

First Order 691

### **Chapter 691: The well-prepared Wang Yun**

Two hours after “Old Xu” left the campsite, troops in full battle gear suddenly arrived at the campsite from the wilderness.

“Set up defenses. Provide fire support from our 1 o’clock,” someone commanded over the radio fixed to the troops’ combat helmets.

“Gather the troops and check the campsite. Look out for a marking left behind by the director.”

In just one minute, these 200-odd soldiers were completely deployed across a radius of several hundred meters in the surrounding area. Some of them had organized a line of fire, while others acted as flanking troops, ready to provide fire support at any time.

These 200-odd troops were illustrious in the Kong Consortium.

The Kong Consortium’s Intelligence Department was divided into the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Divisions. 1st Division was responsible for domestic affairs, 2nd Division oversaw foreign affairs, and 3rd Division dealt with the difficult and tough battles. For example, 3rd Division would take charge of extractions when their operatives needed to be brought out from the other consortiums’ territories.

When Wang Yun was serving in 3rd Division a long time ago, these 200-odd soldiers were under his command.

Later, he was recognized by Kong Erdong for his achievements and got transferred to 2nd Division where he oversaw foreign security for the consortium. At that time, he started slowly transferring these soldiers to his side. As a result, these troops gradually gained the nickname of the “Embroidered Uniform Guard” within the Kong Consortium.[1]

After Wang Yun took over as director of 2nd Division, these 200-odd troops became his most trusted subordinates.

It could be said that these people were also the reason Wang Yun was able to get promoted consistently over the years. All these soldiers were skilled in battle and had extremely strong individual capabilities.

Despite the fact that these people were only soldiers, their ranks were very high and they were incredibly well compensated.

Sometimes, after Wang Yun completed an assassination, the money left behind by the target would get distributed among these soldiers.

Wang Yun placed great importance on this expedition to the Sacred Mountains. Therefore, he only brought along his own people in case outsiders created any trouble for him.

By this point, the 200-odd troops had taken full control of the campsite Ren Xiaosu and the others had just stayed at.

Meanwhile, the commander of the “Embroidered Uniform Guard” remained in the campsite and waited for his men to find the marking left behind by Wang Yun.

They were all Wang Yun’s trusted subordinates and were also the Kong Consortium’s most elite scouts from the intelligence agency’s field office. In the past, they had executed numerous missions such as carrying out decapitation strikes and infiltration operations.

This time, Wang Yun’s men were puzzled when he suddenly took them away from the Kong Consortium during such a critical time. Could it be that Wang Yun was giving up on the chance to become the intelligence agency’s director?

After Wang Yun briefly explained his plan to them, everyone understood he was trying to gain promotion through a meritorious achievement!

At this moment, someone on the radio said, “Sir, we found the marking left behind by Director Wang Yun.”

The commander of the “Embroidered Uniform Guard” walked over. “Are you sure it’s Director Wang Yun’s marking?”

“Yes, we also dug a bullet out from under the tree roots,” his subordinate reported.

The marking on the tree and the bullet buried in the ground served as dual verification so they would not confuse it with someone else’s markings.

The commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard walked up to the tree, but he was stunned when he saw the marking.

“Is Director Wang Yun telling us to retreat by drawing an X within the circle?” The commander was a little puzzled. “Could something unexpected have happened that’s making it unsuitable for us to make a move?”

“Or maybe Director Wang Yun thinks we shouldn’t venture any further since we’re just normal people?” One of the subordinates analyzed, “I heard there’s something odd going on in the Sacred Mountains and that it’s a very dangerous place.”

“We can’t be sure of Director Wang Yun’s intentions, but he’s always very confident in what he does. Since he wants us to retreat, we should just retreat.” The commander said, “Let’s retreat to a place 40 kilometers north of the black market and set up camp there. Withdraw!”

After that, the troops retreated in an orderly manner swiftly like the tide.

At this moment, Wang Yun had a grin on his face as he advanced with the Anjing House group. This time, he had come well-prepared.

...

“Who was the person that got attacked?” Cheng Yu asked Song Qiao.

"I don't know." Song Qiao shook his head. "But he must be someone from the consortiums. He should be the assistant of one of the superhumans in the group. When he left the campsite, he was probably not going out to relieve himself but to deliver some news back to the outside world. Unfortunately, he met with misfortune."

"I heard the site of the incident was very close to the campsite. Did he not even have a chance to call for help?" Cheng Yu asked again.

"There was no sound at all," Song Qiao replied. "I also checked the wound, but I couldn't tell anything from the bloody mess on his neck."

"Then we oughta be more careful. I suspect that whatever attacked that guy might've followed you all here," Cheng Yu said helplessly.

He felt very uncomfortable about this. It was obvious Song Qiao's group had been targeted by something. However, the higher-ups still requested for their groups to join up and advance. His group had been doing fine by themselves. But now, he was on edge.

Song Qiao could guess what was on Cheng Yu's mind. He said with a laugh, "It's also a good thing for you that our teams have merged since your combat prowess isn't strong. How can you possibly return safely from the Sacred Mountains with just those few assistants of yours?"

"What do you know?" Cheng Yu snapped. "Wild animals don't know how to distinguish reality from illusion and will believe whatever they see since they aren't intelligent. My superpower might not be effective against a lot of superhumans, but when it comes to dealing with wild animals, which one of you is better than me? If a dangerous situation really arises, I guarantee the wild animals won't notice it even if they walk right past me. You had better worry about yourself first."

Song Qiao pondered that and realized it seemed to be the case. Cheng Yu's power might not be effective against intelligent people, but wild animals were unable to distinguish it from reality. He whispered, "Bro, if you lend me a hand when it comes down to the critical moment, I'll be sure to reward you handsomely."

"That's more like it." Cheng Yu laughed.

But as they were chatting, they suddenly heard a wild animal's roar come from in front of them. Everyone in the group stopped in their tracks at the same time and went on alert.

Cheng Yu and Song Qiao looked at each other and quickly rushed towards the source of the sound.

Neither of them were cowards since cowards would not have come to a place like this. Rather than cowering in fear, they might as well hurry over and see what was going on.

Of course, there were some people who rushed over faster than them. Luo Lan had been panting as they trekked on the mountain road, but when he heard the commotion, he immediately rushed over.

He was not afraid at all. Ren Xiaosu was right behind him, so what was there to be scared of?

When someone started running, everyone behind followed suit.

Yang Xiaojin asked, "Can you tell what it is?"

"It's just a large fox." Ren Xiaosu said nonchalantly, "I already killed it. I didn't expect it to be so fast and nearly allowed it to escape."

Yang Xiaojin realized it was Ren Xiaosu who caused the commotion.

When Cheng Yu and the others arrived at the scene, they saw the carcass of the fox lying on the ground. Its spine had been broken in an extremely violent manner.

Cheng Yu said with a frown, "Could this be what attacked your team member?"

"It's possible." With that, Song Qiao took out a dagger and cut open the fox's stomach. When he did that, a jumble of organs spilled out.

Song Qiao's assistant did not mind the mess. After inspecting it slightly, he said, "It still has some undigested human organs inside its stomach. This must be the culprit."

"But who killed it?" After Cheng Yu received confirmation of the culprit, instead of breathing a sigh of relief, he got even more worried!

### **Chapter 692: A wave of unrest**

In everyone's opinion, if the wild animals in the Sacred Mountains were like the fox in front of them that had become larger, more cunning, and stronger, there would actually be nothing to worry about for this expedition into the Sacred Mountains.

What they were most afraid of were the strange and the unknown. As such, there would be a tinge of fear if they did not know who or what the enemy was.

But when the mysterious unknown got revealed, that fear would gradually dissipate.

In fact, after the two groups merged, and with quite a few supernatural beings among them, it would be very easy to deal with wild animals like that as long as they were careful not to get ambushed.

But who could have killed this fox?

Surely it could not be someone who happened to pass by that did them a favor, right?

"Could the wild animals in the mountains have started killing one another?" someone asked.

"No, this must be done by a person." Cheng Yu analyzed, "If it were the wild animals fighting among themselves, there should be some teeth marks or other hints on this fox's carcass. But as you can see, it looks like someone suddenly caught it and broke its spine. The animals in the wilderness definitely don't kill their enemies like this. Let's do a headcount of everyone first."

Cheng Yu had asked to do a headcount to see if anyone had broken away from the group. While they were marching earlier, everyone was scattered and did not move together as a group. Perhaps, this was the doing of an expert hiding in the group.

In the end, Cheng Yu and Song Qiao's assistants quickly counted the number of people and realized two people were missing!

"Does anyone know those two?" Cheng Yu asked, "Anyone know where they went?"

