

First Order 681

Chapter 681: Assembling

When the Anjing House decided to attack the Pyro Company in the Sacred Mountains, their official members set off to the designated black markets to assemble the hitmen.

Cheng Yu was quite resistant to the idea of entering the Sacred Mountains to begin with. After all, it was a strategic location for the Pyro Company. Even though the Sacred Mountains spanned such a large area that their troops had to be scattered at different points, they must still have some contingency plans in place.

If they were to rashly enter the Sacred Mountains under such circumstances, they might just end up losing really badly.

But some things just could not be refused even if one did not want to do it.

Now that Cheng Yu realized there were actually amateurs who were C-rank hitmen on the team, his mood worsened.

Cheng Yu lifted the door curtain and walked into the room. He looked around at the dozen or so people sitting inside. "Is everyone here to take part in the mission?"

No one answered him. Yang Xiaojin leaned against the doorframe and started sizing up the people one by one. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu, who was half a head taller, was standing behind her. "Something about these people doesn't feel right."

Yang Xiaojin nodded but the two of them did not continue talking. This was not the right place for them to discuss any further speculations in detail.

Actually, the two of them could tell the people in this room were not simple at all. There might even be quite a few experts from the consortiums hiding among them.

Since Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were willing to follow the Anjing House into the Sacred Mountains, the other organizations' experts would be even more willing to take advantage of the situation by tagging onto a larger group.

Therefore, no one here could be trusted. Only the Great Hoodwinker, Yang Xiaojin, and Ren Xiaosu could trust one another.

At this moment, another dozen people walked in from outside. Ren Xiaosu turned around and was surprised to see the person who had scammed them earlier was here as well. When this person saw Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin, he looked a little embarrassed. However, Yang Xiaojin's lips curled. Did this person think it would be so easy to get her money?

She even took back the dagger she had promised to Ren Xiaosu. This girl was never a generous person to begin with!

After everyone had entered the room, Cheng Yu said to them, "We'll assemble in an hour, so take this time to prepare your logistics. We estimate we'll need to survive in the Sacred Mountains for at least 15 days, so I don't want anyone to say you're not prepared once we're on the road. I won't be responsible for providing any logistics support to you. Later, the guide will lead us to the outer perimeter of the Sacred Mountains. After we enter the territory of the Sacred Mountains, I don't care what ulterior motives you might have, but you must listen to my orders."

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he felt Cheng Yu must also know the identities of the members in the group were very complicated. That was why he emphasized he did not care what their motives were.

Only a few people in the room responded to what Cheng Yu said. Ren Xiaosu noticed three people. The first one was a middle-aged man who was sitting quietly in the corner. As he sat in the corner, his body was postured to constantly be on guard against the others. But what caught Ren Xiaosu's attention was that the man did not even have any calluses on his hands. He did not look like a normal hitman at all, so he was quite likely a supernatural being.

The second person was a young man who kept glancing at Cheng Yu and the others. It was as though he were paying attention to where they kept their weapons.

The third person was a young woman. Ren Xiaosu was just about to make a more detailed inspection of her.

Ow! Ren Xiaosu grimaced in pain as he looked at Yang Xiaojin. Then Yang Xiaojin let go of her hand pinching Ren Xiaosu and whispered, "Where are you looking?"

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. But Yang Xiaojin continued, "You don't have to look anymore. That woman is a superhuman."

It was unknown just how many supernatural beings had gathered in this small little room in the black market. It was clear the Anjing House intended to lead the experts from the various forces into the Sacred Mountains so they could make things difficult for the Pyro Company.

As a matter of fact, Yang Anjing was also a very ruthless person.

Other people would recruit experts into their own ranks in order to achieve their goals. But Yang Anjing started the Anjing House and made all the other forces take the initiative to get ahold of the cell phones and help her with her missions. All she needed to do was dangle the carrot, and whoever was willing would take the bait.

Ren Xiaosu thought maybe Yang Anjing had already planned everything when she first established the Anjing House.

After agreeing on the assembly time, Ren Xiaosu, Yang Xiaojin, and the others went to walk around the black market. Other than information trading, assassination missions, money laundering, and casino gambling, firearms and ammunition were also sold here. There was even an amulet industry too!

The people selling the firearms and ammunition said that as long as the buyers had enough money, they could even get them an armored vehicle if they wanted. It was as though there was nothing these arms dealers could not get their hands on.

The person hawking amulets said his products would calm the wearer and cleanse their sins. It could also help them pursue good fortune and avoid disasters.

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Do these things even have a market?"

Yang Xiaojin glanced at the stall and said, "The people who are here have done too many guilty things. Some of them can't even get a good night's rest because of their conscience. Not everyone can kill without batting an eyelid."

Off to the side, the Great Hoodwinker said with a smile, "This lady our future commander fancies is very knowledgeable indeed. You're absolutely right. There's a lot of people in the black market who're willing to buy these charms. Even if it may sound foolish, all they want is to have peace of mind."

Yang Xiaojin looked at the Great Hoodwinker speechlessly. She kept getting the feeling this guy was just a random person Ren Xiaosu had hired with money to praise him in her presence, not someone who was in charge of intelligence and field operations for Fortress 178.

The Great Hoodwinker smiled until his face was all creased and said, "Miss, why don't you let me read your fortune? Our future commander knows that I, Divine Foresight, am capable of seeing both the past and the future."

Ren Xiaosu said with a dark expression, "Don't you bring up the 'Prosperous Northwest' again!"

"Haha." The Great Hoodwinker said awkwardly, "How did you guess?"

"Do you even know how to read fortunes?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

If he said he did not, what about the time when he told the Lord of Wolves, Li Qingzheng, he was destined to meet a benefactor in this life?

But if he said he knew how to read fortunes, then why did he keep going on and on about the Prosperous Northwest to everyone? How did that make him someone who was in charge of intelligence and field operations? He was clearly the director of Fortress 178's Recruitment Division overseeing their talent acquisition program.

The Great Hoodwinker sighed and said, "To be honest with you, Future Commander, I didn't actually know how to read fortunes at the beginning. When I was younger, I hooked up with a woman and got intimate with her at her place when her husband happened to come home. To explain the situation, she told her husband I was a fortune teller. Then I randomly read his fortune and told him he would definitely get promoted within three days. I had only said that to get off the hook, but I didn't expect that guy to really be promoted the very next day."

Ren Xiaosu was dumbfounded. "Has your tongue received some kind of blessing?"

The Great Hoodwinker sighed and said, "Later, her husband even recommended a lot of people have their fortunes told by me. Gradually, more and more people started approaching me for my fortune telling services. Sometimes, I even wonder if I really know something about geomantic omens while lying in bed in the middle of the night."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the Great Hoodwinker skeptically. He was trying to discern whether the other party was lying or not.

However, it was already approaching the time for them to assemble. The three of them packed up the supplies they had just bought and left. Ren Xiaosu wanted to carry Yang Xiaojin's backpack for her, but Yang Xiaojin said she could handle it herself.

This girl had never pretended like she needed help from others.

Chapter 682: Black sniper rifle

On the way out of the black market.

"Why are the Sacred Mountains called the Sacred Mountains?"

This question might sound a little nonsensical, but the Great Hoodwinker's interest was aroused when he heard it. He answered Ren Xiaosu, "Actually, this mountain range did not have a name in the past. Everyone was caught up with trying to survive in these wastelands, so why would anyone care to remember its name? Moreover, the terrain around here had also changed since The Cataclysm. Later, the Pyro Company only named this place the Sacred Mountains after they set up a research laboratory here and cordoned it off."

"I keep getting the feeling that this name sounds a little religious. It's somewhat awkward to hear it being called that," Ren Xiaosu muttered.

"It has nothing to do with religion at all. The Pyro Company only believes in genetics." The Great Hoodwinker said with a sigh, "However, there's a rumor circulating among a minority of people that this is hallowed ground. The Qing Consortium defined the Jing Mountains as hallowed ground as well, but now that the Jing Mountains have been destroyed, no one dares to explore there anymore."

"Hallowed ground?" Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Does that mean that something like a god has appeared at this place before? What's the explanation for that?"

"That, I'm not sure. It's very difficult to infiltrate the Pyro Company's territories. Back then, I was only brave enough to walk around the outer perimeter of the Sacred Mountains. It somehow felt like there was some kind of unknown danger lurking on the inside." The Great Hoodwinker said, "However, the Qing Consortium seems to have a lot more spies out there. They defined it as hallowed ground because there was someone who appeared there, or was born there, that sparked changes to the surrounding environment."

Ren Xiaosu had never asked Luo Lan about these things. As for the Jing Mountains, it was a memory from a long time ago.

However, Ren Xiaosu knew Qing Zhen disliked the Pyro Company a lot. With Qing Zhen's character, he would indeed spare no effort to understand as much as he could about his opponents.

