

First Order 971

## Chapter 971 - Passive Skill

North of the front line of Mt. Daniu, the expeditionary army had left behind most of their troops to hold the Wang Consortium at the defensive line. Meanwhile, the remaining expeditionary army troops started retreating northwards. It looked like they were planning to retreat directly north of the grasslands.

The expeditionary army troops who stayed behind to guard the rear of the formation did not become disheartened and fight passively just because the main forces had retreated. Instead, they fought even more ferociously.

In the expeditionary army, if a pair of brothers served together at the same time, the younger brother would withdraw with the retreating troops.

If it was a father and son serving together, the son would withdraw with the retreating troops.

It was very rare to see a father-son pair serving together in the military in the Central Plains, but this was very common within the expeditionary army.

Therefore, when the expeditionary army's main forces retreated, those who remained behind did not surrender immediately. Instead, they became even more determined than before as they wanted to buy time for their family and friends to escape.

The expeditionary army troops were not the cold-blooded villains that featured in the stories told at teahouses. They were also people of flesh and blood. As the environment in the Far North had become too harsh, they headed south in search of a better environment. Actually, the expeditionary army was not in the wrong either.

Perhaps there was no such thing as objective right in the world. Wolves eating sheep was just natural selection.

But no matter what, the next time that the expeditionary army tried to invade the Central Plains, the people here would still pick up their weapons and drive away all foreign enemies. This was the justice of a nation.

However, the expeditionary army would probably not have that chance anymore, because Yan Liuyuan was going to use this opportunity to become the new ruler of the North. He was not only going to become the ruler of the steppe but the entire North.

At this moment, the retreating expeditionary army camped and rested. They set up simple fires and started to cook.

The general of the expeditionary army was draped in a black cloak and held his huge axe with both hands, supporting it upright on the ground.

He stood quietly at the edge of the camp and looked south. He could imagine how tragic of a battle his soldiers were putting up at Mt. Daniu. If he were still a rank-and-file soldier, he would also be willing to stay there and die fighting for his comrades.

But he was a general, so he had no choice.

An aide next to him said, "General, the food is ready. Please go and eat."

Before the expeditionary army came to the South, they had sun-dried a large quantity of mutton and ground it into powder, which they placed into enclosed bags.

As they marched south, the dried mutton would expand to ten times its original size once it was cooked in a pot. A bag of mutton powder the size of a soccer ball was enough to feed ten soldiers for up to a month.

But now, they had finished consuming the meat and only had some coarse grains left.

The expeditionary army had paid a far greater price in this war than they had bargained for.

Seeing that the general did not say anything, his aide said again, "General..."

The general suddenly said, "We'll come back. I know how strong the Central Plains people are now, but they aren't united. When we come back..."

As he spoke, a steam locomotive suddenly whistled in the distance.

The general stopped talking. He saw a steam locomotive approaching quickly from the horizon in the distance. In the vast wilderness, the steam locomotive looked a little solitary. It was like a lone horseman charging into the enemy camp.

Black smoke spewed out of the chimney of the steam locomotive. It showed no intention of retreating in the face of the expeditionary army's tens of thousands of troops and seemed like it was about to charge straight into them.

That whistling of the train was like a melodious horn.

The aide hurriedly said, "General, why don't you take cover?"

However, the general shook his head and said calmly, "The Central Plains people can't hurt me yet. Go and tell the soldiers to prepare for a counterattack."

The Wang Consortium's main forces had to still be held back at Mt. Daniu. Therefore, even if Central Plains people were pursuing them, it would be a small number.

On such flat terrain, their expeditionary army would not be intimidated by a small group of Central Plains people. This was their pride as soldiers of the expeditionary army.

Although they had been defeated, they could not lose their last bit of courage just because of some Central Plains people.

The general stood in front of the camp and waited for the soldiers behind him to assemble.

When the steam locomotive got a little closer, the general could even hear the commotion inside the train with his keen hearing. It was as though thousands of soldiers had squeezed into the narrow train body.

Moreover, someone in the train even shouted, "That guy standing at the edge of the camp posturing, yes, aim right at him!"

"That's right, he's still standing so righteously after losing the battle and isn't hiding despite seeing us approaching. Let's kill him!"

"Kill him and we're done!"

"Focus our fire!"

"Get him! He's acting like he's so great! He didn't even run away when he saw us coming!?"

The general had a grim expression. He gripped the huge axe in his hands tightly, ready to use it to slash through the steam locomotive that was approaching!

But all of a sudden, the steam locomotive that was heading straight for the expeditionary army turned west when it was about 400 meters away.

The general was stunned. He was waiting for the steam locomotive to charge, but he did not expect it to look like it was trying to flee instead.

Initially, the expeditionary army could only see the front of the train. But now, it was as though the entire steam locomotive was moving horizontally right in front of them.

Right afterwards, they saw black muzzles poking out of the train windows one by one. The guns were mounted on the windows and extended outwards, making the entire train look like a hedgehog.

Behind those black muzzles were the crouched figures of the Northwest Army's soldiers. The entire train was filled with people, and from the outside, it looked like the carriages were stuffed.

Someone on the train even shouted, "Do you see that person standing still there? Get him!"

This also surprised the general a little. He had thought the other party was going to charge into their formation, but he did not expect that they did not intend to fight the expeditionary army head on right from the beginning and use guerilla tactics instead.

All of a sudden, the impressive mobility of the steam locomotive was put on vivid display. The huge body of the steam locomotive moved freely on the battlefield like cavalry, executing fire and maneuver tactics in front of the expeditionary army's formation.

Bullets poured down like heavy rain, washing away all the targets they could hit.

A soldier from the expeditionary army immediately raised his shield in front of the general to prevent him from getting shot.

But P5092 suddenly ordered the 2nd Regiment to take out the remaining 12 thermobaric bombs.

Amid the loud explosions, huge bursts of smoke exploded from the man-portable launchers. In the blink of an eye, 12 thermobaric bombs fell onto the expeditionary army's camp.

When the thermobaric bombs reached their targets, red-orange flashes could be seen, closely followed by a surge of black smoke from the explosions that came after. The high temperature and pressure were capable of almost destroying everything.

The man-portable thermobaric bomb was an epoch-making individual weapon in itself. Even Fortress 178, which was known for its military engineering, might not be able to achieve the power it had before The Cataclysm.

However, it was still enough to kill the barbarians.

In the carriages, everyone started coughing due to the smoke released when launching the thermobaric bombs. "Fuck, I'm choking to death!"

"Cut the shit and quickly finish firing your ammo!"

The 6th Combat Brigade drove past the expeditionary army's camp from more than 400 meters away. This time around, everyone was ready to retreat after firing off all their ammunition.

But before they could retreat far, they heard a shout erupt from the expeditionary army's camp. "The general! They blew up the general! We need to take revenge for him!"

When they heard this loud shout, even Ren Xiaosu, who was on the steam locomotive, was stunned.. "That's so evil. Did Liuyuan make a wish again, or do I have some passive skill that enables me to kill commanders without fail?"

That powerful general of the expeditionary army was dead. Perhaps not even the general himself could have expected to die in such a careless manner.

Thousands of barbarians rushed out of the expeditionary army's camp holding giant axes in their hands in an attempt to avenge their general.

At first, they only received orders to muster when they heard it was an enemy attack. Later, word went around that the general had been killed by the enemy.

The barbarian soldiers at the camp who did not know what was going on just assumed the Wang Consortium's main forces had caught up with them and were prepared to fight to the death with the general.

They were prepared to sacrifice themselves for the glory of the expeditionary army.

But when they rushed out, they only saw the caboose of the steam locomotive moving away.

The barbarians were stunned. These people had come over in such a grand manner just so they could fire once at them and run away? Nobody could make sense of the situation!

"Should we give chase?"

"After them! We have to avenge our general!"

As P5092 watched the expeditionary army's camp getting farther and farther away, he felt a little emotional. This strategy was way too nefarious. They were fully relying on their impressive mobility to take advantage of the situation before fleeing.

If the steam locomotive traveled at a speed of 120 kilometers per hour, even a powerful barbarian could not catch up with such a mode of transportation. Even if there were someone with an explosive speed comparable to that of the steam locomotive, how many people could last for more than ten minutes at

full speed? If they even sprinted for an entire minute, it would put great pressure on their heart and lungs.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not drive the steam locomotive too fast. He kept a fixed distance from the pursuing barbarians and even slowed down.

