

First Order 671

Chapter 671: The Pyro Company and the No. 001 Experimental

Before Ren Xiaosu's appearance, Su Lei thought he was definitely going to die today. After all, several gangs of bandits had teamed up in an attempt to kill him.

But for some reason, while they were in the yard, they heard a lot of screams coming from outside. By the time they stepped out, all of those bandits were dead.

Su Lei asked cautiously, "You two are..."

Ren Xiaosu inspected Su Lei with a smile. "Do you know that there's even a supernatural being in your town?"

To be honest, Ren Xiaosu was also quite surprised. He really had not expected there would be a supernatural being in a town full of bandits. Su Lei was stunned to hear this. "Supernatural being? Who's the supernatural being? Where is he?"

Ren Xiaosu answered, "Oh, don't worry. He's dead."

Su Lei was speechless. The supernatural being died just like that? Why did it sound so easy for this young man to kill a supernatural being?

Ren Xiaosu looked at Su Lei and asked, "What kind of deal did you make with the nomads?"

"They wanted us to bring ironware, medicine, vegetables, tea, and salt from the South to trade with them for the fur hides of their prey." Su Lei explained carefully, "We didn't sell any prohibited goods, you—"

"Oh, you don't have to explain it to me. I don't care about that." Ren Xiaosu said, "I heard that you were going to Fortress 178 to make some deals?"

"That's right." Su Lei hurriedly replied, "I'm going to sell these fur hides in our possession before buying some new supplies to deliver it to the North."

Su Lei did not lie. He was not only ruthless but also a smart person. Since the young man before him could kill all the bandits, he was definitely capable of killing him as well.

The only way he could probably keep his life was to be honest when facing someone who could decide his fate.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Su Lei and thought for a moment before saying, "You can take the goods to Stronghold 144 and look for a Fortress 178 commander named Zhang Xiaoman. Just tell him that his comrade from the Razor Sharp Company recommended you go there and someone will take care of you. Currently, Fortress 178 needs people like you who can run a business on the trade route. Rest assured and boldly do business. Don't be a bandit anymore."

“Really?” Su Lei was pleasantly surprised. It was clear the young man in front of him was on very good terms with Fortress 178. If he could build a relationship with Fortress 178 through Ren Xiaosu’s recommendation, wouldn’t his business be even more secure?

Moreover, he knew full well the nomads required weapons. That young lord from the steppe also wanted weapons, but he knew Su Lei was still unable to get his hands on any for now.

If he really could make good on the business relationship with Fortress 178 in the future, wouldn’t he be able to expand his business and start selling weapons to the nomads?

That would be a chance to make a lot of money!

Ren Xiaosu suddenly wondered, “How did you link up with the nomads from the Northern Plains? Why do they want to do business with the Southerners?”

Su Lei said honestly, “One day, a nomad riding an extremely well-built horse suddenly came to our village. Then he announced to everyone that whoever wanted to get rich should head to the Shenmu River several hundred kilometers away from here in a month’s time with a supply of ironware, medicine, vegetables, and other items.”

Ren Xiaosu was curious. “So you took the items there? Why didn’t the others in town go as well?”

“They didn’t wanna travel that far. Besides, they were worried that nomad was lying to them,” Su Lei replied. “If they weren’t lazy and hated working, these people would not have ended up becoming bandits either. So it was only to be expected that no one else went.”

“Then why did you go?” Ren Xiaosu said.

“Because I didn’t want to be cooped up here for the rest of my life. I heard that the Northwestern trade route has been reopened. Be it Fortress 178 or the Wang Consortium, everyone is welcome to do business with them. I think it’s better to strike out and do business than to live like a coward here forever,” Su Lei explained. “As a true man—”

“Hold it right there, don’t be so pompous with me,” Ren Xiaosu interrupted and snapped at him, “Are you doing business with the nomads from a large tribe? Tell me your impression of them.”

Su Lei hurriedly said, “The leader of the other party is a mysterious young man. They weren’t even holding any guns, but they gave off a calm and composed demeanor. It was like they weren’t afraid that we would stir up any trouble for them. It was as though he had the look of a lord in the steppe. The things that they requested were very strange...”

But at this moment, a message tone sounded in Yang Xiaojin’s pocket. She took out her cell phone and read it. Ren Xiaosu realized Yang Xiaojin’s cell phone was very similar to the ones the A-rank hitmen from the Anjing House carried. However, it seemed like her phone had more functions.

Ren Xiaosu figured out something. Some time ago, he had been wondering why the Anjing House, an assassination organization, would have a communications network that used cell phones as a tool.

Ignoring everything else, the Anjing House would at least need a satellite to be able to use the cell phones, right?

Therefore, now that he thought about it, the Anjing House and the Wang Consortium must have already been working together back then. The reason the Anjing House could use cell phones as a form of communication for their hitmen was because they were also relying on that satellite the Wang Consortium originally controlled.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu also took out two cell phones, which were C- and B-ranked respectively, from his storage space.

Ren Xiaosu was surprised to find that the moment he took out the cell phones, they received a text on both at the same time: "We suspect the Pyro Company has captured an Experimental target in the Northern Plains. They are now on their way back to the Pyro Company's research base. All Anjing House hitmen may proceed to intercept and kill the Pyro Company targets. The mission reward..."

Upon seeing this, Ren Xiaosu looked at Su Lei first and said, "Take the goods to Stronghold 144 and do as I said. There will be people from Fortress 178 looking after you when you get there. Don't mention selling medicine and ironware. You can sell even more things to the Northern Plains in time."

Su Lei nodded in surprise. "Alright, thank you very much!"

After saying that, Su Lei led his men out of town. He knew Ren Xiaosu probably had something important to attend to, so he did not have time to waste with Su Lei anymore.

After Ren Xiaosu chased Su Lei and the others away, a man who was with Su Lei passed by Ren Xiaosu and whispered when the others were not paying attention, "My greetings, future commander."

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. That fucking Wang Fengyuan was so impressive. He even had a spy in a place like this?

However, he did not say much and just waited for Su Lei and the others to leave. After that, he turned his head to Yang Xiaojin and asked, "Did you receive this text as well?"

Yang Xiaojin nodded. "This is also a dedicated cell phone used by the members of the Anjing House, and the text I received mentioned something about the Pyro Company too. However, it contains more information. It says here that someone from the Anjing House suspects the captured target is likely to be the No. 001 Experimental the Experimentals were looking for! Otherwise, the Pyro Company would have no reason to mobilize so many of their troops. Y'know, the Pyro Company did not even show up when something happened at Luoyang City. It's extremely rare to see them sending so many people to the Northern Plains in recent years."

When Yang Xiaojin realized Ren Xiaosu had frozen, she asked, "What's with you?"

When Ren Xiaosu heard the mention of No. 001 Experimental, he got lost in thought.

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There was a time in Stronghold 74 when Ren Xiaosu wondered if Yan Liuyuan was the legendary No. 001 Experimental. After all, no one knew where exactly Yan Liuyuan had popped out of. Moreover, the problem was that the date and location of Yan Liuyuan's appearance coincided with the time the Experimentals escaped from the research laboratory.

Although the details were not an absolute match, the Experimentals probably had no concept of time since they were kept locked up in a dark place. Who the hell would know the specific time and date the No. 001 Experimental escaped from there?

Of course, Ren Xiaosu had also thought of the question before. Could he be the No. 001 Experimental instead?

After all, he also lost a lot of his memories, and no one in town knew where he came from.

But now, since the Anjing House was saying the Pyro Company had captured the No. 001 Experimental, it meant it was definitely not him. After all, wasn't he standing here all well and fine?

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Why are you frowning?"

"I suspect that the person captured by the Pyro Company is Yan Liuyuan." Ren Xiaosu said, "If it really is Liuyuan, I'm afraid that things will get very troublesome."

"Liuyuan?" Yang Xiaojin was stunned. "Are you sure? This person was captured in the steppe. What would Liuyuan be doing in the steppe?"

"I don't know where Liuyuan is right now, but the Pyro Company's Lab 39 was located next to the town where we used to live. You're also aware of this since we went to the Jing Mountains together at that time." Ren Xiaosu explained, "A few years ago, I suddenly discovered Liuyuan lying in the snow. He couldn't remember where exactly he came from or what he had experienced in the past. His memory was wiped."

"But it still doesn't prove he's the No. 001 Experimental." Yang Xiaojin said, "However, your worries are well-founded. The closest stronghold in the vicinity of Stronghold 113 is more than 200 kilometers away. It's impossible that a child like him could walk more than 200 kilometers on a snowy day and just appear outside the town. And the Pyro Company's research lab in the Jing Mountains is actually closer."

"Yes, this is the reason why I'm worried. Although Yan Liuyuan does not have a strong physique like the Experimentals claimed, he was indeed different from others since childhood." Ren Xiaosu said, "Also, all supernatural beings tend to improve and strengthen their physiques. Other than Liuyuan, I haven't seen any exceptions."

After that, Ren Xiaosu saw Yang Xiaojin turn around and make her way out of town. He said in surprise, "Where are you going?"

