

First Order 771

Chapter 771: Entering the city

The combat troops of Stronghold 176 on the mountainside stopped their pursuit as well. The soldiers looked up in horror and saw the vortex moving rapidly towards Mt. Zhuolu.

It started raining all of a sudden. As the rain turned heavier, the sand and stones on the mountain were washed away by the sudden storm and gradually formed into several small streams. Following, the small streams converged into a torrent as a surge of silt and stones started washing downhill.

Bulan Zir roared, "Quick, run up the mountain ridge. We'll die here if we don't get away now!"

Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan were even feeling a little terrified. They imagined the storm was definitely related to that young man. The kid really possessed the power of gods. It was no wonder many of the nomads had claimed he was a god who had descended into this world!

In the past, Bulan Zir did not believe in gods at all. But now he believed it without a doubt!

By this point, the nomads from the eight tribes behind Yan Liuyuan had dismounted from their horses and were kowtowing in reverence to the young man.

Hassan had conveyed their master's orders that they did not have to take any action this time.

At that time, everyone was somewhat puzzled. If they did not have to take any action, why did they come to Mt. Zhuolu?

Only now did they understand there wasn't a need for them to make a move.

Not everyone from the eight tribes who submitted to Yan Liuyuan had worshipped him. Before this, there were at least more than half of the nomads who did not believe in Yan Liuyuan.

But when they saw the terrifying storm clouds swirling and flashes of lightning above their heads, and looking at the torrential rain pouring down on Mt. Zhuolu, they had no choice but to believe it now!

The scene on the battlefield turned strange. On one side, people were running for their lives up Mt. Zhuolu. Those who did not manage to escape were washed away by the mudslide.

On the other side, thousands of people had dismounted from their horses to kowtow to the young man, becoming the most loyal believers of a god.

Yan Liuyuan had mentioned to Xiaoyu that he would have to resort to miracles over and over again to strengthen the devotion of his worshippers.

If he was a fraud, he would definitely be exposed one day. But to him, these grasslands were where he belonged. His worshippers were already waiting for him there to convert them.

This was one of the reasons why Yan Liuyuan decided to come to the grasslands.

Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan trekked along the mountain ridge and climbed towards safety. If they encountered a mudslide, running down the mountain would be a dead end for sure. Of this, they still had some common sense of what they needed to do.

Therefore, the death toll of the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes was not that high. However, the troops of Stronghold 176 on the mountainside suffered the most casualties.

This time, the troops of Stronghold 176 had been deployed almost in full force for the battle. There were at most only two battalions left behind to defend the stronghold. But with the torrent of mudslides arriving, it was useless no matter how many soldiers they had. That was the power of nature, and humans were exceptionally powerless and insignificant in the face of disaster.

This mudslide lasted for a full five hours. Bulan Zir and the others waited silently atop the mountain under the pouring rain.

They looked at Yan Liuyuan from afar. That young man remained still at the foot of the mountain, and his worshippers behind him also remained kneeling for five hours until the troops of Stronghold 176 were utterly defeated.

Gradually, the torrential rain stopped. Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan looked at each other and both ordered their men, "Let's fight our way back. This is our best chance to counterattack!"

Although there were still quite a few Central Plains people at the foot of the mountain, they were clinging to their lives. Some of them were hiding behind rocks, while others had climbed into the trees. Most of them did not even know where they had abandoned their guns. In contrast, the Bulan and Kirghiz tribesmen were in a much better state than the enemy. At least, they still had their swords with them!

This battle lasted for a full 13 hours, but Yan Liuyuan was not in a hurry at all. He only instructed Hassan to have the tribesmen start a fire and cook while waiting for the battle on the mountain to end.

Some of the soldiers from Stronghold 176 managed to flee from the mountain, but what awaited them were heavy machine guns.

The troops of Stronghold 176 could not figure out when the nomads had managed to get their hands on these heavy machine guns.

Hassan came to Yan Liuyuan and said, "Master, why don't I lead some soldiers to fight our way in now? By taking advantage of the chaos and killing Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan, their tribespeople will naturally submit to us."

"No need." Yan Liuyuan smiled and shook his head. "I believe that the two of them are not stupid."

Throughout the night, there was continuous shouting coming from the mountain. When it was almost dawn, Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan emerged from the mountain with blood all over their faces. Only a third of their tribe's warriors were following them.

Yan Liuyuan mounted his horse and said with a smile, "Not bad, I didn't expect there to be so many survivors."

Although he wanted to save them to preserve the strength of the entire grasslands, Yan Liuyuan also had to weaken the forces of Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan. Only then would they be convinced and he would finally be able to gain firm control of the grasslands.

So Yan Liuyuan did not use his powers nor allowed Hassan and the others to head into the mountain to help when the battle was being fought in the middle of the night.

Currently, the members of the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes who survived were all their elites. If they were to get involved in another tough battle in the future, the 9,000 people from these two tribes combined would become one of the core forces in the grasslands.

Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan panted as they rushed before Yan Liuyuan's horse. Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "Submit to me, and I'll bring you to Stronghold 176 to have a look. If you don't, you'll die here today, and your souls can see how I'll achieve all that you're not capable of."

Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan looked at each other and prostrated to Yan Liuyuan at the same time with their arms raised and palms facing up.

Yan Liuyuan smiled and used the whip in his hand to brush the two men's palms. This was a ceremony nomads performed when they wanted to seek their master's forgiveness. And Yan Liuyuan using the whip to brush their palms was to tell the offenders they had been forgiven and that they could continue to follow him and fight on the battlefield.

Lying on the ground, Bulan Zir roared, "A real god has finally descended on the grasslands. From now on, our Bulan tribe will lay down our lives to serve you."

Kirghiz Yan hesitated for some time as he did not know how to express his loyalty. Eventually, he roared, "The same goes for our Kirghiz tribe!"

From now on, there were no longer any forces in the grasslands that could hinder Yan Liuyuan from achieving unification.

"Alright then," Yan Liuyuan said with a smile as he turned his horse around, "Bulan Zir, you seem quite learned for a nomad, knowing how to express yourself so eloquently. On your feet. Do you two still have any strength left? If you do, follow and keep up with us, and I'll show you that people in the Central Plains are actually not that noble at all."

When they heard the horse galloping away, Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan got up. Hassan brought over two warhorses. "Master has bestowed these to the two of you."

The warhorses of Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan had died in Mt. Zhuolu. To preserve their dignity, Yan Liuyuan bestowed these warhorses to them. Otherwise, if the chiefs of the other tribes were to ride their horses while they followed on foot, they would not be able to lift their heads when they returned to the grasslands.

However, Bulan Zir felt a little puzzled. He asked Hassan, "Did Master just say that we're heading to Stronghold 176? There's still a lot of garrison troops there, so how are we going to attack our way in?"

Hassan glanced at them and said, "Can the enemy summon a mudslide from the heavens?"

These words left the two of them speechless. Right, no matter how powerful firearms were, how could they be a match for the power of a god?

When the nomadic army arrived outside Stronghold 176, Bulan Zir and the others saw the stronghold walls suddenly collapsing. Half of the garrison forces on the walls came falling down along with the crumbling walls!

Chapter 772: Faceplate and rebirth

The city walls had crumbled like the sky was falling, and the morning sun shone down like a raging fire burning.

There were no longer any garrison troops alive on the stronghold walls. Hassan, Bulan Zir, and the others had killed their enemies after a prolonged fight on the walls. Then they quietly waited for their lord of the steppe to enter the stronghold and begin his reign over the city.

Before entering the city, Yan Liuyuan rode his horse through the refugee town outside the stronghold. The refugees on both sides of his path hid back into their shacks.

The stronghold had been breached. But surprisingly, the town was not affected at all by the city walls that had crumbled. After the battle, not a single refugee had died.

Yan Liuyuan saw a child hiding in a shack behind his father who was shielding him firmly. However, the child could not help but sneak a peek at Yan Liuyuan.

Yan Liuyuan just smiled. He got some beef jerky from Tsetseg next to him and threw it to the child. However, he did not say anything and just continued moving.

The child given the beef jerky looked at Yan Liuyuan curiously. He suddenly felt that Yan Liuyuan was the most good-looking person he had ever seen in his life. Yan Liuyuan's eyes shone like stars, and he had sharp features. Gazing at Yan Liuyuan, it was as though he was looking at a flawlessly perfect god.

But what the child did not know was that when Yan Liuyuan looked at him, he saw himself from many years ago. At that time, there was also someone who constantly protected him like the child's father was doing.

When he passed by a courtyard house made of bricks, Yan Liuyuan saw many students hiding on the inside. He asked, "Is this the town's school?"

A young man said, trembling with fear, "Please let these children off. The oldest is 14 while the youngest is only eight. Even if Stronghold 176 has offended you, these children are innocent."

The schoolteacher was extremely terrified, as the cavalry that came into town stretched so far back he could not see the end of it. The majestic horse in front of him was so tall he needed to look up to see the young man who was riding it.

But even though he was afraid, he did not take a single step back.

The muscular horse snorted loudly, shooting out white vapor through its nostrils like arrows and looking extremely imposing.

The young teacher stumbled back in fright at this. However, he still continued to tenaciously shield his students.

Yan Liuyuan sized up the young man, then said to the children with a smile, "You have a good teacher. Remember to study hard. Someone once told me that books are the best avenue to gain an understanding of the world. If you wish to learn more about the world after leaving school, there's a price you have to pay in blood. Know that this is your last shelter." Yan Liuyuan began to think of something and grew distant.

The young schoolteacher was uncertain of what to do. The young man on the horse across from him was supposed to be a very ruthless person, but it did not seem like that was the case at all.

"Kirghiz Yan, hand out some beef jerky to them." Afterwards, Yan Liuyuan continued riding forward without looking back at the children.

Kirghiz Yan looked at the children in surprise. But eventually, he had his tribesmen bring over a bag of beef jerky and threw it onto the ground in front of them. He said fiercely, "This is given to you by my master."

Hassan had already run down from the city wall tower and knelt inside the city to respectfully welcome its new king.

"Rise," Yan Liuyuan said.

Beside him, Tsetseg suddenly realized Yan Liuyuan's expression had turned frosty after he entered the stronghold. He was completely different from how he was back in town.

Clop, clop, clop, clop.

The clapping of horse hooves could be heard on the streets of Stronghold 176. The entire stronghold had fallen silent due to the arrival of Yan Liuyuan and the nomads.

The tough-looking nomads' outfits from the grasslands and their majestic cavalry formed a stark contrast with civilization in the Central Plains.

Neat rows of brick structures could be seen on one side, while the other was a sight of people wearing animal skins and carrying long swords dripping with blood. Yan Liuyuan sat quietly on his horse and took in the sights around him. Previously, he never thought he would ever step foot into a stronghold again, setting foot in a place he hated so much with his status as a god.

