

First Order 221

Chapter 221 Hu Shuo's true strength

It was a really strange sight at the campfire next to the outpost's entrance. On one side, there were people barbecuing meat and enjoying themselves. On the other side, five people were kneeling in a row and too afraid to move a muscle.

How pathetic! These five people were way too pathetic.

When Ren Xiaosu got out of the truck and went over to have a look, it was just as he had expected. Those five people all had a small logo of the Pyro Company embroidered on their clothes.

In reality, there wasn't any problem with the direction of the Pyro Company's investigations. They speculated that the disappearance of those two nanosoldiers might have something to do with supernatural beings, so they came here to try their luck to see if they could find that person. This speculation was extremely accurate.

Ren Xiaosu was not wrong either. After Li Shentan informed him about the situation with the Pyro Company, he rushed back during the night as he was worried they would harm the students at the outpost. There wasn't anything wrong with that either.

The only surprise that neither the Pyro Company nor Ren Xiaosu had expected was that Hu Shuo was powerful beyond measure.

The reason Hu Shuo was surprised when he saw Ren Xiaosu was because he would have to teach Ren Xiaosu again now that he was back. It was just like how office workers finally had the weekend off only for their bosses to suddenly demand they work overtime. This immediately spoiled the mood.

Ren Xiaosu explained, "Can't you see that I really missed all of you? That's why we rushed back to the outpost. So what's going on here?"

In truth, Ren Xiaosu already knew Hu Shuo was definitely not a simple person from the beginning. How could a normal old man head up to the mountains alone in the middle of the night to investigate a case? Wasn't he afraid of getting killed by the criminal as well? So he must have had something that gave him the confidence.

Moreover, Chen Wudi mentioned he was the Earth Deity. Based on Ren Xiaosu's deductions, what Chen Wudi probably meant was: This man has a superpower.

Perhaps mental patients possessed some sort of unique perception that enabled Chen Wudi to identify the true nature of someone simply by their appearance, as he was spot on in his observations.

Hu Shuo looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a smile, "Quickly come and have some meat."

All five of the Pyro Company members looked back at Ren Xiaosu, but none of them dared to speak. Hu Shuo said, "They're from the Pyro Company. I was searching for them some time ago, but they managed to hide themselves really well. As some other disturbances were going on at that time, I haven't been

able to locate them at all. Who knew they would actually send themselves to our doorstep just as I was planning to spend the New Year here....”

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself, ‘So you are really here to spend the New Year! You really don’t consider yourself an outsider, do you?’

However, now was not the time to think about that.

Ren Xiaosu had realized most people would usually be afraid or disgusted if they encountered members of the Pyro Company. But when Hu Shuo encountered these five members of the Pyro Company, he got a vague sense of surprise.

“What are they doing here?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

Hu Shuo smiled ambiguously at him and said, “These are probably the main culprits in the killing of those two Li Consortium officers.”

When the members of the Pyro Company heard that, they started panicking. “We’re also here to investigate this case. They weren’t killed by us!”

“Did I say that you all could speak?” Hu Shuo said as he stared at them.

The five Pyro Company members quickly shut their mouths. Ren Xiaosu asked the people around him in a whisper, “Who witnessed their fight?”

The students shook their heads and said, “Only Big Brother Wudi was outside at the time. We were all studying by ourselves in our houses.”

As such, Ren Xiaosu asked Chen Wudi, “What happened between them just now? Can you describe it to me?” He was trying to deduce how strong Hu Shuo was based on the description of the battle with this question,

When Chen Wudi recalled the battle, he could only say, “Holy shit!”

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. As Ren Xiaosu waited for him to relate the rest of the incident, he realized Chen Wudi had already lowered his head back down to eat. So Chen Wudi’s description of the entire battle was simply “Holy shit!”? ‘Can’t you be more cultured!’

Ren Xiaosu was saddened. How could he judge the strength of Hu Shuo through a description like that? However, the little information he could get from this was that when Hu Shuo made his move, his strength even surprised Chen Wudi.

“Is he stronger than you?” Ren Xiaosu asked Chen Wudi.

Chen Wudi thought for a while. “No, he’s not.”

“You seem quite confident in yourself,” Ren Xiaosu lamented. Asking Chen Wudi about such serious matters would probably just make himself even more confused.

During this recent period, he had always seen Hu Shuo getting up early to practice tai chi. Could his boxing really be that powerful?

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu looked at Hu Shuo and asked, "They were the ones who murdered those two officers?"

Hu Shuo said earnestly, "That's right. The Li Consortium has given me until tomorrow as the deadline to investigate the case. Since we've been searching extensively for the murderer and were still unable to capture anyone even though we have been working so hard, they must be considered the murderers."

Ren Xiaosu was surprised. When did Hu Shuo ever work hard while he was here? He was obviously just here on vacation to eat meat. This old man had never seriously gone after the murderer at all!

However, Ren Xiaosu was definitely glad this Pyro Company team would be made the scapegoat. It was fine as long as he did not get himself caught.

But Ren Xiaosu somehow felt that Hu Shuo had already made some discoveries. Neither of them were fools. Just the fact that he had the runs for six hours when Hu Shuo first arrived was unacceptable. Moreover, the Wolf King had been sending all that game to them. Even an idiot would notice that something was going on between this outpost and the wolves.

Ren Xiaosu was not going to assume he had gotten lucky. The two of them just had a tacit agreement with each other for now.

But when Ren Xiaosu thought of this, he suddenly wondered what Hu Shuo's motives were. Was it just so that he could eat all the meat he wanted without worry? But how could that be!

"But there should definitely be an interrogation process, right?" Ren Xiaosu wondered, "What if they would rather die than admit to the crime?"

"If they die, they wouldn't be able to not admit to it." Hu Shuo said calmly, "Isn't that what 'rather die than admit to it' really means?"

When the soldiers of the Pyro Company heard that, they knew they had no chance to survive! How could they be willing to stay here and wait for their deaths when they possessed strength that surpassed normal humans?!

In that instant, those five people got up at the same time and fled down the mountain. They had never thought about fighting against Hu Shuo and Ren Xiaosu. They couldn't even defeat Hu Shuo alone, and now, there was another unknown factor in Ren Xiaosu. Therefore, their only way to survive was to escape.

While the Pyro members escaped, Hu Shuo sat there without moving. When Ren Xiaosu saw that Hu Shuo did not make a move, he also stayed still.

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Aren't you gonna pursue them?"

Hu Shuo was amused. "How can I pursue them with these old limbs of mine? Why don't you go after them instead?"

"The members of the Pyro Company are all supernatural beings. Why would I go after them when I'm just a normal person?" Ren Xiaosu said with a grimace.

They watched as the members of the Pyro Company got further and further away.

The two of them sat there with neither giving chase. When the members of the Pyro Company turned around and saw this, they were overjoyed. They were so surprised no one was pursuing them!

When they ran down to the hillside, a part of the turf on the mountain path suddenly shifted. In the blink of an eye, an entire platoon rushed out from the shadows of the forest as gunshots rang out from trenches. The five exhausted people were caught off guard!

When Ren Xiaosu heard those gunshots on the hillside, he realized he didn't even know when the ambush was laid.

Chapter 222 Rather die than admit to it

Hearing the gunshots ring out on the hillside, the rest of the group was unable to sit still any longer. They ran to the far edge of the outpost and looked down. Meanwhile, Hu Shuo was still sitting there calmly and enjoying the meat. He asked, "Did you get enough seasonings and other supplies since you came back in such a hurry? Although this exotic meat is delicious, it gets too salty if we only use salt on it. What we need is a greater variety of seasoning options!"

Ren Xiaosu gave him a look. "Don't worry, we bought everything that we needed."

This time, Li Qingzheng had made a rather successful deal with Old Wang. He not only managed to bring back enough salt to preserve the rest of the meat, but also procured rice vinegar, star anise, Sichuan peppercorn, and some other spices too. Although, they could just grab a handful of Sichuan peppercorns from the wilderness since they were commonly found there.

While conducting the trade, Li Qingzheng realized it was much easier to do business with Old Wang than to slowly sell the cured meat by himself.

At this moment, someone from the other platoon walked over and said to Hu Shuo, "We've gunned down all five of them."

"Alright." Hu Shuo nodded. "Take them back to the stronghold and report the mission status to the higher-ups. Tell them to be careful and stay wary of the Pyro Company. There is absolutely no mistake in killing anyone who is from the Pyro Company."

"Roger." After the soldier received the order, he led his men away.

But Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled as he looked at this group of people. They were not wearing the combat uniform of the Li Consortium, yet they were much stronger than the private troops. Which fighting force did they belong to?

Hu Shuo said with a smile as he ate, "I feel so relieved now that I've finally completed the assignment. You all might know, but I was so worried about this matter for the past few days that I couldn't eat or sleep well."

Ren Xiaosu asked the students next to him, "What did the teacher talk about today? Let me have a look at your notes so that I can catch up with the lectures and clarify my doubts with Mr. Hu before he goes to bed."

But when he said this, Hu Shuo immediately stood up and said, "Hahahaha, I'm sleepy. I'm off to bed!"

After Hu Shuo went back into his house, Ren Xiaosu had the students unload everything from the truck into the house. He also distributed to them the winter clothing that Xiaoyu had procured.

Chen Wudi went back into the house and happily put on his new clothes. These things were all provided for Ren Xiaosu, Chen Wudi, and the eight other students. When Li Qingzheng saw this, he felt sad. "How nice it is to have a family."

When it got late into the night, Ren Xiaosu quietly headed to the depths of the mountains. He wanted to give the wolves another reminder to not get ambushed by the nanosoldiers that were going to be sent in.

After all, the wolves were burdened with their young right now. It would be upsetting if the Li Consortium's elite soldiers attacked them and the wolves did not have enough time to bring their wolf cubs with them when they fled.

Before he could get deep into the mountains, he saw the Wolf King waiting for him on the mountain path. When the Wolf King saw Ren Xiaosu, it led him straight to the wolf den without having to communicate it to him.

Ren Xiaosu kept muttering, "Have they fully recovered from their injuries yet? Did they eat their food according to my advice as a doctor?"

The Wolf King did not even bother replying to his questions. When Ren Xiaosu arrived at the wolf den, the wolves seemed to be much friendlier towards him than last time. Ren Xiaosu first checked on the wounds of the injured wolves and only felt at ease after seeing they had already healed.

He sat on a large rock and said, "Seems the Li Consortium is sending their elite soldiers to 'spar' with y'all. Are you confident with handling them?"

The Wolf King looked at him with apparent disdain. Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, "But those are supersoldiers with nanomachines. They've been specially assigned to eliminate y'all. The Li Consortium isn't stupid either. If they're willing to attack you, they must have a certain confidence in their plan."

The Wolf King was still giving him a disdainful look.

"Alright then," Ren Xiaosu sighed. "But you better not eat them after they're dead. They have nanomachines in them, so y'all might get diarrhea if you eat them. When the time comes, hide their corpses for me. I'll use the black medicine to make a deal with you."

When the Wolf King heard the words “black medicine,” its eyes seemed to light up.

“But you definitely have to move your wolf den further away.” Ren Xiaosu said, “After all, your wolf cubs can’t run fast enough. If a stray bullet hit them, that’d be bad.”

On his way back, Ren Xiaosu was wondering if he could get his hands on the nanomachines at a faster rate with the wolves’ assistance. Ren Xiaosu was even starting to get a little excited at the thought.

The next morning, everyone was busy taking out the meat they had hidden away to continue curing the meat. They had to stop the process temporarily due to the lack of salt.

The group of men set up several tables at the entrance of the outpost and worked tirelessly, sweating profusely. But when they thought about how this was the source of better food, everyone felt exceptionally accomplished.

If those who did not know the truth went up the mountain and saw this place, they would probably mistake it for a cured meat delicatessen and not an outpost. Everyone had left their guns inside the houses, and some of them had not even touched them for several days.

To be honest, no one would be willing to be a soldier in a godforsaken place like this if it weren’t for survival. These people did not feel a sense of belonging to the Li Consortium anyway. In the present day, nobody had any faith or feelings to speak of. It would be good enough to survive. So having meat to eat was far more important than anything else.

Someone said with a smile, “It’s almost the start of spring. We should find some grape seeds in the mountains and plant them here in the open space behind the outpost. When we harvest the grapes in summer, we can even make our own wine.”

“Yeah, let’s build a grape trellis. We can also plant some garlic, onions, cucumbers, and carrots next to it. During summer, we can mix the cucumber with minced garlic and some shredded carrots to pair with the wine. That will truly be a comfy life!”

With all the laughter at the entrance of the outpost, the cold of the winter seemed to be more bearable. Everyone’s mentality was different with the Lunar New Year approaching, and they were only thinking about how to celebrate the joyous occasion.

Ren Xiaosu said, “There’s something that I want to announce. I still have some family members who are staying in town that I was thinking of bringing over with the truck for the New Year. But we definitely don’t have enough houses for all of them to live in. Let’s work a little harder for the next few days so we can build another wooden house for them. Is anyone here good at carpentry?”

“Me!” Li Qingzheng said with a smile, “I worked as a carpenter for two years. I’m really good at it.”

“Alright, let’s help Ren Xiaosu build a house once we finish curing the meat,” a man said with a smile.

This man was an escapee who had fled with Ren Xiaosu's group here. He was constantly bullied by Li Qingzheng when he first arrived at the outpost. But after everyone integrated into the group, the animosity faded.

Sometimes, Ren Xiaosu thought it was actually quite good for the group to live here in the mountains and be self-sufficient.

All of a sudden, the voice from the palace said, "A side quest has been unlocked. Ensure there are no deaths within the wolf pack for seven days to unlock a new product in the vending machine: seeds."

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he froze for a second. Did the palace unlock the side quest with seeds as the reward because he thought about wanting to be self-sufficient in the mountains?

But the palace didn't mention what the seeds would grow into. Could they have magical effects?

Chapter 223 Encircling the wolves!

The quest rewards given by the palace had always been extraordinary. The first quest reward he received was the black saber, while the second one was Explosive Poker. By now, Ren Xiaosu's gratitude tokens had slowly increased to 460 coins. However, he had exchanged some of them for Explosive Poker cards in between, although nobody knew how many of those handy explosives he now carried.

And now that the palace issued yet another quest to him, the quest reward did not seem related to any type of lethal weapon. It was just some small "seeds." However, Ren Xiaosu placed a great deal of importance to it.

These "seeds" represented a dream, and Ren Xiaosu could only hope that it would live up to the rewards the side quest gave.

If these seeds turned out to be something magical, Ren Xiaosu could find a plot of land and become self-sufficient!

The only problem was that it might not be so easy to ensure that there would be no deaths in the wolf pack over the next seven days.

It looked like Ren Xiaosu would have to pay extra attention to the Li Consortium's nanosoldiers. If he couldn't complete this quest, what should he do if the palace decided not to issue another seeds-related side quest to him?

While everyone was processing the cured meat, Hu Shuo was practicing tai chi off to the side. Ren Xiaosu suddenly thought of something, so he asked, "Are you practicing tai chi as a form of cultivation?"

"Cultivation?" Hu Shuo looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a laugh, "I'm only doing it as a form of exercise and discipline, so don't be overthinking things."

Ren Xiaosu really wanted to know what powers Hu Shuo had. In fact, Hu Shuo didn't dodge any questions, but the one who witnessed Hu Shuo fight was Chen Wudi. This rendered Ren Xiaosu speechless.

When Li Qingzheng mentioned he had been learning boxing styles since he was a child, Ren Xiaosu brushed it off like it was some kind of superstition. But seeing Hu Shuo practice tai chi every day with so much vigor, Ren Xiaosu could not help but think that Li Qingzheng also knew a powerful boxing style.

Right at this moment, over a dozen off-road vehicles suddenly roared up from the foot of the mountain. When everyone here saw the off-road vehicles, they immediately stopped working

“Put everything away,” Li Qingzheng instructed quietly.

The cured meat they were making was definitely not going to be considered official business around here. After all, their primary duty was to keep a lookout for enemies. If those people were here for an inspection, they would definitely fail them.

However, Ren Xiaosu already knew they couldn't be the inspection personnel.

The dozen off-road vehicles arrived in such a hurry with an overbearing manner.

It looked like it was going to get really busy at this outpost.

Everyone had thought they wouldn't have much contact with people after getting posted to this faraway outpost. But in the end, all these different people came here every few days.

What was going on here?

Ren Xiaosu quietly observed the situation. He realized Hu Shuo had gone into a house at some point. It was as though he didn't want to come face to face with these people.

When the off-road vehicles came to a stop at the entrance of the outpost, four people stepped out from each of them. They were all dressed in combat uniforms and held the rank of officer.

On this topic, Ren Xiaosu and the others were soldiers as well, but they were all irregularly dressed with only a few of them in their military uniforms. On the other hand, the soldiers who had just arrived were all smartly dressed, resulting in a stark contrast between the two sides.

