

Beautiful 681

Chapter 681: Team One in action

Team 2 Spirit Fox operator—if they were a conventional spec-ops unit—would have shed cold sweat from her forehead.

After all, simultaneous shots and dodging by luck was a rare event that could be composed into a legendary story.

Naturally, the pointman didn't evade the misfortune by luck. She had calculated her opponent's psychology and aiming point from the initial peek.

Only stupid ones would reappear from the same spot and align themselves directly in front of the opponent's muzzle.

Although so many calculations and tactics were involved in the short firefight, the operator didn't budge because they were extremely used to thinking under stress.

Particularly, the force-on-force drills and training honed their mentality and instilled automatism deep into their bones.

When you shoot at each other several times and get hurt physically, the pain merely instills a sense into the brain, allowing people to become aware long before they even think about it.

The pointman stood up and approached the two fallen bodies, followed by her partner trailing close behind.

The others among Team 2 stepped toward the designated spots allocated among themselves impromptu.

Puff! Puff!

She put two additional rounds into the corpses to confirm the kills, then kicked away the weapons, while her partner disassembled the AKs to render them temporarily useless.

Nobody bothered to check the identities of the hooded terrorists. They trusted Athena's and Ling Qingyu's judgment.

Since they belonged to Country A, they must surely be agents of black ops from Country A.

No doubt about it.

"Control! Area secured!" Everyone reported to the team leader.

"Understood. Move in threes and clear the vicinity," Team 2 leader ordered and radioed to the rest of the team. "Team 2 has finished the task, continuing with the clearance."

"Understood, Team 2," the voice of the commander from Team 1 responded. "Please contain the terminal's exterior once you've completed the secondary objectives. How copy?"

"Solid copy."

"Team 3?"

"On security, standing by."

"Good, keep up the good work. Team 1, making entry."

It seemed only now that Team 1—who had sprinted in the direction of the terminal—could enter the building, Ling Qingyu thought as she monitored her subordinates through the AR glasses.

Team 2 and 3 were now in reserve mode. She had expected the black ops to fight tit-for-tat for a while.

Why were they like spicy ducks and chickens in front of her girls? Ling Qingyu shook her head, eliciting puzzled gazes from Mo Yunxi, Yin Jingfei, and the flight attendants nearby.

A few withheld their fear and gritted their teeth to record the event through the windows, including the pilots—

Even if they were told and aware that the aircraft was totally safe from harm, given the outrageous protection level.

Outside, Team 2 members kicked the bodies away so they could reach the weapons easily, checking the corpses and piling evidence nearby.

Everyone was non-committal about the background firecrackers popping and muffled bangs.

Several glanced toward the terminal and quickened their paces. A minute later, the captain ordered the group to carry out Team 1's commander's task, leaving behind a few sentries to guard the bodies.

Team One operators filed in and rushed toward the source of the gunfire. The muffled booms had turned into loud cracks, thudding across the hall as the sound echoed in the distance.

The operators passed over the hunched civilians who shrieked in fear at their sudden appearance—

But the commotion died down when they received no danger from the Spirit Fox operators.

These menacing warriors didn't shoot them. That alone was enough to regard them as good guys, since many foreign 'soldiers' were helping them as well.

Spirit Fox's appearance hid their identities, creating a sense of mystery. Nonetheless, discerning their vague genders became easier once up close.

Of course, nobody had the time to pay attention to gender issues—apart from a few who were a little surprised that their additional rescuers were women.

Even if the operator's job mostly belonged to men and their attire exuded masculinity, their curves couldn't be hidden.

Thin, sturdy waists. Powerful, beautiful thighs and long legs. Upturned chests at the sides, displaying a delicious weight that couldn't be covered up.

Perhaps their heights had varied greatly before; however, after practicing Tang Ziyi's sutra and receiving excellent, efficient nutrition, the operators had transformed into lean, strong figurines with nearly perfect proportions.

Not only had their strength increased, but their appearances had also been enhanced.

Because of the situation and her piled-up work, Ling Qingyu didn't even have the time to quench her thirst.

Otherwise, she wouldn't have minded enjoying the scenery herself. She might even have planned a catwalk—operators modeling solely for her as the audience.

Unfortunately, Ling Qingyu couldn't indulge in her desires, as urgent calls dragged her focus away.

Especially considering the background of the black-ops team she was about to eliminate—she didn't want eyes of that level hovering over her too early.

Team One operators skipped over the doors on either side. A single operator body-blocked each door—regardless of whether they were closed or open—poising her muzzle at the threshold as the file advanced toward danger.

Sometimes, the obstacles were glasses, allowing them to see through everything clearly. Same procedure—leaving behind a single operator to cover while the train advanced and trailed the formation later at the call of last man.

Priority was to kill the terrorists wreaking havoc. The gunfire from upstairs seemed to have drawn away.

Presumably, the airport defense upstairs was working well. On the other hand, the ground floor remained at a standstill.

Priority was to assist them. Athena, who was observing the entire battlefield, delivered advice from time to time and narrated the whole timeframe to the leaders.

All the events happening inside the terminal were live-broadcasted, causing the leaders among Spirit Fox to lament the usefulness of technology.

Sometimes, they felt they were getting old in front of the wheel of time.

Bang! Bang!

Around the corner, continuous rapid gunfire had been erupting for a while. It had yet to die down—each side testing the limits of their ammunition supply and courage.

Spirit Fox operators peeked from the corner of their eyes and retracted their figures, ignoring the splashes on the wall impacted by bullets.

Ten meters ahead, a group of armed men and women held off the terrorists' approach. A quick observation told Team One that, in a matter of minutes, this line of defense would collapse miserably.

Whether the defenders themselves knew that was another matter. This was simply Spirit Fox's quick judgment based on experience and repetitive drills.

Without hesitation, the lead operator signaled and shared her observation. The entire Team One understood her message.

With the team leader's confirmation, the file advanced, staying close to the wall—but not too close to attract ricocheted bullets.

As their steps came closer, a woman who was fighting the terrorists turned around with suspicion and almost jumped in fright upon seeing Team One's entry.

If not for their non-threatening low-port posture and friendly hand gestures, she might have shot at the formation in panic.

Still, she called her friend: "Agent Sitwell, possible friendly units in the rear. Watch your fire."

"Understood. Don't panic, Agent Hill," Agent Sitwell replied, glancing back while directing the local security force. He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"We wouldn't be alive if I panicked, okay?" the woman, named Agent Hill, rolled her eyes and retorted.

Now that the situation had improved, her confidence returned. These two FBI agents had seen the strange armed group before, when the planes were getting blown up outside. They knew the group could be allies but had never expected them to reinforce so quickly.

In fact, their hearts were filled with trepidation as attacks mounted on the groups. After all, nobody expected a temporary lottery team to fight against an organized force.

Although they looked down on the terrorists, they admitted the enemy was serious in both planning and execution. If not for the veterans with military backgrounds providing assistance and filling in the gaps, Agent Hill suspected they might have had to run just to survive.

They were a little puzzled why the terrorists had lessened the pressure earlier. But when she took note of so many friendly operators' presence, her eyes beamed with joy.

Yes, even though the enemy of my enemy is my friend, nobody could be certain that a third party would help. Something must have happened outside to scare the terrorists away.

Agent Hill and Agent Sitwell noticed the enemy's tendency to withdraw, despite the fact that they were merely from a law enforcement background.

Perhaps Team Two's success had scared the terrorists enough that the pressure eased on the temporary armed resistance teams.

The terrorists' output had dropped noticeably. Team One also took these factors into account.

From Athena's briefing and their own observations, it was clear these people were the good guys. Spirit Fox didn't intend to act violently unless procedures required it, nor did they escalate tensions unnecessarily.

Confidently, Spirit Fox pent up their aggression, replaced the original defensive positions, and pushed the FBI team to fall back—then fired down the corridor.

Agent Hill and her teammates were unaccustomed to the rudeness.

Chapter 682: Half-finished, Sophia participated?

Replacing the original defenders' positions, the effect was immediate. Incoming rounds lessened as seconds ticked by—until they stopped entirely.

Spirit Fox exploited the enemy's retreat and advanced. Crisscrossing across the hallway, their muzzles led and seized control.

The FBI team was stunned by the outrageous success and couldn't help but doubt their own earlier performance.

If not for the heated, stressful occasion that demanded enormous calories, their blushing faces might have embarrassed them.

Without comparison, it had seemed like they held up well enough, but the disparity shown by Spirit Fox completely overturned their confidence.

The gunfight died down after the terrorists abandoned their comrades. A Spirit Fox operator punched in additional rounds to confirm the kills before proceeding.

The FBI team still wanted to follow but was dissuaded. After all, Team One didn't allow any external factors to interfere with their job.

With reluctance, the group returned to their original gathering point, where the temporary team had formed.

Even the local police were glad to oblige, since they weren't willing to risk their lives in the first place.

Now that someone was willing to take over their responsibility, they couldn't care less.

As for fearing blame from their superiors—they had already proven their worth during the most dangerous phase.

On the other hand, Agent Hill and Agent Sitwell didn't feel good about stopping their involvement in the mess.

Though relieved inwardly, there was a hint of unwillingness. Particularly for Agent Hill, who suppressed her excitement upon noticing that many of the additional operators supporting them were women too.

As someone of the same gender in a similar field, Agent Hill understood the difficulties women faced.

To see so many versions of herself on the battlefield was both a motivator and living proof of what the so-called 'weaker gender' could truly do.

She pitied the operators more after witnessing their outrageous expertise. How much effort and sweat had they poured in? How much had they bled?

If the operators heard her lamentation, they would remain silent, at a loss for words.

This female agent wasn't wrong—but not entirely right either.

In any case, Spirit Fox didn't have the time or energy to care about others' thoughts and reactions.

They were relentlessly pursuing the terrorists. Even if the black-ops unit was pretending, their actions were already sinful.

For people like that, Spirit Fox was adamant about instilling righteousness.

Their regular work in law enforcement back home had built a strong mindset and foundation for this pursuit:

Minimal Justice and Morality.

They weren't despicable beings who preached moral responsibility while avoiding the tasks themselves.

They upheld the bare minimum boundaries that a person with a humane mindset should have:

Help when you can—without endangering yourself if possible.

Not to mention, the Spirit Fox girls were far beyond just that. They were highly capable and very keen on eliminating threats.

What did it matter if the terrorists' identities could endanger their own group?

Would those backgrounds dare to admit themselves publicly?

Since they were now terrorists, Spirit Fox was happy to treat them as such.

Before Agent Hill even had the opportunity to warm up to the operators, they dispersed quickly in pursuit.

Of course, the girls had noticed her expression—but time waited for no one.