Nearby, Zhang Xiaoman asked, "Why did you slow down? Have you overtaxed your mental strength?"

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "No, I'm slowing down so the barbarians will think that they can catch up to the steam locomotive if they run harder. That way, we can slowly lure them away from the main group."

P5092 stared at Ren Xiaosu's profile and realized the young commander was also full of dirty tricks. He was clearly trying to tire out the barbarians who had come seeking revenge.

Once their stamina ran out, Ren Xiaosu would definitely turn around and head back to battle to finish them off.

"But we don't have any ammo left." P5092 said, "Even if they get tired from running, we might not be able to kill many of them when we turn back. Of course, it'll also be good for the Wang Consortium troops if we can wear them out."

As soon as he finished speaking, P5092 saw Ren Xiaosu take out several dozen crates of grenades from somewhere.

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "This is the last of my stash."

While Ren Xiaosu was leading the 6th Combat Brigade into guerrilla warfare, the Wang Consortium troops at Mt. Daniu's front line finally achieved victory.

The Wang Consortium's main forces had been fighting very hard on the main battlefield, and now it was finally time for them to counterattack.



The Wang Consortium's main forces advanced northwards from three different routes, nipping at the routed expeditionary army's heels all the way. Not only did they want to kill these barbarians, but they also wanted to continue pursuing north to kill the rest of the expeditionary army that had previously retreated.

During the pursuit, the Wang Consortium's main forces that were pushing forward from the west killed all of the remaining barbarians who fled from Mt. Daniu. In the end, they continued pursuing north for more than ten kilometers before the troops saw a steam locomotive lying in their path. The thousands of soldiers of the 6th Combat Brigade could be seen leaning against the exterior of the steam locomotive and chatting.

They looked extremely relaxed, and some people were even playing cards!

Their uniforms were all tattered and their faces were dirty, but they still looked very laid back.

On this tense battlefield, these soldiers seemed a little out of place with the rest of the world.

This sight left the Wang Consortium's main forces dumbfounded. When the commander of this fighting force approached them with his soldiers, Ren Xiaosu walked up to them.

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "The expeditionary army's troops that evacuated are about 20 kilometers to the north. If y'all double time it, you should be able to catch up to them very quickly. There should've been around 30,000 of them, but we managed to lure some of them out and killed them."

The commander of the Wang Consortium's main forces shook hands with Ren Xiaosu. "Thank you to the Northwest for the help you've given. If it weren't for you all holding back half of the enemy's troops at Mt. Zuoyun, we probably couldn't have held out. Before that, we were prepared to retreat back to the South."

"You're too polite. It's what we should do." Ren Xiaosu said, "If y'all really want to thank us, you can lower the tariffs on our Northwestern goods. We'll have our people make a special trip to the Wang Consortium to discuss this matter. Since you want to express your gratitude, it'll have to be something practical..."

The Wang Consortium officer's face twitched a little. Shouldn't this be the moment for making some inspirational speech? For example, saying something like "I did this for the sake of our nation's justice" or "this is for the unity of the Alliance of Strongholds" or something similar. Why did he suddenly bring up something so practical like tariffs?

Off the side, the Great Hoodwinker looked at Ren Xiaosu in admiration. He felt that the future commander was really getting into his role. Bluntly mentioning tariffs in this setting was something most people really couldn't do.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Alright, I won't delay your pursuit."

"Everyone, why don't you head to the camp at Mt. Daniu first so we can entertain you there?" the Wang Consortium's commander suggested.

"There's no need. What's the point of wasting that time? Everyone's in a hurry to get back home and reunite with their families." Ren Xiaosu said, "Go on then. We'll be heading back to the Northwest."

The Wang Consortium's commander shook hands with Ren Xiaosu again. "Alright, since we have a pursuit mission, let's just bid farewell."

With that, his staff officers beside him also stepped forward and shook hands with the main figures of the Northwest Army.

But when Ren Xiaosu shook hands with the last person, he was suddenly taken aback.

A moment later, the Wang Consortium's troops resumed marching north. But before they could get far, they were greeted by the sight of barbarian corpses strewn all over the ground.

The Wang Consortium's officers looked at one another. What did the Northwest Army say just now? They lured some of them out and killed them? Was this some of them?

The Wang Consortium troops turned around and looked behind them, but the steam locomotive had already disappeared.

The steam locomotive suddenly came to a stop not long after they headed west.

P5092 and the others came to the front of the train and asked, "Future Commander, why have you stopped?"

But he saw Ren Xiaosu holding a small piece of paper and looking stunned.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at P5092. "Do you remember how we became acquainted?"

P5092 smiled and said, "You asked me for a copy of Hope Media's newspaper to read. You came to me on time every morning shortly after I received the day's newspaper."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "I like reading Hope Media's newspapers. As I don't have any intel sources, Hope Media's newspapers are my way of knowing about the world. And I know that every word reported in their newspapers is true."

P5092 was stunned.. He did not understand why Ren Xiaosu would suddenly bring this up.

## Chapter 973 - Lonely

Ren Xiaosu continued, "When I visited Hope Media the first time, I was actually there to publish an ad with them. However, they waived most of the advertising fees with just a word from Jiang Xu. When I was in the Southwest, I knew too little about the world, so I thought that it was a hopelessly dark place. It wasn't until I met Jiang Xu, the Riders, and Elder Wang from the Trinity Institute that I realized there was actually light in this world.

"At that time, I asked him why he was so insistent on pursuing the truth when others did not care for it. His answer to me was that it was their business.

"I messed around and didn't follow the rules when I played chess with him, but he didn't get angry with me either.

"I told him that the Qing Consortium's nanomachines could help him fix his leg, but he rejected the idea so that the truth he reported would remain unblemished.

"An uncorrupted person like him died just because of some messed up power struggle. Jiang Xu is dead."

Yes, Jiang Xu was an uncorrupted person in Ren Xiaosu's mind. His smile was also extremely pure without any motives.

The other party had only wanted to do one thing well in life.

But if the world could not even accommodate such a person, those who could not accommodate him should not be allowed to live.

Ren Xiaosu raised the note in his hand. When he shook hands with the Wang Consortium's officers, the last officer in line had placed the note into his hand.

The note informed Ren Xiaosu that Jiang Xu had been assassinated at 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon.

In addition, it said Luo Lan would continue with his journey to Luoyang City, although there was a chance he might get assassinated, so he needed Ren Xiaosu to make a trip there as well.

Ren Xiaosu had to make this trip to Luoyang City no matter what. He wanted to send Jiang Xu off and also kill a lot of people.

He ordered P5092, "You and the Great Hoodwinker, take everyone back to the Northwest."

"We'll go with you." The Great Hoodwinker also came to the front of the train. "I've met Jiang Xu once before. A person like him shouldn't have died like that."

Yang Xiaojin looked at Ren Xiaosu. "I'll go with you."

However, Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "No, y'all can't go."

Now that the 6th Combat Brigade had just finished fighting the war, they were out of ammunition. There was really not a single bullet left.

The Great Hoodwinker's face was so pale it was obvious he was at his limit.

Yang Xiaojin's entire shoulder was swollen, and she could not lift her right arm at all. Those who had never really used an anti-materiel sniper rifle before could never imagine how terrifying the recoil was.

Although Ji Zi'ang still had some strength left, he had been yearning every day to be reunited with his wife and child.

At this moment, there was actually no need for Ren Xiaosu to bring these people to Luoyang City. He said to the Great Hoodwinker and the others, "Everyone, I have a feeling that there will be a battle in Luoyang City this time, so please don't add to my troubles. You'll only be a burden if y'all go."

Everyone looked at each other and smiled bitterly. Probably only the future commander would think these superhumans were a burden.

Ren Xiaosu was too direct, but if he did not get straight to the point, everyone would probably pester and try to convince him. Therefore, he might as well put it bluntly to stop them from even having the idea.

P5092 thought for a moment and said, "It actually is unsuitable for the 6th Combat Brigade to get redeployed to Luoyang City for battle based on everyone's current condition. So I agree with Future Commander's decision. He'll go alone while we return to the Northwest."

Yang Xiaojin knew Ren Xiaosu would definitely not agree to her going, so she gave him a gentle hug and said, "Be careful. I'll wait for you in the Northwest."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded seriously.

In the end, everyone from the 6th Combat Brigade got down from the train while Ren Xiaosu controlled it and rumbled off towards the South.

