

Chapter 991 - A Highly Intelligent Crime

"The mastermind?" Ren Xiaosu looked at the Northwest's intelligence agent who came to report the matter. "How can we be sure that it's the mastermind?"

The Northwest's intelligence agent explained, "Wang Yun said the person appeared at the intersection where Mr. Jiang Xu was killed. Two hours later, he reappeared at the spot where Mr. Jiang Xu was nearly crushed by a falling billboard as though nothing had happened. This is a classic case of the guilty returning to the crime scene to secretly check on things. Furthermore, he was extremely cautious about it. Most field personnel would definitely not do such a thing, and only the person planning behind the scenes would go back to the scene of the crime."

Ren Xiaosu walked out of the villa. He was no longer interested in the suspects who had already been captured. If this person Wang Yun had identified was the mastermind who wielded the power of the heartworms, he would have to find this person and get rid of them together.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at Luo Lan and Zhou Qi. "Can you make that person talk if I bring him back?"

Zhou Qi said with a sinister smile, "Under my interrogation, there's no such thing as refusing to speak. Don't worry, my water power makes it just right for torture."

After Ren Xiaosu came out of the villa, he said to the Northwest's intelligence agent, "Send out photos and leaflets of that person to everyone and ask if they know him."

In the end, it only took ten minutes to get an update. "Luo Zongren, 29 years old, a technician at the water plant. He came to Luoyang City for work more than two years ago and was hired at a high salary by the water plant."

However, no one in the neighborhood knew Luo Zongren's address.

The Northwest's intelligence agent brought a resident over. "Future Commander, he says he knows this Luo Zongren."

The resident said, "Hello, I'm a shop floor worker at the freshwater plant. I'm very familiar with Luo Zongren. He solved many technical problems and has been attached to our factory for some time. However, no one knows where he lives. When we go out to eat after work, he never participates in them. All we know is that he likes to read. Whenever he has nothing to do, he just stays in his office and reads."

"What's his usual routine?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Other than reading, I don't think he has any other hobbies," the resident answered. "But there's something about him. That Luo Zongren always washes his hands after touching the plant's equipment. He's dressed very neatly as well. Many of the young girls at the factory think that he is different from us shop floor workers, so some of them even tried to date him."

"He has OCD?" Ren Xiaosu wondered. For some reason, he got the impression that the man was extremely disciplined and secretive.

But what should they do about the man's address? Ren Xiaosu said to the intelligence agent, "Contact the water plant. The factory's staff roster should have the addresses of all the workers. Although it might be fake, it's still a lead."

But just as Ren Xiaosu was feeling bitter about not knowing the other party's address, another call from the Northwest came in. "Wang Yun has tracked the other party's behavior through the surveillance cameras and determined his address. It's near 149 Triumphant Road! If you take his photo and ask the residents nearby, you'll definitely find some evidence. There's only two apartment complexes there."

Ren Xiaosu immediately led the troops and rushed for 149 Triumphant Road.

When they got there, Ren Xiaosu found the grocery store owner on the sidewalk and took out Luo Zongren's photo. "Hello, have you seen this person before?"

The grocery store owner immediately recognized Luo Zongren. "Oh, he's the one who's always wearing the water plant uniform and passes by my shop every day. Of course I've seen him before! I think he lives nearby. He buys all his rice, oil, and salt from me."

"Then do you know where he lives?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"It's in that apartment building up ahead, but I'm not sure which floor exactly," the owner answered.

After that, dozens of Northwest intelligence agents quickly surrounded the residential building with guns. Even Yang Xiaojin found the best sniping position several hundred meters away.

Yang Xiaojin said through her earpiece, "I'm in position."

Only then did Ren Xiaosu walk towards the apartment building. There were some old men and old ladies playing mahjong at a small table downstairs. Ren Xiaosu took out the photo and asked, "Do y'all know which floor he lives on?"

An old lady took a look at the photo and said with a smile, "Isn't that Little Luo? He lives on the 4th floor. Room 401. Why are you guys looking for him?"

"It's nothing." Ren Xiaosu smiled. He beckoned for the intelligence agents to escort these people away so they would not accidentally get hurt in the battle later.

The apartment building was very dilapidated, with only four stories in total. Ren Xiaosu led several intelligence agents up the stairs.

But when they reached the fourth floor, the door of Room 401 was slightly ajar.

Ren Xiaosu had an ominous feeling. After pushing the door open, he saw that the furnishings in the room were very simple. There were only some basic tables, bookcases, kitchenware, and a bed.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of a saying. "When a person's inner self is extremely complicated, they have extremely high expectations for their living environment, which would be to have things placed neatly and orderly."

There was no one in the apartment. The other party had probably sensed the danger in advance and left beforehand.

A playing card had been left on the table across from the entrance. It was an ace of spades.

The card was placed neatly on the table as though Luo Zongren was silently mocking Ren Xiaosu and everyone else.

The other party had guessed that Ren Xiaosu and company would definitely find their way here, so not only did he leave in advance, he even left behind a "mark" as though he were declaring war on them.

This was a highly intelligent criminal. Not only did he enjoy the execution of the crime, he also got a kick out of his accomplishments in teasing and controlling his pursuers.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and went out. "Tell the Northwest that the enemy has escaped, but he won't be able to escape from this stronghold. Let's see if there's any other ways to find this person."

Ren Xiaosu's expression was calm.

When the news got back to the Northwest, Wang Yun stood in front of the hundreds of screens in a daze. He suddenly said, "A person like him will definitely leave a way out for himself, right? Everyone says that a crafty rabbit has three burrows. A cunning and highly intelligent criminal like him will definitely leave himself an escape route. C'mon, show me all the recordings of him on his way to and from work. I want to know everything he's been up to for the past month."

This was an extremely large amount of work to do. The suspect's route home from work spanned at least eight to nine kilometers and would require going through dozens of recordings to piece together the enemy's whereabouts.

There were several hundred surveillance cameras in the entire stronghold, so they would have to first pick out the recordings of that route from those surveillance cameras.

Just as the soldiers fell into a predicament, they heard Wang Yun say, "I've already marked the camera numbers. The surveillance footage of his route to work is captured on Cameras 102, 129, 130, 141..."

Wang Yun listed more than a 100 numbers in a row and accurately identified the complete route that Luo Zongren took every day.

Chapter 992 - Calling Card

In order to quickly monitor how Luo Zongren went about his daily life in the surveillance footage, Wang Yun even requested the soldiers to play back the recording at 16 times speed. The recordings spanned a month, so even if they were played back sixteen times faster, it would still take a person nearly two days to finish watching everything.

Fortunately, this also included the nighttime surveillance footage, so Wang Yun could get some rest and leave it to the other soldiers to monitor the goings-on during those periods. If Luo Zongren appeared, they would just have to inform Wang Yun.

The soldiers working could not even see the figures of people on screen clearly anymore. Meanwhile, Wang Yun was still watching intently.

Everyone in the conference room realized Wang Yun's energy seemed to be visibly waning and was worried something would happen to him. However, only Wang Yun himself did not feel so. "Don't worry, I'll definitely be able to go on for another three days. I'm a superhuman, not a normal person. I'll definitely find Luo Zongren within three days!"

By the afternoon of the next day, Wang Yun's eyes were deeply sunken and his entire person looked like he had withered.

However, he calmly muttered to himself, "Going to work, leaving work, buying groceries, going home, shopping at the bookstore. The bookstore he visits is always the same one, but while he goes grocery shopping at random locations, the people serving him are always the same. However, it seems like there's nothing suspicious about them. Tell Future Commander to check on the bookstore, but be careful as the other party might spring a trap."

After the news reached Luoyang City, Ren Xiaosu quickly led his men to the bookstore Luo Zongren always went to.

After the intelligence agents surrounded the bookshop, Ren Xiaosu walked towards it.

But just as he was about to push open the door, he remembered Wang Yun's warning. "You must be careful. The other party might spring a trap."

Ren Xiaosu summoned "Old Xu" while he slowly stepped back.

Old Xu pushed open the door and entered. In that instant, the door handle activated a transparent fishing line that had been set up on the inside. With a click, a trap was triggered by the opening of the door.

A huge wave of heat burst out from the bookstore. Amid the loud explosion, the glass windows on the street were shattered by the unstoppable shockwave. The alarms of the vehicles parallel parked also started blaring.

The residents living on this street cautiously poked their heads out to have a look, but they did not know what was going on.

The bomb that was planted in the bookstore was powerful enough to instantly devour a 30-man platoon. Fortunately, Wang Yun had alerted them in advance, and Ren Xiaosu also happened to have a power like Old Xu.