From appearances alone, Ren Xiaosu and the others looked more like they were on chow duty. All they were lacking were some aprons.

But what surprised Ren Xiaosu and the others was that there was actually someone they knew among these officers!

To be precise, it was someone the refugees knew. Back when these randomly assembled soldiers were undergoing their physicals, one of them in the group managed to pass the synchronization test!

But now, that person had moved on up to become a proper officer of the Li Consortium. Ren Xiaosu vaguely remembered that this refugee who had been elevated in status was called Lin Qi.

When Lin Qi got out of the vehicle, he was taken aback when he saw Ren Xiaosu and the other refugees. But right after, he laughed. "Oh, I didn't expect to see these familiar faces."

Ren Xiaosu and the others did not say anything. Lin Qi's dignified look today would not give away the awful state he was in while fleeing from Stronghold 109. His polished combat boots fit him very well, as did his uniform.

Someone behind Lin Qi asked, "You actually know these people?"

Lin Qi hesitated for a moment before saying, "We came together to Stronghold 108 from Stronghold 109. Now that I've met them again at this remote outpost, I'll definitely need to take care of these little brothers of mine."

Coming from Lin Qi's mouth, Ren Xiaosu and the others had suddenly become his little brothers.

Lin Qi was feeling a great sense of superiority. During their escape, Ren Xiaosu's group had it so easy the entire journey. But look at how the tables had turned. Ren Xiaosu could only remain as a refugee while he had become an officer of the Li Consortium. He was even a first lieutenant!

The gulf that was the stronghold separated Lin Qi from Ren Xiaosu at this moment. Their statuses were as different as that of the heavens and the Earth.

Ren Xiaosu's group did not really find Lin Qi to be that great. In the past, Ren Xiaosu might be envious of the stronghold residents. But now, he wasn't the least bit envious at all.

But the other refugees who used to walk alongside Lin Qi were feeling somewhat embarrassed. When they saw Lin Qi in his uniform, they did not even dare to come forward to speak with him.

Lin Qi was getting conceited. He laughed and said, "How are you doing here at the outpost? It must be really difficult, right? If I had known that all of you were here, I would have brought over the pound of pork allocated to me by the troops so that you can have a taste of some meat. After all, it's not easy for you all to get any meat in a place like this, unlike me who gets to have it every day."

If he had mentioned anything else but this, it would have been fine. But when it came to the topic of having meat to eat, Ren Xiaosu and the others started looking a little funny. Honestly speaking, they would prefer having more vegetables in their diets right now. Having too much meat really did not help with their digestion.

But Ren Xiaosu felt that if Lin Qi were really willing to share some meat with them, it would mean he was still kind at heart even though he was a little showy. They would just treat it as someone giving them compensation so they could look good, something that wouldn't hurt them at all.

But Lin Qi's tone took a turn at this moment. "Forget it, it wouldn't be good if I brought meat for you refugees. If I let you have a taste of meat, I'd be bringing harm to you if you don't have the appetite for anything else in the future."

Ren Xiaosu nearly burst out laughing. Beside him, Li Qingzheng stood up and laughed along humbly. "Dear sirs, to what do we owe your distinguished visitation?"

Lin Qi's expression turned a little dark when his words were cut off by Li Qingzheng who changed the topic. However, he still answered very quickly, "We're here to offer fire support to our comrades to rein in the threat of the wolves in these mountains. But this area is not going to be the main battlefield. That will be the next outpost where even more troops are currently waiting."

Ren Xiaosu was startled. Surely there was a problem with the intel the Li Consortium received, right? But he soon understood. The previous wolf attack had taken place in the vicinity of the next outpost, which was why the Li Consortium's troops thought the wolves' area of activity was closer to the mountain range over there.

It was no wonder more than 40 nanosoldiers had gathered here. Based on his fight with the nanosoldiers, and assuming these nanosoldiers here were at the same level as those he had faced, he felt they wouldn't amount to any threat to the wolf pack.

However, he could not dismiss these nanosoldiers either, because he had recently realized the nanomachines might still have a lot of functions he hadn't discovered yet. He was using it purely as external armor right now.

This was the perfect opportunity for him to observe how these nanosoldiers did battle.

Chapter 224 Meat is our staple food

When normal soldiers came to this outpost, they would be ferried in military transport trucks. But these nanosoldiers who were all at least first lieutenants had arrived in over a dozen off-road vehicles.

Ren Xiaosu checked out how many of them there were and counted 48. If this number of nanosoldiers who had gathered here was only serving as support for those at the next outpost, then how many people were in the main force over there?

The outpost's soldiers stood at the side, not daring to utter a word. Only Li Qingzheng went over to the officers to ask if they needed any assistance and if they wanted to eat lunch here.

However, Lin Qi proudly laughed and said, "We're on official duty here, so how could we have time to eat lunch here? We usually carry our own rations when we're out on a mission. If we eat anything unhygienic here at your place and get the runs, none of you will be able to answer for it."

"Yes, that's right." Li Qingzheng pretended to smile and said, "You're absolutely correct."

In reality, Lin Qi's resentment was mainly focused on Ren Xiaosu. After all, he did not have anything against the rest of the refugees. Just based on the difference of their statuses, he was quite satisfied.

But during their escape, Ren Xiaosu's group really had it too easy while the rest of them had to endure starvation. Now that he was elevated in status, he naturally wanted to compare.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu could also understand this.

At this moment, Lin Qi said, "I heard that the rice supply sent here was mixed with sand. I had heard about how the living conditions of those of you who were recruited by the private army during the expansion isn't too good. Do you usually have enough to eat?"

“It’s not too bad.” Li Qingzheng said with a smile, “We’re still able to pick some wild vegetables to add to our meals sometimes.”

He couldn’t possibly tell them that they had meat to eat, right? There was no such thing as not having enough to eat around here, but it would definitely intensify the conflict if he said that now.

However, Lin Qi continued, “You won’t have enough strength if you just eat wild vegetables and not have a staple food. Don’t let it get in the way of performing your sentry duty.”

Chen Wudi asked Ren Xiaosu at the side, “Master, what does a staple food mean?”

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment before giving him a short answer. “Food that you always eat.”

When Lin Qi heard the conversation between Chen Wudi and Ren Xiaosu, he said to Chen Wudi with a laugh, “You’re such a crazy fool. A staple food refers to food like rice and noodles.”

Chen Wudi shook his head. “That’s not right, our staple food is meat.”

Lin Qi: “???”

Li Qingzheng and Ren Xiaosu realized this was going to be bad. That fool of a kid had somehow spilled the beans. However, they then discovered that Lin Qi did not seem to believe what Chen Wudi had said. They heard Lin Qi say with a sigh, “You’re even turning to lying in order to boost your pitiful self-esteem, I see.”

But even though Lin Qi did not believe it, the other officers started getting suspicious. “You all have meat here?”

Ren Xiaosu’s heart sank. Some of these people were quite astute. Li Qingzheng laughed and replied, “Haha, he was just kidding. How could we possibly have any meat here?”

But that soldier did not let go of the matter just because of Li Qingzheng’s explanation. He went towards outpost. “There’s something off about your outpost.”

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, “So you’ve found out?” Ren Xiaosu then headed to one of the houses in the outpost. He opened the door of that house with everyone looking... only to reveal Hu Shuo inside!

It was obvious that Hu Shuo was a high-ranking official in the stronghold. How else could he command a group of elite soldiers comparable to those the consortium had?

Since this old man was planning to spend the Lunar New Year here, Ren Xiaosu brought him out to shield them from any further trouble during a crisis!

Hu Shuo looked calmly at Ren Xiaosu, and Ren Xiaosu looked calmly at Hu Shuo as well. Hu Shuo got so angry he almost laughed. He had specifically gone into the house to avoid meeting these people!

One of the officers said in surprise, “S-Sir, what are you doing here?”

Hu Shuo slowly stepped out. “Oh, I’m here to investigate something, so my little friends here at the outpost are providing me with some assistance.”

“Sorry, we didn’t expect you to be here. I’m a soldier of the 7th Brigade and have been assigned to the Divine Arms Battalion,” the soldier said humbly while bowing deeply.

For a refugee like Lin Qi who had only recently been recruited into the combat troops, he definitely would not know who Hu Shuo was. But this officer had been a soldier of the Li Consortium for a while and recognized Hu Shuo immediately.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this unfold, he nearly gasped. Just who was this Hu Shuo supposed to be? This nanosoldier was behaving so arrogantly just now, so what made him become so humble all of a sudden?