The black smoke that billowed into the sky above the steam locomotive was just like Ren Xiaosu's rage.

On the train, Ren Xiaosu took out his satellite phone and made a call.

The phone rang twice before it was answered. "This is Wang Shengzhi."

Ren Xiaosu stood at the front of the train and got straight to the point. "Were you the one who sent someone to kill Jiang Xu?"

There was a long silence on the other end of the call. "Do you also think it's me?"

"I don't feel like that's important. What matters is the truth," Ren Xiaosu said firmly.

"It wasn't the Wang Consortium," Wang Shengzhi said.

Ren Xiaosu immediately hung up.

No matter who it was, he would definitely find out the mastermind's identity. If he could not do so, he would just kill all who were suspicious.

Ren Xiaosu gazed silently ahead and wondered what was wrong with the world.

Murderers and arsonists got away with the champion's belt, while those who mended bridges died with no bodies left to bury. The world should not be like this. People should not be like this.

In the past, no matter how chaotic this world was, Ren Xiaosu always felt he could stay out of those issues. He would just leave the consortiums to fight among themselves all they wanted.

Ren Xiaosu felt that it did not matter who died, but Jiang Xu absolutely must not die.

How could such an uncorrupted person who only held his own ideals be killed by others using such underhanded methods?

It felt like another lamp had gone out in the dark.

Dark clouds gathered in the sky, and it started to drizzle.

Ren Xiaosu quietly climbed on top of the steam locomotive and sat cross-legged there as he faced the wind and rain.

In the vast and empty wilderness, the young man sat alone on top of the black steam locomotive as it sped off into the distance.

He looked exceptionally lonely.

...

In the rain, the 6th Combat Brigade, which was marching to the Northwest, quickly set up camp. Then everyone hid in their tents and watched as the rain got heavier. The Great Hoodwinker sighed and said, "I wonder if it's raining in the Northwest. Rain is very precious there. Only if it rains in spring will there

be a harvest in the future. There was a flood after the drought last year. A lot of the crops in the Northwest have started showing signs of a waning harvest."

P5092 looked at the Great Hoodwinker. "Don't you know how to read fortunes? Why don't you check if it'll rain?"

"Ahem." The Great Hoodwinker said, "I've become a little rusty in recent years in that area. I can only assess whether someone's suitable for the Prosperous Northwest now."

P5092 looked out of the tent as raindrops fell onto the canvas tent's tilted roof before washing down along the creases. He suddenly said, "Future Commander must be very angry and sad. This is the first time I've seen him look like that. It's like an undercurrent stirring in the deep sea."

The Great Hoodwinker sighed and said, "In any case, I know that Commander Zhang will definitely be upset. He and Jiang Xu were good friends for decades."

"Can you predict if Future Commander will be safe on his trip to Luoyang City this time?" Zhang Xiaoman asked.

The Great Hoodwinker said, "There's gloom and doom draped over the Southeast. Many people will die."

Zhang Xiaoman turned his head and looked around. Then he asked, "Eh, where's Ms. Xiaojin? Have you guys seen her?"

"She fell out of the group after saying that she was going outside for a bit." Wang Yun said, "That was 31 minutes ago."

Everyone was stunned. When Yang Xiaojin said she would see Ren Xiaosu again in the Northwest, everyone thought she was heading back with them.

However, Yang Xiaojin was still unwilling to let Ren Xiaosu face the danger alone.



She knew Ren Xiaosu would not be willing to let her go with him, so she pretended to return to the Northwest with the 6th Combat Brigade before quietly leaving the group.

Yang Xiaojin had lost Ren Xiaosu once before, but she told herself she would never allow that to happen again.

#### Chapter 974 - He Rode Off On A Whale

Drizzle unremitting falls on Qingming Day;

Broken-hearted travelers pass by.

It was not yet Qingming in Luoyang City, but everyone on the streets had sorrowful looks on their faces.

Each of them wore a small white flower on their chests as a tribute to their respected elder.

The intersection outside Qinghe University's campus was cold and quiet. When people passed by, they would place down a bouquet of flowers at the intersection. Spring had just arrived in Luoyang City, but the blooming peonies and winter jasmines had all been picked and placed here.

It looked like a sea of flowers on the intersection.

Someone said that if Mr. Jiang Xu were still around, he would definitely criticize everyone for this. Flowers should be growing on branches, not plucked and placed down here. Everyone should just observe their beauty from afar.

But someone argued that since Mr. Jiang Xu was no longer around, who could be in the mood to enjoy the sight of the flowers?

The Qinghe University students stood on the streets and mourned silently. A number of them even cried until they fainted. It wasn't until the afternoon when something happened to Jiang Xu that they realized why he suddenly wanted to give that lesson.

It was because that was his final lesson. So it turned out Professor Jiang Xu had a premonition of his death.

But an hour before he died, Jiang Xu was still laughing and talking as though everything was fine. When he encountered students greeting him while walking around on campus, he even responded amiably to them.

He had only suggested he wanted to take a walk by himself as he was afraid Zhang Chentong would get implicated.

Remaining so calm even though he knew that he was about to die was probably the greatest composure one could have.

On this day, the entirety of Luoyang City was grieving. In this era, Jiang Xu was the only one who could affect so many people.

It was not only within Luoyang City but also beyond it.

Due to the war in the North, a lot of people had fled to the Zhou Consortium in the South. When they found out Jiang Xu had died, they even made their way to Luoyang City to place a bouquet of flowers for him.

However, the people's opinion of Jiang Xu's death was definitely not just mourning. They were extremely angry too.

On the streets not far from where Jiang Xu had died, people raised banners to condemn the Wang Consortium. Some people even got Wang Shengzhi's portrait and started burning it.

Everything they did was because they could not accept Jiang Xu's sudden departure.

This era was an unfortunate one. That was because The Cataclysm had never truly finished and people had been displaced from their homes. Morality had started crumbling, and laws were no longer effective.

However, this era also had its bright spots. It was precisely because of all these difficulties that light was born out of a dark fissure.

Outside Luoyang City, Luo Lan and Zhou Qi arrived with a floral wreath in their hands. Luo Lan went to the gate and handed over his visa the Qing Consortium had prepared for him.

When the Luoyang City garrison troops stationed at the gate saw Luo Lan's identification, they were surprised. Luo Lan? That Luo Lan from the Qing Consortium?

Everyone was under the impression the Wang Consortium was the one who killed Jiang Xu, so everyone felt they had gone insane.

As an organization the Wang Consortium had constantly targeted, for Luo Lan to suddenly come here to Luoyang City, was he really not afraid of death?!

It was only a three-hour drive from the Wang Consortium's nearest stronghold to Luoyang City, so if the Wang Consortium troops were to rush here, not even Luo Lan would have enough lives to get out of this.

The soldiers guarding the gate had a look at the floral wreath that Luo Lan was holding and saw a simple condolence message written on it:

On this day, he rode off on a whale.

But someday, he'll return as a crane.

After entering the city, Luo Lan walked slowly under everyone's gaze to the site where Jiang Xu had met his demise. As there was no memorial service yet, he could only place the wreath there.

As for whether he could attend the memorial service, that would depend on whether he was still alive.

However, Luo Lan didn't care to think about those matters right now.

Luo Lan was usually dressed in a very brutish manner. He did not look like a big shot from a consortium at all and instead carried himself more like a mob boss.

But today, Luo Lan looked exceptionally solemn and dignified in his black suit.

News of Luo Lan arriving in Luoyang City to pay his respects to Jiang Xu slowly spread. When Luo Lan walked through the streets, everyone would subconsciously keep their distance from him.

As it rained, Luo Lan kept his eyes focused in front of him. When he arrived at the site of Jiang Xu's assassination, he gave a deep bow before saying, "Sir, I started reading your articles a long time ago and have always admired you. As a member of a consortium, I'm also aware of all the darkness and murkiness that goes on in this world. So I know better than them how difficult it is to stick to the principles you stand for in this world.

"I know you and Xiaosu were on very good terms. He and I are very good friends too, so I can also be considered one of your juniors. If your spirit is still around, please accept my summons."

But even after waiting for a long time, it felt like nothing had changed in the world.

In the end, he just gave a sigh. It looked like Jiang Xu was unwilling to take notice of him.

In fact, the power of the Martyr's Palace was extremely cruel to the dead. The laws of nature dictated that the dead could not be resurrected. So the spirits would also suffer punishment if they were to be resurrected.