Ren Xiaosu stood in the distance and watched all of this quietly. All the pain Old Xu suffered was transferred back to him at this moment. However, his expression did not show any signs of pain. Instead, it darkened.

This opponent was much more difficult to deal with than he had imagined.

Moreover, the most detestable thing was that even though the other party knew he was being pursued all over the city, he did not try to escape immediately. Instead, he deliberately set a trap by relying on his day-to-day activities which he deliberately created in the past to mislead his pursuers.

Truly, this was probably one of the most duplicitous opponents Ren Xiaosu had ever encountered, and the previous one was even Black Robe.

"Tell Wang Yun that it was a trap like he expected," Ren Xiaosu said.

Over at the Northwest, Wang Yun felt like he had discovered a treasure after receiving this information. A lot of people even felt he was a little too happy when he learned about what happened.

Zhang Xiaoman wondered, "What are you so happy about? Didn't we just lose another lead?"

"Lose a lead?" Wang Yun smiled tiredly. "This is also a clue."

Actually, in Wang Yun's opinion, as a mastermind hiding behind the scenes, the less information revealed, the better. Only by hiding without hesitation after committing a crime and not making any unnecessary moves could the criminal avoid being tracked.

But now that the other party had set up an ambush in the bookstore, it was just like the "calling card" of a criminal. In Wang Yun's eyes, it was actually an inferior move.

Wang Yun said with a smile, "Whatever else he does now, they can actually serve as new evidence for us to follow. In this way, I can profile his character through his actions."

Leaving behind the playing card and setting up the bomb in the bookstore, all of this seemed to be telling Wang Yun that the mastermind who had been lying low in Luoyang City for two years was starting to grow a little restless.

The other party was only 29 years old. Although he was extremely good at investigation and counter-investigation, he was still not sophisticated enough!

Suddenly, Wang Yun felt that the other party was like a child who enjoyed showing off. He firmly believed he could ferret out the mastermind.

Wang Yun continued to observe traces of Luo Zongren's day-to-day life for the past month. During that time, Luo Zongren should have come up with a plan of action. The other party knew very well that the assassination of Jiang Xu in Luoyang City would immediately cause a huge commotion. In that case, he would definitely want to determine whether his backup plan would work.

"To him, what should a perfect safe house look like?" Wang Yun pondered it. "It should be along the way from his work and home and have no need for him to take any unnecessary routes to see if it's safe or not. It'd be best if it's on the first floor because that'd facilitate excavating a basement and also be convenient for him to be aware of any commotions outside. It's best if it's situated in a blind spot of the surveillance cameras so it's easier for him to hide. It can't be too far away from the bookstore because he'd want to hear the explosion with his own ears. To him, the explosion should sound as beautiful as a symphony!"

Wang Yun suddenly shouted, "Rewind Camera 181's recording to the prior day, then play it back at 32 times speed."

After a while, Wang Yun suddenly shouted again, "It's here! For the past half a month, Luo Zongren has been looking straight ahead every time he passes by this place. But as he was getting close to making his move, he couldn't help but glance at the blind spot of the surveillance cameras on the right side of the road twice."

The others in the conference room looked at one another. With the speed at which the recording was being played back, they could not even see Luo Zongren's figure. They did not know how Wang Yun was still able to see that the other party was looking elsewhere at this playback speed.

Wang Yun shouted to the Great Hoodwinker, "Quick! Confirm where this place is and get Future Commander to hurry over. The enemy's safe house is nearby. I'm very sure of it!"

The Great Hoodwinker quickly contacted Luoyang City. When Ren Xiaosu received the news, he immediately rushed to the vicinity of 74 Triumphant Road. This location was not too far away from the bookstore. If Luo Zongren were hiding here, he would be able to find out whether the ambush he set up at the bookshop was successful or not.

When Ren Xiaosu rushed over, he had Yang Xiaojin get into position first. Meanwhile, Old Xu jumped onto the roof and surrounded the target's location from the other side.

In the end, Luo Zongren was even bolder than Ren Xiaosu had imagined. When he had just rushed to the vicinity of 74 Triumphant Road, a middle-aged man in a brown jacket walked towards Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu did not stop moving. When the other party saw Ren Xiaosu, his expression remained the same as well.

But when they went past each other, Ren Xiaosu's eyes turned red.

City Crusher!

Before the middle-aged man could react, Ren Xiaosu hit him in the main artery of his neck. The force was so precise it could knock a supernatural being unconscious without killing him.

Ren Xiaosu squatted down and pulled out all of the enemy's teeth with his bare hands before confirming that two of them were inlaid with suicide pills.

Then he had the intelligence agents strip the person naked and shave off his hair as well. Only after ensuring there were no longer any places for him to hide anything was Ren Xiaosu able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Ren Xiaosu started laughing. In truth, he really felt it was so worth it to have a talented man like Wang Yun join the Prosperous Northwest.

When the Great Hoodwinker was passing on the information to him just now, Wang Yun had suddenly snatched the phone and instructed, "Future Commander, when you rush to 74 Triumphant Road, you must pay attention to all pedestrians who walk past you. The target loves to selectively plan and observe the traps he sets. After he hears an explosion go off, he might even disguise himself as someone else. If you don't discover him, he'll feel extremely satisfied.. This feeling has hooked him."

Chapter 993 - Did We Skip A Few Protocols?

At the garrison base of Stronghold 144 in the Northwest, everyone in the conference room held their breaths as they waited for the outcome at Luoyang City.

Everyone was very nervous, including Wang Yun.

This was in spite of Wang Yun being very sure of his own judgment. It was not just a random guess, but a valid deduction.

But even so, he was still a little worried. What if the other party had some other trick up their sleeve? Or could he have escaped in advance again?

These were all uncertain factors.

Ten minutes had already passed since the information was relayed over from the Great Hoodwinker's side.

Suddenly, the phone in the conference room rang. An intelligence agent's voice rang out, "We've successfully captured him! Future Commander said that we've caught the right person!"

After six days of suffering in the conference room, there was suddenly a chorus of cheers.

For the past six days, everyone could only watch helplessly as Wang Yun started losing weight at a visible rate. He was getting thinner and thinner by the day, and his hair was getting messier while the circles under his eyes became darker and darker. Everyone was feeling very worried and pained for him.

It wasn't much better for the others either. The Great Hoodwinker had been standing guard here the entire time. Zhang Xiaoman took turns leading the soldiers who were assisting Wang Yun's work. Everyone did not even dare to breathe too loudly in the conference room for fear of breaking Wang Yun's concentration.

But now it was finally over!

Wang Yun finally showed a smile. The Great Hoodwinker, Zhang Xiaoman, P5092, and the others all looked at him with smiles on their faces. Then P5092 took the lead and started clapping.

The applause in the conference room lasted for a long while. Wang Yun looked around at everyone. He enjoyed this feeling too much. Compared to everyone's heartfelt admiration, the fame and fortune he had previously sought did not seem particularly important anymore.

P5092 said with a smile, "Back at Mt. Zuoyun, I already wanted to say that I'm very happy to be your colleague. It's my honor."

"It's mine too." Zhang Xiaoman chuckled.

But at this moment, cries rang out in the conference room. "Wang Yun!"

Wang Yun slowly closed his eyes and collapsed. The Great Hoodwinker quickly caught him and felt his carotid artery before he could feel at ease. "He's just passed out from overworking. Have the medics give him glucose and saline. He hasn't even had a proper meal in the past few days and kept spending his time here."

Zhang Xiaoman and his men carefully carried Wang Yun to the barracks, relieving everyone in the conference room.

"Ask Future Commander about the details of the sting operation later. I feel that he's also moving at a rapid pace since he located the mastermind so quickly," the Great Hoodwinker told the soldiers.

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In fact, Luo Zongren did not expect Ren Xiaosu to suddenly make a move on him. Moreover, Ren Xiaosu immediately activated City Crusher and attacked with all his might, not giving Luo Zongren any chance to resist.

Luo Zongren's own power was not strong since he was more of a functional supernatural being like Xun Yeyu.

So his biggest mistake was that he was too bold. He dared to try and walk past Ren Xiaosu?

At that moment, Ren Xiaosu remembered Wang Yun had told him the mastermind might pretend that nothing had happened and try to walk past the bookstore. When they encountered each other on the street, Luo Zongren's expression was way too calm even though he was wearing a disguise.

In that kind of environment, one should at least have a curious look on their face if someone were to come running towards them. Moreover, the commotion from the explosion at the bookstore had just subsided, so it was very telling if someone was able to remain that calm at a time like that.

It was just as Wang Yun had evaluated Luo Zongren's personality. He was only a self-proclaimed smart person and not truly smart.

