

First Order 761

Chapter 761 Bestowing calamity

In the Northern Plains, Yan Liuyuan sat in the imperial court's tent and listened as Hassan spoke. He listened quietly, thinking about something.

Hassan was kneeling on both knees. "During this period, the chiefs of the two tribes that we took over also submitted to us. They offered half of their livestock as tribute to the imperial court. Master, please bring them with you when you lead our people to plunder the South this time."

Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "How smart of these two chiefs. The Gorlos and Khoton tribes have been utterly defeated by the Bulan tribe and even lost their weapons and horses. How much livestock can they still have left?"

"A few dozen," Hassan said in a low voice. Then he lowered his head further. "Master, the Gorlos and Khoton tribes had a rather good relationship with our Kharchin tribe in past years. In the past, they helped us out a lot whenever there were blizzards. I acted on my own this time and made the decision, so please punish me...."

"There's no need for that." Yan Liuyuan took out a map and took a look at it. He said, "You're my Commander-in-Chief of the Right now, so you can still make the decision for such trivial matters. If they wish to come along and plunder the South, just bring them along. The imperial court has just been set up, and we're still short of talent. Go and tell Gorlos Khong and Khoton Moyu that only warriors can serve in my imperial court. If they're cowardly or afraid to fight when we travel to the South, they had better be content with herding livestock in the future."

Hassan was overjoyed. "Don't worry, Master. I'll be sure to let them know."

Any normal person would have selfish motives. Since Hassan was on good terms with those two tribes, now that he had a powerful lord, he would naturally hope his friends could also gain the favor of his master.

Furthermore, eight tribes had already submitted to the imperial court by now. Although Hassan had been conferred the title of Commander-in-Chief of the Right, it did not necessarily mean his tribe was stronger than the others. Hassan also needed support to maintain his authority as the Commander-in-Chief of the Right.

Wherever there were people, there would be politics. Wherever there was power, there would also be politics. This was not Hassan's expertise, but he could slowly learn to be good at it.

In the future, the entire steppe would become his master's territory. The grasslands were so vast that even Hassan could not help but feel moved by it.

Yan Liuyuan looked at Hassan with a half-smile and said, "It's fine if you want to look after your own people, but you have to tell me in advance next time. Also, don't play word games with me in the future."

The word games he was referring to was the tribute of “half their livestock.” In actual fact, those two tribes only had a few dozen livestock left.

Even ten nomads could not outwit a Southerner when it came to word games.

When Hassan heard Yan Liuyuan say that, he quickly prostrated. “Master, please believe me. I won’t dare to do it again.”

“Mhm, how’s the preparation for the expedition coming along? Are the other tribes ready yet?” Yan Liuyuan asked.

“Our Kharchin tribe has already made the necessary preparations. The other tribes are also getting eager to set off. But someone asked Hassan to ask if you would like us to prepare food for the wolves on this journey?” Hassan asked.

“There’s no need for that. They’re much more resourceful than y’all. If you have time to worry about them, you might as well worry about yourselves,” Yan Liuyuan answered. “But tell them that I’ll be watching how brave they are in battle this time. Don’t always rely on the wolves. If the men of the steppe become reliant on others, they’ll lose their last bit of courage. Go on, I’ve already chosen the route that we’ll travel on, but we’ll have to wait for the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes to set off first.”

The chaos in the steppe had calmed down.

Previously, due to the capture of the khan, many disputes arose on the steppe and everyone wanted to be the new ruler. As a result, the dozens of tribes that were originally under that khan’s rule were immediately divided.

But now, there were only Yan Liuyuan’s imperial court, the Bulan tribe, and the Kirghiz tribe forming a tripartite influence in the grasslands. Surrounding these three powers were vassals made up of dozens of smaller tribes. Everyone was still watching the developments.

This included the tribes Yan Liuyuan had united, as well as the smaller tribes the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes controlled.

Eventually, some of the nomads started talking in private about how the small tribes were content with having enough food to eat and clothes to wear and not be bullied by others. After the last blizzard, the small tribes had suffered heavy losses. Seeing that they might not be able to survive the next winter, they had to seek a change.

So where would those losses be compensated from? It would have to be from the South.

Therefore, everyone thought that whoever of the three powers could lead them to raid the South successfully would be the true, new ruler of the steppe. Otherwise, any aspirations would only be fluff. The nomadic tribes had never been truly united before. They would only follow whoever was stronger. Therefore, the three powers were prepared to head south. To be honest, with winter about to pass and the icy surface of the river starting to melt, it was actually no longer suitable for them to go on a raid.

But due to the circumstances, everyone could only brace themselves and head south.

In contrast, Yan Liuyuan was the most relaxed of them all. It was as though he was not very worried about this expedition to the South. Over the past few days, all he did was talk with the tribal chiefs one by one and listen to their requests and concerns. However, he did not show any attitude of resolving the problems for them.

Initially, Hassan was worried these tribal chiefs would have any objections. But after a few days, he realized the tribal chiefs had become much more well-behaved. All of them were privately talking about how they could not see what their master was thinking and that he was way too mysterious.

That mysteriousness slowly turned into reverence.

Hassan did not understand. It was not like his master had done anything for them to think this way.

Yan Liuyuan glanced at Hassan. "Alright, you may go now."

Following, Hassan kowtowed to Yan Liuyuan before bowing to Tsetseg who was not far away from Yan Liuyuan. Only after that did he slowly leave the royal tent.

Tsetseg was once his daughter. But now she was the lady of the imperial court. If Li Xiaoyu had to bring the tribespeople out to gather salt, all the daily affairs would be seen to by Tsetseg.

Therefore, half of Hassan's hopes for the future were actually placed in his daughter. Once his master gained control of the vast grasslands, how could there not be a place for him?

Hassan felt that he must quickly explain to the chiefs of the Gorlos and Khoton tribes to perform well on this expedition to the South and warn them not to allow the other tribes to outperform them.

After Hassan left, Yan Liuyuan looked at Tsetseg. "Do you feel uncomfortable that your father has to bow to you?"

After a long silence, Tsetseg said, "Mother told me that I have to get used to it sooner or later."

Yan Liuyuan laughed out loud. "Your mother is right. Although it might seem unkind, you have to understand that all of this is unavoidable."

Tsetseg changed the subject. "Are you really going to lead them to the South? I saw you ordering the wolves to head west two days ago."

"I sent them west to look for new pastures. After we get back from the South, the Central Plains will definitely take an excessive response. Now is not yet the time to clash head-on with them. The wolves will be back in another two days. Without anyone to protect you and Big Sister Xiaoyu, I couldn't head to the South without worry," Yan Liuyuan said.

"But you won't have the wolves with you then. What if you encounter danger," Tsetseg said nervously. "That won't happen," Yan Liuyuan replied.

A lot of people thought that he was dependent on the wolves, but very few people knew the young man already had the power to bestow calamity upon others. If he had not come to the North, he would have become one of those demigods in this era of the "Rise of Gods."

Tsetseg asked again, "Then are you going to kill a lot of people?"

Yan Liuyuan looked outside the tent at the blue sky. He did not answer this question. "Come and help me comb my hair."

Tsetseg obediently took a comb and sat behind Yan Liuyuan. She knew that whenever Yan Liuyuan was about to kill or had killed someone, he would always have her comb his hair.

Chapter 762 Worshippers

"Big Sister Xiaoyu is back!" A girl shouted loudly outside the imperial court's tent. Her voice was filled with joy and adoration. Combing Yan Liuyuan's hair, Tsetseg's eyes lit up. She realized Yan Liuyuan, who was sitting before her, relaxed. His muscles were no longer as tense as before.

It seemed that in these vast grasslands, only Xiaoyu could make this young lord feel at ease.

"Go on, go and see what Big Sister Xiaoyu has brought back for y'all this time," Yan Liuyuan said.

Tsetseg was still young, so she was also quite playful, and she rushed out of the imperial tent with a smile when she heard this.

Hundreds of warriors in the tribe had started worshipping Yan Liuyuan as a god. However, Yan Liuyuan did not keep any of these people by his side. Instead, he left them all under the command of Xiaoyu.

Although Yan Liuyuan made Xiaoyu their overall commander, he did so in order to have them protect her safety. If he lost Xiaoyu as well, there would be nothing left for him on the steppe.

This was his and Xiaoyu's home. As long as the authority of the imperial court was stabilized, they would no longer have to bear the disdain of others.

Every time Xiaoyu returned from her outings, she would have the tribe's warriors catch some cute little animals to bring back. On one hand, she wanted to try to rear them, and on the other hand, it was to make the tribe's children happy.

During this period, the various tribes under the rule of the imperial court started gaining respect for Yan Liuyuan. However, everyone could not help but feel a heartfelt fondness for Xiaoyu as well. She was truly a gentle Southern woman.