"To save Liuyuan, of course," Yang Xiaojin answered matter-of-factly. "The Pyro Company will only take six days to get back to their research base, so we have to intercept them."

Ren Xiaosu was surprised by Yang Xiaojin's decisiveness. He still could not confirm whether the Pyro Company had really captured Yan Liuyuan.

However, he would definitely have to make this trip. Whether it was Yan Liuyuan or not, he needed to verify it personally.

"Do you want to contact the Saboteurs?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "Um... this will be the first time I meet your aunt. Do I need to bring some gifts? Does your aunt have anyone that she hates? Maybe I could kill them for her or something?"

Ren Xiaosu thought that since this was the first time he would be meeting Yang Xiaojin's only kin, he would definitely have to bring a valuable gift. What else could be more valuable than a life?

However, Yang Xiaojin shook her head. "I won't be contacting them. The two of us are enough."

Actually, Yang Xiaojin had not thought of how to face Yang Anjing yet. So it would be better if they did not meet for now.

Chapter 672: Immortality

In a plain-looking official residence in Stronghold 31 of the Kong Consortium, a group of people in military uniforms were waiting outside the main hall. All of them were holding a document in their hands, as if waiting to give a report on their work.

They were standing outside the main hall and staring at the mahogany-colored wooden door in front of them. The room inside was completely soundproofed by this thick wooden door.

The officers were standing there solemnly even though some chairs had been placed outside for them to sit on. However, it was a little special today. Because of the incident in Luoyang City, the boss was in a very bad mood, so no one outside dared to sit down.

At this moment, a young man walked in from outside the official residence. When he saw the others standing around, he smiled and looked for the butler. "How many bowls of rice did the boss eat today?"

When the officers inside the residence saw the young man, they all greeted him softly. It was as though this young man's standing in the Kong Consortium was very high.

When the butler saw the young man, he said softly with a kind smile, "The boss hasn't eaten yet today."

The young man smirked. "No wonder these people dare not sit down."

"You be careful too. The boss is in a terrible mood," The butler reminded him.

"It's none of my business." The young man said with a smile, "It's not like I was involved in the matter in Luoyang City. If I were there, I would definitely not have fallen into Wang Wenyan's trap. Old Liu, brew a new pot of Da Hong Pao[1] for me. I'll bring it in for the boss."

"Alright." The butler nodded.

Actually, even the butler did not dare to breathe too loudly inside the residence. When his boss was in a bad mood, he was even more terrifying than the rumors said.

It was said that Kong Erdong, the director of the intelligence agency, was a ruthless person. Others would kill people when they got angry, but he would get angry if he did not get to kill people.

When the tea was ready, the butler handed it to the young man on a tray. But when the young man was about to enter the room, the butler pulled him back. "Wang Yun, you had better not speak carelessly today."

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing," the young man known as Wang Yun said with a smile.

Wang Yun pushed open the door and stepped into the main hall with the tray in hand. The officers outside were visibly relieved. It seemed as though once this young man named Wang Yun went in, the disaster they were facing today would be averted.

When Kong Erdong saw that someone had pushed open the door and walked in, his expression darkened. But when he saw it was Wang Yun, he reined in his temper and said slowly, "When did you get back? Did everything go smoothly? Have you found out what happened?"

"I got back this morning." Wang Yun said with a smile, "When I heard that you were angry, I quickly came over to pay my respects to you. Please have some tea first."

Kong Erdong glanced at him. "The matter in Luoyang City has been handled badly. After four or five years of planning, it has gone up in smoke. Even if it's me, I'll have to face the wrath of the big boss above."

"I've already investigated the matter thoroughly." Wang Yun said, "I just returned from Luoyang City, and to be honest, Second Brother Kong wasn't to blame. There were two reasons for this failure."

Kong Erdong did not say anything and waited for Wang Yun to continue.

"The first reason is that Wang Wenyan, whom the Wang Consortium has kept hidden all this while, is indeed a superhuman. Moreover, there are many doubts surrounding the Wang Consortium regarding this operation, including the battle on Wangchunmen Boulevard. Most of the people who ran away from the battle were the Wang Consortium's superhumans. It feels like they had planned to escape right at the start and did not have any expectations that Xu Ke would get killed in that battle at all." Wang Yun said, "Wang Wenyan is a very powerful opponent. My guess is that he was the one behind the mysterious deaths of Second Brother Kong and the others in the safe house."

"Keep going," Kong Erdong said.

"Second Brother Kong was not of average ability either. He rarely made any mistakes in the course of his fieldwork over the years." Wang Yun thought for a moment and said, "Therefore, we need to be more vigilant if Wang Wenyan could catch them off guard and blow them up like that. On the other hand, it's clear the Wang Consortium wants the satellites the most, yet they were the quickest to retreat. I suspect the Wang Consortium has some other way to seize control of the satellites, and it might also be

related to Wang Wenyan's superpower. Wang Wenyan is a very crucial person in this Luoyang City incident. I had wanted to find him and kill him, but that guy already returned to the Wang Consortium. Hence, it won't be easy to make a move on him."

"That's enough. You're already on the Wang Consortium's watchlist, so there's no need for you to take the risk." Kong Erdong said calmly, "If that fucking A of the Wang Consortium discovers you, I'm afraid that all of the Wang Consortium's superhumans will start hunting you down. Tell me the second reason."

"The second reason is that mysterious superhuman from the Northwest." Wang Yun said, "In this incident in Luoyang City, he played a very important role. He also has a girlfriend who's good at using a sniper rifle. When I went to check on the bullet holes on the ground at Wangchunmen Boulevard, I discovered the sniper had killed at least several dozen people. I believe most of the superhumans won't want to face enemies like those two right now."

"Then what about you?" Kong Erdong asked.

"I wouldn't want to encounter them either." Wang Yun said with a smile, "However, that guy has no conflict of interest with the Kong Consortium, so the possibility of meeting him in the future isn't that great. I think he should have returned to the Northwest by now. He was most likely just helping out this time. Didn't we also hear about it a few years ago? Rumor had it that Zhang Jinglin had been to Luoyang City during his travels."

Kong Erdong knitted his eyebrows. He took off his reading glasses and placed them on the table. "At least you managed to find out about Wang Wenyan's background on this trip. If only the others were as capable as you, then I wouldn't have to worry so much. What do you plan to do next?"

"Have you heard about the Pyro Company?" Wang Yun replied.

"Of course I've heard about them." Kong Erdong looked at Wang Yun. "Why? You got ideas?"

"The Pyro Company is our neighbor, so how can we not concern ourselves with them?" Wang Yun said with a smile, "Besides, Boss, think about it. Ever since the incident at Luoyang City, it's clear the Anjing House is siding with the Wang Consortium. Regardless of whether it'll be useful for us to get our hands on that No. 001 Experimental, even if it's just to spoil the plans of the Anjing House and the Wang Consortium and stop them from getting the Experimental, that would be good enough."

Kong Erdong suddenly said, "I heard the No. 001 Experimental might have been alive for over 200 years now?"

Wang Yun was stunned. He had not expected Kong Erdong to actually focus on this.

In the dark room, a sunbeam shone through the gap in the curtains. Wang Yun looked at the reading glasses Kong Erdong had just placed on the table. Only then did he remember his boss was not young anymore.

An old person standing on the pinnacle of power and being only second best, what else would they want to pursue in life?

Immortality and everlasting power would be the things they wanted the most.

Initially, Wang Yun did not care too much for the so-called No. 001 Experimental. Furthermore, he thought Kong Erdong would not pay any special attention to it either. But at this moment, he realized he was wrong.

Because he was young, he had never coveted something such as immortality.

Chapter 673: Assassination

“Boss, he might’ve lived for over 200 years,” Wang Yun cautiously phrased his words, “but you should consider this as well. The other Experimentals have also lived for over 200 years, but what kind of ghastly appearances do they have to live with?”

Kong Erdong shot a glance at Wang Yun. “Alright, point taken. You’ll lead a team to the North this time and watch from the sidelines while the Anjing House, the Wang Consortium, and the Pyro Company fight among themselves. If there’s a chance, bring this No. 001 Experimental back to me.”

As the saying goes, being in the king’s company is tantamount to living with a tiger. Wang Yun, who was favored just a second ago, could feel a hint of annoyance from Kong Erdong at this moment.

When his boss lost his temper, everyone would always invite Wang Yun over. As long as Wang Yun were here, he would have his way to make Boss Kong happy. That was because he was capable of solving many difficult problems.

But now, Wang Yun could feel that Boss Kong was so obsessed with the No. 001 Experimental that he refused to listen to any suggestions.

He had had something more important to report. But now it seemed that he should wait for a while first.

Wang Yun said respectfully, “Understood. I’ll definitely bring this Experimental back to the Kong Consortium for you.”

Kong Erdong stood up. “Mhm, I still have to go over to my boss’s residence to discuss some important matters, so I won’t ask you to stay for lunch. Get ready to set off as soon as possible.”