But this was the first time the nomads had gone inside a stronghold in over 200 years since The Cataclysm.

As the warriors observed the city around them, they grew restless. Meanwhile, the city's residents all cowered in fear at home. They did not even dare to breathe too loudly.

Hassan whispered next to Yan Liuyuan, "Master, should we get started?"

Yan Liuyuan glanced at him. "Get started with what?"

"Slaughtering everyone in the city!" Hassan said, "The tribal chiefs behind us are getting excited. They want to massacre the city's residents to spread your glory. This is what all of us wish for."

"Slaughter everyone in the city?" Yan Liuyuan was stunned for a moment. He looked at the tribal chiefs behind him. Indeed, they were all getting restless, especially the two chiefs from the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes. Too many of their tribesmen had died in the battle, so it was time to spill the stronghold residents' blood in remembrance of them.

Moreover, they had found out from Hassan that their master had mentioned he would use the blood of Stronghold 176 as a sacrifice to the gods.

Although everyone had suffered heavy losses in the storm and incurred a lot of material losses in the battle, they knew they could obtain a large amount of wealth after massacring the city.

Hassan realized his master had fallen silent.

Once the massacre began, there would be cries and screams ringing out everywhere. Black smoke would billow in the large stronghold and countless people would die.

Yan Liuyuan looked at the stronghold that should have been very prosperous and the ruined stronghold walls behind him. If Xiaoyu were here, she would definitely not want to see a massacre happening in the city.

He suddenly said, "Pass down my orders. There shall be no massacre in this stronghold. Seek out all the managers of the stronghold first and tell the residents that they'll be allowed to live as long as they report to those officials. It would be even better if they could reveal their crimes. But before any further orders from me, I'll kill whoever indiscriminately kills the innocent."

Hassan said awkwardly, "If you kill your own people over the deaths of the stronghold residents, I'm afraid..."

Yan Liuyuan said calmly, "Then they probably still don't understand who the true lord of the steppe is."

"I understand." Hassan accepted the order and went around. Of course he would obey Yan Liuyuan's orders unconditionally. If anyone disobeyed, he would pull that person out and drag him to death with the horses.

The following warriors acted quickly. In just a few minutes, they found out the residences of a few officials before dragging them out of their homes.

Throughout this, Yan Liuyuan sat calmly on his horse while Tsetseg rode beside him as their large entourage headed towards the center of the stronghold. That was where the Shen clan's mansion was located as told by a stronghold official.

When they were about to arrive at the official residence, Hassan saw the manor was heavily guarded. He immediately led his Kharchin tribesmen to rush over with heavy machine guns.

Yan Liuyuan halted his horse and waited outside. Less than half an hour later, Hassan opened the manor's door for him.

The mansion had turned into an abattoir, and all of the survivors were kneeling on the ground. As Yan Liuyuan rode forward, he looked at the people in the manor and said, "I heard that someone named Shen Yin is in charge of this stronghold. Which one of you is him? Stand up and answer me. Kirghiz Yan, lead your men on a raid of the granary and arsenal. We'll take everything that can be taken."

After that, Yan Liuyuan dismounted from his horse and walked towards the villa in the manor. It wasn't until he sat down on the leather couch in the living room that he saw a middle-aged man being escorted over by Hassan. "Are you Shen Yin?"

Shen Yin glared at Yan Liuyuan. "How dare you nomadic barbarians come and make trouble in the Central Plains? Aren't you afraid to incur the wrath of the entire Central Plains?"

Yan Liuyuan laughed, "The Pyro Company? The Kong Consortium? Or the Wang Consortium? Who do you think will want to avenge your Shen clan?"

Shen Yin realized the young man in front of him seemed very familiar with the political situation of the Central Plains. The other party had come prepared this time for their attack on Stronghold 176.

"I'm curious about something." Yan Liuyuan asked as he tapped on the leather couch's armrest with his slender fingers, "Stronghold 176's reputation was clearly on par with Fortress 178 in the early years. Why has it degenerated so much?"

Shen Yin glared at Yan Liuyuan, but he did not know how to answer the question.

At this moment, a large group of stronghold officials were escorted into the villa by Bulan Zir. He was holding a thick stack of paper in his hands.

The officials were forced to kneel in a row. Bulan Zir handed the papers to Yan Liuyuan. "Master, these are all the evidence of crimes that the stronghold residents have written down."

"It seems like y'all're really unpopular with the people." Yan Liuyuan took the papers. "Why don't we play a game? I'll allow y'all to tattle on each other's crimes to redeem yourselves."

Right as he finished speaking, a middle-aged man crawled forward and said, "I would like to report that the Shen clan has been acting like a tyrant in the city for decades. They've been oppressing the

commoners to the point of suffering beyond words. This Shen Yin has grievously sinned. He even seized the wives of his subordinates for himself!”

“Carry on,” Yan Liuyuan said with great interest as he rested his arm on the couch and supported his chin with his hand.

“Also, Shen Yin is a real jerk. He used to indiscriminately kill the innocent, and when he caught some nomads, he slowly tortured them to death!”

Once someone got the ball rolling, accusations from the others started flowing like an open tap. It could not be stopped.

“He also abducted some women and children from the refugee town outside the stronghold two years ago!”

Yan Liuyuan started getting impatient as he listened to the rabble of voices. “That’s enough.”

Everyone in the villa immediately fell silent again.

Yan Liuyuan looked at Shen Yin. “See, these are what you stronghold residents are like. You live your lives in comfort but have lost your backbone and sense of happiness.”

However, Shen Yin sneered as he knelt on the ground, “The refugees are just pigs. What pride and happiness do they have?”

“No, they lead a happier life than you people.” Yan Liuyuan shook his head.

Shen Yin laughed heartily and said, “Those refugees can only struggle to make a livelihood. Some of them sold off their daughters while others have to resort to stealing and robbing. Even if they die inside the mines, no one will care about them. When their family members turn up, they never talk about seeking revenge and only ask how much they will be compensated. Some of them send their children to school only to realize that the things they learned are useless after graduating. In the end, they still have to farm sand or work down in the mines every day as their fate dictates. They live as though they might never get to see the next day arriving like animals on a farm. Let me ask you then, what happiness is there for such people?”

Yan Liuyuan looked at the dawn shining through the villa’s gate. In his memory, that was not what the towns were like, and neither was that an accurate description of the refugees.

When his elder brother returned from hunting in the past, he would often go to Wang Fugui’s store to buy two pieces of sickeningly sweet hard candies for him even though their family was very poor.

His elder brother would hide one and only give him a single piece, reminding him to eat it slowly.

But Yan Liuyuan would always end up finishing it at once before looking at Ren Xiaosu as though he wanted more. When he did that, Ren Xiaosu would take out another piece from his pocket so that Yan Liuyuan would be doubly surprised.

Every time during the New Year, his brother would go to Wang Fugui's store to purchase some new clothes for him. Although they were very poor, he would still get new clothes to wear for the new year.

In the cold winter weather, the adults in town would buy some fatty meat from the butcher to make dumplings with. On New Year's night, the aroma of the meat wafted out from the crude-looking shacks, leaving the children watching hungrily.

Wang Fugui would distribute some firecrackers he dismantled from a roll of 5,000 firecrackers to the children in town, each child given five firecrackers to play with.

The children could be seen running around in town playfully and they would even occasionally knock over other people's shacks. Then the adults in their family would hurriedly apologize and spank the culprit's bottom at the same time.

In that town, there were both laughter and crying.

Everyone experienced poverty and hardship during that time, but Yan Liuyuan somehow felt that those memories were filled with happiness.

Yan Liuyuan could even recall his brother's rare smile at that time.

All of a sudden, Yan Liuyuan resisted recalling all of these memories.

However, he did not intend to tell this to Shen Yin, and neither was Shen Yin fit to hear it.

"Bulan Zir," Yan Liuyuan said.

Bulan Zir knelt on one knee in front of Yan Liuyuan. "Master."

"This is getting quite pointless. Kill them all and hang their bodies at the gate." Yan Liuyuan said without his gaze ever landing on Shen Yin and the others, "I didn't allow you all to slaughter the stronghold residents earlier. But now, I'll allow you to raid the homes of these officials here. Each tribe can raid one of their homes. I believe that's enough to make up for your losses in the battle. Go on, I don't want to hear their piggy squeals when you kill them."

Afterwards, Bulan Zir and Kirghiz Yan stood up excitedly. They instantly broke the officials' teeth by smashing the hilt of their swords into the mouths of Shen Yin and the others, rendering them unable to speak.

The former prominent officials of the stronghold could only open their eyes wide in horror and let out screams in their throats.

Shen Yin, who was not giving in earlier, had now pissed his pants.

Bulan Zir and the others rushed into the official residences with their own tribesmen and did whatever they wanted. There were gold bars, jewelry, and firearms hidden in there while the arsenal and granary were also emptied out by Hassan.

By the evening, their plundering finally came to an end.

The nomads erected a huge wooden fence in front of the villa's gate and hanged the bodies of the officials one by one. From afar, it looked like a row of terrifying wind chimes.

Regardless of whether Yan Liuyuan liked these “wind chimes” or not, the nomads needed to stir up their people’s fighting spirit before going on to face even tougher battles in the future.

Yan Liuyuan would have to let them enjoy each of their victories and killings so they would become his most loyal worshippers.

It no longer mattered if he liked it or not. As the lord of the steppe, he only had to consider whether his worshippers needed these things.

If it were necessary for the nomads, he would turn the corpses of the enemy into his flag.

However, an incident still happened after he repeatedly emphasized to the nomads not to slaughter innocent people. When the chief of the Khoton tribe was escorted over by Kirghiz Yan, Yan Liuyuan frowned and asked, “What happened?”

Kirghiz Yan answered, “Master, when the Khoton tribe was confiscating an official’s assets, they actually led their tribesmen to kill unarmed civilians without your permission. The other tribesmen could not control themselves when they saw the Khoton tribe’s actions and joined in as well. Fortunately, Hassan informed me and Bulan Zir, so the situation did not get worse.”

The Khoton tribe had been badly defeated in the grasslands. So, after arriving at the stronghold, their chief was hoping that Yan Liuyuan would give the order to massacre the entire city. That way, it would make him feel better about his previous losses.

However, he did not expect that after Yan Liuyuan had saved the Bulan and Kirghiz tribes, they became the most loyal tribes to Yan Liuyuan. They carried out Yan Liuyuan’s orders meticulously and captured all of the Khoton tribe members.

Yan Liuyuan asked, “What did they do?”

“They killed thousands of civilians, started fires in the stronghold, and even violated the women,” Kirghiz Yan answered.