As there were so many tribes under the rule of the imperial court, conflicts would arise from time to time. For example, trivial cases such as stealing of goats or cattle could easily lead to bloodshed in the grasslands.

As for Xiaoyu, who handled these matters, she was always impartial and never sided with anyone.

As time passed, Xiaoyu unexpectedly gained the love and respect of everyone. The tribespeople liked to approach her if they had any trivial matters that needed resolving.

If Yan Liuyuan asserted the authority of the imperial court through his absolute strength, then Xiaoyu was the mediator who made things work between the various tribes.

Of course, this was also because the influence of Yan Liuyuan's imperial court was relatively stable. The other tribes did not have a godlike figure like Yan Liuyuan.

His miraculous predictions and calamities were way too divine, and the nomads happened to really believe in them. Therefore, Yan Liuyuan won over a large group of worshippers. Every morning, they would kowtow to the imperial court's tent a 100 times before starting their day.

This way of maintaining authority seemed to be much more secure. When the tribal chiefs saw their own people worshipping Yan Liuyuan as a god, there was really nothing they could do about it. Furthermore, two of the tribal chiefs were also Yan Liuyuan's worshippers.

Yan Liuyuan remembered that Ren Xiaosu had said that resorting to divine powers to stabilize a regime might not be the most stable method, but it would definitely be one of the fastest ways to achieve it.

While Yan Liuyuan was lost in thought, the imperial court's tent was suddenly opened, and cold air from outside blew into his face. There was only one person in the entire tribe who dared to come in without an announcement. He looked up and said with a smile, "Big Sis, where'd you go this time?"

"I have good news to tell you. I found a new salt pool behind Mt. Gongzhuo to the northwest!" Xiaoyu smiled as she sat down next to Yan Liuyuan. "With this discovery, the problem of having enough edible salt for the entire tribe will be solved."

Yan Liuyuan smiled and nodded. "That's a good thing!"

However, Xiaoyu realized Yan Liuyuan did not seem to be surprised by this. She punched his shoulder. "You made a wish again, didn't you? You should at least pretend to be happy next time. Otherwise, I won't feel any sense of accomplishment at all."

Yan Liuyuan cried out in pain after being hit, "That hurts! Sis, be gentler!"

Ever since Yan Liuyuan killed someone, Xiaoyu suddenly started joking around with him more often. She would even occasionally hit her little brother as an older sister would.

This left Yan Liuyuan's worshippers at a loss. They could only respect Xiaoyu even more now.

But Yan Liuyuan knew full well that Xiaoyu was not doing this to elevate her status in the eyes of others. She just did not want him to be so depressed.

Every time he felt like he was about to slide into the abyss, Xiaoyu would hit him and pull him back from the edge of it. She was there to keep him grounded, dragging him back from the divine to his human senses. So Xiaoyu deliberately made herself appear more cheerful so she could influence Yan Liuyuan.

Yan Liuyuan was still crying out in pain. Xiaoyu rolled her eyes. "Alright, stop faking it. Let me ask you something. Why haven't you touched Tsetseg yet?"

"Big Sis, why are you suddenly asking about this?" Yan Liuyuan replied after a moment of silence.

"That girl came running over to ask me in grief if she wasn't pretty. I told her that it was not like that, that she's the most beautiful girl in the imperial court, even more beautiful than Big Sister Xiaoyu," Xiaoyu said with a smile. "Then she asked why you still haven't touched her even though she was already living in the imperial court."

"Big Sis, I'm still young," Yan Liuyuan said softly

"Oh, come on." Xiaoyu said, "A lot of people in town had already gotten married at your age, and many of them also had children as well. But I won't poke my nose into your affairs. You can decide for yourself, lest you think I'm being naggy. If you don't like the nomadic girls here, you should snatch one or two from the Central Plains."

Yan Liuyuan was stunned. "Big Sis, is that how you should be talking? If I snatch a girl back, her family will be so heartbroken." Xiaoyu gave it some thought and said, "In that case, just snatch her whole family along with her."

As they conversed, the two of them started laughing. Actually, Yan Liuyuan knew Xiaoyu was just kidding, and Xiaoyu knew Yan Liuyuan would not do something like that.

But with just a joke, Yan Liuyuan clearly felt much happier.

Xiaoyu got down to work in the imperial tent. "I'll pack your stuff for you. Tsetseg will take care of your daily needs on this expedition. I feel more at ease if she goes along with you. The others don't even know what you like to eat."

"Mhm." Yan Liuyuan nodded. "She should also want to see what the Central Plains is like.... Sis, I might kill a lot of people when I go to the Central Plains this time. It might be much more than what I'm expecting."

Xiaoyu stopped packing for a moment. "Then come back earlier. Big Sis will cook porridge for you when you return. Bring back some pickled vegetables from the Central Plains. After all, our porridge will go better with the pickled vegetables from there." Xiaoyu did not answer him directly. It was as though she was deliberately avoiding the issue.

Hassan's voice came from outside, "Master, your faceplate has been forged. Would you like to try it on?"

Chapter 763 The contending Wang Yun

"Faceplate?" Xiaoyu was stunned when she heard what Hassan said. "Why would you have them forge you a faceplate?"

Yan Liuyuan looked at Xiaoyu and said with a smile, "It's because I'm too young, so I often lack an authoritative figure. The faceplate might help with stabilizing the authority of the imperial court." In truth, he did not finish his explanation. Gods needed to portray a sense of mysteriousness, and since the grasslands needed a god now, he would be that god to them.

Xiaoyu looked at Yan Liuyuan. She wanted to say something to him but hesitated. In the end, she just straightened his collar and said, "I'll go and brief Tsetseg on the things to watch out for on the journey. You have to come back safely from this expedition to the South. As long as you're safe, nothing else matters." "Mhm." Yan Liuyuan nodded.

After that, Xiaoyu went out. Then Hassan came in respectfully and handed the black faceplate to Yan Liuyuan.

Yan Liuyuan saw the black faceplate was engraved with a ferocious face that looked very solemn and dignified. Yan Liuyuan looked at Hassan. "I'm happy. You can get back to your work."

After Hassan left, Yan Liuyuan held the mask and took a close, long look at it. In the end, he sighed and put it aside.

Outside the main tent, the pounding of horse hooves sounded. Someone jumped off the horse and got down on one knee outside the tent. "Master, a Qing Consortium envoy is waiting outside. He said that he's brought you what you need the most."

Yan Liuyuan smiled. Although he did not know what the smart Qing Zhen would send him, he reckoned he was ready to make the trip to the South now.

Outside the Sacred Mountains, Wang Yun, the director of the Kong Consortium's 2nd Military Intelligence Division, was rushing towards the black market in the South. Before he could reach the black market, he saw people who had set up camp 40 kilometers to the north of it.

The way the tents were set up looked really familiar.

When he got closer, Wang Yun realized that even the troops who had set up camp here looked really familiar.

Weren't they his 200-odd subordinates? What were they doing here?!

When the sentry who was keeping watch from a hidden post outside the campsite spotted Wang Yun, he immediately came out of the forest and shouted in joy, "Sir, you're back!"

Seeing that none of Wang Yun's subordinates who had followed him were dead, the sentry was even happier. It looked like their commander's operation had gone very smoothly this time. They didn't even suffer any loss of personnel!

Wang Yun was confused when he saw the campsite. "Didn't you all head into the mountains? Weren't you all following me?"

The 200-odd subordinates who rushed out of the campsite were also confused. “Sir, didn’t you tell us to retreat? We found the mark you left behind.”

Wang Yun nearly spat out a mouthful of blood. This was probably the biggest mistake he had made ever since he joined the intelligence agency. He knew his comrades would not lie. Someone must have changed the marks he left behind, and it led them to retreat from the mountains.

There was only one thought in his mind right now. ‘Who the fuck did that?! You’re way too fucking horrible!’

However, Wang Yun did not have time to think about that now. He said, “Follow me back to the Kong Consortium immediately. We mustn’t trust anyone from the other intelligence divisions that we encounter on our way back. If anyone inexplicably approaches, get ready to fight immediately and kill without mercy.”

The final steps of a tightrope walk were the most dangerous. Now that Wang Yun had stolen the hard drive from Wang Wenyan, he had to use it to face his other two competitors.

It would definitely not be safe for them on the way back. When they left, everyone sent them off with a smile on their faces. Now that they wanted to go back now, it would probably be harder than reaching heaven.

Someone might try to kill him on his way back.

Just as Wang Yun had expected, after they set off for the Kong Consortium, they were ambushed about a 100 kilometers away from the Kong Consortium’s stronghold that very night.

But Wang Yun was also very tough. He led his subordinates and fought their way out of the ambush.

