

First Order 601

Chapter 601 I have too few friends, so Luo Lan cannot die

“There is a way, though. We can use zip fuels or something like white phosphorus to burn down this entire stronghold. But if we stay at the center of the stronghold and the fire spreads here, we’ll all be dead before the creeper vine gets exterminated.” Luo Lan added, “If the creeper vines start moving again, we’ll really be done for.”

Zhou Qi frowned. “Continue searching for an enclosed environment. As long as I don’t have to face too many vines at once, I might be able to buy us some time with my power.”

Luo Lan sighed and said, “The last time I faced a predicament like this, I was getting pursued by the Experimentals.”

One of the Qing Consortium’s soldiers suddenly asked, “Boss, how did you manage to escape from the Experimentals previously?”

Luo Lan thought back and replied, “I met a strong young man back then. But I’m not that lucky this time.”

One of the protesters who had joined Luo Lan’s group suddenly stepped forward and asked, “Luo Lan, is this plant part of your conspiracy?”

Luo Lan was surprised. “Are you out of your mind? Didn’t you guys say this was an auspicious sign for your Wang Consortium?”

Back when people first started noticing the creeper vines growing, they deliberately described it as an auspicious sign for the Wang Consortium. They said Wang Shengzhi had managed the dozen-odd strongholds under the Wang Consortium really well, which was why an auspicious sign like this appeared.

But thinking back now, that sounded like an absolute joke...

“Then how did you know in advance there would be a crisis like this?” that protester asked loudly.

Luo Lan was amused. “Didn’t you guys see those military vehicles driving to and fro when you were sitting downstairs? It’s because you’re too used to leading a comfortable life in the stronghold and act like domesticated pigs that you can’t recognize when danger is coming. The news about the creeper vine was reported a long time ago, so what’s it gotta do with me? Don’t tell me that I planted them from across the strongholds? If I had that ability, I would’ve already impregnated your wife!”

The protester’s face darkened!

The Qing Consortium soldiers’ mouths twitched a little. It seemed that Boss Luo was also getting a little annoyed at being surrounded by the creeper vines. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have started throwing insults. However, they did not think much of it. After all, Boss Luo had always been a rascal.

Luo Lan looked around and saw the other residents were fleeing towards the center of the stronghold. They were the only ones who were still standing at the boundary where the creeper vines had grown to.

Luo Lan suddenly asked his subordinates, "Hehe! What do you say if we just kill them here now? No one will know anyway, right?"

When he said that, the protesters' expressions changed. They were really frightened now!

They were willing to protest against Luo Lan because they knew he could not do anything about them in the Wang Consortium's stronghold. But now that all order was gone, the safeguard they had was also no more!

However, Luo Lan did not really intend to kill them. Nearby, the Hope Media reporter, Zhou Tao, coughed and said, "I will report everything that happens factually."

"Alright, alright, I got it." Luo Lan waved his hand impatiently. "You've already seen the kind of people they are. I won't argue with them, but your Hope Media should also understand that such methods disgust me. It's too underhanded."

With that, Luo Lan led the way and headed off towards the center of the stronghold.

Regardless of whether the creeper vines would continue spreading, they had to get to the center of the stronghold and find some food first. Afterwards, they had to seek shelter in a safe place where they could not be harmed!

The stronghold had descended into chaos. Luo Lan did not get far before he came across some people smashing open store doors and going in to loot any food and water inside.

"Looks like not everyone is stupid. They know food and water are the most important things right now," Luo Lan said with a smile. From his behavior, he did not look like he was in a dangerous city at all.

After a group of people had just raided a store, they ran into Luo Lan and a group of Qing Consortium soldiers looking at them with a smile. Their spoils were forcefully taken away.

Luo Lan distributed the food to Zhou Qi and the others and said, "This should be enough to last us for three days. Hide the food well on yourselves."

In this dangerous city, everyone was panicking. The protesters were no longer following Luo Lan's group. Instead, they went off looking for the other residents of Stronghold 61 and the Wang Consortium troops.

Along the way, when they saw other people stealing food, they started doing the same. However, after they got their hands on some food, they secretly hid it on themselves and no longer looked as united as before.

Zhou Qi said, "Should we go and approach the Wang Consortium troops? We're still considered their guests, after all. From a political standpoint, they're obliged to protect us. They can't bear Qing Zhen's wrath otherwise, even if they aren't really to blame."

If Luo Lan died here, Qing Zhen would seriously launch a nuclear strike at the Wang Consortium's strongholds! Even if the culprit behind his death was actually a plant!

However, Luo Lan shook his head and said, "The Wang Consortium must still have many surviving troops right now, but do you think firearms will give us any protection? It's not like the Experimentals are the threat right now. Old Zhou... at a critical moment like this, I guess we still have to rely on you! I've known you're especially reliable since a long time ago. You're someone who will step forward at a critical moment like a good brother...."

Zhou Qi curled his lips. "I already made the disclaimer that I can't protect you."

"I'll pay more!" Luo Lan said.

"I can't protect you even if you pay me more money." Zhou Qi roared, "Can you recognize the situation we're in?!"

"Let's find a house with fewer openings to set up a last-ditch defense in." Luo Lan sighed and said, "Hopefully, the rescue troops will arrive earlier and save us, although I don't know what they can do against this plant. Let's just hope the Wang Consortium doesn't choose to set the entire stronghold aflame. If only Ren Xiaosu were around. We could kill our way out of this mess."

"Yeah, right." Zhou Qi said in a speechless manner, "Look at the creeper vines outside. Even if Ren Xiaosu were here, he couldn't get us out of this place!"

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Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was standing in front of the gate outside the stronghold. He was looking at the dense growth of creeper vines blocking the gate. He turned around and said to Zhou Yingxue, "Can you control the vines?"

Zhou Yingxue revealed a hesitant look. "Master, do we really have to go inside? Didn't you hear the Wang Consortium soldiers say this stronghold is doomed? When they were fleeing for their lives from the stronghold walls just now, they already saw a third of the stronghold getting overrun by these creeper vines. Judging by how long has passed, the entire stronghold must already be covered in creeper vines. Luo Lan is definitely going to die, so do we really have to go in and save him?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment before saying, "Knowing Luo Lan's craftiness, I feel that he'll definitely survive until the end. Regardless of whether he's dead or alive, I still have to go in and take a look."

Zhou Yingxue muttered, "Why are you so insistent about saving that fatass?"

Ren Xiaosu said seriously, "Because he's my friend."

Zhou Yingxue suddenly realized Ren Xiaosu had two extremes of personality. If it were not his friend, he wouldn't care whether the person was dead or alive. But if it were his friend, he would go to the ends of the earth for them.

Ren Xiaosu could tell that Zhou Yingxue was puzzled, so he briefly explained, "I have too few friends, so every one of them is precious. One dead person means one less friend."

"Alright then." Zhou Yingxue sighed and said, "I tried to control the plant just now. It seems that because we're too far away from the creeper vines' roots, I can't gain control whatsoever."

"Is that so?" Ren Xiaosu looked at the creeper vines and quietly estimated his chances if he were to force his way in.

Then Zhou Yingxue added, "But I can make it not attack me."

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Chapter 602 The maid's power

Back when Ren Xiaosu and the Razor Sharp Company had to attack the Beiwan River, everyone was still thinking about how to approach the battle. In the end, the Qing Consortium's troops arrived and took the Beiwan River in a flash. Initially, everyone thought the Qing Consortium might have some other motives for offering their help. However, that was not the case. It was only because Qing Zhen and Luo Lan had found out about Ren Xiaosu's situation that they decided to help him attack the Zong Consortium. This linkup was also what shocked Zhang Xiaoman back then. No one in the Razor Sharp Company had expected the Qing Consortium would place so much importance on their relationship with Ren Xiaosu.

Furthermore, Luo Lan had also stood by his side at the Yang Consortium's gala back at Stronghold 88. When everyone was mocking them, Luo Lan stepped forward to back him.

Now that Luo Lan was here in Stronghold 61, and since Ren Xiaosu had found out about his itinerary from the newspapers, it would be wrong of him to not go to Luo Lan's rescue.

Ren Xiaosu had Zhou Yingxue test it out first. Just to be safe, he wanted to see if Zhou Yingxue would really not get attacked by the creeper vines.

What surprised Ren Xiaosu was that when Zhou Yingxue walked towards the gate that had been blocked by the creeper vines, the vines started giving way to her. Zhou Yingxue turned around to look at her master. "Master, I wasn't lying. They really won't attack me."

Ren Xiaosu frowned and thought for a moment. "Then can you make it not attack me as well?"

The creeper vines had grown so dense it would be a little troublesome even if Ren Xiaosu could get into the stronghold. So it would be best if he could rely on Zhou Yingxue's power.

But Zhou Yingxue replied, "I doubt it..."

"Let's give it a try." Ren Xiaosu walked to Zhou Yingxue's side. But as he walked over, extremely aggressive creeper vines thrust towards him.

