

Chapter 961 - Queen Of Vines

Several hundred gray Experimentals were crawling within the forested wilderness behind the mountain that protected the defensive position. They had received orders from Black Robe to hold at this location and kill any humans who tried to escape from here.

Black Robe did not have them attack the defensive position directly because he had taken some of these barbaric Experimentals from the expeditionary army, such as Valentin, the former commander of the advance guard.

Among these Experimentals, many of them were soldiers who had survived the battle at the Great Wall but were captured by him. If these barbaric Experimentals were to appear on the battlefield, the expeditionary army would probably start hating him. Especially Valentin, he must absolutely not be seen by the expeditionary army.

These Experimentals, who were crawling on the ground and waiting for the hunt to start, suddenly turned their heads and looked back after detecting the scent of a human.

A light breeze blew past, and a pleasant smell drifted towards them. It was as though roses had suddenly bloomed during the night.

But the Experimentals did not care whether it was a fragrance or a stench. They only knew that since a human had come here, they would have to kill whoever it was.

But before they could locate the source of the fragrance, the Experimentals saw some strange and dangerous-looking vines spreading towards them in the forested wilderness.

The Experimentals' instinctive fear caused them to start retreating. They stared with extreme caution at the creeper vines that kept pressing forward at them.

Valentin let out a roar, and an Experimental carefully approached the creeper vines. It tried to grab its tentacles to see what it really was.

But the moment it touched the creeper vine, the dense growth of creeper vines on the ground sprang up at the same time and stabbed into the Experimental's body.

The body of the Experimentals that could not even be penetrated by bullets was completely pierced by the vines.

In an instant, the terrifying vines wrapped up the Experimental into a cocoon before dragging it into the wilderness.

All of a sudden, all of the Experimentals here felt they were facing a formidable enemy. They had never come across such a strange plant before.

The Experimentals still retained a low level of intelligence, so they knew how dangerous the creeper vines were.

When the maid in the wilderness saw that the Experimentals were no longer taking the initiative to provoke the creeper vines, she slowly walked out. "I hurried all the way here, and you dirty creatures are the first things I see. How unlucky..."

The Experimentals quietly sized up the woman who was standing across from them. They saw she wore ten shimmering rings on her fingers and a shiny pearl necklace around her neck, which made her look extremely opulent.

Moreover, she was wearing a purple qipao even though she was out in this wilderness. Why would anyone wear something like that during a battle? Unless she was extremely confident of beating them?

In fact, the maidservant was full of confidence.

At the beginning, she did not really test out how strong her power was after she absorbed the creeper vine at Stronghold 61 and only felt like she had an inexhaustible amount of strength. Later, she did not sit idle after parting ways with Ren Xiaosu at the Sacred Mountains. The maidservant headed all the way northwest and tested her limits on the bandits there.

However, the bandits were too weak. After taking on all the bandits along the way, she still could not figure out the limits of her power.

But in any case, she was extremely confident now.

Zhou Yingxue could still hear gunfire coming from the other side of the mountain. That meant the battle over there must be very intense. If she handled things here quickly, she would make it there in time.

Zhou Yingxue shot a glance at the Experimentals, but she did not hide the disdain in her eyes. It was as though she would taint her eyes by looking at these hideous creatures a moment longer. She thought it strange that there were no signs of Black Robe, which her master mentioned to her.

But whatever, she would just have to kill them first.

Thinking of this, the vines around the maidservant started sweeping towards the Experimentals. When the Experimentals tried to escape, they realized the creeper vines had already and completely surrounded them.

That's right, the maidservant had surrounded all of the Experimentals by herself. The few hundred Experimentals Black Robe had painstakingly raised were about to perish among the vines.

Valentin led the Experimentals in an attempt to tear their way out of the vine encirclement. But no matter how powerful they were, they could only struggle inconsequentially in the face of the creeper vines that could destroy a city.

The Experimentals kept tearing off the vines that had pierced their bodies, but more vines started wrapping around them. There was no end to it regardless of how hard they tore at the vines.

"Alright, stop struggling already. After I'm done with you all here, I have to rush off to save my master." As soon as the maidservant said that, the vines covering the entire wilderness suddenly became enraged and overwhelmed the few hundred Experimentals. In just one second, all of the Experimentals died.

Overshadowed by this level of power, the battle became totally one-sided. It was like a fight between an adult and a child, with the outcome in no doubt for a moment.

The maidservant took out a satellite phone from her luxurious handbag and made a call. "Master, I've finished off all the Experimentals behind the mountain, but I didn't see the Black Robe you mentioned."

Ren Xiaosu's voice came from the other end of the line, saying, "It probably ran away in advance again, but that's fine. It can't escape this time."

"Alright then, I'll head over to the main battlefield to help out now," the maidservant said.

"There's no need for that." Ren Xiaosu said, "You can't reveal your power to everyone yet, or people will easily link you to the destruction of Stronghold 61. That will be difficult to explain, and it'll be bad if you get attacked by public opinion."

"Why should we care about what they say? It's not like I'm afraid of them," Zhou Yingxue said nonchalantly.

"Enough. If you have strength to spare, you can secretly hunt down and kill the defeated barbarians in the mountains." After that, Ren Xiaosu ended the call.

The maidservant curled her lips and muttered, "He's always ordering me around like this. I'm already a first-class superhuman, yet he hung up on me in such a hurry! He didn't even ask about me. Heartless!"

With that, the maidservant walked off. The vines on the ground followed her and moved through the wilderness behind her, covering all the mountain paths in their way.

But what did her master say just now? Was the expeditionary army about to be defeated? Wasn't it rumored that the Northwest Army was having trouble fighting the expeditionary army? How did it end up with the barbarians suddenly getting defeated then?

Could someone else have come to rescue her master?

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was looking at the Wolf King on the mountaintop, and the Wolf King was looking back at him in silence.

Ren Xiaosu was very sure this was the same Wolf King he knew back then. He even gave some black medicine to it at that time, which it liked very much.

Sometimes, Ren Xiaosu wondered where the wolves had gone and why he had not heard from them again since then.

Logically speaking, even if the wolves had been living in the wilderness after they grew stronger and bigger, they would have been seen by some people. However, it was as though they had disappeared into thin air.

Ren Xiaosu finally realized the wolves had followed Yan Liuyuan to the grasslands! Yan Liuyuan was the new king of the steppe!

Suddenly, a horn clarified on Mt. Zuoyun. The war horn sounded sorrowful with a hint of haste and fluster.. The barbarians who were attacking the defensive position suddenly started pulling back.

Chapter 962 - Black Robe Has To Die

At Mt. Zuoyun, the expeditionary army's barbarians were initially charging forward fearlessly at the defensive position. But after the Wolf King appeared on the mountaintop, their orderly attacking formation descended into chaos.

The war horn sounded continuously through the valley, urging the troops at the front line to retreat quickly.

P5092 carefully observed the barbarians' movements. He was certain this was not a ruse; the barbarians were really retreating.

He also looked at the huge wolf standing atop the mountain before turning to ask Wang Yun, "Has anyone seen such mutated wolves before?"

Wang Yun carefully cycled through his memories. "Intel regarding the wolves have appeared several times in my memory. The first incident occurred near Stronghold 113, but that stronghold was destroyed by the earthquake in the Jing Mountains. The second occurrence was in the Li Consortium's territory. Reportedly, the military had been attacked by the wolves."

"Does it have anything to do with the future commander?" P5092 asked.

"Yes." Wang Yun said, "The future commander originally lived at Stronghold 113. Later on, he also went to the Li Consortium."

P5092 said with a sigh, "We thought that even the future commander couldn't create any more miracles in the face of tens of thousands of barbarians. But in the end, this miracle happened immediately."

However, they could not see what was happening outside the mountains, so they could not tell what was really going on either.

P5092 turned his head to Xun Yeyu. "Based on your perception, can you roughly describe to us the situation outside?"

"After foreign reinforcements arrived at Mt. Zuoyun, they didn't stop at all. When the thousands of powerful lifeforms first collided with the expeditionary army's formation, the barbarians' numbers rapidly decreased." Xun Yeyu said, "Based on those lifeforms that came from the north and the huge wolf that's appeared now, I think those thousands of fast-moving lifeforms might be a pack of 3,000 large wolves!"

As if confirming Xun Yeyu's description, the Wolf King stood atop the mountain and growled. The sharp howling that followed sounded like it could pierce everyone's hearts.

A mountain breeze blew, and the Wolf King's silvery fur fluttered majestically like an imperial court's flag flying in the wind.

"Those wolves attacked so quickly that the barbarians didn't have enough time to form an effective defensive formation. Their rear was shattered instantly." Xun Yeyu continued, "For now, it's only the wolves that have arrived. There's still regular troops to the rear approaching quickly. I estimate they'll arrive at the battlefield in another 10 minutes."

With that, Xun Yeyu even put a black flag on the sand table to simulate the movements of the wolves.

"What a powerful wolf pack." P5092 suddenly laughed. For some reason, he felt very excited.

It was very rare for him to act like this. That was because this surprise came too suddenly and shockingly.

To be honest, P5092 could not imagine what kind of person Ren Xiaosu knew. The other party could actually command such a powerful pack of wolves to come and reinforce Mt. Zuoyun.

However, he could imagine the thousands of strong, powerful wolves on the hunt outside Mt. Zuoyun at this moment as they drove the expeditionary army like antelopes into the mountains where they killed them quickly.

Then P5092 turned to Wang Yun and asked while pointing at the barbarians who were retreating, "If we trap all of these barbarians here on the battlefield of Mt. Zuoyun, do we have enough ammo to finish them?"

Wang Yun said, "If it's only these barbarians, we definitely have enough ammo as long as no other expeditionary army forces join the fray."

After that, P5092 said excitedly to Ji Zi'ang, "Topple all six of the mountains to cut off the expeditionary army's retreat route. Although our reinforcements are very powerful, our Northwest Army is pretty strong too. They're fighting the enemy at their rear, so we must not allow these barbarians to go back and reinforce their comrades. We'll divide their battlefield to reduce the pressure on our reinforcements!"

Ji Zi'ang smiled and said, "Got it!"

P5092 made it very clear that even though their reinforcements were really strong, the wolves would not have it easy either if these barbarians made it back to their rear.

Over the past few days, P5092 had been racking his brains to think of a way to turn defeat into victory. He did not even get any sleep for the past two days and nights because he did not want this group of people from the Northwest to die here.

But while he waited for an opportunity to score a victory, the expeditionary army kept up steady attacks and did not give them a chance at all.

Now that this opportunity had presented itself, it was time to launch a counterattack.

A moment later, P5092 said to Wang Yun, "Contact Luo Lan. Have them attack from the south and take out the remaining barbarians on the battlefield with us. Tell him that I'll leave an opening at the

northern side of the battlefield to give the barbarians a chance to escape, so he can make full use of their nanosoldiers' mobility to pursue them!"

At this moment, Luo Lan was standing next to a river south of Mt. Zuoyun. He was skipping stones across the surface in boredom. Zhou Qi, who was standing beside him, said, "We're just sitting around and waiting like this after rushing here from so far away?"