Fortunately for him, his enemies had probably not expected Wang Yun to escape unscathed from the Sacred Mountains nor his subordinates to have all survived.

Although his two competitors wanted to kill him, they could not cause too much of a commotion. As a result, the numbers they sent for the ambush were even fewer than Wang Yun’s men.

Wang Yun suddenly felt a little grateful to whoever had set him up. At least by tampering with the marks, he was able to preserve all his forces.

When they arrived at the Kong Consortium’s stronghold the next day, the soldiers at the gate seemed to have been ordered to interrogate them and deliberately delay Wang Yun from entering the stronghold.

The commander of the garrison troops at the stronghold’s gate said awkwardly, “Director Wang Yun, we’re just following orders here. All we ask is that you come back after three days.”

Wang Yun suddenly realized the decision to appoint the next intelligence director might have an outcome soon!

No, he could not just sit back and do nothing!

Wang Yun said in a low voice with a dark expression, "I'm not sure who instigated you, but have you ever thought about how dangerous it would be for you to get embroiled in the contention for the director of the intelligence agency? You're Qian Yiwen, right? Your family lives at 76 Deyang Street, and you have a wife and a daughter. You even kept a mistress at Xixing Street and she gave birth to a son for you last year. I remember that your father-in-law still has many ex-subordinates in the military, right? Your position as company commander was also given to you by your father-in-law. How do you think he'll deal with you if he finds out that you're having an affair? Two years ago, you got into a fight after getting drunk. In the end, you did not even pay for the crime after killing someone and still brought your troops to threaten the safety of the victim's family. Do you think all of this would be enough for you to be court martialed?"

Wang Yun's memory really was terrifying. Just by seeing Qian Yiwen, he managed to accurately regurgitate specific information about him. Qian Yiwen blanched. As expected, he really could not afford to offend someone from the intelligence agency.

Moreover, Qian Yiwen realized Wang Yun seemed to have predicted he would be stopped from entering the city. Therefore, he had grasped their weaknesses before he left so he could safely return to the city at this time.

Wang Yun was no ordinary person. How could he not have thought of this day when he made the trip out of the Kong Consortium?

Qian Yiwen was conflicted for a long time before turning to his subordinates and saying, "Open the gate!"

Wang Yun heaved a sigh of relief. He smiled at Qian Yiwen. "You'll be rewarded handsomely."

With that, he led his troops back into the city. The first thing he did was not to report to Kong Donghai about his work but to return to his safe house in the Kong Consortium to check out what was on the hard drive.

When he saw the contents, he was shocked. Wang Yun had never thought the thing he had gotten his hands on would turn out to be so important!

"Prep a vehicle for me." Wang Yun said to his subordinate, "I need to make a trip to the secret prison to interrogate the Pyro Company member who's being held in custody!"

If the contents of the hard drive were really effective, the Pyro Company would not be able to withstand a single blow from the Kong Consortium.

Furthermore, Wang Yun would be assured of his place as the director of the intelligence agency, and no one else would have the right to compete with him!

Wang Yun had not expected Wang Wenyan to present him with such a generous gift!

However, he would have to try it out personally and confirm its effectiveness before handing it over to the boss

Chapter 764 Taking over

At about the same time Wang Yun entered the city, many big shots in the Kong Consortium became aware that he was back. These big shots were waiting for a show as Wang Yun and his two competitors started a power struggle.

The power struggle in the Kong Consortium's intelligence agency had been going on for nearly a month now. Kong Donghai had already revealed to his trusted aide that he would decide on who would take over at the intelligence agency within the next three days. In the end, Wang Yun's sudden return added a lot of excitement to the show.

Someone said Wang Yun was even bleeding when he came back in from outside the city.

But to everyone's surprise, Wang Yun did not go and see Kong Donghai directly. Instead, he went back to his own safe house first and headed straight for the Kong Consortium's secret prison after that!

Even Wang Yun's competitors did not know what he was up to. Wang Yun's return this time felt very unusual.

The director of the 1st Military Intelligence Division sat in his office and asked his subordinate, "Did you see who Wang Yun brought back with him?"

Everyone was still concerned about whether Wang Yun had caught the No. 001 Experimental. Kong Donghai was quite advanced in age. If Wang Yun were to bring back the No. 001 Experimental at this time, he was bound to instantly become the candidate with the best chances.

The subordinate thought for a moment and answered, "We have someone keeping an eye on him but did not see anyone being escorted back. However, it's also possible that the No. 001 Experimental was hiding among them disguised as their 2nd Division's troops. It's very difficult to get a confirmation of that." The director of the 1st Military Intelligence Division smiled. "The No. 001 Experimental should be very powerful. It's impossible that it would willingly follow Wang Yun back and become a guinea pig to be researched. So there's a high chance he didn't manage to capture. But don't let your guard down. Go, find out what he's up to at the secret prison." Wang Yun had already arrived outside the secret prison. This time, no one stopped him, and he passed through smoothly.

As the director of the 2nd Military Intelligence Division, Wang Yun's authority was terrifying. This was the reason why many people feared him.

Next to him, Wang Yun's subordinate said, "Sir, the Pyro Company member has been brought out from his cell. He's in the first interrogation room. He's a T4 combatant from the Pyro Company. He's very tight-lipped and hasn't given us any information before. Would you like me to prepare any torture instruments?"

"There's no need." Wang Yun shook his head. "I'm not here to interrogate him. Stand guard outside and don't allow anyone to enter the interrogation room. Go and turn off the recording equipment as well."

His subordinate rushed to find the warden of the secret prison. It was antithetical to the rules to turn off the surveillance cameras, and the secret prison was not managed by Wang Yun. But it did not matter. Wang Yun also had something on the warden, so a small matter like that could easily be handled.

Wang Yun waited for the surveillance cameras to be turned off before pushing open the door and entering the interrogation room.

The incandescent light inside was a little blinding. The T4 combatant, who was sitting inside, did not move at all. The long imprisonment time and interrogations had exhausted him physically and mentally.

When the Pyro Company's T4 combatant saw that someone had come in, his expression did not change a bit. "What do you want to ask today?"

However, Wang Yun did not say anything. He only took out an audio player he had brought in with him. There was a file inside he had just copied onto it.

A moment later, Wang Yun pressed the play button, and a strange sound started playing. When the T4 combatant heard the sound, he had a puzzled look on his face. He was wondering what Wang Yun was up to. But a second later, the Pyro Company member suddenly lost consciousness and fell on his side while foaming at the mouth!

Wang Yun pried open the man's eyelids and stood up after confirming he was really unconscious. He took a deep breath before turning around to leave the interrogation room.

"Sir." His subordinate who was waiting outside looked at Wang Yun and realized his superior was smiling

The smile on his face grew wider and wider until Wang Yun could no longer hold it in. He started laughing as he walked out of the secret prison and headed straight for Kong Donghai's official residence!

The contents of that hard drive turned out to be an audio file that could be used against the Pyro Company's troops as well as some DNA information.

It was just like how the Pyro Company had controlled the tarantulas. They only dared to release the tarantulas into the wild because they had a "key" to control them. Likewise, the Pyro Company's combatants were treated like tarantulas by their own organization's higher-ups. They had deliberately been genetically modified so they could be controlled easily. This was to ensure they would never betray the Pyro Company.

Therefore, even though the Pyro Company had been mistreating those people at the bottom so harshly over the years, no one had defected yet. This was the crux of the matter. The Pyro Company had full control over their underlings' lives!

However, there were also hidden dangers behind a stable rule like that. Once this document got leaked, the entire Pyro Company's authority would crumble like a sandcastle.

When Wang Yun saw this document, he could not help but get excited. How could he not be?

The Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium were northern and southern neighbors. The tension between them had been going on for many years, and they both coveted the other's resources.

And right now, it seemed like there was only death awaiting the Pyro Company.

However, this document should be a top secret of the Pyro Company. How did it end up getting stolen by Wang Wenyan?

Wang Yun thought hard, but electronic technology was not his expertise. He could not figure out what was going on at the moment and could only admit that Wang Wenyan was truly more capable than him.

When Wang Yun walked out of the secret prison, he stopped in his tracks. His subordinate asked, "Sir, what's the matter?"

"Was it a coincidence that I stole this from Wang Wenyan's hands, or did Wang Wenyan deliberately let it happen?" Wang Yun pondered.

His subordinate said, "I don't think it's a coincidence. If you weren't around, there would be no one to stop him. Wang Wenyan can't even be attacked by a sword after turning into a black mist, nor can bullets harm him any. No one could stop him after he stole the information, but it just so happened that he bumped into you."

Wang Yun's power was a natural counter to Wang Wenyan's skill.