Ren Xiaosu brought Luo Zongren back to the neighborhood and handed him straight to Luo Lan and Zhou Qi. Then he took a seat while waiting quietly for Zhou Qi to interrogate him.

Luo Zongren slowly regained consciousness in the basement of the villa. He slowly looked around his surroundings first before looking at Ren Xiaosu and the others. He sneered, "'Hop bein yirusional. Aye won shay anyfing."

What Luo Zongren wanted to say was: "Stop being delusional. I won't say anything."

Luo Zongren's teeth had been plucked out by Ren Xiaosu with his bare hands, so he was probably still finding it difficult to speak. When he said that, the blood in his mouth started flowing down. It was an extremely pathetic and gross sight.

Luo Lan was facing him and felt an inexplicable urge to laugh. "I have to say, that was way too heavy-handed of you. You should've at least left a few teeth intact. Look at what you've done to the child. He can't even articulate properly now."

Luo Zongren seemed to be humiliated. After hearing those harsh words, he did not say anything further.

Meanwhile, Zhou Qi ordered someone to bring over a set of tools and started preparing for the interrogation.

Luo Zongren made up his mind not to say anything. As the mastermind of the assassination, he was already prepared to die when he fitted the suicide pills in his mouth.

It had to be said that Zhou Qi was also a ruthless person. The tools he had brought looked quite terrifying.

Moreover, Zhou Qi did not even ask any questions and just started torturing.

He did not ask who Luo Zongren was or what organization he belonged to. He did not even make any small talk like what they should have for dinner. It did not seem like he wanted to do the interrogation at all. Instead, it felt more like he enjoyed torturing people as a hobby and for pleasure.

Zhou Qi created a ball of water enthusiastically and wrapped it around Luo Zongren's head. In only one minute, Luo Zongren fell into a state of asphyxiation. Then Zhou Qi ruthlessly stabbed a metal needle into the gap under Luo Zongren's fingernails. As a result, Luo Zongren instinctively let out a loud cry of pain and a large amount of water poured into his mouth. A majority of it even went down his windpipe.

After Zhou Qi drained the water and allowed Luo Zongren to catch his breath for a moment, he used the water to wrap around Luo Zongren's head again without saying anything. Immediately after, he inserted another metal needle under Luo Zongren's second fingernail.

During this time, Zhou Qi did not have any intention at all of communicating with Luo Zongren. He just kept repeating the process of inserting the needles under his fingernails.

By the third needle, Luo Zongren was already starting to show signs of pain and shock. Zhou Qi called for someone to bring in a small generator and a set of transformers, which he clamped the ends of to Luo Zongren's legs.

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "What's this for?"

"Oh, I'm using a weak electrical current to stimulate him so he won't fall unconscious," Zhou Qi said with a smile, looking as psychotic as he could be.

Even Ren Xiaosu felt a little creeped out when he saw how Zhou Qi looked.

Gradually, the way Luo Zongren looked at Zhou Qi changed. Why did he not ask any questions and only focus on torturing him? Did they skip a few protocols in the interrogation process?

At some point, he almost thought Zhou Qi was sent by his organization to silence him!

However, Zhou Qi still did not give Luo Zongren a chance to speak. It looked like he would only be done after he had inserted the needles into all of Luo Zongren's fingers and toes.

Water torture was already a very terrifying form of punishment. It was a terrifying experience when a person slowly suffocated to the point of death. Many organizations liked to use this form of torture since most of those interrogated would definitely confess.

But from the look of things, water torture was only an auxiliary skill in Zhou Qi's hands. Even more ruthless forms of torture awaited Luo Zongren.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu understood what Zhou Qi was up to.

Zhou Qi was interrogating a highly intelligent criminal who also happened to be a psychopath. As the interrogator, Zhou Qi had to make the other party understand he was even more psychotic than him before he could make him speak.

Since Luo Zongren would not open his mouth that easily, Ren Xiaosu, Luo Lan, and Zhou Qi were all prepared for a prolonged interrogation.

Chapter 994 - Luo Zongren Speaks

Zhou Qi's interrogation had been going on for nearly 26 hours already. Luo Zongren's constant screams in the basement went from loud and clear to feeble.

Sometimes, an interrogation would take several days or even several weeks due to the requirement of human rights. The interrogators could only use methods such as not letting the criminals sleep or

starving them slowly so they would break down. Such methods were also very effective, but it would take slightly longer to work.

As for the crueler torture methods, they would basically only last a day or two before speaking.

For Luo Zongren to be able to endure for 26 hours, he was an extremely determined person.

During this time, Luo Zongren's screams were even heard in the other basement levels where other spies and officials unrelated to the case were held. His screams were so horrific that everyone started feeling fearful and uneasy.

As a result, while Luo Zongren was still enduring his torture, the people from the other floors confessed before they were interrogated. This was really unexpected.

During these 26 hours, Zhou Qi only slept for three hours. For the rest of the time, he did not say anything and just kept thinking of ways to torture Luo Zongren without asking a single question.

Several times, Ren Xiaosu felt that Luo Zongren was almost close to speaking, but Zhou Qi did not give him a chance to do so.

At some point, Ren Xiaosu even thought Zhou Qi might be planning to silence the suspect.

Luo Zongren really wanted to debate Zhou Qi. He knew a person like him must have his own logic in an argument. It did not matter whether they were mature or not, such people were completely self-absorbed in their own world.

This self-proclaimed intelligent criminal had laid low in Luoyang City for two years and meticulously planned a grand murder case. Actually, he was very anguished and wanted to pour his heart out to others. He wanted to tell them how great he was, or perhaps he wanted to kill himself so he could put a perfect end to his plan and become a so-called martyr.

However, Zhou Qi did not ask him anything, nor did he allow him to die.

During the break, only Luo Zongren and the thick scent of blood remained in the basement. Zhou Qi walked to the neighborhood's garden and lit up a cigarette as he thought silently.

Luo Lan asked, "How are things? Based on your experience, have you made any progress?"

Ren Xiaosu listened in. However, he knew Zhou Qi had his own plans, so he did not interfere.

But based on what Luo Lan said, it seemed like Zhou Qi had also carried out a lot of similar work before.

Zhou Qi thought for a moment and said, "The time is not ripe yet. It's been more than 20 hours, but I can feel that he's still putting up a stubborn resistance. So I paused the interrogation for a while because I want to think about how to destroy his self-esteem. A criminal like him thinks he's extraordinary, so we have to completely destroy his self-esteem in order to break him."

Zhou Qi fell into deep thought again.

Suddenly, Zhou Qi extinguished his cigarette and turned around to walk back to the basement.

Luo Zongren was already on his last gasps. Anyone who saw him would think he was on the verge of death, but Zhou Qi firmly believed he still had the will to resist.

Zhou Qi called over a soldier and said, "Prepare a rack that you can tie someone on. I'll need it later."

Then he picked out a steel needle from his toolbox and stabbed it into Luo Zongren's right abdomen.

All of a sudden, Luo Zongren lost control of his bladder and bowels when he got pierced by this needle. This was the first time Ren Xiaosu had seen such a precise technique.

As a matter of fact, Zhou Qi was very professional in this domain.

Luo Zongren roared angrily as though he could not accept the reality of his incontinence.

Right after, Zhou Qi said to the soldier, "Tie him up on the rack and show the people of Luoyang City how pathetic he is. Tell them that Mr. Jiang Xu's murderer is just this revolting nobody."

As soon as he finished speaking, Ren Xiaosu realized Luo Zongren's eyes glazed over for a moment. It was as though he could not accept the fact he was going to be displayed to the public.

Luo Zongren despised the common people he had toyed with and deemed them to be less than ants. So he was even more unable to accept being publicly exhibited in front of those people and get despised by them.

However, Zhou Qi noticed the change in his expression. He silently breathed a sigh of relief as though he had finally found a breakthrough in the interrogation.

Zhou Qi ignored Luo Zongren and said to the soldier, "Hurry up, it'll get dark soon. Remember to strip him and wash his face clean so everyone will remember what he looks like."

Luo Zongren's weak voice could be heard in the basement. "Whadyawanano? Aye falk!"

What Luo Zongren meant was: "What do you want to know? I'll talk."

Zhou Qi said with a smile, "Weren't you quite insistent on not talking?"

Luo Zongren said resentfully, "Ba-chew-di-nuh-ash-anyfing!"

"Oh, so that was why." Zhou Qi laughed. "Leave, set aside the prepared rack and find a suitable set of dentures for him. It's too much of a hassle to listen to him talk like that."

Ren Xiaosu also felt relieved. 27 hours after the interrogation started, Luo Zongren finally spoke!

