

First Order 981

Chapter 981 - Taking Over Luoyang City

Having normal life functions was not the only thing that determined whether someone was still alive. If someone continued to live in the memories of others, their will would never actually be dead.

When Ren Xiaosu realized he could not summon Jiang Xu back with the help of the Martyr's Palace, he knew this matter was beyond him.

However, he did not find it regrettable. Perhaps Jiang Xu was also unwilling to continue "living" on as a martyred spirit.

Because at that time, Jiang Xu would just become Ren Xiaosu's vassal. How could an untainted person like Jiang Xu possibly accept such an outcome?

At some point after Ren Xiaosu said those words, Luo Lan even felt that the golden silhouette of Jiang Xu's spirit would gradually appear.

Fortunately, nothing happened. Therefore, Luo Lan was still unaware Ren Xiaosu had copied his power of the Martyr's Palace.

Ren Xiaosu sighed and looked at Yang Xiaojin. "Does your shoulder hurt?"

"Yes." Yang Xiaojin said, "But I can still bear it and fight."

"Alright, let's make a trip to Hope Media first," Ren Xiaosu said. He looked at Luo Lan. "How about y'all? Are you gonna remain in Luoyang City or you gonna leave?"

"Of course we'll stay. Someone has to be held accountable for Mr. Jiang Xu's death no matter what." Luo Lan narrowed his eyes and said, "Leave the hitman in your hands for us. I'll take charge of interrogating him."

"There's no need for that." Ren Xiaosu picked up the hitman by the neck and broke it easily at the spot where Jiang Xu had died. "There's a type of bug wrapped around their hearts that makes them unable to be interrogated. I brought him here so he could be offered as a tribute."

Zhou Qi looked at Ren Xiaosu's calm face and felt a chill run down his spine.

Other people used pig heads, apples, and stuff like that as offerings to commemorate their deceased family and friends, but Ren Xiaosu used human lives.

Suddenly, a window on the fifth floor of a residential building across from the intersection was opened. A child shouted loudly, "Guardian, please avenge Mr. Jiang Xu!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned when he saw the child who looked like he was only eight or nine years old. His eyes were red and his expression sincere.

The adults in that household hurriedly covered the child's mouth and pulled him into the house. They were afraid the child would provoke someone he shouldn't.

The things happening in Luoyang City were no longer something ordinary folks could involve themselves in.

In their panic, the adults wanted to apologize to Ren Xiaosu. Although they did not know what they were apologizing for, they were really afraid their child might have somehow offended Ren Xiaosu.

However, Ren Xiaosu replied, "You're so young. Do you know who Jiang Xu is?"

The child broke free from his parents' grips and leaned against the window sill and shouted, "I know Grandpa Jiang Xu used to be an investigative journalist, but he's now the chief editor of Hope Media. While eating, the adults always say Grandpa Jiang Xu is the only one who dares to speak the truth now."

Ren Xiaosu laughed. "Do you admire him?"

"Yes, I wanna be an investigative journalist when I grow up too!" the child declared loudly.

Ren Xiaosu nodded and said, "Remember your dream. If you still want to be an investigative journalist when you grow up but are worried that someone will threaten your well-being, you can come to the Northwest to look for me. My name is Ren Xiaosu."

After that, Ren Xiaosu led Yang Xiaojin and the others towards Hope Media.

The streets were still empty, with only drooping flowers drenched by the rain and corpses that were flowing with blood remaining.

However, Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a little better.

'Did you see that? Since you died, none of those who claimed to hate murderers dared to step forward to avenge you when the hitmen attacked.

'This is what the real world we live in is like.

'But none of that is important. What's important is that a little of that glow around you has remained behind with us.

'It's just like inheritance and reincarnation. Only time will provide us with an answer.'

...

Hope Media's building was already dilapidated in the first place, so it looked even more desolate in the rain.

When Ren Xiaosu walked in, the reporters and editors in the building got up and looked over silently.

He looked around at these people who were panicking and feeling sad. Everyone's eyes were red, and he wondered how long they had been crying for.

However, even after Jiang Xu left, they still stuck to their posts. Jiang Xu left behind a total of four letters, one of which was for Ren Xiaosu, and one that was addressed to everyone in Hope Media.

Jiang Xu did not make a solemn speech in the letter. He just calmly told them to focus on their work and not let the truth go unreported because of the chaos that followed his death.

He also reminded them to water the natal lily on the window sill of his office. He did not want it to wither and suffer an undeserved death.

In addition, he even congratulated a female reporter in advance on her upcoming wedding. Unfortunately, he could not attend it personally.

The message in the letter was very trivial. The words conveyed were just like an old man holding a cup of hot tea by the stove and speaking to his juniors warmly.

When Zhang Chentong read the letter out loud in the building, everyone was in tears after hearing it.

They now knew about the things Ren Xiaosu had done in Luoyang City, so they were deeply grateful to him for standing up for Hope Media and Jiang Xu again.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu quietly took in everything happening at Hope Media until he saw the wall filled with those people's names. Then he walked forward and carved two words on it seriously with the black saber: Jiang Xu.

Sobbing could be heard in the building as Ren Xiaosu walked silently upstairs to Jiang Xu's office.

In front of the office, Zhang Chentong stuffed a letter into Ren Xiaosu's hands. "The chief editor wrote this to you before he died."

"Thank you." Ren Xiaosu nodded and went into Jiang Xu's office. The natal lily flowerpot on the window sill looked like it had just been cleaned.

Ren Xiaosu took a deep breath and opened the envelope. He stood by the window and quietly read the contents of the letter.

So it turned out Jiang Xu had foreseen his death.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt a great sadness when he saw the lines of farewell.

He did not cry when he found out about Jiang Xu's bad news.

On the way here, he did not cry even though it was raining hard.

He did not cry when he failed to summon Jiang Xu back on Luoyang City's streets.

But as he read the seemingly casual words, he suddenly started tearing up.

He had told Yan Liuyuan not to cry, that this world did not believe in tears. But he could not suppress his sadness.

Ren Xiaosu put the letter he was holding into the palace and placed it in the most conspicuous position in the palace's display cabinets. This was to remind himself of Jiang Xu's hope for him to be another ray of light in the world before his demise.

He turned around and walked out. As he left, he asked Luo Lan, "How many people does the Qing Consortium have in Luoyang City?"

Luo Lan answered calmly, "71. We can deploy them anytime."

Actually, it was taboo to ask something like that, but Luo Lan was very happy to answer. That was because by asking, it meant Ren Xiaosu trusted the Qing Consortium.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Have the Qing Consortium's people retrieve the surveillance footage of the entire city for the past month or so. After that, send it to the Northwest for me and hand it over to Wang Yun."

"That'll be a little difficult. These 71 people aren't really armed with that many weapons. The Qing Consortium did not prioritize Luoyang City as an important location to keep watch over," Luo Lan said matter-of-factly.

There was no need for him to fake their strength and act like he had an impressive force stationed at this place. If he wanted to gain access to all the surveillance cameras in the city, he would have to take over many locations to get them. Moreover, this was the Qinghe Group's territory they were talking about.

Ren Xiaosu did not say anything and just walked straight out of Hope Media's building.

Luo Lan was stunned. He saw Wang Yuchi, Ren Xiaosu's maid, and the others standing outside the entrance. Ren Xiaosu said to Zhou Yingxue, "The Qing Consortium's people will report to you. Can you lead them and take control of Luoyang City?"

Wang Yuchi laughed. "Brother Xiaosu, don't worry. Even without Big Sister Yingxue, the eight of us can do it."

With that, all eight of the students activated their armor. The eight armors looked extremely forbidding. It seemed they had made further modifications to its structure while they were attending school.

Back then, Ren Xiaosu had left behind a lot of nanomachines for them, and later on, Luo Lan sent over another batch of nanomachines. While Ren Xiaosu, Wang Fugui, and the others were working hard for their "family," these students did not idle around either.

And now, they had grown up.

Chapter 982 - Liberated Serfs, Sing

Attempting to take over Luoyang City was a very complicated matter. However, Ren Xiaosu's so-called takeover was not to occupy the entire city. He only sought to obtain the surveillance footage and then lock down the city.

The purpose of retrieving the surveillance footage was so Wang Yun could analyze it. As for how it should be analyzed, not even Ren Xiaosu had it fully figured out. However, he was sure Wang Yun would definitely surprise him.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu wanted to prevent any of the enemies who were still hiding in Luoyang City from escaping.

With the gates shut and Zhou Yingxue's measures in place outside the city, anyone who dared to escape by going over the walls would definitely die.

This time, the move Ren Xiaosu made was probably the biggest one he had taken.

The 71 members of the Qing Consortium who were operating covertly in Luoyang City had already reported to Zhou Yingxue. After that, this group of people marched into the Public Order Division and took control of it.

The director of the Public Order Division in Luoyang City was a distant relative of the Xu clan. Initially, he did not think much of it when he received the news that a large group of people were heading towards the Public Order Division.