Wang Yun replied, "I don't know them, but I think I remember they're both men. One of them is a middle-aged man in his forties, and the other is a young man around the age of 25." Wang Yun turned his head to a young woman. "Oh, it's that young man who sent up camp next to your tent last night."

The young woman was stunned. Then she looked around. "It really is him."

At this moment, everyone looked at Wang Yun. They were surprised by this fellow's memory as he actually remembered everyone so clearly. Not only did he know who had left the group at just a glance, he even knew where they set up camp the previous night.

This was not something the average person could manage.

Of course, if Wang Yun were just a normal person, he would not have become the director of the Kong Consortium's 2nd Military Information Division.

Back then, when the intelligence agency was recruiting talents while he was serving in the military, the chief recruitment officer in charge immediately took a liking to him. At that time, every candidate had to be put through an interview. The moment Wang Yun entered the interview room, the chief recruitment officer's first question was, "How many people did you meet on the way to this interview room just now?"

Wang Yun said, "Seven."

"What color were their clothes?"

"Two were wearing blue; five were in black."

"How many moles were there on the face of the third person you encountered?"

"Six."

As such, Wang Yun quickly became the center of attention after joining the intelligence agency.

Wang Yun had been keeping a low profile at the start of this expedition into the Sacred Mountains. After making sure there was no one else following their group other than his subordinates, Wang Yun felt very confident that he could start revealing a little bit of his ability now.

Cheng Yu looked at Wang Yun and said, "Since you have such a good memory, you should remember where they went, yeah? Were they the ones who killed this fox just now?"

"I don't think so." Wang Yun shook his head and said, "They'd fallen far behind at the back of the group, and they're not close with each other either, so it doesn't look like they're partners."

Cheng Yu frowned. He suddenly said, "Let's go back and look for them!"

After that, Cheng Yu immediately headed back the way they came. But after walking a few hundred meters, he saw the middle-aged man Wang Yun was talking about lying in a pool of blood with a mangled wound on his neck.

After walking a dozen meters more, they also discovered the corpse of that young man with a wound in the same position.

Everyone in the group fell silent as a strange, oppressive atmosphere spread through the crowd.

When they saw the carcass of the fox, everyone thought they had found the real culprit. But they immediately went on alert again after having just breathed a sigh of relief.

"But we clearly found human organs in the fox's stomach." Cheng Yu's assistant wondered, "Could it have companions as well?"

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu, but Ren Xiaosu surreptitiously shook his head and denied Cheng Yu's assistant's explanation.

Then Wang Yun said to Ren Xiaosu with a smile, "I noticed you shaking your head. Can you tell me why?"

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him and was about to answer when the voice from the palace rang out in his mind. Ren Xiaosu let out a sigh in his head.

Everyone was looking at Ren Xiaosu because of Wang Yun's question. Then they saw Ren Xiaosu take out a rope from his pocket and started skipping with it.

Ren Xiaosu said while jumping rope, "Because the neck wounds on those two were not caused by a fox's bite.... Ignore me, I'll be done skipping in a moment."

Wang Yun was confused, as was Cheng Yu.

Wang Yun had wanted to ask about something else as well. But due to Ren Xiaosu's bizarre behavior, he did not know how to react! *'You could have just answered my question normally. Why did you have to suddenly start jumping rope?!'*

It was not only Wang Yun; almost everyone's mind turned blank when they saw this strange sight of Ren Xiaosu jumping rope.

Everyone did not even care about how these two people had died. They were more concerned about why this young man had to jump rope while answering the question!

Having gotten Yang Xiaojin's understanding, Ren Xiaosu no longer felt any embarrassment when he was required to perform his quests. As long as the person he cared about could understand why he was doing this, it was good enough for him. So why would he care what others thought about him?

Ren Xiaosu was examining the wound on one of the corpses while jumping rope. The wound did not have any teeth marks and was more like someone had grabbed to the main artery of the neck with their hand, causing the victim to fall unconscious before tearing the flesh off.

This was such a violent way of killing someone that Ren Xiaosu could not be sure if his judgment was correct or not.

As Ren Xiaosu continued jumping rope, he even mumbled something that made Cheng Yu ask, "What are you mumbling?"

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. "278, 279, 280..."

When he counted to 300, he finally stopped jumping. He said to the palace in his mind, "What's the completion level for the quest this time?"

"Perfect."

"Great."

Ren Xiaosu looked around and realized everyone was wearing a complicated expression on their face.

But this was to be expected. Having been put through a series of strange incidents that involved a crisis being resolved and immediately plunging into another, and seeing Ren Xiaosu jumping rope throughout all of it, everyone needed a while to digest what they had just experienced.

After Ren Xiaosu finished jumping rope, Luo Lan said, "As everyone can see, we've already encountered several dangers even before entering the boundary of the Sacred Mountains. So we have to tighten our formation even further as we move on. Even if you plan on going to relieve yourself, you are to proceed in a group of at least five people. There's only four ladies in our group, but that's fine; I can reluctantly accompany you all."

### **Chapter 693: The relaxed Fatty Luo**

Everyone was at a loss for words when they heard Luo Lan say that. Could he get any more shameless?

But someone suddenly realized something. "Aren't there five ladies in total? Did you miss out on counting one of them? The five of them are just enough to form a group."

Luo Lan was stunned for a bit. Only at this moment did he realize he had left out Yang Xiaojin.

As he knew about Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin's relationship, he had filtered her out of his mind and did not treat her as a woman!

Luo Lan gave an awkward laugh and said, "Hahaha, I counted wrong."

“Has Luo Lan always been this thick-skinned?” Yang Xiaojin asked Ren Xiaosu in a low voice while everyone’s attention was on Luo Lan.

Ren Xiaosu lamented, “He’s always been this thick-skinned.”

After all, when Luo Lan tried to recruit Dong Funan to join him, he kept running down to their clinic every day to look for her.

“We should be more careful. Not even ‘Old Xu’ was able to find out what has been loitering around us.” Ren Xiaosu said, “The other party might have some way to avoid Old Xu’s detection. I didn’t even notice anything when those two were killed just now.”

“Mhm.” Yang Xiaojin said, “The Great Hoodwinker and I will be keeping watch tonight. You should have a good night’s rest to conserve your strength. But what’s with that fox? Why are there human organs in its stomach?”

“I’m guessing that it might be following something around to find food for itself. Whatever that thing is, it only cares about killing people. It must have gone away after ripping off the neck of its victim and left the fox to feed on its kill. That was why Luo Lan and his group discovered the corpse with its organs consumed. We had assumed it was done by one creature, but in fact, there were actually two of them. There are many symbiotic relationships in the wilderness and...”

“And what?” Yang Xiaojin asked.

“And if I guessed correctly, the perpetrator might very well be a person, and this fox could be their pet.” Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, “If that’s really the case, it’ll be a little troublesome.”

“Why did you come to such a conclusion?” Yang Xiaojin wondered.

“Did you notice that the fox’s fur is very clean? Like someone’s washed it before? Even for the animals in the wilderness that are particularly clean, they wouldn’t be as clean as this,” Ren Xiaosu explained.

The others might not have noticed this, but how could Ren Xiaosu not notice it when he had been venturing into the wilderness for so long?

If this fox were really someone’s pet, the other party would probably hate him to the bone for using “Old Xu” to kill it. There would be some form of retaliation waiting for them later on.

At this moment, “Old Xu,” who was scouting about one kilometer ahead of the group, suddenly turned around and saw a stone flying at him from out of nowhere in the wilderness.

The stone was extremely fast and hit “Old Xu” in the chest like a bullet, causing it to stumble a little. If a normal person got hit like that, they would probably vomit blood on the spot. Even supernatural beings might not be able to withstand it.

But when “Old Xu” went around to investigate, it could not find the culprit who threw the stone.



Ren Xiaosu's back was hurting so much he started sweating. "The culprit's already started taking revenge on Old Xu. But I can't identify their location yet, so I can't determine what it really is."

But at the very least, Ren Xiaosu had guessed something right. The fox was indeed the other party's pet. Otherwise, they would not be so anxious to take revenge on Old Xu.

"How's it taking revenge? What did it do?" Yang Xiaojin asked.

"It threw a stone at Old Xu," Ren Xiaosu replied.

Yang Xiaojin was stunned. Hitting someone with a stone? Why did that sound like something a child would do?

When they continued the journey again on the same day, everyone obediently followed the instructions and tightened their marching formation due to their fear.

Not only that, but Luo Lan also divided the group into several smaller teams so they could take turns to guard the rear and protect the flanks as they made their way forward. At this moment, Luo Lan felt like he had returned to the days when he was leading fresh recruits at the Qing Consortium. He even found this quite fun.