As such, even though it looked like Wang Wenyan had failed miserably, Wang Yun still felt that something was not right. Instead of stealing the information at a different time, Wang Wenyan had to do it right when Wang Yun was passing by.

Furthermore, the boss of the Anjing House was clearly in the Sacred Mountains as well, yet she did not retrieve the information Wang Yun had seized. The entire sequence of events even felt like it was just an act, albeit an unconvincing one.

"Sir, is there a problem?" his subordinate asked.

Wang Yun smiled. "No. Prepare the car and send me to Boss Kong Donghai's mansion!"

Wang Yun had no choice but to act on his findings. He was already back at the Kong Consortium. If he could not produce anything of value, it would be difficult for him to walk out of the Kong Consortium alive once either of his competitors took over.

So no matter what conspiracy might be hidden behind this hard drive, Wang Yun had to continue moving forward!

Moreover, he was not planning to stay on forever with the Kong Consortium after his return this time. Wang Yun had other plans!

That night, news that shocked everyone in the Kong Consortium started spreading from Kong Donghai's official residence. There was a change of candidates for the position of the intelligence agency's director overnight. Kong Donghai seemed very happy and did not wait another three days to decide.

Chapter 765 The Kong Consortium gets tricked

On the second day after Wang Yun took over, everyone thought the first thing he would do would be to get rid of his two competitors. After all, those two had tried to intercept and kill him when he was making his way back. This was a fight that would not end until some of the parties were dead.

However, Wang Yun did not do so. Instead, he secretly ordered all of the Kong Consortium's strongholds to begin their operation to wipe out the Pyro Company's members.

Over the years, the Kong Consortium and the Pyro Company had been in constant conflict with each other. Both sides had planted many spies in each other's territories, and this frustrated the Kong Consortium a great deal. The spy wars between the two sides had been going on for many years, and the Kong Consortium had always been at a disadvantage. Because the Pyro Company had brilliant ways of nurturing their spies until their loyalty was almost unquestionable. Even if they managed to capture the Pyro Company's spies, it would still be very difficult to get anything out of them. This was where the Kong Consortium was unsuccessful. But it was different now. What the Kong Consortium had on their hands was a sharp sword held above the Pyro Company's head that they could easily swing down at any moment.

At about the same time, the public broadcast systems of the Kong Consortium's twenty-odd strongholds' started broadcasting a strange sound throughout the day. Following that, the residents of the strongholds saw strange things happening. Some of the pedestrians on the streets fell to the ground and started foaming at the mouth. It was either that or their colleagues suddenly collapsed on their desks and died on the spot.

Some people in the Kong Consortium's military also collapsed to the ground. When the others tried to save them, it was already too late. In about the span of a day, the Kong Consortium had wiped out a total of 629 Pyro Company members. This was not a large number compared to the people living in the strongholds, but the fact the Kong Consortium had so many Pyro Company spies among them was enough to shock all of the Kong Consortium's higher-ups.

Fortunately, Wang Yun had brought back that hard drive. Otherwise, the spies might have become a threat to the entire Kong Consortium at some point in time. After all, the highest-ranking appointment one spy managed to reach in their military was that of a brigade commander.

For this reason, Kong Donghai summoned Wang Yun to his official residence again to discuss the subsequent intelligence plans and award him with the highest military honor.

In the luxurious mansion, Wang Yun looked at the graying Kong Donghai. "Boss, in the intelligence agency that I'm overseeing now -"

Wang Yun was trying to take this opportunity to bring up the removal of certain personnel to force out his two colleagues who tried to kill him. However, Kong Donghai interrupted, "I know what happened between the three of you, and I can understand how you feel as well. But to achieve great things, one must not care about the trifles. Now that you've become their superior, you should be magnanimous as

the winner. If you kill the two of them as soon as you get promoted, what will others think of you? Wang Yun, you've become an important figure in our Kong Consortium. You have to learn to let go."

It was all pompous language, but Wang Yun knew full well the two intelligence directors were retained to keep him in check in case Kong Donghai lost control of the intelligence agency. However, Wang Yun was mentally prepared for that. Otherwise, he would have killed both of them last night.

On the battlefield, blood would be spilled when others were killed. But politics in the stronghold tended to simmer. Wang Yun was not in any hurry. Whatever he was owed, the other parties would have to pay it back sooner or later.

Wang Yun said with a smile, "Boss, you're right. I have another matter to report today. The Pyro Company seems to have sensed the danger, so the troops from their northern strongholds have started deploying southward. It seems like they're getting ready to defend against any sudden moves we might make."

"Don't worry about that." Kong Donghai said unhurriedly, "The thing that you brought back this time has proven very useful, so what point is there for them to gather so many troops? I'm actually more worried that the Pyro Company is preparing a countermeasure. After all, we don't know anything about DNA. If they can overcome this method of control by getting some kind of injection, we would lose a good chance to strike them down. I called you here because I wanted to ask you something. Do you think we should strike while the iron is hot, or should we take cautious steps?"

Wang Yun lowered his head. "Boss, I'm not smart. Without your foresight, I wouldn't dare to make any suggestions. I'll leave this matter to you to decide and just make sure I properly handle my intelligence work."

Kong Donghai pointed at Wang Yun with a smile. "Alright, go and get some rest then. You did a fine job during this period. I've already gotten someone to transmit the audio file to the front lines. Our Kong Consortium should be able to swallow up the Pyro Company effortlessly this time."

But all of a sudden, a middle-aged man rushed in. Wang Yun recognized him as Kong Donghai's first secretary.

The secretary came in and had a look at Wang Yun before saying to Kong Donghai, "Boss, something important has cropped up."

"You can bring it up. Wang Yun isn't an outsider, and there will be many opportunities for the two of you to interact in the future." Kong Donghai smiled amiably.

As a result, the secretary said, "News from the front lines came that the command and control systems, as well as the operating systems of the armored troops, have all malfunctioned today."

The elderly Kong Donghai jumped to his feet. "How could something like that happen? What's Kong Fangyun doing? Did they find out what happened?"

The secretary glanced at Wang Yun and said, "Kong Fangyun's engineers said it was due to a technological intrusion."

"Technological intrusion?" Kong Donghai was puzzled.

"Yes, it happened right after the audio file was sent over this afternoon and the troops at the front lines copied it into the command and control systems," the secretary said.

Wang Yun, who was present, frowned and said, "Didn't I instruct that when the audio file is being copied, the computer should not have any connections with other equipment? It had to be done on a separate computer and broadcast over an isolated device. Why didn't the front lines follow my instructions?"

He was already a little uneasy about this. It was only because he had no other choice that he took the audio file from the Sacred Mountains. As such, to prevent any accidents from happening, he even wrote a detailed operational manual in case there was a problem with the audio file.

But Wang Yun did not expect the front lines to ignore his instructions!

Wang Yun had wanted to rerecord the audio file directly, but for some reason, it lost its effect when it was copied that way.

Kong Donghai was suspicious of Wang Yun at first, but when he heard what he said, he could not blame him for anything since he was also aware of the measures that were taken.

"Where did you get this audio file?" the secretary asked.

"I stole it from the Wang Consortium's Wang Wenyan. I specifically handed down those instructions precisely because I was worried." Wang Yun said coldly, "Why didn't the front lines follow the operational manual to deploy it?! Immediately arrest those who are in charge of this operation. I suspect they're spies from the Wang Consortium or the Anjing House!"

The secretary remained silent for a couple seconds before saying, "The staff officer responsible for executing this operation committed suicide by poison."

Wang Yun was stunned. He did not expect the Anjing House would be waiting for him at this point. The other party actually managed to predict where the audio file would end up and had planted a spy on the front lines beforehand. From there, they just waited for the right moment to strike.

He had taken precautions against it happening, but in the end, he still ended up falling to a mere spy on the front lines!

The enemy had set up an intricate chain of events that led to this and finished off the entire front line of the Kong Consortium with this final nail in the coffin, turning their armored troops into a pile of scrap metal!

Chapter 766 How horrible!

Although there was a problem at the front lines, Wang Yun felt he should not be held responsible for it. After all, he had given explicit instructions and did what he needed to do, so how was it any responsibility of his?

Kong Donghai was a little tired, so he instructed Wang Yun, "Go and investigate the matter. Make sure to weed out all the Wang Consortium and Anjing House spies."

Wang Yun nodded in acknowledgement before leaving Kong Donghai's official residence.

He still felt some sympathy for the commander on the front lines. With this major incident, the commander's future could no longer be guaranteed.

Kong Donghai was someone who could not stand to be messed with. Working under such a boss, anyone would have to be extremely conscientious and cautious.

The reason why they addressed him as "boss" was that no one in the entire Alliance of Strongholds dared to officially declare independence yet. Consortiums still remained consortiums.