Luo Lan chuckled, "What's the big deal with waiting for a little bit? We're not the commanders on the battlefield, so we have to obey our orders since we're here. It doesn't mean that just because we're here to rescue them, we can be calling the shots as we like. There's protocols to follow in war. We don't even know what's going on in the mountains, so of course we have to follow their orders."

At this moment, the radio operator trotted over to convey P5092's instructions. Then Luo Lan started laughing. He turned around and shouted to his soldiers, "Brothers, it's time to go to work!"

With that, the cocking of guns came from among the nanosoldiers.

After the Li Consortium made the breakthrough in nanorobotics, they felt that a powerful soldier should be equipped with powerful weapons. As such, they created nanoswords to complement their nanosoldiers. These swords had nanomachines moving at high speeds at the edge of the blades to achieve a high polymer cutting effect.

But to Luo Lan and Qing Zhen, if there were guns, wouldn't it be better to just use them? Weren't guns more useful?

Therefore, the nanosoldiers Luo Lan brought here this time were all carrying firearms. The only difference was that these soldiers were all equipped with 40 mm grenade launchers that could be attached to their guns.

In Qing Zhen's own words, the current physical fitness of the nanosoldiers would only put them on par with the barbarians. Therefore, they would have to take the fight against the barbarians seriously, and only by using heavy weapons would it mean they were serious!

Actually, the 40 mm underbarrel grenade launchers were not really that great. But if all 2,000 troops were to carry such a weapon, that would truly be a little terrifying.

A lot of people had yet to realize the Qing Consortium was probably the strongest organization in terms of strength other than controlling a large territory.

Some years ago when Qing Zhen was not politically active, he had been ordering his troops to search everywhere for technology that had been lost to humans. He had also used all of his financial and material resources to develop what was recovered. As such, time had given him a satisfactory answer.

Of course, the Qing Consortium would still have some difficulties in equipping all 2,000 soldiers with grenade launchers even with their capabilities. They had to be urgently allocated from the military factories and even from the active troops as well. But since they were here to rescue their friend, they would have to show their sincerity in doing so.

As for the heavy load the troops had to carry, the nanosoldiers did not have to worry about it at all.

The 2,000 nanosoldiers began advancing into the mountains. Their plan was to eliminate all the surviving barbarians.

Ever since the fighting began, a coin that determined the fate of the war was flipped high into the air where it continued spinning, and until it landed, no one knew who would secure the final victory.

And now, this coin of fate had finally landed.

The mountains in Mt. Zuoyun started to collapse as large boulders came crumbling down. The expeditionary army's troops that were retreating could be heard wailing in pain. The barbarians who had been brimming with confidence all this time were finally starting to feel fear and despair.

When the six mountains collapsed at the same time, a large cloud of dust was swept into the air. As a result, the sky turned dark. A patch of dark clouds had shrouded everything.

A sound resembling the cracking of a glacier could be heard constantly, and the rumblings as the mountains collapsed to the ground could be described as the most magnificent sight in the world.

Most people in the world had only ever seen waterfalls gushing down, and very few people had probably ever witnessed a mountain crumbling down like that.

Some of the barbarians who tried to retreat were instantly crushed under the rockfall, while the remaining barbarians were forced to turn around and get back on the battlefield. However, they no longer had any will to fight.

Some barbarians suddenly realized there was still an opening at the northern side, so they fled towards it.

When P5092 saw this, he was finally able to put down the last of his worries. Now was the time they could truly start taking out the remaining barbarians on the battlefield. The barbarians would be fleeing with their heads in their hands, and they would not have the courage to fight back anymore.

"What should we do now? Hunt down those barbarian deserters?" Ji Zi'ang asked.

P5092 shook his head. "We can leave it to Luo Lan to pursue those deserters. Pass down the order. We'll take our weapons and form an envelopment with the reinforcements outside the mountains. We'll assist them in wiping out the barbarians of the expeditionary army."

But just as he finished speaking, P5092 and the others saw Ren Xiaosu running all the way to the entrance of the command post. Ren Xiaosu pulled Xun Yeyu aside and asked, "Can you sense any solitary lifeforms leaving the vicinity of Mt. Zuoyun at this moment?"

Xun Yeyu asked, "Solitary? You mean someone by themselves?"

"Yes, a lone person!" Ren Xiaosu said firmly.

"Yes, there was a lifeform that used to be with the Experimentals. After that, it left by taking a detour from there before Luo Lan and his men arrived at the south side. It's now taking a huge detour and

leaving quickly via the north." Xun Yeyu said, "And the life forces of the Experimentals that were behind us have totally disappeared."

Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. "That's who I'm looking for. Let's go. I'll take you with me and head north. As long as that monster hasn't died in this war, I won't feel at ease!"

Actually, Ren Xiaosu really wanted to go meet someone else. He had been thinking of him every day and night for over a year.

Although the two of them were not related by blood, they thought of each other as family.

If it were the past, Ren Xiaosu would probably have gone to look for Yan Liuyuan without any hesitation. As for whether they would win the war or not, and whether there would be more hidden threats for humanity in the future, it wouldn't be any of his business.

But the current Ren Xiaosu seemed to have changed. He might still be that selfish Ren Xiaosu, but now he understood what his choice would mean and how many lives it would affect.

At this moment, since they were already victorious on the main battlefield, Ren Xiaosu did not need to stay here anymore. He glanced in the direction where the Wolf King had appeared and said, "Wait for me. I'll return immediately after killing Black Robe.. Although I want to go look for you now, Black Robe has to die first."

Chapter 963 - Why Are You Still Talking About The Prosperous Northwest At A Time Like This?

On the main battlefield, the soldiers of the Northwest Army's 6th Combat Brigade were bounding over the blinds at the defensive position.

Earlier, they had been defending the position desperately, and the blinds at the defensive line were what kept them alive. If the barbarians broke through here, their comrades would die.

There were barbarian corpses piled up everywhere in the wilderness outside the defensive line.

With just 6,000 soldiers, the 6th Combat Brigade managed to hold off the expeditionary army's 70,000 barbarians for over ten days. If the details of this battle were to get out, the entire Alliance of Strongholds would probably be shocked.

If it weren't for them, these 70,000 troops would have joined the battlefield at Mt. Daniu without any delay posed a great threat to the entire Wang Consortium and possibly the South as well.

When the 6th Combat Brigade climbed out of their defensive line, some of the soldiers subconsciously looked back at the trench blinds behind them. This was the first time in the battle that they were looking from the other side. Some of the soldiers felt a tingle in their noses when they thought about how this was the place they had defended with their lives just a while ago. Now, it was finally their turn to fight back.

As the dust from the collapse of the mountains cleared, the sky started turning bright. Suddenly, the soldiers felt a great sense of pride.

The commander in front shouted, "Stop watching! Keep up with the group. The battle isn't over yet. Now, it's time for us to make them pay with their lives."

Yes, the battle was not over yet.

Thinking of this, the soldiers resolutely rushed out of the mountains. As they quickened their pace, they gradually heard the screams of the barbarians mixed with the howling of the wolves.

The Great Hoodwinker took the lead and charged ahead. When everyone climbed over the ruins of the collapsed mountains, the horizon in front of them started broadening.

They saw the wolves weaving in and out among the expeditionary army troops as they attacked. Each group consisting of 300 wolves constantly tormented the expeditionary army's formation like a saw cutting through the battlefield.

If he had not seen this with his own eyes, it would be really difficult for P5092 to imagine that the wolves could be so methodical in their killing.

When the wolves advanced, the most powerfully built gray wolf in the pack would charge in front of the group. Even if it got hacked by a barbarian's axe, it would not cower.

Once the wolves started shifting spots, some of those that had been conserving their strength in the pack would fall to the back of the group. If any barbarians tried to pursue them in the chaos, they would be greeted by their bloodied jaws.

These 3,000 huge wolves moved through the expeditionary army without any resistance. They were more dauntless than humans as they executed their mission to a tee.

If any of the wolves' brethren got killed, they would not hesitate. They simply changed their formation before continuing their mission.

P5092 looked up at the Wolf King that was standing atop the mountain next to him. That huge wolf had been standing there throughout as it commanded its "soldiers."

But at this moment, the Wolf King suddenly leaped down and headed straight through a group of barbarians as it rushed out of the mountains. None of the barbarians were able to stop its movement.

"Wait, where's it heading?" Zhang Xiaoman wondered, "Why's it leaving?"

Just as he was done speaking, everyone saw a group of men rushing over on horseback from beyond the battlefield. They were led by a person wearing a ferocious-looking faceplate.

The Wolf King quickly ran to the man in the ferocious faceplate and rubbed its head against his sleeve affectionately.

When P5092 saw this occur through his military binoculars, he was secretly shocked. He said to Wang Yun and the others around him, "Previously, the Pyro Company received intel that a new lord rose among the nomads. Now that I've seen him with my own eyes, I'm really amazed."

After that, he watched the young lord jump onto the Wolf King's back from his horse before moving slowly towards the battlefield.

Next to the young lord, tens of thousands of nomads rode past him on horseback and rushed towards the expeditionary army like a tidal wave crashing onto the beach. They were a huge tsunami.

A large shadow flitted across the ground from above and made everyone look up. They were all surprised to see a large hawk soaring in the sky at a low altitude.

When it flew over the heads of the expeditionary army, it grabbed two barbarians with its talons before soaring into the sky again. Then it dropped them from a great height.

The falling barbarians screamed loudly in midair as they fell to their deaths among the host.

The nomads let out tremendous cheers within their formation as though they had already won the battle.

Disregarding their combat strength, their mentality was actually pretty good.

To P5092 and the others, they needed a reason to participate in this battle, such as fighting for the survival of mankind in the Central Plains and so on.

But the nomads' reason for doing so was very simple. They were doing it for their master.

If a war correspondent were here at this time and asked the nomads why they came to reinforce Mt. Zuoyun, Hassan would probably scratch his head and answer that it was because their master had ordered them to come.

It was just that simple.

Wang Yun said, "I remember that hawk. It was hovering above our defensive position at one point. At that time, I thought it was just a wild hawk. I didn't expect it to belong to the nomads."

"Looks like they were already paying attention to the battle over here," Zhang Xiaoman said.

P5092 started handing down orders, "All fighting forces, take note. We'll just use the mountain ruins where we are as cover and shoot at the expeditionary army. Be careful not to hurt the wolves and the nomads. What we need to do now is help our reinforcements pin down the barbarians!"

As the Northwest Army was already at its limit, the reinforcements were the key to victory. P5092 had only brought everyone over to support the nomads' efforts, so they absolutely had to get their priorities right.

However, the young lord in his ferocious faceplate did not join the battle after arriving on the battlefield. Instead, he ordered the Wolf King to navigate through the tens of thousands of barbarians and head straight for the defensive position where P5092 and the others were.

Wang Yun muttered, "That's way too bold. What if he gets surrounded by the expeditionary army?"

Just as he finished speaking, there were indeed some smarter barbarians in the expeditionary army who could tell from a glance that Yan Liuyuan was the actual leader of the reinforcements. As such, they immediately organized their troops to surround him.