It had to be known that the brigade Luo Lan had led previously was one of the most fearsome fighting forces in the Qing Consortium.

In the afternoon, when the enemy seemingly realized there was no suitable opportunity to kill anyone, it did not make any further moves.

Some people in the group wanted to leave, but how could they possibly get away now?

If anyone tried to turn back at this moment, they might even get ambushed by that monster. Without knowing what and how strong it was, leaving the group on their own was as good as suicide.

When they set up camp again at night, Luo Lan arranged for each of the teams to take turns keeping watch. He even drew up the night watch areas himself and specified the positions where the sentries had to be stationed, how to rotate duties, and when to change shifts. Everything was well-organized.

Ren Xiaosu watched quietly. He realized Luo Lan's assigned night sentries were particularly thought out. Anyone who tried to sneak attack the campsite would not be able to escape the sight of these sentries.

If something happened to the sentries at any of the positions, the others would find out very quickly.

Regarding this matter, Cheng Yu and Song Qiao also felt a little ashamed of themselves. Although they were supernatural beings, they did not have any experience in leading troops into battle. They might be able to kill people, but they were far worse than Luo Lan when it came to organization and coordination.

Sometimes, the way Luo Lan portrayed himself could easily cause others to overlook his talents. A long time ago, someone from the Qing Consortium had mentioned Luo Lan might be more suitable to be the

organization's Shadow than Qing Zhen. But because Luo Lan was an illegitimate child, no one brought this matter up again.

After making arrangements for the night sentries, Luo Lan swaggered back to his campfire and got ready to sleep.

Cheng Yu quickly stopped him. "Aren't we going to discuss how to deal with the thing that attacked us?"

Luo Lan gave him a strange look. "That's something for you supernatural beings to handle. What's it gotta do with me?"

After that, Luo Lan ignored Cheng Yu and went straight to sleep.

Cheng Yu looked like he could do nothing about Fatty Luo. Then he asked Song Qiao, "Just what the hell is that fatty planning? Why the fuck does he even want to go to the Sacred Mountains?"

"Who the hell knows?" Song Qiao sighed.

But a minute later, Luo Lan's snoring reverberated loudly throughout the entire campsite. He was sleeping so soundly his breathing even made a beat.

Next to Luo Lan, Zhou Qi was already sprawled spread-eagle, asleep.

Cheng Yu found this a little strange. He asked Song Qiao, "Wait a minute, aren't those two together? Why didn't one of them stay up to keep watch? They just went to sleep like that? Is that Fatty Luo not afraid we'll plot against him? Were they also like this before?"

Song Qiao was taken aback. He thought back for a bit and said, "No, when he was traveling with our group, he was extremely vigilant. The two of them would never sleep at the same time."

"That's strange." Cheng Yu looked towards the campsite and said firmly, "This means that Luo Lan and Zhou Qi must have someone they can trust in this camp. The level of trust they have is even allowing them to fall asleep in an environment like this without having to worry for their own safety. Luo Lan would only dare to sleep so soundly if he believes no one here is capable of killing him!"

#### **Chapter 694: A wild guess**

Tonight, everyone was exceptionally serious while performing their sentry duties. Of course, the members of this group with their own motives would only start working together in the face of a common danger.

After all, everyone's goal was to get to the Sacred Mountains so they could stir up trouble, so they had better not die before they got there.

Over a dozen campfires were burning brightly in the campsite. Before going to bed, Luo Lan had led everyone to collect enough firewood to last throughout the night. Fortunately, it was winter right now, so firewood could be found everywhere on the ground.

There were nine sentry posts in total, and each of them was manned by two people. All of the trees around the sentry posts had been chopped down to ensure the sentries could have a broad view of their surroundings.

Luo Lan was well-versed in this aspect. In his own words, if one wanted to be able to sleep soundly during a war, one would have to prepare well during the day.

This time, Luo Lan was treating their expedition to the Sacred Mountains as a war.

Ren Xiaosu was sleeping soundly in the tent while Yang Xiaojin guarded the outside. She was fiddling with a palm-sized sniper rifle bullet in her hands. While other people usually played with walnuts or beaded bracelets, Yang Xiaojin was a little special compared to others. When she had nothing to do, she would fiddle with her bullets.

At this moment, "Old Xu" was sitting quietly about 500 meters outside the camp, apparently waiting for something.

The moon was not very bright, and dark clouds occasionally drifted through the sky. It looked like it was about to snow. Many of the group members wrapped themselves tightly with their blankets within their tents as the campfires around the campsite flickered nonstop due to the cold, piercing wind.

The sky was shrouded by a patch of dark clouds as a shadowy figure in the wilderness started approaching "Old Xu." It did not make any sound as it walked across the ground.

Gradually, it could vaguely see Old Xu's back in the darkness. It felt like it could kill the person in front like how it had killed the other humans.

Just as Ren Xiaosu had guessed, the other party had concentrated all of its hatred on Old Xu because "he" had killed that fox.

Moreover, Old Xu had been acting alone all this while, and a hunter always liked to pick off this kind of solitary prey.

In silence, the shadowy figure approached its target very quickly. There was even a hint of joy that the human in front of it still had its back facing it. Regardless of whether the other party had noticed its approach or not, it was too late!

In that instant, the shadow reached out and grabbed Old Xu's neck. However, it was startled to realize it couldn't cause any harm to Old Xu!

This was wholly different from any other prey it had encountered before. No blood spurted out of the other party, nor did he lose his consciousness. It was as though the figure it had touched was not made of flesh and blood.

But he was clearly a human being!

Ren Xiaosu, who was in his tent, suddenly opened his eyes. When Old Xu, who was seated, sprang up, it looked more like a terrifying ghost that had been unleashed. By then, it had already slashed the black saber that was resting on its knee at the shadow.

But to Ren Xiaosu's surprise, Old Xu actually missed. That monster in the wilderness was even more alert and cunning than he had imagined. After discovering Old Xu's abnormality, the other party turned around and ran back into the wilderness without hesitation. Its speed was not worse than Old Xu's in the slightest.

When Old Xu chased after it into the forest, the monster started jumping freely between the tree trunks without any impediment.

"City Crusher."

Ren Xiaosu was determined to finish off the other party here. It made no sense to constantly be on the guard against something like that. Who could sleep well with such a freak stalking them?

When the monster landed at the next tree trunk, Old Xu's speed suddenly exploded. It arrived ahead of that tree and slashed its saber at the monster again.

However, something unexpected happened. The little monster was so frightened by the oncoming black saber that it let out a scream. Ren Xiaosu thought this slash would definitely not miss, but the monster seemed like it could defy the laws of physics as it changed its direction in midair. Thus, Old Xu missed it and slashed the air instead!

Ren Xiaosu frowned. The purpose of activating City Crusher was to catch the other party off guard. If his first attack missed, there would be no hope of landing any subsequent hits.

In the wilderness, Old Xu was pursuing the monster from behind. However, the path the other party took was way too strange. It kept changing its direction in midair, making it impossible for Old Xu to anticipate which way it would go. In the end, when City Crusher deactivated, Ren Xiaosu made Old Xu stop pursuing.

Many people in the camp were awakened by the battle. Although it happened 500 meters away from them, the commotion was deafening, as Old Xu cut down several large trees while trying to hunt down the monster.

Cheng Yu lit a torch with the campfire and stood at the edge of the camp as he looked out. However, he could not see anything as it was too dark.

When Ren Xiaosu sat up in the tent, Yang Xiaojin asked in a low voice, "Did you kill it?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu lowered his voice and said, "It was harder to deal with than I thought. I don't know how, but the enemy can actually switch directions in midair."

"Did you get a clear look at what it is?"

“No.” Ren Xiaosu shook his head. “It was too dark, I could only tell from the silhouette that it was humanoid. I can’t confirm if it’s human or not, but if it is, it should only be around 1.2 meters tall or so.”

At this moment, Song Qiao went over to Cheng Yu and wondered, “Who’s fighting out there? Could it be the person that helped us kill the fox during the day?”

“It’s possible.” Cheng Yu said with a solemn expression, “I wonder which demigod is so bold as to wander around the wilderness in the middle of the night. Do you think he successfully stopped the enemy?”

“Why don’t we go and check it out?” Cheng Yu’s assistant asked. “We would at least have to see what happened out there before we can feel at ease.”

“No.” Cheng Yu shook his head. “It’s too dangerous to go out at this time. I’d rather go there tomorrow morning than risk my life now. What if it’s some monster trying to lure us there?”

The people around them did not say anything. No one was going to risk going out into the dark like this.