Wang Yun got into his own private car to leave. However, he realized something was wrong the moment he got into the car. The chauffeur was no longer his own personnel.

However, Wang Yun simply watched quietly during the journey and did not expose this.

After a while, he saw the vehicle had suddenly deviated from its original route. It was not heading towards the intelligence agency's office or his residence at all.

Moreover, vehicles suddenly turned out of the alleys in front and behind of his car. Wang Yun remembered the license plates of these vehicles to all be from the intelligence agency. However, they were under the jurisdiction of the 1st and 3rd Military Intelligence Divisions.

Wang Yun's face darkened further. However, he still did not say anything to the unfamiliar driver in front of him.

Just as the car was about to drive past an intersection, Wang Yun snorted. The air in the car surged like a blast, and the driver was pushed onto the steering wheel with a huge impact. His head hit the steering wheel so hard he did not stop bleeding.

The doors on both sides of the car were blasted open by the surge of air. Wang Yun bent forward and jumped out of the car. Due to inertia, he even rolled several times on the street before coming to a stop.

When the tailing vehicle arrived soon after, Wang Yun saw someone take out a pistol inside that vehicle.

There was no time to think. Wang Yun raised his hand and aimed it at the vehicle behind him. With a loud bang, an air blast was pushed out from his palm. After the invisible force hit the vehicle, it crumpled the vehicle's hood. With an external force acting on it, the vehicle was sent rolling!

Wang Yun got up and tore off his black suit and tie. Then he quickly fled towards his most secure safe house.

He knew he could not leave the city now as the roads leading out of the stronghold would be blocked by the garrison troops.

Capturing and assassinating an intelligence officer in the stronghold was not something the directors of the two intelligence divisions would dare to do. It was definitely an order by Kong Donghai!

Actually, Kong Donghai had only sent him back to investigate the matter of the Wang Consortium's spies to stall for time. As long as he left the official residence, Kong Donghai's safety would be ensured. Only then did he issue an order for Wang Yun's arrest!

But Wang Yun could not understand why Kong Donghai would suddenly want to arrest him. Although the matter at the front lines was related to him, he did not carry the major responsibility.

As Wang Yun ran madly on the road, many of the residents who had fallen asleep were jolted awake. They looked at him curiously through their windows.

Wang Yun felt a little helpless. If this were daytime, there would be a lot of pedestrians on the streets, and he could quickly blend into the crowd at any time. But it was the middle of the night. With no one on the streets, he became a really conspicuous target for his pursuers.

Eventually, Wang Yun stopped in his tracks. The company commander, Qian Yiwen, had already ordered his soldiers to set up a roadblock at the street corner ahead. But that was not the most important thing.

Worse was that more than a dozen of Wang Yun's subordinates were being restrained next to Qian Yiwen. All of them had guns pointed at their backs.

When Wang Yun's subordinates saw Wang Yun, they shouted, "Sir, leave by yourself. Don't worry about us!"

But Wang Yun smiled wryly on the inside. How could he leave since it had come to this?

He raised his hands and walked over slowly. "I'm Wang Yun, the director of the intelligence agency. I would like to request a meeting with the boss. I'm innocent!"

Qian Yiwen sneered, "Whether you're innocent or not is not for you to decide. You can explain it to your colleagues after you've been put in the secret prison."

After that, a small group of soldiers approached Wang Yun cautiously. Initially, they were worried Wang Yun would ignore the safety of his subordinates and put up a resistance. But later, they realized Wang Yun was actually surrendering. His subordinates felt a little hopeless. "Sir, you don't have to stay behind for our sakes. They can't stop you."

Wang Yun smiled. "Where can I go? They must have a dragnet waiting for me. But that's fine. At least it saved me some trouble."

His subordinates fell silent. They knew full well that Wang Yun was just finding an excuse to console them. In the past, no matter how tight of a situation Wang Yun was in, he had never been one to surrender.

Before Wang Yun could finish speaking, the soldier next to him knocked him out with the butt of his rifle. Then Wang Yun was quickly brought to the secret prison.

When Wang Yun's subordinates saw this, they roared in anger, but there was nothing they could do.

When Wang Yun regained consciousness, he was already sitting on a cold metal chair in an interrogation room with his hands cuffed to the table in front of him. Everything on him had been taken away, including his shoes. All he had left on were a white shirt and his suit pants.

Wang Yun was barefoot on the cold ground. The incandescent light above his head was a little dim and eerie.

At this moment, the door of the interrogation room was pushed open. The director of the 1st Military Intelligence Division, Kong Sheng, walked in and said to Wang Yun with a smile, "Director Wang, you probably never thought you'd be sitting here one day, right?"

As he spoke, Kong Sheng remained standing next the door and did not approach rashly.

Wang Yun said calmly, "There's no need to say too much. Let's just go through with the process. I'm already in captivity, so why is Director Kong Sheng still keeping his distance? Don't tell me you're afraid of a prisoner like me?"

Kong Sheng laughed. "Director Wang Yun is indeed different from normal people. You can still remain so calm after being put in the secret prison. But it's true that I really am afraid to go near you. After all, I'm not a superhuman."

"Why did you arrest me?" Wang Yun said, "I want to see Kong Donghai."

"You're even addressing the boss by his name now?" Kong Sheng pulled over a chair and sat down at the door. He smiled from afar and said, "But why would the boss want to come to a place like the secret prison to visit you? Tell me, how did you conspire with the Qing Consortium and the Wang Consortium to plot against our Kong Consortium's frontline troops? And what else have you done?"

Wang Yun was stunned. He could understand the accusation linking him with the Wang Consortium, but what did it have anything to do with the Qing Consortium? Since when did he have any dealings with them?

But then, Kong Sheng took out a photo from his shirt pocket and threw it onto the table in front of Wang Yun. "Take a look. We had a hard time getting ahold of this information."

Wang Yun looked over and was surprised to see a picture taken in the Sacred Mountains. In it, he seemed to be whispering something to Luo Lan.

Wang Yun's memory was very good, so when he saw the photo, he could recall the exact situation at that time. The angle of the photo was obviously taken from the Great Hoodwinker's direction.

Wang Yun started cursing in his head, 'Ren Xiaosu, Great Hoodwinker, you people from the Northwest are way too fucking horrible!'

Chapter 767 The beginning of the war

Wang Yun fell seriously ill while being held in the secret prison. In fact, it had become very difficult for superhumans to fall sick nowadays. He knew it was purely because he felt so wronged that he had fallen sick this

time.

It was not easy for him to become the top dog of the intelligence agency, but he only managed to be on the job for one day before he was removed. He had not even warmed the seat yet!

Moreover, he did not only get framed by one party. While in prison, Wang Yun realized he had been set up by both the Wang Consortium and the Northwest.

These two organizations probably did not conspire with each other, but their simultaneous efforts had caused a critical effect on him.

Regarding the problem at the front lines, Wang Yun thought about it and felt there was something fishy.

Because entry into the command center was restricted, not everyone had access to the command and control systems. The soldiers were also not allowed to bring any electronic devices into the military base.

But this was a trap set by the Anjing House and the Wang Consortium. To them, if they only needed a hard drive to take down the entire front line's command and control systems, why would they resort to using him to achieve that? Although other methods might be more difficult, it was not entirely impossible!

Besides, there was obviously a lot of uncertainty involved in using him to do this.

So Wang Yun suddenly understood the other party was being redundant like this because they had intended to cast the blame on him.

If he did not succeed in helping them achieve this objective, the enemy might have other backup plans for the front lines. They would still be able to paralyze the command and control systems at the front lines regardless.

And then there was the Great Hoodwinker. Wang Yun did not at all expect him to do something like that!

How horrible!

Wang Yun even felt that the Great Hoodwinker, Ren Xiaosu, and the others were probably the ones who sent his subordinates away by changing the marks he had left for them. Although he did not have any evidence, these two incidents were equally awful!

Under normal circumstances, it would be quite difficult to encounter such mean people.

However, Wang Yun could not figure out why this had happened. He did not have any grudges with them, so why were both parties targeting him at the same time?

Actually, Ren Xiaosu asked the Great Hoodwinker a similar question before. He was wondering if there was really a need to force Wang Yun into a corner. The Great Hoodwinker's answer was that it was absolutely necessary.

If someone like Wang Yun were allowed to lead the Kong Consortium's intelligence agency, he would become a big threat to all of the other organizations. When Wang Yun first joined the intelligence field, he made a name for himself. He could carry out missions decisively, and his ability to find leads was unmatched, while his memory was also unparalleled.

When such a person occupied a low position in an organization, he might not be able to reach the potential of his power. But if he were to become the director of the intelligence agency, it would be disastrous for the spies of the other forces.

Who knew when your comrades might get caught and be tortured by him?