If only Chen Wudi could explain it more clearly; then Ren Xiaosu could have at least figured out how strong this Hu Shuo was.

Hu Shuo smiled amiably at the officers and said, “You guys have work to do, so I won’t waste your time.”

That soldier immediately stood to attention. “Yes, sir!” Then he ordered the others to quickly unload their gear from the vehicles and wear it.

Ren Xiaosu observed them and discovered there wasn’t much of a difference between these nanosoldiers’ gear and what the ordinary soldiers wore. They were all standard-issue combat uniforms and individual weapons of war, while one of the officers was carrying a portable radio transceiver. After all, the distance between the outposts were some dozens of kilometers away from each other, so they needed to use the radios to communicate and share intel.

The only difference was that these soldiers were each equipped with a long saber that was sheathed in a black leather scabbard. Ren Xiaosu could not tell what kind of material this sword was made of. But if it was something the nanosoldiers carried, it probably wasn’t any ordinary weapon.

Someone asked that soldier while they were donning their gear, “Who’s that old man?”

That soldier’s expression changed. “Don’t ask. Let’s head into the mountains and get out of here.” He sounded terrified of Hu Shuo.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this, he couldn’t figure out what was so scary about Hu Shuo.

Everyone at the outpost watched as these officers fell silent en masse before hurrying off deep into Mount Kun. After they left, Ren Xiaosu laughed and said, “I won’t ask you any questions for the next three days.”

When Hu Shuo heard this, the annoyance of getting “betrayed” by Ren Xiaosu lessened a little...

Ren Xiaosu followed up with a smile and said, “You see, it can’t get out that we have all this meat here. Otherwise, you’re not going to have a peaceful New Year either.”

“Don’t take this undeserved gain for granted,” Hu Shuo snapped at him.

“But I’m curious about something.” Ren Xiaosu asked, “I know that Lin Qi too, and he didn’t used to be a soldier. He only joined the army for a few days, but they’re already sending him out on a mission?”

Hu Shuo shot him a look. “What are you trying to ask?”

“Soldiers are required to train for a long time before being deployed.” Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, “Whether it be their discipline or combat skills, those are not qualities that can be instilled quickly. So I’m curious why the Li Consortium is so anxious to deploy them. They can’t even be considered recruits, right?”

Chapter 225 Ren Xiaosu, the snake catcher

In Ren Xiaosu’s opinion, whether a soldier was capable of going into combat was absolutely not only dependent on their capability. There was also the instinctive sense for combat they had and their skills.

If a normal person gained newfound strength, that person might not even know how to wield or control it.

Even though Lin Qi and the other officers were fully geared and were even equipped with special close quarters combat weapons, did they really know how to use them?

Therefore, Ren Xiaosu felt that if he could anticipate such a problem, the Li Consortium would definitely have also thought of it.

“Because they need to gather actual combat data and collect the data of nanomachine use in battle.” Hu Shuo did not hide it from Ren Xiaosu. “Ever since the breakthrough in neurotech that made it possible for nanomachines to interface with neurons, there hasn’t been any actual combat testing by the Li Consortium’s nanosoldiers. So they’re curious about how effective these nanosoldiers are.”

“Aren’t they afraid of taking huge losses?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“What losses?” Hu Shuo laughed. “It’s only a few lives, that’s all. The ratio of nanosoldiers selected from the screening isn’t as low as you might imagine. Don’t tell me you haven’t realized that, other than the one experienced soldier leading the group, the rest of the troops were made up of refugees? To them, soldiers trained with their money are like gold, while refugees only serve as a tool. Did you really think they lack candidates with high synchronization rates?”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. So these people... they were all sent here to die for the sake of collecting data! Was the Li Consortium that vicious?!

“Wait, isn’t a requirement of 80% synchronization very high?” Ren Xiaosu could not understand this. “What exactly does this synchronization rate refer to?”

“The synchronization rate is the degree to which you can perfectly control the nanomachines.” Hu Shuo explained, “But this isn’t set in stone. By undergoing physical training and responsiveness coaching, it can be steadily improved. Of course, there’s also a limit to everyone’s improvement potential. It’s just like how some people naturally have better athleticism than others. It’s also down to one’s talent as well.”

That meant that even those with a low synchronization rate might still be able to control the nanomachines. It was only a matter of how efficiently they could do it. For example, even though you might order it to turn into external armor now, it only turned into external armor a year later.

If that was the case, then what was the point of having the nanomachines turn into armor?! Wouldn't it be more efficient to turn it straight into a coffin instead? The user would have already died anyway!

However, even though Ren Xiaosu's synchronization was 0%, he sensed that the nanomachines were very obedient to his commands. They would do whatever he needed them to do without any delay.

He asked, "Then what does having an extremely low synchronization rate mean? Does it mean that the user is a vegetable?"

Hu Shuo looked at Ren Xiaosu meaningfully and said, "There are special cases too. After a person becomes a supernatural being, their independent consciousness will reject the nanomachines, thus leading to a low synchronization rate. That means that person has an extremely powerful consciousness."

Ren Xiaosu froze at the words. However, he soon got around it when he realized Hu Shuo was bluffing!

If the Li Consortium already knew this from the research, he and Chen Wudi, who had gotten a synchronization rate of 0% and 1% respectively, would have been targeted by the Li Consortium! Hah! Who would have thought Hu Shuo was quite cunning!

However, Ren Xiaosu still had doubts about the Li Consortium's decision to send in recruits like Lin Qi and the others to take on the wolves. "Don't the nanomachines cost anything? The nanomachines they have in them should be worth a lot of money too,

right?"

"Nanomachines can be recycled." Hu Shuo said calmly, "Even if the soldiers die, the nanomachines won't die. When the real elite troops get here, they'll be able to retrieve all the nanomachines scattered in the wilderness."

That did sound quite logical. And thus, Ren Xiaosu had nothing more to say.

However, he did not think that Hu Shuo was totally correct. At the very least, this group of soldiers' nanomachines were not going to be retrievable by the Li Consortium anymore.

The snowy mountain was covered in fog.

Lin Qi and the rest of the troops were walking in the wilderness at this time and using the radio to maintain communications with the main force at the neighboring outpost. This coordination made it feel like it was a military exercise.

The main man of the group was the soldier who spoke to Hu Shuo, while the rest of the troops were just as Hu Shuo had said, recruits who had just joined the Li Consortium's combat troops.

They had thought that after joining the army, they would be subject to very rigorous training as recruits, as well as undergo military-style training on how to operate the nanomachines. But that wasn't the case at all. After undergoing just some brief training, they were immediately assigned on their first ever mission.

But of course, no one rejected this. After all, they heard of how tough the training was for recruits, so it was best that they did not have to suffer through any of that.

No one felt suspicious of anything. The joy of having their statuses elevated had blunted their judgment. Even though there was a mismatch in the information they knew, it left them with no opportunity to be judgmental.

Lin Qi only thought that since they met the synchronization standard, it meant they were special.

"Captain Zhou, who was that old man?" Lin Qi asked.

"Don't ask," Captain Zhou answered. "Just don't provoke him. In the entire Li Consortium army, he's one you should not offend most of all."

"What should we do next?" someone asked.

Captain Zhou thought for a bit before saying, "Scout ahead!"

One of the officers suddenly stepped forward. A silvery liquid metal started seeping out from underneath his skin and landed on the ground.

In an instant, that silvery liquid metal suddenly turned into five small, silvery snakes that slithered towards the depths of the mountain.

Captain Zhou asked, "What's the furthest range of your control?"

"It was assessed at 418 meters during the previous test," the platoon member replied.

"Alright, that's good enough for our purposes." Captain Zhou said, "Keep a careful lookout on the surroundings and maintain the range so you don't lose control of the nanomachines. The key is to not be careless. Once you discover anything odd with the nanomachines, inform me."

"Roger," answered the platoon member.

Lin Qi suddenly said, "But Captain, this isn't where the wolves were active. Besides, we have five squads conducting a simultaneous search. There shouldn't be any danger, right?"

Honestly, if a battle were to break out, it would be really difficult to depend on Lin Qi and the others even if they had nanomachines in them, because they did not have any actual combat experience.

Captain Zhou looked at him and said, "Just listen to my orders and everything will be fine."

But right at this moment, the soldier controlling the nanorobotic, silver snakes suddenly exclaimed, "This is bad!"

Captain Zhou was startled. "What's the matter? Is it the wolves?"

"No... I don't think so." The soldier hesitated for a moment before saying, "A shadow just flashed by up ahead and stole away one of my silver snakes."