The longer they wasted here, the more people would die—either shot on the spot or bleeding out.

The Golden Hour was crucial during rescue operations, regardless of what kind of emergency they were dealing with.

In fact, the Spirit Fox operators had paid attention to the only woman helping the defenders hold off the terrorists.

With Athena's detailed intel, they already knew Agent Hill's identity.

They wanted to connect and expand the network—after all, it seemed like they were working in the same field.

What bodyguard? Although it was a real job, they worked part-time as specialists in police and military operations too.

The operators rushed after the fleeing terrorists, quickly piecing together the reason behind the retreat.

It was likely that a warning—delivered through the elimination of their comrades by Team Two—had set off the current chain of events.

They understood the mission was now a foregone conclusion. Lin Fan and the others had also sensed the sudden shift in the wind.

Bang! Bang!

Tat! Tat! Tat!

The muffled bangs of suppressed weapons clashed with the thunderous cracks of AK rifles.

Though the enemies initially managed to maintain formation during their withdrawal, the relentless pressure from Spirit Fox soon broke them down.

Sure, these terrorists were once elite-tier special operators—but even the old must eventually pass their thrones to the young.

And beyond that, the disparity in levels and support between the two sides was vast—like a chasm.

Around the elevator, as the terrorists backed off and slid down to the underground, probably leading to the parking lots for the staff or whatnot, Spirit Fox operators bit at their heels.

One of the last terrorists spun around and fired maniacally in Spirit Fox's direction. The pointswoman had to retract her head just in time, letting the corner serve as her cover.

She was about to return fire—but the terrorist shot first.

From past experience and honed instincts, she knew the enemy's muzzle was zeroed in directly on her position.

This wasn't fear—it was training. Her skin prickled, not from danger, but from a stimulus—an ingrained sense—that warned her: the bullets coming from that barrel would hit her dead-on.

It was something mysterious. A battle-hardened intuition shared by all Spirit Fox members.

Like a boxer who ducks instinctively after being hit countless times, these lessons became second nature—only after an immense amount of suffering and relentless, punishing drills.

If she tried to compete in that moment, she might score a hit—but she would be hit too.

Even with the secret sutra passed down by Tang Ziyi that enhanced their physiques, it wasn't enough.

Yes, they were quicker, stronger, and sturdier than peak human limits. But even so—it was impossible to react, aim, and fire faster than the enemy already pulling the trigger.

Let's imagine an average human reaction speed of 0.5 seconds.

This meant the operator had less than 0.1 seconds to think, then only 0.4 seconds to move out of cover, aim, shoot, and get back into cover.

0.5 seconds might be average—but against trained opponents, that margin shrinks even further.

Perhaps Ling Qingyu and her closest aides could pull it off—but not every operator in this battle.

Unless absolutely necessary, Spirit Fox operators avoided taking bullets—regardless of their body armor or protection level.

Somehow, this creed had spread among the team—an internal culture started by veterans.

Just as many elite forces disdain anyone who shoots at civilians—even by mistake—Spirit Fox had their own standard:

They would mock any operator who got wounded by carelessness in the same cold, biting way.

Shrapnel and sonic booms rattled around her—but the pointswoman held her ground.

She took a deep breath, steadying her racing thoughts.

She couldn't blindfire. She couldn't prefire, either—not here, not now. There were civilians around, even if most were sprawled on the floor from being shot or injured or pretending to be one.

In any case, they couldn't afford to risk an unrelated casualties. The terrorists could disregard the lives of civilians but they couldn't

Fire superiority wasn't earned by haste.

And she knew—haste would only ruin everything.

When the suppression dropped, she sprang out from cover and fired two shots at the disappearing figure down the slope.

The sound of a heavy object crashing and sliding off the elevator echoed amidst the heated gunfire. She had scored a kill.

A sister behind her gave her arm a quick squeeze, and she moved out from cover.

The other operators covered their sectors as the formation advanced toward the elevator.

From their high vantage point, they opened fire on terrorists who burst out of a room, kicking the door open with brute force.

Puff! Puff!

Easy kills.

Team One's operators had already secured parts of the downstairs area.

In the trailer, Team One's leader frowned as she noticed a dropped rifle on the floor.

As the leader, she typically refrained from engaging directly unless necessary—her subordinates were responsible for neutralizing threats.

If every member fulfilled their role properly, she had more time and energy to think and act strategically.

This weapon on the floor was a clue.

She speculated that a terrorist had tried to blend in with civilians to escape.

Another possibility was that it had simply been dropped by mistake or during a scuffle.

But she wasn't one to gamble.

Even if there was only a one-percent chance, she would check thoroughly.

She signaled her partner to follow her toward the nearest room.

Naturally, during pursuit of primary targets, the operators didn't have the luxury to clear every room—unless the enemies were close to their formation.

Rooms like these were often left until secondary clearance.

But now, with a lull in action and no one in sight, they resumed systematic room-clearing procedures.

The leader raised her rifle and positioned herself against the wall beside the doorknob.

Tucking her SCAR tightly under her armpit, she tested the knob—unlocked.

She glanced at her partner.

Sophia gave a small nod, her barrel shifting in quiet confirmation. A silent "ready."

Yes—Ling Qingyu's new secretary had accompanied the mission.

Hidden behind a holographic mask, she had blended in with the guard team, her identity concealed.

Receiving the signal, the leader twisted the knob and pushed the door open.

She took a step back, raising her rifle. Together, they cleared the room from the threshold—

Another connected room came into view.

Sophia stepped in first, followed closely by the leader, her barrel extended just beside Sophia's elbow.

Chapter 683: Last clash

Sophia aimed her rifle at the door while the leader stomped the blockade open—frightened screams erupted in response.

A small group of five people huddled together, shivering in fear amidst the chaos. The leader's frown deepened as she carefully scanned each of them.

Three men, two women, and a child—diverse in race and appearance. A surprising find. Among them, one couple held hands tightly.

Perhaps having vented their initial fear, the group began to speak up.

"No, please!"

"Let us go!"

"Please don't. I still have—"

"Have mercy!"

"Stay calm. We are not here to harm you," Sophia said, using an international language.

As an Interpol agent, she was better suited to communicate without giving away too much.

"Are you telling the truth?"

"We have no reason to lie," Sophia replied, though a slight impatience crept into her tone.

She exchanged a glance with her partner. The leader mirrored her look. Both had reached a silent, mutual conclusion.

Something didn't feel right—especially about the couple and the child.

The man and woman kept glancing at the child, clearly worried for his safety. But the child... the child wasn't being held by them. He was in another man's arms.

The unease that tickled the edge of their instincts now made sense.

Despite the child's crying and sniffing, it became clear—the couple and the child shared physical similarities.

But the man holding him did not. Not even a hint.

Silence hung for several seconds. Both Sophia and the leader had pinpointed what was wrong.

Their eyes narrowed.

One of these civilians—possibly more—wasn't who they claimed to be.

This wasn't just a frightened group of survivors. This was a hostage scenario.

Suddenly, red outlines flashed across the visor display—the man holding the child. The datalink had confirmed it.

Without hesitation, the leader snapped into action and pulled the trigger.

The gunshot echoed like thunder in the small room. The round punched through the man's left eye and blasted out the back of his skull, splattering blood across the wall.

The man stiffened and collapsed, falling onto his butt. Only the bloodied wall supported his lifeless body.

The group screamed in horror—but the couple immediately rushed to the child, pulling him into their arms with tears of relief.

Sophia stood stunned. The leader, by contrast, remained expressionless.

She had full trust in Athena's system.

The visor had marked the man as hostile. That alone was enough.

And her instincts had warned her several times even before that—

The couple's protective posture, the physical dissimilarities, the subtle reactions from the rest of the group—

All of it pointed to the same truth.

The dead man never expected to be executed so decisively.

He thought he had blended in well enough.

If he hadn't gotten cut off and lost, he would never have resorted to such a despicable disguise.

"What are you doing?!" Sophia exclaimed, still in shock.

"What must be done," the leader replied flatly, unaffected by the outburst.

Veterans didn't argue with recruits. She understood Sophia's hesitation—

The gap between blind trust and battlefield instincts, between intel and conscience.

"You can't just judge someone like... like—"

Sophia faltered, her voice caught between protest and realization.

She saw it too—the couple's reactions, the truth revealed after the shot.

"When you start working with us, learn to trust," the leader said calmly, flashing a brief smile.

"Check his body and move on."

Sophia nodded, albeit reluctantly. Now wasn't the time for debate.

She turned to comfort the civilians while quickly investigating the corpse.

Reality matched their earlier suspicions.

No further threats were present. With the area secure, the two rejoined their unit.

Yet even as she regrouped, Sophia couldn't help but reflect on the technology and intelligence—the powerful weapons Spirit Fox wielded so effortlessly.

She had long realized Ling Qingyu's group was anything but ordinary.

And after reaping the benefits of that strength firsthand, Sophia had stopped considering leaving.

Even if Ling Qingyu drove her away, Sophia wouldn't hesitate to kneel and beg. There was no way she'd ever separate from this incredible team.

Of course, Ling Qingyu wouldn't push away a warrior—rare existence in this world—without a good reason. Besides, Sophia was easy on the eyes and made excellent eye candy.

In fact, long before the leader sensed someone preparing to hide after spotting a weapon on the ground, Athena had already tracked the terrorist using every possible camera feed.

Combined with information gathered through hacking, she had already compiled full profiles—biographies, photos, everything—of the participants.

She didn't inform the leader immediately, seeing that the latter had begun to realize the truth on her own, and only confirmed the ID at the last moment.

Despite her capabilities, Athena rarely intervened directly, allowing operators to make decisions for themselves.

Though the datalink greatly enhanced the speed and coordination of an operation, Athena was cautious—it shouldn't dull their independent thinking.

The datalink's core purpose was to show teammate positions and enemy silhouettes as seen through allied equipment. Even this seemingly simple function had already granted the team an unimaginable edge.

The difference between fighting with and without real-time intelligence could mean life or death in those split-second, brain-burning moments.

Team One regrouped and pushed forward, repelling the terrorists. By now, their relentless aggression had shaken the black-ops force.

High-low corner battles. Hallway dominance. No matter the terrain, the enemy couldn't hold.

Under Spirit Fox's pressure, the firefights gradually converged toward the terminal entrance—where the initial attack had erupted.

Localized skirmishes soon merged. Some operators moved upstairs to assist defenders, clearing threats from above.

Although some confusion occurred due to their unannounced intervention, higher authorities quickly coordinated and smoothed things out.

Airport security leaders—those who were still alive—welcomed Spirit Fox's arrival with visible relief.

Near the terminal entrance, elevators connected the upstairs and downstairs gates—departure and arrival areas.