The Qing Consortium's people found over a dozen sets of dentures and tested several of them before they found a suitable one for Luo Zongren. Off to the side, Luo Lan asked, "That's pretty efficient. Where did you find the dentures?"

"Oh, they were donated by a few elderly people in Luoyang City. They said it was their way of contributing to the investigation of the murder," the Qing Consortium soldier said.

Luo Lan and Ren Xiaosu were stunned. These were taken out of other people's mouths? The two of them turned around and looked at Luo Zongren, who nearly vomited.

Luo Zongren turned 29 this year. The humiliation he had suffered all his life was not as great as everything he went through today.

Zhou Qi did not care so much and directly asked, "Who instigated you?"

Luo Zongren panted as he said, "The Wang Consortium. My immediate superior is called Wang Wenyan. He's the one who arranged for me to enter Luoyang City. Initially, there was no intention to kill Jiang Xu, and I operated covertly for the plan to seize the satellites in Luoyang City. But since I wasn't needed for that operation, I chose to bide my time and continued lying low."

Luo Lan and Ren Xiaosu looked at each other. They had already started treating the Zhou Consortium as their imaginary enemy. But they did not expect Luo Zongren would point all of the suspicions at the Wang Consortium the moment he opened his mouth!

Zhou Qi asked, "Tell me about Wang Wenyan."

Luo Zongren answered, "He has an oval face and is 176 centimeters tall. He likes to drink Iron Goddess and lives in Stronghold 62 at 12 Tongqu Road."

Luo Lan could not help but ask, "You should've met Wang Shengzhi before too, right? You should be very familiar with him since you're such an important superhuman, isn't that so?"

However, Luo Zongren shook his head and said, "Wang Shengzhi isn't my direct boss, so how could I possibly jump ranks and interact with him? I'm not familiar with him."

Luo Lan had wanted to take the opportunity to ask Luo Zongren much more confidential questions to test whether he was telling the truth. However, he was stumped by this answer.

Zhou Qi asked, "When did you guys start planning the assassination of Jiang Xu?"

Now that Luo Zongren had spoken, Ren Xiaosu and company would have to find stronger evidence to prove Luo Zongren was really from the Wang Consortium.

Chapter 995 - Acting

"This mission was issued two months ago." Luo Zongren said weakly, "At that time, Jiang Xu had just published an article targeting our Wang Consortium. However, the initial order was only to formulate a plan. We were not told to execute it."

Luo Zongren continued, "On the 21st of March, the higher-ups passed down the order to assassinate Jiang Xu, because he refused to meet with our diplomatic team, so there was no way for the two sides to clear the air.

"We have a total of 381 covert agents, and most of them were secretly deployed from the Wang Consortium's military and trained as spies.

"Before the operation, to deflect any suspicions from the Wang Consortium, Wang Wenyan specifically ordered Vanilla and me to put on a good show together." Luo Zongren explained clearly, "Our soldiers

were unaware of it, but Vanilla and Tang Hualong knew about the operation in advance and pretended to be caught in the danger. They even deliberately got injured. After all of the surveillance footage was exposed, everyone would shift their suspicions away from the Wang Consortium.

"But all of this was just an act we put on for you all to see!"

Ren Xiaosu listened to all of this quietly. If what Luo Zongren said was true, he would definitely have to make a trip to the Wang Consortium.

Moreover, he would have to reevaluate his relationship with them.

There was no room for compromise regarding Jiang Xu's assassination.

However, Ren Xiaosu somehow felt that everything Luo Zongren said was a little strange. He started thinking about everything he had confessed.

If only Wang Yun were here. Wang Yun was an expert at analyzing lies and was the best at finding loopholes in the other party's logic.

At this moment, Luo Lan asked Luo Zongren from the side, "Which department are you affiliated with in the Wang Consortium?"

Luo Zongren answered matter-of-factly, "You don't have to test me on purpose. I'm under Wang Wenyan's command, so of course I'm with the 1st Military Intelligence Division."

"Hehe, I'm sorry." Luo Lan said with a laugh, "You probably didn't expect this, but the Wang Consortium's people were afraid that someone would frame them, so they specially sent a person to Luoyang City. Coincidentally, it's someone from the 1st Military Intelligence Division as well. Men, bring in the Wang Consortium's man!"

As they spoke, a young man in a suit was escorted into the basement by the Qing Consortium's soldiers. The young man said coldly, "We came all the way here to clarify things. Is this how you treat your guests?"

Luo Lan walked up to the young man with a smile and slapped him in the face without warning. "If we find out that Jiang Xu's death is related to your Wang Consortium, you can forget about walking out of Luoyang City alive. Why are you still harping about how guests should be treated? Come and identify your colleague from the 1st Military Intelligence Division. We already have a witness here. Do you think that you can still deny it?"

That young man looked at Luo Zongren and got even angrier. "That's not a member of our 1st Military Intelligence Division at all. He's slandering us. What evidence do you have to say that our Wang Consortium was responsible? Where's the evidence?"

Luo Lan looked at Luo Zongren. "Proof? Don't worry. The Wang Consortium can't silence you here."

Luo Zongren kept quiet.

The young man sneered. "See, he's lying. He doesn't dare directly confront me. We don't have such a person in our 1st Military Intelligence Division at all."

Luo Zongren suddenly looked at the young man and said, "Are you going to give up the queen to save the king? At Wang Wenyan's place, Wang Wenyan personally promised me he would appoint me as the deputy director if I succeeded in the mission. You were also there at that time. Why are you trying to shake me off now?"

The young man said angrily, "Don't talk about such baseless things. I've never met you before!"

"You dare not admit it?!" Luo Zongren roared angrily. He looked hysterical, even a little crazy.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

Luo Lan applauded. "This performance is wonderful. If I didn't know the truth in advance, I would've really been fooled by your acting. But I'm really sorry. This is not someone from the Wang Consortium's 1st Military Intelligence Division at all. He's from our Qing Consortium. See, this suit was even just borrowed from a Luoyang City resident."

Luo Lan laughed heartily while Zhou Qi stared at Luo Zongren mockingly and admired the stunned expression on his face.

Luo Zongren was a little dazed. Looking at Zhou Qi's expression now, he seemed to have the same expression as himself when he looked at those "normal people" while he was carrying out his mission.

In the past, he had regarded normal people as dumb sheep. But now he had become a sheep in the eyes of others.

Luo Lan walked up to the young man who had acted as a member of the Wang Consortium and said, "Does your face hurt?"

"No," said the young man as he straightened up.

Luo Lan patted him on the shoulder. "Silly lad, how can it not hurt when I didn't hold back? Go and get some rest. You did a great job; that was really good acting."

To make things look realistic, Luo Lan did not show any mercy. The young man's face was swollen from Luo Lan's slap, but he was still smiling very happily. "It's all good as long as the mission is successful."

After that, the soldier went up the stairs and left the basement.

Luo Zongren sat in the interrogation chair in a daze. Luo Lan walked up to him and bent down to look him in the eye. "In order to make you tell the truth, you made me slap my own soldier. You should understand now that your 'conspiracies' are just childish attempts before us. You can't afford to mess with us! If you still don't tell the truth, we'll drag you out onto the street. Believe me, our Qing Consortium has a way to make sure you won't die for ten years and beg for death every day."

"What do you all want to know? Just go ahead and ask," Luo Zongren said calmly.

Zhou Qi was sure Luo Zongren's mental defenses had finally been completely taken down. His ego was fully crushed.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Lan's profile and suddenly thought of something. This fatty might look like a carefree person on most days, but he was also a very scheming person. In normal times, he would just act as though all of his brilliance was covered.

But why did he hide it?

Truly, Luo Zongren was also a ruthless person. He did not accuse the Wang Consortium immediately after he was captured. Instead, he forcefully endured for 27 hours and only started his painstaking plan when he was on the verge of death.

For the past 27 hours, all he had been enduring was just for this moment.

It was precisely because he still had an objective that was not yet completed that he was able to endure for so long.

Moreover, the other party's narration of what happened was very logical. Even Vanilla and Tang Hualong had become a part of his plan. All of this was done so the Wang Consortium could not clear their suspicions and be convicted of the accusation!

Luo Zongren said, "I'm under the command of the Zhou Consortium's intelligence agency. I don't fall under the command of the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Divisions. I'm the highest-ranking commander independent of all the divisions, and all field agents under my jurisdiction operate under the highest security clearance. I only carry out top-secret missions, and my rank is only second to the intelligence director, Zhou Shoushi. My serial number in the organization is 019002, and my real name is Yang Yanbang."

Luo Lan and Ren Xiaosu looked at each other. Success!