But to the expeditionary army's surprise, when they started attacking the young man riding on the Wolf King's back, the wolves and the nomads did not go to his rescue.

A moment later, a barbarian who had rushed towards Yan Liuyuan suddenly tripped over a rock at his feet. When he fell, he lost his balance and accidentally sliced another barbarian's heel with the large axe in his hand.

The barbarians fell mysteriously to the ground like dominoes, and some of them even accidentally died on the spot.

When P5092 and the others saw this, they found it extremely absurd. It was as though the expeditionary army elites whom they had previously been locked in battle with had suddenly contracted polio!

Were these the same barbarians who had fought them? That young lord on the Wolf King's back was like a harbinger of doom. Why did it look like disaster followed him wherever he went?!

It was no wonder he dared to cross the battlefield alone. So it turned out he was such a powerful person.

P5092 thought to himself that even though the nomads had come to reinforce Mt. Zuoyun this time, they had taken down Stronghold 176.

If such a powerful person remained in the grasslands, the Central Plains would still be in grave danger.

No one knew what the other party and Ren Xiaosu's relationship was. Did he come here to rescue them because Ren Xiaosu had helped him before?

P5092 pondered all these questions only because the nomads were also once a hidden threat to the Central Plains. As such, he was worried the nomads would turn against them at the last minute.

What if the nomads attacked them after driving away the expeditionary army?

Yan Liuyuan had already ridden in front of P5092 and the others. The 6th Combat Brigade had also ceased firing because of his arrival.

Both sides fell silent. P5092 and the others did not know how to greet him.

But after two minutes of silence, Yan Liuyuan suddenly asked hesitantly, "Where's my big brother? Does he not want to see me?"

P5092 and the others looked at one another. Big brother? Little brother? Could it be that the new lord of the steppe was the future commander's little brother?

If that were the case, wouldn't it mean the Northwest would gain another powerful ally for apparently no reason?!

The Great Hoodwinker muttered, "The wisest decision that I made in life was probably persuading the future commander to join the Prosperous Northwest. Once he was convinced, a whole lot of others just followed along...."

P5092's mouth twitched a little. Why are you still talking about the Prosperous Northwest at a time like this?

....

Chapter 964 - I Finally Found You

"Erm, you're..." Zhang Xiaoman looked at Yan Liuyuan's ferocious faceplate, not knowing how to address him. "Hero, is Ren Xiaosu the big brother you were referring to?"

Yan Liuyuan looked at Zhang Xiaoman. "Yes, my name is Yan Liuyuan."

Zhang Xiaoman said excitedly to P5092, "It's really Liuyuan. When the future commander was with me in the Razor Sharp Company, he mentioned several times he was going to look for his younger brother after taking out the Zong Consortium, and this search went on for over a year."

At this point, the Great Hoodwinker looked over at Yan Liuyuan. "Hello, I'm the Great Hoodwinker. I'm in charge of Fortress 178's fieldwork. Your brother previously requested I help look for you, but I couldn't find any news of you. I didn't expect you would actually go to the north. Do you know how much effort your brother has spent looking for you? He even made a trip to the Pyro Company's Sacred Mountains just to find you, but nothing came out of that."

Wang Yun was stunned. "So Ren Xiaosu went to the Sacred Mountains because he wanted to find him? It was way too dangerous at that time."

Yan Liuyuan listened to all of this quietly. So it turned out his brother had been looking for him all this while and even put himself in danger for him.

He asked again, "Where's my brother? My servant's hawk saw him at your defensive position."

"Oh, when he saw that the situation on the main battlefield had already been decided, he led his wife and a chubster with him to the northern side. He was talking about killing Black Robe first. You probably don't know who Black Robe is, right? It's an intelligent being that exists among the Experimentals," Zhang Xiaoman explained. "But he should be back soon. I feel that it won't take long for him to kill Black Robe."

But the moment he finished saying that, everyone saw Yan Liuyuan commanding the Wolf King to turn back, muttering, "Head north..."

The Wolf King started picking up speed as it ran.

The man and the wolf weaved through the battlefield, the barbarians posing no obstacle.

The Great Hoodwinker watched Yan Liuyuan's figure recede. "I can tell that the brothers have great affection for each other. I wonder if I can persuade him to have those nomads join the Prosperous Northwest. Y'know, our Northwest has very good pastures...."

Wang Yun suddenly said, "When Stronghold 176 was invaded the first time, someone saw him bring down the stronghold from far away. They didn't even know how he did it. These two brothers are really powerful. To be honest, we've really fought a very tough battle. Great Hoodwinker, if you had helped the future commander find him earlier, we wouldn't have had such a hard time fighting the barbarians. This young lord is probably capable of fighting an army of 20,000 by himself."

The era of the "Rise of Gods" had truly arrived. When this era first began, there were only two people powerful enough to take on the organizations on their own. But now, there were more and more of them.

However, Wang Yun suddenly had a thought. 'Why does it seem like all of these people have an inextricable link with Ren Xiaosu?'

And now, if the consortiums of the Alliance of Strongholds were to learn Ren Xiaosu's background, they would probably be glad he had no ambitions of vying for power, right?

When Yan Liuyuan got to the rear of the enemy, Xiaoyu was waiting outside the battlefield on her horse with Bulan Zir standing guard by her side. Xiaoyu asked, "Have you found your brother?"

"He went to the northern side." Yan Liuyuan grabbed Xiaoyu by the waist and carried her over from the horse. He placed her on the Wolf King's back and said, "Let's go and look for him."

...

In the wilderness, Black Robe hid its tracks as it fled northwards. While lying prone on the ground, it saw the wolves from afar and realized the expeditionary army's defeat was already decided.

Right now, it was not only the expeditionary army at Mt. Zuoyun that was starting to collapse. The barbarians over at Mt. Daniu would definitely pull a quick retreat as well after learning about the defeat at Mt. Zuoyun, right?

However, Black Robe was not dejected. Just as it had said to Valentin, it never expected the expeditionary army to be able to achieve the final victory.

It had urged the expeditionary army to come to the Central Plains because it coveted their northern kingdom. But at that time, the barbarians were simply too strong, especially that general Black Robe did not even dare to make a move against.

And now, only a few out of the 190,000-strong expeditionary army troops could return home after this campaign ended. This way, there would be more opportunities for Black Robe to strike later on. It did not even seem difficult anymore if Black Robe wanted to turn the entire northern kingdom into its own territory.

Moreover, Black Robe was thinking how great it would be if the Central Plains people could surround and kill the general here. In that way, it would no longer have any opponents up in the Far North.

But while thinking about that, Black Robe gradually stopped in its tracks. When it saw the young man looking at it in the wilderness up ahead with a smile, its suddenly got worried.

Just over a month ago, it was this young man who had caused its entire body to turn completely black. Whenever Black Robe thought of this, it felt a deep hatred for Ren Xiaosu.

Moreover, the other party had even displayed his killing resolve on the opposite peak yesterday.

Black Robe might seem powerful, but it always felt some apprehension and fear deep down inside. It had appeared extremely confident while in the presence of humans, but if that was really the case, it would not have fled in such a hurry.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Black Robe, who was in front of him. "What? Are you planning to escape to the North now? The expeditionary army's war is not over yet, and you're already thinking of fleeing?"

Black Robe said in a hoarse voice, "What's that got to do with me? It suits me just fine if they lose."

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Don't you find it tough living like this? You're always thinking of fighting and killing all the time. After causing all that trouble in the Southwest, you came to cause trouble in the Central Plains again. A thing like you should not be alive in this world."

Black Robe said in a low voice, "I also want to lead a quiet life, but can I really live as normal as you all? Can you humans accept me? You can't, right? Will you all allow anomalies like me to live among you when it's human nature to ostracize those that are different? Perhaps you all will place me captive in a zoo to exhibit to others or turn me into a specimen. Isn't that what humans like to do? I was also a human in the past, so I know exactly how humans treat anomalies. There's no possibility for us to coexist!"

"You must've gotten your logic wrong." Ren Xiaosu wondered, "You were clearly the one who hunted down humans the moment you appeared, so why would humans want to get along peacefully with you?"

"I only kill people because I want to survive. When the Qing Consortium went into the Jing Mountains and saw us, didn't they also try to capture all of us?" Black Robe said fiercely, "There's no point in me telling you all this. What are you doing here? Did you come to debate me? What, you still wish for us to choose a side and try to convince each other? Save it!"

In that instant, Black Robe suddenly took a step back as a sniper bullet flew over from the wilderness in the distance. Surprisingly, Black Robe wised up this time and dodged it in advance!

Black Robe started laughing hysterically. "I know you set an ambush for me, but you shouldn't be using the same trick..."

While laughing, Black Robe looked down the gaping hole in its chest.

Black Robe was sure it had dodged the bullet, so why did it still get shot?

At this moment, Yang Xiaojin's voice crackled through the earpiece, "I figured out what's unique about the black bullet. Once a target's been shot by it, the second shot will definitely kill it if the target did not die the first time around regardless of where it hits. I already had it in my scope, so it really did dodge the trajectory of my shot in advance."

As the black bullet's second shot could change its trajectory, this shot was a surefire kill!

Ren Xiaosu was stunned when he heard this. This was the first time he learned the black bullet had such an effect.

Black Robe looked at its chest silently. In its world, it was the ruler, and the world revolved around it. Therefore, Black Robe never thought it would die as easily as this.

However, it could feel its life force draining away after the black bullet pierced its chest.

Black Robe looked at Ren Xiaosu and said dumbfoundedly, "I clearly dodged that. No, that's not a normal sniper bullet. What is it..."

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "My dear opponent, that's the argument our side has presented."

Black Robe could not accept this as it slowly fell to the ground. It wanted to firmly commit this young man's face to its memory. However, it suddenly realized Ren Xiaosu was not looking at it but someone behind it.

As Black Robe fell to the ground, Ren Xiaosu stared blankly at the huge wolf rushing towards him from the south. With no one around in the wilderness, the sight of that huge wolf and the people riding on its back came as striking yet such a surprise.

Ren Xiaosu had been waiting for this day for so long that he thought it would never arrive. They were standing at two ends of a long river of time, separated by a stretch of galaxy and a bottomless black hole.

He could not see the end of it no matter how far he looked.

In his life's journey, he once walked for an extended period alone and saw the lights in his life go out one by one. Wudi was gone, and Xiaoyu and Liuyuan had gone missing as well.

In that period, he felt a little lost and alone.

Actually, at certain points, he could somewhat understand the loneliness Zero had mentioned.

This was a feeling of not seeing anyone waiting for him in that dimly lit boulevard when he turned around, followed by all the lights going out.

Ren Xiaosu stood quietly in place and watched as the other party approached him quickly. He suddenly felt a lump in his throat.

I finally found you.

Chapter 965 - Reunion

"Bro, I want to go out to hunt too."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the young man walking towards him after slowly getting off the Wolf King's back. It felt like the words Yan Liuyuan had said to him were still resonating in his ears.

In the blink of an eye, Liuyuan had grown taller. In the past, Little Liuyuan only reached up to his chest. But now, he was nearly as tall as him.