Therefore, this information that had originated from the Qing Consortium might very well be true.

“Hallowed ground...” Ren Xiaosu muttered to himself. That place was where the Pyro Company’s Laboratory 39 was, and now, it had somehow become known as hallowed ground? Could this also be related to the No. 001 Experimental?

“Why are you suddenly so interested in this matter?” the Great Hoodwinker asked.

“Yang Xiaojin and I both went to the Jing Mountains. We can at best be considered survivors of that cataclysmic earthquake.” Ren Xiaosu said in a low voice, “If there’s a correlation between the two hallowed grounds, we had better be more careful. There could be extremely terrifying creatures living here in the Sacred Mountains.”

When they were traveling into the Jing Mountains, that black shadow in the river gave Ren Xiaosu a sense of danger. Then there were the events of the fish bones and meat and human corpses that had mysteriously disappeared. There were also the Experimentals and face bugs too. Some of those were strange existences that even supernatural beings were not capable of dealing with.

But what worried Ren Xiaosu the most was that enormous monster living in the volcano. Could there be something similar lurking in the Sacred Mountains?

Once the volcanic eruption destroyed the Jing Mountains, Ren Xiaosu was constantly worried for several months that the creature would come out of the volcano. But when there were no signs of activity there, Ren Xiaosu began to forget about it.

But how could he truly forget about a creature as surreal as that?

If there were also such a monster in the Sacred Mountains, all those who ventured into the Sacred Mountains this time would probably be in trouble.

The three of them were walking at the back of the group. Someone had suggested they drive to the periphery of the Sacred Mountains, but Cheng Yu rejected that plan.

Cheng Yu was a very cautious person. He would rather travel on foot in the wilderness for a 100 kilometers than drive on the main road.

After all, the Sacred Mountains was the home field of the Pyro Company. By being more cautious, it would ensure they could survive longer.

At this moment, Cheng Yu turned around and shouted at the Great Hoodwinker, “Guide, what are you constantly mumbling about at the back of the group? Lead the way from the front! How are we going to proceed from here?”

The Great Hoodwinker obliged as he jogged to the front of the group. “Normal people like me can’t keep up with the pace of people like you. My feet aren’t nimble either, so isn’t it quite normal that I fall behind? You should have a map on you, right? Let me draw the route of the hike for you.”

Cheng Yu thought for a moment before having his assistant bring over a map. The Great Hoodwinker took the map and drew on it as he said, "To reach the outer perimeter of the Sacred Mountains, we still have to cross three large mountains first. We'll reach the foot of Mt. Fang by tonight, then Mt. Wuzhai in two days, and finally arrive at Mt. Shenchu after seven days. Once we get to the mountainside of Mt. Shenchu, we should be able to see the outline of the Sacred Mountains."

Cheng Yu was a little unhappy. "Why does it take seven days when it's only a 100 kilometers of walking or so?"

"Because my legs aren't good. If you all think that I'm slowing you down, you can carry me. Or since I've already drawn the route, maybe you should go there by yourselves?" the Great Hoodwinker muttered as he marked the map.

Cheng Yu was so angry that he laughed. "Carry you? Why don't you die instead? You better stay put in the team and behave yourself. If it's gonna take seven days, so be it."

When they arrived at the foot of Mt. Fang that night, the Great Hoodwinker secretly said to Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin, "There's some things that I didn't tell them. In recent years, I've been coming to the outer perimeter of the Sacred Mountains yearly. As a result, I realized the zone in which the plants have mutated has slowly been expanding. So we must be careful once we've gone past Mt. Wuzhai so that we don't end up dying."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought he could have Zhou Yingxue come here in the future. Didn't she have the ability to replicate the powers of mutated plants now? This would be the best place to collect them.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu stepped away from the Great Hoodwinker and asked Yang Xiaojin in a low voice, "Do you have any weaknesses in your superpower? Let's communicate this in advance so that we're better aware when fighting others. Take me for example. The shadow clone power that I copied from Xu Xianchu, if it gets hit hard enough between the eyes, it will vanish. The steam locomotive power that I copied from Wang Congyang will reflect any damage done to it onto me in the form of pain."

All supernatural beings had weaknesses in their superpowers. For example, Zhang Baogen, whose power was blowing explosive saliva bubbles, could not do so if his mouth was dry.

Powers were born from the willpower of a person, but that did not mean it would be perfect. This was something limited by objective factors.

Under normal circumstances, supernatural beings would never tell others about the weaknesses of their superpowers. However, this was not a problem between Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin.

Yang Xiaojin gave it some thought and said, "My power's weakness is that my sniper rifle can only fire one shot at a time. Every time it's fired, I have to reload, and the rate of fire restricts how effectively I can use my superpower. I've always had a feeling that I can't exert any strength at all."

Ren Xiaosu was a little stunned. In previous battles, Yang Xiaojin's rate of fire had always been extremely high, such as in Luoyang City and the Li Consortium's stronghold.

If a bolt action rifle could already be fired at such a high frequency, what kind of results could she get with an automatic rifle?

Wait a minute, he had two black sabers and two black sniper rifles, didn't he? However, "Old Xu" was not capable of firing the sniper rifle with any accuracy at all, so it might as well be carrying a heavy machine gun instead.

In that case, could he let Yang Xiaojin use his black sniper rifle? After all, the black sniper rifle had so many advantages. Its effective range was even farther, and there was no need to equip it with an additional flash guard or manually reload it. There was also the black bullet ammunition Ren Xiaosu had not dared to use even now.

Chapter 683: Penalties

While everyone was still setting up their tents and starting a cookfire, Ren Xiaosu ditched the Great Hoodwinker and led Yang Xiaojin into the mountains.

Cheng Yu, who was in charge of leading the team, frowned at the sight. It was only the first day, yet there were already people moving around on their own? Was that young couple so afraid of loneliness? Was seeking pleasure all they could think of at their age?

They were in the middle of a war!

But on second thought, these two C-rank hitmen might not even be able to make it out of the Sacred Mountains alive. Moreover, they did not look like supernatural beings either, so it would not matter how hard they fought. What they could achieve would still be very limited in the end.

Cheng Yu refocused his attention on the suspected hitmen from the consortiums. He had to pay attention in case they turned against him.

However, Cheng Yu still called his assistant over in the end. "You're the most skilled at combat. Go follow those two and see what they're up to."

His assistant nodded and said, "Alright, you can count on me."

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin had already arrived at another mountainside. After making sure no one had seen them, Ren Xiaosu said, "I can conjure up a sniper rifle with my power. Would you like to give it a try?"

Yang Xiaojin shook her head. "No. What'll you use if you give it to me?"

"I can conjure two rifles, but the second one's no use to me," Ren Xiaosu replied. He had made such a wise choice to copy Xu Xianchu's superpower.

The shadow clone was not only one of Ren Xiaosu's greatest helpers, it was also directly linked to the palace. As a result, every time Ren Xiaosu unlocked a weapon, he would get two sets. This made Ren Xiaosu feel like he had taken advantage of the palace.

As he spoke, he took out the black sniper rifle from his storage space. Yang Xiaojin looked at it curiously. "Why is your superpower so strange? It's like a treasure chest with all kinds of items in it. What special traits does this black sniper rifle have?"

Ren Xiaosu said, "Its effective range is over 2,600 meters, and there's no need to manually reload. There's also many different bullets to choose from and no need for an additional flash guard to be attached. I call it the black sniper rifle."

"It can suppress muzzle flash without a flash guard?" Yang Xiaojin muttered, "Then it's pretty apt that it's called a black sniper rifle. It'll be very suitable for covert operations."

Yang Xiaojin listened as Ren Xiaosu detailed the black sniper rifle's attributes to her. She was particularly interested when he mentioned the bullets did not need to be manually reloaded and the muzzle flash was automatically suppressed.

But right as Yang Xiaojin took the additional black sniper rifle from Ren Xiaosu, the long-awaited voice from the palace suddenly said, "The black sniper rifle has been detected to be compatible with the target's power. Would you like to gift it to the target?"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. First, he was very happy the palace had finally spoken again. Second, the palace sounded exceptionally pleasant today. It was actually allowing him to gift the black sniper rifle to Yang Xiaojin?

However, Ren Xiaosu turned wary. After all, his stingy palace used to demand a lot of money from him just to open up some storage space. So why was it being so generous all of a sudden?

Ren Xiaosu asked in his mind, "And what's the price to pay?"

"The host will accept being punished for a duration of seven days. The choice of penalty will be random."

"What's with this random penalty thingy? Are you trying to cause trouble again?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "Can't you just tell me what the punishment will be?"

Seeing that they would only be entering the Sacred Mountains seven days later, the palace probably did not want anything to happen to him either. Therefore, the punishment duration was set for exactly seven days. In that case, this was not an unacceptable outcome.

But not knowing what the punishment would be, Ren Xiaosu felt a little uneasy. Who knew what the palace was really up to?