In the Martyr's Palace, all martyred spirits would remain in a state of hibernation before they were summoned. It was an endless darkness for them, and the only purpose in their "lives" was to protect the host of the Martyr's Palace.

The host of this power would become stronger, but this was actually very cruel to a spirit who was formerly a living person.

Luo Lan had awakened his power in Stronghold 61 and summoned 12 martyred spirits. However, they were all his former subordinates who had followed him for a long time. Furthermore, the martyred spirits were only willing to become part of the Martyr's Palace to protect him.

Moreover, the host of the Martyr's Palace could only summon the martyred spirits as equals. If the other party refused, the host could not summon them by force.

Luo Lan stared blankly at the street full of flowers. He bowed deeply again. "If I'm not dead in a few more days, I'll come back to see you at the memorial."

A black-clothed sniper was quietly watching Luo Lan through his scope on the roof of a tall building 400 meters away. He had a white earpiece in his ear. "Target in sight."

"Engage."

All of a sudden, the sniper felt a huge force lifting him up from behind. The moment the sniper pulled the trigger, his rifle suddenly flew askew.

The sniper turned around in a panic and saw a calm young man holding him in his hand.

When the sniper rifle rang out, Luo Lan, who was on the street, jerked to look at the high-rise building. When he saw the outline of the young man on the roof, he felt relieved.

Ren Xiaosu was here. He would always show up whenever Luo Lan was about to have a close shave with death.

Luo Lan stood in place and laughed. "It's time for us to settle the score with those troublesome enemies."

Zhou Qi said nonchalantly, "You only dare to say that because Ren Xiaosu has arrived."

"What did you expect?" Luo Lan retorted, "I don't feel safe at all with you protecting me..."

At the same time, the gunshots had not only attracted Luo Lan's attention but also the enemies lurking within Luoyang City.. When they realized their sniper companion had been attacked, several hundred black-clothed men walked out of a residential building and headed towards that building to surround it.

## Chapter 975 - Heartworm

Ren Xiaosu stood on the roof in his black rain poncho. He could make out hundreds of hitmen approaching the building he was on, but he did not panic.

"Which organization are you from?" Ren Xiaosu looked at the sniper who he'd broken the limbs of. "Only a consortium can plant so many spies in Luoyang City. Tell me, which consortium do you belong to?"

The sniper was lying on the ground and struggling in pain. His teammate's questioning voice came through his earpiece as the communications channel remained open. As such, Ren Xiaosu's voice was also transmitted through the earpiece to the other party.

Ren Xiaosu squatted next to him and pulled it out of his ear. "Tell me which organization you belong to, and I'll spare your life."

The sniper was breathing heavily in pain, hesitating.

"Don't worry, as long as you tell me who the organization behind you is, I'll leave," Ren Xiaosu said. He then pinched the spot where the sniper's arm was broken. With just two fingers, he crushed the already broken bone to pieces.

But a second later, the sniper died as soon as he opened his mouth.

Ren Xiaosu was clearly taken aback. Wasn't this the same way some Pyro Company members had died? As long as the person displayed any sign of treachery, they would die.

Was it the Pyro Company that had Jiang Xu killed? But the Pyro Company was clearly in dire straits.

No, wait! Ren Xiaosu drew his black saber and cut open the sniper's chest. He saw a black worm wrapped tightly around the sniper's heart.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this, he was disgusted.

But just as Ren Xiaosu was about to use the black saber to cut off the worm, it turned into a black ball of energy and dissipated.

This was the power of a superhuman used to control agent suicides!

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu felt a little relieved when he realized this was not the Pyro Company's doing. After all, those people had just risked their lives to fight the expeditionary army.

Just which organization was it then? Why had he never heard of the existence of such a superhuman?

Oh, right. How could a superhuman who used such underhanded methods be exposed to the public?

Ren Xiaosu got up and looked down from the rooftop. When he saw that the black-clothed hitmen were about to arrive below the building, he picked up the sniper rifle on the rooftop and killed four of the nearest hitmen in succession. After that, he proceeded down the stairwell calmly.

As gunshots continued to ring out in Luoyang City, all of the Luoyang City residents knew that the repercussions from Jiang Xu's death were not over yet. Rather, it was just beginning.

At the very least, revenge was only just beginning for Ren Xiaosu.

This time, he did not use "Old Xu" or any other of his powers to prevent identification of himself.

He hid his identity not because he was afraid someone would seek revenge on him; rather, he was worried the appearance of White Mask would scare his pursuers away.

Now that he had attracted everyone's attention with the sound of the sniper rifle, he calmly faced the impending encirclement and danger so he could kill them all.

It would be too troublesome to finish them off one by one, so he wanted to let these people attack him all together.

The sky was a gloomy gray, just like Ren Xiaosu's mood.

There were no lights inside the building. As he went down the stairwell, only some faint light shone in through the windows few and far between.



Ren Xiaosu traversed through the light and shadow, his black rain poncho swaying like a cloak. The light and darkness cycled through within his eyes, with his nose bridge being the boundary that separated them. It was as though the light and darkness in his heart were rapidly interweaving.

The moment he walked out of the building, a hitman sticking close to the exterior wall in ambush prepared to shoot.

When the black-clothed hitman saw Ren Xiaosu, he immediately pulled the trigger. However, he only saw a blur in front of him as Ren Xiaosu dodged the gun's muzzle in the blink of an eye. Ren Xiaosu decisively pressed down on the hitman's face with his palm before pushing it towards the wall.

With a loud crack, his head was smashed into the wall.

Ren Xiaosu did not look at the hitman again. Instead, he decisively turned around and left, heading towards Peony Avenue in the south of Luoyang City.

Ren Xiaosu did not hide his whereabouts or try to quickly escape from this place. He was just like a practice target that had suddenly appeared in Luoyang City as he waited for the sharp arrows to arrive.

All of the Luoyang City residents were already hiding in their homes and did not dare to step out. Only Ren Xiaosu silently stalked the streets, with the sound of his footsteps masked in the drizzle.

The black-clothed hitmen surrounded him from both flanks like a pack of wolves and the cocking of guns could vaguely be heard on both sides of the street.

Just as they were about to surround Ren Xiaosu, he suddenly turned into an obscured alley. When a black-clothed hitman in there saw Ren Xiaosu, he raised his gun and fired.

But he suddenly realized he could not pull the trigger no matter how hard he tried, because Ren Xiaosu was squeezing the gun.

After that, Ren Xiaosu's left hand shot out like lightning. A sudden burst of strength passed from his arm to his fingers, then through the joints of his index finger, precisely hitting the upper left side of the abdomen of the hitman's body.

The hitman's spleen ruptured, and the resilience of the organ was instantly destroyed. A large gush of blood started to fill his internal organs. He was beyond saving, and he would be in pain for a while before he was completely dead.

The alley was paved with gray bricks, and when rain fell, the water flowed through the gaps and into the ground. The hitman could not make a sound as he laid powerlessly on the ground until he gradually lost consciousness.

He could only watch as Ren Xiaosu slowly walked away. The sound of his footsteps below his black rain poncho's hemline gradually disappeared as he headed towards the next intersection.

The encirclement the several hundred black-clothed hitmen had just set up had been easily torn apart.

However, the hitmen did not give up. They did not even care about Luo Lan anymore. Instead, they went all out to hunt down the young man who had suddenly appeared in Luoyang City and was overflowing with killing intent.

In their opinion, since Ren Xiaosu did not try to take them on directly, it meant that even though he might be strong, his power was still limited and he could not possibly take on several hundred of them by himself.

When they thought of this, the black-clothed hitmen quickened their pursuit. They reorganized themselves and bounded towards Ren Xiaosu like a large net.

However, while they picked their pace, so did Ren Xiaosu.

However fast they moved, Ren Xiaosu matched their speed. It was as though there were multiple parallel lines between them that the hitmen could never shorten.

The distance between the black-clothed hitmen and Ren Xiaosu was entirely dependent on Ren Xiaosu's mood.

Ren Xiaosu was traveling from the northern part of Luoyang City to the south. He was moving towards National Treasure Garden on Peony Avenue, and when the hitmen saw Ren Xiaosu running south the entire way, they roughly knew where he was headed.

A black-clothed hitman called out to his companion over the radio, "Sniper 2, start searching for a shooting position in the south of the city!"

"Sniper 2?"

"Sniper 2?!"

The black-clothed hitmen were shocked to discover that their remaining sniper had disappeared. No one knew if he was still alive.