However, he discovered through the surveillance cameras several junctions away that these people were fucking carrying guns.

When he realized what Zhou Yingxue and the group were up to, he immediately got his men to draw their weapons from the armory.

Then, after they retrieved their weapons, they realized the opponents they were facing were eight armored beings.

When faced with the eight armored beings, the director of the Public Order Division felt a deep sense of powerlessness. Opponents their weapons were ineffective against was not something their Public Order Division could handle. No matter how many people they had, they could not defeat these eight armored beings.

After Wang Yuchi and the others took control of the situation, Zhou Yingxue swaggered in. She was dressed in an expensive qipao and jewelry, looking extremely pompous.

Wang Yuchi looked at Zhou Yingxue. "Big Sis, what do we do next?"

The eight students in the armor looked to Zhou Yingxue for further instructions. This made her very happy. It was as though she had become a mob boss, with her eight younger brothers serving as her fighters.

This sight immediately made Zhou Yingxue feel like she was the protagonist of the world.

Earlier at the entrance of Hope Media, when the maidservant saw Yang Xiaojin was also here in Luoyang City, she had quickly lowered her head and did not even dare mutter a word. Now that she was here to take on outsiders, she was finally able to hold her head high and sing like a liberated serf.

Zhou Yingxue looked at Wang Yuchi and the others and smiled. Her efforts in cooking for her younger brothers and taking care of their daily needs had not been in vain. In the future, if anyone dared to provoke her, she would just have Wang Yuchi and the others help her solve the problem.

Just like her master's style, anyone who caused a problem would be taken care of!

Zhou Yingxue swaggered over and sat down in the Public Order Division, then said to the director, "We'll be taking charge of the Public Order Division starting from now. Any objections?"

The director of the Public Order Division said with a wry smile, "I'm only an employee, so I don't have the final say."

"So I'll kill you and look for someone who has the authority then?" Zhou Yingxue asked with a serious expression.

The Public Order Division director replied, "You have full command of the Public Order Division. You can have the men do whatever you want."

Zhou Yingxue immediately gave a warm smile. "Alright, I'm also just serving my master. He just killed a lot of people in Luoyang City, and I think your Public Order Division should've watched it, right? Don't try anything funny, or you'll die. Have the Public Order Division retrieve all the surveillance footage of the city streets for me. We're only here to avenge Elder Jiang. After we're done with that, we'll leave."

With that, Zhou Yingxue left behind two students and 20 Qing Consortium members and turned around to head for the garrison troops' base.

Unexpectedly, the garrison troops did not put up any resistance. Instead, they voluntarily welcomed Zhou Yingxue and the others in.

Zhou Yingxue looked curiously at the Luoyang City garrison commander. "Aren't you guys gonna resist a little?"

The maid thought to herself, 'I'm not even getting any sense of accomplishment here!'

The Luoyang City garrison commander said with a wry smile, "The Qinghe Group sent us orders to give our full cooperation. To be honest, we also want to avenge Elder Jiang. If you can find out who did it, that'd be great."

"Eh?" Zhou Yingxue found it a little strange. As the controller of Luoyang City, the Qinghe Group should be the first to come forward to protect their sovereignty. But from the look of things, why did it seem like the other party had willingly handed over their authority?

"Let's go, we'll head straight to the Qinghe Group's HQ." Zhou Yingxue did not even step past the gate of the garrison base. She only left behind two students and 20 Qing Consortium members to supervise the garrison troops in locking down the city before heading straight for the Qinghe Group's headquarters.

When they arrived at the entrance of the Qinghe Building, all of the security personnel were already waiting downstairs. Zhou Yingxue glanced at them before walking in and taking the elevator to the top floor.

Xu Zhi was alone in the office on the top floor.

The leader of the Qinghe Group had always been the Rider Xu Ke. But after Xu Ke handed over the leadership to Xu Zhi, Xu Ke went and chased after his dream of being a Rider. It could be said that the current Qinghe Group was now controlled by this former president of the Qinghe University Student Council.

Xu Zhi stood in his office and watched quietly as the maidservant arrived. Now that he saw the lady he had missed so much, he did not know what to say.

Instead, it was Zhou Yingxue who casually sat down on the sofa in the office. "Where are the Riders of the Qinghe Group? Why did they not even show up after such a big incident?"

Xu Zhi thought for a moment and answered, "They don't serve the Qinghe Group, so they're free to do whatever they want. When Chief Editor Jiang Xu tragically passed, the Riders were helping the escapees and the Pyro Company's troops retreat from the front line. The battle at the Great Wall was extremely tragic, and several of the Riders were also injured in the evacuation. Later on, when the Riders were organizing the escapees to retreat to the South, they were ambushed by the Experimentals. Fortunately, there weren't any major incidents. They should've received the news and should be heading back."

Zhou Yingxue said, "Oh, I see, so they went to help the escapees. I heard you ordered the garrison troops to give us their full cooperation? Why?"

"Because we all want to avenge Mr. Jiang Xu." Xu Zhi said, "The Luoyang City garrison troops had gone to support the Northern battlefront and deployed too many of their troops there. Actually, what's left of them here is only an empty shell, so they can't stop you guys anyway."

Zhou Yingxue nodded. "Smart, that's really sensible of you. Alright, since you guys are so cooperative, there's no need for me to take any action. You can just sit back while we handle things from here."

After that, Zhou Yingxue headed downstairs. Xu Zhi hesitated for a long time before suddenly asking, "Can I talk with you after we find the culprit who killed Mr. Jiang Xu?"

Zhou Yingxue walked into the elevator. She turned around to look at Xu Zhi, who had chased after her and was standing outside the elevator. "Kid, I'll have to check with my master regarding such matters. But I can't be bothered to ask him since I don't think there's anything to talk to you about. You're too weak."

When the elevator door closed, Xu Zhi stood outside looking despondent.

Zhou Yingxue made a show of her newfound authority at many places in Luoyang City. She took over all of the places Ren Xiaosu wanted her to take control of, as well as a number of places Ren Xiaosu did not ask her to.

It was not that she was hardworking but that she enjoyed the feeling of being in the limelight today.

The maidservant had led a very oppressive life ever since she was young. When she was a child, she was really poor and did not have any money. After joining the Yang Consortium, she still had to obey her superiors' orders. But after she met Ren Xiaosu, not only did she become stronger and could do whatever she wanted, but others also started looking at her with reverence.

This made the maidservant feel like her life had been raised to a higher level.

However, some people were just this strange. Even though she had become stronger, her mentality was still that of a simple woman. She only wanted to go around and show off, but she did not think that since she was already so powerful, there was actually no need for her to act so flamboyantly.

Moreover, theoretically speaking, Ren Xiaosu could not at all beat her, and neither could Yang Xiaojin. However, Zhou Yingxue seemed to have gotten used to her role as a maid.

Ren Xiaosu and the others moved into the residence Luo Lan had prepared for them. In fact, the Qing Consortium was extremely rich, as they went around purchasing houses and land in Luoyang City. In the entire neighborhood of National Treasure Garden on Peony Avenue, the Qing Consortium alone had purchased eight villas.

During the war in the Southwest, many of the big shots from the Li Consortium and the Yang Consortium had fled here and concealed their identities, living in the properties they had bought here long ago.

On the same night, Zhou Yingxue returned with her subordinates. Her younger brothers behind her were carrying black boxes in their hands that were filled with external hard drives that contained surveillance footage spanning nearly a month. All of the surveillance footage in the city had been gathered together.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Wang Yuchi and the others. "The Central Plains have descended into chaos. From now on, no matter who tries to seize control of the world, Luoyang City will no longer be peaceful. Moreover, your identities have been made public this time. If anyone targets me in the future, I'm afraid that they'll make a move on y'all as well. So I want y'all to bring these boxes back to the Northwest. Wang Yun's already waiting at Stronghold 144, so you can just hand them over to him."

It would take at least three days to drive from Luoyang City to Stronghold 144, and five days to Fortress 178. With Wang Yuchi and the others escorting the boxes, Ren Xiaosu could feel at ease.

If the students were intercepted, not even a regiment of soldiers could catch the eight of them once they transformed into armored beings and ran off into the wilderness.

Wang Yuchi looked at Ren Xiaosu. "Brother Xiaosu, we want to stay behind and help you."

"No need." Ren Xiaosu patted Wang Yuchi on the shoulder. "The surveillance footage is more important. We can only find the murderer of Mr. Jiang Xu if we send it back in time. Moreover, Uncle Fugui and the others miss y'all heaps. It's time to reunite with them."

But Zhou Yingxue suddenly said, "Why don't I send the surveillance footage back to the Northwest instead? It would be much safer if I did it..."

To be honest, Zhou Yingxue found it really satisfying to strut around during the day. But when she came back at night and saw Yang Xiaojin here, she felt oppressed again. Therefore, Luoyang City was not as good as the Northwest. It was still more exciting to be in the Northwest where she would be far away from her master and mistress.