Nothing had seemingly changed between the two of them. Ren Xiaosu could still feel the eagerness in Yan Liuyuan's eyes.

However, he had on a fierce-looking faceplate and was no longer that little sidekick who followed him around. He was now the new king of the steppe.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "You've grown taller."

Yan Liuyuan took off his faceplate and revealed his handsome face. "Bro, you've gotten a little tanner."

With that, Yan Liuyuan quickened his pace and hugged Ren Xiaosu.

Yang Xiaojin came out of her sniping spot in the distance and put away her black sniper rifle before walking towards them. However, she did not interrupt the two brothers' reunion.

She understood Ren Xiaosu quite well, so she clearly knew how much he had been longing for this day to come.

When Xiaoyu saw Yang Xiaojin, she wiped her tears with her sleeve and went up to her. "Xiaojin, you haven't changed at all. You're still as beautiful as ever."

At this moment, Yang Xiaojin switched from her usual intimidating self and started blushing, as though she was embarrassed to meet the "parents." "Big Sister Xiaoyu, you also haven't changed at all."

Xiaoyu pulled Yang Xiaojin aside. While taking a stroll, she took a gold bracelet out of her pocket and put it on for Yang Xiaojin. "I knew that we would definitely find y'all when we came to the South this time, so I had Hassan specially make this gold bracelet. Consider it a gift for our long-awaited reunion."

Now that Yan Liuyuan was already the lord of the steppe, they were definitely not lacking any gold. So Xiaoyu was very generous with the gift. The heavy gold bracelet probably weighed more than 200 grams...

If they were in the Central Plains, only the rich families could afford the betrothal jewelry necessary to plan a marriage.

Xiaoyu felt that while Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan used to be poor, there were probably not a lot of people in the entire Alliance of Strongholds who could compare to their status as they progressed further in life.

Therefore, they would have to make it a grand affair when Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan married and had children in the future.

They would also become an influential family in the future, and maybe people might even think they were a rich family when someone mentioned them.

In front of the sheepish Ren Xiaosu, Yang Xiaojin would often tease him verbally. But when facing Xiaoyu, she acted much more reserved, like she was afraid of leaving a bad impression on her.

The two ladies walked away, leaving Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan behind to catch up.

No one noticed that Xun Yeyu was still lying in the wilderness a distance away and muttering, "What's the situation now? Can I come out yet?"

When Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin teamed up to kill Black Robe, they had made him hide here, and he was told not to come out without Ren Xiaosu giving him the word.

But in the blink of an eye, everyone had forgotten about him.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu checked on Black Robe's body and gave it a few more stabs after confirming it was dead.

Honestly, this guy was such a relentless spirit. Even the nuclear bomb did not kill it, so Ren Xiaosu was really afraid it would suddenly get up and run away again.

Only when this devious creature was completely dead could they feel at ease.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Liuyuan. "How did y'all end up on the steppe?"

The two of them found a large rock and sat down side by side on it. Yan Liuyuan explained, "Back then, I saw you get pierced in the abdomen by the spear. When the flood was about to hit, the wolf pack suddenly appeared, and the Wolf King picked Big Sister Xiaoyu and me up in its jowls before heading to the North. Later on, I wanted to avenge you, but I felt that I should establish my own forces first. I thought of what you told me previously, that the people living in the grasslands were still ignorant, and it happened that my power was suited for creating 'gods' there."

"Was it tough to unify the grasslands?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Yan Liuyuan shook his head and said with a smile, "Not at all. Initially, we were supposed to be in for a tough battle, but we got quite lucky. The Pyro Company actually came and captured the most powerful khan in the grasslands...."

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. "I only went to the Sacred Mountains after hearing about this kidnapping. I didn't expect that it was actually just a big misunderstanding!"

Yan Liuyuan was taken aback. "What happened?"

"The Pyro Company and Anjing House happened to have their goals aligned and claimed that the Pyro Company had caught the No. 001 Experimental." Ren Xiaosu explained, "At that time, I was under the impression that you were the No. 001 Experimental, so I went to the Sacred Mountains because I wanted to save you. But that was just an assumption anyway. Since we both can't remember anything about the past, I hope you don't take this matter to heart."

But Yan Liuyuan suddenly fell silent. He asked in a soft voice, "Bro, have you recalled anything?"

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "No, why are you suddenly asking about this?"

"It's nothing." Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "It always feels strange to have part of my memory blank. By the way, how'd you end up becoming Fortress 178's future commander?"

"Oh, after I was swept away by the flood, I was saved by Wang Shengzhi, who then brought me to Fortress 178." Ren Xiaosu said, "Later on, Mr. Zhang Jinglin told me that he could help me take revenge since they happened to be sending troops to attack the Zong Consortium. Thus, I joined Fortress 178's Razor Sharp Company and killed my way to the North. It was also in that war that Fortress 178 wiped out the Zong Consortium. After that, I left the Northwest and went to the Central Plains to search for your whereabouts."

"Have you found Uncle Fugui and the others yet?" Yan Liuyuan asked.

"Yes." Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "They're doing business in the Northwest now and it's thriving. We've also found Ms. Jiang, Wang Yuchi, and the others."

"That's good then." Yan Liuyuan nodded. "You and sister-in-law are now—"

"Hahahahaha," Ren Xiaosu interrupted. "You're still a kid, so don't be asking such questions."

The two of them fell silent. Ren Xiaosu immediately felt that he might have been a little tactless. Yan Liuyuan was no longer a child but the new king of the steppe.

Although he was still his younger brother, Liuyuan had grown up.

After a long while, Yan Liuyuan finally said, "Actually, I found out about your news a few months ago. I saw those words in the Hope Media newspaper when we attacked Stronghold 176, but I didn't go and look for you."

"Why?" Ren Xiaosu was surprised to hear that.

Yan Liuyuan said, "While unifying the grasslands, I killed a lot of people, and some of them were even people who I shouldn't have killed. But in order to establish my authority, I killed all of them. Many civilians in Stronghold 176 also died because of me when I didn't restrain my subordinates. That nearly led to a tragedy of the city being massacred. And after seeing the 'don't let the sorrows of our era become your sorrow as well' in the newspaper, I felt that I might be unworthy to meet you again."

Ren Xiaosu could not hold back his laughter.. "Do you really think you went overboard with all that? If you knew what I did, you'd probably try to persuade me to be kinder...."

Chapter 966 - Different Paths But Never Far

The battle for Mt. Zuoyun was about to end.

Actually, the expeditionary army's defeat was foreseeable from the moment the wolves arrived. All that was left now was cleaning up the battlefield.

The Qing Consortium's nanosoldiers led by Luo Lan had fought their way from the South to the North. How could the already defeated barbarians possibly be a match for these elite troops? Moreover, they were even equipped with 2,000 40 mm underbarrel grenade launchers.

If the Qing Consortium were fighting on the main battlefield, they would definitely not deploy all of their underbarrel grenade launchers in one army. But now it was like these troops were given a cheat code and routed the expeditionary army until they did not even have the courage to fight back.

Meanwhile, on the 6th Combat Brigade and the wolves' side, both parties were constantly applying pressure on the expeditionary army's area of movement until there were no barbarians left alive on the battlefield.

Hassan and the nomads rode on their sturdy horses and patrolled the battlefield. When they saw the barbarians' huge axes, their eyes lit up. "These are great!"

With that, they immediately gathered all of the axes and took them as the spoils of war for the nomads.

Although the Qing Consortium had provided firearms to them, there were still too few to equip all the nomads. As the nomads did not have the capability to manufacture firearms, they were naturally very happy to find these axes.

When P5092 and the others saw the Battle for Mt. Zuoyun had ended, they emerged from behind a makeshift blind and headed towards the nomads.

When Hassan saw them, he welcomed them warmly with the other nomads.

Hassan knew full well that these troops were led by his master's brother, so they were on the same side.

But when the two sides got closer, the nomads were stunned. They learned from Hassan that the barbarians from the Far North had surrounded this place for more than ten days, so they thought this should have been an evenly fought battle between the Central Plains and the barbarians.

As such, they felt the Central Plains troops here should also be elites.

But when they saw the soldiers of the 6th Combat Brigade, they were all covered in dust and dirt. Some of them even had to use their guns to steady themselves.

There were fewer people in the 6th Combat Brigade than expected, and their clothes were all tattered and dirty, making them look pathetic and battered.

Nearby, Bulan Zir asked, "Is this all of you?"

P5092 smiled. "What, you expected more?"

Bulan Zir looked at the thousands of soldiers of the 6th Combat Brigade. They had encountered the expeditionary army at the salt pool and witnessed the combat strength of the barbarians during their reconnaissance. Therefore, it was very difficult for him to imagine it was just these few people in front of him who had held the expeditionary army's 70,000 troops here for a dozen days.

Bulan Zir walked forward and patted P5092 on the chest. "You're all men worthy of respect. If there's a chance, come visit the steppe, and we'll definitely play host to y'all with the best wine."

P5092 did not mind. He said with a smile, "Thank you for coming to our aid. If it weren't for you all, we couldn't have held out for much longer. But now is not the time to talk about that. We still have to rush north."

"As it happens, my master's also headed north, so let's ride together." Bulan Zir turned around and commanded the nomads behind him, "Bring the horses!"

For this long-range raid, every one of the nomads had to bring two horses along in case one was unable to bear the long journey.

Now that they were willing to let the soldiers of the 6th Combat Brigade ride their horses, it could be considered as a way of showing their admiration.

...

At this moment, Yan Liuyuan was staring blankly at Ren Xiaosu north of the battlefield of Mt. Zuoyun. He did not expect that the matter he had been worried about for so long was simply brushed aside by Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu said, "During the war against the Zong Consortium, I killed at least several thousand people. Later, I went to Stronghold 146 and nearly wiped out an entire brigade there. When Stronghold 146 was destroyed, there were definitely civilians who got injured as well.

"And the East Lake cave-in at the Zhou Consortium's Stronghold 73 also caused quite a stir even though the stronghold was not destroyed.

"After that, I also killed several hundred people at the Kong Consortium's strongholds and another thousand-odd people at Luoyang City..." Ren Xiaosu recalled. "Now that I think about it, I feel like I'm jinxed. It's as though whichever stronghold I go to, they all end up getting destroyed..."

Yan Liuyuan did not say anything for a while. He realized Ren Xiaosu had killed far more people than him!

Ren Xiaosu then said, "I only told you that because I didn't want you to go astray. But do you remember what I said? As a person, you have to have a clear conscience. If you feel guilty, you just have to convince yourself not to. Actually, we're not suited to be heroes, so we don't have to tie such heavy chains on ourselves. It's more important to protect the people around us and keep them alive."

Yan Liuyuan thought for a moment and nodded. "Mhm."

"By the way, tell me about your time on the steppe." Ren Xiaosu asked, "Was life tough over there?"

"It's a very beautiful place." Yan Liuyuan said, "When I went there, a blizzard turned the entire steppe into a vast expanse of white and looked extraordinarily magnificent. After winter went and spring came, the snow melted and became a stream. The rivers in the grasslands are clear and winding like a sky-blue scarf. Cows and goats are scattered across the plains grazing while the herdsmen ride on their horses with their whips. When the breeze blows, the grass resembles waves on the sea."