"The intelligence division that I head is called Poison." Luo Zongren stated everything with a numb expression as though it was unrelated to him. "A lot of people in the Zhou Consortium are unaware of our existence. My job is only to report to two people. One of them is the intelligence director, Zhou Shoushi, and the other is the Zhou Consortium's boss, Zhou Shiji."

Although this guy's real name was Yang Yanbang, Ren Xiaosu and company were used to the name "Luo Zongren." So they decided to continue addressing him that way. They believed Luo Zongren himself was used to this pseudonym as well.

"There's a total of 581 members under my command who I personally selected from the military five years ago. The commander had authorized me to recruit all the superhumans in the military and allowed me to use my superpower to control them. The missions we carry out are all matters the Zhou Consortium doesn't want to be found out for."

Ren Xiaosu asked coldly, "581 people? But there were only about 300 people that participated in the battle this time. Where's the others?"

"There's still 21 people in Luoyang City who have not been arrested yet. The others are scattered across the various strongholds and lying in wait while waiting to be summoned. I'm the one who can contact everyone, so they have no means to contact me," Luo Zongren said.

"Tell us their identities immediately," Luo Lan said.

"There's Deng Kai, an auto repairman living at 31 Fanglin Road.

"Zhu Can, the owner of a fast food restaurant at 78 Osmanthus Road.

"Hu Chengjun lives in the apartment complex at 21 Wuling Road. His unit number is 301..."

Luo Zongren revealed all 21 of the covert agents who had slipped through the net. Ren Xiaosu ordered the Northwest's intelligence agent next to him to write down all of the names. He was going to settle the score with them after Luo Zongren's interrogation.

All of the information was very precious. Ever since they started searching for Luo Zongren's whereabouts, Wang Yun, Luo Lan, Zhou Qi, Ren Xiaosu, and Yang Xiaojin had expended a great deal of energy.

After that, it took a lot of effort to make Luo Zongren speak, and they even had to engage in a battle of wits to make him confess.

Just a moment ago, they were nearly deceived by Luo Zongren.

Although Luo Lan had successfully called the opponent's bluff and destroyed his last bit of confidence, Luo Lan was actually not that sure, because Luo Zongren was way too calm.

It was not easy to obtain all the intel they had gathered now, so they had to cherish it.

At this moment, Luo Lan asked, "The covert agents in the other strongholds, tell us about them as well. A dirty organization like Poison has no need to exist in the world anymore."

Luo Zongren's expression distorted for a moment, but his mental defenses had completely collapsed. Even though Luo Lan was belittling Poison, he did not dare rebuke him.

At the beginning, Ren Xiaosu was worried Luo Lan would provoke Luo Zongren and cause him to turn antagonistic again.

However, Luo Lan whispered to Ren Xiaosu, "Don't worry, it's fine. The more you belittle someone like him, the more honest he becomes."

Ren Xiaosu did not understand the logic behind this, but he believed that Luo Lan and Zhou Qi were more professional than him.

When Luo Zongren revealed all the information about the spies who were operating covertly, Luo Lan asked again, "So you guys tried to kill me because you wanted to frame the Wang Consortium for it? And then have the Qing Consortium start a war with the Wang Consortium?"

"Yes." Luo Zongren nodded in admission.

"Carry on, tell me the details of your operation this time." Luo Lan said fiercely, "Our Qing Consortium had wanted to make friends with the Zhou Consortium to stand up against the Wang Consortium, but we didn't expect to actually be working with a venomous snake. When I think of that Zhou Shiji's smiling face now, I can't wait to go there and tear his face apart."

Luo Zongren gave a fake smile and said, "Your Qing Consortium doesn't have good intentions either, right? The two spies we fitted the nanomachines with suddenly changed their allegiance and disappeared. I don't question their loyalty, so the problem must lie with the nanomachines."

Luo Lan curled his lips. "That has nothing to do with us. It was the Wang Consortium's AI that did it."

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Zongren and said, "Were y'all not afraid that there'd be a backdoor program installed on the nanomachines? Y'all actually had the courage to use them?"

Luo Zongren did not say anything. Ren Xiaosu realized they were probably trying to frame the Qing Consortium again. The two spies who were equipped with the nanomachines were probably just cannon fodder too. They did not care whether there were any backdoor programs installed on the nanomachines.

It was just like the people who tried to assassinate Jiang Xu outside of Stronghold 61.

It could only be said that this "Poison" organization did not have any good intentions right from the beginning. They were only here to sow discord.

"Cut the bullshit and tell us the other details of the operation," Luo Lan said.

Luo Zongren said, "This operation was codenamed 'Abyss.' The operation is funded through the anonymous account 019228181 at the Wang Consortium bank.

"There's only one safe house left. It's at 239 Kaiyuan Avenue. There's a password book, communications equipment, weapons and firearms, as well as a record of bribes offered to the officials of Luoyang City inside."

Luo Zongren spent an entire hour just telling them about the details.

With each piece of information he gave, Ren Xiaosu would have the Northwest's intelligence agents verify it. Only when the information's veracity was correct would the witness's statement be verified, and there would be no need to worry that Luo Zongren was still lying.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Luo Zongren. "Anything else you wanna say?"

Luo Zongren looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, "I only have one question. How did you catch me?"

"Because someone persisted for six days and analyzed all of the surveillance cameras in Luoyang City without eating, drinking, or sleeping." Ren Xiaosu said, "Then they found the bookstore and your place of residence, and they also warned me that you might return to the crime scene to check on your evil deeds."

Luo Zongren subconsciously said, "That's impossible. There's so many surveillance cameras in Luoyang City. Who could possibly finish looking through all of them in six days and even identify me among so many people?"

"Nothing is impossible. He happens to be the nemesis of unscrupulous poisonous bugs like you." Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "He's Wang Yun, the former director of the Kong Consortium's 2nd Military Intelligence Division. But he's already gone on to the Prosperous Northwest."

Luo Zongren muttered, "I'd really like to meet a person like that."

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "Forget it, you're not qualified to see him."

Luo Zongren started laughing strangely. "Do you think I'm the only one who's unscrupulous? Although it was the Zhou Consortium that assassinated Jiang Xu, do you really think the Wang Consortium is innocent?"

Ren Xiaosu frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I sent 12 people to destroy the surveillance footage after the incident, but they were all killed by paper cranes while they were carrying out their mission on the rooftops. Do you think I would've left the surveillance footage for you all to find otherwise?" Luo Zongren said, "So the head of Anjing House had already arrived at Luoyang City at that time. Perhaps she was not here yet personally, but her paper cranes were. Furthermore, she did not use them to save Jiang Xu! At that time, I could not figure out why she only killed the people I sent out to destroy the surveillance footage. Now that I think about it, it must be because she wanted to leave the surveillance footage to you and use it to clear any suspicions against the Wang Consortium.. But do you understand what I'm saying? Although she did not kill Jiang Xu, she is not innocent."

Chapter 997 - A Brilliant Person

If Wang Yun, Luo Lan, and the others had not worked together to find the real culprit this time, the Zhou Consortium would probably have successfully covered up the truth.

However, Luo Zongren suddenly claimed Yang Anjing was not innocent either. Although she was also present in Luoyang City, she did not try to save Jiang Xu.

This left Ren Xiaosu feeling a little complicated. He could not understand why Yang Anjing did not personally get involved when she had already arranged for Vanilla and Tang Hualong to protect Jiang Xu.

But if being a bystander was a crime, should Ren Xiaosu go and kill everyone who witnessed Jiang Xu's death but did not step forward to help? That would be impossible.

Ren Xiaosu walked up to Luo Zongren and asked, "Anything else?"

Luo Zongren chuckled. "No, just kill me already."

However, Ren Xiaosu shook his head. Then he said to the Northwest's intelligence agent, "Tie him on the rack and parade him around, then send him outside of Luoyang City to be executed. Of course, that's if he's still alive at that time."

Luo Zongren started struggling in the interrogation chair. "How can you do this to me? I've already told you everything!"

"If you can make Jiang Xu come back to life after saying all that, I'll consider letting you off. Unfortunately, it won't happen," Ren Xiaosu said.

After that, Ren Xiaosu left the basement and walked to the neighborhood's garden to do some thinking.

Luo Zongren's angry curses and cries could be heard coming from the basement. The man probably did not expect Ren Xiaosu to hate him so deeply. After he had already confessed everything, he still wanted to deprive him of his remaining pride.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu was mentally prepared to be a complete villain when he came to Luoyang City this time. He wanted to use the most extreme methods to deal with these villains.

The first time was when he dealt with the sniper on the rooftop. He promised he would spare the sniper's life as long as he told him which organization he was working for.

The sniper was about to say something when he got killed by the heartworm.

But even if he had told the truth, Ren Xiaosu would not let any of these murderers off.

He was not actually intending to keep that promise.