Therefore, if such a talented man was not going to be part of the Prosperous Northwest, they should be exterminated as soon as possible.

Of course, the Great Hoodwinker was more inclined to let Wang Yun experience some hardship first before joining the Prosperous Northwest.

The Great Hoodwinker had always been a resolute fortune teller. If he said you would prosper in the Northwest, you would have no other choice but to fulfill the prophecy.

The only unexpected thing was that according to the Great Hoodwinker's past experience, although Kong Donghai was a suspicious man, he would probably not do anything to Wang Yun over just a photo. At most, he would not place Wang Yun in an important position within his organization.

However, he did not expect that the Wang Consortium would also set Wang Yun up and cause him to be sent straight to the secret prison.

So the Great Hoodwinker was already thinking about how to rescue Wang Yun at this moment.

But before Wang Yun's rescue could happen, a war between the Kong Consortium and the Pyro Company quietly broke out.

At the border between the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium, the troops who had always been affiliated with the Kong Consortium's military suddenly crossed the border and fought an unexpected skirmish with the patrolling Pyro Company's troops.

This caught the Kong Consortium by surprise as well. Due to the collapse of their front line's command and control systems, their command center had given the order not to trigger any conflicts. However, this platoon seemed to have gotten lost and appeared in the Pyro Company's territory.

After that, even though there were only two platoons on both sides totaling less than a 100 people fighting at first, by the afternoon of the same day, more combat units from both sides had joined in, and the skirmish spilled over into an extremely intense back-and-forth battle.

The two armies bordered Mt. Dabaichi. In the past, this place was scenic and beautiful, but now it had turned into a theater of death.

No one knew why the Kong Consortium's platoon had suddenly gotten lost, nor did anyone know the significance of this battle. They just started fighting all of a sudden.

When the Kong Consortium's command center received the news, they decided to send in a brigade to suppress the enemy. These troops were even equipped with audio broadcasting equipment.

The Kong Consortium felt they had the upper hand against the Pyro Company now. 'Since you, the Pyro Company, have willingly delivered yourselves to our doorsteps by starting a war, we, the Kong Consortium, will have to teach you a lesson for being so arrogant. So what if we don't have any armored troops? Our Kong Consortium holds the key to your survival! Over the years, there had been endless friction between the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium. The border armies on both sides had always harbored enmity against each other, so now seemed to be the best time to take revenge. The Pyro Company did not cower even though the entire Kong Consortium's brigade was charging at them. Instead, it was as though they had laid an ambush with even more troops.

The Kong Consortium was not to be outdone either. They wanted to teach the Pyro Company a lesson with blood at the front line of Mt. Dabaichi.

The Kong Consortium's troops rushed onto the battlefield with their sophisticated audio equipment, playing a "backing track" as they charged.

But something unexpected happened. The Kong Consortium soldiers at the front line discovered the audio recording did not have any effect on these Pyro Company troops. No one lost consciousness and fell to the ground, and no one was foaming at the mouth. Instead, they started fighting even harder.

This caught the Kong Consortium's troops off guard and forced them to retreat in defeat!

Kong Fangyun, the commander at the front line, was dumbfounded. Didn't they say the Pyro Company spies in the strongholds had already been wiped out? Didn't they specifically test the authenticity of the audio recording on them? Then why weren't the Pyro Company's troops afraid to hear the audio recording?

This should also be a trap set by the Pyro Company, right? The other party had already made preparations and sacrificed several hundred people to lure the Kong Consortium into their trap. They sacrificed more than 600 spies to make the Kong Consortium believe it was real! Among them, there were even some spies who had already risen to become mid-ranking military personnel in the Kong Consortium army. All of this left the Kong Consortium absolutely convinced they had found something they could use against the Pyro Company!

But just as the Kong Consortium thought they could usurp the Pyro Company, they realized they had been tricked!

If not for this audio recording, the Kong Consortium's frontline troops would probably still be holding their defensive positions instead of taking the initiative to attack like they were doing now. Furthermore, they had even initiated the attack when their armored brigade was mostly incapacitated!

The Wang Consortium and the Pyro Company had collaborated flawlessly and put on a good show for everyone. They tricked so many supernatural beings into going to the Sacred Mountains and killed them there. Then they even joined forces and caused the Kong Consortium to lose the opportunity for a preemptive strike.

Kong Fangyun imagined they would probably not only have to face the Pyro Company. The western front should also be facing a massive invasion by the Wang Consortium!

The chaotic war affecting the Alliance of Strongholds had finally begun. Meanwhile, the first slice of pie everyone wanted their hands on turned out to be the Kong Consortium.

Only now did all of the organizations understand that the peaceful days of the Alliance of Strongholds were about to end. What awaited the stronghold residents would only be a gloomy and bloody war, and no one knew when peace would return again.

Chapter 768 Stronghold 176

"Xiaosu, where do you plan to go next?" Luo Lan asked while seated next to the campfire.

After Ren Xiaosu and the others emerged from the Sacred Mountains, everyone did not go their separate ways immediately. Instead, they found a place to set up camp for the next two days.

Luo Lan, Zhou Qi, Li Shentan, Si Liren, Zhou Yingxue, and Qing Shen the clone got along quite well during this period. They caught some game in the wilderness, and the atmosphere in the campsite was jubilant and cheerful.

Everyone could tell that Ren Xiaosu was in a bad mood, so it could be said that they were accompanying him to lift his spirits.

Everyone knew Ren Xiaosu had only insisted on going into the Sacred Mountains because of the No. 001 Experimental. Ren Xiaosu was also upfront about it and claimed Yan Liuyuan might be the No. 001 Experimental, so he wanted to go there to look for him.

But now everyone else had basically been found, yet Yan Liuyuan was still nowhere to be seen. So how could Ren Xiaosu be happy?

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Luo Lan. "I have to make a trip to the Wang Consortium, and what about you? What are your plans?" As he was saying that, the Great Hoodwinker emerged from the forest to the west. "I just got some news from the black market. Something big has happened."

"What is it?" Ren Xiaosu asked, stunned for a moment.

"The Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium are at war. The Kong Consortium has retreated from the front line of Mt. Dabaichi. They're pulling back their defensive line at the rear." The Great Hoodwinker

said, "The Kong Consortium's armored vehicles on the front lines have turned into scrap metal. They have to wait for further reinforcements from the rear before they can fight back. Some people even said the Kong Consortium initially had something that gave them control over the Pyro Company's fate, but it suddenly could not work after they got onto the battlefield, and it caught the Kong Consortium off guard. In any case, the Kong Consortium has suffered a great loss this time."

Luo Lan chuckled, "That's a good thing. Let's see if they still have time to care about our Qing Consortium now. Speaking of which, the Kong Consortium is really quite stupid. The Pyro Company is so smart, so how could they possibly let others gain leverage over them? Hey, clone guy, do you know the details of what happened?"

"I do." Qing Shen nodded. It seemed he did not mind Luo Lan calling him a clone. He just calmly explained, "This plan of the Pyro Company's has been in the works for a long time. They used several hundred of their spies in the Kong Consortium's territory as sacrifices so the Kong Consortium would believe they can use an audio recording to take down the entire Pyro Company. But in fact, they had already laid the trap when they were genetically modifying their DNA. Only the spies in the Kong Consortium's territory get affected by the audio recording."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Like the tarantulas?"

Qing Shen said with a smile, "That's right. It looks like you've seen how the Pyro Company deals with the tarantulas."

Luo Lan said, "Since war has broken out, I can't waste any more time here in the North. I need to have a chat with the Zhou Consortium before they get embroiled in the war and see if they can be of any help to the Qing Consortium."

"What do you mean by being of help to the Qing Consortium?" the Great Hoodwinker asked.

"Oh, I'm talking about having the Central Plains fight among themselves," Luo Lan replied. "Of course, there's something more important that I need to see to, and that's to send this clone back to the Qing Consortium so my little brother can decide his fate."

When Luo Lan mentioned this, Qing Shen sat next to him with a smile as though it had nothing to do with him.

This was what annoyed Luo Lan the most. The clone was as smart as his younger brother, but at the same, he seemed less human than him.

Although Qing Zhen had long been labeled a cold blooded murderer, everyone in the Qing Consortium knew Qing Zhen was a very loyal person.

Meanwhile, the clone named Qing Shen did not seem to have any unnecessary emotions in him.

At least, Luo Lan did not notice any mood fluctuations from him.

"What other information did you find out?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Someone also verified that White Mask is your power and that you can summon it like a puppet to take on the T5 combatants head on.” The Great Hoodwinker said, “Rumor has it that someone’s gonna rank all the superhumans. I believe that you’ll be ranked very highly. However, they still don’t know your identity.”