Yan Liuyuan waved his hand expressionlessly and said, “There’s no need for the Khoton tribe to continue existing then. Kill them all and hang their heads up with the enemy’s corpses.”

The chief of the Khoton tribe cried and begged for mercy, but before he could say anything, his head was cut off by Kirghiz Yan.

Yan Liuyuan took a deep breath. He did not expect that such a thing would happen under his command. Perhaps other people would simply deal with this by calling for stricter discipline to be enforced on their subordinates in the future, but Yan Liuyuan did not want to let this matter go so easily.

He might be able to accept the act of killing, but he would not stand for women being raped.

Everyone left, leaving only Yan Liuyuan and Tsetseg in the villa.

Suddenly, Yan Liuyuan saw the newspaper on the coffee table in front of him. The words *Hope Media* were printed on its header.

When Yan Liuyuan saw the newspaper, he did not go over to pick it up and just continued resting on the couch with his eyes closed. The Qing Consortium's envoy had already told him everything he needed to know. So he was not particularly interested in the papers.

Tsetseg remained beside him the entire time. She could feel the dilemma in Yan Liuyuan's heart. It seemed like he was struggling as well.

The girl took a comb out of her sleeve and stood obediently behind Yan Liuyuan to comb his hair. As she combed his hair, she said, "You're now the hope of Father and the rest."

"Hope?" Yan Liuyuan repeated as though he was deliberating the meaning of it.

The girl said again, "That's right, I've never seen Father so brave before. In the past, when those large tribes made him pay tribute to them with livestock, he always offered it to them submissively. The other people in the tribe also did not dare to speak out even though they were angry. But it's different now. When I saw him talking to the chief of the Khoton tribe that day, he spoke confidently without being overbearing."

"That's because he holds greater power now." Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "Meanwhile, the Khoton tribe is already on the decline. I had wanted to see if they would fight bravely in this battle. But in the end, I was very disappointed. The Khoton tribe hid at the back of the forces throughout the fight. They've already lost their courage, so how could your father not be confident when facing people like them?"

"No, it's not that." Tsetseg said in a soft voice, "Father said that it was the gods who bestowed him with strength. Every morning, he kowtows to you with Mother. He said that you'll bring our people a comfortable life and that we won't have to be afraid of anyone anymore. Now, everyone in the tribe says that you're the sun in the sky, and I think so too. It's the only way to explain such a beautiful presence as you."

"That's enough," Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "Go to your father and tell him that I'm ready to leave."

Yan Liuyuan absent-mindedly picked up the newspaper from the coffee table and glanced at the date. It seemed that this was yesterday's newspaper.

He had heard of *Hope Media* because Wang Fugui liked reading newspapers every day.

At that time, he even asked Wang Fugui why he liked reading newspapers. Wang Fugui laughed and explained that he just wanted to kill some time. Then he told Yan Liuyuan that he should learn from Mr. Zhang. When he could read and understand an entire newspaper publication, he would reward him with a piece of candy.

At first, Yan Liuyuan would study hard every day with a longing for the candy. However, he started to become playful and lazy again very soon. Every day, he begged his brother to take him out to go hunting because he knew there was a bigger world outside of town.

Now that he could understand an entire newspaper publication, the person who promised to reward him with a piece of candy was nowhere to be seen.

When Yan Liuyuan looked at the first page of the newspaper, it wrote about the war between the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium, as well as the moves the Wang Consortium was taking.

At the moment, the Wang Consortium was not in a hurry to join the battlefield. Instead, they had gathered their troops at the border and were waiting quietly for something.

Based on Yan Liuyuan's deduction, the Wang Consortium was just waiting for the opportunity to finish off the Kong Consortium with one strike.

Actually, there was nothing special about the consortiums. Everyone out here was like wild animals in the wilderness. They would only go all out when there was an opportunity to do so. Before the hunt began, everyone would usually remain silent.

Yan Liuyuan flipped to the second page, which reported about the aftermath of the incident in the Sacred Mountains. For example, it wrote about how many people had gone on the expedition, how many made it out of there, and how heavy their casualties were. Furthermore, the page described in detail that the expedition to the Sacred Mountains was just a scheme by the Anjing House and the Pyro Company. However, no one knew who revealed this to *Hope Media*.

The news on the third page started getting boring. It basically described what the chief editor, Jiang Xu, had seen and heard at the Wang Consortium's stronghold, as well as his review of the artificial intelligence, of which he had mixed feelings about.

The newspaper reported that Jiang Xu was still at Stronghold 61 and that he would continue observing the artificial intelligence's developments.

On the fourth page, the newspaper started to talk about the revolutionary changes surrounding the Qinghe Group in Luoyang City. All the Riders other than Xu Ke had already left Luoyang City, with their whereabouts unknown.

Yan Liuyuan flipped through the pages slowly as he waited for his subjects to gather.

But the moment he got to the fifth page, the young lord froze.

Half of the fifth page had only two lines of words written on it.

"Don't let the sorrows of our era become your sorrow as well.

"61."

Yan Liuyuan was too familiar with these words, and he knew who said it too. All of his fond memories of the refugee town were related to that person.

On that day, he saw that red spear pierce Ren Xiaosu's abdomen before he was swept away by the flood.

That flood was like an irreversible moment that almost wiped away all his fond memories of the world.

There was no more candy and no more new clothes to look forward to every year.

At that time, he was still Ren Xiaosu's little brother. But now, he was the new king of the steppe.

At this moment, Tsetseg rushed into the villa. "Father and the others are back!"

But as soon as she finished speaking, she realized the young man was sitting by himself on the couch and shrouded in the shadow of the distant twilight. He looked exceptionally lonely.

Yes, this was the loneliness of a king.

It was a loneliness enwrapped by blizzards and thorns.

Yan Liuyuan looked out of the villa. He wanted to go to Stronghold 61 to look for Ren Xiaosu.

But when he looked up, he saw the suspended corpses on the wooden fence swaying nonstop as purplish-black blood dripped onto the ground drop by drop.

These were the people he ordered to be killed, and it also represented his sorrows.

Meanwhile, the flames burning in the stronghold were the sins of the Khoton tribe who were his followers. Corpses of thousands of civilians and women who had been violated were burning within those flames.

At some point in time, he seemed to have become a part of this sorrowful era.

Perhaps many people would find it difficult to face their former selves after they grew up.

No longer naïve, no longer kind, no longer regarding themselves as good people.

The fervor in Yan Liuyuan's heart had gradually extinguished. It was as though he had slipped into an abyss. The humanity Xiaoyu pulled him back towards was once again defeated by the godhood he had attained.

Even Xiaoyu was unaware he no longer needed to pay a price to cast his curses.

Or rather, it was just that no one else could see what that price was.

Each time after he made a curse, and each time after he felt like his entire world had fallen apart, Yan Liuyuan would feel like he was taking a step towards a higher level.

That might be a higher level of humanity, but Yan Liuyuan did not know if it was the heavens or the abyss he was heading towards.

Just as Li Shentan had said, when humans were able to unlock their peak willpower, their consciousness would merge with the will of the world.

But would one still be human at that time? No one could be sure.

Yan Liuyuan's gaze pierced the sky. It was as though he could not face the past and himself. He did not want Ren Xiaosu to see him in this state.

At the same time, Hassan and 10,000 cavalry had gathered next to the corpses suspended from the wooden fence. There was a sea of people as the line of tough cavalry stretched along the long street. It was impossible to see the end of the line.

Suddenly, the nomads dismounted from their horses and knelt on one knee. When they shouted loudly, cheering for the ascendancy of the new king, the stronghold started trembling.

Yan Liuyuan could see a glint of excitement in Hassan and everyone's eyes from a distance away. They were looking at him with utterly devoted and passionate gazes.

He remembered the hope Tsetseg had mentioned earlier.

Yan Liuyuan got up and quietly lit that copy of the newspaper on fire. He threw it inside the villa and set it ablaze.

The luxury and decadence in the villa started burning up as the fire began to spread.

Yan Liuyuan stood within the fire and looked at the flames around him. It was as though he was watching this depraved era burn.

"Bro, I can't go back anymore. Bro, I'm not going back anymore."

Amid the flames, Yan Liuyuan took out his black and ferocious faceplate and put it on his face, concealing everything from his past.

He felt it was no longer necessary for his past identity, along with this era, to exist anymore.

Hassan knelt in front of Yan Liuyuan's horse and acted as a footstool for him. Yan Liuyuan stepped on Hassan's back and mounted his horse. "Return home! We're triumphant!"

The warriors started cheering. Some of them even shot celebratory gunfire into the air with the automatic rifles they had just obtained. These men who had come out to participate in this battle could finally return home with their new king.

They were going back to their home located in the North.

Chapter 773: Parting ways

The news of Stronghold 176's fall quickly spread throughout the entire Alliance of Strongholds.

This matter had even temporarily overshadowed the war between the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium. That was because it was the first time the Northern Plains' people had taken down a stronghold in the Central Plains after The Cataclysm. Moreover, it was even reported that the residents of Stronghold 176 were nearly massacred.

Fortunately, the nomads withdrew in time even though nobody knew why they stopped.

What shocked people the most about this disaster was the appearance of a mysterious superhuman, who was also the current lord of the steppe.

Some people said the nomads were able to take down Stronghold 176 only because that person was powerful enough to destroy the stronghold walls.

As for how he did it, no one really knew.

Every time one of these supernatural beings capable of destroying a stronghold appeared, it would cause a stir in the entire supernatural world.

Therefore, someone suggested that the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium, who were part of the Alliance of Strongholds, should put aside their grudges for the time being to defend against external enemies.

But which of them would stop now? The moment either of them stopped attacking, their entire organization would be done for if the other party were to continue attacking relentlessly!

As such, they both made a decision at the same time and turned a blind eye to the matter.

Just as Yan Liuyuan had said to Shen Yin, who would want to save Stronghold 176 and avenge the Shen clan? No one.

On the contrary, it was the Wang Consortium that immediately deployed a rebuilding team to Stronghold 176. They would be responsible for supporting the post-disaster rebuilding effort in Stronghold 176 and take over its management at the same time.

This turned out to be an unexpectedly good thing for the Wang Consortium. For no reason, they had suddenly gained control of a stronghold!

As all of the officials in Stronghold 176 had been killed by Yan Liuyuan, the Wang Consortium's takeover of the stronghold went extremely smoothly.

This was a free lunch..

Moreover, the Wang Consortium filled the streets with surveillance cameras during the reconstruction process and let the artificial intelligence take over the running of the entire stronghold.

The residents of Stronghold 176 were unable to resist and could only submit to the Wang Consortium.

...