Glass walls meant to serve as dividers had shattered under intense crossfire.

Sharp shards littered the floor, blood painting the scene with cruel artistry.

Among the corpses lay those who twitched or groaned. Anyone who screamed had been shot—noise drew attention and attention meant death.

The terrorists were in retreat. Dust and cracks exploded near their fleeing silhouettes as bullets chased them.

From above and below, Spirit Fox covered every route, gunning down all exposed enemies who failed to find cover in time.

Karma had come. As an old soldier once said: if you have the guts to kill, be prepared to die the same way.

What you bring to others will always come back to you.

Spirit Fox annihilated them on the ground floor. A small detachment broke off from Team One to assist Lin Fan and his group.

The double-pronged attack forced the enemy out of the terminal in short order.

Bang! Bang!

Thud!

The loud rhythm of automatic gunfire merged with the flash of muzzles and the thuds of collapsing bodies.

Yes—the terrorists were utterly defeated. Even if Lin Fan's team alone couldn't threaten them, the addition of Spirit Fox had shifted the wind and turned the tide.

However, despite thinning numbers and constant retreat, the enemy remained organized.

They fell back with precision, leaving a few behind to delay the advance while others retreated in stages—one group holding the line as another pulled back, then switching roles.

Lin Fan and the others couldn't stop cussing as they discovered the terrorists' discipline and skill.

In contrast to their chaotic earlier actions, this structured withdrawal revealed the truth.

These weren't just elites. These terrorists were highly trained, far beyond standard expectations.

Otherwise, how could even veteran and elite-tier fighters on their own side feel this much pressure?

The methodical retreat reached the exterior of the terminal, erupting into battles across wreckage and burning vehicles.

Terrorist figures crouched behind cover, especially areas shielded by engine blocks or reinforced structures, and fired back indiscriminately—completely unconcerned about where their bullets landed.

On the other hand, the protagonist's party and Spirit Fox couldn't respond the same way. Morality and mission restrained them—to defend, to protect, to save.

But one advantage flipped the predicament: Spirit Fox's girls were faster and more accurate. That alone made up for the limitation.

Regardless of their restraint, Spirit Fox and the rest refused to be outdone.

The girls peeked out from behind pillars and opened fire. Their stances varied—standing, kneeling, even prone on their side for angled shots.

The battlefield became a chaotic exchange of rounds between those outside and the defenders holding the terminal's interior.

Suddenly, a van screeched to a stop behind the terrorists.

Its side door swung open—and a terrifying muzzle burst into flames.

A machine gun sprayed nonstop, bullets tearing into the terminal interior without pause, even as its barrel glowed red-hot from sustained fire.

The entire front area of the terminal was bombarded.

Gunfire hailed in from the van, pinning everyone down or forcing them to scramble for cover.

The horizontal sweep of the PKM forced bodies flat against the cold floor, like they were trying to melt into it.

Lin Fan's group was in trouble—pinned, shaken, helpless under the sudden onslaught.

But not Spirit Fox.

Even under surprise suppression, the operators remained calm.

They had long grown used to bullets whizzing by and understood the rhythm of their trajectories.

The moment the PKM's muzzle shifted away from their direction, Spirit Fox operators popped up—fast and fierce—returning fire without hesitation.

Some emptied entire magazines in one go, their retaliation fierce enough to scorch the air. Their counteraction forced a brief pause—just long enough for everyone to exploit.

The suppression faltered before it could even properly begin.

From the distance, Spirit Fox's SAW gunner went on a rampage, pouring relentless fire into the van, riddling its skin with uncountable holes.

Boom!

The van erupted in flames, the explosion rocking the wreckage-strewn battlefield. Fire surged up, licking the shattered frame as smoke billowed into the air.

The FN Evolys had struck true—rounds chewed into the side panel before one lucky hit punctured the fuel tank. That was all it took.

Flames slowly engulfed the lower deck, swallowing whatever was left inside. Shortly afterward, a sharp impact struck her in the chest.

The SAW gunner tumbled backward with a heavy crunch.

"No!" someone cried out—but it definitely wasn't one of her sisters.

Instead, Spirit Fox operators were snickering, amused at someone's bad luck. Somebody must be prepared to bleed to host a dinner.

Chapter 684: It's over

The one who shouted in pain the most was Agent Hill. As a woman, she sympathized and felt much more.

How hard it was for a woman to be able to fight like special forces? She had also been through a lot.

As for how she discerned the hit operator was female— from a distance, she saw clearly how big the bust was, how broad and rounded.

However, even if the entire Spirit Fox operators were composed of females, she didn't consider the reason or doubt it for the slightest moment.

Maybe she had yet to recognize that the new operatives were entirely female. Anyway, not only her—the others had concerns too.

At least in their eyes, the SAW gunner had suppressed their greatest foes and created an opportunity, but was now taken down by an unknown sniper.

They were indeed angry, but not as frustrated as the female FBI agent. Today, they had seen too many deaths.

In contrast, nobody among Spirit Fox was worried about their fellow sisters, but they wouldn't express such teasing in public. Everyone knew the real truth.

"Sniper!" Lin Fan exclaimed.

His shout merely alerted his group members. Team One had long understood there was a sniper, taking advantage of the chaos.

By suppressing them, the surviving terrorists had a chance to escape smoothly. Many didn't dare move or expose themselves.

So, the terrorists once again had the upper hand.

Nevertheless, this didn't include Spirit Fox, who attempted fatal attraction—teasing the sniper.

Some even sprinted for a second and slid behind cover. Some fired at the fleeing terrorists before retracting quickly, not giving the sniper a chance for the bullet to hit.

Speed is fast. Fast is supreme.

Of course, the sniper shot at them, but the anti-sniper system catalog inside the helmet's system deduced the shooter's location soon.

After three or more shots, the devices and data link pinpointed the location accurately—2 o'clock, 150 meters in the treelines above a small hide.

Even if Spirit Fox couldn't see clearly, they immediately reacted and laid down fire roughly around the location.

The DMR—designated marksman rifle—operator sifted through her magnifier and tried to find the sniper through her scope.

Meanwhile, a few close to the previous SAW gunner dragged the 'wounded' away behind cover.

While most attention focused on the sniper, several shot down retreating figures. The unprepared ones fell.

The prepared ones—just a few—who were keen on covering their teammates, managed to survive and fought back, shuffling backward.

Now that their transport was down, they had to extract to a secondary option.

Either another vehicle risked itself and rescued them, or they escaped on foot to a safer location and were picked up later.

Sporadic shots, particularly inaccurate ones, failed to frighten or pressure Spirit Fox.

They were the ones who didn't budge, even when a shot hit near them and sprinkled dust over their bodies.

Lin Fan and the others were stunned by Spirit Fox's initiation.

It had only been less than half a minute under the sniper's pressure, and they had already counterattacked.

From being under attack to locating the sniper and suppressing in return—these women were too quick.

By now, Lin Fan understood his déjà vu mood. They were indeed Spirit Fox, no doubt about it.

He had to praise their abilities, no matter how reluctant he felt.

Glancing at the 'injured' SAW gunner, he almost rolled his eyes because he heard the banter. He knew these women weren't just women at all.

What he witnessed was the operator who helped her smack her helmet and giggle.

"Don't regret it. You owe us a great meal from now on. You'll be our slave for a week."

The other reciprocated and flashed a middle finger. She was also grieving her luck. Out of everyone, she became the target.

Every machine gunner's fear was attracting the eyes of a sniper—and it seemed she didn't escape that fate.

Fortunately, she worked under Ling Qingyu and enjoyed the latter's spoiling.

The two's interaction made them sigh in relief. This gunner was alive and well—still kicking, still insulting her teammates.

"I hit him." The DMR yelled.

"Do you kill him?" Team One leader asked.

"No, it's just an arm."

On the other hand, the others didn't understand their words but Lin Fan translated them. Knowing the biggest threat was eliminated, everyone regained courage.

So, the situation returned to the original abuse by the protagonist's faction and the terrorists suffered. Some cursed in their languages.

The faces of Agent Sitwell and Agent Hill weren't good. They had some clues about the identities of the terrorists based on the curses they heard.

Although the doubt remained, they had a premonition, backyard fire was properly very close.

The terrorists managed to start a parked car and attempted to drive away. Of course, there were still terrorists covering their fellas while hurling their ass close to mount on the vehicles.

Three men scurried away from the cover. Based on their routes, they made sure objects blocked the vision of Spirit Fox and its allies.

However, one got nailed in the bullets from different direction. Another merely had the time to look back before gunned down.

The remaining one jumped quickly and dodged the incoming rounds. He looked at the flanks in astonishment.

Team Two operators had managed to walk around and flanked the terrorists from the left. For now, they were indeed in the distance but they had widened the angle exposure.

Even escaping had slimmed to none. Two operators, high and low, spurted out bullets from the corner while the column behind dashed in a flanking maneuver to block the path of escape.

During the approach, the point Spirit Fox member fired at the lead car, making a driveaway.

Two rounds to the driver, two rounds to the copilot. Back and forth, she switched six times. The sedan deviated from its course and crashed the vehicle nearby.

There was definitely resistant from the poor vehicles and a stray bullet scored a hit at her helmet.

Pang!

The operator slipped and was pulled back to cover. Another sped up and rushed away. It had gained its acceleration given by the first vehicle. The engine howled as if to accentuate the dire predicaments.

Team two members were ready to shred the vehicles into pieces. Although the car was fast, they could definitely stop them.

Driver, wheels. All targets were easy to hit despite 30 meters away. The girls were about to squeeze the triggers when a voice stopped them.

"Hold you fire! Let them go. Pretend to hit them but let them escape," Ling Qingyu's orders interrupted their actions.

The members weren't slow to react and immediately shifted their aims. The vehicle enjoyed the metal scratch.

As for stray bullets, Spirit Fox member shrugged and didn't care so long as the vehicle disappeared 'safely.'

They had no idea what Ling Qingyu planned but following orders, especially emphasized in an important tone needed obligation.

Their boss must have her own plan. It wouldn't be good to ruin hers because of impulse and emotions.

"Team Two, this is Team One. Thanks for the assist."

"You're welcome. Go ahead, Team One."

"We've got a high-value threat—a sniper—escaping in the direction... I want your team to chase him. Be advised, don't stray too far from the center."

"Understood. On the move."

The Team Two leader signaled her colleagues to follow and rushed in the direction where the sniper was last spotted.

Although the hope of catching up was slim, given the distance, there was still a possibility.

Not to mention, no Spirit Fox member wanted a talented sniper—someone who now shared grievances with them—on the run.

As for the leftover terrorists, their fate was sealed. Under the combined jab and cross of Team One and Team Two, they were quickly killed.

