on the research data when they saw so many people arriving? Or could it be that this was just a conspiracy as he had guessed?

Then, a text alert sounded from Ren Xiaosu's pocket. When he looked up at the others, he saw more than 20 people among the now nearly a 100-member crowd in the grass take out their cell phones as well.

The lights on the cell phones looked like fireflies fluttering around in the grass.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the text message and was surprised to see the Anjing House had suddenly changed their mind. They had sent a reminder to all hitmen to not act rashly, and that everyone should watch and wait outside the tunnel!

Although the Anjing House did not state the reason for this, everyone was overwhelmed with doubt by this sudden announcement.

Suddenly, someone stood up holding a cell phone in his hand and said, "Whoever owns a cell phone here is probably a contract killer from the Anjing House, and my guess is that not everyone here is A-rank. There should be some of you who are still B and C-rank, so I feel that we lower-ranking hitmen should work together to hunt down the members of the Pyro Company. That way, our chances of succeeding will be greater. Those of us with cell phones—"

The person speaking was a B-rank hitman. Knowing that he would be promoted to A-rank soon, he was also getting a little ambitious at qualifying for the Anjing House trials. However, he was not confident of killing the Pyro Company members by himself. As such, he tried to urge everyone here to attack the enemy together.

It wasn't only the A-rank hitmen who had gathered here; a large number of local B and C-rank hitmen also who wanted to take advantage of the situation. After all, regardless of whether they could qualify for the trials next year, they would still receive a reward for killing the Pyro Company members today.

However, his speech ended up reminding Ren Xiaosu instead!

That was right! There were more than 20 cell phones here!

While the B-rank hitman was speaking, he suddenly saw a hooded figure wearing a white mask get up from the grass and walk over to knock him unconscious.

Not mentioning the Pyro Company, the Anjing House's mission broadcast this time had gathered all of these hitmen with cell phones in one place, giving Ren Xiaosu a chance to capture them in one fell swoop.

Nobody had expected such a turn of events. Why was this person suddenly snatching the cell phone of others without warning?! Weren't they just talking about working together to kill the Pyro Company members?

Watching the shadow clone attacking the hitmen, Zheng Hongning suddenly sighed next to Ren Xiaosu, "How I wish I was a powerful superhuman like that guy."

Ren Xiaosu said modestly without a care while watching the tunnel entrance, "He's not really that powerful."

But when Zheng Hongning heard this, he said to Ren Xiaosu solemnly, "Dr. Ren, I know you're young and energetic, but admitting that others are powerful can also be a sign of self-confidence."

Ren Xiaosu realized he had said something wrong. He responded humbly by reflex, but Zheng Hongning did not know the shadow clone belonged to him.

All of a sudden, loud explosions rang out in the tunnel. In an instant, smoke and fire spewed out of the tunnel like a sandstorm.

Smoke and dust were blasted out by the huge explosions in the tunnel, and some of those who had just gone into the tunnel were immediately blown several dozen meters into the air!

Off to the side, the film crew's cameras happened to record this shocking scene.

The loud explosions jolted the entire stronghold awake.

However, that was not all. Amid the explosions, a sound resembling the crackling of a glacier came from the tunnel as well. Ren Xiaosu mumbled, "The tunnel's gonna collapse!"

As soon as he finished speaking, the tunnel, which had existed since before The Cataclysm, suddenly caved in. Ren Xiaosu realized the Pyro Company was actually using this tunnel as a counterattack against the Anjing House.

If they had not carefully planted explosives at each of the load-bearing points of the tunnel, it would have been impossible to destroy the tunnel in an instant.

A huge whirlpool suddenly appeared on the surface of East Lake, and a flood of water gushed into every corner of the tunnel. However, no screams came from inside the tunnel. The sound of the tunnel collapsing, the explosions, and the current devouring the tunnel had completely drowned out the screams of those inside.

In the blink of an eye, several hundred human lives in the tunnel were snuffed out.

It was as quick as a comet burning through the sky.

The Anjing House had tried to conspire against the Pyro Company. With just a text, several hundred people had been attracted here to interfere with the Pyro Company's plans and bring ridicule to their secret operation.

But the Pyro Company was not dumb. They also made use of the scheme the Anjing House had hatched to finish off these few hundred people who had ulterior motives and leave them dead at the bottom of East Lake.

The director of the film crew was stupefied by the happenings. Compared to the wild world that should have been all about duels and romances, this was completely unlike his expectations.

The wild world that was playing out in front of him could only be described as brutal.