"Master, I wish to discuss something with you." Zhou Yingxue looked at Ren Xiaosu and said in a serious tone, "You see, the Northwest is in need of manpower right now. I've long heard that they do not have enough food there, but my powers should be able to help them with that. I've also asked the Great Hoodwinker about it before. He said there's still a lot of wasteland there, so their crop yield is not high. Sometimes, even the stronghold residents experience a shortage of supplies, so not to mention the refugees..."

Ren Xiaosu, who was sitting next to the campfire, asked in wonder, "What are you trying to say?"

Zhou Yingxue said firmly, "I want to go and support the development of the Northwest!"

Ever since Zhou Yingxue met Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin in the Sacred Mountains, she had been made aware of Yang Xiaojin's plan for her. She was no longer as content as before when she was traveling alone with her master.

Zhou Yingxue was not really a maidservant to begin with. She was also a woman who sought independence in this era of the wastelands. It was fine since she used to admire her master, but she was starting to find it a little unbearable if she had to serve him every day.

In her opinion, she could totally play a more important role in a much bigger place. For example, she could head to the Northwest and start planning for her master to seize the leadership or something!

It really was a waste of her talent to be doing chores here!

That was right, Zhou Yingxue felt that her talents were being wasted!

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought before saying, "I guess you can go, but let's agree on something beforehand. After you arrive in the Northwest, you are to behave properly. Don't keep trying to throw your weight around."

"Of course!" Zhou Yingxue promised.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhou Yingxue suspiciously. He somehow felt that with her character, wouldn't she be extremely arrogant if she went to the Northwest? She might even use her status as the commander's maidservant to bully others every day. After all, this was a woman who used to wear ten rings on her fingers.

Most people would not do something like that!

Before Ren Xiaosu could say anything more to Zhou Yingxue, the maidservant had already packed her belongings and ran off. To Zhou Yingxue, this was not about going to the Northwest to support its development but more like a sprint for freedom!

The Great Hoodwinker also bade farewell to Ren Xiaosu. "I'm leaving too. I've received intel that Wang Yun is being detained in a secret prison. It's said that Kong Erdong is extremely unhappy with the losses on the front lines and wants to make an example out of Wang Yun to the others. He'll be court martialed next month, and I'm afraid that he'll be sentenced to death."

"What happens after you rescue him?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "What are your plans?"

"I'll bring him back to participate in the development of the Northwest, of course," the Great Hoodwinker said with a smile.

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He kept feeling that something was a little off somewhere. It seemed that everyone around him was just going to end up supporting the development of the Northwest. What exactly was going on?

Li Shentan, who was off to the side, looked at Ren Xiaosu, then at the Great Hoodwinker and the others. "Why don't I go and support the development of the Northwest as well? Otherwise, it would make me seem a little antisocial..."

Ren Xiaosu didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Make you seem antisocial? Should a mental patient like you even be considering something like that?"

"Alright then." Li Shentan felt a little disappointed. "In that case, I'll go to the South and wait for the typhoons. I can also get to enjoy the different scenery there."

"What'll you do after you're done typhoon watching?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"I will make another trip to Luoyang City." Li Shentan said, "There's still some children waiting for me to do magic for them."

Ren Xiaosu was silent for a while. A mental patient's train of thought was indeed quite different.

Luo Lan also got up to say goodbye. "I have to hurry over to the Zhou Consortium right away. Our Qing Consortium's informant said the Zhou Consortium has also started a new military deployment. I need to go and have a chat with Zhou Shiji before they complete their military deployment and battle plans."

Zhou Shiji was the current head of the Zhou Consortium.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Lan and said, "Why do I get the feeling that you're always running around? Don't you take any time to stop and rest?"

Ever since Stronghold 113 was destroyed, Fatty Luo had been traveling nonstop, going from the Li Consortium's stronghold to the Yang Consortium's stronghold.

After the entire Southwest was unified, he came to the Central Plains again. It was as though he could never take an idle moment.

Luo Lan chuckled and said, "The world does not give anyone a chance to catch a breather. The world is constantly changing, so people have to change with it as well. Take the Shen clan of Stronghold 176, for example. They did not seek to improve themselves, and look what happened in the end. Can any of us really get comfortable in this chaotic world?"

Ren Xiaosu fell silent. His greatest dream was to make a utopia where he could lead a peaceful life with no worries. But when Luo Lan said that, Ren Xiaosu was reminded of those bandits in the valley again.

When the matter with the Anjing House was settled, he might have to make a trip to the valley.

Luo Lan looked at Ren Xiaosu and said in a serious tone, "Go back to the Northwest as soon as possible. That's where you belong. Qing Zhen and I also hope you'll be the one to succeed Zhang Jinglin in the future. That way, the Qing Consortium and the Northwest will be able to continue getting along peacefully."

"It's too early to talk about that." Ren Xiaosu shook his head, refusing to continue the conversation.

Luo Lan looked into the distance and sighed emotionally. "Qing Zhen said that if he'd been given more free rein previously, he might not have become the head of the Qing Consortium now. I sometimes think that if I hadn't been born in the Qing Consortium, I'd've opened a small business, married a beautiful

wife, and had a younger brother who's an official. I'd be happy enough to lead such a life and not be tired like this."

Listening to Luo Lan's description of his dreams, Ren Xiaosu thought it sounded like a familiar story. He pondered for a moment before exclaiming, "Wu Dalang?!"[1]

Luo Lan was confused.

Chapter 774: The steam locomotive gets pursued

Luo Lan sulked to the Zhou Consortium.

Even though he and Ren Xiaosu had formed a solid friendship, and even though he knew how annoying Ren Xiaosu was usually, he would still get angry at him if there was a reason to.

For his trip to the Zhou Consortium in the South this time, Luo Lan had planned to get there by going around the Wang Consortium's territory. As such, he could not travel together with Ren Xiaosu.

According to him, the Wang Consortium was increasingly getting crazier by the day. In normal times, he might be able to go there and walk around openly since both parties had maintained a polite restraint with each other. But as of now, who knew if the Wang Consortium would do something bad to him?

Ren Xiaosu watched Luo Lan's receding figure as he left, while Yang Xiaojin stood beside him with her hands in her jacket pockets. They were the only ones left in the originally bustling group.

"Whatcha you thinking about?" Yang Xiaojin asked.

"I feel like I've been constantly faced with separation ever since I left Stronghold 113's town." Ren Xiaosu said, "I guess this is what adult life is like."

But not long after Luo Lan left, the sound of a steam locomotive traveling through the wilderness could be heard.

As the sound approached, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin looked at each other. "Wang Congyang?"

Honestly speaking, they did not expect to bump into Wang Congyang here. Didn't he flee from the Sacred Mountains? Why would he appear here?

And from the sound of it, the steam locomotive seemed to be traveling from the direction of the Sacred Mountains towards them at full speed.

The two of them hid behind a mound and waited to see what was going on. Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Could he be here to seek revenge on me? That old bastard is usually very cautious. He can't be that bold, right?"

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu in silence. So in your opinion, seeking revenge on you was a sign of audacity?

While pondering, Ren Xiaosu could see the steam locomotive appearing on the horizon. The steam locomotive kicked up a cloud of dust and smoke in its wake, looking like it was making an extremely powerful appearance.

For some reason, the rugged-looking steam locomotive looked particularly compatible with the wilderness out here.

“Wait a minute,” Yang Xiaojin said as she held up her spotting scope, “There’s others behind the steam locomotive.”

Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see through his spotting scope about 10 off-road vehicles following the steam locomotive. It looked like they were aggressively chasing after Wang Congyang!

“A great escape in the wilderness? A grand pursuit in the wilderness? This is spectacular!” Ren Xiaosu exclaimed emotionally as he looked on in amazement.

Some time ago, he had heard the female singer, Li Ran, discussing making movies with Director Mu. They both expressed it would be very difficult for the film industry to recover to its previous level before The Cataclysm as there were too many scenes that could not be achieved now.

That was why Director Mu Wan’ge wanted to make a documentary about supernatural beings. That was because the actual combat scenes of supernatural beings these days were even more enjoyable to watch than the stunts and special effects in movies before The Cataclysm.

In the past, who would really destroy a stronghold for you to see? Who could witness what a real cave-in at a lake looked like?

“Shouldn’t we be thinking about how to solve this current situation?” Yang Xiaojin reminded him.

“Oh, yeah.” Ren Xiaosu nodded. “Wait, let’s see what happens next.”

Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. Who could possibly be so bored to pursue Wang Congyang out here in the middle of nowhere?

Oh, it wasn’t without reason, after all. Ren Xiaosu had seen the Pyro Company’s logo on the off-road vehicles at the back. From the looks of it, they had been chasing him all the way here from the Sacred Mountains.

Ren Xiaosu muttered, “It’s all my fault.... There’s a total of seven off-road vehicles behind the steam locomotive. They should all be from the Pyro Company. Let’s get rid of them first. I feel that killing them should be a higher priority than taking Wang Congyang out.”

“Alright.” Yang Xiaojin had already conjured her black sniper rifle and started adjusting the scope’s ranging. “Let’s switch to incendiary bullets and just blow up the fuel tanks first. I’ll take the four vehicles at the back, and you can take the three in front.”

No matter how powerful Ren Xiaosu was now, Yang Xiaojin was still the main force when it came to sniping targets.

Wang Congyang, who was fleeing for his life, suddenly heard a sniper rifle go off. After the sniper rifle's gunshot rang out, it was followed by the sound of an off-road vehicle exploding behind him.

When Wang Congyang turned around, he was overjoyed. He looked out of the steam locomotive's window and was surprised to see the Pyro Company's vehicles that had been pestering him for a long time had exploded into balls of fire one after another.

Over the past few days, Wang Congyang edged to the verge of a breakdown. At the beginning, he thought he would shake off the pursuers behind him very quickly. However, he realized he was wrong.

The Pyro Company was far more determined to kill him than he had imagined.

Although the Pyro Company needed to stop their vehicles and get gas from the trunks to refuel, there were limitations to his superpower as well. Otherwise, he would also have sixteen carriages instead of only four.

Afterwards, Wang Congyang started traveling over the treacherous mountains as he attempted to make use of the terrain to shake off his Pyro Company pursuers. However, a new convoy would always manage to catch up with him. There were even T5 combatants deployed to encircle and intercept him in the mountains.

Wang Congyang was puzzled. *'Did I dig up your Pyro Company's ancestral grave or what? What are you all getting so mad about?!*

In the end, Wang Congyang had no choice but to head all the way south towards the Wang Consortium's territory. Surely the Pyro Company's troops wouldn't go so far as to cause trouble in the Wang Consortium's territory, right? Even if they did, the Wang Consortium would not agree to it!

That was what led to the sight Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were witnessing at this moment.

Wang Congyang continued watching as the vehicles behind him exploded into fireballs one after another. He was extremely delighted. "Where did this hero pop out from? Someone actually stepped in to help me in the face of injustice!"