All terrorists in the airport had been neutralized. All that remained was her team's search for the VIP. She had assigned four girls to this task and had yet to receive a positive report.

Hopefully, this man hadn't died too early, the leader thought as she walked in the direction of Lin Fan, who was indulging in the rare camaraderie and cheers.

Even though they had been forced into a group from different backgrounds, they now shared the same enemies.

Each one deserved a moment of enjoyment. The airport security had managed to reorganize and cooperate; every party had played a role.

Spirit Fox operators initiated a secondary clearance. When others saw them double-tapping the corpses of the terrorists, their lips twitched.

"Lin Fan. Long time no see. It's a rare sight to reunite in a foreign land," Team One's leader teased.

She knew Lin Fan didn't recognize her, but she had read his files and even interacted with him before.

Lin Fan froze and lamented inwardly. Sure enough, his suspicion was now confirmed—the same vibe, the same familiarity. They were Spirit Fox.

Haha... Indeed, Spirit Fox members were military, not the police background they had displayed back in Province N.

"I didn't expect you girls to fly here. What's your mission?" Lin Fan asked the approaching warrioress.

"As if I'd tell you."

"Hey, do you know each other?" Agent Hill, eager to befriend this fierce group of women, asked Lin Fan.

Since the conversation had taken place in Country C's language, she couldn't understand it, but the familiar tone and greeting explained everything.

"Of course, Miss. I punched him in the stomach last time. How could I forget that feeling?" Team One's leader joked. "You really fought bravely today. We're impressed, I'm being frank here. It's an honor to meet our like-minded sister."

She patted the agent's shoulder and praised her with no awkwardness at all.

"Same here," Agent Hill shook hands. "Without your presence, I'm not sure if we will survive the planned onslaught."

"Nah, you'll do fine." Team 1 leader smiled and answered with a genuine tone. She wasn't lying—the situation might turn bad without their involvement but this temporary group of veterans could persist and wait out till reinforcement arrived.

On the other hand, Lin Fan almost jumped and scolded—So, it was you!

He had suffered a great injustice that time, and even if there were reasons for it, his pain wasn't supposed to be anyone's amusement.

Chapter 685: Undercover?

"So, I'm curious—do you really abuse this young hero?" Agent Hill asked with great curiosity.

Before the Team One leader could answer, Lin Fan interrupted. Damn, dissing someone right in front of them... what a wonderful experience.

"Situations called for it. It was protocol, and I can understand that," said Lin Fan. "Besides, if I had resisted, this lady would've gotten hurt."

"Hah, a joke. Long before you even moved, your body would've been riddled with bullet holes," Team One leader sneered.

Lin Fan swallowed hard, remembering the abuse he'd suffered that particular night—when he was about to enjoy and devour Lan Xi.

The woman who ruined the night had warned him that every operator under her had skills nearly on par with hers.

Offending this narrow-minded leader wasn't a good idea.

Still, Lin Fan couldn't resist. "At least it's better than your situation—shot in the face. It was pure luck you survived."

"Oh my gosh!" Agent Hill covered her lips and stared at the operator, even though she couldn't see any trace of a wound.

Her concern was genuine. Her expression clearly demanded an explanation.

The Team One leader simply shrugged, though her face darkened.

That incident was one she'd rather forget—even if she had been promoted afterward.

She'd been scared to death in that moment, and the only thing that saved her life was her ballistic visor.

Even now, she could still remember every detail.

And Lin Fan had just poked the wound.

As expected of someone her boss always emphasized and hated, she decided to ignore the taunt and instead focused on befriending Agent Hill.

Of course, not without pouring a bit of oil on the fire—she casually recounted Lin Fan's shameful past, including his history with flirtatious lovers.

Lin Fan rubbed his nose helplessly. Women... never offend them.

Thankfully, his new target—the chief stewardess—wasn't around to hear any of this.

Soon, most of Lin Fan's new partners had gathered around, exchanging information, while security personnel and professionals began tending to the aftermath of the terrorist attack.

Among the civilians, there were bound to be doctors and nurses—or at least people with useful skills.

Spirit Fox operatives helped provide first aid and medical assistance, doing their best while waiting for the Country E government to take over.

The Team One commander conversed with many, but she spoke more with Agent Hill, feeling comfortable around her.

"Is it possible the terrorists' goal was your client?" Agent Hill asked.

Since the commander's team posed as a mercenary security unit, many assumed her protectee must be a high-value target on someone's kill list.

The Team One commander was momentarily stunned.

Everyone's expressions seemed to suggest agreement with Hill's guess.

Where did they even draw that conclusion?

Although the truth was somewhat connected, Ling Qingyu really had no direct ties.

"No, it's impossible. There's no relevance," the commander denied firmly. "Don't overthink it. Politics and national interests, driven by dirty greed, have always affected bystanders."

"Indeed," Lin Fan nodded, with others following, though some still looked unconvinced.

Regardless, her words held a crucial truth—a deeper investigation would be necessary to uncover more.

"I can vouch that we aren't involved," the commander added. "In fact, it was their attack that forced us to defend ourselves."

Even though she knew the real cause, she wouldn't admit any of it.

It didn't matter whether others believed her—what mattered was that she never accepted the blame.

The fault must never land on her boss.

Even if she lacked grand strategic vision, she had enough common sense to know this much—

She and her team weren't going to be scapegoats.

"It's amazing to see so many veterans gathered here today," she added, voice calm but meaningful.

There were implications behind her words:

If you keep tilting the arrows at us, don't forget—you might not be free from the true cause of this terrorist attack either.

No one continued the earlier topic. Instead, they complained about their journey and lamented how fate had brought them all together during this chaotic adventure.

"Interesting," the commander muttered, drawing a raised brow from Lin Fan.

Since she'd spoken in her native tongue, the others didn't understand. Lin Fan glanced back and forth between John and the Spirit Fox commander.

There was something off. The woman was staring at the former Marine Recon with a look far too playful for the current situation—like she'd found a new toy to break.

Even though her face was layered behind a ballistic visor and hood, with only her eyes exposed, Lin Fan caught the glint in them.

He didn't voice his suspicions, but his thoughts turned sharply. Why is Spirit Fox eyeing John like that?

The commander's lips curled ever so slightly.

Unlike others, she was seeing something through the visor that no one else could—information that, if revealed, would cause another shock.

John's outline was highlighted in red—a tag the visor only used to mark enemies.

Just like the terrorist earlier who had tried to slip away in a group of civilians, this situation was no different.

She wasn't the only one who noticed. A few other operators subtly exchanged glances.

The commander casually shoed away the surrounding sisters, keeping only two close, who shifted positions to encircle John from a distance.

It wasn't a direct confrontation. She wasn't aiming to provoke a firefight—just increasing the pressure, subtly.

At first, she had considered whether the intelligence system had made an error, but further data erased that doubt.

Line by line, John's profile came up—past missions, recent assignments.

This man was the undercover asset tied to the terrorists.

A former Marine Recon joining Black Ops wasn't a surprise in itself. But what intrigued the Spirit Fox commander was his behavior during the attack.

That was why she hadn't moved earlier. That, and she had no desire to antagonize Lin Fan's group without solid proof.

Yes, they now had enough to take John down—but exposing him was a different matter altogether.

Revealing how they obtained this intelligence would only bring future headaches. Mishandling the case could create unnecessary risks.

So, she remained still.

Why stir up conflict when people might accuse Spirit Fox of false speculation or staging evidence?

Not to mention—this former Recon had personally eliminated his own teammates without giving away the slightest clue.

That alone impressed her.

She even wondered what Lin Fan's reaction would be if she laid all the facts out in front of him.

Would he feel betrayed? Or relieved?

Did John hate this mission from the start, finding the "dirty work" beneath him?

Black ops had always walked a fine line—heroes to some, criminals to others. Everyone in the game knew this truth.

Maybe John had even considered sabotaging the mission—only to hesitate when he saw a third party like Spirit Fox already involved.

In any case, that bastard was lucky to still be standing in front of Spirit Fox.

She couldn't give her girls the go-ahead to engage—not without a visible, lawful reason, no matter their numerical edge.

Besides, whatever his identity or intent, his actions—taking down the terrorists—deserved recognition.

That alone would give others enough reason to defend him if things escalated.

Meanwhile, John had noticed the subtle triangle of operators watching him.

He played it cool, but his palms were slick with sweat.

Those women's eyes... they weren't ordinary glances.

Luckily, he'd endured enough extreme situations to maintain composure. Still, he couldn't shake the bad feeling forming in his gut.

The commander, meanwhile, ignored his reaction. With a quick, silent signal, she directed the two watching him to maintain observation.

Then, Agent Hill approached, handing her a contact card.

The commander accepted it, but her eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

Why is this woman so eager to connect with us?

She turned the card in her fingers, wondering—Could there be a tracker or surveillance tech hidden inside?

She bore the suspicions and accepted the card, not forgetting to remark—hopefully, she would never need to ping the contact.

Her attention was quickly diverted by incoming reports from her teams and subordinates. A mix of good news and bad.

The good news: a small detachment had successfully secured the VIP and exfiltrated back to the aircraft without drawing attention.

The bad news came from Team 2, who had been tasked with hunting down the sniper.

The target had escaped—with help.

By the time Team 2 reached the sniper's original position, his partner had already picked him up on a motorbike and vanished down the road.

Engaging them at that range risked creating diplomatic issues. So, Ling Qingyu had called off the pursuit.

She wasn't about to hand over political leverage before even speaking with Country E's superiors.

At last, the long-awaited reinforcements arrived—late, as always, just like in the movies.

Military trucks and armored vehicles from Country E screeched to a halt on the scene.

Emergency medical services were a few minutes behind.

Given Country E's infamous corruption, their arrival time wasn't half bad—probably thanks to repeated pressure from higher-ups.

Besides, she had long suspected that the Black Ops terrorists might have allies within the military, deliberately delaying reinforcements to gain an advantage.

So it wasn't surprising if the QRF took their sweet time.

Chapter 686 686: Everything ready

The military personnel approached the gathered group, clearly marked as those who made decisions.

Lin Fan and the others mentally prepared their speeches, knowing that their actions hovered in a legal grey area.

Spirit Fox, however, had no such worries. Even before Ling Qingyu announced her visit, they had already obtained the necessary licenses and permits.

The interrogation didn't last long, largely thanks to the nearby presence of the Spirit Fox commander, who stepped in to assist.

Her presence cut through much of the red tape. Even if the military wanted to exploit the situation for their own gain, they had to think twice.

For that, Lin Fan, Agent Hill, and the rest were genuinely grateful—not being dragged into a bureaucratic mess unawares.