“OK.” Wang Yun went to the coat rack and took Kong Erdong’s coat down for him. “How many men do you suggest I bring along?”

“You can decide for yourself. I trust your ability. Just bring as many people as you deem fit.” Kong Erdong put on his coat and walked out without looking back.

As for the officers who were waiting outside the main hall, they had waited for nothing this time.

When Kong Erdong walked out, the officers all stood to attention with their heads lowered. They did not even dare to breathe too loudly.

The butler gave Wang Yun a probing look, but Wang Yun just smiled wryly and shook his head.

A convoy of black cars were already waiting outside the entrance. Kong Erdong's schedule had already been arranged by his secretary.

As the convoy drove down Tongji Road towards Zhenghe Avenue, police cars led ahead while vehicles full of bodyguards escorted from behind.

However, Kong Erdong was not going to meet Kong Donghai, the head of the Kong Consortium. After the convoy passed Zhenghe Avenue, Kong Erdong's car turned into a small road by itself. A stunning young lady was waiting for him there.

When the car arrived and stopped, it was the only vehicle left in the convoy. There were also only two bodyguards left, and they went to stand guard at the front and the back of the villa.

The woman was already waiting at the door. She looked at Kong Erdong, whose hair had already grayed, and grumbled with a grin, "Why did you just get here? You don't miss me anymore?"

When Kong Erdong saw this young woman, the worries on his mind seemed to dissipate completely. He brushed his finger on the woman's nose lightly. "You greedy little kitten."

The two of them entered the house. As this villa was very secluded, he did not have to worry about getting seen by anyone.

When he pulled open the villa's door, it made a creak. Kong Erdong frowned and said, "It's time to replace the door."

The woman said aggrievedly, "Isn't that because I've run out of money? Look, it's about time to renovate this house. There was even a leak in the attic a few days ago."

Kong Erdong laughed. "You're always asking for money in all kinds of ways."

As the two of them walked into the living room, the woman reached out to unbutton Kong Erdong's shirt. But right at this moment, the crystal chandelier hanging above the living room suddenly rattled. Kong Erdong looked up in shock and saw that the screws at the base of the chandelier had come loose.

The woman screamed and dodged. Kong Erdong wanted to dodge too, but he was too old and did not have the same agility as when he was younger.

With a loud crash, Kong Erdong got pinned under the huge chandelier. As deep purple blood flowed out onto the floor, Kong Erdong's legs were still trembling underneath it.

When the bodyguards outside heard the commotion, they immediately rushed in. On top of a building not far from the villa, Vanilla chuckled to Tang Hualong, "It's done! Time to retreat!"

Tang Hualong asked, "That's it?"

"Of course," Vanilla said with a smile. "I assumed Kong Erdong didn't have any weaknesses, and it'd be difficult to kill him with so many bodyguards around. Who could've known that someone so cautious when he was young would start indulging in his lust for younger women now that he's old?"

Tang Hualong thought for a moment and said, "Maybe he thought he could recapture his youth through escapades with these young women? A lot of people with age and authority are like this. It's like a poison that draws them in."

"That's right." Vanilla said with a smile, "Let's hurry up and leave. Although I've made it look like an accident, the Kong Consortium's intelligence officers will definitely get suspicious. Moreover, the boss wants us to head north. We have to be there for the operation against the Pyro Company."

"What I'm wondering is, since you can do this alone, why did you ask me along? My old bag of bones can't handle being made to run around like this by you," Tang Hualong snapped.

Vanilla patiently explained, "You see, all the powerful people have partners. For example, Li Shentan and Si Liren, Qing Zhen and Luo Lan, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin, and lastly, Xu Xianchu and his large black cauldron..."

"Wait, I understood the first few references, but what's with that last one?"

While joking and preparing to retreat, Vanilla suddenly stopped for a while. He looked towards the roof of another building but saw nothing there. "Strange, it felt like someone was watching us a moment ago. Let's hurry up. We shouldn't stay here any longer."

After the two of them left, Wang Yun, the director of the 2nd Military Intelligence Division of the Kong Consortium, jumped out of the water tank on top of the high-rise building. "I nearly got discovered!"

He looked at the villa where the incident had taken place. There were already countless people gathering there.

Wang Yun had no expression on his face at all. It was as though he were just watching the downfall of someone else.

In the past, everyone in the Kong Consortium's intelligence network was very polite towards Wang Yun. That was because Kong Erdong had mentioned on more than one occasion that he wanted someone like Wang Yun to take over the intelligence agency in the future.

Actually, although Wang Yun was the director of the 2nd Military Intelligence Division, he would frequently overstep his authority and assign work to the 1st and 3rd Divisions. It was not that he wanted to overstep his authority but that Kong Erdong gave him the power to do so.

Wang Yun had been a director for a long time and did not mind doing it for a little longer. Then when Kong Erdong retired, he would take over as the new intelligence head.

He did not mind waiting a while, but he could not keep waiting forever.

A superior who sought immortality could only spell disaster for his subordinates.

People always said that “being in the king’s company is tantamount to living with a tiger,” so who would want to keep a tiger company when it might end up eating him at any moment?

Of course, Wang Yun did not have the courage to kill Kong Erdong with his own hands. He only hid the fact that he had discovered Vanilla and Tang Hualong’s whereabouts from Kong Erdong.

He had wanted to report about this, but the attitude displayed by Kong Erdong made him decide to keep quiet about it.

Initially, he only wanted to see if there might be anything to gain from it, but Wang Yun did not expect such a good outcome.

“I guess I’ll head to the North first.” Wang Yun burst out laughing.

For now, he was undoubtedly one of the frontrunners to take over the intelligence agency. But to get rid of his fellow competitors, he would still need a gift.

The current head of the Kong Consortium, Kong Donghai, was also advanced in age, so he should be very interested in gaining immortality as well.

Wang Yun knew the most important thing to do at this moment was definitely not to form a political alliance and engage in politics but to let Kong Haidong understand who was truly the competent one.

Chapter 674: The Anjing House trials

In Luoyang City, many locations were starting to get busy as repair works began. The Qinghe Group’s workers were transporting truckloads of building materials from outside the city to repair the damaged buildings.

Inside this huge stronghold, blackened walls and neon signs damaged by the big fire could often be seen while taking a walk in the streets.

Fortunately, the first thing the Qinghe Group did after the chaotic battle was to carry out post-disaster rebuilding work. They not only rebuilt the houses and set up temporary tents but also distributed food to the people so they could tide through the crisis.

This gave the Luoyang City residents some hope, and Luoyang City was able to regain some of its vitality.

A reporter proposed to Jiang Xu that he wanted to interview those who had lost their homes and ask them if they felt touched by the Qinghe Group’s rebuilding efforts.

As a result, this reporter was criticized at the headquarters of Hope Media on that very day. Jiang Xu would always reprimand his reporters and editors with a very loud voice. "Those people don't even have a home anymore, yet you're thinking of asking them if they feel touched? Are you out of your mind? Don't go and make things difficult for them at a time like this. Our Hope Media is not a mouthpiece for the Qinghe Group, so there's no need to publicize their achievements for them!"

With this reprimand from Jiang Xu, all the reporters in the office stopped working for a moment.

Some people said Jiang Xu was the bastion of Hope Media. As long as he remained at Hope Media, this newspaper firm would keep reporting the truth.

Today was the day of Qinghe University's special admissions examination. Zhou Yingxue and many other parents were standing outside the school entrance and waiting for the examinees inside.

Among the group of test-takers' guardians, Zhou Yingxue was the only one who was dressed gorgeously. She outshone all the other parents.

Zhou Yingxue even kept glancing at a middle-aged woman next to her from time to time with a disdainful look.

The students' parents standing around her rolled their eyes at Zhou Yingxue's behavior.

At this moment, many students started streaming out of the school, and Zhou Yingxue's spirits were immediately lifted. She saw Wang Yuchi and the others walking in front of the students. When they saw Zhou Yingxue, they waved wildly and shouted, "Ms. Yingxue!"

"So, how did you guys do?" Zhou Yingxue asked anxiously.

"Very good." Wang Yuchi did not keep her in suspense. During this period, the person who had been most worried about how they would do was Zhou Yingxue. She cooked a variety of food for them every day and took care of their daily lives. Wang Yuchi and the others were grateful people. If they weren't, they would not have survived until now by following Ren Xiaosu and Wang Fugui. Therefore, everyone was full of confidence at this moment. The first thing they did was tell Zhou Yingxue about this good news.

The special admissions examination was a written exam, and the results would be announced after seven days. Wang Yuchi and his fellow classmates were smart, well-prepared, diligent, and never lazy.

Before they suffered misfortune, they had been studying for their parents' sake. But now, they were studying for themselves so they could be useful to Ren Xiaosu's group in the future. This motivation in itself was already different from most other examinees.

They had a goal they wanted to achieve.

Moreover, the exams they took at the Li Consortium were much more difficult than what they had just gone through. As a matter of fact, when the other consortiums held their admission examination to select their university students, they would base the criteria on scientific research and only recruit a few

hundred students each year. Meanwhile, Qinghe University recruited thousands of students every year, so the pressure on the students to compete was entirely different.