Seeing Yang Xiaojin holding the black sniper rifle so tightly like she really wanted it, Ren Xiaosu clenched his teeth and said, "Gift!"

However, Yang Xiaojin suddenly frowned. It felt like her power was being controlled externally as her own sniper rifle materialized and turned into an apparition.

Slowly, that sniper rifle's apparition started merging with the black sniper rifle. The palace had turned the black sniper rifle into Yang Xiaojin's power!

Ren Xiaosu was also stunned. Back when Xu Xianchu was showing off his black cauldron, Ren Xiaosu thought he might have unconsciously bestowed it on him. Because he kept making others take the blame for him, the palace decided to compensate Xu Xianchu with a black cauldron.

But Ren Xiaosu was not very sure at that time. After all, no one in this world could add to the superpowers of others, right?

But now, Ren Xiaosu was finally sure he was the one who had given that black cauldron to Xu Xianchu.

Ren Xiaosu had already found the palace to be extremely magical. It was even more magical than most of the powers supernatural beings possessed in this world. Others would only have one superpower to speak of, while the most powerful ones thus far might wield two superpowers at the same time.

But it was different for Ren Xiaosu. He had so many superpowers even he felt it was abnormal. Ren Xiaosu found it terrifying just thinking about how he could replicate other people's superpowers and enhance them stronger for himself. Of course, this was also the reason why he had always been hiding his superpowers from everyone. If anyone were to find out about it, he would be in great danger.

But now he realized he could bestow powers upon others too.

Being able to bestow superpowers to supernatural beings was like a divine gift from the gods. It was like he was naturally at a higher level than others.

Moreover, Li Shentan said before that he was unable to hypnotize him. During the battle in Luoyang City, a superhuman had tried to dictate his fate but was met with backlash instead. It seemed like a lot of supernatural beings were unable to deal with him in their encounters.

Other supernatural beings, such as Luo Xinyu, could only activate her Shadow Door power about a dozen times per day at most. But Ren Xiaosu, whose mental strength never seemed to run out, could open it whenever he wished.

Wang Congyang's steam locomotive only had four carriages, but his had sixteen. If Wang Congyang found out about this, he would probably die of anger.

All of this seemed to be telling Ren Xiaosu that he was no average person.

But Yan Liuyuan's power was clearly able to affect Ren Xiaosu. In that case, could Yan Liuyuan be at the same level as him? Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled.

But before he could think further, the punishment was meted out.

At this moment, the assistant Cheng Yu had sent to tail Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin was slowly creeping up on them. He did not dare to approach them rashly either. If Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were hiding their strength, wouldn't it be very dangerous for him to get too close to them?

He was on the other side of the mountain where he took out his binoculars to observe them in the distance. However, he was stunned by what he saw. Then he turned around and returned to the campsite.

When Cheng Yu saw his assistant returning, he asked, "Why are you back so soon? Did you see what they were doing?"

The assistant hesitated for a moment before saying, "I did, but it was such a strange sight. I don't know how to describe it."

Cheng Yu frowned. "Why? Was it something weird?"

"Yes, it was way too weird." The assistant said, "The two of them were actually jumping rope on the mountainside!"

Cheng Yu was confused. He had thought of the possibility that his assistant might catch them getting intimate, or that the two of them were plotting something. He predicted many possibilities of what they could be up to, but he never expected they would actually sneak out of the campsite just so they could jump rope together!

As Cheng Yu imagined that scene, the mental image killed him!

When Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin returned to the campsite with dark expressions, they felt like Cheng Yu was giving them strange looks.

Chapter 684: Your expertise

After Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin returned to the campsite, they sat in front of the campfire the Great Hoodwinker had built and remained there in silence.

The Great Hoodwinker wanted to say something to the two of them, but when he realized they did not look too happy, he went back to cooking.

All of a sudden, Yang Xiaojin asked in a whisper, "Did you copy your jumping rope skill from me?"

Ren Xiaosu nodded blankly and said, "Mhm, my Skill Duplication technique randomly picks a skill to copy. I don't know what skill I'll get either."

"Then what other skills have you copied from me?" Yang Xiaojin asked.

"Nothing else," Ren Xiaosu replied.

Yang Xiaojin seemed to let out a sigh of relief.

However, Ren Xiaosu immediately added, "But I know that you also have a skill like singing nursery rhymes."

As soon as he said that, Yang Xiaojin's mouth twitched. She did not expect this side of her would get discovered by Ren Xiaosu just like that.

Yang Xiaojin then said, "But I still don't understand why you would suddenly start jumping rope."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the campfire before him and said numbly, "I don't know either...."

Initially, Ren Xiaosu thought the palace's so-called punishment would require him to help or save someone.

Weren't all the palace's quests like that?

But he could never have expected that the moment the gifting was completed, the palace would make him and Yang Xiaojin jump rope together. If it were not completed, his Strength and Dexterity attributes would get lowered.

Attributes were way too important to him. It could be said that the reason why "Old Xu" was so powerful now was all due to his attributes.

As such, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin jumped rope together for half an hour. Moreover, it was Ren Xiaosu who did the jumping while Yang Xiaojin and a tree acted as the pillars on either side.

This was also what baffled Cheng Yu's assistant the most. When it came to jumping rope, shouldn't it be the girl doing the jumping? Why did he see the guy jumping then?!

Cheng Yu's assistant's spying had definitely not escaped Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin's counterreconnaissance. So this made Ren Xiaosu even more downcast. Not only did he embarrass himself in front of Yang Xiaojin, he even embarrassed himself in front of an outsider!

Seeing that the punishment quest was going to last for another seven days, Ren Xiaosu wondered just how much more trouble his palace would cause him.

Of course, it was not all bad today. At the very least, Yang Xiaojin's superpower had advanced to another level. Ren Xiaosu was already looking forward to Yang Xiaojin's fire support in the future. After all, she was already so strong even though she was using a bolt action rifle. In that case, wouldn't she become even more fearsome now?

They would be entering the Sacred Mountains in another seven days, so it was indeed a good thing that they could increase their powers before that.

Ren Xiaosu asked the Great Hoodwinker next to him, "Did anything happen while we were away?"

The Great Hoodwinker responded, "Nothing much, actually. Other than Cheng Yu's assistant tailing you two, everyone else obediently stayed behind at the campsite. However, I realized that the young man to our 8 o'clock and the young woman to our 9 o'clock are probably acquainted. Although they pretended not to know each other, the two of them made eye contact. They might both be from the same consortium."

Ren Xiaosu looked out of the corner of his eye. The young man and woman turned out to be the two people he suspected might be supernatural beings.

The Great Hoodwinker continued, "However, it's very normal to have someone you can trust tagging along when going to a place like the Sacred Mountains with such a large group of people. After all, it'll only work if you have someone trustworthy to take turns keeping watch at night. Otherwise, you won't even know how you died if something happens. There's a total of 31 people here, and five or six groups likely exist within the team. There won't be many lone wolves for sure."

While they were resting at the campsite, the Great Hoodwinker had been scrutinizing everyone. And everyone else was also examining the others. But to the Great Hoodwinker's relief, no one seemed too interested in him as their guide. Their attention was mainly focused on Cheng Yu and the other hitmen. And Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were also not in the scope of their observations either.

At this moment, Cheng Yu stood up and said to everyone, "Although we haven't reached the Sacred Mountains yet, it's not necessarily safe down here either. So we should have some people keeping watch during the night. Everyone, I plan to divide all of us into two groups. One group will keep watch in the first half of the night while the other will keep watch in the latter half. How about that?"

This was supposed to be a very normal request, but no one responded. Everyone just calmly looked at Cheng Yu.

In fact, the people with their own teammates within this larger group had already discussed the night watch order. If Cheng Yu made any further arrangements, it would very likely disrupt their original plans.

Therefore, no one wanted to accept Cheng Yu's arrangements.

Cheng Yu waited for a dozen seconds, but in the end, only two people responded to him. The others kept busy with their own matters and did not even look at him anymore.

The Great Hoodwinker said softly to Ren Xiaosu, "The people who responded to Cheng Yu might be the Anjing House members that he had arranged to be in the team. They're probably here to back him up and give him the necessary support."

Yang Xiaojin nodded.

Sensing the awkward atmosphere, the Great Hoodwinker continued, "It's actually not that easy for the Anjing House to send everyone into the Sacred Mountains to trouble the Pyro Company..."

As he said that, the Great Hoodwinker was surprised to see Ren Xiaosu suddenly stand up and walk to the center of the campsite.

Cheng Yu looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, "What? Is something the matter?"

Ren Xiaosu said in a serious tone, "Since everyone seems to be quite distracted, I'll put on a little talent show for y'all to watch. 'Before the door grows a vine of grapes, tender green leaves that have just sprouted. A snail carrying its heavy shell, inching slowly towards the top...'[1]"

Cheng Yu was confused.