He had seen those people entering the tunnel with his own eyes, and their cameras even captured shots of them. But just a short while later, the people who had passed him were all dead.

Ren Xiaosu recalled that he had not seen anyone from the Pyro Company or the Riders this entire time. Perhaps the Anjing House had also realized this, so they sent out a text to inform everyone to watch and wait outside the tunnel.

However, the text had come too late.

Chapter 538 A jack-of-all-trades doctor

East Lake was caving in.

No, to be precise, East Lake would return to its original calm appearance in time. However, the tunnel that was from before The Cataclysm had caved in.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this sight, he felt like he was looking at a civilization that was about to disappear.

Perhaps warring and plotting among humans might really be an eternal theme.

But before he could get too emotional about this, Ren Xiaosu saw some people surround them from outside the tunnel. He could vaguely see that they were wielding black ceramic sabers as they approached, looking like they were planning to encircle the group of people lying here in the grass.

Ren Xiaosu realized this was probably the Pyro Company's follow-up plan. They were looking to establish their dominance over those who tried to mess with them.

In the past, it was only the Anjing House and the Saboteurs that were at odds with the Pyro Company. However, it was a little different this time. The Anjing House had attracted so many underworld criminals with just a text message, and this made the Pyro Company feel threatened. The Pyro Company knew they had to let the entire criminal underworld understand that it was not going to be easy to seize something of theirs.

The Pyro Company did not intend to communicate this to the underworld criminals in a proper setting. They firmly believed that as long as they massacred this disorderly mob and terrified them, no one would dare to respond to the call of the Anjing House in the future.

At the very least, they should consider whether they were qualified before joining in on the action!

Men died for money, and birds died for food. This saying was just like a reflection of tonight's events.

It wasn't until this moment that the people who came to steal the Pyro Company's laboratory data realized how ruthless the opponent was.

But it was too late.

The 30 people encircling them suddenly made their move. In the blink of an eye, the encirclement perimeter shrank further. When the nearly a 100 people in the grass saw the situation was getting unfavorable, they dispersed and attempted to break out of the encirclement.

However, the members of the Pyro Company were extremely ferocious. When anyone tried to get past them, they would quickly block their getaway and stab them with sabers.

Not only that, at least 40 Pyro Company members were hiding in Stronghold 73 prior to the battle.

In the distance, a sniper had started taking down the Pyro Company members. It seemed the Anjing House was starting to fight back. However, the sniper only managed to get two shots off before he let out a cry and was killed.

In turn, that member of the Pyro Company's Dusk squad who finished off the sniper was killed with a fine metallic needle that penetrated through his skull.

The elderly sugar painter was sitting beside Vanilla with his aluminum plate spread out in front of him, along with a stove and a metal pot. As the sugar cubes reduced into an amber liquid in the red-hot metal pot, the old man waved his hand over the aluminum plate and painted a dragon that came alive and stood close guard next to Vanilla.

These two people had formed a tacit agreement to work together. One would paint a dragon to protect the team while the other focused on manipulating metal to finish off the enemy.

When the first amber dragon appeared, the old man wiped the sweat off his forehead and said, "Can't you inform me in advance next time? Don't make it so hasty for me. I need some time to cast my power."

Vanilla replied with a smile, "Well, you still managed to get it done, didn't you?"

As he spoke, he opened the silver box he was carrying that contained 24 tailor-made long metal needles. With a flick of his finger, 12 long metal needles flew up and floated in front of him, searching for targets.

The long needles shot out as though they had detected something, and a person cried out in pain in the darkness. Vanilla killed one of the Pyro Company's combatants lurking in the vicinity!

In the darkness nearby, more members of the Pyro Company appeared. Some of them had crawled out from the river, and they had gill-like features growing at their jowls. This was likely what allowed them to breathe underwater.

These people were the ones who had detonated the tunnel with explosives, and it could be said that the cave-in at East Lake was their doing.

Now that they had completed their mission, they would have to come out of the water to join their teammates in battle.

However, Ren Xiaosu was at a loss. Could they still be considered human? Had the Pyro Company's genetic modifications already reached a stage where they could even change the characteristics of a species?

Seeing that close to a 100 members of the Pyro Company had already appeared, Ren Xiaosu wondered if there really were a research laboratory in Stronghold 73.

Did the Pyro Company really come here with the intention to search for the research laboratory, or had they chosen a location that was most beneficial for the scheme they had been plotting for so long against the Anjing House?