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "No, you have to stay behind. I still need you to lock down the city."

Zhou Yingxue hurriedly said, "Master, look at how cooperative the Qinghe Group is now. The garrison troops have gone onto the walls and started implementing martial law. All of the city gates have also been shut. You should also know the mastermind behind this is definitely one of the consortiums. If it's really the Wang Consortium, Wang Yuchi and the others will be in great danger. That artificial intelligence of theirs feels pretty powerful."

These words reminded Ren Xiaosu of something. Luo Lan had mentioned Zero might've taken control of the Qing Consortium's nanosoldiers, especially the 2,000 nanosoldiers that supported the battle at Mt. Zuoyun.

If it were really Zero that killed Jiang Xu, the eight students would probably be in danger if the other party used those 2,000 nanosoldiers to intercept them to destroy the evidence.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "Alright, you can go with them then. Remember, don't stop along the way. I need y'all to deliver these boxes to Wang Yun as quickly as possible."

The maidservant broke into a smile. "Alright, Master, don't worry. It doesn't matter who tries to intercept us. They can't stop us anyway."

After that, the maidservant happily went off to pack her things.

With this, the boxes would definitely be safe. There were not many people in the world who could stop the maidservant, not even Zero.

After everything was handled, Ren Xiaosu finally heaved a sigh of relief. Next to him, Luo Lan said, "Don't worry, we'll definitely find the mastermind."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu nodded.

All he needed to do now was wait patiently. There had to still be people in Luoyang City they had not identified yet. Ren Xiaosu needed to turn Luoyang City upside down and find the answer.

Ren Xiaosu thought of something. "By the way, Luo Lan, aren't you already a supernatural being? Why do you still need the black medicine?"

Luo Lan's expression became strange. "Ahem, how can you bring that up in public?"

Ren Xiaosu chuckled. "What's so secretive about it? There's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Well, it's like this. I think my body is a little frail." Luo Lan explained, "Ever since I was 15, my urine started split-streaming. When I went to the hospital, the doctors could not find anything wrong with me. But when the doctors heard that I started split-streaming at such a young age, they said I might have inflammation or that my bladder control is not strong enough."

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. "No way. They diagnosed that just because you had a split stream?"

Luo Lan glanced to the side and saw that Yang Xiaojin and the others had gone outside to talk about something else, so he whispered, "It's mainly because it splits a little too much...."

Ren Xiaosu also had a strange expression on his face. Just how many streams did his urine split into to make the doctors think Fatty Luo was frail?

Luo Lan hurriedly said, "That's why I've always placed a lot of emphasis on improving my health by taking all kinds of tonics after that. However, my condition would sometimes get better and sometimes worse. The split-streaming happens on and off. It's really strange. But after I took the black medicine, I felt extremely energetic and I didn't have any problems during that period. Later, when I came to the Central Plains and stopped taking the black medicine, it started splitting again. That's why I asked you for the black medicine."

"Is that so?" Ren Xiaosu lowered his head and pondered it. "Let me ask you something. When did Zhou Qi awaken his power?"

"I don't know." Luo Lan said, "That guy's really smart. We didn't even know he had awakened his power for many years until one time I went to the reservoir for a swim. I had a cramp and had to be saved by him, which was when I found out he had awakened his powers."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. "Then try to remember. Is it possible that the frequency of your urine split-streaming happened like this? When you were with Zhou Qi, you would experience the split-streaming. But when you were not with Zhou Qi, there was no split-streaming?"

Luo Lan was speechless.

Luo Lan suddenly looked at Zhou Qi, next to him. Then he threw a punch straight at him!

Before Zhou Qi knew what was going on, he was punched in the face. He roared, "Damn, fatty, have you gone crazy?"

The two of them started wrestling each other.

Chapter 984 - The Average Person Has Their Own Way Of Living

The next morning, when Luo Lan and Zhou Qi appeared again, each of them had a black eye.

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu had witnessed many battles between supernatural beings before, but this was the first time he had witnessed two supernatural beings swinging their fists at each other.

"Come on, let's go and eat," Ren Xiaosu said, stifling his laughter.

After crying his heart out at Hope Media, Ren Xiaosu's mood improved. He no longer felt as gloomy as before.

The deceased were no longer around, but those who were still living would have to search for light and hope again. There was no need to wallow in sorrow, and life would still have to go on.

When Luo Lan heard Ren Xiaosu's greeting, he grumbled, "We don't have to go out to eat. We can just get a group of chefs to come and cook at the villa."

Ren Xiaosu laughed and said, "Forget that. There's no need to mobilize so many people just for a meal. It just so happens that I want to walk the streets too."

"Sure," Luo Lan agreed.

Dawn had just broken as Luo Lan, Zhou Qi, Ren Xiaosu, and Yang Xiaojin walked out of the neighborhood. The rain had stopped, so the air smelled much fresher now.

After what happened in Luoyang City over the past few days, fewer and fewer pedestrians were out on the streets. A lot of them did not even dare to go to work anymore, and many of the factories also informed their workers to go on vacation.

As such, the streets were rather quiet.

Since yesterday afternoon, a rumor started spreading in Luoyang City. Apparently, Luoyang City was no longer under the Qinghe Group's control, and that there had been a change in leadership.

This news alarmed a lot of people. As a result, Ren Xiaosu and company saw many vehicles parked at the entrance just as they stepped out of the neighborhood. Every one of the vehicles looked more impressive than the last.

Ren Xiaosu took a look at those vehicles. "Those sedans look pretty nice."

"Mhm, they're high-end cars produced by the Zhou Consortium's factories. In recent years, it's become the exclusive vehicle for the upper class," Luo Lan replied.

"Why're they all parked at the entrance?" Ren Xiaosu looked at the vehicles in confusion. "Do they belong to the residents of the neighborhood? Why didn't they park their cars inside?"

Luo Lan laughed. "It looks like you haven't experienced something like this before. These people aren't residents of the neighborhood. They're here to look for you."

"Why're they looking for me?" Ren Xiaosu could not understand.

"Since you've taken over Luoyang City, they're here to call on you, of course." Luo Lan said calmly, "Look, the show's about to begin."

As soon as he finished speaking, it was as though Luo Lan had seen what would happen next. When the people in the vehicles saw Ren Xiaosu and company walking out, they hurriedly got out of their vehicles and broke into a trot towards them.

Although they did not know what Ren Xiaosu looked like, they knew about Luo Lan and Zhou Qi.

The person who could have Luo Lan and Zhou Qi accompanying him would definitely be that person from the Northwest.

When the residents nearby saw the sight of so many of Luoyang City's big shots gathering together, they understood what was going on.

But nobody thought much of it. Actually, Ren Xiaosu had already earned a very high standing among the people of Luoyang City after two major battles. Therefore, everyone did not feel too flustered about Ren Xiaosu taking charge of the city.

Rumor had it that Ren Xiaosu was also a friend of the Riders. In the past year, the Riders had left Luoyang City one by one, so everyone felt a little insecure without their protection. Now that a new overseer had arrived, everyone felt it was actually a rather good thing.

They just did not know what would become of the Qinghe Group.

When the well-known figures of Luoyang City came over, Ren Xiaosu looked at them calmly. "Alright, y'all don't have to come here to call on me. I'll leave after I've taken revenge, so I'm not really going to take charge of Luoyang City."

When everyone heard that, they realized the Northwest had no intention of taking over their city.

Ren Xiaosu waved them off. "Don't be an eyesore here. Go on to wherever you need to be."

"OK, OK, we shan't keep you occupied then." When the group saw that Ren Xiaosu did not seem too happy, they quickly bowed and ran off.

Luo Lan said with a smile, "When you return to the Northwest in the future, you'll face a similar situation. All of a sudden, high-ranking officials, rich businessmen, and anyone who wants to earn a livelihood in your territory will start approaching you. That's because you'll be the future owner of the Northwest, and their livelihoods will be controlled by you. My younger brother, Qing Zhen, took refuge in the military base not only because he wanted to avoid assassination attempts, but also because he was afraid that such people would keep coming to call on him. It's way too annoying. He's a person who likes peace and quiet, so he can't stand it."

Ren Xiaosu watched vehicles depart and sighed, "This is the way of the world, I guess."

Luo Lan belly laughed and said, "This is politics."

With a laugh, the wound he sustained during the scuffle with Zhou Qi last night reopened.

Luo Lan said indignantly, "I had such a slim figure back in the day. But ever since I started stuffing myself with all kinds of tonics when I was 15, I ended up like this. When my father was still alive, he even despised me for eating too much. Now that the truth's out, if it were anyone else who pranked me like that, I would've shot them dead!"

Zhou Qi rolled his eyes. "It was just a joke, wasn't it? Is there a need to overreact like that?"