"On rainy days, everyone will gather in their tents and sit by their fire pits. Listening to the sound of the falling rain outside, the warmth of the fire pit slowly dries our clothes to a comfortable feel," Yan Liuyuan continued. "But there aren't any vegetables to eat there. I even made Hassan make a special trip to the Northwest to look for a bandit named Su Lei to purchase some."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. Why did the name "Su Lei" sound so familiar? He seemed to have encountered that bandit before.

However, Ren Xiaosu was more concerned about Yan Liuyuan's expression and tone. He understood that Yan Liuyuan liked it very much in the grasslands.

Before this, Yan Liuyuan had been to many places before. However, Ren Xiaosu had never seen him like a place so much before.

Yan Liuyuan said softly, "In the past, my favorite place was the town outside of Stronghold 113. Although we led a tough life, I always feel I belong whenever I think of that place. But, Bro, we can't go back there anymore, right?"

With Stronghold 113 gone, the town there had also ceased to exist. There was an implied meaning to Yan Liuyuan's words.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Liuyuan and said, "Come with me to the Northwest. We also have pastures there."

Actually, Ren Xiaosu already knew the answer, but he still could not help asking.

But at this moment, the sound of galloping horses came from the south. The crowd of people who appeared on the horizon were tiny specks as they quickly approached.

Yan Liuyuan stood up. When those people rushing over saw their master and the Wolf King, they spurred their horses faster and let out thunderous cheers.

When the nomads and the 6th Combat Brigade arrived before the two of them, there was a clear divide between the two groups. Everyone looked at their respective leader. Although they got along, there was always an invisible line separating them, even if that line was only a meter wide.

Yan Liuyuan looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Bro, I didn't dare to come and see you before because I was worried that you would be really disappointed in me. I came here this time because you used to be the one to protect me, and I was looking forward to the day when I could protect you instead. I've done it this time, and not only that, but I'll do it again in the future. However, I'm now a member of the steppe."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Liuyuan quietly. Yes, Little Liuyuan had finally grown up.

Before this, Yan Liuyuan had become the new king of the steppe, and with this independent identity and strength, he was no longer that little boy who always followed Ren Xiaosu around. Instead, he had become a real man. He was the king of the steppe.

But at that time, his personality was still not fully developed. That was because he was afraid to see Ren Xiaosu due to the shadow in his heart. To escape from that shadow, he even thought of cutting off his past feelings.

But now he faced all of this squarely and made his decision without any fear or avoidance. At this moment, he was truly complete.

Ren Xiaosu knew full well that the king of the steppe was an eagle in the sky, so how could that eagle hide under the wings of others to survive?

The nomads were a complete tribe on their own. Such a tribe would definitely have all kinds of conflicts with Fortress 178 if they were to go to the Northwest, and neither would Yan Liuyuan be willing to let his people live under someone else's care.

Therefore, Ren Xiaosu understood Yan Liuyuan's choice.

At this moment, the nomads and the Northwest Army's 6th Combat Brigade were standing side by side in the vast wilderness. The crowd of people extended into the distance and spread towards the horizon.

In the end, the two of them had their own lives and paths to take. Life did not have to be tied together to be perfect. Watching one's family and friends leaving for elsewhere was also an experience most adults had to go through.

The two youths had grown up together and gained complete and independent personalities after experiencing hardship together. They no longer avoided the unbearable past and calmly walked their own path.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Then will you come to the Northwest to visit in the future?"

"Of course I will." Yan Liuyuan said with a smile, "Bro, from now on, you'll be guarding the Northwest. In that case, I will guard the North for humanity. Give me three years and I'll guarantee that the barbarians in the Far North will never cross into the steppe again. Meanwhile, our grasslands and the Northwest will always be best of friends."

Although their paths were different, they would never stray far from each other.

Chapter 967 - Farewell And The Black Medicine

The nomads bade farewell to the Northwestern men from the 6th Combat Brigade. They hugged each other and invited their new friends to visit their homes in the future. All of them were extremely enthusiastic with one another.

Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan both knew that such a day would definitely come. At the very least, as long as the two of them were still alive, the Northwest and the grasslands would not wage war with each other.

Yan Liuyuan did not intend to participate in the subsequent battles. Now that the overall situation was decided, the expeditionary army's defeat was no longer in doubt. As the new king of the steppe, there was no need for him to risk the lives of his subjects any further. What they should do now was to return to the grasslands to recuperate.

He told Ren Xiaosu to leave it to him to guard the North in the future. In a sense, from today onwards, the nomads would replace Stronghold 176 as the Central Plains' first line of defense in the North.

If the expeditionary army tried to head south again, they would have to pass through the grasslands first.

Before leaving, Xiaoyu pulled Yang Xiaojin aside with reddened eyes and said, "Xiaosu, that kid, has been through a lot. Now that he's finally come through that, I plead that you treat him well. Love is between two people, and as an outsider, I have no right to say anything. I only hope for both of you to live well. When you two bear a child, I can go to the Northwest to help you take care of it...."

All of a sudden, Yang Xiaojin's face turned red. She was not one to get shy so easily in front of Ren Xiaosu, but for some reason, she always felt like she could not open up fully to Xiaoyu.

As for having children, it was still too early to talk about that.

Yang Xiaojin asked, "Big Sister Xiaoyu, are you also going back to the steppe with Liuyuan? I know you must not be used to living there. After all, the customs in the South are very different."

Xiaoyu turned around and took a look at Yan Liuyuan. However, she said to Yang Xiaojin with a gentle smile, "Y'all have Wang Fugui, Teacher Jiang Wu, Mr. Zhang, and so many friends with you in the Northwest, but Liuyuan only has me on the steppe. So I have to accompany him. Don't worry, I heard from Liuyuan that it's not difficult to get to the Northwest. If we ride horses, we can get there in ten days. It'll also be very convenient for me to go and visit y'all."

Xiaoyu continued, "Moreover, now that Xiaosu has become the future commander of the Northwest, it's only a matter of time before the Northern Plains and the Northwest link their trade routes with each other. Then I can travel with the caravans to see y'all."

"Mhm, Big Sister Xiaoyu, you must come," Yang Xiaojin said in seriousness.

"Alright, I'll go and join up with them now," Xiaoyu said reluctantly. "Xiaosu has never liked other girls before, that I can guarantee you. That's why, sometimes, he might not know what girls like or want to hear. If he makes a mistake, you can tell me when you see me again and I'll lecture him for you."

"OK." Yang Xiaojin smiled.

...

After Yan Liuyuan confirmed they were returning to the grasslands, he started discussing some serious matters with Ren Xiaosu. Ren Xiaosu then called Zhang Xiaoman, the Great Hoodwinker, P5092, Wang Yun, and the others over.

Then Yan Liuyuan said, "There's many things we require in the grasslands, such as weapons, vegetables, tea leaves, and cloth. When I get back, I'll send Hassan to form a caravan as soon as possible and bring goods from the steppe to trade with y'all. I wonder if that's possible?"

The Great Hoodwinker was still needed to answer these questions. He thought for a moment and said, "That's not a problem. We'll also form a caravan and head to the steppe to discuss this."

"Besides that, I also hope I can send some children to Fortress 178 to attend school as there's a severe lack of knowledge among the nomads," Yan Liuyuan said.

"No problem," the Great Hoodwinker agreed immediately.

Yan Liuyuan looked at Ren Xiaosu again. "Bro, I'd like to send some of our nomads to attend the Northwest's military institute. Is that OK?"

Ren Xiaosu immediately put a smile on his face. Yan Liuyuan was still as smart and quick-witted as ever. Sending people to attend a military institute was still considered a sensitive matter, so Yan Liuyuan did not speak directly to the Great Hoodwinker about this. Instead, he requested it to Ren Xiaosu as his younger brother.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the Great Hoodwinker and said with a smile, "Can I decide on this?"

The Great Hoodwinker hurriedly said, "Since you're the future commander, of course you can."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Yan Liuyuan and said, "Alright, I'll promise you that."

Finally, Yan Liuyuan led the nomads back to the North. But before they left, the Wolf King suddenly went up to Ren Xiaosu and paced around him, refusing to leave.

Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. Although he had not seen the Wolf King in a long time, they were still old friends. But what was the meaning of this?

Everyone looked at the Wolf King while it looked at Ren Xiaosu.

After a long time, Ren Xiaosu suddenly took out a vial of black medicine. "Is this what you're asking for?"

The Wolf King immediately nodded!

Ren Xiaosu was startled. 'Why would an old wolf like you need something like that?!' However, he still gave out a dozen vials of black medicine to the Wolf King before it went away satisfied.

P5092 looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, "Future Commander, where are we going next?"

"Let's finish what we've started." Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "After we finish firing all the ammo we have, we'll head back to the Prosperous Northwest."

P5092 hesitated for a moment before saying, "Although I also want to continue assisting the Wang Consortium in pursuing the expeditionary army, it's not suitable for us to join the battle again, because our mobility isn't as great as the expeditionary army's, so it's very easy for us to get into trouble."

"Who says that our mobility isn't as good as theirs?" As Ren Xiaosu said that, P5092 and the others heard the sound of the steam locomotive driving out of the darkness.

P5092 was stunned. "Future Commander, are you thinking of having all our soldiers get onto the train?"

Ren Xiaosu had also mentioned this idea before they arrived at Mt. Zuoyun. But they needed to delay the expeditionary army at that time, so P5092 rejected the suggestion.

"Yes." Ren Xiaosu explained, "Although there's only about a 1,000 seats in the sixteen carriages, it definitely won't be a problem for all of the 6th Combat Brigade to get onto the train if everyone stands. We won't fight the expeditionary army head on either. We'll just use the steam locomotive to chase after them and leave after we're done expending all of our ammo!"

With that, Ren Xiaosu had everyone board the train. Then he had them mount their guns on the windows of the carriages, making it look extremely terrifying.

In that instant, P5092 suddenly felt the infantry brigade had become somewhat like an armored brigade.

On the train, the soldiers of the 6th Combat Brigade started getting excited. They had not expected their future commander to have such tactics.

Just as the train started moving, Ren Xiaosu saw yet another group of soldiers appearing in the distance. These troops were led by Luo Lan and Zhou Qi.

Ren Xiaosu stopped the train in front of them. Luo Lan shouted, "Are you all heading back onto the battlefield?"

Ren Xiaosu answered, "Yes, thank you for your help this time. I'll remember the Qing Consortium's friendship. What are your plans?"

Luo Lan chuckled and said, "I won't go back with you and get involved in this mess anymore. Who knows if the Wang Consortium might really want to capture me now? I'll get the nanosoldiers to return straight to the Southwest while I make a trip to the South. Since the Wang Consortium still has their hands full, I should hurry to the South."

"You're going to the South?" Ren Xiaosu was curious.

"That's right, I'm making a trip to Luoyang City before heading to the Zhou Consortium." Luo Lan said, "Erm... there's something more important though. Do you still have the black medicine? Some of my soldiers are injured.... You know what I mean!"