Of course, they knew that a reasonable person wouldn't stir up problems needlessly. But life, unfortunately, wasn't always reasonable.

People had a tendency to take advantage when they saw the opportunity. Sincerity was a rare commodity. Often, when someone showed it, they were met with ridicule rather than reciprocation.

It wasn't that people were stupid—they just didn't want to assume the worst in others. But once, twice... fine. After that, it was time to cut ties and move on. Or at the very least, stop being so open and treat everything as business.

In the adult world, even the tiniest suspicion was necessary for self-preservation.

Yet all these life lessons were meaningless in the face of a powerful entity like the state machine. Only Spirit Fox and Ling Qingyu's prestige from Miss System action could talk on the table properly.

Perhaps, solely Ling Qingyu might not achieve this but with the addition of her cohorts, it guaranteed respects and honor. Guns speak with guns.

Ling Qingyu 5Cs principal didn't need further proof to authenticate her philosophy.

Still, the military officer clearly had an axe to grind with them. The commander smiled knowingly, her eyes flickering toward the orange outline marking the military superior's figure through her visor.

As expected, the Black Ops network had penetrated deep.

But the commander quietly thwarted every underhanded move.

Watching her fight these silent battles, Lin Fan and the others held their tongues, silently cursing the narrow-mindedness and greed they saw unfolding.

The commander gave a subtle hand signal to one of her operators, who quickly contacted Ling Qingyu and relayed everything.

Inside the A380, the terrifying cracks and explosive noises had already died down—Spirit Fox had handled the situation.

Ling Qingyu turned to Xiao Yue for advice, only to be met with unexpected news.

"What the heck, shortie?"

"Be serious," Xiao Yue smacked her arm in response.

Mo Yunxi and Yin Jingfei stifled their laughter—until they remembered their own heights and turned toward Ling Qingyu with playful, evil glints in their eyes.

Ling Qingyu shivered, feeling the sudden shift in atmosphere. She looked around at the unfriendly gazes and coughed awkwardly. Xiao Yue was on the shorter side—but girls, on average, were shorter anyway.

The Spirit Fox operators had managed to break the mold in height thanks to sutras and a disciplined regimen of nutrition and training.

"I mean... how many did you bring?" Ling Qingyu asked. "You know I have a bracelet, and yet you didn't consult me once. You need to be taught a lesson."

"Come back after you can beat Sister Ziyi," Xiao Yue replied, clicking her tongue and ruthlessly patronizing her.

"Tsk... you really know how to bully people," Ling Qingyu grumbled.

Her shocked reaction was understandable. Xiao Yue had just admitted that, in addition to the SUVs, she'd secretly transported four Aegis 2.0 vehicles—and now suggested they unload and showcase them for deterrence.

With Country E's military practically glued to them like a sticker, the deterrence from eliminating terrorists earlier was starting to wear thin.

Sure, once the identities of the terrorists were confirmed, the military's attitude might shift. But that was a matter for later.

The original Aegis 1.0 was an MRAP vehicle that looked like a massive military truck with large troop capacity. Aegis 2.0 was still an MRAP, but in a sleeker 4x4 configuration—six wheels versus four. Think of a Humvee, but better protected, armored, and far more advanced in systems.

Ling Qingyu gave the order to Team Three, who were stationed as sentries in the surrounding area.

Soon, the rear compartments slid open as the pilots acknowledged the command. Spirit Fox operators and even the stewardesses acted as crew members, helping with deployment.

The latter were visibly elated once they heard that they were finally safe—and that the mysterious women accompanying their flight had quelled the chaos outside.

Later, they discovered the truth about Ling Qingyu's guards:

Spirit Fox—the infamous unit whose name alone was enough to send criminals into cold sweats.

On the other hand, Ling Qingyu sighed at the fate of those who had met misfortune. She couldn't save everyone; she was powerless in some situations.

She had done the best she could. Who would've expected those bastards to really launch a massacre? At least, seeing the living through her spectacles brought some comfort.

"Let's go. Seems like we need to display our fists," Ling Qingyu told Xiao Yue and descended once the vehicle formation had been set.

Xiao Yue nodded in understanding and gestured toward Mo Yunxi and Yin Jingfei. Ling Qingyu didn't really like the idea of bringing them into danger.

After all, she'd learned from Miss System and Athena that the aircraft was the safest fortress—second only to her residence in Province N.

In her opinion, it was better for Mo Yunxi, Yin Jingfei, and the others who couldn't defend themselves to stay behind.

However, her moral compass reminded her: unless the situation was inevitable, she had no right to stop others or chain them down.

If every decision needed her approval, what would be the difference between a person and a doll?

Seeking their answer after careful thought was the proper way. If she disliked others dictating her life, why should she behave the same toward them?

So, she asked the two, "Sister Xi, Sister Fei, do you want to tag along or stay inside the aircraft? It won't take more than a day. I just need to meet with the leaders here."

"Hmm... I guess we better stay here," Mo Yunxi replied, though she sounded unsure.

Noticing her unease, Ling Qingyu smiled and reassured her. "Don't worry. I'll leave behind my guard. You saw how the terrorists' projectiles exploded before even reaching us."

Mo Yunxi, Yin Jingfei, and the nearby stewardesses nodded. Ling Qingyu took the time to explain the aircraft's defense mechanism and Spirit Fox's security plan during her absence.

Everyone decided to stay, having picked up on Ling Qingyu's implicit advice. After all, based on her words, no one here was stupid.

Besides, Ling Qingyu would return in just a few hours. Why cause her unnecessary stress?

Ling Qingyu and Xiao Yue descended the stairs and met with the Team 3 leader, who was responsible for securing the aircraft's perimeter.

"Boss," the leader greeted her.

"Well done. I'm going to burden you a bit more to protect the girls inside."

"Don't worry, Boss. We promise to deal with any enemies."

"I don't doubt it." Ling Qingyu nodded. "You'll have fire support on standby—available all the time."

"All the time?" the leader echoed in surprise.

"Just contact Athena and relay the coordinates."

"Understood, Boss."

"Besides," Ling Qingyu added with a grin, "I left behind a bunch of goodies for you girls to loot."

The leader caught her drift and smiled. She knew exactly what kind of "goodies" Ling Qingyu meant—rare firepower, top-tier gear, and so on.

Although she didn't yet fully understand what kind of fire support Athena could deliver, she could guess.

And whatever it was, it would far outclass what was stored on the aircraft in terms of destruction, damage, and protection.

Soon, Ling Qingyu and Xiao Yue mounted a vehicle, picking one from the convoy. The rest followed autonomously.

It wasn't surprising—technology had long since matured to be implemented in every vehicle used by Spirit Fox and under Ling Qingyu's alias.

Team 3's presence was necessary to secure the girls inside the A380. The convoy was meant to transport Team One and Two.

The convoy circled the terminal and parked near the area where the Spirit Fox commander and the others were gathered.

Lin Fan and the others noticed the menacing formation.

Country E's military reinforcements seemed a little hesitant in the face of the arriving visitor.

After all, two Aegis 2.0s with .50 caliber machine guns mounted on top radiated the aura of kings.

They suspected that their own military vehicles—mostly trucks and technicals—wouldn't stand a chance against such an onslaught.

Even their armored vehicles wouldn't be able to withstand bullets capable of shredding aircraft into pieces.

Yes, Ling Qingyu's convoy included two Aegis 2.0s and over a dozen armored SUVs.

Two more Aegis units had been intentionally stationed around her aircraft to guard against any unforeseen threats.

Such protection means, combined with Elena's submarine's outrageous weapons and capabilities were more than sufficient to level the entire Country E army.

As for the air force and airpower of Country A, if someone wanted to rollover the table, Elena's electromagnetic railguns weren't decorations.

Chapter 687: Country E's internal landscape

The Spirit Fox commander, leader of Team One, cried out in joy and shot a provocative glance at Country E's military officer.

She didn't say it aloud, but she still held a grudge over his constant efforts to stir up trouble for her group.

Though she understood that his intentions were rooted in personal loss—Spirit Fox's intervention had cost him connections and money due to ties with BlackOps—his repeated provocations made her want to slap some sense into him.

Now that Ling Qingyu had arrived, she felt like a huge weight had been lifted off her shoulders. She was more than ready to kick the problem down the line.

Having dealt with officialdom back in Province N, she was long tired of the pointless power plays.

"Now that my boss is here, we gotta go," the commander said casually. "You don't want to mess up negotiations with higher-ups, do you?"

"Of course not," the officer replied with a bitter smile. "But it's best if we escort your convoy."

"Thanks, but no need. We can handle ourselves. You should focus your energy on securing the airport."

Then, turning to her team, she called out, "Team One and Two, mount up."

Ignoring the officer, she headed for the convoy as her teams regrouped and dashed toward their assigned vehicles.

There was no confusion during deployment. Thanks to Athena's support and AR technology, each member had a digital highlight over their figure, clearly labeling team roles and positions.

The commander paused to glance at the other soldiers who had stood their ground during the attack.

Though their kill counts couldn't compare, their courage in resisting deserved recognition.

She nodded respectfully before stepping into her vehicle.

One amusing moment stood out: several operators were lowkey fighting over who got to ride in the Aegis 2.0.

Not far off, Lin Fan and the others exchanged knowing glances while John finally let out a relieved sigh.

He'd been on edge the whole time—those Spirit Fox operators kept staring at him for reasons he couldn't grasp, and it almost sent him into a panic.

Meanwhile, Lin Fan started to reevaluate his partner. As someone familiar with Spirit Fox, there had to be a reason for their reactions toward John.

Especially when recalling how strangely John had behaved just before the attack.

Lin Fan's speculation was wild, but he kept his emotions in check.

If his guess was even close to correct, then this situation was far more dangerous than expected.

The forces behind the terrorist attack were tangled in enough hidden agendas and shadowy backers to shake the very foundation of the world—or at least destabilize the Elephant Continent.

Considering the language used by the terrorists and the precision of the assault, Lin Fan suspected—80 percent certainty—it was orchestrated by BlackOps.

The plan had been flawless... until it collided with a group of misfits: ex-military, intelligence agents, and somehow, Spirit Fox, who'd managed to arrive after an 18-hour flight.

Still, lacking solid evidence, Lin Fan chose to stay quiet. For now, he focused on the convoy, hoping to get a better look at the mysterious "boss."

He had no idea that Spirit Fox's presence had absolutely nothing to do with the terrorists.

As for the officer from Country E, he wasn't about to let the convoy roam around unchecked—even if Spirit Fox had declined an escort.

They both understood what was at play here. Without argument, the officer ordered one of his units to send a single vehicle ahead to lead the convoy.