Zhou Yingxue was just about to rush forward to save him when she saw the black saber in Ren Xiaosu's hand flick by. The vines thrusting at him broke off and fell to the ground.

“Master, this is too dangerous.” Zhou Yingxue said, “Let’s not go inside. As your maid, I definitely won’t allow you to take such a risk!”

To put it plainly, Zhou Yingxue absolutely refused to go into such an eerie place at this moment. Although she could now make the creeper vines not attack her, who knew what else could happen inside the stronghold?

When Zhou Yingxue saw Ren Xiaosu frowning silently, she thought she had convinced him. Therefore, she added, “Master, think about it. We’ve stuck together for so long, so how can I watch you die?! It’ll be very dangerous for you to go in there!”

Ren Xiaosu pondered it for a moment before saying, “Alright, I won’t go in then, but you should be careful when going in alone.”

Zhou Yingxue was surprised.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhou Yingxue. “There a problem? Yesterday’s Hope Media paper reported about the hotel Luo Lan checked into, so go and look for him there first. If he isn’t there, you can go and take a look at the bank vaults. If he isn’t at the bank vaults, go search for him in the center of the stronghold. Luo Lan’s a smart person. Since the creeper vines are growing inwards from the outside, he’ll only escape towards the city center.”

“Ahem.” Zhou Yingxue said, “Master, I suddenly thought of something. Actually, you won’t get attacked if you hold my hand....”

Ren Xiaosu sneered, “Why didn’t you say so earlier?”

“I just thought of it,” Zhou Yingxue replied. She was on the verge of breaking down. How could she have known her master would make her go into the stronghold alone? If she had known that, she would have said so earlier! ‘Master, you’re way too cruel!’

Ren Xiaosu gave Zhou Yingxue a sidelong look. “Can you really make the vines not attack me?”

Zhou Yingxue nodded vigorously. “I guarantee that as long as you hold onto my hand, the creeper vine will definitely not attack you!”

“Alright, wait here for me.” Ren Xiaosu then he went back into town. Zhou Yingxue stood there in a daze, not knowing what Ren Xiaosu was planning.

Ten minutes later, Ren Xiaosu returned. Zhou Yingxue looked at Ren Xiaosu dumbfoundedly as he held a pair of gloves in his hands!

“Master, what’re you doing?” Zhou Yingxue asked.

"It's improper for men and women to be in close contact with each other. Let's put on the gloves!" Ren Xiaosu said.

"Master, do you really have to go that far!" Zhou Yingxue did not know whether to laugh or cry. "It's just holding hands, isn't it? Are my hands that dirty to you?"

"Don't think too much into it. I just feel that we should avoid certain misunderstandings." Ren Xiaosu remarked, "After all, it'll be a little difficult to explain why I'm holding another girl's hand. Although she won't see it, I have to be honest with her."

"Master, you're way too innocent." Zhou Yingxue had no energy to argue with him anymore. Her master standing before her had achieved so many amazing deeds, yet he was not even willing to hold hands with another woman!

Ren Xiaosu had already put on his glove. Then he held Zhou Yingxue's hand and they tested it again. As expected, the creeper vines did not attack him anymore.

Ren Xiaosu was initially worried that wearing the glove would make the power ineffective. In the end, he was relieved it worked. Meanwhile, Zhou Yingxue was rolling her eyes from next to him.

Most of the refugees in town had already fled along with the soldiers that had just escaped from the stronghold. Only a few of them were still watching the developments.

Qin Shengm who was standing not far away from Ren Xiaosum suddenly said, "I'll go inside with you two!"

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at Qin Sheng. The young Rider had a lot of combat strength as well. If a battle were to break out, he would definitely be of great help.

But this time, the enemy was not human or beast. It was a plant. Moreover, after going in, based on the character of the Riders, he might even try his best to save some of the stronghold residents. This might slow Ren Xiaosu down in his search for Luo Lan. So Ren Xiaosu decisively rejected him. "You can just wait here in town. Aren't you Riders not supposed to enter the stronghold during your training period in town?"

"But this is a crisis! How can I just stand by and do nothing? Besides, even if I go in, my teacher might not necessarily find out," Qin Sheng explained.

Ren Xiaosu said, "If you go in, I'll go to Luoyang City and report your actions."

Qin Sheng was confused.

With that, Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue walked into Stronghold 61. Qin Sheng was just about to rush in when the vines blocking the gate started closing up again, leaving him helpless.

Qin Sheng suddenly realized there was probably no human who could face the creeper vines alone. Not even a superhuman could do that.

A group of refugees nearby could only stand by and watch as Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue made their way into the stronghold. They could not understand why someone would voluntarily enter the stronghold at a time like this.

How bold of them!

Ren Xiaosu was considered a familiar face in town. Everyone only knew he was rich, but they did not know he was actually also a superhuman.

And that person who addressed him as “master” earlier, was she also a superhuman?

After Ren Xiaosu entered the stronghold with Zhou Yingxue, the first thing that shocked him was that everything in sight had turned green.

The dense growth of creeper vines was an ocean, while Zhou Yingxue and he were a miniscule presence in this huge expanse.

Chapter 603 The bank vaults

When Ren Xiaosu looked away from the ocean of green, he was startled to see that the Wang Consortium’s artificial intelligence camera near the gate was turning slowly towards him.

Ren Xiaosu pulled his hood up and wondered, ‘The stronghold’s on the verge of being destroyed, so why is the AI still working? Since it’s still working, why wasn’t there any warning given?’

A lot of people had mentioned the artificial intelligence to Ren Xiaosu. However, Ren Xiaosu was never really certain about how it worked. As Ren Xiaosu did not have any experience with things like computers in his previous environment, he had always been curious about the artificial intelligence yet somewhat skeptical.

Now that he thought about those who had praised the artificial intelligence, he felt like they might have been sarcastic.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu did not know if the Wang Consortium themselves thought that way.

As he did not understand the artificial intelligence, Ren Xiaosu had no way of judging it.

Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue walked cautiously along the streets. As they proceeded, Ren Xiaosu suddenly stepped on something. He looked down and saw a human skeleton under a dense growth of creeper vine leaves.

It wasn’t just one. Human skeletal remains were strewn all over the streets with the creeper vines wrapped tightly around them. It was a horrifying and terrifying sight to see.

Ren Xiaosu could imagine how desperate the people were at the moment of the disaster.

If it had been the Experimentals attacking, some of these people might have at least been able to escape by taking refuge at home. The Experimentals’ awareness was not as heightened even though their physical fitness had improved significantly. As such, some people had managed to survive that ordeal.

But it was different when faced with the creeper vines. After walking around for a long time, Ren Xiaosu did not even glimpse any survivors.

Ren Xiaosu tried to remember, 'What was the name of the hotel that Luo Lan was staying at?'

He took out a copy of yesterday's newspaper from his storage space. After browsing for a long time, he finally found it in the papers: InterContinental Triumphant West Road.

Ren Xiaosu led Zhou Yingxue to a newspaper stand first and found the map of Stronghold 61 there. Then they identified where Triumphant West Road was located.

They were only about five or six kilometers away from the hotel, and it would take about half an hour to get there by walking.

When they arrived outside the InterContinental Hotel, other than the skeletal remains of humans, there were also the banners the protesters had abandoned.

"It's here." When Ren Xiaosu saw the banners, he was sure they were at the right place. "Let's check out the parking lot first."

When they arrived at the parking lot, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to find the vehicles with the Qing Consortium's license plates already covered in vines. The tires of the vehicles looked like they had been punctured.

Ren Xiaosu wondered why all of Luo Lan's vehicles always met with such unfortunate incidents. Back at the Li Consortium's stronghold, didn't Yang Xiaojin destroy his cars one after another?

And at this place, his vehicles' tires were punctured.

Ren Xiaosu took Zhou Yingxue upstairs and searched through the rooms one by one. However, he could not find Fatty Luo at all. Just searching from room to room alone took Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue an entire hour to complete.

"There's no sign of any corpses that might be Luo Lan's, so that means that he's already escaped from the hotel. That's a good thing," Ren Xiaosu analyzed. "But where'll he head?"

"He's so fat, so he definitely can't run fast enough. Who knows, he might've already been caught by the creeper vines," said Zhou Yingxue, curling her lips.

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "He brought his subordinates here. The Qing Consortium soldiers are far more loyal than you can imagine. If he can't run, they'll carry him and escape together."

"Alright." Zhou Yingxue said, "Then let's go search the bank vaults?"

Awhile later, a group of people who were hiding in a bank vault suddenly heard knocking come from the outside. The people who had locked themselves in the vault were shocked. Why would someone be knocking on the vault door at a time like this?

“Has rescue arrived?” Someone said excitedly, “It must be the Wang Consortium troops who came. Who else would be knocking on the door at this time?”

“Maybe it’s the vines?”

“The vines don’t know how to knock on doors!”

“The vines can even eat humans, so why would it be strange if they can knock on the door?”

As they were discussing, a muffled shout came from outside. Due to the soundproofing of the vault, the volume was very soft when it reached the inside.