When Ren Xiaosu went past the streets of Luoyang City, he suddenly wondered if Jiang Xu had also passed by this place like he did today, looking at the Luoyang River that ran through Luoyang City like a jade belt, enjoying the sight of the lush Luoyang Park, and viewing the world that everyone both loved and hated.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu's desire to kill became even greater.

As Ren Xiaosu strolled around Luoyang City and watched the streets that Jiang Xu might have walked before, his mind could not help but wander.

Who could have killed Jiang Xu?

'Was it Wang Shengzhi?' Ren Xiaosu pondered.

To Ren Xiaosu, Wang Shengzhi was his benefactor for saving his life before. Based on his understanding of Wang Shengzhi, even though he would resort to any means to achieve his goals now, he was still someone who had a bottom line.

Of course, this was only his judgment. In the end, Ren Xiaosu would still have to base it on evidence.

Then could it be Zero? Ren Xiaosu pondered for a moment. Based on the level of sapience Zero had attained so far, it could very well be doing a lot of things behind Wang Shengzhi's back.

Zero would also have a motive. That was because in Zero's opinion, it was impossible that humans would allow other intelligent species to coexist with them. Moreover, Jiang Xu was the one who was most against the artificial intelligence and had an extremely influential effect on others.

Now that Zero had the nanomachines to enable it to carry out its plans, it had instantly become a very dangerous being.

Although Zero claimed it only had that small quantity of nanomachines that were in Mo Fei, who knew if it was lying?

After all, Zero could even deceive its "father," Wang Shengzhi, so what was the big deal with lying to Ren Xiaosu?

No, Ren Xiaosu had a niggling feeling that something was not right.

He cycled through his memories to find some clues. Yes, Ren Xiaosu finally knew why he felt that something was amiss.

When he killed the sniper on the rooftop, the sniper had been receiving his orders and instructions through his earpiece. If it were a soldier under the control of Zero using the nanomachines, there would not be a need for the earpiece at all since Zero could just control him directly.

And when the black-clothed hitmen encircled him to kill him, many inevitable openings in street battles still appeared despite how meticulous they were in their operation. This was the reason why Ren Xiaosu was so fearless right now.

It was not that the hitmen were not elite, but that no one could execute a theoretically perfect plan during an actual battle since all kinds of accidents were bound to happen.

But if it were Zero controlling those people, they would never have made so many mistakes. Because if Zero ran the show, it would have absolute control over them.

So then, if it was really not Zero or Wang Shengzhi who was responsible, who else could it be?

Now that Jiang Xu had died, everyone in the Alliance of Strongholds was probably enraged by the Wang Consortium. Who would benefit from such a situation?

The Qing Consortium? The nanomachines that appeared in Stronghold 61 had also pointed to the Qing Consortium as a suspect.

Ren Xiaosu felt a chill run through him. If it were really Luo Lan and Qing Zhen who were behind this, that would make him really sad.

However, he firmly believed his judgment that Qing Zhen and Luo Lan would not do such a thing.

The black-clothed hitmen who had been chasing after Ren Xiaosu probably did not expect he would still be in the mood to consider other matters while they were pursuing him closely.

When Ren Xiaosu came back to his senses, the black-clothed hitmen had fully surrounded him and tried to kill him again.

A moment later, Ren Xiaosu picked up his pace and accelerated. The black-clothed hitmen in front suddenly appeared from the street corner. But before they could shoot, they saw a black barrel held in Ren Xiaosu's hands.

A bullet was fired through the falling rain and hit a hitman between his brows.

As Ren Xiaosu had been fighting with his bare hands earlier, the black-clothed hitmen had nearly forgotten he could actually use a gun as well.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu was very fond of using guns, and his Master Firearms Proficiency would easily put him several levels above these hitmen.

He finally arrived at National Treasure Garden on Peony Avenue, a well-known affluent neighborhood in Luoyang City, with some of the villas in the district center greatly sought after by the rich and powerful in Luoyang City.

Ren Xiaosu disappeared into the main entrance of the neighborhood wearing a black rain poncho. The black-clothed hitmen standing outside hesitated for a moment before new instructions came through their earpieces. "He can't escape. Encircle him and kill him."

The black-clothed hitmen scattered in all directions outside the neighborhood. After that, they entered together by scaling the walls, vowing to surround Ren Xiaosu here.

A hitman's voice rang out in their earpieces. "Target has entered Villa 27. I repeat, the target has entered Villa 27."

The black-clothed hitmen sneered. Now that Ren Xiaosu had gone into a villa, he had better not think of ever coming out again. Their killing intent surged in this moment. By the time the several hundred hitmen had completely surrounded the place, even a single round of gunfire would be enough to turn any superhuman in the world into Swiss cheese, especially when the other party was only a single individual.

On the boulevard of the neighborhood, the hitmen quickly assembled into several dozen combat formations and rushed towards Villa 27.

A fine drizzle fell from the sky, and raindrops landed onto the leaves of the trees on the sidewalk.

A dark killing intent refracted through the water droplets that had gathered on the tip of the leaves.

The hitmen trampled through the puddles on the ground, splashing the water under their combat boots. They exchanged tactical hand signs with one another as they completely surrounded Villa 27.

It was so empty in the villa that it seemed like no one lived in it. When Ren Xiaosu looked around the house, there was not even a sofa to be seen.

There was the unusual sound of water splashing outside, which Ren Xiaosu knew to be the sound of the hitmen moving around.

However, a solitary metal alloy box measuring a cubic meter in size had been left in the house. It looked like the box was plated with a special metal that shielded it from any outside detection.

Ren Xiaosu walked up to it and saw a note placed on the silvery box:

A gift for Ren Xiaosu, my good friend. May our friendship last forever.

—From Luo Lan.

Ren Xiaosu laughed. That fatty had left such a corny note for him that totally felt out of place with the current situation.

The dampness of the rain and the earthy scent of the soil refreshed the mind. On a rainy day like this, one oughta kill some enemies.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu pressed the button on the metal box. When the box slowly opened, the voice from the palace rang out:

"Nanomachines not paired to a consciousness have been detected. Would you like to establish a connection?"

"Yes," Ren Xiaosu answered.

"Rebooting..."

"Resetting to factory settings..."

"No backdoor program has been detected..."

"Pairing successful."

Ren Xiaosu threw his black raincoat on the ground and turned around to face the killing intent that was surging outside. The silvery nanomachines flowed affectionately within Ren Xiaosu's body like a torrent.

It was as though the long-awaited cuties had inherited their predecessors' will as they formed a solemn-looking external armor around Ren Xiaosu.

With every step Ren Xiaosu took, the armor became more and more complete. Meanwhile, his killing intent became more intense.

Before this, Luo Lan said he would arrange for a batch of nanomachines to be escorted from the Southwest to Luoyang City and that Ren Xiaosu could come and retrieve them at any time he needed them. This was a gift from the Qing Consortium, and Luo Lan did not break his promise.

Ren Xiaosu realized this batch of nanomachines did not even have a backdoor installed.



He had reached his peak state and was ready to start killing some people.

In that instant, the agile and sturdy armored being smashed through the villa's door and rushed out.. Only when the hitmen saw this did they realize who they were hunting today.

## Chapter 977 - He Will Do As He Promised

The black-clothed hitmen were already sure of their victory. But when that familiar metallic-gray armored being appeared from behind the shattered door, the legendary figure completely destroyed the hitmen's confidence in the blink of an eye.

Some time ago, the guardian angel of Hope Media had worn armor and slaughtered nearly a 1,000 thugs in Luoyang City.

A person like that was not someone they stood a chance against.

They thought that with hundreds of armed combatants on their side, they would be 100% assured of a victory even if they were facing a supernatural being. After all, there were not too many supernatural beings who did not fear bullets in the world.

However, the hitmen suddenly realized they had encountered the exact person who was not afraid of bullets.

That was right. After Jiang Xu was killed, how could Hope Media's guardian angel possibly not come?

Ren Xiaosu had already charged into the group of hitmen in his armor. In front of this metallic frame, whatever combat formation and firepower they had would be useless.

Before Ren Xiaosu entered the villa, the manner in which he killed his enemies was more like a brutal work of art. But after he emerged from the villa, his killing techniques reverted to pure violence.

As Ren Xiaosu grabbed the necks of two hitmen in his armor, the tough armor covering his hands locked around their cervical discs. With just a light squeeze, a crushing sound could be heard.