As everyone’s attention was focused on the dark place out there and discussing among themselves, no one noticed Wang Yun had carved a small triangular marking into the roots at the bottom of a tree. This marking meant there was danger ahead, and Wang Yun wanted to remind his subordinates to his rear to act carefully.

Actually, this action was quite unnecessary. After all, his subordinates were already very careful, having retreated.

Luo Lan furtively made eye contact with Ren Xiaosu while everyone was distracted.

He pointed at Ren Xiaosu first, then himself, and finally at the darkness outside. He was implying, “Bro, you have to protect me. It’s too dangerous out there, and I’m afraid of dying.”

When Ren Xiaosu shook his head back at him, Luo Lan’s expression turned bitter. Could it be that Ren Xiaosu was not confident of protecting himself?

Luo Lan started pondering his life and wondered if he had been too reckless by coming to the Sacred Mountains this time. If even Ren Xiaosu was not confident of protecting himself, that was enough to show how dangerous this place was.

When Yang Xiaojin saw the two of them making eye contact, she asked in a whisper, “What’s he gesturing about?”

Ren Xiaosu answered, “He pointed at me, then himself, and finally pointed to the woods. I think he was asking if I wanted to go to the bathroom with him, so I shook my head to say no.”

## **Chapter 695: Argument**

Ren Xiaosu did not give any serious thought as to what Luo Lan was gesturing to him. Therefore, he was unaware that Luo Lan was deeply regretting it now. He was regretting that he had been so reckless for wanting to come out to the Sacred Mountains.

As Luo Lan dwelled on it, he actually dozed off.

That night, the monster did not come near the campsite again. When Ren Xiaosu went to sleep, "Old Xu" remained sitting cross-legged outside the campsite. If any creature were to attack it, he would immediately sense it through the pain that was relayed back to him.

Although Ren Xiaosu could not control Old Xu while he was asleep, Old Xu acted like bait by sitting alone in the wilderness. If the enemy were a wild animal, who would it attack?

It would definitely not attack the campsite that was occupied by dozens of people.

After the battle was over, everyone at the campsite could only hear the commotion coming from the wilderness but not know what was going on out there. As a result, everyone suffered from sleeplessness again for the rest of the night.

Cheng Yu suddenly lamented how he had not had a single good night's sleep since their expedition to the Sacred Mountains started.

He sat outside his tent and let the flickering campfire illuminate his cheeks. Song Qiao was sitting next to him and holding a cup of hot water to keep his hands warm. "What're you thinking about?"

"I'm wondering if we can get out of the Sacred Mountains alive," Cheng Yu answered calmly.

"Hehe, what's the point of thinking about that?" Song Qiao said with a smile, "Have you ever thought that the head of the Anjing House might not even care if we survive or not?"

Cheng Yu glanced at him. "No."

As the snoring continued, Song Qiao looked to Luo Lan's tent and lamented, "I'm a little envious of him. That Fatty Luo is really fearless. If I had a younger brother like Qing Zhen, I would've gone somewhere to lead a carefree life. Why would I want to come here and risk my life? As the saying goes, 'The son of a wealthy family does not sit under the eaves; a gentleman does not stand under a dangerous wall.' With such a distinguished status, I would be cherishing my life for sure. Just what is that Fatty Luo really thinking?"

"Who knows?" Cheng Yu sighed and said, "But don't you underestimate that Fatty Luo. Just as we've said before, Luo Lan must have a very powerful person backing him up in this group."

"Let's wait and see then." Song Qiao shrugged.

When day broke, everyone formed into teams and hurried over to check on the battle site from last night without even freshening up.

The location where the battle took place 500 meters away was a mess. But strangely enough, there was no blood to be seen.

“Could neither side have been unable to hurt the other?” Cheng Yu frowned and said, “That’s really strange. How could no one have gotten injured when their battle caused such a huge commotion?”

“It might be that they were very cautious. After all, if they got injured in a place like this, they could end up dying out here,” Song Qiao said.

Wang Yun was standing next to a tree that had been cut down by Old Xu’s black saber. He was secretly shocked to see how neat the cut of the tree trunk was. Just how sharp did the weapon in his hand have to be to cut through a tree trunk that was so thick a person could wrap their arms around it? And the cut was made so cleanly too?

Not only did the weapon have to be sharp, the person wielding it would have to be exceptionally strong.

A young woman next to them noticed the cut on the tree trunk as well. She exclaimed, “Have you all ever seen such a sharp weapon before?”

When she said that, it alerted Cheng Yu. He was not sure if the others had seen it before, but he did!

When Old Xu killed T5102, Cheng Yu had lamented how powerful the weapon was if it could even cut down someone like a T5 combatant with a single slash.

Not just anyone could get their hands on such a weapon.

Therefore, Cheng Yu immediately realized the person who had fought here last night might be White Mask, who he encountered previously!

“I’ve once met someone who can do this.” Cheng Yu said in a low voice, “As you all know, there was a person who intercepted the Pyro Company’s convoy. At that time, I saw with my own eyes how White Mask severed a T5 combatant in half with his saber.”

“You mean to say the one who fought here last night was White Mask?” Wang Yun wondered, “But what’s he doing here?”

Cheng Yu looked at Luo Lan. “Boss Luo, any opinions?”

“No.” Luo Lan grumbled, “Fighting should be the forte of you supernatural beings. I’m only responsible for overseeing the direction of our group!”

Cheng Yu immediately wanted to curse at him. Who needs you to oversee the group’s direction?!

He looked at Luo Lan in displeasure. “Then tell us, what do we do now?”

Luo Lan gave it some thought and said, “Why don’t we retreat? I feel that this place is too dangerous. Since I’m still young, I don’t need to get my hands on the No. 001 Experimental to prolong my lifespan. All your bosses regard this Experimental to be Tripitaka’s flesh. It’s as though they think they can achieve immortality by consuming it.”

All Luo Lan could think about at the moment was that if even Ren Xiaosu could not protect him, what was the point of him staying? But what he did not know was that this was just a beautiful misunderstanding. A wink in real life was absolutely not as magical as depicted in fiction.

Luo Lan continued with his persuasion. "You all must have been sent here by the various consortiums, right? But just think about it. Even though you're risking your lives out here, you'll only be obtaining the possibility of immortality for others. If your boss ends up living a long life, wouldn't you be anguished?!"

Wang Yun glanced at Luo Lan when he heard this. Wasn't it precisely because he was worried his superior, Kong Erdong, would live for too long that he allowed Vanilla to create that "accident" and kill him?

But Wang Yun could not leave yet. He had to capture the No. 001 Experimental this time. Even if he weren't successful, he would have to at least obtain a sample of the target's DNA no matter what. Only then could he gain a foothold when he returned to the Kong Consortium.

Actually, it was a little risky for him to leave the Kong Consortium at this time. After all, his two competitors who stayed behind in the Kong Consortium would surely try to get rid of their dissidents. If he returned without any achievements, he might not even be able to keep his position as the director of 2nd Military Information Division.

Wang Yun said, "Since we've already made it all the way here, why should we leave now? Besides, it's clear White Mask is also trying to enter the Sacred Mountains. With someone so strong around, what are we still worried about?"

Luo Lan curled his lips and said, "You make it sound as though you know the other party. Once the enemy starts a massacre, you won't be able to avoid death."

Luo Lan and Wang Yun started arguing at the place where the battle took place last night. One of them was calling for a retreat while the other wanted to continue heading into the Sacred Mountains. Meanwhile, the others who were happy to watch the commotion decided to wait and let them both argue for a while.

But at this moment, Ren Xiaosu opened his mouth to say something. As he still had to head into the mountains to save Yan Liuyuan, he did not have any time to waste here. "Enough nonsense, let's keep moving forward."

When Cheng Yu saw Ren Xiaosu speak up, he laughed. He even started fanning the flames by saying to Luo Lan, "He's saying that you're talking nonsense."

Luo Lan was taken aback and looked at Cheng Yu. "Yes, I'm talking nonsense. You have a problem with that?"

Cheng Yu was confused.

But then, the way Cheng Yu looked at Ren Xiaosu changed. He realized Ren Xiaosu was Luo Lan's backing in the group!



## Chapter 696: Divine Lake

Ever since last night, Cheng Yu and Song Qiao had suspected that Luo Lan had the backing of someone in the camp. However, Cheng Yu could never have expected the person would turn out to be Ren Xiaosu.

If it had been someone else, such as Wang Yun or any other person, Cheng Yu would surely feel a sense of superiority like “I saw through everything” as he lurked in the shadows and watched everyone. It would be as though he had gained an advantage over Luo Lan after finding out about his trump card.