When someone heard the shouting, they pressed their face against the walls and heard what was being said. “Is there anyone inside? Don’t open the door. It’s full of vines out here. I just wanna ask if there’s anyone named Luo Lan in there.”

The people in the vault looked at each other in dismay. What on earth was going on? Why would someone come here to look for people?

The person inside shouted, “No, we don’t have anyone called Luo Lan in here!”

“Alright, just stay well-hidden in there and don’t come out rashly. The vines out here haven’t been dealt with yet, and the Wang Consortium troops are also not here yet.” Ren Xiaosu then led Zhou Yingxue away.

The people in the bank vault were the first group of survivors Ren Xiaosu had encountered. This was a good sign. Based on Luo Lan’s intelligence, he would definitely know he could hide in a bank vault too. As long as Luo Lan could get in there, he could wait until Ren Xiaosu came to rescue him!

When the people in the vault heard the situation outside had calmed down, they were all dumbfounded. “Who was that outside? It wasn’t the Wang Consortium troops?”

“It’s definitely not them.” Someone said, “But at a time like this, what kind of a powerful person can walk freely among those vines?”

For a moment, their image of Ren Xiaosu suddenly became very mysterious and elevated. They looked at themselves hiding in the vault in such a pathetic state, and even their breathing had become a little difficult due to the lack of air. Meanwhile, the person knocking on the vault door was treating the creeper vines as though they were nothing.

Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue continued walking deeper into the stronghold. Zhou Yingxue suddenly whispered, “Master, look over there.”

Ren Xiaosu looked in the direction Zhou Yingxue was pointing and was surprised to see a few people tied to a wall. The creeper vines were stabbed into their bodies, and blood was flowing out through the vines, making them appear red.

However, these people were different from the skeletons Ren Xiaosu had come across. Although their eyes were closed and they seemed unconscious, they were clearly still alive!

It was like these people were sources of nutrients the creeper vines were keeping for themselves.

Ren Xiaosu wanted to get closer to take a look, but Zhou Yingxue stopped him. "Master, don't get too close. The creeper vine has a very strong instinct to protect its food and is highly territorial. If you get too close, it'll get angry and both of us will be goners."

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "What is the principle behind it not attacking you?"

"I assimilated it with my power and let it think that we're part of it. So it's not that it doesn't attack us but that it hasn't discovered us yet," Zhou Yingxue explained.

"But didn't you manage to control my Potato Shooter plants? Why can't you control the vines?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Zhou Yingxue explained helplessly, "Because I can't find its roots. If I want to gain control of it, I have to infuse my power into its roots. Master, why don't we go and look for its roots? As long as I can control it, won't the threat in the stronghold get resolved immediately?"

Ren Xiaosu stared numbly at the vast ocean of greenery before him. "Look, my ass! Who could possibly find its roots in the midst of all this? Stop dreaming!"

"OK..."

Chapter 604 Even if I die, I need to get to Stronghold 61

For the entire afternoon, many of the people who had taken shelter in the bank vaults across Stronghold 61 encountered Ren Xiaosu's efforts as he went around searching for a person. The survivors hiding in the vaults did not know how to react when they encountered this, with some people begging Ren Xiaosu to take them with him to escape. But after finding out Luo Lan was not in those vaults, Ren Xiaosu immediately left and headed to the next bank to continue his search.

There were many banks in Stronghold 61, but Ren Xiaosu could not find Luo Lan even after searching all of the banks within a ten-kilometer radius of the InterContinental.

Ren Xiaosu could feel his mood growing heavy. Everyone knew that all of the Wang Consortium's male residents were required to serve in the military.

So right at the beginning, Ren Xiaosu felt that if a disaster were to befall a Wang Consortium stronghold, the Wang Consortium residents could deal with it better than the other consortiums' residents. But he was wrong. When everyone was facing a situation where they were helpless, the outcome was still the same.

It wasn't that the residents of the Wang Consortium's stronghold were physically weak, but that they had never faced such an enemy before.

Ren Xiaosu held Zhou Yingxue's hand the entire way as he led her around everywhere they went. She looked at Ren Xiaosu's profile from the corner of her eye and suddenly could not recall when she first became known as his maidservant.

In this stronghold engulfed by disaster, the city felt like it belonged to only the two of them.

Even though Ren Xiaosu was holding her hand while wearing gloves.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu was in a very dangerous situation at this moment. It was very difficult for Ren Xiaosu to face such a massive creeper vine network by himself. If he were a little careless, he might even end up becoming one of the skeletons lying around.

The creeper vines had absorbed a lot of nutrients from the humans and was no longer a force that a lone supernatural being could take on.

At this moment, if Zhou Yingxue suddenly let go of his hand, Ren Xiaosu would definitely end up in a predicament.

But Zhou Yingxue realized Ren Xiaosu did not seem to be worried about something like that happening. In these current times, being trusted suddenly made Zhou Yingxue feel kind of blessed.

As this thought ran through Zhou Yingxue's mind, she got so distracted she nearly tripped over the vines. It was still Ren Xiaosu who reacted fast enough to help her back on her feet.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and asked with a frown, "Why are you spacing out?"

"Master, I'm a little hungry..."

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Outside Stronghold 62, a large convoy of trucks suddenly drove towards the stronghold. Due to the overly large size of the convoy, the Wang Consortium's garrison troops instantly went on alert.

Before the convoy could get any closer to the stronghold's perimeter, they were stopped by a group of heavily armed troops.

The Wang Consortium troops pointed their guns at the convoy and said, "Everyone in the trucks, get out of your vehicles. State the purpose of your visit and prepare to be inspected!"

The Wang Consortium's troops were very well-trained. They had quickly formed a defensive formation to ensure there were no blind spots. If any suspicious movements were made by the people in the vehicles, the convoy would face the full force of their firepower.

A slightly older middle-aged man jumped out of the lead truck. He looked like life had treated him harshly, his face weathered, his back a little hunched.

After this person jumped out of the truck, he smiled apologetically and said, "Hello, sirs, I'm Wang Fugui, a trader! Didn't our Wang Consortium start trade relations with Fortress 178? I'm probably one of the first groups of merchants to travel to the Northwest!"

The Wang Consortium officer frowned and said, "Why do you have such a large convoy?"

Wang Fugui gave a wry smile. Actually, he did not want to bring back so many goods with him either. But if he did not do so, Zhang Xiaoman would not have allowed them to leave!

From the looks of it, there were as many as 71 trucks behind him. This was the main reason why the Wang Consortium's troops were alarmed. They had never seen a merchant with such a large convoy before.

"What are you guys transporting in the trucks?" the officer asked. "You don't have to call me 'sir.' My name is Wang Linlan, and I'm the battalion commander of this unit. Speaking of which, we're related through our surnames."

Building trade relations with the Northwest was one of the foremost matters for the entire Wang Consortium. Therefore, the higher-ups had ordered the troops to treat the merchants well. If they were found to have violated the rules or tried to extort the merchants, they should just get ready to be transferred out or get discharged from the military.

So when Wang Linlan heard the other party state he was a merchant, his attitude softened a lot.

However, they still had to inspect the vehicles carefully. This was not something that they could be sloppy about.

Wang Fugui explained, "There's potassium chloride, nickel ore, and... well, kinda everything..."

Wang Fugui smiled wryly again. The cargo Zhang Xiaoman had loaded up for him was so much it was almost unimaginable. Furthermore, there were so many types of goods it would be impossible for him to finish listing them all for the Wang Consortium troops in a short time. He even had an entire truckload of wolfberries from the Northwest. Apparently, some of the big shots in the Central Plains liked drinking wolfberries soaked in water, especially the black variety of wolfberries.

Wang Linlan had a look at the size of Wang Fugui's convoy and ribbed, "Bro, don't mind us; it's just a routine inspection. This is the first time we've come across such a large convoy as yours, so please forgive us for having to check so thoroughly."

With that, he gestured with his hand, and two companies of soldiers hurriedly raised their guns and approached the convoy. They only stood down when they were able to confirm the entire convoy was only carrying cargo with them.

There were some weapons and guns in the trucks, but Wang Fugui instructed the truck drivers behind him to hand over their firearms obediently. Throughout the course of the inspection, no trouble arose.

When the Wang Consortium's troops saw the firearms, they did not question them further either. These days, if traders did not equip themselves with any weapons, then the goods they were transporting might as well be gifted to the bandits staked out along the trade route.

After Wang Linlan found nothing suspicious, and with Wang Fugui's convoy being so large, he invited Wang Fugui into the military base to wait. This was because the Wang Consortium had to personally receive the goods after arrival so they could set the prices.

As the Wang Consortium intended to operate the trade route for a long time, they had to be transparent on the prices as well.

Wang Linlan explained to Wang Fugui, "Bro, please wait here in the base for a while. Officials from the stronghold will soon come to take these goods."

Wang Fugui nodded with a smile and agreed to wait. He thought about it and realized that because of Ren Xiaosu, he was treated like a VIP upon his arrival in the Northwest. And because he had transported so many goods from the Northwest, he was also treated as a VIP by the Wang Consortium. Perhaps this could be considered as a type of karma.