He had to report everything to his superiors anyway, and the meaningful look that woman gave him still lingered in his thoughts.

He was sure that his report would shock the higher-ups—too much evidence had surfaced in too short a time.

That was why he'd initially tried to redirect suspicion toward Ling Qingyu, to paint her as the real target of the attack.

But that woman wasn't a fool. There was no room left for excuses—only the truth could be handed over.

As for the money he'd received from BlackOps? Well... he'd done his best.

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The convoy followed a military jeep that led the way. As they exited the airport, every eye scanned the surroundings—drivers included.

But with the vehicles moving autonomously, there was more room for attention to be directed elsewhere.

Inside one of the armored SUVs, Ling Qingyu listened as the commander briefed her on the operation in detail.

She offered genuine praise, pleased by what she was hearing.

Relief and pride welled up within her. The girls had grown.

Their words carried weight now—measured, tactical, thoughtful. No longer were they mere fighters who followed orders blindly.

She never wanted machines. She wanted human beings—capable, intelligent individuals who could think, decide, and lead.

In her long-term plans, obedient soldiers were of little use.

She needed officers—leaders, thinkers, field tacticians.

Even though Spirit Fox members had far surpassed the level of standard NCOs, especially under Tang Ziyi's ruthless yet effective training, Ling Qingyu still demanded more.

If it came down to numbers, Athena could mass-produce fighters easily.

Fighting machines were the easy part. A wave of humanoid androids designed to blend in and act like ordinary humans would soon be ready.

Breakthroughs were near. When the time came—and if her other operations progressed accordingly—an expansion would be inevitable.

But not just with machines.

Each Spirit Fox member would lead a squad, a team at minimum.

She wasn't just building a force—she was building an army of commanders.

The ambition solidified when she gained full ownership of the Medical Island and the surrounding chain of territories.

The land she possessed was no different from a small nation.

But that would be something for her future self to handle.

"Athena, don't just keep an eye on us—monitor the surroundings as well. Notify me and Aunt Yue the moment you detect anything strange," Ling Qingyu said. "You're granted full permission to snoop around, no restrictions."

"Understood, Mom," Athena replied solemnly, saluting in her military uniform.

Her tiny idol figure delivered the response with perfect decorum—but the contrast between her serious tone and petite size made it all the more adorable.

Ling Qingyu felt a pinch in her heart but said nothing.

"Elena, stay on high alert. I want immediate response, no delays. Can you do that, dear?"

"Of course, Mom. Who do you take me for? Just say the word—Even Country A will disappear. Your command is my sword."

Hmm... Ling Qingyu closed her eyes and tried to calm the throbbing vein on her temple.

Why was this shippgirl so hell-bent on destroying Country A?

She had long suspected that Miss System might've dragged along someone with a serious grudge against a nation eerily similar to that superpower.

Otherwise, Elena should've made her feel secure by now—not constantly on edge.

"Mom's worried about you, Elena. You can't control yourself," Athena scolded her sister.

"Oh please, as if you're the golden child," Elena shot back. "Puchi! What can you do other than beep around and hack things? Truth lies on the edge of a sword!"

Here we go again.

Ling Qingyu rubbed her cheek and ignored the familiar bickering. She rarely came out ahead when dealing with both of them in a single chat—though she knew they had their own private group too.

Her two AI daughters competed over everything—favor, recognition, uniqueness.

Ling Qingyu had once tried to mediate, but eventually gave up. It didn't matter. Their endless arguments were just a quirky way of bonding.

If they weren't quarreling, then she'd be worried.

She beckoned Xiao Yue to step in.

But Xiao Yue only listened, unmoved by Ling Qingyu's silent plea.

She didn't want to go bald or gray from kid-induced stress.

Parenthood—whether real or digital—was no walk in the park.

Instead, Xiao Yue turned her focus to the view outside.

The open fields and rolling sand dunes had a kind of raw, rustic charm.

She noticed the small thatched homes and sparse two-story concrete buildings lining the side of the highway.

Country E was poor. Its road infrastructure remained underdeveloped.

Only the main route from the airport to the city had seen minor improvements—and even then, not by much.

The so-called highway was just two narrow lanes, one for each direction.

Vegetation and occasional trees grew out of the sand, casting light shade over the route.

Children ran barefoot along the edge. Adults walked further off in the distance.

Perhaps intimidated by the military jeep leading the way, civilian drivers quickly pulled over to give space—allowing the convoy to pass without delay.

Old buses and worn-out sedans made up the bulk of the road traffic. Occasionally, an off-road vehicle appeared—clearly a luxury reserved for the wealthier few.

If even the main highway was in such poor condition, Xiao Yue couldn't begin to imagine how dire things were deeper inland.

As for regions constantly threatened by battles and civil wars—there was no doubt.

They had long been neglected, abandoned to the mercy of fate and conflict. Development was a dream too distant, stability a luxury no one could afford.

Even the bare minimum infrastructure was either destroyed, repurposed by militias, or simply never built to begin with, Xiao Yue could predict the outcomes.

While the airport and its surrounding areas had been relatively well-developed, the rest of the region cried out for investment and proper planning.

Then again, perhaps the higher-ups simply didn't care. After all, the lives of those living beyond their circles held little value in their eyes.

A/N: A little late on the update.

It couldn't be helped since a dog, i love and care, died. That dog is what I've watched since its young age. I live through the time it grew to nine month or so old. Now it died suddenly.

Chapter 688: Meeting

Old buses and worn-out sedans were the most common road users. A few off-road vehicles showed up occasionally—it seemed only wealthier people could afford to ride those.

Just from how poor the highway looked, Xiao Yue couldn't imagine the darker and more impoverished areas. While the airport and nearby zones had been constructed decently, the rest of the country clearly needed more investment and planning.

Perhaps the higher-ups didn't care that much, since the lives of the people didn't hold much weight in their eyes.

As for regions constantly threatened by battles and civil wars—no doubt, they were even worse off.

Or perhaps, there were people who cared and tried to make changes—but they were too powerless within the system.

Most of the time, those idealists were either abolished by the officialdom or deliberately blocked from climbing the ladder.

After all, what corrupt leaders in their right mind would promote a talented person only to risk losing their own wealth and power?

Maybe some revolutionaries were simply biding their time, pretending to blend in while waiting to launch their plans.

Whether they would stay true to their original ideals... that still required further testing—and uncertain futures.

These were Xiao Yue's quick contemplations as she observed the living conditions in Country E.

As time passed, the barren, deserted scenery gradually shifted into more urban surroundings. Advanced infrastructure began to appear, and a sense of the city slowly emerged.

Sure enough, the closer they got to the capital, the more showy it became. One couldn't judge a nation's development at a glance.

A deeper study would reveal its weaknesses—and the true causes behind them, along with their solutions.

But so long as those in power never fancied the idea of reform, the wealth imbalance would persist.

High-rise buildings and improved roads became evident from the smoothness of the ride—though the vehicles' excellent suspension systems, produced by Ling Qingyu's group, helped mask roughness too.

The road widened into six lanes. More vehicles zoomed past. Compared to developed nations, the city still fell short—but the difference was understandable.

As expected of a capital city, population density spiked all of a sudden. There was a bit of traffic congestion, and more pedestrians were visible.

Even if the rest of the country wasn't safe, the capital maintained at least a surface-level order—or so it appeared.

While Xiao Yue observed and reflected, Ling Qingyu remained deep in thought. Neither Xiao Yue nor the other operators disturbed her.

Ling Qingyu was envisioning how Country E's leaders might attempt to exploit her or make her bleed.

She was mentally preparing countermeasures, excuses, and rebuttals while carefully reading the nation's reports compiled by Athena.

At the same time, she consulted Miss System to learn exactly what her name had achieved to earn ownership of the valuable island chain.

Seeing the sheer amount of investment involved, Ling Qingyu shuddered. It was more than enough to buy the country—fifteen times over.

Buy, with a price so merciless it could suffocate the seller. That was how Miss System operated.

Against such overwhelming power, only fools would try to resist—especially in corrupt nations. Who in their right mind would reject free money?

Of course, Ling Qingyu suspected there would be tentative tests ahead of her visit. Maybe, after reviewing her background information, some would develop crooked intentions or overwhelming greed.

It seemed she would have to stage a shock-and-awe performance.

Ling Qingyu shook her head, sighing. Pity. Miss System really loved handing out problems.

She had complained before—but was met with a deadly punch from that unscrupulous System.

Her words: "If you can't stand the test, you don't deserve the reward."

Ling Qingyu had nothing more to say after that.

She couldn't blame Miss System for not being thoughtful or careful, could she? She suspected Miss System had felt a little guilty about her extreme approach and simply forgot to fill in the holes.

But it didn't matter.

Like Miss System said, she had the confidence to face it all head-on.

After a while, the convoy slowed down, as the road seemed to lead toward a sparser district—likely a residential zone reserved for high-ranking figures, possibly even the President or one of the Ministers.

Her "donation" definitely earned this kind of treatment and respect—regardless of their doubts about Ling Qingyu's background, given how unofficial this entire scenario was.

And the presence of Spirit Fox added an extra layer of confusion. Possessing such a heavily armed unit during a diplomatic visit was a clear message—one of hidden strength.

The convoy made a turn and rolled forward, passing through the first checkpoint after a brief halt.

It seemed the destination wasn't far off. Soldiers' gazes followed them, trying to peer through the tinted windows, but in vain. Only the pitch-black glass reflected their own faces back.

Normally, the two Aegis vehicles should have been stopped before being allowed to proceed any further.

Unlike ordinary SUVs, these MRAPs—armed with firepower strong enough to level entire building blocks—weren't something one could afford to let roam as an uncontrollable variable.

Perhaps the recent airport attack had loosened a few strings, granting temporary rights to accommodate Ling Qingyu's visit.

At the very least, the gesture left a subtly positive impression, even if she knew it was done deliberately.

Still, she hadn't let down her guard. A psychological battle awaited her ahead.

As for panic? Ling Qingyu sneered inwardly.

She had met Gu Yi, Minister of Justice—her own mother-in-law—and had plenty of interaction with true political titans.

Why would she be fazed by officials from a small nation?

No racism. No arrogance. Just pure confidence.

Elena, Athena, Spirit Fox, her immense wealth, and the dark hand of Miss System—these were her weapons.

After a few more checkpoints, Spirit Fox's commander informed her that the two Aegis vehicles were requested to remain behind.

Ling Qingyu accepted the request without much thought. It was likely the final checkpoint.

Leaving the two Aegis 2.0s and two SUVs behind, the rest of the convoy moved forward.

Even the initial military escort vehicle wasn't permitted inside.

Only the SUVs were allowed to drive through the winding road, passing beautifully maintained vegetation and a classically designed pool—rare sights for this country.