Everyone looked at Ren Xiaosu in shock. The Great Hoodwinker and Yang Xiaojin were both stunned!

Weren't they just discussing who should keep watch during the night? How did it end up with someone singing?!

After he finished singing the nursery rhyme, Ren Xiaosu returned to Yang Xiaojin's side and sat down expressionlessly. Yang Xiaojin asked in a whisper, "So you've copied my Nursery Rhymes Singing too?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu said ashen-faced.

Next to them, the Great Hoodwinker tried to ease the atmosphere. "Future Commander, your singing sounds very pleasant."

"Enough, stop flattering me already." Ren Xiaosu was on the verge of breaking down. Just how many times did the palace have to mete out punishments every day?

During the journey, everyone was trying to determine the strength and character of the others based on their behavior. Not many of those who were present were truly amateurs, and their investigative instincts and judgment were all top-notch. However, everyone suddenly realized they could not get a read on Ren Xiaosu at all.

No matter how they looked at him, they just could not understand anything about him.

However, this sudden turn of events saved Cheng Yu from embarrassment. The awkward atmosphere allowed him to skip over the topic of who should keep watch during the night.

Then the young man the Great Hoodwinker had been paying close attention to at the campsite said with a smile, "Since we're all going into the Sacred Mountains together and will be facing battle with the Pyro Company in the future, why don't we all share our expertise so we can assign duties according to our capabilities?"

After saying that, the first person he looked towards was actually Ren Xiaosu. The young man smiled and said, "So, what's your expertise?"

Ren Xiaosu snapped, "Singing nursery rhymes."

Chapter 685: Obfuscation

Ren Xiaosu had already given up. He could foresee that in the next six and a half days, the palace would definitely brew a lot more trouble.

Therefore, when that young man asked everyone about their expertise, he simply told him it was singing nursery rhymes.

The reason why the young man chose Ren Xiaosu as the first person to ask was mainly to test him out. After that, he wanted to see how the others would respond so he could get a deeper understanding of the others on the team.

But the moment he posed that question to Ren Xiaosu, it might as well have ended right there. It was impossible to continue asking any further!

The young man turned towards the Great Hoodwinker in slight embarrassment and asked him about his expertise. With Ren Xiaosu kicking it off by answering that his expertise was singing nursery rhymes, the Great Hoodwinker followed up by saying that he was good at kneading playdough. If it weren't because he had taken into consideration that everyone was about to have dinner, he even wanted to say he was good at scratching his feet.

As such, this discussion finally died off here. Cheng Yu sat back down at his campfire and looked at Ren Xiaosu through the flickering flames.

He was a little puzzled. Was this young man playing dumb or did he really have some kind of strange fetish?

Cheng Yu was sure that Ren Xiaosu was not stupid. After all, an idiot could not become a C-rank hitman. Cheng Yu was different from Zhou Yingxue in that he had to work his way up to become an A-rank hitman before getting accepted as an official member of the Anjing House. Cheng Yu had to conscientiously perform his missions in order to rise up the ranks.

He knew full well that even if an idiot had been lucky enough to pick up an Anjing House cell phone, it would be impossible for them to rise from D-rank to C-rank.

But when he thought about his assistant mentioning that Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin had gone out to jump rope in the afternoon, Cheng Yu couldn't be sure of his judgment.

Cheng Yu had wanted to conduct a check on everyone tonight, but it seemed that he would have to leave it for now.

To ease the awkward atmosphere, Ren Xiaosu headed out alone and caught two large rabbits to roast for dinner.

Once he got that rolling, many others in the campsite also headed out to hunt. As many people went out, no one could tell who had gone hunting for game or who was taking the opportunity to go elsewhere to plot something with their companions.

Ren Xiaosu hung the plump rabbits on a tree branch and said to Yang Xiaojin while smearing honey on them, "Laugh if you want. There's no need to hold it in."

Yang Xiaojin pursed her lips to stop laughing. "It sounded pretty nice."

Off to the side, the Great Hoodwinker said, "I know! Future Commander, you must be trying to obfuscate these people so they can't see through you. Was that why you suddenly acted like you were crazy?"

Act crazy, my ass!

Ren Xiaosu's face darkened as he handed the branch with the rabbits hanging from it to the Great Hoodwinker. "Leave me alone!"

That night, the Great Hoodwinker negotiated with Ren Xiaosu and said he wanted to keep watch for the night by himself. He said he felt quite energetic and could keep watch without problems, but Ren Xiaosu did not agree.

In the end, the Great Hoodwinker said he would take turns with Ren Xiaosu and keep watch for each half of the night so Yang Xiaojin would not have to. After all, she was a girl, so she should get some preferential treatment since they were out in the wilderness.

But Yang Xiaojin objected. In her opinion, everyone on a team should always do their best. At this moment, there should be no differentiation between genders. There were simply teammates and companions.

After compromising, it was decided Ren Xiaosu and the Great Hoodwinker would each keep watch for half of the night today, while Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin would share the duties of keeping watch for tomorrow night. The day after that, it would be Yang Xiaojin and the Great Hoodwinker's turns to keep watch. As such, there would always be one person in the trio at their best during the day to deal with any emergencies.

While keeping watch, Ren Xiaosu made some careful observations during the first half of the night. Just as the Great Hoodwinker had said, these seemingly independent experts seemed to have already been assigned their duties as they went about keeping watch for the night.

During the day, Ren Xiaosu wondered if there were really some lone wolves among them. But now he realized there was not a single one.

Previously, Ren Xiaosu was worried the Anjing House might not be able to trouble the Pyro Company much even though they had split into several groups to enter the Sacred Mountains.

But from the looks of it now, the organizations probably wanted to get their hands on the No. 001 Experimental very badly.

Immortality?

Ren Xiaosu had never thought about living forever. He always felt it might not be a good thing for some people to live too long.

If a cat was not happy, having nine lives would be kind of sorrowful.

Ren Xiaosu did not think those people living in high places and had a grip on authority were truly happy at all.

Tonight, Ren Xiaosu was keeping watch for the first half of the night. Even though he was on guard in front of Yang Xiaojin's tent, Yang Xiaojin still placed her pistol nearby so she could easily grab it. However, her breathing this time was much more even, and it was as though she was sleeping better.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and glanced at Yang Xiaojin, who was sound asleep. This girl must have been so wary in the past because she did not have anyone she could rely on.

Comparing Yang Xiaojin's current state with how she was in the past, she did not even fully trust Luo Xinyu. After all, Luo Xinyu had always been by her side while they were in the Jing Mountains. But at that time, Ren Xiaosu clearly noticed the girl had never really slept well.

At this moment, the young man, who had earlier asked Ren Xiaosu what his expertise was, got up and walked into the wilderness. It might be that he wanted to relieve himself.

Initially, Ren Xiaosu did not take this matter to heart. However, something the palace said suddenly caused his expression to change.

Ren Xiaosu paled as he sat at the entrance of the tent. When the young man returned to the campsite more than ten minutes later, Ren Xiaosu looked up and asked, "Why were you gone for so long? Did you pee on your hands?"

The young man was shocked. Are you crazy?!

The young man flew into a rage out of humiliation. "What's so strange about that? Have you never peed on your hands before?"

Ren Xiaosu sighed. Judging by this reaction, he actually got it right!

But he really did not want to ask such a weird question in the first place. It was the palace that made him do it!

Moreover, after this quest was completed, the palace suddenly added, "As you have completed three penalties perfectly, a side quest has been activated. If you can complete every quest perfectly over the next seven days, you will receive a new skill reward."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He did not even hear what the young man said to him after that. After completing all three penalties perfectly today, he had activated a new side quest that would reward him with a new skill?

When it came to new skills, Ren Xiaosu got really excited at the thought. After all, everything the palace gave him as a reward, including a crop like the Potato Shooter, always proved to be useful at critical moments.

Ren Xiaosu was a very pragmatic person. As long as there was a new skill to be earned, what was there to be embarrassed about?

Then Ren Xiaosu heard the sound of something stepping on decaying leaves in the wilderness behind him. But when he turned around, he did not see anything.

Ren Xiaosu counted the number of people at the campsite. Everyone was right here, so who could have made that sound just now?

He recalled his encounters in the Jing Mountains. At that time, they had also encountered many strange happenings.

The commotion outside the campsite did not only alarm Ren Xiaosu, but many of those who were sleeping also suddenly opened their eyes. It seemed that everyone here was no average person.

Yang Xiaojin asked in a whisper, "Is it an enemy attack?"

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "Don't worry, go back to sleep. Everything will be fine with me around."

He was no longer that ignorant young man from the Jing Mountains.

Chapter 686: Song and dance

Many people at the campsite were woken up and got out of their tents to find out what was happening.

Cheng Yu looked at Ren Xiaosu, who was on watch duty. As Ren Xiaosu was closest to the source of the commotion, he bluntly asked him, "Did you see anything just now? Was it someone from our campsite?"