Therefore, Wang Yuchi and the others were able to finish the exam with ease.

Zhou Yingxue was overjoyed to hear their reply. "Let's go! When we get back, Big Sis will cook something delicious for you guys."

But on the way back, Zhou Yingxue suddenly said, "Er... I have something to attend to, so I'll be leaving Luoyang City for a while. I think I've found out about your Brother Xiaosu's whereabouts. I have to go and look for him to give him a piece of my mind. How could he just abandon all of you at Luoyang City without a care? If I were you, I couldn't tolerate it!"

Wang Yuchi and the others held back their laughter. All of them were fully aware of why she wanted to give Ren Xiaosu a piece of her mind.

After Ren Xiaosu left Luoyang City, Zhou Yingxue's cooking became either too salty or had too much vinegar in it. This situation lasted for three straight days!

At this moment, Zhou Yingxue also received a text message from the Anjing House. After informing all the hitmen of the mission to attack the Pyro Company, the Anjing House sent another text to tell everyone this mission would act as the official Anjing House trials.

In other words, whoever performed outstandingly this time would be qualified to directly enter the Anjing House.

Zhou Yingxue felt a little tempted by this announcement. Furthermore, she thought that since her master had been particularly interested in joining the Anjing House, now that the trials were about to begin, he would definitely go as well, right?

Zhou Yingxue was extremely unhappy about being abandoned at Luoyang City, but she could not locate Ren Xiaosu to complain to him about it. The Anjing House trials could very well be her opportunity to find him.

Wang Yuchi smiled at Zhou Yingxue and said, "Ms. Yingxue, just go. You don't have to worry about us. We can take care of ourselves."

"I see, then Big Sis will leave you with enough money for your living expenses so you can have whatever you want to eat. I could be back soon." Zhou Yingxue said, "No, I'll definitely be back soon."

When they got back to the courtyard house they were currently living in, Zhou Yingxue immediately started packing. And she even planted some strange seeds in the yard. She could confidently say this house would definitely become the safest place in the entirety of Luoyang City in the coming days.

Zhou Yingxue told Wang Yuchi they should immediately run back home if they encountered any danger. As long as they stayed at home, not even a god could touch them.

Wang Yuchi and the others smiled and promised they would do so. Ren Xiaosu had also told them before that there were very few people who were a match for Zhou Yingxue now. In their minds, Zhou Yingxue was a very powerful supernatural being.

Therefore, they just had to do as Zhou Yingxue said.

Before leaving, Zhou Yingxue even lamented, “Y’know, your Brother Xiaosu is a handful. He has such a lovely mai here in Luoyang City... no, he has so many lovely little brothers here, so how could he run away with someone else? Alright, alright, don’t hold it in anymore, just laugh all you want!”

Wang Yuchi and the others stifled their laughter and saw Zhou Yingxue out the door. However, they saw Xu Zhi already standing outside the yard.

“You all can go back now. Remember to study hard.” With that, Zhou Yingxue walked over to Xu Zhi. “What are you doing here?”

“I heard from Brother Xu Ke that you’re leaving?” Xu Zhi asked softly.

“What has that got to do with you?” Zhou Yingxue rolled her eyes.

“I just came to send you off.” Xu Zhi was a little unsettled. He was no longer as prideful and confident as he was back at school and at the Qinghe Group.

“You don’t have to send me off. I have legs; I can walk by myself.” Then Zhou Yingxue got into the new car she bought recently.

Xu Zhi suddenly asked, “Since I like you so much, can you give me a chance?”

Zhou Yingxue closed the door. “I like my master very much too, but he didn’t give me a chance either!”

With that, Zhou Yingxue stepped on the pedal, and the off-road vehicle roared north.

Chapter 675: Ambush

While a large number of people with different intentions were heading north, a convoy was fleeing hastily south at the border of the Northern Plains and the Central Plains.

Within the convoy, a fully enclosed container truck that was being protected was traveling with them. The entire trailer compartment was just like a special cage that had no windows.

Hundreds of nomads on horseback were pursuing the convoy. They would even shoot at them with arrows every now and then. Those arrows were steady, accurate, and deadly. The last vehicle at the rear of the convoy had its spare tire that was mounted on the back pierced by the arrows like an archery target.

The Pyro Company’s plan to capture the supernatural being was not proceeding too smoothly as the other party’s superpower troubled them a lot. Before they came to the grasslands, they had expected

their target to be very strong. But in the actual battle, they realized they had still underestimated their opponent.

Fortunately, the Pyro Company had sent a lot of people this time, and even a T5-ranked combatant was dispatched. Only then did they finally manage to capture their target.

This was probably one of the most important operations the Pyro Company had carried out in recent years. They could only succeed; failure would not be tolerated.

When the convoy drove out of the grasslands, the off-road vehicles' speed after they got back onto the dirt track became faster, and they got farther away from the horses behind them. Someone cursed out loud in the vehicle, "What the hell did they feed the horses in the grasslands? How can they run for three days straight without getting tired? And they're so fast!"

"Get used to it." A person sitting in the back closed his eyes to get some rest. "In the future, the creatures in the wilderness might become even more ferocious. I heard that even the plants in that mountain under lockdown have already mutated on a large scale."

It was no secret the Pyro Company had a mysterious mountain range under their control.

Back when Qing Zhen went into the Jing Mountains, he mentioned the Jing Mountains might be a hallowed ground similar to that of the Pyro Company's mountain range.

The Saboteurs had once hoped to explore that mountain range, but they were still too weak at that time to do so.

The Pyro Company's strongholds were situated north of the Kong Consortium, with half of them east while the other half were west. The layout of the strongholds' locations seemed to form a circle that protected that mountain range at the center.

Upon leaving the grasslands, the nomads stopped chasing. They just stood at the edge of the grasslands on their horses and stared into the distance as they watched the Pyro Company convoy leave.

A member of the Pyro Company heaved a sigh of relief. "They've finally stopped pursuing us."

"Don't let your guard down." The T5-ranked combatant said behind them, "We've received news from the headquarters that the Anjing House has issued a mission to intercept us. There will be even more people coming after us later, so it won't be easy for us to get back to the company safely."

"Since this superhuman is so important, why don't you request for headquarters to send us some support?" someone asked.

But when this topic was brought up, the T5-ranked combatant kept quiet.

All the Pyro Company members who were feeling relieved just a moment ago became worried again. Did this mean there would not be any reinforcements?

Right at this moment, a distant mountain in front of them suddenly started moving. The mountain transformed into a gigantic dragon that blotted out the sky and let out a ferocious roar.

This was a sight that could be called a wonder of the world. If this was a supernatural being's doing, it would be enough to let the wielder be ranked among the top five supernatural beings just based on this ability to move mountains!

Some of the Pyro Company members in the convoy were immediately flustered. Seeing the five-clawed golden dragon was about to crash down onto the convoy from the sky, the driver quickly turned the steering wheel in shock.

However, the T5-ranked combatant suddenly grabbed the steering wheel from behind. "Don't panic!"

The T5-ranked combatant picked up the built-in walkie-talkie and said, "Keep driving forward! Keep driving forward! Don't make sharp turns!"

They were currently traveling at a speed of 80 kilometers per hour. If they were to turn their steering wheels in panic, all of the vehicles in the convoy would overturn for sure!

T5102 continued saying coldly, "This is an illusion. I repeat, this is an illusion. If it were real, the opponent would not have to resort to making such a big scene to try to scare us. Also, if it weren't an illusion, we couldn't get away from a superhuman like that either!"

As he was saying that, the five-clawed golden dragon swept over their vehicles at a low altitude. However, it did not cause any damage to the convoy at all.

T5102 sneered, "So it was really an illusion. Does he think he can deter us with a little trick like that?"

Seeing that the Pyro Company's convoy was not affected, the supernatural being in the distance raised his hand again and made another mountain transform into a similar-sized spotted tiger that pounced at the convoy.

If such an illusion did not work the first time, it would definitely not work subsequently.

The supernatural being's forehead was full of sweat as he said to his companions next to him, "I can't frighten them at all, so start making your moves now!"

The people next to him had already set up heavy machine gun nests at the mountain pass. They were just waiting for the convoy to come into range.

This team was led by an official member of the Anjing House, and they had rushed here to ambush the Pyro Company at this spot.

This time, the reward offered by the Anjing House was enough to tempt anyone. Moreover, the Anjing House also promised the hitmen would not have to hand the No. 001 Experimental to them after capturing it. They were free to deal with it on their own.

In other words, they could totally sell the No. 001 Experimental to the consortiums that wanted it after receiving the reward from the Anjing House. This way, they could earn twice the amount of money!

Everyone realized the Anjing House was only targeting the Pyro Company's operation this time because they did not want them to complete their follow-up research after obtaining the No. 001 Experimental. As for who got the No. 001 Experimental after that, they were not concerned at all.