Luo Lan walked up to him. "What are your plans?"

"A blood debt has to be paid with blood, of course," Ren Xiaosu said.

"And then?"

"I'll return to the Northwest. There's a lot of people waiting for me there," Ren Xiaosu said.

"Then I'll accompany you to the Zhou Consortium. After we take our revenge there, it'll be time for me to return to the Southwest as well." Luo Lan said with a smile, "I heard the fruit in the Northwest ripen in September. When the time comes, I'll go visit you in the Northwest."

"You don't have to go with me," Ren Xiaosu said.

Nearby, Zhou Qi also said, "You can't go to the Zhou Consortium. Qing Zhen called yesterday and wants you to go back immediately. You were already put in danger in Luoyang City, so you shouldn't go to the Zhou Consortium."

Luo Lan was stunned. "No, how can I let Ren Xiaosu go to the Zhou Consortium alone?"

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Don't worry, I won't be alone. My helper has already arrived."

Since Ren Xiaosu did not say who his helper was, Luo Lan did not probe further.

Luo Lan started talking about something else. "You also know that my younger brother likes to plan ahead. Back when he was still the Qing Consortium's Shadow, he decided to establish his own secret troops and secret research base. At that time, no one understood what he was thinking. Even his trusted

subordinates did not understand the significance of him doing so. However, I supported him because I knew he was more farsighted than other people."

"In the end, it turned out he was right. Since the Qing Consortium could not tolerate him, he had to take their place. The reason why I'm saying all this is to tell you that Qing Zhen has been guarding against the Wang Consortium since more than a year ago. Ever since he moved into the military base, he's started keeping to himself more and more. He doesn't talk much to others anymore. In the past, he would still explain why he did the things he did, but not anymore now. It was only when Luo Zongren mentioned the theft of the nanomachines that I realized he might have begun guarding against the AI since that time."

Luo Lan said in seriousness, "So you must be careful of the Wang Consortium. There aren't many things that can make Qing Zhen feel like he's up against a formidable enemy."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. "Got it, thanks for the reminder."

Actually, even when the Experimentals were wreaking havoc in the Southwest, Qing Zhen had never taken them to be a serious problem. But now that he was taking Zero so cautiously, Qing Zhen must have sensed some kind of danger.

Luo Lan then prepared to leave. Although Jiang Xu was not killed by the Wang Consortium, Luo Lan knew it would still be very dangerous for him to remain in the Central Plains.

Before leaving, Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "Why do I get the feeling that you've allowed Qing Zhen to take all your glory? What about yourself?"

Luo Lan explained with a laugh, "For someone as lazy as me, I'll just tag along for the victory. He's the one who should shine brilliantly in this era. Alright, I'll be off now!"

After that, Luo Lan led the Qing Consortium's troops and retreated out of Luoyang City. It was said that the Qing Consortium had already sent an elite force across the southwestern mountains to the Central Plains to escort Luo Lan back.

It was clear that Qing Zhen was very worried for Luo Lan's safety.

In this chaotic world, it was very rare for such brotherhood to exist.

After Luo Lan left, Ren Xiaosu walked around in the neighborhood's garden and called Wang Shengzhi.

The phone only rang once before it was picked up. Wang Shengzhi said straightforwardly, "Are you going to ask why the Wang Consortium did not save Jiang Xu?"

"There's no need for me to ask anything." Ren Xiaosu said, "From your Wang Consortium's standpoint, Jiang Xu's indeed just a normal person with no benefits to you. Whether y'all save him or not, that's your own business. Or rather, when y'all sent Vanilla and Tang Hualong here it counted as extending a hand. So I have no reason to blame y'all. But from today onwards, we're no longer friends."

Ren Xiaosu ended the call.

Just as Ren Xiaosu had said. It was the Wang Consortium's business whether they chose to save Jiang Xu. So he had no reason to attack the Wang Consortium.

But he could no longer be friends with people who set themselves apart from this matter. This was his choice.

Back then, Ren Xiaosu was willing to accept the three tasks Wang Shengzhi had requested of him because there was still some friendship between them. Ren Xiaosu tried to understand the Wang Consortium and the artificial intelligence, and he was willing to show his goodwill.

But it was different now.

Jiang Xu's death created a rift between Ren Xiaosu and the Wang Consortium that could not be repaired.

Ren Xiaosu called over the Northwest's intelligence agents and said, "Y'all can fall out from here and return to the Northwest."

The intelligence agent in charge of this field operation wondered, "Future Commander, aren't you going to the Zhou Consortium? We can go with you to seek revenge."

"No need." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "It's not your responsibility to take revenge for Jiang Xu. You don't have to put yourselves in danger. Go back home. Your families are still waiting for you all in the Northwest."

Yang Xiaojin walked out of the villa and looked at him. "What about me?"

Ren Xiaosu smiled. "Come with me."

Yang Xiaojin laughed.. "Not bad, at least you didn't think of sending me away this time."

Chapter 998 - Interrogation Report

Just as Luoyang City was abuzz with the investigation of the real murderer, some breaking news shocked everyone.

The Wang Consortium had just recalled all men under the age of 30 who had served in the military from the strongholds they controlled. Then they suddenly launched an all-out war against the Kong Consortium and the Pyro Company.

Currently, the Kong Consortium existed in name only. Their former bureaucracy and big shots had taken refuge in the easternmost strongholds along the coast after abandoning the dozen or so strongholds they originally controlled.

During the past few months, those strongholds had been left unmanned, with a large number of residents having fled south. As such, criminals started running amok in them. Whoever had a gun would call the shots.

It would not be difficult for the Wang Consortium to occupy most of the Kong Consortium's strongholds anymore.

As for the Pyro Company, they only had two of their original 12 divisions left due to the war with the expeditionary army in the north.

If the Wang Consortium had planned to unify the entire Alliance of Strongholds from very early on, this would probably be the best opportunity for them to annex the other organizations.

Moreover, the Wang Consortium's conscription policy played an extremely effective role during such a time.

Similarly, they had fought against the northern expeditionary army like the Pyro Company. Although they suffered many casualties, the Wang Consortium was able to quickly replenish its troops.

However, the focus of the average person's discussion of this war was more about how they had just defeated the foreign enemies, so should the Wang Consortium take advantage of the situation?

After all, the Pyro Company had fought very hard to resist the expeditionary army's advance. For the Wang Consortium to make a move now, wasn't that a little too unethical?

But they also knew their discussions were pointless and would not change the will of the consortium. The Wang Consortium did not care how they were viewed.

As the saying goes, winner takes all. If the Wang Consortium could really unify the Alliance of Strongholds one day, history would be written by them.

Everyone knew the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium no longer had the strength to resist the Wang Consortium. After this battle, the Zhou Consortium would be the only force in the Central Plains that could stand up to the Wang Consortium.

However, only the Wang Consortium's higher-ups knew that the Zhou Consortium, who they were initially worried about, was probably unable to even look after themselves.

Just as the Wang Consortium was sending out their troops to the Kong Consortium and the Pyro Company, the Zhou Consortium suddenly started mobilizing their main forces.

When the rest of the world learned of this news, they thought the Zhou Consortium was preparing to guard against the Wang Consortium's troops who were heading south. After all, the deployment of the main forces this time was extremely widespread, and it looked like they were preparing for a total war.

Among the deployments, the Zhou Consortium's 1st and 3rd Divisions marched northwards when they were originally garrisoned in the south.

But two days later, everyone realized the Zhou Consortium's main forces did not seem to be rushing to its northern front line. Based on their trajectory, they were actually heading to Stronghold 73 where the Zhou Consortium's political center was based.

This left many of the intel brokers confused. Why were so many of the Zhou Consortium's divisions heading to Stronghold 73?

After all, Stronghold 73 was located in the center of the Zhou Consortium's territory. Even if the Wang Consortium attacked, they couldn't make inroads there, right?

Could it be that the Zhou Consortium was planning to abandon their six strongholds north of Stronghold 73?!

At this moment, an article called Interrogation Report was published in Hope Media's newspaper.

In the report, it detailed how the Qing Consortium and the Northwest Army had surrounded the hitmen in Luoyang City and investigated the spies, how they analyzed the surveillance footage of the city, how they arrested corrupt officials who had taken bribes, all of which led to the capture of the mastermind, Luo Zongren (real name: Yang Yanbang).

This interrogation report clearly listed all the events of the time leading up to Jiang Xu's assassination and the events after that. It was obvious Hope Media had received Ren Xiaosu's authorization to publish this report, and they even had someone who specially provided them with information to write the article.

In the interrogation report, even the interrogation process was described. Although most of the violent torture methods were omitted, the process of how Luo Zongren pointed the blame at the Wang Consortium and how he was exposed was also mentioned in the article.