"No, everyone in our group was at the campsite. It sounded like footsteps to me, but it was very light. If there were really someone approaching, it would have to be a child," Ren Xiaosu answered.

The assistant next to Cheng Yu got goosebumps all over his body. "It's the middle of the night in the wilderness. Where would a child like that possibly come from?"

"I'm just making an analogy." Ren Xiaosu looked around at everyone and realized they were all frowning and looking a little worried. He suddenly said, "Since you all look so nervous, why don't I put on a show—"

"No thanks, good night." Cheng Yu turned around and went back to his tent. Rather than being overly suspicious out here and listening to Ren Xiaosu's performance, he might as well go back to sleep!

Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips regretfully. This time, he was not doing this because the palace had issued a quest to him but out of his own enthusiasm.

After all, if he wanted to complete his penalties perfectly over these seven days, he would have to face them with a brand new attitude. Instead of accepting it passively, he might as well take the initiative to do them with enthusiasm. It would all be for the sake of a new skill!

The Great Hoodwinker also woke up and went over to Ren Xiaosu at this moment. "Are you sure that it was the sound of footsteps just now?"

Earlier, the Great Hoodwinker had bravely gone out for a stroll in the wilderness. However, he did not notice any footprints. This was indeed very strange. No matter how light the intruder's footsteps were, there should at least be some traces of footprints left behind, right?

"I'm sure. It was approaching in a rhythmic pattern." Ren Xiaosu said, "You previously mentioned that the zone of mutation taking place in the Sacred Mountains has been constantly expanding. Who knows, we might be closing in on that zone now. And it should be quite normal if something were to come running out of there. Anyways, just be careful."

"Alright, why don't you get some sleep then?" The Great Hoodwinker said, "It's my turn to keep watch."

"Mhm, shout for me anytime if something happens."

Everyone seemed to stop going out to relieve themselves in case they met with any accidents. A few of them even decided to hold it in until daybreak.

Although they were all experts who had killed people before, they still felt a tinge of fear when faced with a strange existence like the Sacred Mountains.

The Great Hoodwinker was sitting next to the campfire and thinking about something as he looked out for any signs of trouble. But by daybreak, he detected nothing unusual.

Then the Great Hoodwinker saw Ren Xiaosu sneak out of the tent quietly. Just as he was about to greet Ren Xiaosu, he saw Ren Xiaosu raise his index finger to his mouth. "Shh!"

The Great Hoodwinker perked up. He was unsure of what this was about.

The sky was still quite gloomy at this time. The Great Hoodwinker watched as Ren Xiaosu quietly took out a pistol and loaded a magazine. Was he going to make a move on someone?

Thinking of this, the Great Hoodwinker's muscles tensed as he prepared to support Ren Xiaosu at a moment's notice.

He did not care why Ren Xiaosu would suddenly make a move now. In any case, he would just follow along and take on whoever Ren Xiaosu wanted to fight. There need not be any reason for it.

A moment later, Ren Xiaosu suddenly fired three shots into the sky and shouted, "Wake up! It's dawn!"

The Great Hoodwinker was speechless. *'Wait a minute, Future Commander, is this how you usually wake people up?'*

What was he even thinking?!

To say nothing of the Great Hoodwinker, even Cheng Yu, who was jolted awake by Ren Xiaosu, was dumbfounded. He looked at Ren Xiaosu's smiling face and wondered if he was crazy!

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu asked the palace in his mind, "What's the completion level for the quest to wake everyone up?"

"Successfully awakened 17 people. Completion level: Perfect."

Ren Xiaosu asked again, "Can you tell me what that new skill is for?"

"Unauthorized to answer," the palace answered emotionlessly.

"Can't you just give me a general idea of what the skill's about?" Ren Xiaosu said unhappily.

However, the palace ignored him.

At this moment, Cheng Yu asked with a dark expression, "What the hell are you doing? It's only 6 AM."

Ren Xiaosu bowed. "Sorry, I misread the time."

Cheng Yu suddenly felt a little muzzled and couldn't come up with a response.

Ren Xiaosu bowed again. "It won't happen again."

After that, he went back to his tent to sleep.

But while he could fall back asleep, the others could not.

Even Yang Xiaojin came out of her tent grumpily. However, she did not blame Ren Xiaosu as she could guess that he was probably performing some penalty for giving her the black sniper rifle.

Ren Xiaosu did not tell her the specifics, but the timing of Ren Xiaosu going crazy came right after she accepted the black sniper rifle from him. Therefore, she understood this to be the price he had to pay for her accepting the black sniper rifle.

Cheng Yu felt a little helpless. What did he do to deserve such karma? The Anjing House had arranged for him to lead another team into the Sacred Mountains, but he purposely chose this team as they were the last group to enter the Sacred Mountains.

However, the outcome was not what he wanted at all.

At 8 AM, Ren Xiaosu came out of the tent looking very well-rested. The moment he stepped out, everyone looked at him.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Y'all look a little haggard."

Cheng Yu thought to himself, *'Aren't you stating the obvious? Everyone was woken up by that strange commotion in the middle of the night. But before we all could fall back asleep, we got scared awake again by your gunshots! As if we can fucking not look haggard!'*

He ignored Ren Xiaosu and turned around to ask the Great Hoodwinker, "Where do we proceed from here?"

The Great Hoodwinker answered, "We'll head northeast. After we cross that mountain up ahead, we'll reach the boundary of Mt. Wuzhai."

"Why did you come out here by yourself back then?" Cheng Yu suddenly asked.

“Because everyone says that the things found in the Sacred Mountains are worth a lot of money. If you can find any exotic flowers or plants, you can sell them for a high price,” the Great Hoodwinker replied. “There’s people in the black market who’re collectors of such exotic flowers and plants, and they’re willing to pay a high price for them.”

Only then did Cheng Yu stop pursuing the matter. The people who collected exotic flowers and plants in the black market were all spies of consortiums. Why would normal people be interested in those things anyway? Only the consortiums were looking for such things to use in their research.

Cheng Yu took a look at his cell phone and said to the others, “Let’s set off. Everyone, be on high alert. Our team’s the only one that’s taking the Mt. Wuzhai and Mt. Shenchi route. If anything happens, we won’t even be able to call for reinforcements.”

With that, Cheng Yu got up and set off towards the northeast. From time to time, he would even hear Ren Xiaosu singing out loud behind him.

Initially, no one cared about Ren Xiaosu when he started singing. However, his singing was too catchy as they were all nursery rhymes everyone was familiar with. This caused the others in the group to involuntarily start humming along as they walked.

Looking at Mt. Wuzhai in the distance, Cheng Yu felt a little melancholic. It was clearly a very tense atmosphere, and there was also an unknown creature that ventured near their campsite during the night, so why did it feel like they were here on a spring trip while being entertained with song and dance?

Just what did he really come here for...

Chapter 687: An odd superhuman

In order to avoid getting discovered by the Pyro Company, the path the Great Hoodwinker pointed out was the most remote and difficult to take. Initially, there were even some people in the group who criticized the Great Hoodwinker unhappily, “Are you sure you’ve been to the periphery of the Sacred Mountains before? Why do I get the feeling you don’t know the way?”

However, the Great Hoodwinker sneered, “In that case, let me leave. I’m only in charge of bringing y’all to the periphery of the Sacred Mountains. Does it matter which route I take? Besides, this route that I chose is the safest. You’re all highly skilled, and some of you are even supernatural beings. If we encounter the Pyro Company, y’all can just run away. But where am I supposed to run to? I don’t want us encountering them.”

At first, Cheng Yu was also a little displeased with this stubborn guide. But when he realized they really did not encounter any attacks from the Pyro Company along the way, he started to acknowledge the Great Hoodwinker as their guide.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were currently portraying themselves as ordinary people who were C-rank hitmen, so the two of them pretended to be as exhausted as the Great Hoodwinker during their trek across the mountains.

After all, even some supernatural beings would find it a little tough to travel this route, let alone “normal people” like them.

When some of the people in the group saw how exhausted Ren Xiaosu looked, they started laughing in their heads. Some of them even hoped he would start falling behind.

The person who wanted Ren Xiaosu to fall behind the most was definitely Cheng Yu. When he saw Ren Xiaosu panting and looking like he could not walk any further, he said, “Why don’t the two of you turn back? This is not a place where C-rank hitmen should go. Which other C-rank hitmen would go to their deaths out here? You two are probably the only ones.”

But then, the young man who asked Ren Xiaosu his expertise raised his hand and said with a smile, “I’m also a C-rank.”

Cheng Yu was speechless.

He cast an unhappy glance at that young man and saw he was not even panting from the trek across the mountains. He was definitely a supernatural being. Why would a supernatural being like him bother to chip in at this moment? By persuading those two to leave, wouldn’t it be easier for everyone?