Captain Zhou froze for a moment. "It didn't do anything else and only took your silver snake away?"

"That's right. It ran off after catching it."

Everyone was starting to get suspicious. What the fuck just happened?!

Chapter 226 Stealing nanomachines for fun!

Was it the wolves? No.

The soldier's silver snakes were fitted with extra camera equipment that could send back an image feed via the nanomachines' neural connection. So even though that shadow was extremely fast and the image was blurry, the soldier was very sure it wasn't a wolf.

Captain Zhou looked at him and wondered, "If it's not a wolf, what is it?"

"It looked more like a... shadow," the platoon member said. But at this moment, he exclaimed again, "Oh no, my silver snake is getting out of my range!"

He then chased after it and tried to keep within the control range of the nanorobotic, silver snake. However, his speed was way lower than his opponent's. Before he could even cover two steps, his neural connection to that silver snake was completely cut off!

Captain Zhou's expression sank. He had not believed they would encounter any danger out here. But who could have thought they would lose a portion of their nanomachines less than three hours after entering the mountain!

And they didn't even know who did it! And for what motive!

If the opponent were a human, why did they want to steal the nanorobotic snake? As if they could use it after stealing it?!

"Captain, what do we do now?" someone asked.

Captain Zhou said with a cold expression, "Where did he run off to?"

"To the southwest!" that platoon member said.

“Give chase!” Captain Zhou said, “It’s only one person, isn’t it? Make a call to the next outpost with the radio. Tell them we’ve discovered a new target that might be even more important than the wolves. Let them know we’ll be pursuing this target with everything we’ve got and will be disengaging from Operation: Wolf Encirclement.”

In truth, this Captain Zhou was the only person in the platoon who knew why they had been deployed to the mountains. There was no hurry in trying to encircle the wolves. What was more important was to ensure they did not lose the nanomachines.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu had just received the nanorobotic snake, already in an idle state, from his shadow clone. He had thought it would take a nasty battle for him to get his hands on the nanomachines. But that would not have been worth it at all, and he still preferred picking them off the nanosoldiers who had gotten separated from their groups...

But sometimes, luck could even make a person hand you a pillow right when you were feeling sleepy. Someone had actually volunteered to send some nanomachines his way.

In just two seconds, the palace reset the nanomachines back to their factory settings by clearing the remote access protocol and executing a series of other instructions. The tiny, nanorobotic silver snake transformed back into liquid metal and melded together with the rest of the nanomachines within Ren Xiaosu’s body.

It was like the newly gained nanomachines had been handed to him on a silver platter.

However, Ren Xiaosu was sad. The size of this silver snake was too small. It wasn’t easy for him to control the shadow clone before finding this one snake. If he had to go and continue searching for more of them, how many years would that take him?

No! A glimmer suddenly appeared in Ren Xiaosu’s eyes!

Lin Qi and the others kept going deeper and deeper into the forested mountains. However, they did not head up and were instead walking along the mountain pass down towards the valley.

“Captain, why don’t we give up on the chase?” Lin Qi said, a little worried. “It’s only a silver snake. I’m afraid something bad will happen if we walk too far.”

Captain Zhou shot him a look and said, “If you’re so afraid of death, why be a soldier? The wolf pack isn’t in our direction, so what’s there to be afraid of? Keep marching!”

As that was being said, a platoon member whisper-shouted, “Captain, look over there in the valley!”

Everyone turned to look at the valley and noticed a shadow dash by. That “person” looked like he had been resting over there and wasn’t expecting Captain Zhou and the others to chase him all the way here!

“Don’t let him get out of our pursuit range!” Captain Zhou ordered ruthlessly.

In an instant, the remaining four nanorobotic snakes slithered towards where the shadow had disappeared. Simultaneously, the other soldiers rushed towards the forested wilderness as a silvery glow emanated from the blood vessels in their skin.

Could the nanomachines be constantly running in their bodies and only needed a thought from their owners to instantly form into sophisticated support machinery that could aid them in achieving an even greater strength? Strictly speaking, these nanosoldiers' strength and speed had already exceeded that of normal people. They were basically superhumans created through technology!

These nanosoldiers rushed across the uneven terrain as though it was flat ground. There were even some people who could leap across distances of more than ten meters with a single leap!

Endless gunfire rang out as they chased the shadow clone while concentrating their firepower on it. It was as though they were attempting to blast the shadow clone to shreds with their overwhelming firepower.

But even if they were physically strong, they were still recruits who had not gone through firearms training. While moving at a high speed, they could not even manage the most basic of aiming.

"Don't waste your ammo." Captain Zhou sneered. "Catch him first and take it from there."

But during the pursuit, only the soldier controlling the nanorobotic snakes had suspicions. It felt like this shadow's speed was slower than when it escaped after taking away the snake.

But since he had precious little combat experience, he wasn't willing to casually pass judgment on the situation.

As they were closing the distance between themselves and the shadow clone, the silver snakes had already closed the gap. However, the shadow clone suddenly reached behind and took a swipe. No one knew what it was swiping at, but the shadow clone immediately picked up its pace and disappeared!

The speed at which it ran off stunned Captain Zhou and the others. 'How can that be a fucking human?! Just what are you after? If you're so good at running, why didn't you run faster just now?'

But a second later, the nanosoldier controlling the silver snakes caught up to the rest. He panted out, "This is bad!"

His nanomachines had been used to form the nanorobotic snakes for scouting ahead, so when the group gave chase with all their might, he fell behind their pace.

Captain Zhou frowned and said, "What's the matter?"

The nanosoldier said, sounding devastated, "The silver snakes have all been taken away...."

It was only at this moment that everyone realized it. Their supernatural opponent had only used this as a tactic to slowly pull the silver snakes closer to him so he could capture them all at once.

Their opponent had been targeting the nanorobotic snakes from the very beginning!

What the hell? Was he unsatisfied with how long it took to capture them one by one? Was that not enough to satisfy him?

Captain Zhou stood atop a rock looking resigned

At present, before they even encountered any of the wolves, one of the nanosoldiers had already had their nanomachines forcefully taken away. Was it even acceptable for a nanosoldier to not have any nanomachines in them?

Previously, he felt that using the nanomachines as external scouting equipment was a really good idea since it could vastly raise the efficiency of their reconnaissance.

After this incident, Captain Zhou felt he would have to go back to the general staff to report to them that this method wasn't going to work anymore. There was someone who specialized in stealing nanomachines for fun.

"Let's retreat." Captain Zhou said coldly, "We can't continue chasing him."

After weighing the pros and cons, he felt they might suffer even greater losses if they continued the chase. They were obviously not on the same level as their opponent, so it was necessary to cut their losses as soon as possible.

But right at this moment, wolves howled from a hillside not far from them. Captain Zhou's face turned gloomy.

Chapter 227 Well, I don't care!

When the howling sounded, Captain Zhou, Lin Qi, and every one of the officers could feel their hearts sink. During the chase, none of them had considered the wolf pack a threat.

To them, the wolf pack should have been very far away, near where most of the troops had gathered to encircle them. But they realized now to their horror that the wolves' area of activity was actually close to them!

How did it turn out like this? The outpost the wolf pack attacked was very far from here. If this was where the wolf pack was active, then why was Ren Xiaosu's outpost unharmed?

Captain Zhou thought about it for two seconds before saying coldly, "I'm afraid the scale of the operation at the neighboring outpost must've been too big. That's why the wolves were alarmed and came over here. We underestimated how strongly they can smell danger and keep clear of it."

"That could be possible." Lin Qi said, sounding afraid, "So what should we do now?"

"What else can we do? Rapidly retreat!" Captain Zhou whisper-shouted, "If you don't want to die, hurry up and get out of here. We'll head to the outpost. Who knows, the wolves might get attracted to those people. That's our only hope of survival!"

As they were talking, Captain Zhou reactivated his nanomachines and became as quick and powerful as a mech. When the others saw this, they stopped caring about other things and hastily followed suit.

But not everyone in the platoon was equipped with nanomachines. The soldier who had been controlling the nanorobotic snakes roared from behind them, "Take me with you!"

Without any nanomachines, he was just a normal person. He had absolutely no chance to escape the pursuit of the wolves. As such, he required someone to help him if he did not want to die.

But his comrades who had been addressing each other as brothers did not even turn around to look at him when they heard his shouts.

This was the result of not having undergone any formal military training. In the face of danger, they were no different from refugees!

Looking at his platoon mates running further and further away, this abandoned nanosoldier started getting desperate. He could already hear the wolves moving in the forested hill behind him!