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether to laugh or cry. He looked at those nanosoldiers and thought, 'How could any of them be injured? If you want the black medicine, just ask directly!'

First, it was the Wolf King, then Luo Lan. Why do all of you have to come and get the black medicine from me before leaving?!

Chapter 968 - Impending Danger

Northwest of Mt. Zuoyun, the nanosoldiers did not travel with Luo Lan to the South. Instead, they headed back to the Qing Consortium via the same route they had taken here.

There was already a convoy 300 kilometers away waiting to pick them up for the return trip.

For the nanosoldiers, they were here to rescue Ren Xiaosu with Boss Luo on one hand and also go through combat training on the other. After they returned, the data related to their battle this time would be fully documented and analyzed by a dedicated team. They would assess the performance of all the nanosoldiers and develop more suitable combat strategies and training methods for them.

The nanosoldiers quickly made their way to the rendezvous point, as everyone was eager to return home.

As they had won the battle, everyone was very relaxed. However, the officer at the front suddenly stopped in his tracks and held up his arm. All of the well-trained nanosoldiers behind him immediately crouched down and got ready to provide covering fire.

"Who are you?" The Qing Consortium's officer asked coldly. "Identify yourself, or we'll shoot!"

The other party looked at them with great interest and said, "The nanomachines this time should be enough to last for the short term. Although they're still a little bad, the factory will be set up soon enough. Then there'll be an endless stream of nanomachines being manufactured."

When the officer heard the other party muttering to himself, he got an ominous feeling. The person who spoke said with a smile, "Let me introduce myself. My name is Zero, and I'm here to take command of you all. I guess I'll put you people in charge of the construction of the factory."

Before Zero was done speaking, the 2,000 nanosoldiers' faces turned blank. Three seconds later, their expressions returned to normal again.

However, they did not ask who Zero was and headed straight out into the wilderness. No one knew where they were going.

At the same time, a convoy of vehicles southwest of the Qing Consortium was escorting a newly manufactured batch of nanomachines to Stronghold 111.

The convoy traveled on the road between the mountains with two armored vehicles leading the way, and eight motorcycles and an armored vehicle behind them.

The entire convoy's defenses were extremely tight, and the nanosoldiers in the convoy were constantly on guard against the sudden appearance of anyone.

But the moment they entered a tunnel, all of the nanosoldiers fell into a daze before returning to normal.

They stopped the convoy in the tunnel, and everyone got out of their vehicles to open up the cargo boxes they were transporting. Then they offloaded the boxes containing the nanomachines one by one.

After that, this group of nanosoldiers abandoned their vehicles and quickly carried the nanomachines into the wilderness.

30 minutes later, a voice from the command center rang out over the vehicle's radio. "Report location."

"Alpha Three, report your current location!"

However, no one answered him as the vehicles were empty.

Not even Ren Xiaosu could directly control the nanomachines in the bodies of others. If he wanted to reset the nanomachines, he would have to wait until the targets were in a coma first.

But even though what Zero was doing at this moment might look similar to what Ren Xiaosu did before, the principle behind it was completely different.

The aftermath of the destruction to the Qing Consortium's secret base by Yang Anjing and Wang Wenyan was much worse than they had imagined.

It was just like the time in Luoyang City when Wang Wenyan only needed to bring a palm-sized device to connect to the Qinghe Group's network for Zero to successfully seize the seven satellites.

And this time, the military system of the secret base was a doorway, and no one knew how much Zero had gained after walking through it.

Zero had gained control of the Qing Consortium's nanomachines through the backdoor program the Qing Consortium had built into the nanomachines. This was the first time the artificial intelligence's godlike ability in the field of computer science was on full display.

When the Qing Consortium's troops realized they could no longer contact the convoy, they immediately informed Qing Zhen of the matter. Qing Zhen's first order was to disconnect all of the military's network coverage.

The Qing Consortium then contacted the nanotroops Luo Lan had taken with him. However, they also lost contact with this 2,000-strong force. It was as though they had evaporated into thin air.

Boss Luo had just called to say the battle was over, so how did the 2,000-strong force suddenly become uncontactable?

This time, many of the Qing Consortium's high-ranking commanders could sense that danger was slowly approaching. They quickly asked Qing Zhen what their next step should be, but the Qing Consortium's head did not say anything. It was as though he was still waiting.

...

On the top floor of Hope Media's headquarters in Luoyang City.

Jiang Xu carefully checked the draft in his hands. He read it word by word and line by line as he was afraid inappropriate words would appear in the article.

Chief editors of many newspaper firms were no longer involved in such trivial matters. They would let their editors handle the job of going through the drafts and not carry out the final review personally. They only controlled the direction of their newspaper firms' reporting and the public's opinion as a result.

However, Jiang Xu was exceptionally attentive when it came to publishing the news.

After he finished reading the draft, he picked up a phone on the table and said, "Have Deputy Editor Zhang come in."

In the past, he would have Ji Yi publish the drafts. However, Ji Yi was still retreating with the Pyro Company's troops at this moment, so another deputy chief editor by the name of Zhang Chentong helped with Ji Yi's job.

Jiang Xu took his overcoat from the coat rack. When Deputy Chief Editor Zhang Chentong came in, Jiang Xu instructed, "Arrange for this to be published on the second page tomorrow."

Zhang Chentong picked up the draft from the table. It was an article about the Northwest Army garrisoned at Mt. Zuoyun and their great victory. He looked up and asked, "We haven't been able to contact Mt. Zuoyun at all. Where did you get this news from?"

Jiang Xu seemed to be in a good mood. "This is the Wang Consortium's firsthand account of the battle. I didn't expect them to suddenly send this to me either. The expeditionary army is about to be defeated, and we've achieved a preliminary victory in the war. The Wang Consortium is going to pursue full victory now. Currently, half of the expeditionary army's forces are still stubbornly resisting at Mt. Daniu while the other half has started retreating north."

This was undoubtedly good news. The defeat of the Pyro Company cast the shadow of war on everyone, and they were afraid news of the Wang Consortium's defeat at the front line would reach them again.

"Where are you going?" Zhang Chentong asked with a smile.

"I have classes at Qinghe University. By the way, tell everyone they don't need to work overtime tonight. We've been busy for a long time, so it's time to get some rest." Jiang Xu said with a smile, "But tell them not to drink either. Before the war is over, we still have many things to report about. Once victory is truly assured, we can arrange for everyone's compensatory leave then."

"OK." Zhang Chentong smiled and nodded. However, he thought of something. "By the way, Chief Editor, the Wang Consortium's people still haven't left. They're staying at a hotel in Luoyang City and drop by here punctually every day.. We can't keep turning down meeting them like this."

Chapter 969 - No Regrets

In everyone's eyes, Hope Media stood opposed to the Wang Consortium and deliberately targeted them.

Although they adhered to the principle of reporting the truth, Hope Media had indeed reported too much negative news about the Wang Consortium during this period.

Moreover, those articles had caused a huge reaction in society. Rumor had it that even within the Wang Consortium, there were also some opposition voices. Many people sat quietly in front of the Wang Consortium's administrative center to protest the Wang Consortium's disunity with the Alliance of Strongholds in the war.

The Wang Consortium's diplomatic team had remained in Luoyang City in hopes of meeting with Jiang Xu. Many of the reporters from the other media outlets also came here hoping to capture the scene when Jiang Xu and the Wang Consortium interacted.

Hope Media had always been the leader in the media industry. Many of the media outlets wanted to get a handle on Hope Media to topple this huge figure of the industry from its pedestal.

Actually, as long as those media outlets stuck to the principle of reporting the truth like Hope Media did, they could also rise quickly in this era and gain the trust of the people.

But in the end, they still chose the quicker and more effective way of trying to topple Hope Media. As long as they could capture a scene of Jiang Xu and the Wang Consortium's private meeting, the reporters and newspapers that published this news would instantly gain fame.

This was what the real world was like.

Now that the war was about to end, Hope Media would definitely report some news that was beneficial to the Wang Consortium in the future. That was because at the end of it all, the Wang Consortium was the true winner of this war.

Hope Media's responsibility was to report the truth. They could not simply erase the Wang Consortium's contributions even though everyone was extremely unhappy with them.

But the more it was like this, the more Jiang Xu could not meet with the Wang Consortium's people. If he started reporting positive news of the Wang Consortium after meeting them, those who were waiting for Hope Media to fall would immediately make an issue out of it.

At this moment, Jiang Xu walked out of Hope Media's headquarters. Although he was holding a cane, his posture was straight.

For such an uncorrupted and principled person, it did not affect his bearing one bit, even though he was crippled.

Most of the time, Jiang Xu would be picked up by a private car that sent him to Qinghe University for his classes. However, everyone at Hope Media knew that Jiang Xu also had a penchant for slowly walking over by himself when he was in a very good mood. There was no need for the car in that case.

Someone secretly asked him why he did that, and Jiang Xu's answer was that when a person was in a good mood, their perception of the world would be exceptionally clear and beautiful. A person's life was very short, and there might not be that many times when they were in a good mood. Therefore, they should cherish this beautiful scenery.

When he walked out onto the street, many of the pedestrians would smile at Jiang Xu when they saw him.

Many years ago, when Jiang Xu's leg was just broken, he became the most respected person in Luoyang City. At that time, a lot of people would voluntarily greet Jiang Xu when they saw him.

After that, there were more and more examples where Hope Media enforced their principles, so Jiang Xu also became more and more respected. It was so much so that everyone could not help but greet him whenever they saw him.

Then everyone realized that no matter whether Jiang Xu knew any of them or not, he would return their greetings.

And then they realized Jiang Xu's voice had gone hoarse.

His colleagues at Hope Media felt bad for him, so they secretly told everyone not to greet him anymore. With Chief Editor Jiang Xu's character, it was impossible that he would ignore others if they greeted him. If such scenes were to take place every day, who could bear it? All of Jiang Xu's time would be wasted on greeting everyone back.

As such, the residents of Luoyang City gradually stopped greeting him vocally. Instead, they just nodded at him with a smile.

However, it was different today. The news of the preliminary victory in the war had somehow spread to Luoyang City as well. When someone saw Jiang Xu's smiling face, they could not help but ask, "Chief Editor, I see that you're in a very good mood today. Did you also receive news of a great victory at the front lines?"

Jiang Xu looked at the pedestrian and said with a smile, "Yes."

"When will the war end then? Will we achieve the final victory?"

"I can't be sure about that yet." Jiang Xu answered seriously, "The news published in the newspapers are the most factual, but I personally hope the war will end soon."

The pedestrians jumped for joy. "Did you hear that? The chief editor has also received news that a great victory has been achieved on the front lines!"

Someone else asked, "Chief Editor, it's rumored that the Wang Consortium sent people to destroy the Qing Consortium's nuclear test site during the war. Is that true? Apparently, the Qing Consortium will be holding a press conference soon."

Jiang Xu was stunned. He did not expect news of this matter to spread so quickly. However, he had no intention of answering this question. "I can't express my opinions until there's conclusive evidence that it was the Wang Consortium's doing. Alright, I have to rush off to teach the students."