"I should've fucking known. No matter how frail I might be, my urine couldn't possibly have split into five streams!" Luo Lan was still angry.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu and the others arrived at a breakfast diner across the street. It seemed like there were no customers in the restaurant because no one dared to leave their homes.

When the owner-manager saw that it was the four of them, he hurriedly welcomed them, "What would you all like to eat? We have rice vermicelli, hot pepper soup, millet porridge, and wontons."

"Give me a bowl of wontons," Luo Lan said.

Ren Xiaosu wanted the chicken vermicelli, Yang Xiaojin wanted millet porridge, and Zhou Qi also ordered a bowl of wontons.

After the four of them had a simple meal, they were surprised to find that the breakfast diner's dishes were quite tasty.

Luo Lan started chatting with the owner-manager as though they were friends. "Boss, Luoyang City has been such a mess for the past two days. You're still operating your business?"

The middle-aged owner smiled amiably. "No matter how chaotic it is, we still have to make a living."

Before leaving, Luo Lan took out his wallet and was about to pay up. But to everyone's surprise, the middle-aged owner rubbed his hands together and said with a smile, "Since it's the four of you who came to eat, you don't have to pay. Not only will you not have to pay today, but there won't be a need for you to pay when you come again in the future."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "Why not?"

The owner explained, "The news of the four of you avenging Chief Editor Jiang Xu in the city yesterday has spread throughout Luoyang City. Although we ordinary folks were also very angry, we didn't dare to step forward to take revenge for the chief editor. But the four of you taking revenge for him is equivalent to being the saviors of the people of Luoyang City. Many of the owners in the Food Business Union have said that no matter where the four of you choose to dine in the future, as long as you're in Luoyang City, you won't have to fork over a single cent to eat. This is something we ordinary folks can do, so I hope you all won't decline."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned.

Actually, when he left the intersection yesterday, he was still feeling a little resentful. Everyone clearly said they respected Jiang Xu very much, but no one came forward to help him when he died, and no one dared to step forward either when the hitmen appeared yesterday.

Now, Ren Xiaosu felt relieved. That was because the owner had said, "This is something we ordinary folks can do."

Ren Xiaosu smiled. That was right. The average people had their own way of living, so there was no need for him to force everyone to be like Jiang Xu.

Wasn't today's free breakfast also a ray of light left behind by Jiang Xu? Although that light was still faint, it was never truly extinguished.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu thanked the owner with a smile before leaving the shop.

For the first time since he received the bad news, all of the dark emotions he had were swept away.. All there was left to do now was to wipe out the remaining enemies.

Chapter 985 - Gift

"Did you send me back to the Northwest so you could take Zhou Yingxue to Luoyang City with you?" Yang Xiaojin asked Ren Xiaosu nonchalantly as she sat down on the sofa.

Ren Xiaosu, who had been sitting on the sofa and reading a book, trembled. "I only asked you to return to the Northwest because I care about you. There were no other motivations. I got Zhou Yingxue to come to Luoyang City because her superpower is more suitable for such large-scale battles."

Before this, Yang Xiaojin did not make any mention of this matter. As a result, Ren Xiaosu thought they were already past that.

However, Yang Xiaojin did not mention it because she was considerate of the overall situation and did not want to argue over such trifles during critical moments. However, this did not mean she had forgotten about it.

Ren Xiaosu quickly put down the book in his hand and walked over to ask, "Does your shoulder still hurt? Do you want me to massage it for you?"

"It's OK." Yang Xiaojin waved it off. "Although applying the black medicine on it didn't work as miraculously as when used on external wounds, it still recovered quicker than usual. It doesn't hurt that much anymore."

Someone from the Qing Consortium who was in charge of the security around the villa came in and reported to Ren Xiaosu, "There's someone who'd like to see you."

"Who is it? It must be something very important. I better go handle it." Ren Xiaosu followed the Qing Consortium personnel and walked out.

Yang Xiaojin's eyebrows twitched. She wanted to fire a shot at Ren Xiaosu's back with her black sniper rifle.

The person who came to see Ren Xiaosu was the director of the Public Order Division of Luoyang City. Actually, this was not the only person who had come to pay Ren Xiaosu a visit. After chasing away a group of them earlier this morning, their enthusiasm did not subside.

In fact, authority was something that could make everyone circle around you. As long as you had the authority, not even beating these people with a stick could stop them from flocking to you.

However, the director of the Public Order Division had also heard about what happened in the morning. He was here purely to express his attitude and prove he did come to call on Ren Xiaosu before.

After all, some high-ranking officials were very erratic. If you went to call on them, they might chase you away as though they were very moral.

But if you didn't, they would remember and mark you in their minds.

So actually, driving them away was just an act.

Now that Luoyang City had been taken over by Ren Xiaosu, who knew exactly which type of person he was?

The director of the Public Order Division had been involved in politics for a long time and had seen too many unwritten rules practiced. Therefore, he felt he had to make this trip regardless. It didn't matter even if he got chased away since that wouldn't hurt him.

However, just as he was mentally prepared to be driven away, he saw Ren Xiaosu walking out enthusiastically to welcome him, and he even took the initiative to shake hands with him!

The director of the Public Order Division was a little flattered. "Oh? You actually came out to meet me? I'm a little nervous."

He thought to himself, 'It's just as I thought! The group of people who came in the morning were simply not important enough. That's why they got chased away. As the director of the Public Order Division, of course I won't get rejected! I still carry more weight!'

Ren Xiaosu gripped the director's hand and chuckled, "You must be the director of the Public Order Division of Luoyang City, right? Good job in gathering the surveillance footage."

The director of the Public Order Division felt touched and said, "You're too kind. I'm really ashamed that you had to trouble yourself over such a trivial matter. I heard about you a while ago. You were totally

our Luoyang City's guardian angel during the Battle of Wangchunmen Boulevard. Since it's the first time I'm meeting you despite hearing about you for some time, I've brought you some gifts."

Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. "You're too polite. What did you bring?"

The director of the Public Order Division was stumped. 'He's even asking what I've brought so directly? What a straightforward leader...'

He smiled politely and said, "It's just some local specialty products of Luoyang City. I won't disturb you further, so I'll be heading back now."

Ren Xiaosu had a Qing Consortium soldier take the gifts from him. Then, when he saw Yang Xiaojin eyeing him with hostility, he hurriedly said to the director of the Public Order Division, "Don't go yet. You must have something very important to report since you came all the way here to see me."

The Public Order Division's director was stunned for a moment before hurriedly saying with a smile, "No, I just came to call on you. There's nothing important."

Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, "There is!"

The director of the Public Order Division was confused.

'What's the meaning of this?' The Public Order Division's director was dumbfounded.

On this day, the director of the Public Order Division was held back by Ren Xiaosu for over an hour before he was allowed to leave. After he returned, news that the director of the Public Order Division was highly regarded by the new owner of Luoyang City spread throughout the city.

Although it was very agonizing during the chat, the director of the Public Order Division was extremely high-spirited when he got back.

Moreover, he couldn't wait to tell everyone that he was on Team Northwest.

Actually, everyone knew that even though the Qinghe Group had a very powerful business team, if the consortiums were to target this place, the Qinghe Group would not have any chance of resisting them.

Fortress 178 had already gained control of the entire Northwest and become one of the top forces in the entire Alliance of Strongholds. In that case, they were a very good backer, right?

Although Ren Xiaosu and company had said they would leave after killing the enemies, everyone felt it was not possible a consortium would give up such a juicy prize when it was right in front of them. Fortress 178 shouldn't be an exception either, right?

After sending off the director of the Public Order Division, Ren Xiaosu opened the box of "local specialties" and had a look. Wow, there were eight gold bars in it!

Ren Xiaosu even wanted to shout for the morning people to come back and see him. He wasn't in a great mood in the morning, so he did not want to deal with them at the time. But now, he was in a much better mood.

Luo Lan and Zhou Qi went out for a walk before returning with various snacks they had bought on North Avenue. There were chicken wings, fried gluten...

"Xiaosu, Xiaojin, come and have something to eat. The food in Luoyang City is delicious. I heard in the Southwest that Luoyang City's North Avenue is one of the top ten food streets in the Alliance of Strongholds." Luo Lan chuckled.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of something and asked Luo Lan, "Don't eat yet. Let me ask you about something very important. Do you know of any other organizations that can manufacture nanomachines?"

"No." Luo Lan answered, "As you know, only the Yang Consortium and the Li Consortium had this technology in the past. Later, it was all diverted to the Qing Consortium. Those two consortiums developed this technology because they excavated a research base in the Southwest that happened to have information on the technology. Later, the Li Consortium developed a technology for nanomachines to interface with a person's neurons. Only then did they consider developing the nanomachines for military use. In the past, it served as medical technology to remove thrombuses in blood vessels."

Ren Xiaosu frowned.

But Luo Lan then added, "But I think the Wang Consortium should've gotten their hands on this technology by now too. You know about the nanosoldiers that were abducted a few days ago too. The Wang Consortium's AI is way too powerful. We didn't expect it to be able to directly invade all the networks. We weren't at all able to stop it."