But when he realized the person was Ren Xiaosu, the other party’s odd behavior left him in some doubt. Following that, questions started popping up in his mind: *‘Did I see wrong? Could I be blind? Is Luo Lan blind as well...’*

*‘Could Luo Lan be trying to mislead everyone?’* Cheng Yu knew that Luo Lan was always a very meticulous person. Although he appeared to be very carefree, he had never done anything that would expose his trump cards. Therefore, when Ren Xiaosu pretended to be crazy, Luo Lan followed suit to give people the impression they were in cahoots. This way, wouldn’t there be someone to share his burden when things got critical?

He could even take it a step further and conceal the identity of his real teammate!

Cheng Yu suddenly felt like he was enlightened!

But no matter what, Ren Xiaosu’s importance in Cheng Yu’s eyes skyrocketed. Regardless of which of his guesses were right, Cheng Yu felt he could no longer look at Ren Xiaosu in the same way as before.

Actually, when Luo Lan saw Ren Xiaosu, who had always been hiding at the back of the group, come forward to say that they should continue, he understood that Ren Xiaosu must have something very important to do in the Sacred Mountains. Moreover, Ren Xiaosu must have already made an assessment of the people in the group and felt these people would not pose a threat for the time being.

Although there was a disconnect in their unspoken communication earlier, Luo Lan was quick-witted and managed to react in time. In just an instant, he figured out the details and came forward to support Ren Xiaosu’s decision.

“Pack up and continue moving!” Luo Lan gave a wave of his hand and said to Wang Yun, “Only cowards would be too scared to continue heading into the Sacred Mountains. If you’re afraid of death, stay behind by yourself and don’t affect us.”

Wang Yun stood in his spot and suddenly felt there was something wrong with Luo Lan’s words. Wait a minute, weren’t you the one that wanted to retreat at the start!?

However, Luo Lan had no intention of staying behind to continue arguing with him. Instead, he turned around and walked back to the camp to pack his belongings before leading the group forward!

“Tour guide! Where’s the tour guide?” Luo Lan shouted at the front of the group.

The Great Hoodwinker ran over happily. “Over here, over here!”

“Which direction should we head in next?” Luo Lan asked.

“Are we following the original plan?” the Great Hoodwinker asked.

“Yes, we’ll continue based on the original plan,” Luo Lan said.

“That means we’re heading in the direction of Mt. Shenchi.”

Over the years, the farthest place the Great Hoodwinker had traveled to in the outer periphery of the Sacred Mountains was Mt. Shenchi. This was not a name someone had come up with after The Cataclysm, but came from the words “Shenchi” that were originally carved into a cliff wall of the mountain.

Based on the mountain’s name, it would suggest there was a divine lake within the mountain. However, the Great Hoodwinker had never come across any divine lakes on his two previous trips to Mt. Shenchi.[1]

Instead, it was always foggy on Mt. Shenchi, and the air was extremely humid. When the Great Hoodwinker came here two years ago, he had stayed on Mt. Shenchi for four days. However, there was heavy fog during three of those four days.

The Great Hoodwinker said, “If y’all want to pass through Mt. Shenchi together without getting lost, you’d better stick close to me. Otherwise, you won’t be able to find your way out of the heavy fog. If you get lost on that mountain, you’re gonna end up falling behind.”

A person next to him asked, “And we’ll get lost in there forever?”

“Of course you won’t.” The Great Hoodwinker said, “The heavy fog on Mt. Shenchi will eventually disperse. When I came here last, I was lost for three days as well. Then, the moment the heavy fog cleared on the fourth day, I ran off the mountain. So if you really end up falling behind, don’t go wandering around. When the fog disperses, you can just head home by yourself.”

The Great Hoodwinker was just being frank. As he did not have any grudges with these people, there was no need to go to the extent of abandoning them in the mountains to die. As such, he thought it would be better to warn them.

At this moment, Cheng Yu said, “All of us can just tie a hemp rope around our wrists. That way, we won’t have to worry about being left behind.”

What Cheng Yu meant was that they should link everyone together in a line with a rope.

“That’s a good idea.” Luo Lan said, “I’ll take second!”

Zhou Qi said, “I’ll take third!”

Before Ren Xiaosu could say anything, Cheng Yu quickly said, “Fourth!”

Cheng Yu had responded so hastily because he was worried Luo Lan, Ren Xiaosu, and the others would end up at the front of the formation. If Luo Lan and the others harbored any evil intentions after they

entered the heavy fog and cut the rope, those at the back of the line would be left scratching their heads.

Therefore, Cheng Yu wanted to stand between Luo Lan and Ren Xiaosu with his assistants to prevent Luo Lan from playing dirty.

Luo Lan smiled ambiguously at Cheng Yu. As they were both smart people, he could tell what Cheng Yu was thinking at a glance.

In the end, the final order was decided as such: The Great Hoodwinker would lead from the front, while Zhou Qi stood second in line, followed by Luo Lan, Cheng Yu and his five assistants, Ren Xiaosu, and the others.

Curious, Wang Yun asked the Great Hoodwinker, "Must we pass through here? Are there any other routes we can take?"

The Great Hoodwinker looked at him and said, "We can only successfully break through the defenses around the Sacred Mountains if we take a route that normal people, or even the Pyro Company themselves, dare not tread. After all, the Pyro Company isn't easy to deal with."

Wang Yun said with a smile, "I was just asking."

Wang Yun's main concern was that if he followed the Great Hoodwinker into the mountain, how would the reinforcements behind him pass through Mt. Shenchi?

Before this, Wang Yun was unaware of the situation at Mt. Shenchi since he was not omniscient. If everyone knew how to pass through Mt. Shenchi, there would be no need for them to pay the Great Hoodwinker for his services.

After thinking for a long time, Wang Yun finally decided to stand at the back of the group. He planned to use the hardtack he had brought with him and grind them into crumbs to scatter on the ground as a guide for his reinforcements.

Although this might cause him to starve after he got into the Sacred Mountains, what was there to be afraid of when the reinforcements were right behind him? He was going to go all out this time!

Thinking of this, Wang Yun took the opportunity to make a straight marker when he returned to the campsite to pack up. This marking was meant to tell his subordinates they should follow his trail and that he would lead the way for them.

Wang Yun thought for a moment and looked up at the sky. He wanted to see if there were a lot of birds around. After all, birds were really fond of eating bread crumbs, so it would be bad if they ate the crumbs.

But as he thought about it, Wang Yun suddenly realized he had never seen a single bird since entering the vicinity of Mt. Wuzhai.

Wang Yun calmed himself and tried to listen to the sounds of the wilderness. However, he could not hear anything at all.

Could it be that there were no birds here? Even though it was winter now, not all birds would migrate south for the winter. Shouldn't a large and secluded place like this be perfect for birds to live?

### **Chapter 697: An eerie fog**

By the time the group arrived at the foot of Mt. Shenchu, it was already the morning of the fourth day since they set off from the black market. To be ready to deal with the devious Mt. Shenchu, everyone even made sure to rest well for the night before coming here.

During this period, the monster that attacked the campsite at night did not appear again. It seemed that it sensed lethal danger from "Old Xu" and decided to temporarily give up attacking any further.

However, Ren Xiaosu felt the other party would come back. Thinking about it from another perspective, if someone had killed his pet, he would surely seek revenge against them for a while too.

But when Ren Xiaosu thought about it again, he felt it was impossible he would have a pet at all. Anything remotely edible would have already been used to fill his stomach.

This was a result of his many years of living as a refugee. People like him were unlikely to have any pets at all. He had even turned an offensive plant like the Potato Shooter, which was a reward from the palace, into a crop, so how could he possibly own a pet?

In the past, a young Yan Liuyuan had asked Ren Xiaosu if he were afraid of snakes, but Ren Xiaosu said he was only afraid they were not fresh.

At that time, Ren Xiaosu loved winter the most. That was because it was the safest time to catch snakes.

Mt. Shenchu was indeed as strange as the Great Hoodwinker had claimed. The entire mountain seemed shrouded in clouds, like a different world altogether.

Only at this moment did Cheng Yu confirm the Great Hoodwinker had really been to the periphery of the Sacred Mountains before. As a matter of fact, many of the guides back at the black market were always swindling, lying, cheating, and stealing. It did not matter whether they had really been there before. As long as there was money to be made, they would claim they had "been there" before.

Before entering Mt. Shenchu, Cheng Yu had his assistants bring out a 200-meter rope. Then he made everyone tie it around their wrists.

At first, everyone was worried this would affect their mobility. But when they realized later it was not really a hindrance, they felt relieved.

Cheng Yu smiled and said, "There's still about two or three meters of rope between each of us. This length should be enough for everyone to move around freely, so even if you encounter any danger, you won't get impeded by other people's movements and there will still be time to loosen the rope."