This was the first time Hope Media had published an article like that. When the readers of Hope Media saw this report, all of them were thrilled.

This was probably the readers' first experience with a real spy war.

In the past, no newspaper had ever dared to publish such articles. This was because there would be bloody battles involving the organizations, and no organization would allow such reports to be published.

Moreover, even though there were also relevant cultural works covering spy wars in the past, those were mostly just the imaginations of directors and authors. They were not as authentic as the interrogation report that was published.

However, the main point of this interrogation report was that it pointed out the real culprit responsible for Jiang Xu's death—the Zhou Consortium.

While everyone thought the Wang Consortium had killed Jiang Xu, Hope Media announced the true murderer in the headlines. The Zhou Consortium's purpose was to make everyone outraged at the Wang Consortium and even split the Wang Consortium from the inside.

In an instant, many of the young people in the Zhou Consortium's strongholds walked out onto the streets to protest. Before this, the Zhou Consortium's spokesperson even held a press conference to condemn the Wang Consortium for the assassination.

At that time, many young people still supported the Zhou Consortium's unyielding attitude and admired their courage for criticizing the Wang Consortium.

But now they realized they had been deceived. So it was actually the Zhou Consortium that did it.

There was no doubt about Hope Media's reputation. The trust the journalists and editors had accumulated over the years made it so no one doubted the authenticity of the newspaper when they read it.

At this moment, many of the intelligence brokers realized the Zhou Consortium had not mobilized their troops to defend against the Wang Consortium but to prevent someone from taking revenge on them.

And the intelligence circle knew very well who that someone was.

However, they could not understand why the Zhou Consortium would mobilize such a large force. Was it really necessary?

The Northwest was so far away from the Zhou Consortium, and it could be seen from the previous sting operation in Luoyang City that not many of the Northwest's intelligence agents were operating covertly in the Central Plains.

Moreover, after Luo Zongren was beaten and killed by the residents of Luoyang City during the protest, all of the Northwest's intelligence agents left.

Therefore, no matter how powerful that future commander was, he could not possibly take on the Zhou Consortium's main forces all by himself.

The intelligence brokers somehow felt the Zhou Consortium was making a mountain out of a molehill. After all, the Zhou Consortium was an organization, while the other party was seemingly only one person.

However, they still rushed to Stronghold 73 very quickly. Everyone felt that the future commander would definitely head there. Witnessing someone opposing an entire organization was something that would probably only happen once in their lifetimes.

Just as everyone's gaze turned to the Zhou Consortium, a group of more than 2,000 soldiers in the north advanced into the Sacred Mountains that had been abandoned by the Pyro Company.

After the Battle of the Sacred Mountains, this place had become desolate. Even the Pyro Company's own troops had pulled out from this place.

No one knew what these troops had come to the Sacred Mountains for.

Chapter 999 - Finding Those Responsible

The fog around the Sacred Mountains did not disperse, and the tarantulas hidden within it still lingered.

When these 2,000-odd people arrived at the foggy region, they did not stop in their tracks like normal people would. Instead, they plunged right in.

But surprisingly, their pace did not seem to be affected by the fog at all. They continued advancing into the heart of the Sacred Mountains without any hindrance.

It had been a long time since anyone came to this abandoned land. When the tarantulas discovered there was prey, they started converging on this unit of soldiers.

But when the tarantulas appeared, these soldiers did not panic one bit. One of them took out a black box that played a strange sound. When the tarantulas heard the sound, they immediately retreated.

It seemed the soldiers did not intend to kill the tarantulas. Instead, they wanted to use them as a natural protective barrier to continue guarding the secret of this place.

It was not the same secret the Pyro Company used to protect, but a new one.

The group of more than 2,000 soldiers walked in an orderly manner. When they entered the heart of the Sacred Mountains, silvery strands appeared on the face of the person at the front. "This really is a suitable place. Although the facilities are a little old, there's a lot of materials here that we can put to use immediately."

After that, the 2,000-odd soldiers behind him immediately entered the various buildings and started searching for equipment left behind by the Pyro Company.

Based on his calculations, this Sacred Mountains were currently the most suitable place to establish a secret factory. Although it still lacked the support of certain technologies, his final requirements would soon be met when the Wang Consortium fully annexed the Pyro Company.

He turned around and looked around at the overgrown weeds in the heart of the Sacred Mountains and suddenly felt this place was very suitable for him. Everything here seemed like a new beginning.

...

At this moment, the Zhou Consortium's main forces were still rushing to Stronghold 73 to assemble.

Inside Stronghold 73, in an office at the intelligence agency's secret base, a middle-aged man wearing gold-rimmed glasses was reading a document in his hand with a frown. "Any news of Ren Xiaosu?"

"Sir, he departed from Luoyang City by himself two days ago in the morning. His whereabouts are currently unknown."

The Zhou Consortium's intelligence director named Zhou Shoushi was a little unhappy. "What the hell are you people doing? How could you lose track of an extremely dangerous person like him?"

In the luxurious office, a huge, taxidermied tiger head was hanging on the wall. This was the tiger Zhou Shoushi had killed 17 years ago.

There was even an exquisite-looking hunting rifle placed under the tiger's head. Everyone who entered the office would be greeted by this sight first and feel the authority of the office's owner within the Zhou Consortium.

In the Zhou Consortium, Zhou Shoushi, as well as Zhou Xilong, who had been killed by Ren Xiaosu, and the current highest-ranking military commander, Zhou Yifei, were also known as the Zhou Consortium's Three Tigers. Zhou Shoushi actually quite liked this nickname.

The office windows were covered by thick curtains. It was as though the people in here had a natural dislike for sunlight.

The intelligence agent opposite of Zhou Shoushi said, "The main forces should be arriving at Stronghold 73 within two days. Sir, surely we don't need to be this worried, right?"

"The issue is how are we going to make it through the next two days." Zhou Shoushi placed the document in his hand aside. "How are things over at Hope Media?"

"An informant at Luoyang City sent us a message saying Hope Media is packing up their stuff. It seems like they're moving out of their headquarters." The intelligence agent said, "A convoy has already parked outside of Hope Media, so they should be leaving in the next few days."

"Leaving?" Zhou Shoushi was taken aback. "Where are they going?"

"It's rumored that they're heading to the Northwest," the intelligence agent said.

All of a sudden, an explosion boomed from outside. Zhou Shoushi immediately stood up. "What's going on?!"

After a while, an intelligence agent knocked on the door and came in. "Sir, bad news! The city gate of Stronghold 73 has been blown up with explosives!"

"What?" Zhou Shoushi was stunned. "The city gate was blown up? What're the garrison troops doing?"

"They're pursuing the person who blew up the city gate. Apparently, the culprit was inside the city during the incident. He suddenly approached the city gate at a very fast speed, dropped the explosives, then ran away. Right now, the criminal who blew up the gate is trying to escape the stronghold, but it seems like there's more than one of them. He has a partner," the intelligence agent explained.

"Hurry off! It's a disgrace to our intelligence agency that people like them have infiltrated the stronghold. Organize a field operation to arrest them. We must capture these people before it turns dark!" Zhou Shoushi flew into a rage. For such a serious crime to happen, he would probably not be able to answer to his boss, Zhou Shiji.

In an instant, most of the Zhou Consortium's intelligence agency's field operatives were attracted by the explosion and rushed out like a swarm of locusts.

When Zhou Shoushi picked up his teacup, he suddenly realized it had gotten cold. He picked up the phone and told the people outside, "Change my tea."

Afterwards, he hung up and started going through the other documents. But for some reason, Zhou Shoushi felt a little uneasy.

They were already on guard against Ren Xiaosu taking revenge on the Zhou Consortium. Now that such a terrible incident had suddenly happened in Stronghold 73, he knew it was definitely related to Ren Xiaosu.

The door opened with a creak. Zhou Shoushi frowned. "Why didn't you knock—"

Zhou Shoushi was about to lose his temper, but when he saw the young man who pushed open the door, he froze.

Ren Xiaosu was holding a tea saucer in his hand. However, there was no cup nor any piping hot tea on it. Instead, a bloodied pistol was resting there.

Zhou Shoushi forced himself to calm down. He slowly reached under the table and tried to press the red button. However, Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Don't bother pressing it. It's useless. Everyone in the building is dead. I didn't even let off the guard hounds that y'all raised. Do you think I'm a little deranged?"

Zhou Shoushi felt a chill fall upon him. He had not even heard any commotion outside. But as soon as Ren Xiaosu said that, Zhou Shoushi believed him simply because he was Ren Xiaosu.

"What are you doing here?" Zhou Shoushi asked anxiously.