For some reason, he regretted becoming a nanosoldier. Although he would have become a refugee if he didn't become a nanosoldier, he might have been able to live a little longer. But right at this moment, he looked back and was stunned, because he saw not only the wolf pack; a young man was with them as well!

The young man and the wolves were coming towards him together. The young man and the Wolf King were walking side by side while the rest of the wolves followed them. It looked like his standing in the group was very high.

But wasn't this young man that Ren Xiaosu they met earlier at the outpost?

Then Ren Xiaosu said, "Don't worry about them getting away. I've already calculated their speed and used the shadow clone to lead them here into the depths of the mountain. They're running for their lives right now with everything they have, but those nanomachines will run out of power in approximately ten minutes. After that, those few dozen people will revert back to normal humans."

Just as Ren Xiaosu had speculated, the most lethal limitation the nanomachines had right now was its energy source. By depending on a bioenergy source to charge, they were utterly unable to keep up with the rate of power consumption. Therefore, nanosoldiers were best suited for blitzkrieg, not conventional warfare. Of course, Ren Xiaosu was unsure if the Li Consortium had solved this problem internally yet.

The Wolf King and Ren Xiaosu came before that nanosoldier, and the two of them communicated by guessing each other's intentions. That nanosoldier suddenly felt like he had already been forgotten by them at this moment. 'Aren't you two looking down on me too much?'

But why was this young man in front of him able to stand with the wolf pack without being harmed? Wasn't this unbelievable? Wait! Could the attack on the neighboring outpost have something to do with this young man?

Suddenly, the Wolf King took a look at this nanosoldier and then raised its paw to prod at Ren Xiaosu like it wanted something.

Ren Xiaosu's expression changed. "He doesn't have any more nanomachines in him, so I'm not going to trade him to you. Besides, I took the nanomachines that he used to have with my own method!"

The nanosoldier was stunned as he listened to Ren Xiaosu. He realized the shadow was Ren Xiaosu's doing. So that meant this young man was also a supernatural being!

However, the Wolf King shook its head. "Well, I don't care!"

Ren Xiaosu took out a vial of black medicine and handed it to the Wolf King unhappily. "Whatever, I'm not going to argue with a wolf."

When the Wolf King saw the black medicine, it became happier. Ren Xiaosu said, "Alright, I'll go on ahead to give chase. Come to me after you've dealt with him." Ren Xiaosu then got ready to leave.

The nanosoldier who was about to get left behind was terrified. "Don't go, we're both humans. How can you let the wolves eat me?"

Ren Xiaosu turned around and said with a smile, "I'd rather dance with wolves than associate with people like you."

After saying that, Ren Xiaosu left and headed into the forested hills. The nanosoldier could see the solitude and determination on the young man's back. In this moment, the nanosoldier figured out a lot of things. So when they said their staple food at the outpost was meat, they weren't actually lying about it.

So the wolf pack had not attacked the outpost over here because Ren Xiaosu was there. That was all there was to it!

And he noticed this person called Ren Xiaosu knew a great deal about the nanomachines.

They had been wondering why that shadow was trying to steal the nanomachines. It wasn't like it could use them anyway.

But he wasn't so sure anymore!

As Ren Xiaosu walked forward, he heard a scream coming from behind him. However, his expression did not change much.

Including the five silver snakes, they were enough to allow his hand to be covered with the nanomachines up to his wrist. There was still a long way to go before he could gather enough nanomachines to piece together a full set of armor.

Lin Qi and the others were running with all their might through the forested hill. They didn't even care about their faces getting cut by protruding tree branches anymore. The nanomachines they had in their

bodies were still not enough to support the entirety of their structure. So their skin was not that different from that of normal people.

As they ran, Captain Zhou slowed down a little. "Seems like the wolf pack isn't coming after

US?"

"Yeah." Lin Qi said with a look of consternation, "Could it be that they didn't realize we were there?"

"That's impossible!" Captain Zhou coldly rebuked. "There must be some other reason for it."

A hypothesis came to Captain Zhou at this moment. He wondered if the wolf pack somehow knew the nanomachines had a limited duration of charge and was waiting until their power ran out before making their move.

However, he immediately brushed off this idea. After all, how could the wolves possibly know something like that? There were not even many people within the Li Consortium's military that knew about this other than the nanosoldiers themselves.

Lin Qi and the others had already discarded some of their supplies. They were not so stupid as to throw away their weapons. Instead, they got rid of their combat rations.

But Lin Qi suddenly realized something. Right from the beginning, Captain Zhou had never opened his backpack. Currently, the silvery glow from everyone else's blood vessels was starting to dim. But that was not the case for Captain Zhou's blood vessels.

Lin Qi asked, "Captain, is there some sort of charger in your backpack?"

Captain Zhou gave him a look. "Don't ask if it's none of your business."

Chapter 228 The wolves turn intelligent

It wasn't until when Lin Qi and the other soldiers noticed a problem with Captain Zhou that they finally realized he might be carrying a wireless charging pack for his nanomachines.

It was precisely because of this equipment that Captain Zhou's nanomachines were still at full power while everyone else's nanomachines were close to dying.

In this time of danger, Lin Qi and the others were all hoping to charge their nanomachines as well. If they could, their chances of survival would be higher. So Lin Qi and a few others decided to ask Captain Zhou for his backpack after exchanging looks with each other.

But before they could ask, chaos broke out in the forest behind them. Huge beasts seemed to be moving within it.

"Damn, the wolf pack has caught up!" Captain Zhou shouted, "Run!"

Who could have the chance to say anything at such a time? They could only continue fleeing for their lives!

But when they realized the wolves had caught up to them and were already flanking them, everyone forced themselves to run even faster at the sight of this in fear of getting caught by the wolves.

Several nanosoldiers whose nanomachines were almost dead started falling behind. However, none of their comrades intended to help them.

They just got more and more desperate as they ran, to the point that some even forgot they had guns they could use to protect themselves with from the wolves' attacks.

Ren Xiaosu hid somewhere on the hillside and watched, sighing. The Li Consortium had indeed sent them out here to die. If this group of nanosoldiers were made up of the Li Consortium's combat troops, there would have at least been some order even if they were retreating, not a total rout like what was happening

At the end of the day, these were just normal people who happened to be able to control the nanomachines.

Some of them might not even have willpower on par with most people.

However, Ren Xiaosu was actually more curious about what an elite nanosoldier of the Li Consortium was like.

"Eh?" Ren Xiaosu noticed something different about Captain Zhou. He discovered the power of his nanomachines did not seem to be weakening.

Why was that?

A moment later, the wolves suddenly converged from both flanks for the attack. They forcefully separated the group of fleeing nanosoldiers in two. Only now did the nanosoldiers who were under attack finally remember that they were still carrying guns. They immediately thought to shoot the wolves. But they turned out to be so stupid they even forgot how to disengage the safety on their guns!

Some of them drew their sabers from their waists. The sword was a melee weapon the Li Consortium had specially issued the nanosoldiers so they could make use of their superstrength when it became necessary.

To these nanosoldiers, a sword was far more useful than a gun when the battle became a close quarters fight.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the saber in their hands from nearby and saw the blade was orange. However, the edge of the blade was silver just like the nanomachines.

When the blade was swung at the wolves, the silver edge of the blade pulsed and felt like a ripple spreading outwards.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if the edge was also composed of nanomachines.

When one of the soldiers' sabers cut into a wolf's body, that wolf's abdomen was split open like it encountered a burning blade!

When the wolf pack saw the power of this weapon, they stopped pushing for a frontal assault. Rather, they went in from behind to sneak attack!

Captain Zhou, Lin Qi, and the others did not even turn around and continued fleeing for their lives. If they didn't think of something, they would die as well. This was also the case for Captain Zhou whose nanomachines were still at full power as he wouldn't be able to outrun the wolves!

"Who has the cluster grenades? Hand them to me!" Captain Zhou roared. His life dangling by a thread, his commanding voice was even starting to sound a little hoarse.

Someone's expression changed when he heard that. "But our comrades are still behind us!"

Some people were still firing their guns within the wolf pack. This indicated that some of the people surrounded by the wolves were still alive!

Captain Zhou sneered, "If you want to sympathize with them, go ahead and save them. Otherwise, don't put on a false front with me. Didn't we already leave our other comrades behind to escape?"

No one made a sound. Still, someone could not help but comment, "You're trying to blow up our comrades."

"Comrades?" Captain Zhou gave a snort of disgust and said, "You people are not fit to be called my comrades! Our platoon still has ten cluster grenades. Hand them all over."