With that, Wang Congyang drove the steam locomotive right for the sniper's gunshots. Just as he was about to get close, he suddenly narrowed his eyes and tried his best to make out who was helping him.

But at this moment, the ominous feeling within Wang Congyang started getting stronger, until he saw Ren Xiaosu's attire clearly.

"Fuck!"

Wang Congyang panicked. He got very flustered!

When he saw the Pyro Company had been attacked, he thought it was the Wang Consortium that had stepped in. Now that they were inside the Wang Consortium's territory, who knew if it were the Wang Consortium's border guards who had ambushed the Pyro Company here?

But the moment he saw Ren Xiaosu, he immediately understood that after the Pyro Company members were all dead, he would be the next to die.

Sometimes, the enemy of the enemy might not be your friend, but still an enemy.

When the steam locomotive in the wilderness made a sudden left turn, the inertia caused the rear of the train carriages to nearly swing into the air. From afar, it seemed like all four segments of the steam locomotive had just completed a drift in the wilderness.

“What a spectacular sight!” Ren Xiaosu said again emotionally.

He was about to pull the trigger to blow up the final vehicle of his target. But before he could pull the trigger, the vehicle exploded. It was Yang Xiaojin who fired at it.

Although they had agreed that Yang Xiaojin would take four vehicles while Ren Xiaosu took three, Yang Xiaojin blew up five of them in the end.

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that this was probably the difference between a Master Firearms Proficiency user and a Perfect Firearms Proficiency user.

But a second later, a shadow leaped out of the last vehicle that was engulfed in flames. Although the other party's clothes were on fire, he seemed to be fine.

Ren Xiaosu said with a frown, “There's even a T5?”

Chapter 775: Tragic snowflakes

When Ren Xiaosu saw the Pyro Company's logo, he roughly understood why Wang Congyang was being pursued.

After all, Ren Xiaosu was not forgetful to the point he wouldn't know what he had done.

But he did not expect there to actually be a T5 combatant among the Pyro Company's convoy that was pursuing Wang Congyang.

Even for the Pyro Company, T5 combatants were a very valuable asset. More than a dozen of them had probably been killed in the Sacred Mountains. But they even sent out a T5 combatant to hunt down Wang Congyang. It could be seen how much emphasis the Pyro Company placed on capturing him.

They saw the T5 combatant dashing madly through the wilderness. His shirt gradually burned to nothing and exposed his dark grayish skin. He had a look like he had been smoked on a grill.

His hair and eyebrows were burnt off, and it looked like a hairless hound had just crawled out of hell.

However, this T5 combatant was no longer targeting Wang Congyang. He had turned his sights to Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin!

Yang Xiaojin asked, “Should I use the black bullet? He can't avoid it since he has to take some time to make a turn at the speed he's going.”

Ren Xiaosu felt a pain in his heart. "Ahem, you can take a break first. Let's not use the black bullet yet. I don't want you to get exhausted."

Yang Xiaojin covered her mouth and nearly burst out laughing. She always enjoyed seeing Ren Xiaosu try to make up some dignified excuse when he was obviously just stingy.

A moment later, Ren Xiaosu jumped out from behind the mound and rushed straight for the T5 combatant.

With just a slight calculation of Ren Xiaosu's speed, the T5 combatant sneered on the inside. When he realized the human in front of him would not be a match for him, he even gave a slight smirk at the thought of it.

A sniper had actually given up on what he was best at to fight him in close combat? What else could he be other than suicidal?

But even if the sniper were to use his sniper rifle, it would be useless. He was already within a 100 meters of him. No matter how good the two snipers' marksmanship was, not even the gods could save them now!

Then the T5 combatant noticed from the corner of his eye that the steam locomotive he had been chasing for two days had come to a stop a distance away.

The T5 combatant was puzzled. Why had the other party stopped fleeing? Was he not afraid he would continue pursuing him after getting rid of these two?

But he did not have time to think about that. The T5 combatant looked seriously at the oncoming Ren Xiaosu and thought the young man was pretty brave. He even dared to take on a T5 combatant like him single-handedly.

As he was thinking, the T5 combatant was knocked into the air by "Old Xu," who had appeared out of nowhere.

The huge collision force from the side left the T5 combatant at a loss. His entire body started twisting at this moment, and he completed three full turns in midair. This was followed by the sound of a sniper rifle.

While the T5 combatant was in midair, he saw a young girl pulling the trigger. However, he felt that as long as he could quickly dodge, the bullet could not get to him.

But in fact, Yang Xiaojin had fired three shots in a row. Even though the T5 combatant was spinning rapidly in midair after being knocked into the air by Old Xu, every bullet landed in the same wound.

The three bullets pierced right through the T5 combatant!

The T5 combatant fell to the ground like a tattered cloth bag. Ren Xiaosu dusted off the nonexistent dust from his hands when he saw that the T5 combatant was dead. "These T5s seem quite stupid. They

just don't seem to understand that all is fair in war. Did they sacrifice a portion of their intelligence on the path of evolution?"

"That's possible." Yang Xiaojin put away her weapon and got up. "They're different from supernatural beings since they rely on external factors to evolve, so there might be some repercussions. But most supernatural beings who encounter them will still end up in a tragic state."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the steam locomotive that was parked in the distant wilderness. Wang Congyang was inside that train, and it seemed as though he was about to run away again at any moment.

"Why didn't that guy take the opportunity to escape?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

He heard Wang Congyang shout, "It was you who caused the Pyro Company to go all out to pursue me, right?!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. How did Wang Congyang guess? He hollered back, "Wait, I can justify myself!"

Wang Congyang was surprised.

He nearly spat blood out of the train window. He yelled at Ren Xiaosu, "After I met you at Stronghold 73 when the cave-in happened, the Pyro Company started coming after me. After I met you again in the Sacred Mountains this time, the Pyro Company immediately upped my wanted level on their wanted list. I find it very hard to believe that this is merely a coincidence!"

Although Wang Congyang still did not know what was going on or what had happened, he suddenly gained the ability to conjure an additional black cauldron after leaving Stronghold 73. He was even wanted by the Pyro Company back then. Now that something similar had happened again, and his black cauldron had also become bigger, he knew this was definitely not a coincidence!

At that time, he felt that something was amiss. Since Xu Xianchu also had a black cauldron, how did he end up having the same power as him? Something must have gone wrong somewhere.

And wasn't carrying the black cauldron a metaphor for taking the rap for someone? This was as straightforward as it could get. All that was lacking was expressing it explicitly.

Xu Xianchu was probably unaware of the origins of his black cauldron and might even feel pleased about getting a new power, but how could Wang Congyang not have thought of it?

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "It really has nothing to do with me!"

Wang Congyang slowly calmed down. "Regardless of whether you admit it or not, I already have a rough idea of what happened. Although I don't know how you did it, I hereby formally apologize to you. As the saying goes, 'An eye for an eye makes the world go blind.' Why don't we turn our hostility into friendship? You can just continue on your path, and I'll continue providing my delivery services! I didn't have a choice in the past, but now I just want to be a good person!"

These were Wang Congyang's heartfelt words. He really did not want to get involved in those strange matters anymore. He already had enough money to spend, yet he was still being hunted by enemies every day. Who could he go and reason with?!

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and replied, "And what if I say no? You've found trouble with me on more than one occasion, haven't you?"

Wang Congyang nearly broke down. "Why would you say no? Didn't you kill my cousin as well? Actually, I didn't have a good relationship with that cousin of mine. Do you remember when I went to search your house for the first time? I even said that it would be great if you were a soldier under me. You're much more capable than those good-for-nothings. In fact, I didn't have any intention of killing you back then."

Ren Xiaosu raised his eyebrows. "You still think that you're innocent?"

Wang Congyang said resentfully, "Hold it right there. I know that each snowflake in an avalanche pleads not guilty, but you still can't single out one snowflake and beat it to death!"

A gust of cold wind blew through the wilderness. Other than the sound of the wind, nothing could be heard.

Yang Xiaojin, who was standing off to the side, suddenly said, "You might have misunderstood. Ren Xiaosu isn't singling you out."

Wang Congyang was stunned. "Then what?"

Yang Xiaojin said in an exceptionally serious tone, "He's gonna beat every single snowflake to death."

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

A cloud of black smoke suddenly spewed out of the steam locomotive's smokestack. Wang Congyang was choosing to leave immediately! It would not be wise to stay here any longer!

Yang Xiaojin looked curiously at Ren Xiaosu. "Did I scare him off?"

Chapter 776: Winning over people with virtue

Ren Xiaosu watched as the steam locomotive disappeared into the distance. "He ran off just like that?"

When Ren Xiaosu saw Wang Congyang flee, he lost interest in pursuing him. In order to keep up with Wang Congyang's speed, he would have to use his own steam locomotive for the pursuit until Wang Congyang was completely exhausted.

Second, Ren Xiaosu felt it was an option to keep the other party alive so he could continue taking the blame. Of course, he could not let others know about this thought of his.

Yang Xiaojin glanced at Ren Xiaosu before conjuring her black sniper rifle. "Should we go after him?"

“Unnecessary.” Ren Xiaosu quickly stopped Yang Xiaojin and said, “Look, my questioning just now has already made him so ashamed that he wants to be a good person. Let’s not keep fighting and killing all day. We have to win people over with virtue.”

Yang Xiaojin wondered, “You? Win over people with virtue?”

Honestly, no matter how much Yang Xiaojin glorified Ren Xiaosu in her mind, she would still find it very difficult to associate him with that saying.

But after pondering for a while, Yang Xiaojin took out a dagger from her boot and carved “virtue” in small letters on the black sniper rifle’s butt.

Then Yang Xiaojin decisively fired at the steam locomotive in the distance. She stood steadily as though she were not affected by the recoil at all.

About a second later, when the bullet hit the train, Wang Congyang nearly spat blood in the carriage. After all, any attacks on the steam locomotive would be transferred back onto the user.

But he did not have time for that. The most important thing now was to quickly get out of this damned place.

Yang Xiaojin put down the black sniper rifle and said to Ren Xiaosu, “Did you mean this way of winning over people with virtue?”

Ren Xiaosu was startled. What was with this girl’s comprehension of things? Her interpretation of “winning over people with virtue” was to carve the word “virtue” in the butt of the rifle and shoot at someone with it?

Using “virtue” to win over someone?

More importantly, she was actually able to carve the word on it. *‘That’s the fucking black sniper rifle, alright!’*

Ren Xiaosu picked up Yang Xiaojin’s black sniper rifle and saw “virtue” elegantly inscribed on it. It was like it originally came with the rifle.

Ren Xiaosu was silent for a moment. “Well, if you say so I guess...”