After that, Jiang Xu smiled and bade everyone farewell.

But before he could even take two steps, a young man in a suit suddenly bumped into him. The young man was walking very quickly, so when he bumped into Jiang Xu, Jiang Xu nearly lost his balance and fell to the ground.

After Jiang Xu barely managed to stabilize himself, he looked at the young man who had brushed past him in surprise. The young man apologized softly before quickly disappearing around the corner.

But the moment the young man disappeared, a huge neon billboard not far from Jiang Xu suddenly crashed to the ground loudly.

Jiang Xu suddenly turned around and looked at the billboard on the ground. If that young man had not knocked into him just now, based on his walking pace, he would probably be dead under it.

Jiang Xu looked at the shattered billboard on the ground. The shop owner rushed out and had a look at the billboard as well. When he saw that his own billboard had nearly hit Jiang Xu, he hurriedly apologized to him and asked if he was alright.

Jiang Xu waved it off and said it was fine. Then he looked at the billboard and fell into deep thought.

Suddenly, he stopped walking towards Qinghe University and turned towards another street.

Jiang Xu passed through the long streets of Luoyang City as he walked. The empress trees¹ on the sidewalks had just sprouted new buds. As the sunlight penetrated through the branches and leaves, it cast mottled shadows on the ground.

When he returned home, he had just opened the door with his key when a little tabby cat rushed to his feet. It hugged him around the ankle and refused to leave.

Jiang Xu was stunned before breaking into a smile. "Luna, have you sensed something as well?"

Jiang Xu sat down on a walnut stool at the door that he used when changing his shoes. He hugged the little tabby cat in his arms and tickled it gently.

The cat stretched its paws comfortably and looked extremely cute.

Jiang Xu carried the cat into the house and tidied up the litter box and toys before carrying them out together.

He came to the door of his neighbor's house and knocked on it. It was a little girl around seven or eight years old who answered. Jiang Xu smiled and greeted her, "Little Yue'er, are you home alone?"

When the little girl named Li Yue'er looked up and saw Jiang Xu, she said in surprise, "Grandpa Jiang Xu! Daddy and Mommy have gone to work. I'm at home by myself!"

Jiang Xu squatted down with great difficulty and placed the cat's litter box on the ground. Then, he handed the cat to Li Yue'er and said with a smile, "You always liked playing with Luna the most. so I'll give her to you now, alright?"

Li Yue'er's eyes lit up. "Really?"

"Yes, really." Jiang Xu smiled and patted Li Yue'er's little head until her hair was a little messy, but her attention was entirely focused on Luna.

It seemed that Luna was also very familiar with Li Yue'er, so she did not resist at all when the little girl hugged her.

Jiang Xu stood up. "Take good care of her."

When Li Yue'er saw that Jiang Xu was about to leave, she hurriedly asked, "Grandpa Jiang Xu, where are you going?"

Jiang Xu looked at Li Yue'er and said with a smile, "To handle some important matters. It feels like there's still a lot of things I've not done."

With that, Jiang Xu left.

Finally, he turned around and took a look at the house he had been living in for decades. Garlic shoots had just sprouted in the yard, and the sun was shining brightly.

...

At 10:20 AM, Zhang Chentong was reviewing the draft in his office when he saw Jiang Xu's figure through the glass.

Zhang Chentong stood up and asked, "Chief Editor, didn't you go to teach your class?"

Jiang Xu said to Zhang Chentong, "They're serving fish with pickled veggies for lunch at the cafeteria, right? Have them send some over to me."

Zhang Chentong was stunned. "Sure."

Jiang Xu returned to his office and quietly took in the sight. Then he withdrew a stack of letters and sat down at the table. He filled his fountain pen with ink before holding it up to write: "Xiaosu, first of all, I'd like to congratulate the Northwest for their great victory at Mt. Zuoyun. When I heard the news, I was really elated. Before this, I always thought Fortress 178 would probably decide to sit out of it. But it turned out I was wrong. But after learning I had judged the situation wrong, I was very happy..."

"When we first met, you were sitting in the conference room like a normal young man. When you wrote down the words 'don't let the sorrows of our era become your sorrow as well,' I was really moved. However, I somehow felt that it wasn't something someone your age would say. But at this moment, I'm very happy because I'm sure you were the one who said those words. I want to thank you for protecting Hope Media that day. You've let us know that Hope Media isn't alone in adhering to our principles and reporting the truth..."

"The path of adhering to our principles and reporting the truth is a tough and dangerous one. I've always known it from the beginning. But if there is a need for a founder of this belief, I, Jiang Xu, will not be the first, nor will I be the last..."

"It was nice knowing you. Good luck, and take care."

Jiang Xu wrote four letters in a row addressed to different people.

Zhang Chentong knocked on the door and came in. He said in a low voice, "Chief Editor, the food delivery man is here."

Jiang Xu got up and stuffed the four letters into Zhang Chentong's hands. "Send these personally by hand."

After that, he turned around and opened the safe in his office. He took out a leather envelope and made his way towards the back entrance of the cafeteria downstairs.

There was already a plump driver waiting there. Jiang Xu smiled and greeted, "You've gained weight again."

"Life's been good." The plump driver said with a laugh, "Why did you suddenly—"

Jiang Xu interrupted him by stuffing the envelope into his hands. "Send it to the usual place. This information is very important and can't fall into the hands of someone with ulterior motives. It has to be kept classified for 50 years before it can be made public."

"OK, I understand." The plump driver nodded seriously. He hesitated for a moment before suddenly asking, "Chief Editor, is something about to happen?"

Usually, such classified information would be taken away on a schedule. But today, Jiang Xu had requested for it to be delivered in advance, so he thought that something must have happened.

Jiang Xu patted him on the shoulder and said calmly, "It's nothing, don't overthink it."

When the plump driver saw that Jiang Xu did not look flustered at all, he felt relieved.

He hid the envelope in a hidden compartment under the cargo container and turned around to get into the truck. When he turned his head again, he saw Jiang Xu looking at him with such seriousness it was as though he was trying to remember his face.

It felt like a silent farewell.

Jiang Xu watched as the cargo truck drove away. He said to Zhang Chentong, "Drive me to Qinghe University. Please inform the Qinghe University side that I'm rescheduling my class today and will be taking up the students' lunch break."

Zhang Chentong went to arrange everything calmly while Jiang Xu stood in the lobby of Hope Media's headquarters. He looked at the names on the walls, names of the pioneers who had tread this path before.

Li Xiang, who had investigated the use of gutter oil within the Alliance of Strongholds, was on his way home from the newspaper firm when he got stabbed dozens of times by some thugs and died on the spot.

Jiang Weisuo, who investigated the Zhou and Kong Consortium's fake milk manufacturing incident, was beaten to death as a retaliation.

Jian Guangzhou.

Le Qian.

Yang Wei.

Gao Qinrong.

These names were engraved on the walls of Hope Media, reminding all the reporters of the path they were going to be taking.

Actually, many people thought the Hope Media reporters were all brave, decisive, and fearless. However, Jiang Xu knew very well that the people he knew were no different from any other person.

They would also feel fear, unease, and panic.

The word "responsibility" was not as rosy as one would imagine. Instead, it was as cold as a rock. But even so, these people still chose this most difficult path while trembling in fear.

Moreover, there would be even more people taking this path in the future.

Just as Jiang Xu had written in the letter to Ren Xiaosu, he would not be the first or last person to go down this path.

Jiang Xu walked up to the wall with his cane and gently wiped off the dust on "everyone" with his sleeve.

Zhang Chentong came up behind him. "Chief Editor, the vehicle is ready. The Qinghe University students are also waiting."

Jiang Xu resolutely turned around and walked out of the building before getting into the car.

When he arrived at the lecture theater, it was already full of students. Jiang Xu said with a smile, "I'm sorry. I was delayed by something, so I didn't manage to make it to this morning's lesson. I apologize for taking up everyone's lunch break."

The students in the audience did not think too much of it. They just said, "It's alright, Professor Jiang Xu. Please go on with the lesson. We don't have a habit of taking afternoon naps anyway."

Jiang Xu smiled and said, "I teach humanities and politics, but I'd like to speak about something different today. Does anyone here want to know what I was doing when I was your age?"

The students' interest was immediately piqued. Chief Editor Jiang Xu rarely mentioned his past, so this lesson was totally going to be worth it!

Jiang Xu looked at a female student. "Guess what I was doing when I was your age?"

"You must've been investigating some unfair issues, right?" The female student said loudly, "Who knows? You were probably undercover at one of the consortiums and probing for firsthand evidence."

This answer was likely what everyone was thinking as well.

However, Jiang Xu shook his head. "No, when I was your age, I was still aspiring to be a Rider. At that time, I was always uninterested in working. I just ate, drank, and goofed off every day. There was even one time when I smashed someone's glass panel and got arrested by the Public Order Division. It wasn't until when I was 31 that I suddenly felt that I couldn't keep going on like that."

The students were stunned. They did not expect Jiang Xu's past to be so normal.

In their opinion, Jiang Xu should have been the kind of person who was a model student or the president of the student council when he was still at school. They did not expect Jiang Xu to behave like a rebel before the age of 31. This was completely unexpected.

Jiang Xu said calmly, "I'm telling you all this because I want you to understand that it's not too late to decide to work hard and change yourself. To put it bluntly, the best time to plant a tree was ten years ago, and the next best time is now."

"This war made me realize that Qinghe University has protected you guys too well. You should really go out and take a look at how much the world has changed. This will make you more pragmatic people." Jiang Xu said, "I believe in your potential, so when you start growing as a person, you'll definitely experience a rapid change."

The students in the audience suddenly felt that Chief Editor Jiang Xu seemed a little different today, and it was not only the content of the lesson that was being taught.

Jiang Xu suddenly changed the subject. "But right as you start to grow, I hope you will remember everything that I'm going to say here."

"When you start to experience the myriad ways society functions, I hope you'll still believe that rules can overcome unwritten rules.

"That you'll still believe that academia is not the same as bureaucracy.

"That you'll still believe that academia does not equal politics.

"That you'll still believe that having strength of character outshines sycophancy.

"Nowadays, more and more people pursue promotion while fewer seek the truth. There's more talk of gaining preferential treatment and less discussion of ideals. So while you're heading into society, what I want to say is, please guard the passion and ideals you once believed in. In this era of doubt, we still need to have faith."

Jiang Xu looked at the silent students in the audience and continued, "In Hope Media, there's a file archive that contains many secrets and truths of the world. I might've seen more of the darkness in this world than all of you, but even though I've seen so much truth and darkness, I still love the world. Don't let the sorrows of our era become your sorrow as well."

After that, Jiang Xu turned around and walked out of the lecture hall. This was his last lesson as a professor of Qinghe University.

Zhang Chentong waited outside the classroom, ready to pick Jiang Xu up after his class. However, Jiang Xu said to him, "You can go back to Hope Media first. I want to take a walk around by myself."