Wang Fugui suddenly saw a lot of soldiers in the military base assembling with their field packs. Curious, he asked, "Where are you going off to?"

"Eh, it isn't really a secret." Wang Linlan said, "Have a look at this newspaper, bro. You've only just returned from the Northwest, so you don't know what's happened here in the Central Plains." As Wang Linlan brought this matter up, his smile slowly faded.

Wang Fugui looked at the newspaper and was surprised to see that the news of Stronghold 61 getting attacked by a plant was the headlines on Hope Media's newspaper. He said in shock, "Plants these days have become this scary?!"

"That's right." Wang Linlan sighed and said, "We didn't expect something like that either. The AI never defined plants as dangerous threats before, so we didn't get any warning of such an attack. Of course, I'm not entirely sure about the specifics of the situation either."

But Wang Fugui had already flipped to the fifth page of the newspaper. He looked down at the huge blank space below and saw the words: "Don't let the sorrows of our era become your sorrow as well.

"61."

When Wang Fugui saw this, he could feel goosebumps explode all over his body. He suddenly stood up and walked outside.

Wang Linlan wondered, "Bro, where are you going?"

"I need to get to Stronghold 61!" Wang Fugui said.

"Wait a minute, why do you have to go to Stronghold 61?" Wang Linlan said in surprise, "Didn't you just read the news? It's very dangerous over there at the moment!"

“No, I have to go there no matter how dangerous it might be!” Wang Fugui said, “My family’s at Stronghold 61!”

Wang Linlan was stunned. “Are you not afraid of death?”

“I am.” Wang Fugui said bitterly, “But even so, I still need to go.”

Chapter 605 A desperate situation

In Luoyang City, all the reporters of Hope Media were sitting quietly in the headquarters and waiting for a call. One of their reporters had been assigned to follow Luo Lan to Stronghold 61. And coincidentally, this reporter was fortunate enough to have survived the creeper vine attack and informed Hope Media about it over the satellite phone.

Then the reporter had to end the call in a hurry as he was fleeing for his life. Meanwhile, everyone at Hope Media was left speechless by the developments. Humanity had just experienced an invasion by the Experimentals, and now, they were facing yet another disaster.

The chief editor, Jiang Xu, lamented at how bad news had been coming nonstop since the previous year.

All of a sudden, Jiang Xu caught sight of the advertisement published on the fifth page of their newspaper beside him.

“Don’t let the sorrows of our era become your sorrow as well.

“61.”

Jiang Xu had also been thinking about this matter quite a bit. What exactly did “61” mean? At that time, although he graciously promised Ren Xiaosu he would publish the advertisement for him, Jiang Xu was actually hoping the newspaper would remain impartial so it would not become a tool for others to convey their messages.

However, he liked those words too much that he couldn’t agree to not publish them.

But now that he saw the “61” again, it gave him a slightly different feeling this time. Could the young man have hinted that Stronghold 61 would face a disaster such as the one that was happening? But how could that young man possibly predict this?

Did that young man plant the creeper vine?

Jiang Xu felt it was highly unlikely, yet he couldn’t help associating “61” with the ongoing situation. However, he just could not figure out exactly what this was all about.

That young man suddenly became very mysterious to Jiang Xu.

At this moment, the call everyone was waiting for suddenly arrived. Everyone looked at Jiang Xu as the phone’s ringing pulled him out of his thoughts. He picked up the phone and said, “This is Jiang Xu.”

“Chief Editor! It’s Zhou Tao! I’m currently at the center of Stronghold 61.”

Jiang Xu immediately asked, "Are you injured? Have you found a place to seek shelter?"

Jiang Xu did not directly ask about what was happening in Stronghold 61 at this moment and started worrying about Zhou Tao's safety instead. However, Zhou Tao interrupted Jiang Xu, "Chief Editor, let me give you a brief update on the situation first. Otherwise, it might be too late."

"Go ahead." Jiang Xu pressed the speakerphone button. At the side, a stenographer had already prepared a stenotype to record the details.

It was Jiang Xu's responsibility as the chief editor to be concerned about his subordinates.

However, Zhou Tao, who was field reporting, also had his duties and pride as a Hope Media reporter.

"Yesterday, half of the stronghold was suddenly invaded by creeper vines. But for some reason, it suddenly stopped moving later and that left the center of the stronghold temporarily safe. But after 24 hours, it started spreading and continued its invasion. However, the area that was attacked this time was not that big. Six hours later, which was just a while ago, it started to slowly spread towards the center of the stronghold again. Right now, there's only an area of a few thousand square meters left in the center of the stronghold where the residents can take shelter in. However, the frequency of its attacks has gotten higher and higher. I don't know when it'll again start threatening the lives of everyone here," Zhou Tao said anxiously.

Jiang Xu fell silent. A few thousand square meters did not sound like it was a small area, but in the context of the entire stronghold, this area was basically a drop in the ocean.

Even in such a large stronghold, there were actually not that many places where humans could hide.

Jiang Xu said, "I've already received news that the Wang Consortium troops have set off for Stronghold 61 and will probably arrive there by this afternoon. As for whether they have a way to deal with the creeper vines, that's still unknown..."

Zhou Tao said on the other end of the line, "Please tell my parents that I love them. I might have argued with them often when I was young, but I realized the sacrifices they made for me after I grew up. Also, please tell Zhang Liangyue not to wait for my return."

Jiang Xu understood from these words that resembled a person's last words that Zhou Tao knew his situation. Before the Wang Consortium troops could arrive at Stronghold 61, the creeper vines would definitely get to all of them. It was too late!

"Do you regret being a reporter?" Jiang Xu sighed.

Noisy screaming came from the other end of the line. Zhou Tao said anxiously, "The creeper vines have started moving again. I'm now heading towards a store with Luo Lan and the others..."

Beep beep beep. Only the busy signal came through on the call. Meanwhile, the editorial department at Hope Media had fallen silent. Many of the female staff members were crying so hard they could no longer speak. It was very rare for them to experience a forever parting.

...

“Hurry up and run!” Zhou Qi carried Luo Lan on his back and took off with loping strides. Meanwhile, the Qing Consortium soldiers continued guarding him, ready to defend against any creeper vines that might get near them at any moment.

There were not many places where they could hide anymore. The creeper vines behind them were a huge wave approaching, and a mishmash of screams and cries of the stronghold residents reverberated around them.

Luo Lan broke into laughter while on Zhou Qi’s back. Zhou Qi frowned and said, “Everyone is fleeing for their lives, so what are you laughing about back there!”

“I remembered something.” Luo Lan said, “Do you remember when we were young and hanging out on the streets, a group of Qing Consortium kids would follow me and Qing Zhen around to pick fights with gangsters?”

Zhou Qi also laughed. “How can I forget? Qing Zhen was still quite timid at that time, but he was always the most ruthless with his attacks. And when we were piggyback jousting, that bitch, Qing Zhen, would always go for cheap shots while riding on our backs.”

Although they were fleeing for their lives, the two of them were bantering about unrelated matters and reminiscing about the past. It almost felt like they were doing so because it would be too late if they did not reminisce now.

“Whenever I got into a fight at that time, I would always get beaten up by my old man after I returned home.” Luo Lan said with a laugh, “Qing Zhen would just stand by the side with an innocent look on his face like I was the one who led him astray. Thinking about it now, that period was actually the happiest time for me. You had not officially joined the Qing Consortium at that time, and Qing Zhen was also not the Qing Consortium’s Shadow yet.”

But those wonderful times flew by. A huge turning point during that period cut off the happy times from Luo Lan, Qing Zhen, and others.

“Do you think we can escape from here?” Zhou Qi suddenly asked.

“Probably not, unless a miracle happens,” Luo Lan said calmly.

“What will happen to Qing Zhen if we die here?” Zhou Qi asked again.

“He’s already the Qing Consortium’s leader. We should probably think about what we should be doing instead, right?” Luo Lan asked.

While they were talking, their group of over a dozen people arrived at the entrance of a midsize supermarket. Zhou Qi ran inside while shouting, “Pull down the roller shutter!”

Facing the creeper vines closing in on them aggressively, a few of the Qing Consortium soldiers pulled down the roller shutter without any fear on their faces. Right when the roller door was halfway down,

the creeper vines reached them. What was even more unfortunate was that the door got jammed as well.

A platoon commander of the Qing Consortium soldiers shouted, "No one is allowed to retreat! We must get the roller shutter down no matter what!"

At the very last moment, the roller shutter finally budged and locked everyone inside the midsize supermarket!

Chapter 606 Rescuing Li Ran

An hour before the creeper vine began its invasion into the center of the stronghold, Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue were making their way towards the city center.

But when they passed by the gate of a courtyard house, Zhou Yingxue suddenly saw some banners scattered on the ground below her feet. She was stunned for a moment before saying, "Master, why are there so many banners lying on the ground here? There's far more banners here than where Luo Lan and his entourage were staying."