He looked up at the sky and lamented how the girl next to him was so much more resolute than him the majority of the time.

But wasn’t this the reason why he liked her?

...

Stronghold 61 was now in a very orderly state. Residents could leave their doors open at night and no one would take things that were not theirs.

Currently, not only were there surveillance cameras installed in the stronghold, even the town had them as well.

As such, when Ren Xiaosu finally returned to Stronghold 61's town again, he somehow felt very uncomfortable everywhere he went. This was no longer the town he was familiar with.

The shacks in front of them were still dilapidated and the roads remained muddy. However, brand new surveillance cameras were now installed above their heads.

Ren Xiaosu found it a little ironic. Actually, the Wang Consortium did not lack any money since it was located in one of the richest regions in the Central Plains. However, they would rather fill the town with surveillance cameras than build more brick houses for the refugees to have homes to live in.

It was really a little out of place for these technologically advanced surveillance cameras to appear in the slums.

When Ren Xiaosu led Yang Xiaojin into town, he said to her, "This was where I lived when I first arrived at the Central Plains. At that time, I wanted to look for y'all, but I didn't know where to start and didn't dare to expose my identity. After that, I got to know about the Anjing House through the storyteller and had wanted to join them to make use of their resources to search for everyone. But I slowly realized that the Anjing House was not as honest as what they say, so I gradually dropped the idea."

"Mhm." Yang Xiaojin nodded. "The Anjing House was actually abandoned as soon as it was established. It was just a disguise for the Saboteurs' external affairs. My aunt never seemed to have any intention of managing it seriously, but even so, the Anjing House has become the largest assassin organization in the Central Plains."

In seriousness, both Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin really admired how capable Yang Anjing was. It was just that they did not approve of what she had done.

Ren Xiaosu continued, "The tavern is just up ahead. When I had free time, I would order a bowl of lamb stew, read some books, and listen to stories about me..."

Yang Xiaojin curled her lips. "Listening to stories about yourself is the highlight, right?"

"Hahahaha, no, that's not it," Ren Xiaosu said with a laugh.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized that a surveillance camera above his head seemed to be following him wherever he moved. It made him feel like he was being watched from behind by something that had developed a strong interest in him.

But when Ren Xiaosu looked up, that surveillance camera stopped moving. Then, when Ren Xiaosu tried walking out of the surveillance camera's field of view, it did not follow him anymore.

"I wonder what the hell this AI thing really is." Ren Xiaosu lamented, "It seems that the Wang Consortium really trusts this thing that they've created. But I get the feeling that the stronghold residents won't be too happy about being monitored by the surveillance cameras all the time. Or should I say, they won't dare to feel unhappy...."

Ren Xiaosu had already led Yang Xiaojin into the tavern. He heard the storyteller saying, "But my dear audience, what you don't realize is that the prominent White Mask is actually only a superpower of some supernatural being. When this fact is made known, the world will be shocked!"

Yang Xiaojin was stunned. Could this tavern be specially catered for Ren Xiaosu? Why did she hear something related to Ren Xiaosu as soon as they stepped into the tavern?

When she turned around, she realized Ren Xiaosu was already listening to the story with relish!

But something unexpected happened at this moment. Yang Xiaojin suddenly saw a girl glare at her. After glaring at her, that girl looked at Ren Xiaosu and nearly burst into tears.

Yang Xiaojin could not help but think about what Ren Xiaosu had done during the time she and Ren Xiaosu were separated. Zhou Yingxue had only just left, but here came another girl throwing herself at him.

Ren Xiaosu did not notice Xiaolu's expression at all. He just said to the waiter, "I'll have two sets of lamb stew! Top it up with 20 yuan of meat!"

He would have to be more generous! He was treating Yang Xiaojin to a meal after all!

Realizing that Ren Xiaosu was back, the storyteller drew the story to a natural close and proceeded with setting up the highlights of the next session.

He touched Xiaolu's face and whispered, "Silly girl! Wasn't he also here with another girl the previous time?"

Although the storyteller did not want Xiaolu to have anything to do with Ren Xiaosu, his heart would still ache when his granddaughter was sad.

Xiaolu whispered in grief, "It's different this time. He didn't like that woman from the last time."

"What about this time?" The storyteller was amused instead.

"The way he looked at that girl this time is different. He really likes her." After that, Xiaolu went into the kitchen without even greeting Ren Xiaosu.

The storyteller cursed in his head before walking over slowly to Ren Xiaosu. "You're lucky to have come back at this time. Otherwise, you wouldn't see us anymore."

Ren Xiaosu's expression immediately changed. "Are you serious? You still look quite healthy to me."

The storyteller spat, "I don't mean that I'm dying, but it's just too depressing to be constantly living under the surveillance of that annoying Wang Consortium's AI."

Chapter 777: Therapy

Before meeting the storyteller, Ren Xiaosu's impression of the artificial intelligence was that even though he did not like it, he felt it might be better at maintaining law and order. However, he was not really bothered since he did not plan on living in the Wang Consortium's strongholds anyway.

But now, even the storyteller wanted to move away from the Wang Consortium because of it.

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Is it that serious?"

The storyteller sighed and said, "Initially, I thought that there wouldn't be any surveillance cameras installed in town. But I didn't expect that even the town would have them as well. Because of that, the sources for my stories have been cut off since many people no longer dare to provide any material to me."

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. *'Material? Can't you just say that they are here to relay intel to you?'*

Some time ago, Ren Xiaosu learned this storyteller was definitely not what he seemed. How else could he come up with those new stories so frequently? Sometimes, he might even be more updated than the intelligence agencies of many organizations. In that case, how could it be ordinary material that he was getting?

Moreover, when Yang Anjing came to town back then, the storyteller immediately had Xiaolu inform Ren Xiaosu about it. It was obvious he knew who she was.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the storyteller and asked, "How long have you lived in this town? Can you move away that easily?"

The storyteller said with another sigh, "I'm really quite reluctant to move away after living here for over a decade. But we don't have a choice. The Wang Consortium's control will only get stricter in the future. This place won't be able to accommodate us anymore."

"Then have you thought about where to go?" Ren Xiaosu asked again.

The storyteller shook his head. "I haven't thought of it yet."

"Then I have a suggestion." Ren Xiaosu said, "Based on your facial structure—"

"The Prosperous Northwest?" interrupted the storyteller.

"Yes, the Prosperous Northwest." Ren Xiaosu did not feel any embarrassment about being exposed. So it turned out the storyteller was already aware of the Great Hoodwinker's tricks?

Yang Xiaojin quietly turned her head and looked at Ren Xiaosu. *'This Great Hoodwinker is way too influential. He even managed to infect Ren Xiaosu with his enthusiasm?'*

Ren Xiaosu asked, "How did you know I was going to bring up the Prosperous Northwest?"

The storyteller snapped, "That Great Hoodwinker has read my fortune more than a dozen times over the years. Every time he does, he talks about the 'Prosperous Northwest.' He didn't even bother coming up

with something new. Of course, the Northwest is also within my consideration. But I still have to think about where the safest place is.”

But at this moment, someone pushed open the tavern’s door. The storyteller immediately turned around and headed into the kitchen as though he did not know Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see the other party was a young man. He politely said to Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin, “Hello, my name is Wang Run. I’ve been instructed to pick you up and bring you into the stronghold. Accommodations have already been arranged, and there’ll be a dinner party in the evening.”

Although the young man was very polite, he had a domineering aura about him. He was neither servile nor overbearing as he stood there, giving people a sense of oppression.

Ren Xiaosu carefully sized up the other party. He had a vague feeling the man might be a supernatural being. Wang Run suddenly gave him the impression that he was one of those Imperial Guard commanders as told in the storyteller’s tales.

But he and Yang Xiaojin had not told anyone they were coming to Stronghold 61’s town. When they got here, they also did not encounter anyone from the Wang Consortium. How did the Wang Consortium’s people know they had already arrived? And they even found them at the tavern so quickly?

Wait a minute! This was probably the work of the artificial intelligence, right?

Ren Xiaosu got up. “Let’s go then.”

His motive for coming to Stronghold 61 was so he could fulfill his promises to Yang Anjing. He did not care about anything else.

Ren Xiaosu had also discussed it with Yang Xiaojin. Once the three tasks were completed, they would immediately set off for the Northwest. They would no longer care about what was going on in the Central Plains and would focus on the development of the Northwest.

Previously, Ren Xiaosu was worried Yang Xiaojin might not be willing to go to the Northwest due to the harsh climate. After all, life would really be much tougher there than in the Central Plains.

However, Yang Xiaojin really did not mind it.

The car was already waiting outside of the tavern. After Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin got onto the off-road vehicle, it drove off towards the stronghold.

Currently, the Wang Consortium’s administrative center was being shifted over to Stronghold 61. Meanwhile, Wang Shengzhi had already moved his official residence here.

The last time Ren Xiaosu was in Stronghold 61, it was to resolve the creeper vine crisis. Even now, the entire supernatural world was still unaware of how the creeper vine had died, with the case becoming an unresolved mystery.

Someone said the creeper vine had gained sapience and gained a human form to bring disaster upon the human world. Others also said the creeper vine had been taken care of by the Wang Consortium's experts. In any case, there were all kinds of speculation...

Only a few people who had personally been through the disaster would know that all of the creeper vines' energy had been absorbed by Zhou Yingxue.

Even people like Luo Lan would act very politely towards Zhou Yingxue now when they saw her.

After entering the stronghold, the off-road vehicle drove along the long main avenue. Ren Xiaosu saw through the window that the pedestrians would hurriedly lower their heads subconsciously after noticing the off-road vehicle. It seemed as though they were afraid to look directly at it.

Ren Xiaosu asked Wang Run who was sitting in the front passenger seat, "I noticed that the pedestrians all seem to be hurrying somewhere. Where are they going?"

Wang Run replied, "It's already past noon. They're probably on their way back to work after lunch."

Ren Xiaosu asked again, "I heard that everyone here has work to do and food to eat. Is that true?"

Wang Run replied rather proudly, "Yes, no one here suffers from starvation, and everyone is leading a very fulfilling life. We're already two months into the new year, but there's only been two cases of crime in the stronghold."

"Did they choose their own jobs or..." Ren Xiaosu asked.

"The stronghold will assign them their jobs. After their personal details are inputted by the staff into the system, the AI will allocate jobs to them accurately," Wang Run replied.

"But what if the people don't like what they were assigned?" Ren Xiaosu asked curiously.

"This allocation method assigns the most suitable jobs to them in a rational manner."

"I mean, what if they don't like the job they were assigned?" Ren Xiaosu asked puzzledly. Just like how some people might really be more suited for a logistics job but prefer doing something more challenging like sales, how should their jobs be chosen?