Among the official members of the Anjing House, some of them operated as lone wolves like Vanilla previously did, while the others worked in a fixed team, like this supernatural being who was currently using his illusion techniques.

Actually, his superpower was quite useless. If he encountered a powerful supernatural being, he would definitely not be a match for them. Therefore, he needed to collaborate with others for his missions.

His assistant next to him said calmly, "As long as they get into range, I'll turn their convoy into Swiss cheese."

The supernatural being emphasized, "Be careful not to damage the vehicle in the middle. I want the Experimental captured alive!"

"Got it!"

But before the convoy could enter their precise range, they saw a person jump out of the rear door of the vehicle at the front of the convoy.

After T5102 jumped out of the vehicle, his body tilted extremely close to the ground for a short moment due to the inertia. However, he didn't care at all and maintained a 60-degree angle with the ground and started running madly.

Within two seconds, T5102 had already overtaken the convoy and was rushing towards the mountain pass where someone was lying in ambush. His speed was so fast it was unimaginable!

Four seconds later, T5102 had left the convoy far behind in his wake. With every step he took, he would leave a hole in the ground.

As he ran, his combat boots could not withstand the tremendous force and started cracking open.

"Open fire! Don't let him get near us! That's a T5-ranked combatant from the Pyro Company's Dawn team!" the supernatural being roared.

The Dusk and Midnight teams were the most common Pyro Company members that supernatural beings would encounter. But a lot of people knew that Dusk was not the strongest fighting force within the Pyro Company. There was an even stronger unit above them, and that team was known as Dawn.

The speed of the enemy had already given them a great sense of danger. No one at the site could survive if the enemy got near them!

But suddenly, someone rushed out of the shadows at the foot of the mountain and collided straight into T5102.

The people up on the mountain saw the other party was wearing a white mask.

Chapter 676: Working together

No one knew when that person in the white mask had hidden at the foot of the mountain. Not even the members of the Anjing House who had been lying here in ambush since earlier were aware.

Up on the mountain, these Anjing House members broke out in cold sweat. If this person were here to kill them, wouldn't it mean they would not have even known how they might have died?

Fortunately, this person was here for the Pyro Company!

"Wait a minute, isn't that the legendary White Mask?" someone asked.

White Mask had become too well-known in recent times. He had slaughtered many people at Stronghold 73 and even made it onto the newspapers for facing the Experimentals at Stronghold 74. Later, there were also rumors he had appeared at Luoyang City during the Qinghe crisis.

It seemed he was always involved in the major events that happened recently. However, no one knew where he came from.

Initially, Li Yingyun, Qin Sheng, and Zhang Qingxi had suspected Ren Xiaosu and White Mask were in fact the same person. But later, the two of them appeared at Hope Media's headquarters at the same time, so that dispelled their suspicions.

However, this White Mask would not help the Qinghe Group for no reason, so he must be somehow related to Ren Xiaosu, right?

But of course, the Riders would definitely not tell anyone about this.

At this moment, T5102 was dashing crazily past the gunfire. As he ran, he kicked up a large cloud of dust.

Meanwhile, the speed of White Mask, who was rushing towards him in the opposite direction, did not decrease at all. If the two of them were to meet each other head-on, it would probably be no different from a high-speed train collision.

Even supernatural beings would get severely injured by that, let alone normal people.

The impact of this collision would crush a supernatural being's organs!

"Neither of them are going to stop?" The supernatural being up on the mountain looked down with his binoculars. "These two are way too ferocious. They're both probably going to die if they really collide with each other."

Supernatural beings tended to cherish their lives a lot. Since they had already become supernatural beings, who would be willing to die before they got to enjoy their lives first?

But now, these two people seemed to be acting out of spite. It was like they did not care about anything else.

In a battle between experts, the first move would not involve a saber or sword but intimidation.

Whoever retreated first would have been intimidated.

This was not mysticism but a matter of psychology.

Furthermore, whoever changed their trajectory during this high-speed motion would inevitably affect their balance.

And balance was very crucial in battle.

Up on the mountain, the professional team of assassins had stopped firing and started to watch this first-class battle between two supernatural beings.

In the distance, the Pyro Company's convoy was trying to give support to T5102, but they could not catch up with his speed. And they did not dare to chase too closely either. After all, there were still heavy machine gun nests up on the mountain. If those heavy machine guns were not destroyed first, it would be as good as suicidal for them to go over.

"Old Xu's" and T5102's speed was getting faster and faster. But just as everyone thought that they were going to collide, T5102 suddenly dodged to the left. At the very last second, T5102 still got intimidated!

But before he could regain his balance with that maneuver to the left, "Old Xu" had already grabbed hold of his collar. His clothes were even torn in the process.

"Old Xu" twisted its hips with some force as it traveled forward at high speed while dragging T5102 through the air. Like a shot putter pushing a ball, it forcefully threw this living person about 10 meters up into the air!

Many people liked resorting to flashy attacks, such as flying kicks or spinning kicks, but all true combatants knew that whoever's feet went off the ground first and lost their balance while fighting would have already lost half the battle.

That was because no matter how strong your hips and legs were, you needed to have a firm footing on the ground to fully exert your strength.

Therefore, the moment the two sides came into contact and T5102 got intimidated, "Old Xu" was able to catch hold of his Achilles heel.

When T5102 was thrown up into the air, he tried his best to turn his hips around to attack "Old Xu," who was approaching from behind. But how could "Old Xu" possibly give him a chance?

Before T5102 could adjust his balance in the air, the black saber had already come slashing at him from behind.

T5102 grit his teeth and decided to use his left arm to block the blade. In this way, he would still have a chance to get back on the ground and join back up with the convoy even if he lost an arm.

But he could only watch helplessly as the black saber slashed through his arm like a hot knife cutting through butter. Then it continued slicing through his body without any resistance!

He was a T5-ranked combatant of the Pyro Company. His body was capable of resisting bullets, but why couldn't he even block a saber slash?!

A member of the Anjing House hiding up on the distant mountain said in shock, "Judging by his speed, I guess he should be a T5-ranked Dawn member, right? What kind of saber is that? It can even cut through the T5-ranked combatant's body?!"

It wasn't that no one had ever fought with a T5-ranked combatant before. But weren't they supposed to be so strong they were almost invulnerable, with even firearms being ineffective against them?

However, this T5-ranked combatant suffered a crushing defeat against White Mask.

Actually, it was not that the T5-ranked combatant was too weak in the battle, but that Ren Xiaosu had taken advantage of the situation.

T5102 wanted to scare "Old Xu" away by relying on his strong body. He knew most people in this world would not dare to collide straight into him. But he did not know "Old Xu" was not even a person at all.

Others might be afraid to collide with him. But to Ren Xiaosu, all he would experience was a little pain and some cold sweat at most.

As a result, T5102's wrong move affected all his subsequent moves. Because he got intimidated at the last second, he lost the initiative in the battle for that moment. He was then killed after a series of attacks by "Old Xu" that seized the opportunity.

If he had stood firm and fought steadily, "Old Xu" might not have a good way to defeat him. In fact, Ren Xiaosu might even have to resort to activating City Crusher to do that.

At some point, Ren Xiaosu even thought that if the Pyro Company had a lot of these T5-ranked combatants in their ranks, the Anjing House would probably not be a match for them.

After "Old Xu" killed the T5-ranked combatant, it went straight for the Pyro Company's convoy. The Anjing House members who were watching the battle from the mountain said, "Let's head down quickly. Who knows? We might be able to get something from that T5 combatant."

But as soon as they got up, a sniper bullet came from nowhere and hit the ground behind them, sending loose gravel flying.

The five of them were immediately stunned and did not dare to move a muscle. "Sniper!"

“Did you get a clear view of where the sniper’s firing from?”

“No, but the sniper’s probably in the 9 to 3 o’clock direction.”

“Is there any point in giving such a wide range? You might as well say you don’t know!”

The five of them stayed still. As the other party did not kill them directly, it meant they did not want to start a killing spree. At this moment, it was better not to go looking for trouble since they were completely exposed and within shooting range.

Since the other party wanted them to stay here quietly, they would just have to remain in their positions obediently.

A supernatural being who could kill a T5-ranked combatant, and a sniper who was lying in ambush in the shadows, just who were these people?! They were terrifying!

Remaining hidden in the shadows, Ren Xiaosu was watching “Old Xu” as it attacked the convoy. He asked over the radio, “I’m going to attack the convoy soon. Are those people hiding on the mountain going to cause any trouble? That was an illusion just now, right? It caused quite a commotion, but it’s a pity that it was quite useless.”

Yang Xiaojin was covered with a yellow camouflage cloth as she lay in the wilderness. She took out a piece of chocolate and said while eating, “Don’t worry, they’re as quiet as quails now.”

Chapter 677: Completely empty

Yang Xiaojin had her sniper rifle aimed right at the Anjing House members in the wilderness to prevent them from coming out to cause any trouble.

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin had even purposely gotten hold of some radio equipment the troops used. With their earpieces on, they became the most dependable team in the field.