"We can disregard what happened in the past few days," Ren Xiaosu said. If Zero had only recently gotten its hands on the manufacturing process of the nanomachines, the timing of the incidents would not match up, so it should not have anything to do with this matter.

Luo Lan suddenly thought of something and said, "But if you want to talk about who has the nanomachines, there's probably something we can link it to. After we manufactured the nanomachines, we sent a batch to Luoyang City, which you're also aware of. We even sent a batch to the Zhou Consortium and the Northwest as a gift. However, the nanomachines that were sent to Luoyang City and the Northwest did not have a backdoor program installed. Meanwhile, we added a backdoor program to the Zhou Consortium's nanomachines, which I believe they won't discover. Of course, even though they won't discover it, they'll definitely still be on guard against us. They aren't likely to let anyone particularly important use them, I think."

As he spoke, Luo Lan noticed Ren Xiaosu's expression turning solemn.

Chapter 986 - A Terrifying Memory

"What's the matter?" Luo Lan saw Ren Xiaosu pondering with his head lowered like he had caught onto something he said.

"Are you sure that the Qing Consortium has only given their nanomachines to the Zhou Consortium, the Northwest, and me?"

"Of course, I was the one who personally made the arrangements to send them to them," Luo Lan said.

This time, Ren Xiaosu seemed to have figured many things out.

Some nanosoldiers had suddenly appeared in Stronghold 61 and attacked Jiang Xu.

At that time, Ren Xiaosu was wondering if it was Zero or the Qing Consortium behind that attack. But now, two more organizations were added to the list of possibilities.

A small portion of the nanomachines sent to Luoyang City by Luo Lan were now in Ren Xiaosu, while the rest were given to Wang Yuchi and the others. Ren Xiaosu firmly believed they would not participate in the killing of Jiang Xu.

For the batch of nanomachines that were sent to the Northwest, Ren Xiaosu also firmly believed that the people there would not do something like that. The nanomachines sent there by the Qing Consortium would surely be placed under heavy guard, so if someone had secretly stolen a batch, they would definitely have found out about the missing nanomachines.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu still had the Great Hoodwinker confirm whether those nanomachines were fully accounted for.

So then, the only suspect left was the Zhou Consortium.

The Zhou Consortium and the Wang Consortium had a long-standing feud. At the beginning, the Wang Consortium used trade to drive many of the Zhou Consortium's refugees into the mountains to secretly breed silkworms by purchasing their silk at high prices. Later, when Stronghold 61 recruited the refugees from their territory, many of the Zhou Consortium's factories were forced to shut down.

All the organizations in the Central Plains had the intention of annexing one another, so it was normal for them to guard against each other.

Seeing that the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium were about to fall into the hands of the Wang Consortium, how could the Zhou Consortium possibly not panic in such circumstances?

The killing of Jiang Xu would inevitably set the entire Alliance of Strongholds against the Wang Consortium, which was something the Zhou Consortium wished to see happen.

Even though the Qing Consortium had given some nanomachines to the Zhou Consortium, the Zhou Consortium did not dare to let their important figures use it. Instead, they trained up nanosoldiers to go and assassinate Jiang Xu. If these nanosoldiers were discovered by the Wang Consortium during that time, the Wang Consortium would also start suspecting the Qing Consortium, deepening the animosity between them.

Moreover, if the blame for killing Luo Lan could be cast on the Wang Consortium, and the Qing Consortium ended up declaring war on them, the Zhou Consortium would be able to hide behind this conflict, making that the best deal in the world for them.

As the saying went, "If no mastermind or culprit is found after an incident, you should first suspect the person who benefits most from it."

So when Luo Lan mentioned the Zhou Consortium, Ren Xiaosu felt that everything made sense.

All the evidence gathered so far pointed to that logical possibility.

But even though it could be explained, Ren Xiaosu still decided to wait for Wang Yun's analysis.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Lan and asked, "Since the nanomachines that were given to the Zhou Consortium had a backdoor program installed, can you find out about the whereabouts of those nanomachines using it?"

Luo Lan shook his head. "We usually don't activate the backdoor in case someone finds out about it, but we can do it. However, we can't track them as our military network has just been hacked by the AI."

...

Three days later, Zhou Yingxue arrived at Stronghold 144 with Wang Yuchi and the others by car.

On the day after they left Luoyang City, a secret group of troops suddenly intercepted them in the wilderness. However, the outcome was already determined, and they were all held off by Zhou Yingxue.

During the encounter, Zhou Yingxue had deliberately spared a group of enemy troops for Wang Yuchi and the others to practice on. She hoped they could get used to fast-paced battles as soon as possible.

In the end, a strange scene played out. The creeper vine rounded up all the enemies who were still alive for Wang Yuchi and the rest to practice their skills on. Meanwhile, Zhou Yingxue rooted for them outside the ring.

This made the enemies who had intercepted them feel like they were really dumb for attempting to come and kill these people.

How was this even a fair battle? They were simply being humiliated!

If it weren't for the fact that Ren Xiaosu urgently wanted the surveillance footage to be analyzed, Zhou Yingxue could probably continue torturing them for another two days. After all, where else could she find such outstanding sparring opponents?

Her lovely little brothers needed a sparring session like this!

As a matter of fact, Zhou Yingxue treated Wang Yuchi and the others really well, and it wasn't just the feeling of "kinship" that had developed when she was taking care of them. Zhou Yingxue thought that if her master took in another maidservant in the future, her younger brothers could stand on her side and speak up for her.

Although Zhou Yingxue felt that Ren Xiaosu was unlikely to take in another maidservant with Yang Xiaojin around, wasn't she just taking precautions?

When they arrived at Stronghold 144, Wang Yun, the Great Hoodwinker, and the others were already waiting at the city gate.

The Great Hoodwinker had helped Ren Xiaosu confirm that all the nanomachines given by the Qing Consortium were stored at Fortress 178 and everything was intact. This made Ren Xiaosu heave a sigh of relief. At the very least, they could rule out the possibility of a spy among their people.

Next, it would have to depend on Wang Yun's performance.

Three days ago, Ren Xiaosu had ordered the Great Hoodwinker to prepare a venue for Wang Yun to analyze the surveillance footage. After receiving the black boxes, they immediately made a trip to the military base near Stronghold 144.

A space had been vacated here to make room for a large conference room with countless screens mounted on the walls.

Zhang Xiaoman connected the ports with his men. When they were powered on, all the screens lit up and displayed different scenes.

Wang Yun stood silently facing the screens with his arms crossed. He burned all of the images into his mind as he watched them so he could analyze everything accurately later.

"Play the recordings back at triple speed." Wang Yun said, "Otherwise, it'll take a month to finish watching all the surveillance footage. Future Commander can't wait that long."

The upper right corners of the screens were marked with serial numbers. If Wang Yun needed to pause any of the screens, he would just say whichever number.

When the recordings were replayed, Wang Yun stood silently in front of the screens and watched. Meanwhile, dozens of the Northwest's intelligence agents assigned by the Great Hoodwinker surrounded Wang Yun and assisted him in his work.

All of them were all here to serve him.

Before this, Wang Yun watched the surveillance footage of Ren Xiaosu's battle in Luoyang City first and memorized the faces of all the hitmen who had appeared in the footage. As such, Wang Yun would definitely find any traces of the enemy as long as they appeared in the surveillance footage that spanned an entire month.

Suddenly, Wang Yun said, "Pause Screen A17. The man in A18 moved off and reappeared in A17 around ten seconds later holding a black plastic bag. In that short 12 seconds, someone must've interacted with him at the surveillance camera's blind spot. Take a screenshot of this man's appearance and send it to Future Commander. Let him find and interrogate this person in Luoyang City. Alright, let's continue watching. Replay all the surveillance footage from the cameras around A17. I want to find out who the suspect is meeting with!"

The Great Hoodwinker and the others were surprised as they looked at this sight of over a hundred screens in front of them.. Previously, they only knew Wang Yun had an amazingly good memory, but they did not expect it to be this terrifying.

Chapter 987 - Everyone's War

In the era of the Rise of Gods, most people were accustomed to the fact that supernatural beings had long transcended the level of normal people.

But the people around Wang Yun started to overlook his superpower and instead became more focused on the value he brought.

Honestly, no matter how good he was at controlling the air or how good his combat skills were, he was still not a match for Zhou Yingxue.

However, no other person could take Wang Yun's place and do whatever he was doing.

Even though there were hundreds of screens placed together, he could still accurately notice someone holding an extra plastic bag in their hands after passing through a surveillance camera's blind spot. This memory and analytical ability were just like superpowers.

In fact, it was no different from having superpowers.

When the images were rapidly replayed on the screens, Wang Yun was the only one speaking in the entire meeting room. Everyone even felt like they needed to hold their breath for fear of disturbing him.