Cheng Yu ignored what the young man said and continued trying to persuade Ren Xiaosu to leave. “Our journey has only just started. It’ll probably get even more dangerous after we enter the Sacred Mountains six days later. Don’t think I’m being nasty. I’m just saying this for your own good. You can barely keep up with the group. If you suddenly fall behind when we get to the Sacred Mountains, how’re you going to ensure your survival in that dangerous environment?”

Seeing Ren Xiaosu sink deep into thought, Cheng Yu was ecstatic. He had had enough of the guy’s nursery rhymes. If he could persuade him to leave, it would be a joy for this operation.

For the entire morning, Ren Xiaosu had sung so much it made his head buzz!

“Don’t you think what I said makes sense?” Cheng Yu said earnestly. “Your stamina —”

But Ren Xiaosu said emotionally, “I’m fine. Actually, I also have a superpower.”

Cheng Yu was stunned for a moment. “You’re also a superhuman?”

“I’m not sure if I’m a superhuman or not.” Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, “But as long as someone sings a nursery rhyme for me, I’ll immediately regain my strength.”

Ren Xiaosu sneered in his head. This person was actually trying to dissuade him from entering the Sacred Mountains? *‘Alright then, I won’t pretend anymore. I’m gonna lay all my cards on the table. I’m also a supernatural being!’*

Cheng Yu said in a speechless manner, “Who’re you trying to fool here? Besides, who’s gonna sing nursery rhymes for you? Do you think we have nothing better to do?”

Yang Xiaojin sang, "The bridge in front of the gate, a group of ducks swimming under it. Quick, come and count them! Two, four, six, seven, eight..."[1]

Ren Xiaosu immediately straightened his posture and stopped panting. Then he climbed up the mountain and headed into the distance, dumbfounding Cheng Yu.

Cheng Yu thought it was no wonder that guy had to have a bloody partner. So it turned out it was not only he who sang nursery rhymes. He also had someone sing them for him. They were simply the perfect duo!

But Cheng Yu also thought the guy was probably a supernatural being to begin with. He must have just been pretending previously, right?

Indeed, how many real C-rank hitmen would want to go to their deaths here even if they had nothing better to do?

Therefore, the probability Ren Xiaosu was a superhuman to begin with was very high!

'But which supernatural being would behave the way you did? So what if you're a superhuman? What're you trying to achieve by singing those nursery rhymes? Even if you're a superhuman, you're still an odd superhuman!'

Along the way, Ren Xiaosu asked Yang Xiaojin in a whisper, "Do you find it very embarrassing that I'm behaving like this?"

Actually, even Ren Xiaosu himself found it quite embarrassing. He was clearly a normal person, yet he had to sing those nursery rhymes every day.

But he had no choice but to do the quests. Since he was going to do it, he would complete them perfectly.

Ren Xiaosu was not too worried about anything else; he was mainly concerned that Yang Xiaojin's impression of him would worsen.

Yang Xiaojin smirked slightly and replied, "It was quite cute."

"Really?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

Yang Xiaojin asked, "Are you doing all this because you gave me the black sniper rifle?"

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "It's gonna go on for seven days. This is the price that I have to pay for giving away the black sniper rifle."

"Thank you," Yang Xiaojin suddenly said in a serious tone. She felt that since Ren Xiaosu was considered a very powerful supernatural being now, he must have known there would be a trade-off before giving the black sniper rifle to her, yet he still did it.

Most relationships in this world were just built on empty promises. The relationships between adults tend to be more like a restrained admiration, with no one side truly able to selflessly sacrifice for the other.

Some people said that liking someone meant going all-out for them, while loving someone required restraint. However, Yang Xiaojin had her own thoughts on this.

In her opinion, love was about going all-out for a person, while liking was a form of restraint.

As young people would not know about restraint and self-preservation, they would go all-out and love without hesitation.

However, it was different for adults. If they liked someone but did not get a response, they would just leave. "When I take a step towards you but you step back, I shall just turn around and leave." Such feelings that were constantly restrained would never blossom into love.

Therefore, there was no such thing as love in the world of adults, only restrained admiration.

Right now, Yang Xiaojin was feeling a little regretful that she had accepted the black sniper rifle, but she could also feel Ren Xiaosu's sincerity when she saw he had no choice but to put away his pride and pretend to be crazy because he had given her his power.

Yang Xiaojin said, "In the future, I'll sing with you if you want to sing, and I'll go wherever you go no matter what you want to do."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt that singing nursery rhymes was not that embarrassing anymore.

When they set up camp that night, Cheng Yu looked at the others in the campsite with a numb expression. He did not know if it was because of Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin's influence, but someone actually suggested holding a gathering at night. Seeing everyone putting on a lively talent show at the campsite, Cheng Yu's assistants were even starting to get a little eager.

"What are you going to perform?" Cheng Yu asked one of his assistants.

"I can whistle...."

"If you even dare think about performing, I'm gonna deduct your salary this month."

"Alright then," the assistant said reluctantly. As a result, the other three assistants gave up on the idea as well.

Chapter 688: Usurping authority

"Be careful of the situation outside the campsite when you're keeping watch at night," Ren Xiaosu reminded Yang Xiaojin before he went to sleep, "The sound of footsteps last night really did happen. It

can't be that so many people heard it wrong. If you sense any problems, just fire your gun. The sound of the gunshots will wake everyone up."

Yang Xiaojin nodded. "Mhm. Do you feel the situation right now is very similar to the time when we were in the Jing Mountains?"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "We're still taking turns to keep watch for each other, but our relationship this time—"

"I'm saying it's as strange as back then," interrupted Yang Xiaojin. "We don't know who the real enemies are."

"Oh, you're talking about that?" Ren Xiaosu said, "I feel the changes at this place happened much earlier than in the Jing Mountains, so it might be more dangerous here."

"Hallowed ground." Yang Xiaojin pondered things for a moment. "There's only two hallowed grounds in the entire Alliance of Strongholds. But if the Qing Consortium said it was because a god was born here, why have we never come across any gods before?"

"We probably won't recognize a god even if we see one." Ren Xiaosu said, "But I don't think the truth can be kept under wraps for long. The truth will be revealed sooner or later."

"Mhm, go and get some sleep," Yang Xiaojin said softly.

On this night, no one was able to get a good sleep, including Ren Xiaosu.

Everyone reckoned that if something were really following them, it would only be a matter of time before the enemy made its move.

On the surface, no one was nervous. When everyone was asked during the gathering earlier if they were afraid, all of them laughed it off and said there was nothing to be scared of.

But as the night continued, everyone stopped hydrating. It was as though they were afraid they would have to head out of the camp to relieve themselves at night.

Thus, on this night, everyone was waiting for that strange creature to approach again. Regardless of whether they were keeping watch or not, everyone was waiting.

However, nothing happened even after dawn broke.

But even at this moment, everyone was unable to sleep. They were worried Ren Xiaosu would wake everyone up again the moment they fell asleep.

Therefore, Cheng Yu was thinking he should only get some rest after Ren Xiaosu's morning antics were over.

As he waited, there was still no movement from Ren Xiaosu even though it was already daybreak.

Cheng Yu came out of his tent with two dark circles under his eyes. He found the experience of leading the team this time to be extremely terrible!

Just as everyone was getting out of bed to wash up, they saw Cheng Yu walk to the middle of the campsite with a heavy expression. "Something happened to the other team."

Everyone immediately turned to look at Cheng Yu. Someone asked, "What happened? Did they all get wiped out?"

"No." Cheng Yu shook his head and said, "They said an unknown creature attacked someone who went out to relieve himself during the night. Only one person had died, and they all went out this morning to look for him. They just found his corpse and discovered his organs had all been consumed."

Someone asked, "Did they see what it was? If it only ate the internal organs, could it be a scavenger?"

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he frowned. It was probably a misunderstanding that many people had about scavengers. In fact, most carnivores in the wilderness would prioritize eating the internal organs of their prey first. This was because the internal organs had the most nutritional value, especially the cholesterol heavy ones, and were easier to digest. They would usually finish eating the internal organs before feeding on the other parts.

Therefore, it would be impossible to determine the type of animal based on its feeding preference.

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu. She knew Ren Xiaosu was probably the person who understood the wilderness the most among this group of people. "Can you deduce anything from this?"

"It's difficult." Ren Xiaosu said as he looked at Cheng Yu again, "Where did they find it? Were there any footprints or feces in the vicinity of the body? What was the area around the wound shaped like?"

Cheng Yu shook his head and said, "I only received very limited information from them. I just know the body was found a few dozen meters away from their campsite. No one heard his cry for help. There were bite marks on his neck, so it seems like he passed out immediately after being ambushed."