Everyone agreed unanimously, that was, until Ren Xiaosu started jumping rope while they were marching.

This time, Ren Xiaosu did not even have to use his own rope. He just untied the one around his wrist and had Yang Xiaojin swing it for him.

After entering Mt. Shenchi, the visibility between each person went down to only about five meters. Cheng Yu could suddenly feel the rope tied to his hand starting to sway frequently. When he turned around, he discovered that Ren Xiaosu had started jumping rope at some point in time.

Ren Xiaosu was jumping rope this time with one end of the rope tied to Cheng Yu's hand, while the other was tied to Yang Xiaojin's hand. When Yang Xiaojin swung the rope, Cheng Yu's arm swung as well.

Cheng Yu felt a strange sense of participation.

What the fuck! He really did not want to be a part of this!

Cheng Yu shouted at Ren Xiaosu, "Why are you jumping rope in a place like this?!"

With Mt. Shenchi covered in thick fog, who knew when a dangerous creature might suddenly jump out and attack them? With everyone already feeling so anxious, a person in their group had started jumping rope and marching at the same time? It really couldn't be any stranger than this.

Ren Xiaosu frowned when he heard Cheng Yu shouting at him. "What are you shouting for? Just mind your own business and keep walking. It's not like I'm affecting you by jumping rope."

Cheng Yu nearly collapsed. This guy could still calmly ask him why he was shouting? He even looked annoyed when he said that.

If this were the past, Cheng Yu would definitely have beaten him up already. However, when he thought the other party might be Luo Lan's backer and felt he was probably not a match for him, he calmed down and dismissed the idea.

But who could possibly regard a lunatic like him as their backer?! And that girl behind him, why would she be so cooperative and swing the rope for him?!

Ren Xiaosu stopped jumping and asked in his mind, "What's the completion level for the quest this time?"

"Perfect!"

Ren Xiaosu breathed a sigh of relief. He was still a bit worried his quest's completion level would get affected if the others could not clearly see he was jumping rope in this thick fog.

As the Great Hoodwinker led them through the mountains, at least half of Cheng Yu's attention was focused on him now. He wanted to see what the guide was relying on to bring them out of Mt. Shenchi.

The Great Hoodwinker muttered as he walked, "150 steps ahead to the left..."

Cheng Yu silently counted the Great Hoodwinker's steps as they marched. When he reached 150, he saw the Great Hoodwinker standing in front of a huge rock before muttering again, "370 steps ahead to the right..."

Cheng Yu was shocked to realize the man was completely relying on this stupid method of memorizing landmarks to slowly feel his way forward. But wouldn't it take at least a 100,000 steps to walk out of Mt. Shenchi. How could he even remember all that?

The people at the back of the group gradually came to a stop.

Cheng Yu asked out loud, "What's going on at the back? Why have you all stopped moving?"

His voice could only reach the middle of the group, so someone in the middle responded, "We can't see anything, so we're not sure why they've stopped moving."

With that, everyone stopped talking. They were waiting to hear how the person at the back of the group would respond.

In this moment of silence, Ren Xiaosu suddenly heard a strange rattle come from the white fog. It sounded like bones clattering against the ground, as well as like countless insects moving at a fast speed.

"Surely it's not the face bugs, right?" Ren Xiaosu had a bad feeling. This sound was almost the same as when they encountered the face bugs back in the Jing Mountains. Moreover, these two places were also known as the legendary hallowed grounds.

Suddenly, a scream reverberated through the mountains. Almost in unison, Luo Lan, Zhou Qi, Ren Xiaosu, Cheng Yu, and Song Qiao all looked toward the source of the sound.

But the fog was so thick no one could see what was going on.

They could only feel the rope getting tighter and tighter, and it was even shaking violently. It was as though some of the group's members were struggling against something.

Eventually, the rope got so tight it went taut. Song Qiao, who was standing behind Yang Xiaojin, had his arms yanked straight by the rope. He ended up looking like a cross as Yang Xiaojin and another person held tightly onto the rope on either side of him.

Ren Xiaosu immediately rushed over to Song Qiao and cut off the rope around his wrist with a dagger. Right after, the severed rope was pulled out into the white fog!

He quickly loosened the rope around Yang Xiaojin's hand and shielded her behind himself. Meanwhile, Luo Lan and Zhou Qi had already loosened their rope by themselves and taken cover behind Ren Xiaosu.

Cheng Yu could finally confirm Luo Lan had only dared to sleep soundly without someone keeping watch for him at night in the campsite because he had encountered Ren Xiaosu.

A person's first reaction to danger would definitely be to seek safety!

Ren Xiaosu and the others stood there quietly. Every now and then, they would hear cries of grief coming from within the white fog. There were even some inexplicable light and shadows flashing inside the white fog.

“There’s supernatural beings fighting,” Cheng Yu said.

However, none of the remaining dozen or so people were willing to go in and rescue them.

Since this was a group of people with different intentions, who would be willing to plunge themselves into the fog to save others at a time like this?

Only Song Qiao was worried, because his assistants were now in that fog!

### **Chapter 698: Tarantulas**

“Are we gonna save them?” Song Qiao asked powerlessly.

As expected, no one answered him.

At this moment, the only people around him were the Great Hoodwinker, Ren Xiaosu, Yang Xiaojin, Luo Lan, Zhou Qi, and Cheng Yu and his five assistants. All of these people did not look like they were helpful.

Although both Song Qiao and Cheng Yu were members of the Anjing House, Cheng Yu would probably not care to help Song Qiao even if something were to happen to him, much less help him save his assistants.

“What the hell was that?” The Great Hoodwinker asked in a low voice, “I did not encounter something like this when I was here previously!”

Cheng Yu believed the Great Hoodwinker’s words. After all, the monsters in this wilderness would have no semblance of pity for humans. If the Great Hoodwinker really encountered these creatures when he came here previously, he would already be dead.

“What should we do now? Run?” Luo Lan asked Ren Xiaosu from behind.

Cheng Yu turned around and realized Luo Lan was only looking to Ren Xiaosu for answers and no one else.

It seemed the monstrous creatures were being held back by some of the supernatural beings at this moment, so it would be a good opportunity for them to make a run for it.

However, Ren Xiaosu said calmly, “Don’t be rash now. The fog here is too heavy. Rather than run away in confusion, we might as well watch and wait. There’s quite a few of us here, and also many supernatural beings in our group, so we might not lose to the monsters in this fog.”

Just as he finished speaking, Song Qiao was surprised to see a figure dart past in the fog in front of them. However, that person was not trying to escape from the battlefield. On the contrary, he seemed to have come from somewhere further in front of the group and plunged himself straight into the battlefield!

Wait a minute, who was that? Song Qiao looked at his figure but could not remember anyone in the group wearing an outfit like that.

“It’s White Mask!” Cheng Yu exclaimed. “Why did he suddenly come here? It looks like he was really the one who cut down all those trees and fought that monster in the wilderness.”

Song Qiao was bewildered. “Are you sure you’re not mistaken?”

“It’s definitely him. He’s wearing the same outfit as the previous time I saw him.” Cheng Yu said, “I wonder why he didn’t change his clothes.”

Ren Xiaosu looked at Cheng Yu speechlessly. He thought, *‘Aren’t you totally focusing on the wrong thing?’* There was no need to change Old Xu’s clothes since this outfit had become Old Xu’s trademark. Since Old Xu was meant to be his scapegoat in the first place, Ren Xiaosu was more worried that others would not recognize “him.”

When Luo Lan suggested earlier that they flee, the reason Ren Xiaosu decided to stay around was because Old Xu, who was scouting ahead of them, was rushing over to them.

No matter what monsters might be attacking them now, he would have to take a look before leaving, right? If they kept running away the moment they encountered any danger, they might as well not enter the Sacred Mountains since there would surely be more danger ahead.

If they wanted to survive the Sacred Mountains, they would first have to understand what was roaming out here.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu would be depending on all the supernatural beings in the group once they got into the Sacred Mountains. He needed them so he could get an opportunity to fish in troubled waters. If these people were to die on Mt. Shenchu, who would cover for him later?

To put it simply, Ren Xiaosu could not let these people die so easily. At the very least, they would have to survive until they were in the Sacred Mountains.

Even if he couldn’t fend off the monsters, he could still use Old Xu to draw their attention and let the others escape.

However, Ren Xiaosu had thought too much. After making Old Xu enter the battlefield, he realized the team members at the back had not really suffered too many casualties. The supernatural beings in the group were still supporting each other as they took down the monsters attacking them.

At this moment, a gust of wind blew behind Old Xu. Ren Xiaosu made Old Xu turn around and fight, but he was stunned for a moment. A huge hairy spider more than half the height of a person was bounding over in the white fog.