Eventually, the convoy eased to a smooth stop. Doors clicked open in unison.

The operators swiftly took position, alert to any vulnerabilities that might threaten Ling Qingyu.

Everyone had already been briefed inside the vehicles before arrival. Each member took over their roles immediately.

However, their intimidating formation startled the military guards stationed at the residence.

The decorative statues, auspicious ornaments, and manicured fields sharply contrasted with the armed and clearly battle-hardened security detail.

Ling Qingyu and Xiao Yue stepped out of the SUV, scanning their surroundings.

The meeting spot was well-chosen—quiet, secure, far from disturbances, and with heavy protection.

At least the armed soldiers here had an air of steel-hardened professionalism, unlike the loosened, half-hearted posture she'd seen earlier in the day.

Of course, judging their actual capabilities would require live action—talk was cheap until bullets flew.

Initially, Spirit Fox's operators had been underestimated, dismissed because of their appearance and gender.

Ling Qingyu still caught signs of skepticism among the Country E soldiers—unconvinced that these women had been the ones to neutralize the terrorist threat so cleanly.

While surveying the area, she spotted a small group approaching.

All were black men and women—the latter clearly meant as visual foils armed with flowers —with welcoming smiles.

The man in front, clearly the leader, called out with enthusiasm, "Welcome! Welcome to Country E, Miss!"

"Thank you," Ling Qingyu replied with a polite nod.

She had already read the files Athena compiled—this man was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"I'm sorry your first day turned out so unsightly," he said sincerely. "Those lunatics... Fortunately, you're unharmed. Otherwise, we'd be overwhelmed with guilt."

"It's alright, Your Excellency. Sometimes life needs a little excitement to rid itself of boredom," Ling Qingyu replied lightly, downplaying the incident.

"It's our fault for endangering your safety," he said, then glanced at her team. "Your guards are impressive. The way they dealt with the situation—swift and thunderous—was admirable."

"As human beings, it's not too much to offer help when we can," replied Ling Qingyu. "I hope the investigation will maintain pressure and identify the real culprits."

"This is only natural," the man nodded. "Now, please—our President is waiting for you."

"It's an honor."

Ling Qingyu's composed demeanor raised the deputy minister's alertness. In his eyes, she left no flaws in the conversation—nothing to exploit.

She didn't seem bothered by the attacks beyond making a few polite remarks to push for deeper investigations. Was that a subtle hint?

Or was she implying the attack had nothing to do with her? He had intentionally brought up the incident to probe her, to test her stance—but her unshaken, expressionless face gave away nothing.

"Actually, Ms. Ling," the deputy minister hesitated, casting a glance at the Spirit Fox operatives. "I hope what I say next won't offend you."

"I understand," Ling Qingyu cut in smoothly. "Only my secretary and I will accompany you. Will that satisfy you?"

"O-of course," the minister stammered slightly. His thoughts raced—so her politeness was only a façade to lower others' guards. The sudden assertiveness caught him off guard.

On the other hand, her words frightened him a lot as if this woman could read his mind thoroughly. Before he even spoke, Ling Qingyu finished the sentence.

In truth, Ling Qingyu had acted bluntly on purpose. She had no need to feign humility or conceal her edge, only to entice others into overstepping.

Sometimes, a show of appropriate firmness worked better in dangerous situations. Take one step back, and others would trample you.

Chapter 689: Mistreatment?

Leaving behind her subordinates, Ling Qingyu followed the deputy minister inside. The latter wanted to argue that she could bring along two personal bodyguards, but thinking about the well-armed operators, he refrained from speaking.

He couldn't invite a team of armed personnel inside and risk frightening his superior, could he? Xiao Yue paced behind and observed the changing expressions at lightning speed.

She chuckled and inwardly gave a thumbs-up. Ling Qingyu's powerful, pretentious aura flooded the surroundings and affected everyone.

The deputy minister tried to warm up and chose topics to please Ling Qingyu, who reciprocated politely as if the previous sternness hadn't come from her.

Meanwhile, Xiao Yue spoke to waste time. "Poor Azi. She has a big aircraft but no opportunity to show her skills."

"What do you mean, shortie?" Ling Qingyu raised her brow. The conversation didn't affect the duo's walking pace. They were conversing in their mother tongue.

"You didn't fulfill what you promised, Miss President," Xiao Yue chuckled.

"It's not like there are so many aircraft waiting to fly. I'll send her a Virgin to shut her up," Ling Qingyu snorted. "Besides, who knew I'd get an entire crew ready?"

"Anyway, don't forget to plug the holes you've dug," Xiao Yue lightly patted Ling Qingyu's shoulder and blew away imaginary dust.

Ling Qingyu snorted and muffled her laugh. Xiao Yue's dark expression only fueled her amusement further. The scene would have been warmer if Xiao Yue weren't tiptoeing to support Ling Qingyu.

The two's height disparity wasn't so much and Xiao Yue wasn't short, frankly. Daily banter created the comedy.

The two didn't continue deeper topics. No one could be certain whether a monitoring party was present.

Of course, Athena could blind electronics, but she couldn't stop a living being. Like now, the woman following behind, one of them, spoke in her native language—clearly reporting what she and Xiao Yue were saying.

Not that it mattered, since Ling Qingyu didn't give a damn if her every word was reported. She was mature enough to know how to behave in public and avoid traps.

Sure enough, Athena, who was guarding her electronically, reported the hidden communication between the deputy minister and the woman.

Every word was translated. The deputy minister didn't slow down or change his facial expression.

Judging by the conversation, they should have known they would gain nothing more from casual chatter.

If these ministers, officials, and intelligence agents worked in the entertainment industry, no artist would survive the pure mental assault.

After so many twists and turns, to the point that Ling Qingyu was growing impatient, the small group finally arrived.

Even though the location wasn't as big as her residence, the walking tour was a nuisance.

From Athena's analysis, why not park the convoy closer to the destination instead of taking such a long walk?

If that wasn't possible, there was at least the option of riding on an electric golf cart.

Perhaps noting her emotions, the minister offered comfort: "Sorry, Milady. To ensure the best results from future discussions and to entertain you, we've chosen the finest spot."

"I understand, Your Excellency. Time is of the essence," Ling Qingyu nodded perfunctorily and expressed her dissatisfaction bluntly. "We'd better meet with your highly busy Excellency."

"Ah," the deputy minister didn't expect her to be so direct—particularly her tone.

In Ling Qingyu's opinion, it was mandatory to give due respect, but if she sensed manipulation, she wouldn't be kind.

Perhaps her tone might differ when speaking to a powerful nation, one she had to look up to, holding in the grudge and then behaving accordingly.

Nonetheless, if the situation had led to this scenario, she wasn't far from screwed because she wouldn't even visit in the first place, facing misdemeanors and suffering hidden attacks.

She had her pride, and wouldn't break her spine to cater to others' desire. She would rather cut all connections and suffered a loss when meeting these types.

But what was the status of Country E? A sovereign nation on the verge of becoming stateless.

She had obliged and treated everyone without the slightest contempt or prejudice.

Not to mention, she wasn't naïve enough to believe the walking trip wasn't intentional. The arrangement had been made long ago, when she notified them of her visit.

Even if extraordinary measures were implemented due to the recent terrorist attack, there were still alternatives to welcome her.

If the superior was truly busy managing high-stakes matters, she might have even admired him and later offered support, overlooking the unpleasantness.

But here, she was being treated as if she owed Country E compensation, while the waiting party seemed to be enjoying themselves in peace—and, who knew—perhaps watching her like an animal in a zoo.

Furthermore, with Miss System's hand, she had provided aid and funding. She was their investor, not the other way around or donors in other sense because their treasury increased from her action.

So far, she had yet to gain any benefit, aside from the option to buy islands. No parties owed another.

Respect was essential but had to be mutual. Her status didn't doom her to lick others' boots.

Such power plays, Ling Qingyu had already foreseen and steeled her emotions against. But experiencing it firsthand, she was deeply annoyed despite her preparedness.

The best response was to deter such behavior by expressing nonchalance and maintaining an emotionless state—to confuse the other party's encroachment.

Seeing Ling Qingyu's cold, chilling eyes, the deputy minister felt something catch in his throat, until the woman accompanying the group nudged him awake.

"Sorry, Ma'am. Forgive our impoliteness. Before we enter, we must conduct a body search to ensure the safety of our leader," the minister said, gritting his teeth and forcing out the words despite the dropping temperature.

The woman before him shouldn't be underestimated. He sensed terror just from the eye contact.

The information they had gathered was more than likely falsified. They must not treat her as a mere businesswoman.

In fact, nobody truly considered her as such, given the amount of donated funds in their treasury.

Xiao Yue sneered and waited for Ling Qingyu's response. She knew her pride and emotions too well.

She was too familiar with this naughty woman. Though Ling Qingyu acted servile around close peers and polite without prejudice, full of humanity, the arrogance built into her bones bowed to no one.

This type of person was extreme when it came to emotional entanglement. Sincerity was the only key—not threats, coercion, or manipulation.

They repaid everything tenfold, whether positive or negative, and were a rare breed in the business and political world.

Apologies from them were nearly as rare as extinct species. Naturally, most of the time, they were righteous and rarely made unbearable mistakes that warranted one.

If a mistake was too obvious, they would not hesitate. But unless they saw themselves in the wrong, they stood tall.

They would rather quit and start over elsewhere to make a comeback than bow down just to make life easier.

In short, such people were despised by manipulative individuals—aka those in politics and business, who needed obedient followers and tools, not idealists with strong hearts to ruin their interests.

Tensions grew as neither party elicited a word.

Silence created palpitations. Just when the minister was about to speak again, Ling Qingyu chuckled. 'I've come here with good gestures and haven't complained a single word since the airport attack. Even the long walk, enough to wear down others, I endured patiently. Now you want to pat me and my sister down? A dignified guest? This isn't going to end well. You should remember today and recall this moment in the future.'

Of course, Ling Qingyu didn't speak out loud but vented psychologically. She inhaled and took a moment of three breaths to stay steady, unbothered, unaffected.

Nonetheless, she wasn't going to take it lightly. The matter of pat-down under the excuse of safety pissed her off.

Perhaps this was a simple requirement and a necessary step, but the previous treatment had already overturned Ling Qingyu's tolerance.

Some might ask, if there was nothing, why bother? No—this was a matter of dignity and strength, a silent power struggle to rank people.

She looked the deputy minister straight in the eye.

"One inch for me, I will give one yard, Your Excellency," said Ling Qingyu.

"Please, ma'am. I know it's uncomfortable...