Moreover, jobs like writers, painters, sculptors, philosophers, and other kinds of artistic work would probably not be allowed to exist anymore in such an environment. Although these jobs seemed a little mismatched with the current world, weren't these "useless" things also one of the cornerstones of human development?

Although Ren Xiaosu did not really like those people who dabbled in the arts, he also felt it was a little wrong to completely eliminate them.

Therefore, he asked Wang Run what would happen if those people did not like their assigned jobs.

Wang Run thought for a moment before answering, “We have a specialized therapy team in the stronghold. When someone is feeling conflicted about their work, there’ll be a counseling team assigned to help them.”

“Counseling?” Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment.

For some reason, he suddenly felt a chill down his spine when he heard those words. However, he was unable to describe why he had this feeling.

Chapter 778: Became braver today

Ren Xiaosu did not know what this “therapy” was about. He just felt the Wang Consortium’s methods were too overbearing.

Ren Xiaosu felt it was only natural that there were people in the world who did not like doing things they were good at. For example, Qing Zhen often said he did not like wars, but he was good at resolving them. For example, even though Zhang Baogen was a supernatural being, he felt that his calling was to bring joy to children living in the orphanage.

Even though Zhang Baogen’s saliva bubble power had become extremely powerful, and even though it smelled like celery, everyone should be able to make their own choices.

Alright, maybe having such choices and preferences was insignificant in your Wang Consortium’s stronghold.

But what subtle impression would you give to those people by putting them in therapy? “If you think that you don’t like your current job, that’s because there’s something wrong with your mentality, so you need therapy.”

You would be implying that they were in the wrong, so we, the Wang Consortium, would help you to get back on track by giving you therapy.

Ren Xiaosu could not agree with this method. For example, if someone were to say to him, “Ren Xiaosu, since you’re so good at killing people, you should help everyone kill people.”

Ren Xiaosu would definitely smash that person’s head in.

Moreover, at this moment, Ren Xiaosu felt that the word “therapy” had suddenly become a very taboo word in the stronghold. This was something he found difficult to accept.

He could even imagine that if a very stubborn person were to suddenly appear in this stronghold and was not willing to do the job that was assigned to him by the artificial intelligence, that person might just end up getting “counseled” endlessly.

What a horrifying feeling this was.

It was no wonder the stronghold residents would subconsciously lower their heads when they saw the Wang Consortium’s vehicle.

Ren Xiaosu did not make any further comments on this matter. He was not the savior of the world, nor did he have any better or more reasonable suggestions. He only wanted to fulfill his promises quickly and leave this place.

The off-road vehicle drove for nearly 40 minutes as Ren Xiaosu silently mapped out the route in his mind.

When he was here with Zhou Yingxue the previous time, he had memorized the map of Stronghold 61. Although he did not have a photographic memory like Wang Yun, he could still roughly memorize it.

At this moment, the female celebrity, Li Ran, who was walking out of a villa on the side of the road, was taken aback when she saw the off-road vehicle driving past her.

Her new assistant, who was standing beside her, asked, "Ranran, what's the matter?"

Li Ran looked in the direction of the departed off-road vehicle. "I think I saw someone familiar, an acquaintance."

Li Ran had already been living in Stronghold 61. She was rescued by Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue during the creeper vine crisis. Later, she came back after the stronghold was rebuilt. After all, she would have some feelings for the place where she grew up.

When Li Ran saw Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin sitting inside the Wang Consortium's vehicle, she felt a little jealous for some reason.

She used to look down on Ren Xiaosu. But later, she realized she was unable to understand the world he was living in.

The assistant turned to look at Li Ran. "Is it just an acquaintance?"

"Mhm." Li Ran calmed herself down and replied, "Come on, let's head to the event."

The assistant had some thoughts about this. Judging by Li Ran's disappointed expression, it was apparent that the person was no ordinary acquaintance.

The off-road vehicle stopped at a quiet street after driving down the avenue. When Wang Run got out of the vehicle, he said to Ren Xiaosu, "We've arranged these two courtyard houses as your accommodation. This is specifically where our Wang Consortium receives our distinguished guests."

Ren Xiaosu had a look at the two courtyard houses. They were not big, but they stood secluded and elegant.

However, he felt that something was off. "Something's not right!"

Wang Run was stunned. "What's wrong?"

“Why are there two courtyard houses?” Ren Xiaosu said earnestly, “One courtyard house should be sufficient for the two of us. We’re only here on a visit. If we also take up your resources used for receiving distinguished guests, isn’t that such a waste? No, no, you can go and tell your higher-ups that the two of us can stay together.”

Wang Run was stunned and did not know how to respond. He saw Yang Xiaojin push open the door to her courtyard house. As she walked in, she said scornfully, “You’re making it sound like you have the balls to stay with me.”

Yang Xiaojin knew Ren Xiaosu too well. From his behavior in the wilderness, how could she not know how cowardly he was? Now that they were here, he actually even put in a request like that?

Ren Xiaosu stood on the street looking confused. Wang Run said, “You two can rest up first. I’ll come and deliver the two of you to the boss’s residence when it’s time for the party.”

After that, Wang Run went away.

Ren Xiaosu stood still and started thinking about the accommodations. It must have been Yang Xiaojin’s aunt who arranged for them to stay in two separate courtyard houses.

How could anyone do something like that? How could he waste the stronghold’s resources when there were still so many homeless people? This would make him feel bad!

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu walked over to Yang Xiaojin’s courtyard house and tried to push the door open. However, he realized she had already locked it from the inside.

Ren Xiaosu’s expression darkened. “Why did you lock the door? You scared or something?!”

Yang Xiaojin, who was inside, said, “Well done, you’ve become braver today. You even know to come over and open the door yourself.” Then she returned to the house with a smile without any intention of opening the door for Ren Xiaosu.

In the end, when Ren Xiaosu went back over and was about to enter his courtyard house with his head down, a familiar voice rang out from the other side, “Ren Xiaosu?”

Ren Xiaosu turned around and was surprised to see Jiang Xu walking out from another courtyard house with several reporters next to him. Curious, he asked, “Why are you also here at Stronghold 61?”

Jiang Xu said with a smile, “I came to see what the Wang Consortium’s AI is about and took the opportunity to hold some classes here as well. Just as I was getting bored, you arrived. So, what are you doing here?”

“It’s a long story.” Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, “I promised someone I’d do three things for them within my power.”

...

Yan Liuyuan led Hassan, Bulan Zir, Kirghiz Yan, and the others back to the imperial court in the grasslands in the North. But when they arrived, they noticed the women and children in the tribe were all looking a little flustered.

Yan Liuyuan's voice came from under his black faceplate, "What's the matter? What happened?"

Xiaoyu came out from the royal tent to welcome back Yan Liuyuan. She took a look at Yan Liuyuan first to see if he was injured before saying, "I told you about that newly discovered salt pool a few dozen kilometers away from here before. But our people who went there to harvest salt two days ago never returned. I sent out some of the warriors to go and investigate, but they only brought back a few bodies."

Yan Liuyuan was taken aback. "Was it the wolves?"

"No." Xiaoyu shook her head. "They were slash wounds. The right ears of the bodies were also cut off."

Yan Liuyuan suddenly looked at Bulan Zir. "Are there any other tribes on the steppe?"

Bulan Zir shook his head and said, "No, they're all here. However, there were similar incidents during earlier years. But I heard it happened somewhere further north. After that, it became too cold and was inhabitable to people. There was always a legend on the steppe that our north is not the steppe. There's in fact still some humans living in that freezing place, but no one has ever seen them before. Or rather, those who encountered them all ended up dead."

Yan Liuyuan looked north of the grasslands. To many in the Central Plains, the boundary of the Northern Plains was the grasslands, and the enemies were the nomads.

However, many of them had neglected one thing: There was still the north further north of the grasslands.

Chapter 779: Choosing teammates

When night was about to fall, Ren Xiaosu reluctantly put away the chess pieces. He looked at Jiang Xu and said, "Your skill seems to have deteriorated a little."

Jiang Xu's eyebrows twitched, and he said with a livid expression, "You better get lost while I can still hold myself back."

Several of the reporters standing around them sniggered. They had never seen their chief editor lose so badly in front of anyone before. In fact, Jiang Xu's chess skill was well-known throughout all of Luoyang City. Jiang Xu used to go searching for other seniors to play chess with in Luoyang City. He defeated them all and became the best elderly chess player.

But now, Jiang Xu did not even manage to win once having played three games against Ren Xiaosu.

Of course, it was not that Ren Xiaosu was good at playing chess. This happened purely because he was utterly shameless.

Jiang Xu's general could only move one step at a time while Ren Xiaosu could move his 10 steps.

Based on Ren Xiaosu's explanation, it was normal that Jiang Xu could only move one step at a time since he was advanced in age and his legs were not good. However, Ren Xiaosu was still young, and he was a supernatural being at that too, so it was natural that he should be allowed to move 10 steps at a time.

In fact, he had even tested it before. A normal car might not be able to outrun him in the wilderness.

Jiang Xu felt that playing chess with Ren Xiaosu was becoming more like a farce. He said, "Back to the main topic, I suggest you don't get too close to the Wang Consortium. When I first came to the Wang Consortium, I felt the AI was quite good. Without mentioning other things, at the very least, everyone in the stronghold has enough food to eat and clothes to keep warm. But later, when I learned about their therapy, I started having second thoughts. Furthermore, the Wang Consortium is overly ambitious. I suspect the sudden eruption of the war between the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium is also closely related to the Wang Consortium."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. "I'll be careful."

As they chatted, Wang Run's vehicle was waiting outside. After bidding Jiang Xu goodbye, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin got into the car and headed to the dinner party. He mainly wanted to find out what Wang Shengzhi and Yang Anjing were up to tonight.

After Ren Xiaosu left, the reporters standing around Jiang Xu asked excitedly, "Chief Editor, was that him?"

Jiang Xu nodded and said with a smile, "Yes, that was him."

A reporter asked, "Can you get some autographs for us? He was so cool when he protected our Hope Media HQ!"

During the battle in Luoyang City, the reporters and editors were all working inside the building. That night, everyone thought Hope Media was going to perish. But in the end, that person single-handedly took care of all the thugs.

Copies of that sketch of Ren Xiaosu's back view by the female editor had long ago been made and kept as a collection by the reporters. To these people from Hope Media, Ren Xiaosu was their hero.

Honestly, even Ren Xiaosu himself was unaware of how popular he was with the employees of Hope Media.

...

The off-road vehicle drove all the way to the northwest of the stronghold. Ren Xiaosu had thought Wang Shengzhi's official residence would be very luxurious, but he was surprised by it.

The vehicle drove down a path lined with trees and stopped on the side of the road.

The old and mottled courtyard house by the roadside was hidden behind dense parasol trees.