However, the spider in front of him was rarely seen in the Central Plains. Ren Xiaosu started remembering the science books he had read in Stronghold 88's library as he tried to match it to a corresponding Pre-Cataclysm species.

Tarantulas?

From the science books he had read, this arachnid was preying on birds, frogs, and lizards during the time before The Cataclysm. It could be said that they were very terrifying hunters. But didn't tarantulas live in the tropics? Why would they appear here?

After all, they were currently in a northern temperate zone.

This was most likely related to the Pyro Company, right? Ren Xiaosu felt that the appearance of these tarantulas on Mt. Shenchu was not as simple as it appeared.

No wonder Ren Xiaosu had noticed very few birds around since they passed Mt. Wuzhai. Even if the birds had also mutated, they would still be afraid of a natural enemy like tarantulas.

As more and more tarantulas appeared in the white fog, Ren Xiaosu manipulated Old Xu to attack towards the center of the battlefield.

Cheng Yu and the others remained on guard in their positions. They could hear someone shouting "spiders" from inside the white fog followed by exclamations of "White Mask" immediately after. Once Old Xu entered the battlefield, there were also fewer and fewer screams.

When the numerous tarantulas in the white fog noticed how powerful Old Xu was, they stopped attacking their prey and started surrounding Old Xu instead. This gave the others a window to catch a breather.

Ren Xiaosu frowned. The tarantulas were capable of shooting white silk webs to bind their prey. It would be easy to dodge one or two of their attacks, but if there were too many of them, not even Old Xu could escape.

If Old Xu got bound by too many of the spiders' silk webs, its combat prowess would get significantly reduced.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu controlled Old Xu and took out some grenades from a shirt pocket and threw them everywhere.

No matter how powerful the tarantulas might be, they could not withstand the power of grenades. Faced with a formidable opponent like Old Xu, the group of tarantulas began retreating!

"Why do I keep getting the feeling that White Mask has always been nearby?" Cheng Yu felt a little puzzled. "Previously, I thought that he was here to seize the No. 001 Experimental. But now, it seems more like he's protecting someone."

Saying that, Cheng Yu looked at Luo Lan and the others suspiciously. Was White Mask protecting Luo Lan? Or was he protecting someone else?

Luo Lan glanced at him and said, "What are you looking at me for? If I had a bodyguard like him, I would've already given your Anjing House a bashing!"

Cheng Yu's face darkened. Could you not be so direct regarding our conflict?

In fact, Luo Lan did not know about the existence of "Old Xu" either. When he previously heard White Mask and a sniper had intercepted the Pyro Company's convoy, he thought it was Ren Xiaosu. However, Ren Xiaosu was standing beside him right now, so it showed Ren Xiaosu was not White Mask.

Cheng Yu recalled that White Mask had appeared in Stronghold 74, Stronghold 73, and Luoyang City. It seemed like he really did not have anything to do with Luo Lan at all.

On the contrary, Ren Xiaosu, who was previously suspected to be Luo Lan's backer, did not take any action this time. Thinking of this, Cheng Yu felt that no matter how powerful Ren Xiaosu might be, he would probably not be a match for White Mask either.

If White Mask had been constantly protecting the group from nearby, it would be considered a check against Luo Lan and the others. A balance of power was needed in this group to prevent any of the factions from getting too influential and swaying everyone's decisions.

Cheng Yu was about to say something, but he froze. "Someone's missing? Hey, girl over there, where's your boyfriend?"

At some point, Ren Xiaosu had ventured into the heavy fog while they were talking.

Yang Xiaojin wanted to ignore Cheng Yu, but he was pretty insistent and continued asking, "You don't know where he went either?"

Yang Xiaojin said in a serious tone, "He probably went somewhere to jump rope."

Cheng Yu was surprised. For some reason, Cheng Yu felt this answer was actually somewhat plausible even though it sounded extremely absurd.

### **Chapter 699: The monster in the mountains**

Of course, Yang Xiaojin knew where Ren Xiaosu had gone, but why would she tell Cheng Yu?

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was trailing "Old Xu" from a distance. Meanwhile, Old Xu was following the retreating tarantulas. Gradually, Ren Xiaosu realized the fog was getting lighter and lighter in the direction he was heading. When he entered a small valley, his vision became much clearer.

Earlier, Ren Xiaosu had realized something very strange. Although a lot of the people in the group had been attacked by the tarantulas, he did not see any corpses or bloodstains on the ground. There was something that did not make sense about it.

Therefore, under the assumption that these tarantulas were deliberately released into Mt. Shenchi by the Pyro Company, Ren Xiaosu felt that there were probably some other secrets to them.

Of course, if it got too dangerous, he would immediately return and bring Yang Xiaojin, Luo Lan, and the others out of Mt. Shenchì.

Ren Xiaosu was making his way cautiously inside the valley. The stone walls on either side of the valley were very dark. In fact, this valley was very similar to that slot canyon[1] back at the Jing Mountains. When he looked up, he could only see a tiny sliver of light shining through.

While he was looking up, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see countless white silk sacs hanging from the stone walls. They looked like huge, tattered cocoons.

Ren Xiaosu was careful not to make a sound. Old Xu was watching the tarantulas from a short distance in front. If Old Xu got too close, it could get really dangerous.

Moreover, Old Xu could already see the tarantulas dragging some new cocoons up the stone walls and hanging the humans they had just captured.

The people in the cocoons were no longer visible. They were all wrapped in the thick spider silk and did not put up a struggle or resistance. It was as though they were already dead.

Ren Xiaosu scrutinized these “cocoons.” Perhaps this was how the tarantulas stored their food?

Therefore, the reason he did not see any bloodstains or corpses around just now was because the tarantulas had to drag their prey back to their nest before slowly consuming them.

At the spot where Old Xu was hiding, there were dark caves packed densely on both sides of the stone walls. No one knew where they led to.

Ren Xiaosu wondered whether those people who were captured by the tarantulas were still alive. He did not intend to take the risk to save them. Earlier, he had made a rough estimate of there being about a few hundred tarantulas in here.

Animals in the wilderness had a habit of guarding their food, and it looked like there was very little difference between tarantulas and wild animals. If he tried to rescue those people and the tarantulas started regarding him as an enemy stealing their food, things could get really bad.

Faced with these tarantulas, even Ren Xiaosu had no choice but to turn and flee.

But just as Ren Xiaosu was about to leave, he could see through Old Xu’s vision that some powerful flashlights were shining from the other end of the small valley.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Who were the people who were approaching? Why were they coming to such a place at a time like this?

When the powerful flashlights were shone against the stone walls, it made the tarantulas restless. Someone inside the dark valley said, “Looks like there’s a new batch of meat again. I wonder if there’s any superhumans among them this time.”

Another person complained, "As if superhumans are so readily available. The higher-ups are really asking for the impossible."

"I heard a group of people from Mt. Wuzhai have just arrived. We might get some good stuff today."

Ren Xiaosu listened quietly to their conversation. It was clear these people were part of the Pyro Company. Furthermore, the tarantulas here were probably kept by them for their hunting purposes.

Ren Xiaosu had been wondering about something. Even though the Anjing House had issued an order to intercept the Pyro Company, and even wantonly organized groups to head into the Sacred Mountains later, why didn't the Pyro Company retaliate but simply allowed them in like that?

Ren Xiaosu surmised the Pyro Company might be using this opportunity to collect the DNA of supernatural beings!

Outside of the Sacred Mountains, the Pyro Company would have to spend a lot of effort in order to capture a supernatural being. Moreover, they might even suffer heavy casualties if they tried to do so in someone else's territory.

But the Sacred Mountains were the Pyro Company's home field!

Back at Stronghold 73, the Anjing House and the Pyro Company had been plotting against each other throughout. Their schemes were not inferior to each other either. The Pyro Company even used the tunnel to kill many of the experts from the underworld.

Therefore, it was also reasonable that the Pyro Company would use this plan to counter the various consortiums and the Anjing House's supernatural beings.

But he could not understand why these five people would dare to come in here and steal food from the tarantulas. It was not like these tarantulas could communicate with humans, right?

Ren Xiaosu and Old Xu waited quietly, hoping to see the other party's methods.

After the tarantulas sensed the strong light and threat, they started crawling towards the five members of the Pyro Company. The black and hairy tarantulas on the stone walls were so densely packed together that it nearly gave Ren Xiaosu trypophobia.