Moreover, the two of them coordinated extremely well together. Ren Xiaosu was responsible for controlling “Old Xu” to get close to the target while Yang Xiaojin took charge of controlling the battlefield from a distance.

The Anjing House had informed everyone they only had six days to complete the mission. Based on the time, today was still just the third day.

Actually, there were still a lot of people who wanted to capture the No. 001 Experimental. However, everyone was hoping someone else would make the first move as nobody wanted to be the lead bird that stuck its neck out. In the end, they all went to Mount Gardenia that was hundreds of kilometers away to wait for the Pyro Company’s convoy. That was the last part of the journey the Pyro Company had planned to take to return to their stronghold.

However, the people waiting there had not expected someone would rush in to make a move so quickly. On the third day of the mission, they had already overturned the Pyro Company’s convoy and even killed T5102.

One of the people hiding up on the mountain asked, "Do you guys think the sniper from earlier did not get us because of poor aim, or were we shown mercy?"

The supernatural being from the Anjing House said helplessly, "Don't be silly. Those who dare to make a move on the third day are either people like us with a team lying in ambush or daredevils who are really that strong. Didn't you see how he managed to kill that T5 combatant? So how could his sniper teammate be an amateur? Don't be thinking that you somehow survived because you got lucky. The reason why I've lived so long is that I've never taken anything for granted regardless of the situation."

In fact, they had planted explosives on the sides of the mountain. If the T5 combatant had really rushed over, he might have ended up getting killed by the blast.

Everyone was aware that T5-ranked combatants were not afraid of firearms, but the power of explosives was different.

As the Anjing House members were talking, "Old Xu," who was wearing a white mask, appeared in front of the convoy. The Pyro Company members had already stopped their vehicles and were using them as cover while shooting at "Old Xu."

But be it the Pyro Company members or the five-person team hiding up on the mountain, they realized the White Mask did not seem affected at all in the face of the gunfire. When the bullets hit "him," it only caused "his" body to sway a little. There was not even any bleeding.

The five people on the mountain gasped. "That's too fucking strong!"

The supernatural being's assistant asked in a whisper, "Do you think you can withstand the bullets head on like this?"

That supernatural being got so angry he laughed. "If I could, would I have to get pointed at by a sniper rifle and hide here with you people? You're an experienced veteran with countless battles under your belt, so can you think before you speak?"

"Old Xu" had already broken through the suppressive fire and was standing right in front of the convoy. With just a slight nudge of his shoulder, the vehicles were knocked over in an instant.

The Pyro Company members hiding behind the vehicles tried to draw their sabers and engage in close combat. Some of them even started running into the wilderness, but they were all chased down by "Old Xu," one by one.

However, "Old Xu" did not kill them all. Two people were spared.

In the distance, Ren Xiaosu suddenly became nervous. He moved "Old Xu" towards the container truck slowly.

Ren Xiaosu had not seen Yan Liuyuan in a long time, so he was really hoping Yan Liuyuan would be inside the container truck, and that when he opened up the container, the other party would call out "Bro" to him.

Ren Xiaosu had been looking forward to the day of their reunion for far too long.

With a snap, “Old Xu” broke the lock on the container with its bare hands. But when the door was opened, Ren Xiaosu was stunned.

He heard Yang Xiaojin’s voice through the earpiece. “What’s the matter, Xiaosu? Is it Liuyuan?”

“There’s nothing in the container,” Ren Xiaosu said with some difficulty.

When “Old Xu” opened the container door, it was completely empty on the inside. Ren Xiaosu was really unable to accept this. He even ordered “Old Xu” to break apart the container with its bare hands to see if there were any hidden compartments inside.

Unfortunately, there wasn’t.

When the five people on the mountain in the distance saw this, they bit their tongues nervously. The other party had dismantled the truck as though it were a toy.

But they were also a little puzzled. Why wasn’t there anyone in the container?

“What’s going on? Didn’t they say they had captured the No. 001 Experimental?” Ren Xiaosu wondered. “Could the Anjing House have received the wrong intel?”

“That can’t be. They must’ve succeeded in capturing it,” Yang Xiaojin said firmly. “Let’s take the survivors away and interrogate them.”

“Alright then.” Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, “Let’s retreat.”

With that, Yang Xiaojin pulled the trigger and fired at the five people hiding on the mountain. The bullets pierced their caps and collars, scaring them so much that they quickly crouched down to avoid the bullets.

After a long time, they got up and realized the enemy had probably left. They had only fired off those shots earlier because they did not want them to see where they had gone.

“Thankfully, the sniper showed us mercy. Otherwise, the five of us would’ve died here,” the supernatural being muttered. He looked at the bullet hole in his collar and was surprised to see the sniper had shot a button off. If that were intentional, just how good was the sniper’s marksmanship?

If such a team were to travel around the wilderness, whoever encountered them would be extremely down on their luck.

“What should we do now?” his assistant asked.

“Sell the information to the Anjing House. Tell them there wasn’t anyone in the container. We’ve been tricked by the Pyro Company. This news will fetch a lot of money,” the supernatural being said.

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“Old Xu” carried the two unconscious Pyro Company members all the way east. Only when they had chosen a place to camp did they finally settle down to set up their tents and start cooking.

Ren Xiaosu carried a bucket of cold water over and splashed it on the heads of the Pyro Company members. The cold stream water in winter made the two of them shiver. Then they looked at Ren Xiaosu before them in horror.

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, “I’ll ask, and you two will answer. Let’s reduce any unnecessary trouble for each other. Did y’all successfully capture the No. 001 Experimental?”

“Ye—” The Pyro Company member could not even give a complete answer before choking on his words.

Following, dark blood flowed out of their eyes, and the two of them dropped dead to the ground.

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin looked at each other. “Did they commit suicide by swallowing poison or what?”

“It feels more like someone has cursed them with an anti-betrayal hex.” Yang Xiaojin said, “I’ve heard about it before. It seems there’s a superhuman whose power is similar to this. As long as the victims are cursed, they can never betray anyone. The price of betrayal is death.”

“Based on his answer, I guess he was going to say they succeeded?” Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, “Since they succeeded, why wasn’t the No. 001 Experimental in the container?”

“It’s very likely that another team from the Pyro Company secretly transported the No. 001 Experimental away after capturing it. Meanwhile, the group we encountered was meant to draw firepower towards it.” Yang Xiaojin sighed and said, “I’m afraid there was more than one T5 combatant of the Pyro Company that headed to the steppe this time.”

Chapter 678: Preparing to head to the Sacred Mountains

Three days had already passed since the Anjing House sent out the message announcing the start of the mission. Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin had tried their best to rush over as quickly as possible, but they could never have expected that even though they managed to catch up and intercept the Pyro Company’s convoy, it was actually just a strategy to mislead them.

If the Anjing House were able to plant their spies in the Pyro Company and find out in advance that they were heading to the grasslands to capture the No. 001 Experimental, the Pyro Company could also have access to their A-rank hitmen’s cell phones.

Since they were adversaries, how could the Pyro Company possibly not guard against the Anjing House?

Yang Xiaojin even had a feeling that the Anjing House’s spy within the Pyro Company might already be dead.

Espionage and counterespionage was often like an undercurrent in the deep sea, and spies tended to disappear or die without a trace.

“So which route would the Pyro Company take to transport the No. 001 Experimental away if they split up into two groups?” Ren Xiaosu asked, “Can we still catch up and intercept them now?”

“That’s impossible.” Yang Xiaojin shook her head. “Since they planned it so carefully and even got a T5 combatant to act as bait, their alternative route will definitely be much more secure. Who knows? They might be reaching the Pyro Company’s lab soon.”

Ren Xiaosu felt a little anxious. If Yan Liuyuan had really been captured by the Pyro Company, he would most likely be doomed.

Most people would hide until the last moment and let someone else make a move first. If this were any other time, Ren Xiaosu would surely be taking cover in the shadows like everyone else and finding an opportunity to take advantage of the situation.

But Yan Liuyuan was too important to him. Therefore, he would not hesitate to take the lead and make his move in advance.

“Where will the Pyro Company send the No. 001 Experimental for study after capturing him?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Probably the Sacred Mountains.” Yang Xiaojin analyzed, “Almost all superhumans caught by the Pyro Company are sent to the Sacred Mountains. It’s a legendary, hallowed ground where the Pyro Company set up their lab, and all access routes leading to it are heavily guarded by troops.”

“How many routes are there to access the mountains?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Seven.” Yang Xiaojin explained, “The Sacred Mountains are an entire mountain range that stretches on for more than 200 kilometers. An entire regiment of regular troops is stationed at every access route.”

“With our physiques as supernatural beings, there’s no need for us to take the main path. Since the Sacred Mountains span such a wide area, the Pyro Company can’t seal off the entire mountain range,” Ren Xiaosu said.

“You want to go to the Sacred Mountains?” Yang Xiaojin asked.

“Yes.” Ren Xiaosu nodded. “I have no choice but to go.”