Under his instructions, the soldier next to him rewound all of the surveillance footage from the cameras around A17. It only took Wang Yun nine seconds to point at Screen A21 and say, "Pause right there. That's him! Send the image to Future Commander. Seek out those two people first."

Following that, Wang Yun spent the next six hours to identify over 20 suspicious people. Moreover, all of the identified suspects had damning evidence against them. When everyone saw what were in the feeds, they understood that Wang Yun was not just randomly pointing out suspects.

Some of them suddenly had something extra in their hands, or their shirts had become creased differently like they were concealing something underneath.

Then Wang Yun also found the appearances of some hitmen and identified other suspicious people they had interacted with before.

Wang Yun suddenly stopped and looked at the Great Hoodwinker. "Does Future Commander have enough manpower? I realized there must still be other people covertly supporting these hitmen. If too many suspects are identified, can Future Commander round them up?"

"Don't worry." The Great Hoodwinker replied, "I've already arranged for some of our intelligence agents to assemble at Luoyang City."

"OK." Wang Yun nodded. "Make a note of what I'm about to say. When that hitman in B31 passed by the surveillance camera, he looked towards the upper right corner a total of 17 times. The footage shows there's a residential building there. I suspect someone was signaling to them from a safe house in that direction. C27 shows..."

Wang Yun pointed out seven suspicious locations in one breath, leaving everyone in awe.

A few hours later, even Wang Fengyuan, who was the director of the intelligence agency in the Northwest, was alerted by what was happening here. He took his own private car and hurried here from the stronghold next door.

It was not for any other reason than to witness this scene for himself.

The Great Hoodwinker lamented to Wang Fengyuan, "Didn't I tell you so? We should've poached this guy for the Prosperous Northwest a long time ago. I already knew that he had a very good memory, but I didn't expect it to be this scary. Look at him now. He's pointing out all the suspicious people indiscriminately. I feel that after Future Commander has rounded up all the suspects in Luoyang City, Luoyang City will probably become the only spy-free zone in the entire Alliance of Strongholds. Isn't this as good as flushing out all the spies hiding in Luoyang City?"

Wang Fengyuan thought a little deeper. "Don't let him tire himself out. Remember, there should be a proper balance between work and rest. After this, we can gather all of the surveillance footage from our Northwest's strongholds and let him go through them. Haven't we always had a headache trying to suss out those spies? Now's our chance."

A thought struck their minds at the same time. They had found a treasure!

Regardless of organization, identifying and capturing spies operating covertly in their territory was an extremely difficult task, because the spies of the other organizations were well-hidden. They could be disguised as butchers, factory workers, soldiers, or even officers.

But it was different now that they had Wang Yun. Someone like him was simply the bane of spies.

However, Wang Fengyuan was a little curious. "This guy wasn't so capable when he was with the Kong Consortium, was he?"

However, Wang Yun overheard this. He said while staring at the screens, "Sometimes, it's more advantageous not to catch the spies even if you've identified them, isn't it? And I always pursued promotion when I was with the Kong Consortium. If I really turned the Kong Consortium into a spy-free zone, where would my accomplishments come from? Would my superior kick me to the curb after I outlived my usefulness? Actually, I never revealed this much of my power when I was with the Kong Consortium. Because my superior was someone who got jealous of others."

Wang Fengyuan got a sudden realization. So this was the reason why. He laughed and asked, "Then why are you revealing it now?"

Wang Yun said calmly, "Future Commander told me the Northwest is different from other organizations. In truth, I didn't believe it at first. But when I came here after the battle at Mt. Zuoyun, I really felt that the Northwest is quite different. Now, I'm no longer interested in chasing after promotion. If I assist Future Commander well, I'll naturally feel satisfied with how he'll reward me. It's not about money and power but getting that sense of achievement."

In the Battle of Mt. Zuoyun, Wang Yun, P5092, Ji Zi'ang, and the others performed their duties with diligence and worked together for the same goal. With just 6,000 soldiers, they defeated 70,000 barbarians.

For people like Wang Yun and P5092, having this sense of achievement and happiness was actually at a higher level than money and power. Wang Yun felt he had moved on to a higher level of satisfaction and had different goals now.

A large-scale sting operation for the suspects in Luoyang City began.

Wang Yun had only sent over some blurry images of the suspects' appearances, so Ren Xiaosu was initially worried it would not be easy to find them, because he did not know their identities and whereabouts.

The Luoyang City garrison was only an empty shell without enough manpower. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu only had a few dozen people with him, so it would be extremely difficult to capture the suspects.

However, the intelligence agents sent by the Great Hoodwinker would soon arrive at Luoyang City, and there would be over 200 of them.

Later, when Ren Xiaosu went to the restaurant opposite the neighborhood for a meal, the owner-manager who had waived the bill for his breakfast asked him if there were any clues regarding Jiang Xu's murderer. Ren Xiaosu casually mentioned the difficulties he faced.

The owner's eyes lit up. "You can put up the photos of the suspects at the entrance of the neighborhood. I'll gather the residents in the stronghold to help you identify them!"

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Are they willing to do that?"

"While we might not dare take revenge for Mr. Jiang Xu, do you think we're such cowards that we can't even step forward to identify these people? Only if we seek out these culprits will we be safe. We're all very happy to be able to do something small for Mr. Jiang Xu." The owner said, "Please get ready here. I'll go and get everyone over there!"

On the same day, Ren Xiaosu had the Qing Consortium's people put up the photos sent by Wang Yun at the entrance of the neighborhood.

To Ren Xiaosu's surprise, the neighborhood's entrance was fully packed with people trying to take a look at the photos.

Someone pointed at a middle-aged man's photo and suddenly shouted, "I know him! He used to work at the factory with me! His name is Bai Yunpeng!"

Ren Xiaosu looked at the large crowd that had gathered outside the neighborhood. It was as though this had become everyone's war in Luoyang City. He suddenly felt he would definitely find and arrest all of the suspects!

"Go, copy the photos and make them into leaflets and distribute them to everyone." Ren Xiaosu said, "It'll be too difficult for everyone to see if they have to crowd together like this."

For some reason, Ren Xiaosu was suddenly heartened. When he looked at these people, he suddenly realized there was no difference between stronghold residents and refugees. These people were forced to grow up in this era, but all of them still retained a little bit of enthusiasm.

Just as Mr.. Jiang Xu had said, "I might have seen more of the darkness in this world than all of you, but I still love this world."

Chapter 988 - Sting Operation

More and more people started gathering outside the neighborhood on Peony Avenue. Some of the Luoyang City residents worked during the day, but after hearing that their help was needed to identify the culprits, they immediately rushed over at night after work without going home.

Some of them even rushed over with their families to do their part for the cause.

The rowdy crowd that had gathered at the neighborhood's entrance made it a little difficult for vehicles to enter. If this were the past, the residents of the neighborhood would have chased them out. But today, they turned a blind eye and acted like they didn't see them.

After all, no one was a match for that person staying at Villa 27.

It didn't take long for Luo Lan's men to print the leaflets and start distributing them at the entrance.

This time, the Qing Consortium's people did their work very meticulously. They even took the time to explain the situation to everyone, "Everyone, please look at the photo of the young man I'm distributing right now. You can obviously see he had a pistol holstered on his belt. Now, take a look at the next photo where he met up with someone at a blind spot of the surveillance cameras. In the five seconds it took for him to go from one camera's field of view to the other, an additional black plastic bag appeared in his hand. Now take a look at the third photo. This is the person whom he interacted with at the blind spot."

At the beginning, the residents still had their doubts about whether the people in the photos were really spies.

But when the Qing Consortium's people explained things to them, everyone's doubts were answered. Since those people were spies, they would have to flush them out no matter what!

Someone suddenly shouted, "I've seen this young man before. He lives above my place. I saw him when I got home from work. That boy hardly goes outside."

Someone from the Qing Consortium asked in seriousness, "Really?"

"Of course, I can take you guys there to arrest him right away!" The resident said proudly, "I, Old Liu, don't lie."

"OK, we'll carry out the arrest immediately. However, we'd like for everyone to head inside the neighborhood first. We have to ensure that the information doesn't get leaked in case the suspect tries to escape while we're on our way to arrest him," someone from the Qing Consortium said.

The residents were about to enter the neighborhood in a grandiose manner when the Qing Consortium's troops suddenly raised their arms and escorted them in.

A resident said hesitantly, "I don't think it's a good idea. Our families are still waiting for us at home...."

Although everyone was very eager to help, it still felt a little scary to have their personal freedoms restricted.

Luo Lan stepped forward and explained to everyone, "Don't worry, I swear on the Qing Consortium's reputation that no one's personal safety will be threatened. You guys came to help out of goodwill, but the culprits might take advantage of the crowd and blend in among you. We're doing this because we want to ensure that the culprits are caught."

While the crowd was still hesitating, a young man wearing a black face mask turned around and tried to walk away quietly.