Wang Run pushed open the gate, and Ren Xiaosu stepped onto the limestone slabs in the courtyard as he walked in. He could see some bamboo planted around the yard and a koi pond as well. The place looked rather peaceful and comfortable.

Although the outside world had a lot of negative speculation about Wang Shengzhi, Ren Xiaosu was still willing to come to the Wang Consortium to meet him. After all, Wang Shengzhi had saved his life before.

Even though that red spear had only pierced his appendix, he would probably have died on the shore if no one stopped his bleeding on time and applied medicine for him on a huge wound like that.

Ren Xiaosu had always been a vengeful person but would repay kindness with kindness. Therefore, this was one of the reasons he made those promises to Yang Anjing. After all, Yang Anjing and the Wang Consortium were now inextricably linked.

The relationship between Yang Anjing and the Wang Consortium was definitely not something Ren Xiaosu had blindly speculated. Just like this time, he was originally invited here by Yang Anjing, but it was Wang Shengzhi who came to receive him in the end.

As they walked into the spacious living room, Ren Xiaosu turned around when he heard the sound of a wheelchair moving. He was surprised to see Yang Anjing, who was dressed in her black combat uniform, pushing Wang Shengzhi out of the hallway in his wheelchair.

Ren Xiaosu was a little surprised. Could these two have already gone beyond a working relationship?

He greeted, "Mr. Wang, it's been a while."

Wang Shengzhi smiled. "We're already on such good terms, so don't address me as Mr. Wang."

"Then what should I call you?" Ren Xiaosu pondered it for a while and tried out, "Uncle?!"

Everyone in the entire villa fell silent.

Yang Anjing and Yang Xiaojin both looked at him expressionlessly. However, Wang Shengzhi started laughing. "Maybe it's still better if you address me as Mr. Wang. Come on, the food is ready."

After that, Yang Anjing wheeled Wang Shengzhi over to the dining room while Ren Xiaosu sat down at the dining table.

Compared to the grand banquet he had imagined, there were only Yang Anjing, Yang Xiaojin, Wang Shengzhi, and Ren Xiaosu present tonight. The dishes were extremely sumptuous, and Ren Xiaosu could see many servants busily setting up the meal. After he sat down, someone immediately laid out a napkin for him to prevent any spillage from dripping on him.

To tell the truth, this was the first time Ren Xiaosu realized these big shots were so formal when they ate.

However, none of that mattered. He only wanted to know what Wang Shengzhi and Yang Anjing were planning to get him to do.

Ren Xiaosu asked calmly, "Since the two of you hoped for me to come, here I am. What's the hurry with eating? Although I've never had such exotic delicacies placed in front of me before, I can be quite weird. I always find simple food to be more palatable. So, what exactly do you want me to do? Let me say this beforehand: Don't ask me to do things that are against my will. Whether I agree to it or not will entirely depend on me."

Wang Shengzhi said with a smile, "Don't worry, the first task I want to request of you is to allow me to show you what the Wang Consortium's AI is about."

Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. "Have you thought it through? Any normal person who gets me to agree to three promises will not waste them like that."

"In my opinion, this will not be a waste." Wang Shengzhi shook his head. "I went to the Northwest some time ago and personally heard Zhang Jinglin admit he's planning to hand over control of Fortress 178 to you. Since the Northwest maintains good business and neighborly ties with the Wang Consortium, I feel that you need to understand what the Wang Consortium is doing."

Of course, it was not as simple as Wang Shengzhi had described. However, only Yang Anjing knew what Wang Shengzhi's true motive was.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment before saying, "Alright, I can do that."

"That's good." Wang Shengzhi became happier. Before this, he had been looking a little gloomy. It was only at this moment that he finally cheered up.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "But I don't understand something. Why do you insist on me coming to learn about this AI? Why me?"

Yang Anjing, who had been silent all this while, suddenly said, "If you were faced with a great disaster and revolutionary change, would you rather choose a wolf or a pig as your teammate?"

Ren Xiaosu started thinking again. This question felt like it had a more profound meaning to it, and he did not know how he should answer her.

After a while of silence, he said in a serious tone, "If the conditions allow, I hope that my teammate can be a human..."

Wang Shengzhi, Yang Anjing, and Yang Xiaojin were speechless.

Chapter 780: Differing principles, separate paths

Ren Xiaosu was not trying to be annoying at this moment, but he really believed he did not have any grand ambitions for the world. All he wanted was to live happily with a group of people.

Whether it be a wolf or a pig that became his teammate, Ren Xiaosu would not mind. The teammates he wanted should all be real people with compassion.

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu placed a lot of importance on human compassion.

After going through so much, he could only identify with the Northwest because he could sense the compassion he needed there.

This compassion was not about whether his comrades were strong and powerful during battles, but that when the battles were over, everyone could support each other while bantering and cursing as they made their way home together.

But Ren Xiaosu did not see any of this in the Wang Consortium. He could only remember the Wang Consortium's artificial intelligence and how the Anjing House plotted from afar to bring down the supernatural beings and the outlaws in the underworld.

That was right. After the cave-in at East Lake and the expedition to the Sacred Mountains, the Wang Consortium and the Anjing House had indeed made Ren Xiaosu change his opinion of them. The last time he met a genius strategist like that was Qing Zhen.

Actually, Qing Zhen was also decisive in killing people. But his sincere brotherhood with Luo Lan made Ren Xiaosu feel that Qing Zhen had more compassion in him. This was the difference between Qing Zhen and Wang Shengzhi in Ren Xiaosu's eyes.

Wang Shengzhi managed to react after a brief moment of surprise. Actually, Ren Xiaosu had already answered his question.

He said seriously, "I had the same thoughts as you when I was young, but I've seen too many shady things going on within the consortiums. So I gradually started to believe that humans managing humans is the beginning of a tragedy, not unlike my own."

Wang Shengzhi continued, "I've met a girl who was violated, but the Public Order Division did not dare to punish the accused because he was a member of the Wang clan. In the end, I had to personally give the order to sentence the accused to life imprisonment. Even today, there are still people pleading for him.

"I've come across a traffic accident where a few pedestrians were horsing around in the streets. As a result, they fell down accidentally and were hit by a car. The driver was not in the wrong at all, yet the Public Order Division made the driver compensate the victims on grounds of humanitarian reasons."

"I've even seen..." Wang Shengzhi sighed and said, "I've seen too much, so I want to make a change. Many people think I'm doing all this because of what happened to my legs. But I've never defended my reasons and just let them think what they want."

Ren Xiaosu fell silent. In truth, none of Wang Shengzhi's reasons could be said to be wrong. In fact, Ren Xiaosu even supported Wang Shengzhi a little. That was because, at present, it seemed that an absolutely fair artificial intelligence could indeed solve those problems by managing society in place of

humans. At the very least, it would make the family members of the Wang clan and stronghold officials behave like they were treading on thin ice.

If it weren't for the fact that Wang Shengzhi's authority was stable, these wealthy and privileged people would have already flipped the table.

But when Ren Xiaosu suddenly remembered the "therapy," he felt a thorn stab his heart.

While this was only a minor matter, Ren Xiaosu somehow felt he could pry into the logic of the entire artificial intelligence through it. That was a world based on absolute rationality.

A world without any compassion.

Wang Shengzhi said, "I've run the Wang Consortium for 17 years and brought the troops under my firm command over that period. I've completed the purge within the Wang Consortium's political system just so I could wait for today to arrive. For the sake of an impartial world, I can sacrifice everything I have now."

Ren Xiaosu thought for a long time before saying, "Maybe you won't like what I have to say, but I think you're acting too hastily. Perhaps I don't know how to manage a stronghold or a consortium. But I think that the world you dream of might be realized one day when everyone becomes educated and has their basic needs fulfilled. No, it might never be realized even then. I still refuse to accept a world without any compassion in it."

He knew full well that even if the world were rich in resources and most people could afford to attend school, there would still be beggars, thieves, and criminals around.

But even at that time, the majority of people would still be passionate about the world and their own lives.

Meanwhile, with the implementation of the artificial intelligence's governance, Ren Xiaosu could only see pedestrians walking on the streets with their heads lowered. He could not even sense any warmth in them.

Jiang Xu's initial opinion was not wrong. It was already good enough that the refugees could have their basic needs fulfilled in such an era, so why would they insist on more?

However, Jiang Xu gradually realized what a cold and rational world would do to human civilization.

Then Ren Xiaosu looked at Yang Anjing. "When I first learned about the Saboteurs some time back, I thought that you advocated for peace. But now that war has broken out in the Central Plains, the perpetrator turned out to be your Anjing House. I believe that the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium wouldn't start a war for no reason. It should've already been foreshadowed by the expedition to the Sacred Mountains."

Yang Anjing said calmly, "Only by reunifying the entire Alliance of Strongholds can the flames of war be completely extinguished. You've been through quite a few wars too, haven't you?"

"I can understand the logic, and you're also right." Ren Xiaosu said, "But that sounds more like an excuse that a politician would make."

The two sides had started debating. Yang Anjing said seriously, "I never created the Saboteurs to maintain peace. Rather, I did it to get rid of all nuclear weapons in the world. After the AI takes over the running of society, it'll be fair and impartial in regulating all possible nuclear generation methods. Only then can we achieve a truly nuclear-free world."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized this was the basis of Yang Anjing and Wang Shengzhi's cooperation. Yang Anjing knew that only by working with Wang Shengzhi could she finally achieve her goal once and for all. At that time, even the Saboteurs would not need to exist anymore, because no one could escape the detection of the artificial intelligence to research nuclear weapons.

That was Yang Anjing's ultimate objective.

"Are nuclear weapons really that terrifying?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Of course," Yang Anjing looked at Ren Xiaosu. "How else do you think we ended up in this era of the wastelands? It was not easy for humans to get some respite for 200 years. Now that someone has brought out such weapons again, what is a war in the Central Plains compared to the impending disaster of a nuclear winter?"

Ren Xiaosu sighed. Actually, both of them were right from their respective points of view.

The atmosphere in the dining room turned heavy. No one spoke anymore, and Ren Xiaosu lowered his head and ate his food. It was clear he did not want to debate this any further.

After completing the three tasks, he would be leaving the Wang Consortium anyway.

The dishes were so exquisite Ren Xiaosu could not bear to eat them. However, Ren Xiaosu felt the essence of food was not to appear attractive but to fill one's stomach.

People who had lived in the wilderness had a much more down to earth appreciation for food.

"Do you have any noodles?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "May I get a large bowl of noodles here?"

Wang Shengzhi looked at Ren Xiaosu and sighed in his head. This was probably Ren Xiaosu's way of expressing that their paths did not cross.

So was Ren Xiaosu really hinting at something?

No, he really just wanted to have some noodles.