“OK, I’ll go with you.” Yang Xiaojin said, “But there’s some things you need to heed my advice on. The danger in the Sacred Mountains is not only limited to the Pyro Company’s troops stationed there. In fact, those troops don’t usually dare to step into the Sacred Mountains either. The ones who can venture in are the Pyro Company’s genemodded combatants. Previously, the Anjing House sent some A-rank hitmen in, but without exception, we never heard from them again.”

Yang Xiaojin continued, “I know you’re concerned about Liuyuan’s safety, and I don’t want anything to happen to him either. However, this is not a reason for you to lose your cool and caution. We should always plan before making any moves. We can’t just barge in without any preparation. As the saying goes, ‘concern leads to confusion.’ You have to listen to me for this operation.”

Ren Xiaosu pondered for a moment and sighed, "Mhm, thanks for the reminder."

Yang Xiaojin was not afraid of dying. If she were, she would not choose to accompany him to the Sacred Mountains. However, Yang Xiaojin knew full well that it would be very easy for Ren Xiaosu to lose his mind because of Yan Liuyuan. Therefore, what she had to do was not to act rashly along with Ren Xiaosu but to help him keep his cool.

...

That afternoon, the Anjing House members who had watched the entire battle passed on the information to the Anjing House that there weren't any Experimentals being escorted by the Pyro Company's convoy.

After the Anjing House received the intel and verified it, they sent out another text. "The No. 001 Experimental has been transported to the Sacred Mountains. All Anjing House hitmen, please confirm your participation to assist the Anjing House to stop the Pyro Company's research. The reward..."

This time, the reward offered by the Anjing House was even higher than the reward offered for intercepting the convoy. However, they did not mention anything about a rendezvous point or their specific plans. It seemed that this was to prevent the Pyro Company from getting wind of the news in advance.

As for how to gather all of these hitmen together, that would be up to the Anjing House to arrange. They would definitely have a way to do it.

When Ren Xiaosu received the text, he did not head directly for the Sacred Mountains. Instead, he followed Yang Xiaojin to the ruins of a city more than 100 kilometers west of the Sacred Mountains.

This place was originally a county-level city before The Cataclysm. From the outside, all of the buildings in the ruins were in disrepair, and there was no one roaming the streets either.

Yang Xiaojin led Ren Xiaosu and made many twists and turns before they came to the entrance of a bomb shelter where they walked right in.

It was very dark underground. They had to walk for dozens of meters before they saw an old light bulb mounted on the walls of the bomb shelter. There were even two young men squatting beneath it.

When they saw that someone had come in, they stood up and asked, "Where are you from?"

Yang Xiaojin calmly handed over 10,000 yuan in cash and said, "The two of us are here to ask about some information."

One of the young men took the cash from her and slapped it in his hand with a smile. "You've come to the right place. However, we can't guarantee the accuracy of the information that you find here. You'll have to make that judgment by yourself, and neither should you expect us to help you catch any scammers."

“I know the rules.” Then Yang Xiaojin continued walking in. When the young man gave a loud whistle, an old, broken metal door slowly opened in front of Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin.

Unlike the deserted atmosphere outside, the area behind the bomb shelter’s door was bustling with activity.

“This is a black market?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Yes.” Yang Xiaojin walked farther inside. “But the scale of this black market is not that big, and there aren’t that many people either. Unlike the black market at Luoyang City where it’s mainly for leisure with many vice establishments and can be considered a retirement home for some of the mob bosses, this one is more chaotic. Before the appearance of the Anjing House, most of the assassination missions were assigned at this location, and many infamous outlaws hid here. The bomb shelter is huge, as it stretches across the entire county’s ruins, so it’s a good place for criminals to seek refuge in.”

“You didn’t bring me here just to get intel, right?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“The Anjing House has many people stationed here. It can be said that half of the entire underground black market is under the control of the Anjing House. Although this place is not exactly close to the Pyro Company’s Sacred Mountains, the Anjing House will likely treat it as their final staging spot if they plan on infiltrating the Sacred Mountains.” Yang Xiaojin said, “And it’s said that there’s someone here who once traveled to the periphery of the Sacred Mountains. It’s better to have someone lead the way than to blindly feel our way forward.”

In other words, they were here to find someone who could scout the way for them and die on their behalf.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly remembered that when they first entered the Jing Mountains, Yang Xiaojin and the others also found a group of private soldiers who were looking to get by to travel with them. They even recruited him as their guide.

Thinking of that now, it felt as though an entire lifetime had passed. Back then, he had just obtained the palace and did not know about the truth of the world yet.

Chapter 679: Extortion in the black market

In the gloomy bomb shelter’s black market, yellow tungsten bulbs hanging overhead every ten meters or so were illuminating the place dimly.

The reason the lighting was poor was that the air quality underground was really bad.

The black market definitely did not lack money since everyone was required to pay 10,000 yuan before entering. Logically speaking, they could clearly renovate the underground to make it a little better and brighter.

But the people at the black market did not do so. It was as though this place was specially designed so everyone had a chance of survival in the dim lighting. If no one could see each other’s faces clearly, it would be easier to keep their identities hidden.

Fortunately, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were not pampered people. They had survived in worse environments than this before.

Yang Xiaojin whispered as they walked, "Although the Anjing House does not have a lot of official members, many people underestimate the number of A-rank hitmen in their ranks. Some of the A-rank hitmen are also members of various consortiums. They usually carry out missions to maintain their statuses as A-rank hitmen in order to gain access to some of the Anjing House's intelligence. In the past, they generally did not show up for most of the operations. But this time, I believe many big shots of the consortiums will be interested in the No. 001 Experimental. So my guess is that a lot of people will gather here this time."

"Since the Anjing House knows there's so many spies within the organization, why didn't they screen the owners of the cell phones more carefully?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Of course the Anjing House has its own screening criteria. There's people specially monitoring each of the cell phones' accounts." Yang Xiaojin explained, "They don't mind people from the consortiums infiltrating their hitmen teams either. Just like right now, these people might come in handy. As you can see, even B- and C-rank hitmen have also received texts this time. They'd rather have more people showing up than less. In any case, the Sacred Mountains isn't the Anjing House's territory. No matter who comes here to stir up trouble, it'll be the Pyro Company that gets affected. Because the Anjing House is using what the Pyro Company has in their possession to attract everyone."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt the hitmen were just tools for the Anjing House to use.

With so many people attracted to the Sacred Mountains, the Anjing House was probably deciding to sacrifice most of them, right? After all, not many of these people could possibly make it out alive.

"How many black markets are there in the entire Alliance of Strongholds?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"A lot, but most of them don't last long. The established ones are located outside the jurisdiction of the consortiums in no man's land," Yang Xiaojin answered. "Like this place where we are and the one in Luoyang City, they survive by operating in the gaps between the consortiums."

"Did you come here because you hope to follow the Anjing House teams into the mountains? Are you gonna get recognized by anyone?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"No." Yang Xiaojin shook her head and said, "I don't interact much with the Anjing House. Even if there's someone I know, they're just the logistics personnel. Also, if too many people come here, they'll definitely set off for the Sacred Mountains in batches. My aunt and the others will surely not appear at a conspicuous place like this."

"Is the person you know... Dong Funan?" Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked. He remembered he had seen Dong Funan back at Luoyang City.

"That's right, Dong Funan is one of them." Yang Xiaojin said, "Even now, her teeth still haven't fully grown back yet, so she can only serve in a supporting role for now."

There were countless rooms sitting side by side in the bomb shelter. The rooms did not have any doors and were just covered up by a simple door curtain.

When they passed by a room, Ren Xiaosu happened to hear some people discussing on the inside, "That White Mask has appeared as well. And it seems he's also very interested in annihilating the Pyro Company."

Another person said, "After all, he was one of the main fighting forces against the Pyro Company when he appeared at Stronghold 73 and fought in the battle where East Lake caved in. It all adds up based on this logic. However, your intel isn't particularly valuable. The entire time, you didn't mention what superpowers he had, nor revealed his identity. You don't even know the sniper's identity. Besides, you must've heard of this from other people. Since you weren't onsite at that time, this is just secondhand info you didn't personally witness. As such, after discount, I'll only pay you 10,000 yuan at most."

"10,000 yuan? That's too little!"

"Listen, aren't you going to the Sacred Mountains with the members of the Anjing House? I'm guessing White Mask will definitely be there as well. At that time, if you can confirm what his superpower is, I'll pay you 500,000 yuan. If you can confirm his identity too, I'll add another one million yuan on top of that. The identity of the sniper is also worth another 500,000 yuan!"

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yang Xiaojin who was beside him. Yang Xiaojin cast a glance at him and said in a low voice, "Are you thinking of selling yourself out?"

"Who's eavesdropping outside?" When the people inside heard someone talking outside, they lifted the curtain and rushed out. "My info is priceless. Since you overheard us, you have to pay up!"

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. The people inside couldn't possibly have heard what they just said. They only rushed out to ask for money when they realized that there were people standing outside. However, Yang Xiaojin simply handed over 10,000 yuan with a smile before turning around to leave.

"You gave them the money just like that?" Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "Why should we pay them!?"