But as soon as he turned around, he saw Ren Xiaosu staring at him with a smile. "Where are you going?"

The young man said in a low voice, "I'm going home."

"I don't think so. You look a little suspicious," Ren Xiaosu said.

In that instant, the young man pulled a dagger out of his sleeve and stabbed it at Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu simply pinched the edge of the blade with two fingers and hit him in the stomach with his right knuckles.

It only took a moment for the young man to fall unconscious.

Many of the Luoyang City residents saw this exchange. Ren Xiaosu said sincerely to everyone, "There must be evil people like this hiding among y'all, so please cooperate with us. We definitely won't threaten your personal safety. Instead, we'll protect everyone."

When the residents realized there was truly a spy hiding among them, they agreed not to let them get away like this. "C'mon, let's head into the neighborhood. It just so happens that I've never had a chance to look around the villas of National Treasure Garden!"

Luo Lan smiled at a Qing Consortium soldier next to him and said, "Go and fetch the kitchen crew. We'll prepare some simple meals for everyone at Villa 28."

After making the necessary arrangements, Ren Xiaosu said to Luo Lan, "I'll lead a team to arrest the suspects while y'all prepare a place for the interrogation. We'll question them immediately after bringing them back so they don't have a chance to collude on their statements."

"Don't worry, we already dug out four basement levels under Villas 31 and 32 two years ago. We can put them to good use today," Luo Lan said.

Meanwhile, the residents of Luoyang City continued identifying the other suspects from their leaflets. Once someone made a positive identification, the others around them would even applaud them. All of a sudden, the atmosphere became exceptionally harmonious.

Ren Xiaosu left the neighborhood with the Northwest's intelligence agents who had just arrived and quickly searched for the targets in Luoyang City.

To be honest, Ren Xiaosu was really not giving the spies any chance to escape by personally heading out to arrest them. There was probably no spy in Luoyang City who could defeat him, so resisting arrest was not an option.

And Yang Xiaojin was also involved in this operation. With two supernatural beings working together, it was as good as bullying those spies into submission.

The sting operation went very smoothly right from the start. Some of the suspects did not even know that Ren Xiaosu's group would suddenly come for them, so they made no attempt to escape.

After going in, Ren Xiaosu quickly disarmed the suspect first before Yang Xiaojin took over and broke his limbs in case he tried to commit suicide.

Ren Xiaosu felt that even if the enemy mastermind were a superhuman who had the power to kill people with heartworms, he probably couldn't use them on everyone, right? There would surely be some suspects who were not affected.

Therefore, Yang Xiaojin quickly disabled him and even dislocated his jaw in case he had a suicide pill hidden in his mouth. She did not give the suspect any chance.

Yang Xiaojin was simply too proficient at such things. Just what environment did this girl grow up in and how much professional training had she been through?

The Northwest's intelligence agents behind them shuddered at the sight. Then they looked at Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin and wondered how this couple usually got along at home.

"Someone, come over here," Yang Xiaojin said while holding the suspect's jaws open. "There's something in this person's molar. Pry it out."

The group of Northwest intelligence agents had come here in a hurry without bringing any professional tools with them. However, being a group of ruthless people too, they immediately found a pair of pliers and extracted his molar.

The molar highly resembled a real tooth, so it was very difficult to tell which had been fitted with a suicide pill from the outside. As they didn't want to bother Yang Xiaojin, they decided to just extract all of it.

When the suspect's first molar was extracted from his mouth, the intelligence agents realized that it was a real tooth. One of them muttered "bad luck" under his breath and prepared to continue extracting the next one.

After pulling out two real teeth in a row, the helpless spy on the ground hurt so much he broke into a cold sweat. He could only mumble with his dislocated jaw, "Rai sai, rai sai, ye yas mojah ong deh yower yawrrr."

The intelligence agent from the Northwest understood he was saying that the suicide pill was fitted in the last molar on his lower right jaw.

He patted the spy's face on the ground.. "You could've saved yourself the trouble if you'd been smarter just now."

Chapter 989 - Deadlock

The people from the Northwest were generally very welcoming and polite towards others. But now that Wang Yun had finally identified the suspects after much difficulty, there was no need for them to treat the culprits with respect.

So everyone caught by Ren Xiaosu and company would not be able to escape the fate of getting a bloody nose and bruised face.

The spy who still had one molar left was lucky. He was quick-witted enough to point out the location of the suicide pill in advance, but those who would rather die than speak had close to eight of their teeth pulled out on the spot.

Right then, a spy who remained tight-lipped was stunned by what was going on. He looked at the people from the Northwest and thought, 'Didn't that lady say only to pull out the molars? Why did you people pull out my front teeth?'

By the time they went for the eighth suspect, the Northwest intelligence agents were so familiar with the routine they didn't need Yang Xiaojin to do it anymore. They rushed up to the suspect as a group and held him down before extracting his teeth.

But after extracting four molars from this suspect's mouth, they still couldn't locate where the suicide pill was hidden. When Yang Xiaojin came over and prised open his jaws to have a look, she remarked, "Oh, he doesn't have a suicide pill in him."

With that, even the Northwest's intelligence agents were taken aback. "How can that be?"

The middle-aged man who was being held down nearly cried in pain, "Listen up, I'm the director of Luoyang City's Logistics Division. How dare you people treat me like this!"

Yang Xiaojin raised an eyebrow. "Bring him back."

She cross-checked the information Wang Yun gave them and noted the person was carrying an extra gift box in his hands after passing through the blind spots of two surveillance cameras.

Yang Xiaojin could roughly guess that the person really might not be a spy but a Luoyang City official who had accepted bribes.

But even if the other party was not a spy, it did not necessarily mean they had arrested the wrong person. Because Ren Xiaosu was not only looking for spies this time but also those who had let them into Luoyang City.

For this many spies to get into the city, the other party must have bribed many of Luoyang City's officials.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu felt that he might be able to learn some clues from these officials. For example, the person sending the operatives into Luoyang City, his identity, etc.

He could definitely uncover some evidence.

Gradually, Ren Xiaosu and his group encountered some difficulties in the sting operation. Some of the suspects received news they had been targeted and went into hiding.

When Ren Xiaosu realized that this situation was happening, he got a little anxious and hastened the sting operation.

However, he heaved a sigh of relief very quickly. The leaflets they distributed were starting to take effect. When they went after Target 37, the other party had already left the residence in advance. But less than two hours later, a couple came to report that someone suddenly rented their house that had been vacant for some time. The tenant who came to rent it looked like someone in the leaflet.

When Ren Xiaosu went to arrest that person, it turned out to be Target 37, who they were looking for.

Even though the city might look very big, when everyone was helping you, it seemed to have become so small that the suspects had nowhere to hide.

In just a single day, Ren Xiaosu and company arrested 72 people, of which 31 were silenced by the heartworms during their arrests.

Luo Lan detained the remaining 41 suspects separately in the basement of the villas and started interrogating them.

Luo Lan and Zhou Qi were truly skilled at interrogation. Under their torture, some people were unable to endure and confessed everything very quickly.

But even though the Luoyang City officials confessed they had accepted bribes and let the suspects in, they really had no idea who bribed them and which organization's forces were getting deployed here. They were totally clueless.

When those forces entered Luoyang City, the officials were offered much higher bribes than usual. The only request was for them to not ask too many questions.

Moreover, the other party carried out their operations extremely covertly. No one knew their identity and they were always only approached by them. They would sometimes call their homes in the middle of the night and get things done by threatening or intimidating them.

Ren Xiaosu had someone check their call records. Unfortunately, it wasn't too useful even though they found something.

The bribery transactions were all made from the same landline in a private house.

However, the person in the residence had already been silenced by the heartworm user when they went to arrest the person.

Among these 41 people, half of them were the local officials of Luoyang City, and the remaining half were either spies or informants of the Zhou Consortium, the Kong Consortium, the Pyro Company, and the Wang Consortium. All of them were wholly unaware of the details surrounding Jiang Xu's assassination.

What was more surprising to Ren Xiaosu was that there were the Zhou Consortium's spies among these people. But why didn't they get silenced?

Ren Xiaosu regarded the Zhou Consortium as the imaginary enemy, because the logic he had uncovered would only make sense if the Zhou Consortium was responsible for this matter.

But from the look of things, the Zhou Consortium's spies were not in cahoots with the group that was killed by the heartworms.

Zhou Qi explained, "That's quite normal. The people who assassinated Jiang Xu are obviously much more elite. They were probably picked from more than a 100, or even a 1,000 other soldiers in the army. They're likely to have a separate commander who's independent of the Zhou Consortium's intelligence agency. It'd be best to keep a mission to assassinate someone like Jiang Xu a secret even from their own people. After all, who knows whether there's spies from other consortiums hidden among them. If it got leaked, they would be condemned by the public, so they must be extremely careful."

Luo Lan nodded. "The person in charge of this operation is most likely the one who can control the heartworms to silence people."