"But surely you understand—it's not personal. This is standard procedure for any foreign dignitary meeting with our head of state. I assure you, it's only for everyone's safety," the deputy minister said, his tone cautious.

"With all due respect, Your Excellency," she said evenly, her voice calm but cold, "I understand the need for protocol. But I have not flown here, risked my safety, and walked half a city block just to be subjected to suspicion like a criminal."

The minister opened his mouth to explain, but Ling Qingyu raised a hand slightly—stopping him mid-sentence.

"If this is non-negotiable," she continued, still composed, "then I will return to my aircraft. Cancel everything. Your government can enjoy the aid I've already granted. I'll be happy to keep future conversations strictly over the phone. That way, no one here will have to feel... uncomfortable. It's not important anyway."

Her words dropped like stones into the silence. Not loud, not emotional—but decisive and final. No shouting, no fuss.

That last word felt heavier than any accusation.

Hehe, spend her money without reciprocity? They must be seeking death.

Perhaps they were expecting her to grieve herself into giving an opportunity to meet with them so that her other goals could be achieved.

They thought too much. She had no goals whatsoever for a broken nation she could destroy with a few hidden moves.

"Madam Ling, I'm just following the protocol, please don't make us difficult—"

"But if you believe laying hands on me or my sister is acceptable, then I fear our understandings differ too greatly to proceed today. And should anyone inquire why future aid or investment or cooperations has vanished, I'll simply ask them to consult today's entry logs."

A naked threat, a clear warning. Pawns must have the knowledge of being useful. Could the minister bear the aftermath and responsibility?

Chapter 690: Conversation of power

Beside her, Xiao Yue sneered openly. She knew Ling Qingyu too well—this was her 'gentle' mode.

The minister tried to swallow, but his throat caught. It wasn't until the woman beside him tugged on his sleeve that he snapped out of it.

"Madam Ling," he managed, "Please—my sincerest apologies. There will be no search. This was... a misunderstanding."

Maybe the unpleasant affair had reached the so-called head of state.

Ling Qingyu said nothing more. She simply turned and moved forward, as if the matter was too trivial to bother remembering.

But everyone present knew—she'd remember it. And so would his superiors. In addition, the commotion should have reached the man she was about to meet today.

That must be the reason why the woman interrupted the minister to loosen the stake, giving in.

Ling Qingyu was sick of such temptations to test her bottom line. Truthfully, she had none apart from guaranteeing the 'sovereignty' of her islands.

If she received uncertainties, she would ensure one with cannons and force. Navy bombardment policy in the old navigation age.

For now, she shouldn't make a rash judgment before seeing the head of state and understanding their evil intentions.

In fact, Neither Ling Qingyu nor Xiao Yue carried weapons and firearms. They didn't need one with their outrageous physiques and attributes.

Plus, she owned a bracelet, a storage device. If she needed a gun, she could swish one in her hand in an instant, faster than drawing handguns from the holster and others.

Just a prepared hand gesture, and she could gun down everyone here with an assault rifle. The security measures, requested by the minister, existed as thin as paper in front of her capabilities.

The double doors opened with a smooth, silent glide, revealing a bright yet oddly sterile reception hall. Thick carpeting muffled footsteps. Art hung on the walls—strategically placed pieces that spoke of culture and prosperity, a façade polished to perfection.

On the left, a mere glass wall existed to display a beautiful natural scenery, a chill serene lake and small, lush tiny island, with vegetations that pleased the eyes.

At the far end, the head of state stood waiting. His personal securities poised themselves around every corner.

He was not old, but age clung to him. Thinning hair slicked back, creases hidden under expertly applied powder, posture upright like a practiced diplomat who had spent more years at the negotiating table than in real conflict. His smile was composed, carved with care.

Nevertheless, in Ling Qingyu's point of view, his outer stature raised more disgust, when the pretense of formal and polite person showed up vividly close to her.

The more she understood and knew about his private deeds, the more she couldn't connect with the man waiting for her. Devil under a human skin.

In his eyes, perhaps, Ling Qingyu was a sheep within his grasp though unsure of his own finding. The undercurrent moves hidden beneath the surface were meant to test Ling Qingyu's means.

Ling Qingyu was quite familiar with this contempt. The style shown by politicians toward businesspeople. Military toward scholar. Bandits against beggars.

In all cases, whoever possessed power reigned everything and dictated the other's fate.

The President stepped forward with both hands extended. "Ah, Madam Ling. Welcome. We've been looking forward to your visit."

Ling Qingyu didn't hurry. She paused, just long enough to tilt the balance—reminding the room who had made whom wait. Then, gracefully, she reached out to shake his hand.

"A pleasure, Your Excellency." Her voice was smooth, crisp. The kind of tone used when compliments were issued without sincerity, yet without offense.

"I trust the journey wasn't too taxing?" he said, watching her closely.

"Quite smooth," she said. "Except the part where I had to walk off the fatigue." Her eyes flicked to the deputy minister standing to the side. "But I understand it was to ensure I enjoyed the landscaping."

A flash of tension rippled through the room. The deputy minister lowered his eyes.

The head of state chuckled lightly, dismissing the tension with a wave of his hand. "Ah, that. I must apologize on behalf of our staff. We had hoped to show you our renovated compound. The walk was not intended as... discomfort."

"Discomfort is subjective," Ling Qingyu replied, smiling thinly. "But rest assured, I've been through far worse. A little walk never killed anyone."

Xiao Yue stifled a cough behind her hand, hiding a grin. This woman... She was practically lighting the room on fire, wrapped in silk and protocol.

"Please," the head of state gestured toward the central sofa, "let's sit. We have much to discuss."

They did. The rest remained standing watching the two chatted over a variety of topics.

But not a single useful word came out for the next ten minutes.

They sang and danced, praising each other.

He praised the rising cooperation between their peoples. She agreed—warmly, vaguely.

He expressed hope that her company might be interested in infrastructure bids. She noted the importance of transparency and fair processes, with a side glance sharp enough to shave skin.

He smiled, spoke of stability, of the efforts made to secure peace in the region. She nodded, complimented their bravery in light of the recent attack. Then gently reminded him that instability is often rooted in a failure of internal vigilance—not external threats.

On the surface, it was friendly. Cordial. Even boring.

But beneath the words, blades clashed.

He hinted at their sovereignty.

She responded with her autonomy and status.

He downplayed the incident at the airport and hinted the possible relationship with her.

She questioned the results of military investigation about the attacker and mocked their lack of preparedness if she were the target.

He suggested mutual benefit.

She reminded him she hadn't received even a courtesy report about the airport explosion—despite being the largest investor to step foot in the capital since the crisis began.

Not once did she raise her voice. Not once did she lose her temper.

And that was what made her terrifying.

At last, the head of state leaned back, fingers steepled together, studying her. "Forgive me, Madam Ling," he said with a slight smile, "but you speak as though we owe you."

Ling Qingyu's smile didn't waver. "I don't recall suggesting such a thing. But I suppose guilt speaks loudest when no accusation is made."

If people aware, ignored the fact that Ling Qingyu spent huge dimes without the slightest gains, his word definitely sounded righteous.

Silence.

Even Xiao Yue blinked. That one hit square in the chest.

The head of state exhaled softly, pressing a hand to his chest in mock defeat. "Madam Ling... You are as formidable as they say."

"You should never trust rumors," Ling Qingyu said. "Some people exaggerate. Others don't say enough. I am only a human, after all."

He laughed again, this time with less ease. "Well. Let us move forward, then. I understand you have ideas for regional development—logistics corridors, data infrastructure, offshore projects. We welcome them all."

Now she shifted. "Only if the environment is stable and safe—for my people and my interests."

"Of course."

"And if the same respect I give is returned. Consistently."

"Naturally."

"I've brought ideas," she said. "But not favors. I'm here for partnerships. That's the distinction."

His face barely moved, but something behind his eyes flickered. He nodded slowly. "We understand each other now."

"Then we can begin," Ling Qingyu said.

She leaned back, crossing one leg over the other as if she'd finally found a comfortable position—not because she relaxed, but because she had drawn first blood in a war without bullets.

And the rest of the room? They held their breath.

Because this, right here, was how power negotiated.

Time passed, and Ling Qingyu stifled her laughter as she continued to lure the man, whose greed was almost overflowing.

His eyes betrayed everything—each flicker of interest, every glance toward the luxury brochure she casually left open, all fed into the trap she had woven with careful intent.

The reaction was understandable—who didn't fancy a little extra income, even when they already had capital, connections, and an established portfolio?

But it wasn't the lack of wealth that drew people in; it was the illusion of effortless gain that seduced even the most disciplined.

Every proposal she introduced, every offhand mention of "potential," subtly positioned her as an idealist.

To those watching closely, she appeared like someone with a stubborn dream—someone trying to build a community centered around innovation and shared prosperity.

Not once had she uttered the word "deal." Not once had she hinted at profit-sharing, investment returns, or political alignment.

It was all too subtle for most, but that was by design.

She had studied the politicians of Country E long before her arrival, and she understood their craving for power disguised under a facade of service.

Another duel was on the horizon. Not of blades or bullets, but of patience and perception.

Whoever blinked first would lose the initiative.

She could afford to wait. Her schedule may have been packed, but in negotiations like these, time was not a constraint—it was a weapon.

The longer she delayed, the more her silence fermented uncertainty in her opponent's mind.

No one touched the drinks available on the table. Not the polished glassware, not even the condensation pooling at the base of the untouched tumblers.

They were a formality, a ritual offering in a meeting that no one trusted enough to toast.

Here, in this room, every behavior was under silent scrutiny. Every breath, every tap of a pen, every tightened jaw or shifting eye—

each detail exposed something.

Had the Country E official reciprocated with sincerity, the messes wouldn't have stacked up like unfinished reports on a forgotten desk.

There had been chances—several of them. But sincerity demanded courage, and greed rarely left room for that.

Sometimes, Ling Qingyu wondered if human nature was constantly being tested by the smallest temptations.

For just a little gain, people wouldn't hesitate to offend others, to sour long-term relationships, or to dismiss caution as paranoia.

They would step on dignity just to pocket an advantage.

Future connections, once severed, were hard to mend. Yet in the moment, no one seemed to care.

That, to her, was the tragedy of modern diplomacy—short-term opportunism disguised as strategic foresight.

And so she smiled—subtly, patiently.

Let them think she was naive. Let them underestimate her.

The more they saw her as a harmless dreamer, the more blind they became to the net tightening around them.

She wasn't here to ask. She was here to decide.

Hopefully, everything ended with word and she didn't need to exercise extremes. If she could spend money to solve problems with sustainable benefits, all for the best.

Securing her island's control at the cost of cooperation didn't seem bad, even if she was being taken advantage of, as long as the situation wasn't overboard.