The armored being threw the corpses to the ground and started charging around with heavy and powerful steps, shattering the exquisite flagstone pavement in the neighborhood under its feet.

There was no need to precisely deal fatal blows anymore, nor was there a need to meticulously plan how to kill his enemies.

Ren Xiaosu had operated the armor for quite a while, so the moment the cuties connected to his neurons, he knew he had returned to his peak condition.

Gunshots cracked from the sides as the other hitmen teams started coming over to try to intercept Ren Xiaosu.

As the brass bullets hit the armor, the normally highly lethal weapons only managed to send a few sporadic sparks flying.

Not only were the bullets not fatal against Ren Xiaosu, but they attracted his attention.

After Ren Xiaosu wiped out all the hitmen in front of him in his armor, he slowly turned around and looked at the hitmen who were shooting at him.

For some reason, those hitmen gradually stopped shooting and the gunfire slowly started ceasing.

They felt a sense of fear growing in their hearts with just a stare from the menacing armored being.

They had absolutely no way of inflicting any damage on this armored being. As the hitmen were originally planted inside Luoyang City, they could not bring in any heavy firepower with them.

At this moment, the armored being was invincible.

"Retreat!" someone shouted.

The hundreds of black-clothed hitmen had surrounded Ren Xiaosu like a pack of wolves that smelled blood and embarked on a sophisticated hunt for him.

But when the armored being appeared, the hitmen scattered in panic like jackals that had encountered a lion.

But just as some of the hitmen turned to escape, they saw White Mask standing behind them.

"Old Xu" stood there with its saber raised as raindrops kept dripping down from the tip of the black saber in the drizzle.

Ren Xiaosu smiled. He had only come here for revenge so he could kill all of the enemies to avenge Jiang Xu. Since he had painstakingly lured all of these people to one place, how could he possibly let them off so easily?

Screams could be heard coming from the neighborhood. The residents living there were all people of status in Luoyang City. But at this moment, everyone remained hidden in their homes and did not even dare to breathe too loudly for fear of getting caught in the crossfire.

They knew full well that the people participating in this battle in the neighborhood had transcended this world.

The black-clothed hitmen started retreating quickly. But they somehow felt like no matter how fast they ran, they were still going to get caught by the two godly killers behind them.

But as there were simply too many hitmen, not even Ren Xiaosu and Old Xu could kill them all despite their strength.

Ren Xiaosu slowly stopped in his tracks. Actually, the hitmen were still unaware that he was only the bait. The actual trap had already been laid in the pouring rain.

The remaining 200-odd hitmen attempted to jump over the walls and flee for their lives. One of the black-clothed hitmen even threw away his gun and prepared to hop over the black metal railings in the neighborhood with his bare hands.

It was not that he was stupid enough to throw away his own gun but that he knew very well that the weapons were only scrap metal in the face of the armored being.

When the hitman got to the metal railings, he propped himself up with two hands and was about to vault over.

But he did not notice that as he got closer, the creeper vines wrapped around the metal railings had quietly turned into sharp spikes.

Then the creeper vine's spikes turned into sharp spears and pierced his body. Furthermore, it started sucking out his blood and draining all the energy from his body.

Everything happened in an instant. After the hitman's body fell to the ground from the railings, the vine tentacles immediately reverted to their harmless state.

When the hitmen behind him who were also similarly escaping saw the body, they could not even understand how their companion had died.

Ren Xiaosu did not come to Luoyang City by himself but had traveled here together with his maidservant.

Actually, from this point alone, it could be seen just how furious Ren Xiaosu was. By bringing a top-tier superhuman like his maid to Luoyang City, his entire purpose was to start a massacre known as revenge.

Now that the situation was not as terrible as he had expected it to be, it was better to have the creeper vines kill the enemies without causing a scene. But if there were really enemies everywhere, Ren Xiaosu did not mind destroying the city either.

Before coming to Luoyang City, Ren Xiaosu had already stated he wanted to pay his respects to Mr. Jiang Xu and avenge him, as well as to protect Luo Lan.

If someone attempted to assassinate Luo Lan after killing Jiang Xu, they could very well go ahead and try. But Ren Xiaosu would kill anyone who tried to do so.

Since he had said that, he would definitely do as he promised. He would kill every one of them and not leave a single person alive.

At this moment, Zhou Yingxue swayed her hips over to Ren Xiaosu with an exquisite umbrella in hand. She looked at Ren Xiaosu's armor enviously. "Master, can you get Luo Lan to give me some nanomachines as well? I'd like to use this armor as well. It looks so awesome."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhou Yingxue. "Have you surrounded all of them?"

"Don't worry, Master, I've already laid a dragnet in the neighborhood, so none of them will be able to get away." Zhou Yingxue beamed.

The maidservant thought it had been such a long time since she fought alongside her master.. Whenever she was alone in the Northwest, she would reminisce on the times she traveled around with her master.

## Chapter 978 - You're Still In It For The Money

The neighborhood of National Treasure Garden on Peony Avenue had turned into a huge battlefield. Although the rainwater had washed the blood flowing out into the soil, there was still the metallic taste of blood in the air.

Ren Xiaosu stored all the nanomachines he had just obtained in his body and waited for Zhou Yingxue to take out the remaining hitmen.

No one dared to head out of their houses at this moment, so it made it easier for the creeper vines to kill people.

However, Ren Xiaosu still made a trip down to the estate office. The staff and security guards here had already fled, but he came here to take away the main server that stored the surveillance footage.

After all, the creeper vine incident had a great impact on the entire Alliance of Strongholds, so Ren Xiaosu did not want Zhou Yingxue to get embroiled in public scrutiny over something like that.

No matter what, she was still his maidservant.

Before leaving, he even placed a gold bar on the table as compensation for taking the main server away.

When he returned with the main server, Zhou Yingxue confirmed, "Master, I've already killed all of them."

Zhou Yingxue was actually a little puzzled as to why Ren Xiaosu was always unwilling for her to reveal her creeper vine power. After all, she was so powerful, so why should she be afraid of others?

But later, she understood that people's words could sometimes be hurtful. Her master was only protecting her because he did not want her to feel angry when others criticized her.

Ren Xiaosu took out his black rain poncho and put it on again. "Alright, the matter here has already been settled. Go and check on Wang Yuchi and the others while I go look for Luo Lan."

"OK." Zhou Yingxue nodded in agreement. She had gotten enough satisfaction from today's battle. When she thought about how her master acted as the bait to lure the enemy out for her to finish off, she felt like a reclusive expert who had gotten back in the business to fight alongside her master. Simply thinking about it, she felt amazing.

Speaking of which, Zhou Yingxue also kind of missed Wang Yuchi and her other little brothers. Those eight young men who had risked their lives with Ren Xiaosu were still studying at Qinghe University. Back when the eight of them were revising for their admissions exam, Zhou Yingxue was the one who took care of them.

Subconsciously, Zhou Yingxue regarded them as her younger brothers.

But Zhou Yingxue was wondering if she should get them some gifts since she had not seen them in so long, like jade thumb rings or something?

Before leaving, Ren Xiaosu shot a glance at Zhou Yingxue and said, "Have you ever lorded over people in my name after you got to the Northwest?"

Zhou Yingxue panicked a little. "No... I didn't!"

"That's good then. After we're done here, we'll return to the Northwest together. At that time, I'll ask around and find out what you've been up to there." After that, Ren Xiaosu turned around and walked off into the rain.

Zhou Yingxue curled her lips and said angrily, "I've clearly done so much for him, so why does he keep finding trouble with me? What kind of a master is that?! What's wrong with me enjoying myself a little in the Northwest? Do superiors restrict their subordinates from eating?"

...

At this moment, Luo Lan and Zhou Qi were still standing at the crossroads outside Qinghe University as they waited quietly for Ren Xiaosu to return.

Earlier, Ren Xiaosu had lured away all the black-clothed hitmen. When Luo Lan saw there were so many enemies, he was really taken aback. If Ren Xiaosu had not come to Luoyang City, he would probably have died here.

But when he thought about it again, he felt it was a good thing. That was because it was definitely not easy for so many spies to sneak into Luoyang City quietly, so they would definitely leave behind some clues.

The more spies that had infiltrated the city, the happier Luo Lan was. No matter how hard the other party tried to suppress it, there was no such thing as an absolute secret.

Luo Lan preliminarily judged that the Qinghe Group had been infiltrated by spies.