In reality, when the Great Hoodwinker talked about this, he was pretty much understating it. However, the reaction in the black market to this information was quite huge, because this news meant yet another extremely powerful individual had appeared in the world of superhumans.

If they also knew Ren Xiaosu was the Stronghold Destroyer, this information would probably shock them even further. When the Great Hoodwinker bought this information, he even felt a little regretful. Because the simpletons at the black market had absolutely no idea how incredible his future commander was.

The Great Hoodwinker said to Ren Xiaosu, “Another piece of information I found out concerns Wang Yun. He got locked up after only being the director of the intelligence agency for one day.... Hahahahaha...” The Great Hoodwinker even started gloating at Wang Yun’s misfortune. He laughed for such a long time he couldn’t stop.

After five minutes, Ren Xiaosu looked at the Great Hoodwinker expressionlessly. “That’s enough.”

The Great Hoodwinker finally restrained himself when his face started to hurt. “Ahem, I’m sorry, I couldn’t control my emotions for a moment. I have to rush to the Kong Consortium immediately. I can’t really leave Wang Yun to die in the Kong Consortium’s secret prison. I’ll think of a way to get him out. It’d be such a tragedy if such a talented man does not get to participate in the development of the Northwest. Now that the time is ripe...”

“Mhm, go ahead then, but don’t force yourself if you can’t do it. Not just anyone can break into the Kong Consortium’s main stronghold as they like. If you really can’t figure out a way to save him, I’ll go to the Kong Consortium with you after I finish my business with the Wang Consortium.” In fact, Ren Xiaosu also felt that Wang Yun was talented. If someone like him could contribute to the development of the Northwest, it would definitely be a good thing

Although he kept saying he would only consider whether to go to the Northwest in the future, the Great Hoodwinker kept going on about the Prosperous Northwest every day and even kept calling him “Future Commander” in private until he started thinking about the Northwest unknowingly.

The Great Hoodwinker nodded and got up. He looked at everyone. “I don’t know when we’ll meet again after this farewell. The road is long and the world is vast, so let’s part ways.”

Everyone was about to go their separate ways, but this was what the world of adults was like. Everyone was just a passerby in each other’s journey in life, and no one could turn back on that long, winding path.

Although they were comrades once, they still had to get back to their own interests after the battle. Although the Qing Consortium and the Northwest had a rather close relationship, they were still not family.

When they met again in the future, no one knew whether it would be as enemies or friends.

Luo Lan nodded. "Let's part ways. I hope the Qing Consortium and the Northwest will never have to be in conflict!"

The Great Hoodwinker said, "Oh yeah, there's something else that I forgot about. Apparently, the nomadic tribes in the North have started heading south and will arrive at Stronghold 176 quite soon. But that's not exactly a big problem. Stronghold 176 should be able to hold them off in the North."

As soon as he finished speaking, the clone, Qing Shen, smiled and said, "That might not be the case."

The Great Hoodwinker looked at Qing Shen. "What do you mean?"

"Stronghold 176 is different from your Stronghold 178. You all have abundant resources and no consortiums around to hinder you, but Stronghold 176 is different. Ten years ago, the other consortiums cut off their support to them, and it's been quite difficult for them since then." Qing Shen said with a smile, "We can only hope the uninvited guests from the steppe are weaker this time. Otherwise, Stronghold 176 might just end up fading into history."

Chapter 769 Yan Liuyuan's decision

In earlier years, Stronghold 176's reputation was on par with Fortress 178. But over the years, everyone started to only mention Fortress 178 and not Stronghold 176.

There were many reasons for this. On one hand, Stronghold 176's terrain was not as harsh as Fortress 178's, and the enemies from the grasslands were not as ferocious either. Therefore, from a "sacrificial" point of view, Stronghold 176 did not really contribute much to the Alliance of Strongholds. After all, there were only so many nomads around, and they were not even armed with firearms and explosives. It would really be difficult for them to become a major threat to the Central Plains, and neither had any particularly bloody clashes taken place between the two sides.

On the other hand, Stronghold 176's combat power was not strong either. Furthermore, they were getting weaker and weaker with each passing generation. In recent decades, the leadership of Stronghold 176 had turned hereditary, becoming privately helmed by the Shen clan.

Initially, all of Stronghold 176's resources were provided by the Wang Consortium, the Pyro Company, and the Kong Consortium as a token of gratitude to Stronghold 176 for defending against the northern enemies.

But ever since Stronghold 176 was taken over by the Shen clan, and after everyone realized the threat of the Northern Plains in recent years was only a case of the Shen clan crying wolf, the supply of resources gradually stopped. As Stronghold 176 was built in a place where resources were scarce and being

located in between the Kong Consortium, the Pyro Company, and the Wang Consortium, their situation was getting more and more dire over the years.

The past controllers of Stronghold 176 lacked foresight and had no resources. As a result, their light and heavy industries did not develop well. Only their livestock management and farming practices could still be considered passable. As such, they also lost their competitiveness in the Alliance of Strongholds.

Right now, their weapons were very aged, with some people even selling them off to the black market in exchange for money.

This was why Qing Shen said that Stronghold 176 was not good enough.

When the Great Hoodwinker heard Qing Shen's explanation, he chuckled. "It's still our Fortress 178 that's the most prescient. Throughout the years, our commanders have never harbored thoughts about passing on the leadership to their own families. If their children tried to seize power for themselves, they would get sent to the outposts. This is something unique in the entire Alliance of Strongholds. I can only say the commanders of Fortress 178 were worthy of their reputation as pioneers."

The Great Hoodwinker continued, "Moreover, the enemies Fortress 178 faces are not like the nomadic tribes who don't even use any firearms or explosives. This is also why we're called a fortress while they're only considered a stronghold."

Qing Shen sized up the Great Hoodwinker with scrutiny. He realized that when the Great Hoodwinker mentioned Fortress 178, that sense of pride and honor was something most Central Plains people did not have.

Luo Lan said, "Actually, the Shen clan was quite conscientious at the beginning. At that time, the military strength of the Alliance of Strongholds was not that great yet. It was still very tough for them when they had to fight the wars initiated by the nomads. Unfortunately, they fell into depravity during Shen Yin's generation."

"Is that why you think the nomads will be a threat to Stronghold 176?" Ren Xiaosu looked at Qing Shen. "The premise is that the nomads must be strong enough first," Qing Shen replied. "After all, a lean camel is still bigger than a horse."

Seven days later, at the border of the Northern Plains, Yan Liuyuan suddenly reined in his horse and looked south. He said, "Confirm we're on the right route and direction. Check the supplies, horses, and number of people we have. We might encounter battles every day from now on, so don't let your guards down."

Hassan nodded. "Don't worry, Master. I'll make sure nothing goes wrong on my side."

Yan Liuyuan nodded. He felt it was a waste of Hassan's talent to lead a small tribe like he used to. Ever since Hassan became the Commander-in-Chief of the Right, he quickly started showing his talent in management.

Yan Liuyuan asked again, "Where are the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes?"

Next to him, Hassan said respectfully, "The scouts have already been sent out, but it will take a day before they can return. I will report to you immediately if there's any news."

For this expedition to the South, Yan Liuyuan did not lead his troops to Stronghold 176, which was closest to the grasslands. Instead, he diverted to the Pyro Company's territory.

The Qing Consortium's envoy that came to the grasslands earlier had brought him a rather important piece of news that the Pyro Company was about to start a war with the Kong Consortium. Furthermore, the Pyro Company had mobilized their troops several months in advance. At the moment, the strongholds at the north of the Pyro Company's territory were completely defenseless.

It was also because Yan Liuyuan did not want the other tribes to know about his plan that he chose to make this move at the last moment. Therefore, of the three large tribes, two of them went to Stronghold 176 while he headed to the Pyro Company's territory.

The Qing Consortium's envoy had even made an agreement with Yan Liuyuan that someone would open the city gate for him when he arrived at Stronghold 21.

However, when Yan Liuyuan arrived at the boundary of the grasslands with his army of more than 10,000 soldiers from the eight tribes, he chose to stop advancing at about a 100 kilometers away from Stronghold 21. "We'll set up camp here and wait for the scouts to report back."

Hassan did not quite understand what Yan Liuyuan was trying to do, but he did as he was told.

That same night, Yan Liuyuan's worshippers started paying their respects in the direction of the royal tent. It was unknown where this ritual had originated, but it was said they would have to kowtow to the gods a 100 times in the morning and three times in the evening before eating their meals to prove they were sufficiently devout. The nomads' faith in Yan Liuyuan was growing with each passing day. They even started holding ceremonies as a sign of respect.

These ceremonies referred to the usual spiritual rules and rituals, for example, the offering of a sacrifice when praying for rain, kowtowing before Buddha, or chanting scriptures daily.