Suddenly, he saw through Old Xu's vision a Pyro Company member take out a black box from his backpack. An ear-piercing sound reverberated through the valley. When those tarantulas heard this sound, they no longer bounded towards them. Instead, they scrambled like the tide into the dark caves on both sides of the valley walls. In an instant, they had all but disappeared from view.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. It turned out the Pyro Company actually had a way to restrain the tarantulas. The sound produced by the black box might seem harmless to humans, but the tarantulas had an instinctive repulsion and fear of it.

A member of the Pyro Company laughed and said, "Hehe, these spiders really don't learn. We wouldn't have let them out if we didn't thoroughly study their genetics and find out about their weaknesses."

“Enough talking. Let’s hurry up and take the prey away,” another member of the Pyro Company said.

“Wait, someone’s there!”

One of the Pyro Company members had sharp eyes. They could even see Old Xu’s figure a few hundred meters away in this dim lighting.

“Who’s over there?” a Pyro Company member said with a raised voice.

Immediately, the five of them drew their sabers from their belts.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and decided to leave. Since he had already learned a lot of information from the Pyro Company members here, there was no need for him to tussle with them. What if those spiders went crazy again and crawled out to attack him?

But just as he was about to leave, the palace suddenly spoke.

Ren Xiaosu’s expression darkened. Why did it have to assign a quest now of all times?

The Pyro Company members on the opposite side were closing in. They exchanged tactical hand signs with each other as they attempted to surround Ren Xiaosu by fanning out.

But before they could even take a couple steps, they heard a strange voice.

Immediately after, they saw Ren Xiaosu jumping rope and singing a nursery rhyme as he slowly approached. “Let’s paddle together... The boat will push away the waves...”

The five members of the Pyro Company were advancing towards him, but this sight shocked them so much they beat a hasty retreat. For a moment, they were wondering what kind of strange being they had encountered.

“What the fuck is this!”

“Could it be one of those freaks created by the researchers in the mountains again?!”

These people did not even show the slightest fear when they ventured into the tarantulas’ nest. But when they saw this strange person skipping and singing nursery rhymes in the dark valley approaching them, they got scared!

## **Chapter 700: Game of conspiracies**

In this dark environment that was already eerie to begin with, someone actually appeared in the most unexpected of ways and approached them while jumping rope.

It was no wonder the Pyro Company members were afraid. If it were anyone else, who wouldn’t feel scared? After all, there was already something spooky about the atmosphere here!

Ren Xiaosu looked at the Pyro Company members and said while jumping rope, "Hang on, don't leave yet. Let me finish skipping first."

The Pyro Company members looked like they had encountered a formidable foe. However, they could not understand what Ren Xiaosu meant. One of them said, "Who the hell are you? What are you doing here? We are the Pyro Company's T3-ranked Midnight team. If you came out from the mountains, we should be friends."

It was not uncommon for Pyro Company members to be killed by the monsters in the mountains. Therefore, they were now scared that the research laboratory in the mountains had released yet another monster that did not differentiate friend from foe.

But at this moment, Ren Xiaosu fell silent. Two seconds later, he said with a sigh, "Don't make a sound. Y'all have interrupted my counting! Don't talk until I'm done jumping. Otherwise, I'll have to kill someone."

He had already jumped more than 200 times just now, but when the Pyro Company members interrupted him, he lost count of how many times he had jumped. He had no choice but to start counting from 200 again so as not to affect the quest's completion level.

The members of the Pyro Company fell silent. They had only come out here to gather the prey recently caught by the tarantulas. Although they were also trained in combat, they were mostly deployed like handymen in the mountains. Now that they encountered a legendary monster in the mountains, they did not even have the courage to put up a fight.

At this moment, they ascertained this young man in front of them was a freak monster that came out of the mountains. Any normal person outside the mountains would not behave like Ren Xiaosu.

If Cheng Yu knew about these thoughts of theirs, he would probably get so emotional he would want to shake hands with them.

About ten seconds later, Ren Xiaosu finally stopped skipping. Looking at the Pyro Company members, he noticed they had their sabers pointed down. This subconscious action implied they had no intention of fighting. It was as though they were at a loss after giving up on resisting.

Ren Xiaosu pondered things for a moment and asked, "What's that black box for?"

"It plays back a sound that's used against the tarantulas. It was specially developed by the research lab in the mountains. And these tarantulas really are terrified of the sound. They run away the moment they hear it," a member of the Pyro Company explained.

"When did these tarantulas get released here?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Last year."

"They're used to deal with outsiders, right?" Ren Xiaosu pretended he was on the same side as them. "Against the Anjing House?"

“I’m not too sure. We T3-ranked combatants know very little about this. You might as well ask those big shots in charge of our battle plan when you return to the mountains.” A Pyro Company member said, “Just a few months ago, the higher-ups suddenly ordered us to come here and check on the situation every three days. They said a lot of people would be coming here on their own. It’s not only this place that has the tarantulas; other places have them as well. Also, T31901 and I were transferred here to Mt. Shenchi only recently.”

Ren Xiaosu frowned. A few months ago, the Pyro Company told them there would be people sending themselves to their doorsteps. That meant the Pyro Company had deliberately tricked the Anjing House and lured them out here into the Sacred Mountains.

His previous speculation was not wrong. The Pyro Company was hoping the supernatural beings would walk right into their trap!

Therefore, while it seemed like the Anjing House and the Pyro Company were suffering losses as they plotted against each other, it was in fact the consortiums fanning the flames that suffered the most significant losses. After all, the victims that were captured by the tarantulas this time were all the consortiums’ people.

Wait a minute! Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of something. If the Wang Consortium’s target was to gain control of the Central Plains, and perhaps also the southwest and northwest of the Alliance of Strongholds’ entire territory, then with the Anjing House having formed a coalition with the Wang Consortium, could their objective for this operation have been to lure the various consortiums’ experts into the Sacred Mountains so they could help the Wang Consortium eliminate some potential threats all along?

Truly, the minds of these conspirators were way too complicated. Ren Xiaosu was far too inferior to others in this aspect. In fact, no matter who it was that was caught up in this maelstrom, there would always be several motives for every single thing they did.

Ren Xiaosu felt ashamed of himself.

At this moment, a Pyro Company member in front of him suddenly asked, “Which research lab did you come out from?”

To play it safe, Ren Xiaosu replied, “Lab 1.”

But Ren Xiaosu noticed the expressions of the Pyro Company members changing after he said that. A Pyro Company member raised his saber again. “There’s only Lab 2 and 7 in these mountains. What Lab 1 are you talking about!?”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. “Where’s Lab 1 then?”

“Lab 1 was destroyed in The Cataclysm.” The Pyro Company member sneered.

Ren Xiaosu had asked too many questions just now, and shouldn’t the monsters in the mountains know more than them?

At first, everyone was confused by Ren Xiaosu's odd behavior. But they finally realized Ren Xiaosu was not like those freaks at all. Other than jumping rope and singing, he was essentially no different from a normal person.

This was someone who had come from outside of Mt. Shenchu!

After that, the Pyro Company members slowly surrounded Ren Xiaosu. Then they were all killed by him.

"You don't get to live long if you're too smart," Ren Xiaosu lamented as he looked at the five bodies.

They were only a five-man Midnight squad, so Ren Xiaosu wondered where they found the courage to try to kill him. Not even a Dusk team was able to handle him. Perhaps there would still be some hope if it were a five-man Dawn team that were here.

Ren Xiaosu turned his head and looked at the dozen or so white cocoons hanging on the stone walls. After making Old Xu to leave, he used his saber to cut off the spider silk holding up the cocoons and saved the people who were captured.

When Ren Xiaosu cut open a cocoon, he found the person inside was still breathing evenly. Their facial complexion was also normal and it looked like they could still be saved.

Ren Xiaosu remembered that tarantulas were venomous. However, they would only inject digestive enzymes into their prey after they were dead to liquefy the body before consuming it, so it was unlikely they were at that stage yet.

After tying the cocoons together one by one with a rope, he dragged them back like a bunch of Chinese hawberries.[1] He even carried the black box in his hand in case the tarantulas came after him.

When he returned, Ren Xiaosu did not drag these unconscious people over to the group personally. Instead, he made Old Xu drag them over to Cheng Yu before disappearing into the white fog again.

Cheng Yu gazed at White Mask's receding figure. He thought to himself how he did not even have a chance to thank him before he left.

This mysterious and powerful image of White Mask could not be erased from Cheng Yu's mind. Sometimes, he would lament how there was such a huge gap in power even among superhumans.

While he did not dare to move away from where they were, the other party had pursued the tarantulas back to their nest and even rescued everyone there.

It wasn't until the people trapped inside the cocoons began coming to that Ren Xiaosu slowly made his way back.

Cheng Yu snapped, "Where did you go?"

"I went to jump rope," Ren Xiaosu answered matter-of-factly.