The Anjing House sent out another text. "Reward increase. Any hitman within the encirclement that manages to kill a Pyro Company member will receive double the reward."

Ren Xiaosu frowned when he saw the text. As a matter of fact, within the encirclement, he was probably the only one who could receive texts from the Anjing House. His shadow clone was still holding onto the cell phones it'd snatched from the others.

The Anjing House probably didn't expect the group text they sent would end up as a one-on-one chat with Ren Xiaosu.

Right after, the Anjing House's A-rank hitmen appeared out of nowhere and attacked this group of amphibious monsters from the Pyro Company.

The A-rank hitmen must have been outstanding to get promoted to this rank, and that was probably why they did not rush into the tunnel earlier.

As chaos erupted everywhere, a mob boss like Zheng Hongning could only feel at a loss. This was no longer a battlefield they could control. Like what they had said, this world had already changed beyond their comprehension!

The mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind. In this chaotic battle, it was no longer clear who the cicada was, who the mantis was, and who the oriole was!

That verdict would only be reached at the end of the battle.

Only those with more trump cards would emerge victorious from this!

The scent of blood was starting to fill the air in the area of the thicket as more and more people got killed.

While Zheng Hongning and the other mob bosses were thinking about what to do, they suddenly heard “Dr. Ren” say in a low voice, “Follow me if you want to live.”

As soon as he finished, Ren Xiaosu rushed off in the southwest direction. That was where an opening had been created by the Anjing House sniper earlier.

Zheng Hongning and the others had no time to think, so they ran out with Ren Xiaosu. But before they could get past the encirclement, the Pyro Company had already tightened the perimeter.

Zheng Hongning felt a tinge of despair. “Dr. Ren, what do we do now?”

“What are you panicking for?” Ren Xiaosu said coldly.

Eight members of the Pyro Company sneered as they charged. But before they could get to Ren Xiaosu, a figure wearing a white mask suddenly appeared from the side and grabbed the neck of one of the Pyro Company’s members like lightning. The figure dashed forward in an extremely aggressive manner.

Zheng Hongning and the others were stunned. Why did it feel like this superhuman Zheng Hongning was envious of and had just stolen a bunch of cell phones was deliberately protecting Dr. Ren?

They looked quietly at the back of the young man standing in front of them and felt like they had underestimated him!

However, why was Dr. Ren taking pictures nonstop with the cell phones as they ran for their lives? Zheng Hongning asked in panic, “Dr. Ren, this isn’t the time to be messing with your cell phones! Put it away and escape. Stop checking on texts from the Anjing House!”

Ren Xiaosu said strangely, “I’m not checking for texts; I’m taking pictures! Each kill is worth hundreds of thousands of yuan, even up to a million yuan! This is all money! I have to take pictures as evidence to show that they were killed by me and my friend here, Old Xu!”

Zheng Hongning was at a loss for words. Why was he still thinking about money at this time!

He asked, “But aren’t you a doctor?”

Ren Xiaosu said with a grin, “Uh, I’m a jack of all trades.”

Chapter 539 *Lame*The battlefield could no longer be described as just an encirclement. No one knew how many people were fighting in this chaotic battle. There were the Anjing House’s own members, the Anjing House A-rank hitmen, the Pyro Company members, and people from the various forces that came to seize the laboratory data.

As everyone fought one another, hostile and friendly forces could hardly be differentiated.

Ren Xiaosu was very decisive in breaking through the encirclement. Initially, the Pyro Company members planned to come over to attack him when they saw him killing their teammates. However, they realized Ren Xiaosu and his group were too determined to get away.

The Pyro Company member commanding the battle said calmly on their frequency, "Let them leave."

For the Pyro Company, tonight's operation was to establish their dominance. They didn't need to fight to the death with one or two superhumans. Besides, it was obvious these opponents were not to be trifled with. Since they wanted to leave, they should just let them go.

But just as he finished speaking, someone suddenly said on the radio, "He's back again...."

The commander frowned. "How many of them?"

"Only two. One of them is a hooded young man whose face we can't see clearly, and the other is wearing a white mask," someone reported on the radio.

The commander said, "Send out another Dusk squad to surround them—"

Before he could finish speaking, the person speaking on the radio reported, "They've left again...."

The commander of the Pyro Company was at a loss for words. What were their opponents doing? They were coming and going as they pleased?!

However, this also inadvertently showed they were powerless to stop the other party now. The commander said coldly on the radio, "Ignore them. Just do your best to cause casualties. What we need to achieve is making the tragic news spread so these people won't dare to come and cause us any more trouble in the future."