With that, a few people took out several grenades from their backpacks.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this from a distance, he looked disturbed. These people had actually brought cluster grenades with them?!

Although the wolves could withstand bullets pretty well, they wouldn't stand a chance against these grenades. If some of the wolves got blown up, wouldn't Ren Xiaosu fail his side quest?

When he thought about that, he ordered his shadow clone into the battlefield. Ren Xiaosu also rushed towards the Wolf King at the back and whisper-shouted, "Stop giving chase! It's too dangerous!"

The majority of the wolves immediately stopped in their tracks. However, one of the wolves was in bloodlust mode. After biting several of the nanosoldiers dead, it was about to rush forward again. This wolf's social standing was second only to that of the Wolf King, and Ren Xiaosu often saw it standing guard by the Wolf King as well. It was basically the second-in-command.

As a result, the shadow clone rushed in front of the wolf just as it tried to charge forward. The shadow clone picked it up and ran back to the wolf pack. That wolf got angry and kept roaring frantically. However, the shadow clone did not even care and just carried it away!

The Wolf King's appearance changed when it saw the shadow clone carrying the wolf. This thing was that strong?!

Captain Zhou and the soldiers pulled the safety pins out of the cluster grenades all at once and were about to throw them at the wolf pack behind them. However, they were shocked to discover the wolves had already stopped in their tracks and were no longer chasing them. In addition, one of the wolves that had been bounding towards them was being carried away in the opposite direction by the corporeal shadow.

Lin Qi and the others were all dumbfounded by the sight. What was the meaning of this? Why had they given up the chase?

And why was that shadow stopping that wolf from charging?

It wasn't that they were inexperienced and had not seen the world yet, but this sight before them was too ridiculous. Some of the soldiers were looking at the cluster grenades with smoke coming out of them and asked, "Should we still throw them?"

"Throw them!" Captain Zhou then tossed the grenade in his hand at the wolves. If they didn't, they would blow themselves up.

But by throwing the grenades, they couldn't even blow up any of the wolves! Had these wolves turned intelligent?

Loud booms thundered through the wilderness of the mountains, and birds scattered into the sky like a spiraling, dark cloud.

The Wolf King silently watched as smoke, branches, and leaves were sent flying by the blasts. It knew about the firearms and explosives humans used and wasn't all that surprised.

It looked at Ren Xiaosu and nodded its head at him as though to convey its gratitude. If not for Ren Xiaosu stopping them just in time, the wolf pack would probably have suffered major casualties.

But of course, Ren Xiaosu could not say he had interfered only because of the quest. But actually, even without it, Ren Xiaosu would still not have stood by and watched. They were partners, after all.

He looked at the nanosoldiers who had already been killed by the wolf pack. The silvery nanomachines were already starting to seep out from under the skins of the bodies. Ren Xiaosu counted up nine nanosoldiers who'd died from the encirclement by the wolves in what was a fairly efficient attack. It was just a pity that they had allowed Lin Qi and the rest of the soldiers to get away due to the cluster grenades being thrown.

Chapter 229 Chen Wudi's question

Ren Xiaosu looked at the Wolf King and said, "Don't continue giving chase. We're not far from the outpost anymore. Besides, they still have some cluster grenades left. I saw them take out eight, but they only threw three at us."

The Wolf King nodded and expressed that it wouldn't be giving further chase.

Ren Xiaosu took out nine vials of the black medicine for the Wolf King and said in a serious tone, "Don't use it too frequently."

The Wolf King was silent.

"It's time to go. Head deeper into the mountains this time. After this group of people get back, there will be a large number of troops coming here. When that happens, there will be real danger," Ren Xiaosu said.

The wolf pack would only be safe if they hid deep in the mountains. Beyond the quest, Ren Xiaosu was also hoping that no harm would befall the wolves.

Although the nanomachines were a priority, he believed he would still find a lot of chances to get his hands on them.

On top of that nanosoldier who had been killed earlier, a total of ten nanosoldiers had died this time. Ren Xiaosu took their sabers and put them away in his storage space. He was in no hurry to inspect them since he had to run back to the outpost.

When Ren Xiaosu took a detour and returned to the outpost, everyone there had already been startled by the explosions caused by the cluster grenades. They were all standing out in the open space in front of the outpost and discussing what might have just happened. Ren Xiaosu took advantage of the chaos and went over to the group to join the discussion with everyone else.

By the time Ren Xiaosu got back, Lin Qi and the other officers had still not made it back to the outpost yet. The off-road vehicles they arrived in were still parked there quietly.

But it wasn't long before the originally dignified-looking nanosoldiers sprinted out of the mountain path. They all looked miserable and pathetic.

They saw the outpost's soldiers chatting, and Ren Xiaosu was the first to rush over and ask, "What happened in the mountains just now? Are you all OK?"

Although Ren Xiaosu looked extremely sincere, why would Lin Qi and the officers care to answer a refugee like him?

"Make way." Lin Qi sneered as Ren Xiaosu stepped aside for him.

The outpost's soldiers watched as these nanosoldiers got back into their off-road vehicles and drove back down the mountain. Even though they didn't show it on their faces, people like Li Qingzheng could still sense the fear in them.

“There were more of them when they went into the mountains.” Wang Yuchi said, “I counted 48 of them earlier when they went in, but they only have 38 people now.”

Li Qingzheng nodded and said, “It looks like a battle broke out after they headed into the mountains. Was it with the wolf pack? Everyone, remember this carefully. We don’t know anything about the wolf pack lurking around here, understand? All of us ate the meat the wolves brought to us, so it won’t do any of us any good if this gets out.”

“Understood!” everyone at the outpost said in unison. They had somehow become a group that shared a secret.

In fact, psychologists had conducted studies into this a long time ago and came to the conclusion that people got closer if they shared a common secret.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu realized Hu Shuo had not stepped out of his house all this while. It was as though he wasn’t interested in the goings-on of the outside world.

But of course, there could also be another possibility, and that was Hu Shuo not wanting to break the status quo with everyone at the outpost.

Actually, any smart person who stayed here for a few days would surely know there was something fishy about this outpost. How else could the matter of the wolves sending meat over be explained?

What? Did the wolf pack have to pay a property tax to the outpost? That wouldn’t be believable at all!

But Hu Shuo did not seem too concerned about this and looked like he just wanted to spend the Lunar New Year here in peace.

After Lin Qi and the officers left, no one else came to the outpost again for the next two days. If it was really as Hu Shuo had said about the Li Consortium wanting to gather real combat data. The Li Consortium’s research laboratory was most likely working around the clock to analyze Captain Zhou and his platoon’s data.

But Ren Xiaosu knew that whatever would come could not be avoided. It was just a matter of time. He only hoped that the wolves had already taken the rest of their pack far away from here.

Hu Shuo continued holding classes as usual for Ren Xiaosu and the others during these two days. Everything was calm, as though nothing at all had happened. Moreover, Ren Xiaosu also kept his promise to not ask any questions in class for three days. This made Hu Shuo feel like there really was an air of festivity.

As for what this air of festivity was, it was probably being comfortable in both mind and body, the feeling of not having to work.

During dinner, Hu Shuo reminded Ren Xiaosu, “When you say you won’t ask questions for three days, that doesn’t mean you can save three days’ worth of questions to ask me on the fourth day. Don’t try any tricks, understand? It won’t work!”

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. He had not expected Hu Shuo to anticipate this and shut down his plan. Experience really did come with

age.

At this moment, Chen Wudi, who was eating next to them, asked, "I have a question I'd like your help with."

Hu Shuo looked to Chen Wudi and said kindly, "You're different from Ren Xiaosu, so ask away."

Chen Wudi nodded and said, "The height and diameter of a cone, SC, are equal, and the radius of SC and a cylinder, OM..." Chen Wudi then looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, "Master, I don't remember the rest of the question."

Ren Xiaosu patiently reminded him, "And the radius of SC and a cylinder, OM, are also equivalent, as are their volumes. What is the ratio of the curved surface area of SC and OM?"

Hu Shuo looked up into the starry sky and said with a sigh, "You're... just... great..."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly said, "If you don't want to answer this question, then fine, I can ask a different question."

When Hu Shuo saw Ren Xiaosu being so serious, he turned around and looked at him. "Let me hear what you have to ask first."

"Who exactly are you?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Hu Shuo was a little taken aback. He suddenly realized this question was much simpler to answer than the other questions Ren Xiaosu had. Besides, he had not shied away from anything either. It wasn't like he couldn't say

it.