Ren Xiaosu also became curious. When he crouched down and peeled away the creeper vine leaves, he was surprised to see a fan sign made out of LED lights. The sign was still lit and it said, "Ranran, we love you!"

"Wait! Ranran? Why does it sound so familiar? I feel like I've heard that somewhere before," Ren Xiaosu wondered.

Zhou Yingxue was stunned. "Master, did you forget Li Ran's stage name?"

She looked at the courtyard house completely covered by creeper vines. "Could this be Li Ran's house?"

After Zhou Yingxue's reminder, Ren Xiaosu finally remembered that Li Ran's stage name was indeed Ranran. Furthermore, he had read in the newspaper that Li Ran had safely returned to Stronghold 61.

At that time, this news even headlined the entertainment section of Hope Media's newspaper.

"Let's go." Ren Xiaosu said, "Even if this is her house, she definitely won't have survived. The creeper vines have already enveloped her whole home."

"Master, let's go in and have a look." Zhou Yingxue pleaded, "Li Ran is actually quite a nice person. Besides, the people around here have been captured as food reserves by the creeper vines. Their blood is slowly being absorbed for its nutrients, so maybe Li Ran might still be alive?"

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Zhou Yingxue. "Since when did you get so chummy with her?"

"Li Ran told me that she actually had a very sad life. She was the illegitimate daughter of an authoritative figure in the Wang Consortium, and her mother used to be a servant in the Wang clan. After she got pregnant, she was chased out of the family." Zhou Yingxue explained, "Fortunately, both mother and daughter did not starve to death as someone secretly took care of them. Li Ran does not have many friends either as the people surrounding her are all after her money. She told me a lot that night, so I took pity on her."

It was because of the collapse of Stronghold 74 that Li Ran revealed her true self under such vulnerable circumstances. Meanwhile, Zhou Yingxue's teenage years were also very sad. Her mother was bedridden, so she had no choice but to sell herself to the Yang Consortium and become a spy. As such, the two of them found solace in each other.

Furthermore, Zhou Yingxue was not a cold-blooded person. Since she knew Li Ran might be inside, she naturally wanted to see if she could save her.

"Master," Zhou Yingxue said seriously, "you're actually not that cold-blooded either, right?"

Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "Alright, let's go in and have a look."

The two of them pushed aside the creeper vines outside the house. Upon contact, the feelers on the creeper vines suddenly hardened into spikes. Only when they did not detect any prey did the feelers soften again.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this, he could feel his scalp going numb. Could a normal person possibly survive if they encountered such a monster?

"Didn't you say that trying to snatch its food would make it fly into a rage?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Zhou Yingxue muttered, "It shouldn't be a big deal if we just snatch one...."

When the two of them pushed open the door and entered, they saw Li Ran hanging from the middle of the villa's living room with countless vines holding her up. Currently, Li Ran's face was pallid.

Vines were wrapped around Li Ran's limbs. The sight of the strange vines and the fragile young lady's body suspended in the air gave the vibe that it was a beautiful tribute. There was a strange sense of beauty to it.

Zhou Yingxue hurriedly pulled Ren Xiaosu's hand and went over to Li Ran. She tried to get a feel of Li Ran's pulse, but before her hand could get close, the feelers of the creeper vine immediately stopped her.

However, when the feelers came to the front of Zhou Yingxue, they stopped again and lingered in the air around her. It seemed to have been confused by her presence.

Ren Xiaosu was sure the creeper vine did not have a sense of hearing. And it probably wasn't that intelligent either. Otherwise, Zhou Yingxue would not have stayed hidden for so long.

That one Experimental was a highly intelligent being, so Ren Xiaosu was fearful that this creeper vine might also be a highly intelligent creature. If that were the case, it would be really troublesome.

He carefully sized up the feelers and said, "I'll lop off the vines that are binding Li Ran's limbs in a bit. Remember, if the creeper vines attack me in rage, you must give up on saving Li Ran immediately. I'll carry you and we'll escape together, understand?"

"Mhm." Zhou Yingxue nodded.

As soon as he finished speaking, Ren Xiaosu's black saber appeared out of thin air. In the blink of an eye, he chopped off all the vines binding Li Ran's body.

Zhou Yingxue did not immediately try to catch Li Ran, who was falling to the ground. Instead, she reached out to her pale hand and grabbed it!

A moment later, countless feelers attacked Ren Xiaosu. The vines in the villa were all twisting wildly and chaotically.

Ren Xiaosu was fully prepared for this. But when the feelers reached him, they suddenly stopped moving again!

A sharp spike was hovering right at the tip of Ren Xiaosu's nose. Zhou Yingxue realized Ren Xiaosu had not budged an inch. He did not even bat an eyelid.

She had received professional training, so she knew that when faced with danger, flinching was a very natural response humans would have. But it was in the blink of an eye that the outcome of a battle could end up very differently.

As such, powerful warriors would undergo training to overcome such instinctive reactions. It was just like how Yang Xiaojin was able to calm herself by taking a deep breath. These were all behaviors that went against physical instincts.

But this was also a sign that one had truly mastered their own body!

"Carry Li Ran. Let's get out of here quickly," Ren Xiaosu said, clearly still feeling a vague sense of danger. Although the vines had stopped moving, Ren Xiaosu felt it seemed to have realized something this time.

When the two of them rushed out of the villa, Zhou Yingxue was holding one of Li Ran's hands and carrying her on her shoulder like she were a bag of rice.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and looked at the creeper vines in the villa. The feelers had followed them out of the villa, but after Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue got far enough away, they stopped chasing after them.

Ren Xiaosu heaved a sigh of relief. Honestly, if Zhou Yingxue had not repeatedly pleaded with him, he would not have taken such a risk for Li Ran.

Li Ran, who was lying on Zhou Yingxue's shoulder, suddenly let out a whimper as she regained consciousness. Zhou Yingxue placed her down. "Master, she's still alive!"

Li Ran had more than a dozen wounds on her body that were still bleeding after she was stabbed by the creeper vines. Furthermore, a lot of her blood had been sucked out by the plant, so she was probably still in shock.

Ren Xiaosu took out the black medicine and was about to apply it on Li Ran when he realized her clothes were riddled with holes. Moreover, some of the wounds were located in very sensitive areas.

“Apply the medicine on her,” Ren Xiaosu said to Zhou Yingxue stoically.

Zhou Yingxue blinked innocently at Ren Xiaosu. “Master, I’m holding your hand with my right hand and her hand with my left, so how am I supposed to apply the medicine on her?”

“Are you doing this on purpose? You just want to watch things happen, don’t you?” Ren Xiaosu raised an eyebrow.

“Master, don’t keep making it sound like you’re suffering.” Zhou Yingxue could not help but start complaining. “We’re the girls here, and you’re clearly the one who has nothing to lose, OK?! So why’re you making it sound like we’re taking advantage of you!”

Chapter 607 I believe that she’ll pull through

Zhou Yingxue was just stating the objective truth. Since both her hands were holding something, she was really unable to apply the medicine on Li Ran.

If she let go of Ren Xiaosu’s hand, the creeper vines would probably swallow him up immediately.

Furthermore, Zhou Yingxue was only interested in watching the show right now. ‘Master, you want to remain pure? You even needed to put on gloves before holding my hand? Let’s see what you’re gonna do now!’

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment. “Forget it, there’s no need to apply the medicine. I believe that she’ll pull through.”

Zhou Yingxue was confused.

This was a matter of life and death, yet he simply decided not to apply the medicine just like that? ‘Master, do you still have a shred of human decency left?’

Li Ran, who was unconscious with them, suddenly said, “I can apply it myself...”

Zhou Yingxue and Ren Xiaosu looked down and saw that Li Ran had come to. She was struggling to take the black medicine from Ren Xiaosu’s hands.

“Don’t let go of my hand, or those creeper vines will start attacking you again,” Zhou Yingxue added. The show was over, and Li Ran’s strong desire to survive made her regain consciousness.

Li Ran applied the black medicine to her wounds with much difficulty using only one hand. The blood flow to her face had visibly started recovering. Not only did the black medicine have healing properties, but it also encouraged the regeneration of blood in the body.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if the palace had unlocked such a powerful trauma medicine for him as the first item because it was afraid he would accidentally die?

Then what the hell was about the effect of the black medicine when taken orally?!

Li Ran could feel her strength recovering quickly and was even surprised. "What medicine is this? It's so effective!"

"It's a secret ancestral remedy that's only passed down the male side," Ren Xiaosu remarked.

As soon as he finished speaking, Li Ran looked at him with a glimmer in her eyes. "Did you come here specially to save me?"

Li Ran wanted to reach out to hug Ren Xiaosu. However, Zhou Yingxue, who was in between them, pulled her away and said, "I think you must be daydreaming. Don't keep saying 'you' when it was both of us who came to your rescue. Please say 'you two' instead! Why have you disregarded me entirely? And we did not come here specially to save you. Stop being so shameless."

Li Ran found it a little regrettable that she did not manage to hug Ren Xiaosu. Didn't a damsel marry the hero who rescued her? Why was it now that a damsel was offering her hand in marriage to the hero, the hero looked so unhappy? This did not seem to go with the storyline at all!