It wasn't until the next morning that Hassan led the tribe chiefs before the royal tent. At this moment, Tsetseg was combing Yan Liuyuan's hair.

Yan Liuyuan looked at Hassan. "Speak up if there's something to report."

Hassan said respectfully, "Congratulations, Master. Some of our scouts have returned and said that the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes have arrived at Stronghold 176. However, it seems that Stronghold 176 was already aware that they were going there, so they set up an ambush. Right now, the two large tribes are unable to take on Stronghold 176 in a direct confrontation, and their rear escape routes have been cut off. It looks like they're going to die outside of Stronghold 176."

The chiefs of the other tribes also had a look of joy on their faces. After the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes were dead, they would have no more enemies in the grasslands.

Privately, everyone was even speculating their lord was probably a real god that had descended into the world to save them. They did not even have to lose a single soldier and someone would eliminate their enemies for them.

However, Yan Liuyuan thought for a long time. Then he looked at the delighted group of people in front of him and said, "Get ready to set off. We'll be heading to Stronghold 176."

Hassan was stunned. "Master, won't it be dangerous to head to Stronghold 176 at this time? Why aren't we continuing to march towards the Pyro Company? Didn't they say that the strongholds there have been left completely defenseless?" Yan Liuyuan shook his head. "The population of the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes is greater than ours. If all of their young and strong men were to die at Stronghold 176, how many years would it take for the grasslands to recover? Hassan, what I want are the resources and subjects in the grasslands, not the empty grasslands themselves."

Hassan and the others were all stunned. They did not expect their master facing them was actually thinking of going to save the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes. They could vaguely feel his courage and ambition, and this was probably the bearing the lord of the steppe should have!

Yan Liuyuan smiled and said, "Go and get ready. Stronghold 176 is actually not as strong as we think. A new dynasty is about to rise in the steppe, so why don't we use their blood as a sacrifice to mark the occasion?"

Chapter 770: Mt. Zhuolu

For some reason, Hassan felt that the closer they got to the Central Plains, the quieter his master became.

It was not hesitation or fear he sensed but more of a contradictory feeling.

Hassan knew his master had lived in the South before, but he knew nothing about what his master had experienced there.

He did not know why his master went to the grasslands, nor did he know why his master sought to establish a new dynasty there. Hassan always felt his master was hiding a lot of things.

Now, under Yan Liuyuan's lead, the imperial court warriors were rushing towards Stronghold 176 to rescue their enemies, the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes.

At first, Hassan did not understand what Yan Liuyuan was trying to do because those people were their enemies.

But later, he and the other tribal chiefs realized Yan Liuyuan was much more magnanimous than they were. What he wanted was a complete grassland, a grassland that could lead them to greater heights. He was not looking to revel in the fragmentation of the nomads.

The Bulan and Kirghiz tribes contributed about three-quarters the number of the young and strong in the grasslands, and they also had countless women, children, and elderly among them. If the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes were to get annihilated in the Central Plains, the nomads would probably need close to 15 years to recover their numbers.

Yan Liuyuan did not want to wait that long. He wanted to bring his former enemies under control amid the flames of war.

After the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes were ambushed, they had no choice but to retreat towards Mt. Zhuolu under the pincer attack of their pursuers.

The nomads' army mainly consisted of cavalry, so they were most afraid to encounter steep, mountainous terrains. Once they retreated into the mountains, they could not take advantage of their horses' mobility, and their bows and arrows were no match for the firearms and explosives the Central Plains people carried. As a result, they could only wait for death inside the mountain range.

There was no other choice.

Just as Qing Shen had said, a lean camel was still bigger than a horse. No matter how badly Stronghold 176 had declined, they still had outstanding generals and rich combat experience to depend on.

Although their current mechanized troops were practically useless now, and their soldiers had been reduced from 40,000 to just slightly over 10,000, Stronghold 176 was still not someone the nomads could provoke.

This was the reason why Yan Liuyuan chose not to come to Stronghold 176.

Stronghold 176's troops had split into two groups early on. One group was lying in ambush near Mt. Zhuolu while the other was circling around Mt. Yanqing to surround them.

By the time the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes stopped in front of Mt. Zhuolu, the troops of Stronghold 176 had cut off their path from behind.

Bulan Zir, the chief of the Bulan tribe, was standing in front of the mountain. He looked at the mountain path in front of him and eventually took out his dagger unwillingly and stabbed it into the neck of his horse.

The magnificent horse had been following him for many years, but now he had to kill it with his own hands.

The tall horse slowly fell to the ground as turbid tears flowed out of its eyes. Bulan Zir said in a low voice, "I was too stupid and sent you to die with me. I'm not likely to live for much longer either. Don't worry, I'll soon accompany you in Heaven. The breeze in the grasslands will reunite us once again."

When his associates nearby heard this, they could not help but despair.

In reality, everyone understood that if the cavalry were forced into the depths of the mountains by the enemy, there would be no way out for them. Otherwise, they would definitely not have chosen to head into the mountains.

As Bulan Zir climbed his way up the mountain, Kirghiz Yan, the chief of the Kirghiz tribe, happened to look over. Initially, the two of them were competitors, but now they would only end up like dogs cast from their homes.

Kirghiz Yan said coldly, "This is just great. If we both die here on Mt. Zhuolu, that'll be letting off that kid easy. After this, the entire steppe will belong to him."

Bulan Zir sighed and said, "Why are you saying this to me? I remember that you were the one who said that the results of this raid should decide who gets to establish the imperial court? If you hadn't said that, I wouldn't have had to lead my Bulan warriors to their deaths."

A nearby associate of his said, "You don't have to be so disheartened. There might still be a chance to turn things around!"

"What chance do we have?" Kirghiz Yan sneered. "Unless that brat leads his eight tribes here to rescue us, but do you think he would be so kind? He's probably going to gloat when he finds out that we're gonna die. He's gonna laugh at us for handing him the grasslands on a platter."

"There's always a way out—"

"Besides, it's useless even if he comes," interrupted Kirghiz Yan. "We all have to understand that fighting the Central Plains people without guns is basically impossible. Some of my warriors have even awakened their powers, but they were still shot to death by the Central Plains people."

There was no such term as "supernatural beings" in the grasslands yet, so they were all only referred to as awakened warriors.

They could already see from the top of the mountain that the pursuing troops were closing in. It was very dark at the foot of the mountain, but Bulan Zir could already imagine the Central Plains people firing their heavy machine guns at them.

At that time, his comrades and warriors would start falling one by one next to him. Or perhaps he would be the first to fall.

Bulan Zir turned around and continued climbing upwards. This time, Stronghold 176 had found out about their raid plans in advance and probably deployed enough troops in an attempt to win themselves peace for the next 15 years.

As long as they finished off the enemy here in Mt. Zhuolu, the nomads would have to spend the next 15 years to get back to normal.

Sounds of gunshots came from the foot of the mountain. Bulan Zir turned around and saw the warriors of his tribe falling one after another. Blood was flowing down the mountain rocks. It was an extremely tragic sight.

But Bulan Zir's associate suddenly shouted, "Look, someone's heading over from behind the enemy troops!"

Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan turned around at the same time and were stunned. "It's cavalry!"

The Central Plains people had long given up on using horses. Therefore, since the approaching party was riding on horses, they had to be from the steppe.

Kirghiz Yan was silent for a while. "Why did he come here? Shouldn't he be hoping for us to die in the Central Plains?"

Bulan Zir thought for a moment before answering, "Maybe it's because we're all from the grasslands?"

Kirghiz Yan sneered at this explanation. "Since when did we nomads have the concept of 'compatriots'? Aren't we supposed to follow whoever has the biggest fist? Besides, so what if he does come here? Can bow and arrows defeat the firearms of those from the Central Plains?"

Everyone fell silent. They all knew Kirghiz Yan was right. No tribe on the steppe would save another tribe. This was the law of survival of the fittest, and there was no concept of "compatriots." So they could only continue climbing up the mountain blindly to await their deaths.

Bulan Zir was already very tired. He was not fatigued physically, but the feeling of being helpless when he saw his comrades who had gone through thick and thin with him dying by his side was starting to take its toll. Despair started to well up in him like a tidal wave, surging past his neck and leaving him unable to breathe.

But the cavalry in the distance slowly came to a stop. Only one rider trotted forward from the crowd. The young man on that horse had a unique aura.

The man and horse slowly walked towards Mt. Zhuolu. Dark clouds were slowly building above his head as lightning flashed past behind him. The entire sky seemed to have turned into a huge vortex that could suck everyone's souls in.

Bulan Zir and the others on the mountain forgot about running for their lives. They stood on the mountain rocks and watched this sight in shock while holding their breaths.

How was this a power humans could control? This was clearly something that only gods could do!