The objective of the Pyro Company was to eventually make the outside world know they would have to pay the price for coming here. As for what happened in between, it would not affect the big picture. Since there were only a couple enemies, and there wasn't any real laboratory site in the tunnel, they were really not afraid of them causing any trouble.

Just a moment ago, Ren Xiaosu, Zheng Hongning, and the others stopped in their tracks after breaking through the encirclement.

Ren Xiaosu had wanted to lure some of the Pyro Company members to pursue them by manipulating his shadow clone to kill efficiently. This way, he would only need to face a small portion of the Pyro Company members himself. Not only could he earn the rewards this way, but he could also capture one or two of them for Zhou Yingxue to complete her mission.

But he suddenly realized the Pyro Company members had stopped pursuing them!

Ren Xiaosu got anxious. He told Zheng Hongning, "If there's nothing else for you, get out of Stronghold 73, quick. The Zhou Consortium's troops will probably arrive soon. You can see the situation here for yourself, and it's not something that you can handle, so just go back to the black market! Come on, Old Xu, let's go!"

After saying that, Ren Xiaosu returned to the battlefield with his shadow clone. This was the first incident of Ren Xiaosu's return to the battlefield that was reported on the Pyro Company's radio frequency.

But midway through, Ren Xiaosu felt that he had forgotten something. As such, he turned back and stopped Zheng Hongning and the others. "Y'all haven't thanked me yet."

Zheng Hongning and the others looked at Ren Xiaosu with stunned expressions like they were looking at a monster. He was coming and going on the battlefield as he liked at this fucking time just so he could get them to thank him?!

"Thank you..."

"Thank you..."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the typewriter in the palace typing out several lines of words on leather parchment for the gratitude tokens he had earned before returning to the battlefield with much satisfaction.

Although he was still far from unlocking his new weapon, requiring 10,000 gratitude tokens for that, a penny saved was a penny earned.

Honestly, he was quite looking forward to the third weapon getting unlocked. Be it his black saber or black sniper rifle, they proved to be extremely useful to him, helping him a great deal in critical moments.

The reason why Ren Xiaosu chose to return to the battlefield was partly also because of money.

But more importantly, didn't the Anjing House say that only A-rank hitmen who could kill a member of the Pyro Company for this mission would have a chance of participating in next year's trials?

Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of something. Almost all of the A-rank hitmen who could participate in the trials next year were already here. However, he definitely could not kill them. Otherwise, both the Anjing House and the Pyro Company would probably start hunting him down together.

Although he could not kill the A-rank hitmen, he could stop them from getting any Pyro Company kills. As long as these A-rank hitmen failed to complete their missions successfully, they would lose the qualification to participate in next year's trials.

Someone in town once told a story about an evil dragon that only ate the girls in a village. The village selected the most skilled hero to kill the dragon, but the hero still believed he could not defeat it. So he simply made sure the girls became women, and that starved the dragon to death.

Everyone regarded this as a joke. However, this method was similar to what Ren Xiaosu was planning. It was also known as solving the root of the problem.

...

At this moment, the film crew was shivering in fright as the Pyro Company members walked towards them. In the end, it was the director who was bravest. He forced himself to calm down and said, "Hi, we're the film crew from 'Awesome Media.' We're just here to do some filming and have no intention of interfering in your dispute, so can you please let us go...."

The Dusk combatant facing them did not make a decision on his own. He looked at the film crew's equipment and asked on the radio, "Commander, there's a film crew shooting a video here. They said they're from Awesome Media. Should we kill them?"

The commander gave it some thought and said coldly, "Confiscate their equipment and let them go. These people still have some influence across the various strongholds, and they're often featured in newspapers. By letting them leave, they can also help us publicize what happened here."

The Dusk combatant standing in front of the film crew looked at the director. "You're the director, right? You guys can leave, but we definitely won't allow you to take your equipment with you. Take a good look around at this purgatory and go tell the world that this isn't all fun and games. In the modern day, you'll get yourselves killed if you involve yourselves in other people's business."

As he was speaking, the Dusk combatant's expression suddenly changed. He heard a gust of wind behind him and instinctively backflipped into the air. At the same time, he used the black ceramic saber in his hand and slashed at whatever was behind him.

Everything happened in a split second, so the film crew did not even manage to see his movements clearly. However, the attacker was even faster than him. Before the Dusk combatant could slash the attacker, the attacker's black saber had already sliced down onto him!