But there was no time to think about that. The creeper vines in the entire stronghold were suddenly starting to get restless. Ren Xiaosu looked at the vines below his feet starting to move towards the center of the stronghold like a wave.

"What's going on?" Ren Xiaosu was surprised.

"It seems like... a new hunt has started," Zhou Yingxue said.

"Let's hurry to the city center then!"

...

While Luo Lan and the others were taking shelter in the supermarket, their field of vision of the outside was completely blocked by the roller shutter door. The store had become their last place of refuge.

The Qing Consortium soldiers surrounded Zhou Qi and Luo Lan while Zhou Qi sat cross-legged on the floor. The bright blue in his eyes was constantly dimming.

The frenzied creeper vines penetrated through the gaps in the roller shutter door, but no matter how many of them got through, Zhou Qi would use his superpower to draw out the water. In the blink of an eye, the vines dried up and turned into a fine powder.

"How much longer can you hold out for?" Luo Lan asked.

"At most an hour." Zhou Qi had a worried look on his face. He asked the reporter from Hope Media, Zhou Tao, "You said the Wang Consortium troops will only be arriving in the afternoon? What time is it right now?"

“It’s 11 AM.” Zhou Tao sat against the corner. He found a pen and notebook in the supermarket and was writing nonstop in it.

Luo Lan asked, “What are you writing?”

Zhou Tao, whose face was covered in dust, said, “I want to record in detail everything that happened after the disaster began. I wasn’t able to explain everything over the phone, so it has to be written down. The creeper vines should only be interested in lifeforms. After I finish writing everything, I’ll call the chief editor and tell him where to find this journal. Once the Wang Consortium troops arrive and take care of the creeper vines, the reporters from Hope Media will come and retrieve this journal. It will be the most authentic firsthand account they can get.”

Humans could die, but whatever that was recorded had to be left behind for the world to know. This was Zhou Tao’s attitude and dignity as a reporter.

Luo Lan chuckled as he sized Zhou Tao up. Zhou Tao’s face was still stained with blood. He had scraped his palms in a fall earlier. He said to Zhou Tao, “I used to think that people from the Central Plains were all quite stupid. Just look at the Wang Consortium. They’re clearly an ambitious lot, yet they insist on slandering our Qing Consortium. But I wasn’t expecting you Hope Media reporters to be so likable.”

Zhou Tao did not even look up. “We’re just doing our duty.”

“With people like you around, the heritage of humanity will never truly be lost. In any case, this is not something I can achieve,” Luo Lan admired.

Fatty Luo’s greatest strengths were that he was loyal and sensible. Second, he would never be jealous of others. If the other party were stronger than him, he would simply accept it. It wasn’t like he had anything to lose by accepting the fact.

Luo Lan looked at Zhou Qi again. “I’m sorry that I made you come to the Central Plains.”

Zhou Qi curled his lips. “I came here because there was money to be earned, so what’s there to be sorry about? Riches are earned through danger; I understand that perfectly.”

“Actually, you don’t have to work so hard to earn your money.” Luo Lan sighed and said, “Although you worship money, Qing Zhen and I actually see you as our best friend. We’re just worried you don’t feel the same way about us.”

Zhou Qi was silent for a moment before saying, “You’re still lying even though we’re on the brink of death? Aren’t you afraid of being condemned to hell for that?”

Luo Lan chuckled and Zhou Qi also started laughing. The Qing Consortium soldiers next to them could not understand why these two big shots were suddenly laughing when they were facing imminent death.

Zhou Qi said, “I didn’t expect I would end up dying together with a fatty like you. How unfortunate!” He was reaching his limit. “If I get out of this alive, can you bestow that secretary of Qing Zhen’s to me?”

Luo Lan's eyes widened. "Why are you always so obsessed with my brother's secretary—"

As he said that, the creeper vines outside seemed to have sensed that Zhou Qi was exhausted. Suddenly, a large number of vines swept into the supermarket. The creeper vines did not start attacking the people in the store but forcefully used its vines to remove the roller shutter.

Amid the noise, Luo Lan stared dumbfoundedly as the roller shutter got thrown out by the creeper vines, leaving the entire supermarket with a gaping hole. He muttered, "No way!"

Zhou Qi did not know if Luo Lan was answering him or reacting to the situation in front of them.

However, Zhou Qi was stunned when he saw the sight outside. "Look out there. Is that three people walking towards us?"

Luo Lan took a closer look. "Am I seeing things? Isn't that Ren Xiaosu?"

The entire time they were fleeing, Luo Lan had kept rambling to himself about how they would definitely not die if only Ren Xiaosu were around.

When Luo Lan was muttering that to himself, Zhou Qi felt some resentment. But now he was convinced.

Ren Xiaosu, Zhou Yingxue, and Li Ran were walking hand in hand over the creeper vines like it was nothing!

Amid the cries, the chaos, and the tumult of the world, everyone was trying their hardest to stay alive as memories of their lives flashed past.

But right at this moment, three people were holding hands as they strolled through the bedlam in front of them. It almost looked like those three people were going on a picnic or flying a kite.

Time seemed to have slowed down. In everyone's vision, the three people were walking so slowly it felt like the scene was moving forward frame by frame. It was a scene that shattered everyone's worldview.

When Ren Xiaosu saw Luo Lan, he waved at him in pleasant surprise. It was as though they were old friends who had reunited on a street corner and decided to go for a scrumptious meal of lamb stew.

Zhou Qi was convinced. He was utterly convinced.

It was already shocking enough that there were still people alive in the sea of violent creeper vines. But those people were even holding hands too? What the hell?! Were they out there going shopping or something?!

This was simply too bizarre!

Chapter 608 The mysterious saber

Luo Lan looked at the three people outside and ignored the creeper vines sweeping towards him. "Zhou Qi, are you convinced now?"

Zhou Qi, almost at death's door, said in a daze, "I'm convinced, I'm truly convinced."

Previously, in Zhou Qi's opinion, no matter how amazing Ren Xiaosu might be, he was still only a superhuman like him.

Any superhuman would think they were extraordinary, and it was not like some of them had an extra arm or a leg, right? Zhou Qi felt that even if he were to go up against Li Shentan, he would not necessarily lose to him. He might not be able to take him head on, but he could always find ways to assassinate him.

Moreover, Zhou Qi was one of the earlier superhumans to awaken their superpowers, so his physical fitness also surpassed most of the current crop of superhumans.

Therefore, when Luo Lan kept mentioning Ren Xiaosu in the presence of Zhou Qi, it annoyed him very much. It was as though Luo Lan deemed Zhou Qi to be super useless.

But now that he had a reference point, it wasn't the same anymore. The other party was walking leisurely over the creeper vines he could not defeat. He was even holding hands with two women as he walked towards them. The visual impact of this sight was too much.

But more importantly, why was he holding the women's hands despite it being such a dangerous situation?!

Just as the creeper vines were about to entwine Luo Lan and the others, the dark shadow of a saber suddenly flashed in front of them. It went past so quickly they could not make out what it was, and it completely severed the creeper vines in front of them!

Zhou Qi suddenly looked up at Ren Xiaosu and saw the young man holding a black saber in his right hand. However, Zhou Qi did not understand how the young man managed to slash through the vines even though they were still a few hundred meters apart.

The slash was extremely mystifying.

It had to be mysterious! In the past, Ren Xiaosu had used the Shadow Door to smack Luo Lan on his head. His actions had to be quick, or Luo Lan would realize it.

The creeper vine whose feelers had been severed became enraged. Although it was a low intelligence lifeform, even an idiot would fight back after being attacked!

In its perception, Ren Xiaosu, Zhou Yingxue, and Li Ran were still "invisible." Therefore, it focused all of its anger on Luo Lan's group.

A moment later, Luo Lan could only watch helplessly as a huge green wave of creeper vines came slamming towards them. The vines were tangled together like a gigantic hand.

Luo Lan despaired. Perhaps this was not a power any supernatural being stood a chance against.

However, he suddenly felt like he had no regrets. Just as he had said to Zhou Qi, he and Qing Zhen had always regarded Zhou Qi as their best friend. They were just worried he did not see them as his friends.

He also felt the same towards Ren Xiaosu.

Luo Lan had always been very envious of Ren Xiaosu and admired him a lot. He already considered Ren Xiaosu to be a very good friend. Otherwise, he would not have invited Ren Xiaosu to the Qing Consortium on so many occasions, nor would he have sent an armored brigade to attack the Beiwan River on his behalf.

However, he was most worried Ren Xiaosu did not consider him a friend.

But Ren Xiaosu had actually come to this dangerous city to rescue him! Just how many people in this world would truly risk their lives for their friends?

Luo Lan felt he should be content. With a friend like this, he shouldn't have any more regrets in life.

Luo Lan shouted, "You don't have to save me anymore. Hurry up and escape! We can't defeat it."

However, he saw Ren Xiaosu run towards them without a second word!