However, who could be so bold that they even dared to try and kill him?

It was not that Luo Lan regarded himself to be that influential, but surely the people who attempted to have him killed should have considered the consequences, right?

Wait a minute! This was the same scenario as Jiang Xu's death. If everyone thought the Wang Consortium was behind it, and if Luo Lan really died, his death would likely lead to a showdown between the Qing Consortium and the Wang Consortium. If they still could not find the mastermind after some time, it was very possible the Qing Consortium would launch a full-scale war against the Wang Consortium based on Qing Zhen's character.

In that case, who would hope most to see the Qing Consortium declare war on the Wang Consortium? Who was it that wanted to see everyone in the world become enemies with the Wang Consortium?

Luo Lan could roughly guess at a few possibilities, but he was still a little unsure.



Zhou Qi, who had been taking shelter from the rain, suddenly straightened up and looked towards the end of a street. There was a black-clothed person walking slowly towards them.

Zhou Qi turned around and looked in the other direction and saw another person similarly standing in the empty street.

All of a sudden, people in black were slowly approaching from all four directions of the intersection. It was as though they already had Luo Lan surrounded.

The residents of Luoyang City were so frightened by the gunfire they hid at home. Only some of the braver ones dared to look out through their house windows.

As such, the people who had appeared were here to kill Luo Lan.

Luo Lan grinned and said, "I was wondering why everyone went after Ren Xiaosu as soon as he appeared. They didn't even care about me anymore. So they were just cannon fodder to force Ren Xiaosu away from here before sending in their aces to handle me. Well done, great strategy. An opponent like this really makes things more interesting."

Zhou Qi stood quietly in front of Luo Lan. "Stop mumbling. When the fight breaks out, stay within three meters of me."

Luo Lan looked at Zhou Qi's back and chuckled. "Moneyface, you're actually acting like a hero for once? But I didn't bring any money with me this time."

Zhou Qi rolled his eyes. "Your brother paid me yesterday."

"Ptui." Luo Lan said disdainfully, "To think I thought you changed. So you're still in it for the money."

In the heavy rain, Luo Lan and Zhou Qi nearly got into an argument.

But when the four hitmen came within a 100 meters of them, Zhou Qi's expression suddenly turned serious. This was a lethal trap the other party had meticulously set for Luo Lan, so the people who came must be very strong.

In an instant, the drizzle falling from the sky became a little different. As the raindrops fell, they were stretched by an invisible force that slowly turned from water droplets into long and narrow silver needles.

When the fine raindrops hit the ground, they actually tinkled. It was like several hundred thousand needles had fallen from the sky.

Rainy days were basically Zhou Qi's home field.

Luo Lan praised, "Zhou Qi, your power has grown even stronger!"

Zhou Qi did not say anything. He was prepared to make his move.

However, before the two sides could unleash their killing intent, Zhou Qi was suddenly taken aback. He was surprised to see Ren Xiaosu's figure standing on the street on the southern side.

A black-clothed hitman was walking over slowly while Ren Xiaosu lurked close behind.

The silhouette of the young man in the black rain poncho appeared mysterious and calm, as if slowly emerging out of a misty waterfall.

This time, no one expected Ren Xiaosu to finish off all the hitmen so quickly.

It was like a magician had casually performed a disappearing act.. Several hundred people truly vanished and never came back again.

## Chapter 979 - Barrier

In the hitmen's plan, Luo Lan and Zhou Qi were supposed to be surrounded by four supernatural beings who would kill them.

Based on their original plan, even if the several hundred combat personnel that had sneaked into Luoyang City were unable to kill Ren Xiaosu, they should still be able to keep him occupied for half a day.

And in that time, Luo Lan would not have enough lives to make it out of the situation even if he were a cat.

But now that Ren Xiaosu had returned in advance with the rest of the hitmen nowhere to be seen, it looked like they were probably all dead.

The earpieces the four black-clothed supernatural beings were wearing rang out with, "Number One, you'll intercept him while the rest of us go all out to kill Luo Lan. That should be enough."

With that, the supernatural being being pursued by Ren Xiaosu spun around and faced him.

Ren Xiaosu quietly sized up the supernatural being. He was a young man around 28 years old and had a squarish face.

This supernatural being was standing ramrod straight, making him look like some kind of soldier. He had a tanned face, which was probably from the years of training he had gone through. This was an elite soldier from a certain organization's military.

Ren Xiaosu felt a little more reassured. As long as clues of their identities surfaced, it would only be a matter of time before he found the mastermind. What he was most afraid of was that these people had no past, since that would make it difficult for him to find any leads.

The Zhou Consortium, the Wang Consortium, the Kong Consortium, and the Pyro Company all had different ways of training their soldiers. Therefore, the subtleties of their soldiers' movements in battle would be different.

Of course, the subtleties were extremely minute, so Ren Xiaosu could not tell the difference.

But it did not matter. Now that Wang Yun had joined the Prosperous Northwest, even if Ren Xiaosu could not find any evidence after this battle, Wang Yun could definitely give him some answers as long as he brought the surveillance footage of this street to him.

Most superhumans who had just awakened their superpowers would not belong to an organization, so the way they fought in battle would appear exceedingly chaotic.

For example, Zhang Baogen, Dong Funan, and several others.

But over the past year, groups of people had started to awaken their superpowers. Some people felt that the number of superhumans in the Alliance of Strongholds had probably exceeded 300 already, and half of them were even "born" in the military.

After the superhumans who were originally soldiers appeared, they were immediately recruited into the secret units by the various consortiums and trained with greater resources.

The combat strength of these people was very high, especially when they teamed up to fight. They would display combat skills that surpassed normal superhumans.

The superhuman before Ren Xiaosu closed in on him. He wanted to buy some time for his three companions to quickly complete their mission.

The remaining three superhumans rushed at Luo Lan from different directions. However, one of the superhumans suddenly felt that something was off. He turned around and saw someone wearing a white mask following him.

In the gloomy rain, White Mask's appearance was extremely abrupt and terrifying. There was no expression on the mask at all, but for some reason, the superhuman facing it could sense the other party smiling.

White Mask was a legendary being in the superhuman world. Too many major events had involved the presence of White Mask. However, every superhuman was aware now that White Mask was just someone's power.

The hitmen wanted to block Ren Xiaosu and have the other three surround Luo Lan and kill him. But their plan failed again.

From today onwards, it seemed that every one of their plans was going to be very difficult to achieve. With the emergence of one surprise after another, they would have to constantly change their strategy.

At almost the same time, Ren Xiaosu and Old Xu rushed at their respective opponents.

Although Old Xu's battle looked simple and unadorned with fancy moves, every slash it landed with its saber was extremely vicious.

As soon as both sides clashed, Old Xu's opponent was immediately forced into a constant state of retreat.

However, this superhuman quickly realized a problem. Old Xu was much faster than him. If he kept retreating without fighting back, he would not last much longer.

He skidded to a halt and decisively bent down to dodge the incoming blade. Then 13 bone spikes suddenly burst from his spine, making him look like an extremely terrifying Spinosaurus.

The bone spikes measured more than a meter long. Based on the calculations of this superhuman, the moment White Mask swung its saber at him, it would definitely hit the sharp bone spikes on his back and get pierced.

In that instant, he also grew a bone knife from the back of his elbow in preparation to chop off Old Xu's head when it crashed into him.

But the superhuman was stunned a second later. He felt like the bone spikes on his back had pierced soft clay. Although Old Xu was stabbed by the bone spikes, the slashing motions did not stop.

There was no sight of blood splattering as he had imagined. There was only Old Xu slashing at his back emotionlessly.

"How bloody." Luo Lan sighed. Even for someone like him who had committed so much murder and arson, he still felt a little grossed out.

However, this execution style of killing made Luo Lan understand how angry Ren Xiaosu was about Jiang Xu's death.

The other two superhumans who did not encounter Ren Xiaosu and Old Xu's attacks had gotten within 30 meters of Zhou Qi.

However, they did not approach him rashly. They carefully observed the fine drizzle that was coming down as they felt the pervasive raindrops stinging their skin.

The closer they got to Zhou Qi, the more intense the pain was. Their skin started bleeding as though the raindrops had really turned into soft needles.

Luo Lan chuckled and said, "On a rainy day like this, you two will die if you take another step forward. If you don't believe me, why don't you try it out?"