Ren Xiaosu whispered to Yang Xiaojin and the Great Hoodwinker, "Without seeing the bite marks and not knowing how much of the organs were eaten, I can only make a simple guess that it was a lone attacker. Moreover, it was probably not that hungry either. Otherwise, they would've dragged the corpse away and hid it in a cave or tree to protect it. It seems like it might be an extremely powerful creature without any natural predators in the wilderness and isn't afraid of crowded places. It's probably quite patient and knows how to sneak attack its prey."

But even after making all these deductions, he still could not figure out what exactly had attacked that person.

The Great Hoodwinker said to Cheng Yu in panic, "Why don't we turn back? Why are y'all still going forward when it's so dangerous?"

Ren Xiaosu's mouth twitched a little. The Great Hoodwinker was putting on an act again.

However, Cheng Yu said, "Since you've already accepted the payment, stop getting cold feet on me. Just carry out your duty and lead the way. We won't be advancing any further today. The team that met with trouble is only 50 kilometers away, so the higher-ups are now asking them to join us and advance together."

It seemed like the Anjing House was not expecting there to be casualties so soon. As such, they decided to merge the two teams so their strength would be better concentrated.

On the afternoon of the same day, the team members who were sitting idle in the campsite suddenly heard the sound of footsteps.

Everyone stood up and looked towards the source of the sound. A loud voice panted, "How much longer do we have to walk before we join up with the other group? Why is the Anjing House so cowardly? We've only lost one member, yet they're already trying to merge us with another group? Are they trying to tire us to death?"

Another voice said coldly, "Boss Luo, you can withdraw from the team if you don't wish to go to the Sacred Mountains."

"Withdraw?" Luo Lan hooted, "Why should I withdraw? I'm one of your C-rank hitmen too. It was you all who sent me those texts asking me to assemble, yet you want me to withdraw now? No way!"

"You're just a normal person, so why the hell are you tagging along for?!" The Anjing House member was becoming unhappier as he spoke.

When Ren Xiaosu heard Luo Lan's voice, he wanted to facepalm. He had not expected Luo Lan and Zhou Qi would also be part of the team that was joining them!

Moreover, no one knew that Luo Lan was a supernatural being. Judging by how Luo Lan was panting, he was still pretending to be a normal person.

Ren Xiaosu had never met the Anjing House member who was leading the team. He looked at Yang Xiaojin who also shook her head.

When this group of people came walking out of the forest in the wilderness, the first thing everyone saw was Luo Lan's burly figure.

However, Ren Xiaosu realized that Luo Lan, who used to be fat, had now become much bulkier. He was starting to look more like a big man.

Ren Xiaosu found this a little difficult to accept.

When Luo Lan saw Ren Xiaosu, he was stunned. However, he immediately looked away as though it were nothing and had no intention of greeting Ren Xiaosu at all.

Ren Xiaosu was pleasantly surprised. Fatty Luo was still as savvy as ever.

Before the people from the Anjing House could say anything, Luo Lan started calling out to the people behind him, "Alright, we're finally here. Everyone, quickly sit down and get some rest."

The Anjing House members standing behind him had helpless looks on their faces. Luo Lan had usurped their authority on the journey thus far. It was like he was the de facto leader of the group as his leadership qualities completely outshone the rest!

Chapter 689: What grown man would jump rope?

The Anjing House was definitely trying to take the lead in this operation. They wanted to be in control of how to disrupt the Pyro Company's plans, how to seize the No. 001 Experimental, and how to carry out their follow-up plans.

But when Luo Lan swaggered over and claimed he was a C-rank hitman, Song Qiao, who was in charge of leading Luo Lan's group, felt like he had just eaten a fly he was so disgusted!

Just like Cheng Yu, Song Qiao also had his own assistants on the team. However, they had hidden anonymously within the group so they could influence everyone's decisions at critical moments.

For example, when Song Qiao was about to implement some decisions, these assistants would be the first to respond to create the illusion that many people were supportive of him.

Everyone tended to have their own opinion on things, and Song Qiao had planned very well for that. It was just that he never expected to meet Luo Lan.

Previously, Song Qiao had received orders their team would set off a day earlier. However, Luo Lan was unwilling to and invited everyone on the team to head to the black market's spa instead!

How could going to the Sacred Mountains be more interesting than going to the spa!

The members from the various consortiums in their group were also having a good laugh at the Anjing House's expense. Although their common target this time was the Pyro Company, the Anjing House had still caused quite a bit of trouble for them. So everyone was also happy to see the Anjing House deal with this mess.

Song Qiao really wanted to teach Luo Lan a lesson. He even asked the Anjing House if he could kill Luo Lan discreetly since there were no reporters following him around anymore.

In the end, the Anjing House rejected this idea and expressed it was not the time to deal with Luo Lan yet.

However, the Anjing House also affirmed it would not be a problem to teach him a lesson.

Song Qiao was delighted to hear that. Just as he was about to take action against Luo Lan, Luo Lan seemed to have preempted his motives. Luo Lan bluntly said, "Aren't you afraid my brother will send people after you? I don't care about the others, but since I remember how you look, as long as you don't strike me down today, you can rest assured that my brother will hunt you down tomorrow!"

Song Qiao's expression darkened. Luo Lan was constantly mentioning how the Qing Consortium's leader would send people to hunt him down. If that were really the case, could he truly deal with that?

Besides, even if he killed Luo Lan here, there were still so many others from the various consortiums traveling with them. Surely Song Qiao could not silence everyone who was here as well, right?

Of course, it was precisely because of this reason that Luo Lan dared to act so brazenly.

If Luo Lan were in a situation where he could be killed without anyone finding out, he would have long fled.

It was like this guy had a split personality, behaving arrogantly when his safety was not threatened and immediately backing off at the first sign of danger. He was a completely different person in different situations.

At some point in time, Song Qiao actually felt this operation had failed really badly.

They were clearly supposed to be hitmen operating in the shadows where it was most advantageous for them. But for the sake of the mission against the Pyro Company, they exposed several of their members.

Of course, this was what made Cheng Yu the most unhappy. He had also secretly thought this operation did not fit with the character of the Anjing House leader. The boss always came up with a plan before making a move in the past, so why did it seem a little rash this time?

Could there be a follow-up plan they did not know about?

At this moment, Luo Lan plopped himself down at Cheng Yu's campfire. Then he smiled warmly at Cheng Yu and said, "Please, sit down. Why are you standing around? There's no need to be so reserved!"

Cheng Yu's expression darkened. Why was he acting like he was some leader conducting an inspection? And he even seemed to be such a natural at it?

Just as he was about to say something, he saw Song Qiao shaking his head at him with a bitter expression, hinting at him not to provoke this man.

Cheng Yu thought for a moment before finally sitting down with a sigh next to the campfire.

When Ren Xiaosu witnessed this exchange from afar, he chuckled. That Fatty Luo was way too good at causing trouble wherever he went.

"Why's he here?" Yang Xiaojin wondered, "Why's a normal person like him getting involved in something like this? Could the Qing Consortium have an ulterior motive as well?"

"He's awoken his power, so he's also a supernatural being now." Ren Xiaosu explained in a low voice, "I think Fatty Luo's motive for coming here is very simple. He's just looking to stir up some trouble. The Qing Consortium hates both the Pyro Company and the Anjing House, so they definitely won't miss out on the opportunity to make things difficult for these two organizations. Besides, Luo Lan always says

that he wants to buy time for Qing Zhen by causing chaos all over the world, so how could he miss out on such a good opportunity here?"

"Got it." Yang Xiaojin nodded. In the past, she did not like these two brothers, Luo Lan and Qing Zhen. But now that they were friends with Ren Xiaosu, she hated them less than before. Instead, she thought Luo Lan and Qing Zhen were quite loyal after hearing about the things that they did from Ren Xiaosu.

Actually, Luo Lan also felt very nervous on the way here. After all, they were heading deep into the Pyro Company's strategic base. While he was also a supernatural being now, he still felt very panicky even though he was traveling with Zhou Qi.

What if whatever was lurking in the Sacred Mountains was really scary? What if they got ambushed? These were all the things Luo Lan was worried about.

But when he got here and saw Ren Xiaosu, there was only one thing he thought: Everything is gonna be alright!

Luo Lan had witnessed Ren Xiaosu's growth from when he was at his weakest to the point where he could even bring down an entire stronghold by himself. With this person going to the Sacred Mountains, what more did he have to worry about?

As such, Luo Lan got even more arrogant and oppressive. With someone that could protect him, could anyone here do anything to him?

Over at Luo Lan's side, Zhou Qi also sat down next to the campfire without a care. He took some food that was being roasted over the fire and started eating. Meanwhile, Luo Lan said to Cheng Yu as he kept himself warm, "So tell us, what's the situation over here like?"

Cheng Yu sneered, "Who do you think you are?"

He was unable to hold it in any longer. If it weren't for Song Qiao giving him that look, he would have already started scolding Luo Lan. *'You're just a normal person. What right do you have to come to the Sacred Mountains?'*

Luo Lan looked at Cheng Yu seriously. "Aren't you afraid my brother will send people after you?"