When the two black sabers struck each other, the black ceramic saber the Dusk combatant was holding was cleanly severed like a candle being cut in two.

Ren Xiaosu slashed his black saber diagonally across his enemy's chest, and he also forcefully cut through the bulletproof vest.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the corpse of the Dusk combatant and sneered, "Lame."

Dumbfounded, the director gazed at the young man in front of him whose face was half-hidden by the shadow of his hood.

He suddenly got a little excited. This was probably the wild world he had been searching for.

Chapter 540 The cauldron has gotten a little larger

While the director was momentarily stunned, Ren Xiaosu took out a cell phone and snapped a picture of the corpse on the ground.

However, Ren Xiaosu did this without attracting any attention. He would switch to a different cell phone after completing a mission with one. He absolutely did not use the same identity to receive the reward twice.

After all, the cell phones he had just stolen today were taken from B and C-rank hitmen. It would already be very impressive for these “hitmen” to kill a member of the Pyro Company. If he killed too many of them, it would easily arouse the suspicions of the Anjing House.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not realize this would give a false impression to the Anjing House. The mission dispatcher thought there were still a lot of their people left on the battlefield, and they felt terrific about it!

The mission dispatcher asked on their frequency, “How is everything over there? Have you guys killed those amphibious monsters yet?”

Vanilla loosened his tie. “Soon.”

“Alright, don’t worry, our hitmen on the battlefield are all very impressive. There’s still a lot of them, and they’ve killed many of the Pyro Company.”

Vanilla heaved a sigh of relief. “That’s good. Have you seen Boss?”

“No, Boss went out into the wilderness to intercept the Pyro Company’s reinforcements by herself, so she can’t make it over,” the mission dispatcher said.

Vanilla whistled. “The boss is amazing!”

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was about to leave after he finished taking photos to search for his next target. However, someone caught up to him and said, “Bro, can you give me your contact info? My name is Mu Wan’ge.”

When Ren Xiaosu turned around, he saw the director from earlier. The moment he came to speak to him, Ren Xiaosu was reminded of something he nearly forgot about. Rather than asking the director for his gratitude, he retrieved the film roll from the crew’s equipment and destroyed it.

After all, the film crew had been filming really close to him earlier, so who knew if their camera had captured his image?

Mu Wan’ge was stunned. “My film...”

“Hm?” Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at him.

Mu Wan’ge immediately stopped talking about the film roll. “Um, can I invite you to star in my next movie?”

The main reason for this invitation was that the figure of Ren Xiaosu slashing his saber kept replaying in his mind. As the director was really into the visual arts, he found the scene from earlier spectacular.

However, Ren Xiaosu looked at him with a puzzled expression before turning around to continue searching for his target.

Invite him to act in a movie? What bullshit!

Besides, it was still a question whether this director would make it out of here alive.

...

At this moment, an injured A-rank hitman was fleeing for his life with a member of Dusk pursuing close behind.

As the rustle of his footsteps on the grass and his heavy breathing amplified, the A-rank hitman could no longer hear the surrounding gunfire and shouting on the chaotic battlefield. He had never felt so tired before.

He just wanted to lie down in the grass and fall into a deep sleep forever, without having to care about these struggles for fame and status.

However, his pursuer behind him was still getting closer. He still did not want to die!

Just as the Dusk member was about to catch up to him, he suddenly heard a scream behind him. The A-rank hitman turned around and saw a hooded young man slicing the main artery of the enemy's neck in an instant. The Dusk member did not seem to have a chance of fighting back at all in the face of this young man, with even his ceramic saber easily severed in half.

He wanted to go over and thank him, but he saw another figure in a white mask emerging from the side and snatching away the Dusk member's body.

The A-rank hitman was stunned. The reward had been snatched! Before he could say anything, the young man who saved him was already running far away in pursuit of the figure that stole the reward.

From the beginning to the end, the A-rank hitman was left absolutely confused. He did not even know who had saved him!

...

Another A-rank hitman was pursuing a lone Dusk member who had been shot and would not be able to run far. Seeing that he was about to qualify for the trials next year, a hooded figure in a white mask suddenly dashed out from the vicinity and knocked out the Dusk member he was pursuing. Then the hooded figure turned around and ran away carrying the Dusk member!

The A-rank hitman was stunned by the turn of events unfolding before his eyes. Before he could even react, the shadow clone had already run far away.

"Fuck!" The A-rank hitman was furious. It was not easy for him to find this lone Pyro Company member, yet he had been robbed of a kill just like that?

...