The countless nanomachines in Ren Xiaosu's body started surging like crazy. It was as though the nanomachines were hungry for some action. When these cute little guys sensed their owner's call, they cheered inside his body and became restless!

The nanomachines ignored the danger and seeped out of Ren Xiaosu's bloodstream, forming tiny honeycomb structures on the surface of Ren Xiaosu's skin and instantly turning into the strongest armor for their owner!

This transformation was a long journey for the nanomachines. Emerging from the blood vessels to the surface of the skin, a great adventure was about to begin.

But this transformation zoomed by for Luo Lan and the others. It almost felt like Ren Xiaosu was racing against that gigantic green hand. The only thing was that time seemed to be on Ren Xiaosu's side.

From their point of view, Ren Xiaosu completed the entire process of forming the armor in an instant. That handsome young man had transformed into a steel beast!

As Ren Xiaosu made a mad dash to rescue the others, the creeper vines started attacking him as he had let go of Zhou Yingxue's hand. However, the creeper vines' spiked feelers were a little helpless against the armor. The armor could not even be penetrated by bullets and could be considered one of Ren Xiaosu's greatest reliances at the moment.

When the gigantic green hand was about to hit them, Luo Lan excitedly watched as Ren Xiaosu rushed up to them. Then Ren Xiaosu turned to face the entirety of that green wave by himself as he leaped forward to meet it!

Luo Lan could only see the back of the armored Ren Xiaosu. He was soaring against the sunlight and flying toward the creeper vines with the black saber, splitting the "palm" of that green wave from its "hand"!

Li Ran saw everything from afar. So this was the reason why Zhou Yingxue was willing to submit to Ren Xiaosu as his maidservant. That young man was always able to give people an unparalleled sense of security at the most dangerous times.

That power...

“Quickly save them! Make use of this time!” Ren Xiaosu shouted as he descended from midair.

Zhou Yingxue rushed over to the group with Li Ran. Before the creeper vine could organize another counterattack, she quickly shouted to everyone, “Luo Lan, quick! Grab ahold of Li Ran’s hand. And the people at the back, grab Luo Lan’s hand! Form a chain and hold each other’s hands. Don’t panic!”

Everyone other than Zhou Tao had been through countless battles, so they immediately understood what Zhou Yingxue meant. It was no wonder Ren Xiaosu was holding hands with her earlier. So it turned out she had some kind of power that allowed her to not get attacked by the creeper vines!

The Qing Consortium soldiers carried Luo Lan and ran to Zhou Yingxue’s side. They forced Luo Lan’s hand into Zhou Yingxue’s hand and brought the exhausted Zhou Qi to his side as well. Following this, the Qing Consortium soldiers formed an orderly chain, holding hands, while the platoon commander held Zhou Qi’s hand.

Usually, in desperate times like this, if people realized that holding Zhou Yingxue’s hand would save them, they would definitely rush forward and try to grab her hand instead. This would cause the entire situation to descend into utter chaos.

But the Qing Consortium soldiers did not do that. Instead, they completed the chain in an instant with the platoon commander at the front while the rest of the soldiers formed up behind him.

The last soldier even had time to look out for the Hope Media reporter, Zhou Tao!

The moment everyone gripped each other’s hand tightly, the creeper vines sweeping towards them suddenly lost their target. Ren Xiaosu did not continue fighting the creeper vines and grabbed Zhou Tao’s hand. He said, “Let’s go! We have to leave this place before it realizes what’s happening!”

Since he had found Luo Lan, his mission was accomplished. He had to evacuate from here as quickly as possible now!

The group began their grand escape by walking over the dense growth of creeper vines. It was a sight as strange as it could get.

Luo Lan said in anguish, “The last time I held hands with so many people was when I was playing games in kindergarten....”

However, Ren Xiaosu did not answer him. He realized he might have stolen too much “food” from the creeper vines this time. As such, even though the creeper vines did not attack them for a while, the feelers were still following close behind them and might attack at any moment!

Chapter 609 Those vines aren’t enough to trouble my master

Ren Xiaosu was very glad he had successfully located Luo Lan. He had followed the direction the creeper vines were heading and found Luo Lan at the end of the trail.

But it was also probably due to Zhou Qi's self-sacrifice that this could be pulled off. If he had not held on for so long and made so many of the vines wither, the creeper vine would not have gotten so furious it concentrated its attack on them. In turn, Ren Xiaosu would not have successfully found their position.

The group was fleeing without knowing where they were heading. There were no other survivors that could be seen in the stronghold anymore. This stronghold had been completely occupied by the plant now.

Before this, they could never have expected the plants in this era would be so terrifying.

While everyone was escaping, the feelers of the creeper vine were still chasing them. It did not attack, but neither did it give up on chasing after them.

"What about Ren Xiaosu?" Luo Lan shouted while panting breathlessly.

Zhou Yingxue turned around and glanced behind her. Ren Xiaosu was in his armor and withstanding the creeper vine's attacks as he became its only target in this entire stronghold.

The creeper vine seemed like it wanted to unleash all its anger on him as countless vines swept over to his position.

The vines enclosed Ren Xiaosu like a ball of wool, while the spikes on the feelers tried to cut through the armor!

There was no movement within the vines anymore, and it appeared that Ren Xiaosu was also helpless against so many vines.

Luo Lan shouted, "Let's head back and save him! We can't leave him here alone!"

However, Zhou Yingxue snapped, "Take care of yourself first! Those vines aren't enough to trouble my master!"

Luo Lan nearly burst into tears at this insult. How did Ren Xiaosu gain a maid superhuman in this short period that Luo Lan had not seen him? Why did all the supernatural beings like congregating around Ren Xiaosu so much?!

As though to confirm Zhou Yingxue's words, when all of those vines finally enclosed Ren Xiaosu, Luo Lan saw a black saber piercing through the vines from inside. Following, the extremely tough-looking vines were cut apart like they were dry twigs!

The metallic beast leaped out from within, and Luo Lan heard Ren Xiaosu say, "Why're y'all still standing there? Hurry up and flee!"

Luo Lan thought, 'Alright, this guy really doesn't need anyone to save him.'

Everyone started fleeing again while Ren Xiaosu quickly caught up to them as the vines did not slow him down at all.

When Ren Xiaosu came to Li Ran's side, he deactivated the armor and returned the nanomachines into his bloodstream. Once those cute nanomachines were back inside his body, they immediately retracted their robotic arms and curled up into tiny balls to recharge while waiting for their master to summon them again.

But just as the nanomachines fully returned to his body, a vine stabbed for Ren Xiaosu's left arm.

In an instant, Ren Xiaosu mobilized the nanomachines once again to form a shield on the surface of his arm to block the attack. The price of blocking the attack was a small piece of the defensive armor constructed from the nanomachines chipping off and falling to the ground.

After all, Ren Xiaosu had activated those nanomachines in a rush. He didn't feel like it would be a big problem if he lost some. Luo Lan had mentioned the Qing Consortium had fully mastered the nanomachine technology. Since the nanomachine researchers were now in their employment, if Ren Xiaosu wanted to replenish his nanomachines, he could just approach the Qing Consortium anytime.

Or maybe based on his relationship with the Qing Consortium, it wouldn't even be unreasonable to say they might send him some replacement nanomachines.

But this was no time to be pondering about that. Ren Xiaosu put on his glove again and held Li Ran's hand. Zhou Yingxue secretly smirked when she saw this. Even while escaping, she could still think about how her master was equally fair in his treatment towards others. But it was just that at a critical moment like this, why would anyone still think about putting on a glove again?

When Ren Xiaosu grabbed Li Ran's hand, Li Ran could feel her sense of happiness soaring. However, she immediately realized the hand she was holding felt a little fuzzy.

The creeper vine immediately stopped attacking Ren Xiaosu again. However, Ren Xiaosu's direct confrontation with it this time was simply too intense. No matter how low its intelligence was, it could still detect that something was not right.

All of the vines started pointing towards Ren Xiaosu, and while it did not make a move, it seemed to be "thinking" about something.

"Hurry up and run!" Ren Xiaosu noticed that something was off. "Let's just hope that it has the memory of a goldfish. If it forgets about us after seven seconds, that would be perfect."

Luo Lan was thinking as he ran. This escape had a totally different feeling to it. Everyone was holding hands as they ran away with long strides. There was even a hint of joy amid their nervousness and fear, as though they were fleeing towards a field of hope.

But no one noticed that when the nanomachines on Ren Xiaosu's arm fell off, a surveillance camera on the street suddenly turned and focused on the nanomachines.

Usually, when a part of the armor was chipped off, it would immediately turn into a dull gray color. But this time, when it landed on the ground, it returned to its silvery liquid form again. The little guys turned idle, and it was as though a program had been inputted into them and started wrestling for control of them with Ren Xiaosu.

But no matter how hard the program tried, it could not seize control of the nanomachines that had fallen off. It was only after Ren Xiaosu had gotten farther away that it managed to get a chance.

After rebooting, the little guys became active again. Then the silvery liquid metal started streaming towards the surveillance camera.