Off to the side, Song Qiao had a gloomy expression on his face. He realized that even though this was all Fatty Luo could say, it was way too effective against them.

After Luo Lan arrived in the Central Plains, he went to the Zhou Consortium first before visiting the Kong Consortium, with his last stop being the Wang Consortium. In the end, no one could do anything to him even though he kept stirring up trouble for others. Wasn't that because he had Qing Zhen back in the Southwest eyeing the Central Plains like a tiger?

Cheng Yu's expression wavered for a while before he finally said, "There's a total of 33 people on my side and no members have fallen. However, we encountered some unknown creature that tried to approach our campsite two nights ago, though it didn't do anything to us."

Luo Lan nodded. "Anything else unusual happen? Or do you have any personnel behaving unusually in the group?"

Cheng Yu thought to himself, *'Aren't you the one who's acting unusual here?'* He thought for a moment and suddenly said, "Oh, there really is one." Cheng Yu pointed at Ren Xiaosu and said to Luo Lan, "That guy's really strange. On our way to the Sacred Mountains, not only did he go and jump rope with his partner, but he also keeps belting nursery rhymes!"

Composed, Luo Lan looked at Ren Xiaosu. This answer... was truly a little unexpected. To think that Brother Xiaosu would actually have such a hobby.

However, he showed no expression on his face. Instead, he said nonchalantly, "Did you actually try hard to remember things? What's so unusual about that?"

Although Luo Lan pretended not to know Ren Xiaosu, he still could not help but defend him a little. No matter how eccentric Ren Xiaosu was, that was still his business. How could Luo Lan allow outsiders to gossip about him?

Cheng Yu said unhappily, "Isn't that unusual? The journey to the Sacred Mountains is fraught with danger, so what's with singing all those nursery rhymes? Besides, what grown man would jump rope?"

"I jump rope too. You have a problem with that?"

Cheng Yu was confused.

Chapter 690: Cheng Yu, the tour guide

At a certain point in time, even Zhou Qi was sighing at how loyal Luo Lan was. In order to defend Ren Xiaosu, Luo Lan even shamelessly claimed he jumped rope as well.

Cheng Yu and the others around the campfire fell dead silent. No one knew what to say to that.

You must be deliberately rebutting us, right?!

However, Luo Lan was well-known everywhere for his meddling in affairs. Now that they heard what he said, everyone immediately felt the rumors were not unfounded. It was really true!

"Ahem." Luo Lan changed the subject and said, "I heard that your Anjing House tried to ambush the Pyro Company's convoy? What, you guys didn't succeed? They were even allowed to escape back to the Sacred Mountains. You people are so useless!"

Luo Lan only had a C-rank cell phone in his possession, so he did not really receive that much information.

At the mention of this, Cheng Yu finally heaved a sigh of relief. There was finally a topic he could talk about. "Who says we're useless? Didn't their entire convoy get wiped out? It's not that we failed, but that the Pyro Company's convoy was not carrying the No. 001 Experimental in the first place. They were just trying to throw us off."

“Hehe, you’ve already sold the intel, yet you’re still lying through your teeth? Were you the ones who killed the Pyro Company members in that convoy?” Luo Lan chuckled. As a matter of fact, Cheng Yu had already sold the intel for a high price, so almost everyone in the black market knew about it now. There were even a lot of people who used this information to scam others. Therefore, the Anjing House was not the one who took out that convoy.

As for who had wiped out the Pyro Company’s convoy, Luo Lan could guess. A sniper who could suppress five people and an expert who could take on a T5-ranked combatant head on, such a combination was far too rare in this world. But as it happened, there was such a team right here with them.

A lot of people thought Luo Lan was very rash and dumb, but the big shots of the organizations all knew Luo Lan was a bold and meticulous person who also happened to be smart.

Therefore, it was not surprising Luo Lan was able to guess it was Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin.

Cheng Yu was left speechless by Luo Lan for quite a while before saying, “How do you know they aren’t from the Anjing House? It’s quite normal for the members of the Anjing House to not know each other. If they weren’t from the Anjing House, why would they have attacked the Pyro Company?”

Cheng Yu did not know the two partners who had beaten the five of them into submissive quails were also here at the campsite.

When Luo Lan heard this, he fell into deep thought. That was true. Why had Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin gotten themselves involved in this mess? No matter how much trouble Ren Xiaosu had gotten himself into before, he was still someone who preferred to avoid trouble as much as he could. So why did he come out to the Sacred Mountains?

A young man at the side suddenly asked Cheng Yu, “I received intel that White Mask killed the T5 combatant the instant they met. Is that true?”

Cheng Yu was silent for a while before saying with a sigh, “Yes. If you had witnessed it with your own eyes as I did, you would also feel that the other party is probably not a superhuman at our level.”

Supernatural beings all knew they were extraordinary people, but in the face of such a vast difference in strength, Cheng Yu had no choice but to honestly admit how powerful White Mask was.

“Then did they also come to the Sacred Mountains?” the young man asked.

“My guess is they did.” Cheng Yu said, “Based on what happened, they had shown up back there because their target was the No. 001 Experimental. With their level of strength, there’s no reason why they would not come. I feel they might’ve already joined one of the groups. But I’ve checked with the other members of the Anjing House, and they said that they did not see anyone in their groups carrying a sniper rifle. This is where it’s quite strange, but maybe they’re already so powerful they don’t need to travel with others.”

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were of course not that powerful yet. They were currently at the campsite waiting to fish in troubled waters.

At this moment, Luo Lan stood up and waved his hand. "Alright, there's no time to lose. We've already wasted a lot of time here, so let's continue on our way!"

As soon as he finished speaking, the others at the campsite got up and started packing.

Cheng Yu looked at Luo Lan in surprise. He had taken over command of the group from him so naturally?

Luo Lan looked at Cheng Yu and said, "Um... tour guide, where do we head next?"

Cheng Yu was immediately irked by this. *'Tour guide? Who the hell is the tour guide? Do you really think you're here on vacation?'*

He gritted his teeth and thought to himself that this fatty was way too audacious by insisting on going to the Sacred Mountains. *'Let's see if you can come out alive once you're in there!'*

It'd be just as well if Fatty Luo ended up getting killed by the Pyro Company. Then Qing Zhen could seek revenge on the Pyro Company to his heart's content. This would also help the Anjing House get rid of an adversary!

While everyone was packing up, no one noticed a young man bending over quietly to carve a circular marking on a tree next to him.

This guy was the young man who had asked Ren Xiaosu what his expertise was. His identity was Wang Yun, the most promising person to take over the entire intelligence network of the Kong Consortium.

After Wang Yun witnessed the death of his superior, Kong Erdong, he departed from the Kong Consortium on a mission and left his other two competitors to vie for the leadership of the organization's intelligence agency. It was as though he were not involved in the matter at all.

When his two competitors saw him leave the Kong Consortium at such a time, they couldn't be happier. They even deployed more people to send him off personally and wished him good luck on his journey to the Sacred Mountains.

When he left, Wang Yun was even sneering in his head. Kong Donghai, who was the head of the Kong Consortium, was not fooled easily. The post of the intelligence agency's director would definitely not be decided so quickly, as Kong Donghai would still have to observe the situation for at least three months.

At that time, when he returned to the Kong Consortium with his accomplishments, his two competitors would probably not even have a chance to regret things.

After Wang Yun finished inscribing the marking on the tree, he followed the group as though nothing had happened. Shortly after the group of more than 60 people had left the campsite, "Old Xu," wearing the white mask, went to the place Wang Yun had left the mark.

Wang Yun had always been Ren Xiaosu's main subject of observation. Earlier, while he had been putting away his belongings, his attention was actually focused on Wang Yun and a few others.

Ren Xiaosu had sent "Old Xu" out because he had wanted it to search the outer perimeter of the campsite for the intruder that appeared during the night. And now, he could also get it to check the marking Wang Yun had left behind.

There was only a simple circle carved onto the tree roots and nothing else. This puzzled Ren Xiaosu a little. What did this circle mean?

Without any clues, it would be difficult to guess.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a long time before finally deciding to not overthink it. All he would have to do was just destroy the marking.

In any case, it was still unknown whether this young man was friend or foe. By interfering with the other party's plans, it might end up being an unexpected success.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu made "Old Xu" draw an X in the circle. Then, he hurriedly rushed ahead of the group to continue scouting the route ahead.

Having experienced so many disasters, Ren Xiaosu was used to using "Old Xu" to clear a path in the wilderness. This was a habit he had learned through a lot of sacrifice.

Ren Xiaosu had discovered an interesting phenomenon in the strongholds. He noticed that some stray cats and dogs knew how to navigate the streets.

But upon further consideration, nobody knew how heavy a price they had to pay to learn how to do so.