After Zhang Chentong left, Jiang Xu walked across Hongde Square in Qinghe University, supported by his cane. He walked down the footpath next to the tennis court, then walked past the sculptural fountain in the center of the school.

He replayed all of this in his mind. This was the path he had walked every week for over twenty years, and today was no different from the past.

When he first arrived here, he was still very young. At that time, he had written in his journal phrases like "ride with the wind and travel thousands of miles in the vast sky, looking down at mountains and rivers far and wide." But now he was old.

Thinking of his predecessors' names on the wall at Hope Media, he felt it was rather fortunate he had not ever taken a wrong step on this bumpy road.

Jiang Xu committed all of this to memory and walked out of the school calmly.

The moment he stepped out of the school gate, a huge explosion erupted on the next street. It sounded like someone was fighting there.

In that instant, an amber dragon flew into the sky and dived down onto the next street.

For the first time since the chaotic battle in Luoyang City, peace was disrupted again.

The residents of Luoyang City started fleeing. As flames burned, huge black smoke billowed into the sky.

Gunshots and explosions boomed as Jiang Xu walked calmly through the noisy world. He stopped at an intersection and looked at a young man in black clothes standing on the opposite street.

A crowd was fleeing across the streets, but only Jiang Xu and the young man remained still.

Jiang Xu did not look at him anymore. Instead, his view turned to the huge Luoyang City. This was where he had lived all his life. Before this, he knew that such a day would come sooner or later, and he was even afraid of it arriving.

But he was no longer afraid.

In his daze, Jiang Xu seemed to notice some apparitions appearing next to him. There was Jian Guangzhou, Li Xiang, Le Qian, and Yang Wei. They were all smiling at him.

And there was his younger self as well.

The younger version of himself asked softly, "Do you regret it?"

Jiang Xu smiled. "No."

After that, the apparitions dissipated in his mind. Jiang Xu turned to the black-clothed young man and said, "Do it, but don't hurt the innocent."

The young man quietly raised his gun and pulled the trigger.

The bullet seemed to cut through the sea of people before snipping the thread of life.

As bloodstains spread out from the gray suit on Jiang Xu's chest, Jiang Xu slowly sat on the ground and gently placed his cane by the side. He treated it as an old friend of his.

A young man in a suit sprinted over from another street. His face was covered in blood.

The black-clothed gunman had wanted to take advantage of the chaos to escape. But when he saw the young man in the suit, he instantly raised the gun to his own chin and pulled the trigger.

The bullet pierced through the black-clothed gunman's skull.

The young man in the suit looked at Jiang Xu's corpse from afar and said into his earpiece, "Mission failed. Retreat. I repeat, the mission has failed. Old Tang, evacuate as soon as possible."

...

30 years ago, a roguish young man walked into a small newspaper firm and said loudly, "Are you people recruiting reporters here?"

The newspaper firm's door was shattered as though someone had smashed it, and there was only an old editor left in the office.

The old editor adjusted his glasses. "We don't recruit bums around here."

"Hey, old man, watch your tongue. Who're you calling a bum?" the young man said unhappily.

The old editor examined him silently. "What's your name?"

The young man said, "Jiang Xu, that's who I am. Jiang Xu from Luoyang City's West Avenue! Have you heard of my name?"

The old editor was amused. "I've heard of you. So tell me, why do you suddenly want to be a reporter?"

The young Jiang Xu thought for a moment and said, "I just don't want to lead a meaningless life anymore. Before my mother passed, she said that if I continued living like this, she couldn't put her mind at ease even if she died. Also, I somehow feel that this isn't how the world should be. Do you understand? Two days ago, I saw—"

"Why did you come to our newspaper firm?" the old editor asked.

"I heard a few days ago that your firm was destroyed because you reported about the factory scandal." The young Jiang Xu chuckled and said, "Don't worry, let's see who dares to come and smash the front door after I start working here."

The old editor handed him a form. "Have you heard of a career as an investigative journalist?"

"Investigative journalist? Are there different types of reporters?" the young Jiang Xu wondered.

"Of course." The old editor smiled. "It's the most dangerous profession among reporters and also the most difficult path in the world that one can choose."

Jiang Xu turned smug. "Old man, you know me. I like doing the most difficult things!"

The old editor confirmed again, "You won't turn back until you hit the south wall1 then?"

The young Jiang Xu smiled brightly. "Don't worry, I won't turn back even if I hit the south wall."

Chapter 970 - Condolences

In the wilderness, Luo Lan and Zhou Qi were cooped up in a spot downwind. The two of them were waiting for a Qing Consortium soldier who was undercover in the Central Plains to send over transportation. Surely they weren't going to walk directly to Luoyang City, right? How long would that take them?

They had already bypassed the Wang Consortium's northern defensive line by traveling only through the wilderness, so the threat from the Wang Consortium was not too great.

The only thing they needed to worry about was that it could get troublesome if their planted spy had defected and brought the Wang Consortium along to capture them.

Zhou Qi muttered, "You and Qing Zhen also know that the Wang Consortium's AI has control of the satellites. What if it discovers our whereabouts?"

"So what if we've been discovered? The Wang Consortium is currently pursuing the expeditionary army, so how would they have time to bother with us?" Luo Lan said nonchalantly, "If anyone really does come

and capture us, we can just run into the mountains. Would two supernatural beings not be able to outrun them?"

Zhou Qi scorned, "You only awakened a short while ago. With your physical fitness and weight, you might just be unable to outrun them."

"I've already awakened my power for close to half a year, so why are you still looking down on me?" Luo Lan said unhappily.

But at this moment, the sound of an off-road vehicle's engine could be heard in the distance. Luo Lan cautiously poked his head out to have a look. When he realized there was only one person approaching, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Luo Lan jumped out from his hiding spot. "Over here, over here!"

It was a young man who came over. When he saw Luo Lan, he immediately got out of the vehicle and stuffed the car key into Luo Lan's hand. "Boss Luo, Mr. Qing Zhen couldn't get in contact with you. He's very anxious and thinks that something might've happened to you!"

Luo Lan was stunned. He took out his satellite phone and saw that it was dead. "Is he looking for me urgently?"

He was just on the phone with Qing Zhen half a day ago. Normally, if it weren't urgent, Qing Zhen would definitely not have called him at this time.

The intelligence agent said, "We've received news that Mr. Jiang Xu of Hope Media has been assassinated in Luoyang City. So, Boss Luo, your plan to head to Luoyang City has been canceled. Mr. Qing Zhen requests that you return straight to the Southwest in case anyone targets you."

Luo Lan was stunned. He found it very difficult to believe this news. "Jiang Xu is dead? When did that happen?"

"Two hours ago." The intelligence agent said, "Everyone suspects it's the Wang Consortium's doing. After all, they've assassinated a lot of people. The Wang Consortium has totally gone crazy. You mustn't go to Luoyang City at a time like this."

"What did Qing Zhen say? Does he also think it was the Wang Consortium that did it?" Luo Lan asked.

"Mr. Qing Zhen said that he can't be sure," the intelligence agent said and shook his head.

Luo Lan lowered his head and pondered things. To be honest, the moment he heard about Jiang Xu's death, he subconsciously thought it was the Wang Consortium that had killed him as well. After all, the Wang Consortium had been responsible for so many assassinations in recent times. Kong Erdong, Kong Donghai, and Zhou Xilong of the Zhou Consortium were all targets of the Wang Consortium. The deaths of these well-known people were only a microcosm of the Wang Consortium's plans. The Wang Consortium's frequent use of assassinations meant they did not intend to hold back anymore. Would a proper consortium keep resorting to such underhanded methods?

Moreover, the articles Jiang Xu had written over the past month were extremely detrimental to the Wang Consortium. Almost the entire Alliance of Strongholds now felt that the Wang Consortium's strategy to swallow up the Kong Consortium and the Pyro Company in this war against foreign enemies was too disgraceful and did not live up to the social responsibilities a consortium should have.

Everyone was very disgusted by the Wang Consortium's act of fishing in troubled waters. Internally, even the Wang Consortium felt the same way.

Therefore, the Wang Consortium had a motive for killing Jiang Xu.

But the problem was that if Jiang Xu died, everyone would think it was the Wang Consortium's doing. In that case, why would the Wang Consortium still want to kill Jiang Xu at this time?

Would this behavior not infuriate everyone who was already unhappy with them?

If Jiang Xu did not die, everyone would only be annoyed with the Wang Consortium. But if the Wang Consortium killed Jiang Xu, this annoyance would instantly escalate to anger!

Was Wang Shengzhi a fool? Of course not. No matter how they might loathe the things he did, he was still one of the smartest people in the entire Alliance of Strongholds. The Kong Consortium and the Zhou Consortium had been extremely irked over how he recruited their refugees. So how could he possibly make such a rookie mistake?

Was he deliberately trying to inflame public sentiment? Wang Shengzhi would not do something that stupid, right?

The situation had become a little confusing. Luo Lan did not feel like he could figure it out.

The intelligence agent said, "Boss Luo, hurry back to the Southwest. I'll make a trip to Luoyang City to investigate this case and give you a satisfactory answer."

But Luo Lan shook his head. "No, I have to go to Luoyang City."

The intelligence agent was stunned. "It's too dangerous for you to go to Luoyang City at this time. If Jiang Xu was really killed by the Wang Consortium, it means they will no longer care about your status and potentially make a move on you. Our nuclear test site has already been destroyed, so the Wang Consortium has nothing to fear anymore!"

"No." Luo Lan said, "The mission to Luoyang City has been put on hold for the time being, but I still have to pay my respects to Mr. Jiang Xu. By my calculations, I've been a reader of his articles for about eight years. Although I didn't manage to become friends with the old man, I've always respected his character. Now that he's suddenly departed, I want to go and send him off."

The intelligence agent was stunned. He did not expect Luo Lan would risk his life to go to Luoyang City just so he could send Jiang Xu off.

How much courage would he need to have to make a trip to Luoyang City in such dangerous circumstances?

Luo Lan looked at the intelligence agent and assured him with a smile, "Don't worry, I'm not going to die. I still have Zhou Qi to protect me."

Next to him, Zhou Qi rolled his eyes. "Bro, Luoyang City is only a few hours away from the Wang Consortium. I can't protect you there."

"Would it kill you to speak a little less?" Luo Lan said unhappily, "I'm also a supernatural being, so I don't need your protection anyway. If anyone tries to kill me, you should just run away first, alright?!"

Zhou Qi rolled his eyes again. "What's the point of saying such spiteful words? You might as well just offer to pay me more!"

"Alright, alright, I'll pay you more." Luo Lan did not know whether to laugh or cry. He turned to the intelligence agent and said, "I have a very dangerous mission for you."

The intelligence agent immediately stood at attention. "Please give me your orders. I'll definitely complete whatever mission you have for me no matter how dangerous it is."

"Alright, the Northwest Army should still be pursuing the expeditionary army in the North. I need you to relay the news of Jiang Xu's death to Ren Xiaosu, the future commander of the Northwest Army." Luo Lan said in seriousness, "If he learns about it, he'll definitely go to Luoyang City.. At that time, even if the Heavens want me dead, it'll have to depend on his mood."