Suddenly, the interrogation came to a standstill. It was not that the arrested suspects did not confess, but that they still had not managed to capture the most crucial person in the case. The information they

obtained was still not enough to pinpoint which organization was responsible for Jiang Xu's assassination.

Ren Xiaosu relayed this information back to the Northwest. Meanwhile, Wang Yun continued analyzing the surveillance footage while Ren Xiaosu and company carried on with the sting operation.

One minor episode occurred when Wang Yun sent over another image of a suspect in the afternoon.

When Ren Xiaosu saw the photo, he was stunned. Wasn't this the director of the Public Order Division?

He might not recognize other people, but he had chatted with the director of the Public Order Division for more than an hour that day, so how could he possibly not recognize him?

There wasn't even a need for the residents to identify him since Ren Xiaosu could recognize him immediately.

On the same day, the director of the Public Order Division, who was purportedly highly regarded by Ren Xiaosu, the new owner of Luoyang City, was arrested and brought to the neighborhood.

However, the man's situation was similar to the other officials. He had also accepted a bribe and let those spies into Luoyang City. There was nothing special about his case.

Wang Yun had been working for more than four days in the conference room of Stronghold 144's garrison camp. With less than three hours of sleep every day, he began to suffer from fatigue.

It was actually very tiring for him to analyze the surveillance footage. After four days, Wang Yun's eyes looked deeply sunken, and he had to keep rehydrating himself to stay fresh.

Next to him, the Great Hoodwinker could not bear to watch anymore and advised him to get some rest. However, Wang Yun stubbornly refused. "There's still more than half the recordings to go through, so how can I go and sleep at a time like this?"

The Great Hoodwinker said, "Sleeping a few hours won't hinder your progress much, anyways."

Wang Yun firmly rejected the Great Hoodwinker's suggestion to rest. "No, Future Commander is still waiting for me to get things done here!"

Chapter 990 - Mastermind

"We must've missed out on some very important details." Wang Yun said firmly, "The message from Future Commander said that during the sting operation, the suspects were still continuously being silenced by someone. This means we haven't found the superhuman with the power of the heartworms yet."

Wang Yun's hair was messy, and he no longer looked like his usual smart self. He paced back and forth in the conference room with the screens on the wall paused while he processed the clues.

Nearby, Zhang Xiaoman said, "Why don't you get some rest first? We're only halfway through all the surveillance footage, so please don't suddenly die before you're done."

Over the past four days, even the soldiers who were supporting Wang Yun's work had already rotated shifts twice, yet Wang Yun remained on duty without taking a break. He ate and slept here in the conference room and did not even wash his face or brush his teeth.

If one were to see him in his current state, they would never imagine how sharp he looked in the past.

However, Wang Yun did not even answer when Zhang Xiaoman urged him to rest this time. He just lowered his head and continued thinking.

Suddenly, Wang Yun looked up and said to the soldier in charge of playing back the video recordings, "Quick, I want to see that day's footage of the intersection where Mr. Jiang Xu met his demise!"

A soldier quickly switched two of the screens to show the day Jiang Xu died. The footage was captured by two HD surveillance cameras at the intersection.

Wang Yun watched the recording, which had its quality affected by intermittent flashes appearing onscreen. A large number of people could be seen moving through the intersection, and a rough calculation probably put that number in the thousands.

With so many faces in the footage, no normal person would even think about trying to remember them all.

After Wang Yun watched it, he said to the soldier, "Rewind and play it again!"

The soldier quickly rewound it to the start.

Just like that, Wang Yun rewatched this video three times in a row. Then he suddenly said to the soldier, "I remember Future Commander mentioned yesterday that someone told him Mr. Jiang Xu nearly got into an accident that morning. Scrub the feed to that time!"

Wang Yun was referring to the moment Jiang Xu was nearly crushed by the falling billboard.

They did not know the exact time of the incident, so they could only play back the recording from 8 AM of that morning and fast forward while looking for it.

Very quickly, Wang Yun saw Mr. Jiang Xu walk out of Hope Media with an upright posture. Then they saw some passersby greeting Mr. Jiang Xu with a smile.

And after that!

A young man in a black suit bumped into Jiang Xu just a moment before a huge billboard crashed down next to him.

"Vanilla?!" Wang Yun immediately recognized this very active superhuman from the Anjing House.

The Great Hoodwinker was stunned. "Wait a minute, could the Anjing House be behind this? But it looks to me like he's clearly protecting Jiang Xu."

"Yeah, the Anjing House has allied with the Wang Consortium. Since Jiang Xu had been constantly targeting the Wang Consortium in his articles, why would the Anjing House protect him?" Wang Yun wondered.

Next to them, P5092 suddenly said, "It's understandable. Before this, we've always regarded the Wang Consortium as our imaginary enemy. Because the Wang Consortium seems to be the prime suspect in Jiang Xu's death. But think about it this way: If the Wang Consortium is also afraid that someone will frame them and make them the target of public condemnation, their motive for protecting Jiang Xu will become valid."

"Show me the footage of that day's battle, the one that took place on the next street over!" Wang Yun shouted.

In the end, when the images were brought up on screen, everyone was surprised to discover that Vanilla and Tang Hualong were trying their best to rush towards Qinghe University. However, they were stopped by hundreds of black-clothed hitmen.

During this time, Vanilla and Tang Hualong were both injured in the battle. They only managed to escape from the encirclement of the hitmen when Vanilla risked his life to get away from them.

The hitmen were the same group of people that had been wiped out while pursuing Ren Xiaosu.

With that, it fell silent in the conference room. After a while, the Great Hoodwinker wondered, "Is this just an act, or did they really want to protect Jiang Xu?"

"It doesn't look like it was an act." Wang Yun stared at the screen and said, "I analyzed the movements of every hitman and realized none of them were holding back. Some of them even made plastic firearms for the battle. Look, after this person was knocked to the ground, his weapon fell to the side and got crushed to pieces by a moving car. Normal firearms won't shatter like that, so it means the hitmen also knew Vanilla was coming and prepared weapons to deal with him. The firearms were plastic, and the bullets were probably specially manufactured too. Look at Vanilla's abdomen—he was injured. He can manipulate metal, so standard bullets can't hurt him."

Wang Yun continued, "Rewind the recording back to the part where Vanilla protected Jiang Xu."

Then Wang Yun stared intently at the screen, waiting for something to happen.

On the screen, Jiang Xu had already left the scene, but Wang Yun's attention did not leave with him. Instead, he continued monitoring this same location.

He stared at the screen for two hours straight while six hours had already passed in the fast-forwarded recording onscreen. At this point in time, two hours had passed since Jiang Xu was assassinated.

Suddenly, Wang Yun raised his hand and shouted, "Stop!"

Everyone realized Wang Yun had become excited. He pointed at a young man in a blue factory uniform on the screen and said, "Check which factory's uniform he's wearing!"

When the Great Hoodwinker contacted Luoyang City's administrative center, he quickly got an answer. "That's the uniform of the water plant."

"It's him." Wang Yun said firmly, "Luoyang City Freshwater Plant is eight kilometers away from here and nine kilometers away from where Mr. Jiang Xu met with trouble. It's on the edge of the stronghold, and the three locations are arranged in a triangle. It's obviously work hours at this time, yet this person suddenly appeared at such a baffling location. Have you all heard of a principle? Most perpetrators return to the crime scene after the incident. Some of them go back to check out if they're safe from suspicion, while others carry out counter-investigative measures to see if they've done a clean job. Basically, they're just afraid of being found out."

"Of course, the most important giveaway is that he suddenly appeared at the two locations where Mr. Jiang Xu met with trouble. There can't be such a coincidence in the world!" Wang Yun said, "Continue monitoring him. I want his movements to be placed under observation."

As a matter of fact, that person was very cautious. He did not immediately go back to the scene to watch the happenings and only returned after Jiang Xu had died.

At this moment, 99.99% of the people in the world would probably be focused on that road intersection. Who would care to check back on the initial crime scene six hours later?

However, he probably did not expect Wang Yun to be so patient in seeking the answer!

Over at Ren Xiaosu's side, he was listening in on Luo Lan's interrogation. What left him at a loss was that as more and more suspects were arrested, some weirder ones started appearing.

The middle-aged man across from Luo Lan roared hysterically, "I only accepted a pack of sweet potato noodles and a bottle of honey. Did you people really have to drag me here?! Huh?!"

This middle-aged man was only a junior staff member of the Transportation Division. But as a result of accepting some local specialty products, he got arrested.

This time, it was really local specialties that were involved.

Luo Lan was tickled pink. "As the saying goes, though the bribe is small, the fault is great, understand?"

But after investigating this person, they didn't make things difficult for him either.

This time, not only did Ren Xiaosu and the others capture the spies in Luoyang City, they also cracked down on many cases of bribery and corruption as a by-product.

Suddenly, an intelligence agent from the Northwest rushed in from outside. "Future Commander, Wang Yun said he might've found the mastermind!"