"That's the rule of the black market." Yang Xiaojin smiled and said, "Since the rooms at the black market do not have doors, it leads to another kind of business, extortion. The people inside might have heard our footsteps, so they deliberately talked about some useless info for us to hear. As long as we hear it, we have to pay for it. It doesn't matter if you don't want to pay, but you can't enter this black market in the future."

"They're using info to extort money..." Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips. "It really takes all sorts to make a world. You already knew about this rule, didn't you? Why didn't you warn me?"

Yang Xiaojin said with a smile, "It slipped my mind too, but never mind. Isn't that person going to the Sacred Mountains as well? It looks like we'll be traveling together, so it's not like the money is lost yet."

Ren Xiaosu looked at this girl from behind and thought she could sometimes be even more ruthless than him.

The two of them continued walking until Yang Xiaojin saw a marking in the hallway of the bomb shelter. Then they turned and went inside that room.

The marking was not complicated. It was just a triangular symbol formed by the intersection of three straight lines.

It seemed this was the mark of the Anjing House.

Before this, Ren Xiaosu did not know much about what the underworld was like, and Zhou Yingxue only had a passing knowledge. Therefore, when Yang Xiaojin led him into the bomb shelter, it was as though she had revealed another world to him.

After lifting the door curtain, Yang Xiaojin surveyed the room first. Before she continued on in, she had to be sure no one inside the room knew her.

The people in the room carefully sized up Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. But when they realized one of them had a hood over his head and the other was wearing a cap, they turned their gazes away since they could not see their faces clearly. Only one of the people in the room was still staring excitedly at Ren Xiaosu.

Yang Xiaojin said in a low voice, "I don't know anyone in here."

Ren Xiaosu was at a loss. "But I do..."

The Great Hoodwinker was sitting comfortably in the room and smiling happily at Ren Xiaosu with yellow teeth.

Chapter 680: Five little quails

When Ren Xiaosu saw the Great Hoodwinker's bright smile, he was a little at a loss for words.

It had crossed his mind before that he might bump into Luo Lan and Zhou Qi. After all, Luo Lan was still strutting around the Wang Consortium's territory that was not far from here.

He had also thought he might encounter Li Shentan as well. After all, that guy always enjoyed a good commotion.

But Ren Xiaosu had not expected to meet the Great Hoodwinker here.

It seemed that all the people in the room were waiting for the Anjing House members to appear before setting off for the Sacred Mountains together.

Ren Xiaosu pulled the Great Hoodwinker out the door and whispered, "What are you doing here? Don't you know that this place is very dangerous?"

The Great Hoodwinker chuckled and said, "This is my main job. Now that something so big has happened in the Central Plains, I have to do some intelligence gathering for Fortress 178, right?"

Then he looked at Yang Xiaojin. “You must be Ms. Yang Xiaojin, right? As expected, your extraordinary classiness makes you really compatible with our future commander. Ms. Yang, are you interested in settling down in Fortress 178? We’ll allocate free housing for you.”

The moment the Great Hoodwinker saw Yang Xiaojin, he immediately had an idea. Now that Wang Fugui was already committed to working on the trade route business with Fortress 178, if he could also convince Yang Xiaojin to go to the Northwest as well, could Ren Xiaosu still get away?

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu. “Future commander?”

“That’s right.” The Great Hoodwinker beamed and said, “Doesn’t that sound really impressive? After Commander Zhang retires, he’ll take over as the commander of our Fortress 178. Now that you know this, don’t you want to go to the Northwest even more?”

Honestly, Yang Xiaojin really did not expect Ren Xiaosu’s current status in the Northwest to have gotten so prominent. She grinned at Ren Xiaosu. “I’ve never heard you mention this before.”

“Why should I bring that up? He’s just kidding you,” Ren Xiaosu said.

When he said that, Yang Xiaojin immediately understood. It was no wonder the Great Hoodwinker was being so attentive towards him. So it turned out Ren Xiaosu had still not agreed yet.

If it was anyone else, they would probably be too excited to even sleep. That was a force that controlled the entire Northwestern region, after all. Besides, if it were anyone else that got chosen by Fortress 178 to be their future commander, they would surely be bragging about it constantly in the presence of any girls, as though they were afraid no one would know about it.

However, Ren Xiaosu was not like that. He did not mention it, nor boast about it to Yang Xiaojin. He was just different from the others.

But Ren Xiaosu was more concerned about other matters at the moment. He said to the Great Hoodwinker, “I feel that the Pyro Company might’ve already prepared a backup plan this time. It might look like a one-off response against the Anjing House’s operation, but I somehow feel that the Pyro Company is doing this to eliminate the Anjing House, their long-term adversary. I have my reasons for going, but you don’t, so I suggest that you stay put here.”

Previously, Ren Xiaosu was hell-bent on intercepting the Pyro Company to save Liuyuan. His brother, his only kin, had been kidnapped by someone, so it was inevitable he would get anxious and unsettled. Ren Xiaosu was not a sage, after all.

However, Yang Xiaojin’s reminder made him start thinking about this matter calmly. The Pyro Company obviously already knew what the Anjing House was up to, so they had prepared a decoy and split up their troops. In that case, could the Pyro Company lay any further ambushes for them inside the Sacred Mountains?

The Anjing House had already revealed their cards, but no one knew what the Pyro Company was up to yet.

The Great Hoodwinker said, "I've experienced too many dangers in my life. Future Commander, you don't have to worry about me. I'm a tough one. Moreover, I'm also worried about you going in just like that. If something were to happen to you in the Sacred Mountains, how am I going to answer to the commander and Wang Fengyuan?"

"I'll be fine," Ren Xiaosu said firmly.

"That won't do either." The Great Hoodwinker said awkwardly, "If I don't go, you guys can't go either."

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Why?"

At this moment, five people walked in from the hallway of the bomb shelter. It turned out they were none other than the five quails Yang Xiaojin had in her scope earlier. However, they did not recognize Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. During the attack on the Pyro Company's convoy, Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu never once revealed themselves.

The leading supernatural being looked at the Great Hoodwinker and asked, "You must be our guide, right?"

The Great Hoodwinker chuckled and said, "Yes, that's right. But let me say this first. I've only been to the outer periphery of the Sacred Mountains, so I'm not really sure about the situation on the inside."

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt really uncomfortable. So it turned out the Great Hoodwinker was the guide Yang Xiaojin was referring to? The person who was said to have traveled around the periphery of the Sacred Mountains?

It was no wonder this fellow had appeared here. So it turned out the Great Hoodwinker did not only wander around the Northwest all these years, but he had also explored most of the Central Plains already.

The supernatural being frowned and thought for a moment before saying, "Whether or not you've gone into the Sacred Mountains before, it doesn't matter. You'll still have to complete the journey with us before you can leave. How else would I know if you'll leak our information and route to others?"

The Great Hoodwinker said a little reluctantly, "I'm just a normal person, not some superhuman. Aren't you sending me to my death by asking me to go into the Sacred Mountains with you all? If you insist that I have to travel into the Sacred Mountains, I'd rather not earn this money."

Ren Xiaosu nearly rolled his eyes at the side. He did not believe the Great Hoodwinker was a normal person at all. How could a normal person possibly survive through so many dangers?

He was obviously putting on an act here!

The supernatural being standing across from him pondered things for a moment and said, "I also won't insist that you go into the Sacred Mountains with us for nothing. Our team can pay you more. We'll add one million yuan to your compensation."

The Great Hoodwinker hesitated for a long time before reluctantly agreeing to it. He acted so convincingly that it felt like he was really afraid of dying.

To the Great Hoodwinker, money was not important. What was most important was that these people believed he was just a normal person.

It was not Yang Xiaojin and Ren Xiaosu's exclusive right to hide their identities while waiting for an opportunity to strike. Most people would also choose to do so in an unfamiliar environment or group.

The Great Hoodwinker was only going with them to gather intel, not to die.

Then the supernatural being looked at Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. "And the two of you are?"

"Oh, we're both C-rank hitmen. We came here after receiving the text," Ren Xiaosu answered. "She's my partner."

The assistant behind the supernatural being started laughing. "Is there even a need for C-rank hitmen to have partners?"

Ren Xiaosu said nonchalantly, "It's precisely because we're weak that we need to find a partner."

Yang Xiaojin, who was next to him, said nothing. Both of them were calm and collected people. When they made their moves, each of them was more unscrupulous than the other. Since they were planning to hide in the group for now, it would, of course, be better for them to keep a low profile.

The supernatural being introduced himself, "My name is Cheng Yu, and I'll be leading you all into the Sacred Mountains this time. Actually, I wasn't expecting that C-rank hitmen would also participate in this mission. I hope there aren't too many people of your level on the team. I also hope you two won't be a burden during our infiltration into the Sacred Mountains. I'll make myself clear: If you can't keep up with the pace of our march, you'll be left behind."

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin looked at each other. "Alright."

"Let's go inside then," Cheng Yu said with a frown. He wondered why the Anjing House would mass send those texts to the B and C-rank hitmen as well? Were they screwing around with them?