When this small cluster of liquid metal nanomachines got near a lamp post installed with surveillance cameras, it instantly merged into the lamp post and disappeared.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu frowned as he realized something. Although those nanomachines had fallen off, he could still perceive them.

But now they had completely been cut off from Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu thought he had probably gotten too far away from the nanomachines, or that they might have run out of power, so he did not take this matter to heart.

He had not lost too many nanomachines anyway, and Ren Xiaosu thought he would not even have to look for the Qing Consortium to replenish them. This tiny loss had almost no effect on the armor.

Amid the creeper vine tracking them, Ren Xiaosu and the others managed to flee more than ten kilometers from their initial position. Luo Lan was so exhausted he was about to collapse. In the end, it was Zhou Yingxue and Zhou Qi who had to carry him as they ran. Being able to “fly” with his feet off the ground for the rest of the way, Fatty Luo suddenly felt this escape had become even more enjoyable.

Gradually, the creeper vines started closing in and gaining on them. Ren Xiaosu got an ominous feeling. As expected, a second later, the creeper vines started trying to attack them. It was Ren Xiaosu who was the first to bear the brunt.

“Master, what should I do? My power isn’t working anymore!” Zhou Yingxue started getting anxious. If her power became ineffective, wouldn’t it mean that everyone would die here?

Luo Lan no longer felt like they were fleeing towards a field of hope. “Comrade, can you please think of some other idea?”

However, when Zhou Yingxue tried to communicate with the creeper vine, all she could feel was a violent emotion flowing freely through its vines.

Zhou Yingxue was also helpless in such a situation!

Zhou Qi wanted to use his powers again to drain the water from the nearby vines, but there were just too many of them. As such, the backlash from using his power caused him to spit out a mouthful of blood!

Ren Xiaosu started examining their surroundings while continuing to slash the vines that were coming at him with his black saber.

Luo Lan sighed. "Surviving until now makes us luckier than the few hundred thousand others in this stronghold."

But at this moment, Li Ran realized the hand she was holding had pulled away.

Instead of running forward, Ren Xiaosu retreated towards the plant by himself. Luo Lan turned around and looked at Ren Xiaosu in surprise, but Ren Xiaosu's face was hidden under his hood.

Ren Xiaosu said, "I'm the one that this plant hates the most right now. All y'all, keep running away."

Chapter 610 You only have one chance. Are you ready?

Actually, Ren Xiaosu already knew that even though Zhou Yingxue had stolen so much food from the creeper vine, with over a dozen people saved, the creeper vine would not have discovered their whereabouts because of those actions.

The reason why the creeper vine was so angry was because it couldn't do anything about Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu had severed so many of its feelers, and now he wanted to escape just like that? How could there be such a good deal in this world?

Even an idiot would retaliate if you punched them!

Since Ren Xiaosu was the target of all that hatred, why not let the others get away?

As expected, the moment he released his grip from the group, the creeper vine concentrated all its attacks on him and left Zhou Yingxue and the others alone.

Zhou Yingxue turned around and looked at Ren Xiaosu in a daze. "Master, I'm not leaving."

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Didn't you tell Luo Lan earlier to 'take care of yourselves first'?"

Zhou Yingxue was on the verge of tears. "This is different. Master, leave with us! There must be some other way!"

In the past, this maidservant was always thinking about retiring to a life of enjoyment after she had earned enough money by riding the coattails of her master. Who would want to be a servant to a man for the rest of their life? Wouldn't it be better to live life as a carefree and rich woman by herself?

She had wanted to leave on two occasions, but she eventually chose to stay behind.

At that time, Zhou Yingxue consoled herself, "I still haven't earned enough money, so I can't leave yet. I'll just follow Master around for a bit longer and earn more money first."

But gradually, those thoughts never surfaced again.

Zhou Yingxue suddenly felt her heart aching badly when she saw Ren Xiaosu getting surrounded by the vines alone.

She was clearly only relying on him to make more money, so why did her heart feel so much pain for him?

“Leave quickly.” Ren Xiaosu smiled as he severed countless vines again. “I’ll meet up with y’all outside the stronghold later.”

But at this moment, Ren Xiaosu was stunned when he saw his surroundings.

Then, as Luo Lan and the others stood still, they saw Ren Xiaosu take out a newspaper from somewhere while fighting the vines!

Luo Lan looked at Ren Xiaosu as he flipped through the newspaper with one hand. He looked so relaxed and at ease.

Luo Lan suddenly felt it shouldn’t be a problem if they left Ren Xiaosu here alone. Just based on how calm and composed he was, it didn’t even look like he was in any danger! ‘More importantly, why the hell are you reading the paper at a time like this?!’

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu raised his head. He looked at the newspaper in his hands and compared it with the nearby buildings, even raising the newspaper to compare.

The newspaper in Ren Xiaosu’s hand was from more than ten days ago. At that time, there was an article about a creeper vine in Stronghold 61 that did not wither even though winter had arrived. A lot of people came to see the creeper vines and take pictures with it like tourists.

There was a picture insert for that newspaper report of the family who planted the creeper vine. The creeper vine had started growing from there before spreading outwards later on.

The media even interviewed one of the residents, to which the resident smiled and explained he had just scattered some seeds to grow. He did not expect the creeper vine would turn out so well.

At that time, the tall building next to that apartment building stuck out to Ren Xiaosu. There was a very eye-catching red billboard that read: “Jiafu Fuqiao Pedicure and Spa.”

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was looking at an apartment building in the distance and then next to it. Wasn’t that Jiafu Fuqiao Pedicure and Spa?!

If plants were incapable of moving their own roots, wouldn’t it mean the roots of the creeper vine were right below that apartment building?!

Luo Lan broke down and said, “Oh my god, I’ve really gotta give it to you! Can you stop reading the paper in this situation? Are you trying to show off how strong you are in combat or what!”

Right now, the creeper vines were attacking Ren Xiaosu wave after wave, but Ren Xiaosu was still able to block every attack they made without much effort.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhou Yingxue. "If I can help you to find its roots, how confident are you of controlling it?"

Zhou Yingxue was stunned. She did not expect Ren Xiaosu to suddenly talk about this. But she snapped out of it and answered, "If it can still be considered a plant, I'm a 100% sure I can control it!"

Ren Xiaosu laughed. "Then I have a gift for you."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly broke through the creeper vine's encirclement and headed straight for that red billboard.

Only at this moment did everyone finally understand that when Ren Xiaosu was reading the newspaper earlier, he had found a clue to the whereabouts of the creeper vine's roots.

Luo Lan sighed and said, "To think that he can still maintain his rationality at a critical moment like this. I'm impressed."

Zhou Yingxue snorted. "How else could he be my master? Damn fatty, start running on your own for a bit. Don't keep making me carry you all the way. You're a man! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Luo Lan was so angry he wanted to start cursing on the spot. Why was there such a huge difference in the treatment of two people?! The lady's words could really be harsh if she was not holding back!

When Ren Xiaosu suddenly rushed towards the creeper vine's roots, the creeper vine became even more enraged.

It also seemed to have realized what Ren Xiaosu was trying to do. Roots were the lifeline of a plant. No matter how powerful this creeper vine might be, it would not be able to transcend the laws of nature. It was just like how a superhuman would die instantly if they were shot in the head or heart. Although everyone had become stronger, they were unable to transcend the original rules!

Now, Ren Xiaosu was leading the way in front of the group. As he got closer and closer to the billboard, the creeper vines around him also started acting crazier and crazier!

This confirmed Ren Xiaosu's thoughts. The creeper vine was beginning to feel afraid. If it weren't afraid, it wouldn't have reacted so strongly!

Luo Lan and the others saw Ren Xiaosu activating his armor again. Not only that, but Ren Xiaosu had also taken out a grenade from somewhere. He did not deliberately throw it at a specific spot and only wanted to disrupt the attention and attack rhythm of the creeper vines.

"Wait, Ren Xiaosu, be careful of the sewers below you. Its feelers can shoot out of the sewers!" Luo Lan still had a lingering fear of this happening. He had wanted to escape into the sewers but he witnessed someone get dragged under.

However, Luo Lan found it a little strange. It seemed that no creeper vines had ever emerged from the sewers to sneak up on Ren Xiaosu while they were escaping this entire way.

Actually, when Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue entered the villa to save Li Ran earlier, he had let Zhou Yingxue enter the house first and secretly unleashed "Old Xu" behind her back.

But as Old Xu was not a lifeform, the creeper vines showed no interest in him at all.

At this moment, Old Xu was right under Ren Xiaosu's feet and following him closely as it charged forward in attack. With Old Xu's strength, no matter how many feelers were hiding in the sewers, it would be impossible for it to emerge from the manholes to attack Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the red billboard that was already within a hundred meters of him and estimated how much power he had left in his armor. He turned around and asked Zhou Yingxue, "Are you scared?"

"No!" Zhou Yingxue shook her head. She wasn't lying. With Ren Xiaosu chopping down the vines in front of her, she really was not afraid at all!

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "You only have one chance. Are you ready?"