An A-rank hitman had just ended his battle, and the corpse of a Dusk member was lying in front of him. Just as he was about to snap a picture to complete his mission, a figure in a white mask suddenly rushed out.

The A-rank hitman raised the gun in his right hand and fired, but his opponent's target was not him at all!

When he saw the figure in the white mask speeding by, the A-rank hitman fired another two shots in a row. However, his opponent seemed completely unscathed.

The A-rank hitman was getting a little flustered. Why did he have to encounter a "monster" that was not afraid of bullets in this place?!

But just as he stepped back and prepared to use his superpower, his opponent ran far away.

When the A-rank hitman looked down, he discovered that the Dusk member he had just killed... had disappeared.

The A-rank hitman stared at the shadow clone's receding figure as it left. "What the fuck..."

He could not understand why his opponent was not hunting his own targets and had to come steal his prey even though he was clearly so skillful. It even felt like he was invulnerable to attacks!

How nasty could he get!

Throughout, Ren Xiaosu played the good guy while "Old Xu" took the blame.

In any case, Zheng Hongning, who knew that Ren Xiaosu and "Old Xu" were friends, was probably fleeing back to the black market right now. Since Zheng Hongning and the others did not have any interactions with the Anjing House and the Pyro Company, Ren Xiaosu was not afraid of anyone finding out about his scheme.

But so what if they knew? He had already stolen the corpses anyway.

Similar incidents like this happened frequently on the chaotic battlefield. Ren Xiaosu had wanted to take a few more corpses, but the Zhou Consortium's troops had suddenly surrounded the battlefield.

Although there was a rather loud commotion when the Pyro Company blew up the East Lake Tunnel, the Zhou Consortium apparently feigned ignorance about it. They did not care at all about how many people would die here.

It was not until the forces on the battlefield were indistinguishable from one another that they finally arrived.

Even amid the chaos on the battlefield, no one wanted to face the regular army of an organization. The garrison force in Stronghold 73 had at least 4,500 soldiers, which represented an entire brigade's strength.

No matter how powerful a supernatural being was, or how reputable the criminals were in the underworld, it would be impossible for them to take on a brigade.

Moreover, everyone was very sure by now that there wasn't any laboratory data in the East Lake Tunnel, so why would they still stay around?

The Pyro Company and the Anjing House were the first to withdraw. Ren Xiaosu felt that the Pyro Company had gained a slight upper hand in this conflict.

Although the Pyro Company had suffered greater casualties than the Anjing House due to Ren Xiaosu's presence, not too many people would be willing to take part in the conflicts between the Anjing House and the Pyro Company in the future.

The Anjing House could no longer take advantage and garner support from other forces!

Ren Xiaosu also pulled out of the battlefield. But throughout the battle, he had several doubts on his mind. First, he never saw any of the Riders enter the battlefield, and second, he did not encounter his old acquaintance, Wang Congyang.

Did Wang Congyang die in the tunnel?

No, how could someone like Wang Congyang who was such a terrible person enter the East Lake Tunnel rashly?

Ren Xiaosu had a feeling that this battle in Stronghold 73 would continue. After all, the Anjing House and the Pyro Company still had energy to spare. However, this had nothing to do with him anymore. Since he had captured a member of the Pyro Company like he wanted to, he would head back and let Zhou Yingxue complete her mission.

It was not that Ren Xiaosu did not want to stay, but that he could not continue staying.

After all, he had stolen too many of the Anjing House's cell phones and snatched all of the targets from the A-rank hitmen. Furthermore, he also killed a lot of the Pyro Company's members. Once the other parties gave these matters a think when the chaotic battle concluded, they would realize all the things he had done.

At that time, it would not be surprising if the two organizations teamed up to hunt down "Old Xu."

The surface of East Lake had calmed, and it was sparkling in the moonlight that shone down from above.

After the chaotic battle was over, it was as though no one cared about the hundreds of lives buried overnight at the bottom of the lake.

Actually, what more people were thinking about was whether there was really a Pyro Company research laboratory in Stronghold 73.

...

Xu Xianchu, who was far away at Fortress 178, was pondering his superpower. Next to him, Zhou Yinglong snapped at him, "Put away your cauldron already. Why do you keep showing it off?!"

However, when Zhou Yinglong realized that Xu Xianchu looked startled, he quickly said, "I was just kidding."

However, Xu Xianchu asked, feeling puzzled, "Do you think my cauldron just got a little larger?!"

Zhou Yinglong thought that Xu Xianchu was showing off to him again. "Get lost!"