"I, Hu Shuo, served as director of the Li Consortium's 1st Army Group's Office of Special Investigations. My rank is lieutenant general, and I'm the interim overseer of Stronghold 108," Hu Shuo answered.

Ever since the incident at Stronghold 109, the Li Consortium quickly took over control of all the strongholds under them. The original stronghold overseers outside the organization had only remained in power because of an agreement between the corporations.

At that time, the organizations had only just started out and were not as powerful as now. They tried all sorts of ways to infiltrate into the strongholds and slowly grew their own armies. It wasn't until several decades later that the consortiums slowly became the true controllers of the various strongholds. But even after that happened, no one was willing to break the status quo.

Now that the Li Consortium had taken over all their various strongholds, they became the official owners of 11 strongholds. Moreover, the banks in these 11 strongholds started completely rejecting the

currencies of the other organizations. All of a sudden, the other organizations' currencies depreciated within these 11 strongholds.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt like he understood why Hu Shuo had maintained his neutrality all this while. Could it be that, as the current overseer of Stronghold 108, Hu Shuo was thinking of using other forces to weaken the Li Consortium's grip on power and achieve the goal of true authority for himself?

However, Hu Shuo looked at him and said with a smile, "I can guess what you're thinking. But the truth is that what you're looking at is just the surface. Perhaps you'll come to understand it one day. I'm looking forward to seeing your face when that happens."

Chapter 230 Another image down the drain

Based on the organizations' understanding of this world, superpowers were unique abilities that were like the DNA of each supernatural being. By matching superpowers, they could identify which supernatural being the power belonged to.

As a result, following the rescinding of the arrest warrant issued by the Qing Consortium, the Li Consortium had put Xu Xianchu on its wanted list.

Xu Xianchu's power was no secret, after all. Besides, back when Luo Lan was at Stronghold 109, he even enlisted Lu Yuan's help specifically to capture Xu Xianchu. As such, when Captain Zhou, Lin Qi, and the rest of the platoon returned to Stronghold 108 and debriefed, the head of the Li Consortium's army immediately realized that all of what had happened in the mountains must have been caused by Xu Xianchu!

As for why the wolf pack had moved from their original location, it was obvious that they must have sensed danger and shifted elsewhere in advance!

Furthermore, they could have been originally targeting the outpost Li Qingzheng was commanding, but it just so happened that the nanosoldiers inadvertently protected the outpost from disaster.

Thinking of it that way, everything started to make sense.

However, some officers in command of the Li Consortium's fighting forces realized from Captain Zhou's written statement that "Xu Xianchu" seemed to be gathering their Li Consortium's nanomachines!

The higher-ups of the organization were very clear about one thing. If anyone wanted to use the nanomachines, an encrypted pairing process would have to be carried out internally by the organization first. So why would Xu Xianchu, a supernatural being, want to get his hands on the nanomachines?

At this time, the powerful think tank of the organization began to analyze the situation. According to the existing intelligence they had, the Qing Consortium had issued arrest warrants for the trio of Xu Xianchu, Yang Xiaojin, and Luo Xinyu. Yang Xiaojin was confirmed as belonging to the Yang Consortium and the Saboteurs. She was from the bloodline of the Yang Consortium, while her status was that of a Saboteurs' member. The issue surrounding her status was slightly more complicated.

Since Xu Xianchu was wanted at the same time as Yang Xiaojin and Luo Xinyu, there was a high chance that Xu Xianchu was also affiliated with the Yang Consortium or the Saboteurs. However, all of the identified members of the Saboteurs so far were females. As such, Xu Xianchu was tentatively identified as a field agent of the Yang Consortium.

This information was very important as the Li Consortium had intel that proved their neurotech had fallen into the hands of the Yang Consortium after Stronghold 109 was brought down. That meant the Yang Consortium was also conducting full-scale tests and coordination on the usage of nanomachines on their end.

Now that Xu Xianchu had suddenly appeared in the vicinity of the Li Consortium's controlled area and was stealing their nanomachines, what did that entail? It meant the Yang Consortium might start a war against their Li Consortium!

In the vast room of the command center, dozens of the Li Consortium's officers were standing by and listening. When this conclusion came to light, everyone looked somber.

Seated at the round table was a middle-aged general. "We intended to strike first, but who could've guessed the Yang Consortium had even more urgency? Gentlemen, you represent the glory of the Li Consortium, so go back to your respective posts and prepare yourselves."

Someone asked, "What do we do about Xu Xianchu and the wolf pack?"

"Xu Xianchu probably ran far away from here after the previous attack. They're only after the samples of the nanomachines, so it isn't necessary for them to hang around after getting their hands on some," another person said. "The most important thing for us is still to clear out the Experimentals from Stronghold 109. Only by doing so can we stabilize the region behind us."

"Where's the combat brigade that was recently deployed there?" asked a white-haired general of the Li Consortium.

"They just arrived at the newly established forward operating base yesterday. But they haven't checked in with us yet today," a staff officer said.

"Get in touch with them," the general calmly ordered.

That staff officer immediately went out. But ten minutes later, he suddenly came running back and pushing open the door of the command center. "We've lost contact with the entire 4th Combat Brigade. We haven't been able to contact them since they left the FOB."

It fell silent in the command center. How could 4,500 people just disappear like that?

Ren Xiaosu, far away at the outpost, did not know anything of what had happened. Meanwhile, Xu Xianchu, further away at Stronghold 178, was even more unaware of the developments.

There was an air of joy at the outpost currently. As the Lunar New Year approached, the former refugees who did not even know when their next meal would come were suddenly treated with an abundance of meat every day. This was probably the best Lunar New Year every one of them had had.

After Lin Qi and the officers left, Ren Xiaosu thought a large force would come up the mountains to lay siege on the wolf pack again. But in the end, there were no signs of them at all.

However, there was a small group that headed into the mountains to try to recover the lost nanomachines. But just as the Li Consortium had expected, they discovered that the nanomachines were most likely already taken away by “Xu Xianchu.”

The only other people who came up to the mountains were Hu Shuo’s men. These people had not come here to report about work to him but to deliver some red paper, ink brushes, and ink.

When everyone first talked about putting up couplet decorations for the New Year, Hu Shuo had refused to write any, saying he had never written couplets before.

But surely they had to put up some couplets, right? There wouldn’t be any New Year festivities if there were no couplet decorations!

In the past, people would always put up couplets to celebrate the Lunar New Year. In the entire town, there were probably only one or two people who knew how to do calligraphy, or rather, only one or two people could get their hands on an ink brush.

Whenever the Lunar New Year rolled around, almost everyone in town would buy their own red paper and approach these “calligraphers” to help them write a couplet. It wasn’t expensive to do so, and payment would probably amount to only enough to buy one meal.

In this season, no one cared about such a small amount of money no matter how poor they were.

Here in the outpost, Hu Shuo was the only one who looked like a cultured person. If they didn’t get Hu Shuo to write the couplets, who else could they ask?

In the end, Hu Shuo could not refuse their constant requests. Thus, he ordered his men to send over some items that were used for writing couplets.

Hu Shuo set down a table in front of the outpost and put a pre-cut piece of red paper on it. Everyone in the outpost surrounded the table to watch. For the refugees, an ink brush felt really distant to them.

Next to Hu Shuo, someone said with a laugh, “Sir, you won’t charge us to write this couplet, right?”

Hu Shuo shot him a glance. “There’s no need to pay.”

“Your writing must look really nice,” someone flattered. Hu Shuo’s image on most days was a sagacious demeanor, and he looked like someone who excelled in the four arts[1].

Hu Shuo did not respond. He deliberated in front of the table for a very long time before writing: “To get rich, / Build roads first.[2]”

Ren Xiaosu silently looked at the ugly cursive words on the paper and lamented, “Never judge a book by its cover. These words you wrote and the image you portray don’t match at all.”

Hu Shuo was unhappy to hear that. “I already said that I didn’t want to write, but you all still made me do it. I’m already not charging for this. What more do you want?”

Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, “If you wrote this and wanted to put it up in my previous town, you’d have to pay others to do so.”

Hu Shuo stared at him. “All you know is how to criticize. Would it kill you to not speak?”

However, Ren Xiaosu was very puzzled. “You’re pretty learned and can teach rather well in math, physics, and chemistry. At the least, you’re much better than that Mr. Zhang in my previous town. But who would write something like ‘To get rich, / Build roads first’ for a couplet? What’s more, your handwriting... looks a little crooked!”

Hu Shuo felt wronged and speechless. His image had gone down the drain!