One of the black-clothed superhumans suddenly raised his hand. A circular blue glow spread outwards like a water ripple, and wherever that ripple spread, it would appear like it had become part of a different dimension.

Luo Lan was stunned. The streets still looked the same as before, but they seemed to have become isolated from the rest of the world. As the rain entered the barrier, it turned into snow, and the snow on the ground instantly turned to ice.

A layer of frost quickly formed on everyone's hair and eyebrows.

If they wanted to kill Luo Lan, they would definitely have to find out who was protecting him and what powers that person protecting him possessed.

The reason why they dared to make a move was definitely because they had absolute confidence.

Within the barrier, the other party used the frozen climate to seal off all the water content and completely disabled Zhou Qi's water manipulation power. This was the principle behind the freeze dryer's removal of moisture.

Logically, ice was also water, but Zhou Qi's power was not that remarkable yet. He would have to turn the ice into liquid water before he could use it.

Luo Lan chuckled and said, "It looks like you've come prepared. Why don't we discuss how much the organization behind you is paying and I'll pay double that amount. Or you can capture me and bring me to your boss. I won't resist. Let's stop the fighting and killing here in Luoyang City. Wouldn't it be terrible if we hurt the residents?"

However, Luo Lan was not someone who would willingly allow himself to be captured. As he said that, he pulled Zhou Qi behind him and prepared to summon his martyred spirits to catch their opponents off guard.

The two superhumans approached Luo Lan and Zhou Qi without saying a word. It was getting colder and colder inside the barrier as Luo Lan felt his hands almost freezing.

But a second later, the sound of ice shattering could be heard. The four people in the barrier looked up at the same time and were surprised to see someone using a sniper rifle to shoot at the same spot at the top of the spherical barrier.

The top of the dome started cracking like glass!

#### Chapter 980 - Untainted

Above the barrier, the sound of the sniper's bullets hitting it was like a copper bell ringing over their heads.

Truly, the barrier was very strong. It did not really break even after being blasted by 15 to 16 sniper shots, and it even seemed like it could continue to hold for a long time.

Yang Xiaojin's shoulder was still aching from all the shots she had taken back at Mt. Zuoyun, which nearly crippled her shoulder. Her injury was definitely not something that would heal within a day or two.

But she just frowned and continued firing at the barrier without stopping. Each time she fired a shot, the huge recoil of the black sniper rifle would cause the buttstock to hit her already injured shoulder. But even if it hurt, she did not care.

Yang Xiaojin was only concerned with being present on this occasion that Ren Xiaosu had risked his life to fight for.



The superhuman in the barrier hurriedly used his own mental strength to reinforce the area being fired upon. However, the speed at which he was reinforcing it was not as fast as the other party's attacks!

Moreover, the sniper did not seem to have any intention of giving up, with every shot consistently fired at the same spot.

Shot after shot, they came fast and intense. There was no end to it.

For some reason, the superhuman in the barrier suddenly felt a little scared. He saw the spider web cracks getting larger and larger. This was the first time he had seen someone so insistent on breaking his barrier.

Logically, it was already very strong for being able to withstand so many shots from an anti-materiel sniper rifle.

But at some point, the sound of glass shattering could seemingly be heard throughout the entire world. The light blue translucent barrier shattered into pieces before the "debris" dissipated in the air.

The superhuman who set up the barrier spat blood and suffered huge backlash.

When the other superhuman saw that their plan had completely failed, he hurriedly fled.

He did not even care about his injured companion coughing up blood. It was not that he was cold-blooded or heartless, but that the training they had received and mission requirements were just like that. If the plan failed, they would have to quickly retreat and not attempt to save their comrades.

Luo Lan looked at Yang Xiaojin, who was on top of a tall building not far away. She was wearing a cap and a rain poncho as she started locking onto her target through the scope.

"Both husband and wife are here. Don't you feel like you're a divine general or something?" Luo Lan said excitedly.

Zhou Qi said helplessly, "You're a superhuman yourself, so why don't you think about how to raise your power level instead of relying on others?"

Luo Lan thought for a moment and explained, "Actually, this power of mine is a little cruel. The soldiers fought for the Qing Consortium for so long, yet they still can't find peace after death. No matter how I think about it, I can't justify it."

"Whatever." Zhou Qi suddenly felt that Luo Lan's awakened power was a little contradictory. Although it could be a very powerful skill, Luo Lan himself was unwilling to use it.

That was because Luo Lan felt the Martyr's Palace was not the best place for the martyred spirits to return to.

He could not bear to see the soldiers suffer endless darkness in the Martyr's Palace after their deaths. To him, that darkness was like a punishment for bringing them back from the dead, something which transcended the laws of nature.

The crack of the sniper rifle could be heard again. The bullet fired from the high-rise building hit the back of the fleeing superhuman. It was only one shot, but it was enough to leave him lying still on the ground.

But a few seconds later, that hitman's corpse gradually disintegrated to nothing.

Yang Xiaojin frowned. Could this be a kind of substitute power? She had not expected him to get away in the end.

Thinking of this, Yang Xiaojin prepared to head downstairs to give chase. She knew Ren Xiaosu would not want to let any of the hitmen escape.

But before she could get up, she saw Old Xu walking out from a street corner and holding a black saber dripping with blood.

Old Xu raised its hand and signaled to Yang Xiaojin that the superhuman who had escaped was dead.

Five minutes ago, the battle on Old Xu's side had ended decisively. However, Ren Xiaosu did not let it join the battle on Luo Lan's side. Instead, Old Xu quietly hid outside the battlefield in case the enemy had an escape power like Shadow Door.

Yang Xiaojin went downstairs to join up with Ren Xiaosu. When Luo Lan saw her, he immediately greeted her with a smile, "Ms. Xiaojin, long time no see. Sorry for making you come down to Luoyang City personally...."

"We only just met at Mt. Zuoyun." Yang Xiaojin said calmly, "You don't have to thank me; thank Ren Xiaosu instead."

"You two are a couple, so it doesn't matter who I thank." Luo Lan chuckled.

Yang Xiaojin glanced at him but did not refute it.

On the other side, Ren Xiaosu's battle had also come to an end. He was wearing his armor and dragging the almost dead Number One in his hand from the other direction to the front of everyone.

The metallic clanging of the armor as it walked sounded heavy and gloomy. Some of the Luoyang City residents hiding at home quietly looked out their windows. When they saw the armor and Yang Xiaojin in her cap, they immediately thought of the statues on Wangchunmen Boulevard.

Someone got excited. So it turned out their guardian angels had come to Luoyang City to avenge Chief Editor Jiang Xu.

As the armor started peeling away, a lot of people tried to sneak a peek at what Ren Xiaosu looked like. But before they could get a clear look, Ren Xiaosu had already pulled the large hood of his rain poncho over his head.

He dragged the hitman to where Jiang Xu was and stood there quietly. Meanwhile, Yang Xiaojin, Luo Lan, and Zhou Qi did not disturb him.

Ren Xiaosu lowered his head. The hood of his black rain poncho cast a shadow on his face, but everyone could sense how sad he was.

"I've killed some of those who tried to kill you." Ren Xiaosu threw the hitman in his grip onto the ground and announced at the street corner, "Actually, I should've expected that someone would try to kill you, so I should have taken you to the Northwest a long time ago. But I know that you don't want to go there. Because only Luoyang City, a place not controlled by any organization but backed by the neutral Qinghe Group, allows you to do whatever you please without being worried. But if I knew that a day like that day would come, I would've probably knocked you out and dragged you to the Northwest."

"In the past, I vaguely felt that something seemed to have gone wrong with this era. It wasn't until the day you died that I was finally able to confirm this." Ren Xiaosu said, "I know that the dead can't be brought back to life. If life isn't constrained by a time limit, it would become exceptionally meaningless. But I feel that the world can't do without a person like you. So I'd like to ask if you're willing to be brought back to life in another way?"

Off to the side, Luo Lan was stunned. Why did Ren Xiaosu's words sound a little similar to what he had said?

Ren Xiaosu did not avoid Luo Lan and just quietly stared blankly forward.

However, one second, two seconds... One minute, two minutes... For the first time ever, Ren Xiaosu felt that the passage of time was extremely slow and torturous.

However, to his disappointment, Jiang Xu did not appear like the other martyred spirits.

Jiang Xu was gone. He had utterly and completely left this place.

He had led an untainted life, so there were no regrets or the like holding him back when it was his time to leave.

He just departed calmly and with composure.