"I heard that y'all were looking for me and even offered a reward to the intelligence brokers in the mob. When I saw that the offer was so high, I decided to sneak in here and see if I could claim the money." Ren Xiaosu plucked the cloth Zhou Shoushi used to clean his glasses with off the table and started wiping the bloodstained pistol on the saucer.

Zhou Shoushi said, "It wasn't my idea to kill Jiang Xu."

"See, it's much easier if we chat like this, isn't it?" Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "Who else could it be but you? You're Luo Zongren's immediate superior."

"Although he's half a rank lower than me, he doesn't report to me most of the time. I also know the deeds he carries out are those that can't be seen out in the open, so I deliberately avoided them. I was afraid the boss would silence me to keep a secret," Zhou Shoushi explained.

"Mhm, that's a very good reason." Ren Xiaosu nodded.. "So you're telling me that the person who wanted Jiang Xu killed and gave the order to do so was the Zhou Consortium's boss, Zhou Shiji? But even if you can wash your hands of this matter, you still have to die."

Chapter 1000 - Sign Of The Times

When Zhou Shoushi realized he was going to die today regardless of what he said, he gradually calmed down.

Zhou Shoushi adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and even combed his hair with his hand before saying, "Do you know the Wang Consortium is annexing the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium?"

Ren Xiaosu sat down across from him. "I know, but what does that have anything to do with what we're talking about now? Are you saying that everything that y'all did was to target the Wang Consortium?"

"That's right." Zhou Shoushi said, "Several years ago, the Wang Consortium revealed their ambitions when they kept using trade to try to weaken the consortiums around them. Moreover, they've implemented mandatory conscription of their citizens for so many years, so everyone knows they've been wanting to start a war in the Central Plains."

"So?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"So our Zhou Consortium was just seeking self-preservation." Zhou Shoushi said coldly, "If the Wang Consortium can resort to unscrupulous means, why can't our Zhou Consortium do the same? Did you not notice that they just recalled all men under the age of 30 who had served in the military? Actually, they didn't even use their full strength during the war with the expeditionary army. Otherwise, the Pyro Company wouldn't have ended up losing so badly, and your Northwest Army wouldn't have had to fight so hard at Mt. Zuoyun! Don't you think your fellow Northwest Army soldiers at Mt. Zuoyun who died there suffered wrongful deaths?"

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "That's your reason for killing Jiang Xu?"

"Only by doing so would the entire Alliance of Strongholds share a common enemy. It would also make the Qing Consortium and the Zhou Consortium join forces to resist the Wang Consortium together! If the plan was successful, you would also have taken revenge for Jiang Xu, right? Therefore, the Northwest would've become part of the plan as well." Zhou Shoushi said, "This was supposed to be the best strategy for the Zhou Consortium."

Ren Xiaosu had to admit that if Wang Yun and the others had not worked together to find the real culprit, the Zhou Consortium's plan would have indeed succeeded. At that point, the Wang Consortium would become the enemy of the entire world, and there would be no chance for them to slowly annex the various consortiums.

If Zhou Shiji hadn't encountered Ren Xiaosu, he could've been hailed as a cunning strategist, a great man, or something on that level.

"But y'all weren't affected by the war with the expeditionary army. If you're envious of the Wang Consortium's mandatory conscription policy, you could've done the same. You could've come up with various strategies to counter them, but you shouldn't've used Jiang Xu's life in exchange for your victory. Perhaps to you, killing Jiang Xu was the best choice for the Zhou Consortium. But in my opinion, he was the most innocent one." Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "Besides, what did Jiang Xu do to deserve this?"

Ren Xiaosu stood up and unfurled the curtains a little.

When the afternoon sun shone into the gloomy room, Zhou Shoushi could not help shielding his own face from the sunlight. It was a little blinding.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Tell me, what's Zhou Shiji's itinerary?"

Zhou Shoushi said with a dark expression, "Why should I tell you? Can I live if I tell you?"

"Well, no." Ren Xiaosu grinned. "But won't you feel a little lonely if you had to die alone? Wouldn't it be great to have someone accompany you? Think about it. He's clearly the one who came up with the plans, yet you're the one dying for it instead. Don't you find that unfair?"

Ten minutes later, Ren Xiaosu walked out of the intelligence agency's headquarters. He had obtained the specific details of Zhou Shiji's itinerary, as well as the contingency plans of his team if he encountered danger in the stronghold.

It was as though Zhou Shoushi was particularly worried Zhou Shiji would not die, so he explained everything very clearly.

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu felt the interrogation process had gone too smoothly. Perhaps Zhou Shoushi was really afraid of loneliness.

This was the bunch of sunlight fearing, spineless cowards who had orchestrated Jiang Xu's death while hiding behind a thick curtain of conspiracy.

For a moment, Ren Xiaosu also considered another potential problem. If he really managed to kill Zhou Shiji on his visit to the Zhou Consortium this time, a civil war would definitely break out within the Zhou Consortium instantly.

According to Luo Lan, there was no one in the Zhou Consortium who was capable of taking charge other than Zhou Shiji.

In this fashion, the Wang Consortium would no longer have any opponents in the Central Plains.

This was probably why Qing Zhen had urgently summoned Luo Lan back. Could Qing Zhen have seen the day when the Wang Consortium would unify the Central Plains?

And then, would the Wang Consortium go on to attack the Northwest and the Southwest after that? Ren Xiaosu felt that they would.

At that time, the Wang Consortium would turn into a behemoth.

But how could he not take revenge for Jiang Xu? Ren Xiaosu wanted everyone to know there was a price for killing a person like Jiang Xu.

The people from Hope Media had already packed up their belongings and were heading to the Northwest.

Those with families and children would remain in Luoyang City, while the others would head northwards to set up a new headquarters there. After that, the Hope Media that remained in Luoyang City would become a branch office.

This was the decision Zhang Chentong had undertaken after a long deliberation because the Central Plains was no longer peaceful. Everyone could sense the impending danger.

While pondering, Ren Xiaosu had already made his way past two street junctions. The intelligence agency had deployed almost all of its forces to capture the criminal who had set off the explosion at the city gate, so it was exceptionally easy for Ren Xiaosu to infiltrate the intelligence agency after getting into the stronghold. Perhaps no one was even aware that Zhou Shoushi was dead.

As Ren Xiaosu looked around the streets of Stronghold 73, chatter broke out among the residents over the explosion that went off. No one expected that Ren Xiaosu, the chief culprit, would just casually walk past them like that.

The residents were innocent, so Ren Xiaosu did not wish to start a massacre right inside the stronghold. If a lot of innocent people got dragged in, Jiang Xu would probably be very disappointed.

But it did not matter. He would make Zhou Shiji himself walk into the trap.

As the Zhou Consortium's main forces were still two days away from Stronghold 73, Ren Xiaosu felt it was absolutely enough time for him to kill Zhou Shiji.

Another explosion rang out in the north of the stronghold where the garrison troops' base was located. If even that place was successfully attacked, it meant there was no longer a safe location in the stronghold for Zhou Shiji.

But before Ren Xiaosu could safely retreat, he suddenly noticed he was being followed.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and disappeared into a small alley. The people following him quickened their pursuit and ran into the alley.

But when the two of them went in, they realized it was actually a dead end. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was nowhere to be seen.

"Looking for me? There's been quite a lot of people looking for me over the past two days." Ren Xiaosu started sizing up the other party. Actually, they did not look like they were the Zhou Consortium's people. Their clothes made them look more like refugees who lived in the wilderness.

The two men looked at each other and slowly moved their hands towards their waists.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "Which department of the Zhou Consortium are you two from?"

"We ain't their people. We're just looking to earn some reward money," one of them said.

Ren Xiaosu nodded. "So you're intelligence brokers working for the mob? Who's your boss?"

"As if we'd tell you something like that! Even though we're not as strong as you, we still have our pride. If you want to kill us, do it quickly. We won't involve others," one of them said.

Ren Xiaosu smiled. "Forget it, I've killed too many people over the past few days. I don't wish to kill any more people who have nothing to do with this case."

Ren Xiaosu turned around and walked out of the alley.

But as soon as he turned around, one of the men quickly drew his gun and tried to kill Ren Xiaosu. Before he could raise his arm, a sniper bullet pierced the man's chest.

When the other guy saw the situation had turned unfavorable, he attempted to escape by climbing over the wall. But how could Yang Xiaojin possibly give him a chance?

Ren Xiaosu stood quietly at the entrance of the alley and sighed. "Is this a sign of the times? Xiaojin, your position has been revealed. Head over to Alpha Seven. I'll pick you up on the way."

Yang Xiaojin replied over the earpiece, "Roger."