

First Order 251

Chapter 251 Crazy plants!

Ren Xiaosu was squatting in the snow. The blizzard had become terrifyingly heavy. However, he did not at all care because he was fully focused on the seeds he had just planted into the ground.

After planting the Bramble, Ren Xiaosu had traded for another five seeds.

There were about ten different types of seeds in the window slot of the vending machine. But after inserting the gratitude tokens, the vending machine dispensed another four Bramble seeds and one khaki-colored seed.

It seemed that Seeds was similar to the Explosive Poker item that he had. It was easier for him to get his hands on the more common seeds. When he traded for Explosive Poker, three and four were the most common cards dispensed by the vending machine. Occasionally, it would also dispense out one or two 5s, but Ren Xiaosu had never seen any higher-numbered cards than that.

The Brambles behaved in a very aggressive manner. Ren Xiaosu reckoned that if supernatural beings entered its attack range, few people would survive an attack. So Ren Xiaosu was still quite satisfied with this new product.

But what use did this khaki-colored seed have?

After this seed was planted, it sprouted at a much slower rate. It wasn't until ten minutes later that green buds started sprouting out of the ground.

He could see the buds starting to grow. But even at this point, the plant did not seem like anything special.

A moment later, Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He watched a pocketlike structure form at the top of the plant. His mental consciousness then connected with it.

When Ren Xiaosu focused his mind, a potato about the size of a fist shot out at high speed from the pocketlike structure of the plant. It was just like firing an artillery shell.

This was... a potato shooter!

What the hell! Ren Xiaosu was speechless. He already understood how this plant worked through its connection with his consciousness. It turned out to be an automatic rifle of the plant kingdom that could shoot up to 30 potatoes each day.

Ren Xiaosu felt that it couldn't get any more useless than this. Any automatic rifle would be more powerful than this thing, alright? Guns could not only shoot faster, they were also more lethal than this.

It seemed like other than being automatically alert to its surroundings, there was nothing else good about it.

Moreover, wouldn't it be a waste to spit out all those potatoes? They were food after all!

Ren Xiaosu suddenly looked at the Potato Shooter: "Spit out the potatoes for me."

The Potato Shooter spat out the remaining 29 potatoes that it had stored underground. Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips. "High-speed food production, that's pretty useful. We can have potatoes for dinner tonight."

Even the palace did not expect Ren Xiaosu to use an offensive plant like this as a food crop.

But all of a sudden, he heard the crunching of snow coming from across the way. Ren Xiaosu immediately raised his guard. Someone was walking over from the opposite side!

Currently, the rest of the Li Consortium's regular forces were garrisoned at the front line at Mt. Fengyi. What regular force would venture out into these mountains for no apparent reason? Everyone would travel by the main roads, and only special forces like the Divine Arms Battalion would trek through mountains and rivers.

Could they be from the Divine Arms Battalion as well? But they were not moving in the same direction.

If so... they must be enemies!

Ren Xiaosu quietly withdrew. When he stepped on the snowy ground, he used the tiptoes so he would not make a sound.

He retreated to a distance far away and hid behind a large tree. There shouldn't be that many enemy troops and they were most probably just a scouting party. The only thing he did not know was whether they were from the Qing Consortium or the Yang Consortium.

He saw 30 people walking cautiously in the snow in a long single file. They had people taking turns to forge a path in the snow as they moved along like wolves.

Ren Xiaosu waited for them to enter the range of the Brambles. This way he could also observe how the plant actually worked.

But the enemy was pretty astute too. The snowfall was not heavy enough to conceal Ren Xiaosu's footprints in the time it took for him to hide. So the advance party immediately stopped in their tracks when they saw his footprints.

The entire troop immediately fanned out in the snow so they could take control of their surroundings.

"Be careful, someone was here just now!"

"Judging by the tracks in the snow, they must have decided to leave after hearing our footsteps."

"Did our plan get leaked?"

"I'm not sure, but look for the tango's trail. It should only be one person!"

Ren Xiaosu was a little disappointed. They just needed to come a little closer and they would have stepped into the attack radius of the Brambles. The Brambles had an attack range of dozens of meters.

However, Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. Although the Brambles were in a fixed spot, he could control the Potato Shooter to initiate an attack!

Ren Xiaosu focused his mind and controlled the Potato Shooter to attack in an attempt to test its power, but he found it did not respond to him.

Was this a fucking fake? Why wasn't it shooting any potatoes?

Oh wait, he had already taken all the potatoes and put them into his backpack. So it wasn't the Potato Shooter that was to blame...

Ren Xiaosu was certain by now that these were the combat troops of the Qing Consortium after watching them from afar. Although he was on familiar terms with Fatty Luo, neither of them would hold back if they bumped into each other on the battlefield. War is war.

Furthermore, weren't Qing Zhen and Luo Lan under house arrest now? So these soldiers wouldn't have anything to do with them, right?

Suddenly, the Qing Consortium's combat troops switched on the flashlights attached to their automatic rifles. With the light illuminating the snow, they followed Ren Xiaosu's footprints and locked onto a large tree he was taking cover behind.

In the deep snow, there was no way of hiding those footprints. Unless Ren Xiaosu could fly.

To be honest, Ren Xiaosu did not expect the Qing Consortium's troops to be so careful and vigilant. The Qing Consortium's troops looked at one another and said, "Affirmative, it's only one person."

"Don't let him escape in case he exposes our whereabouts by reporting it," the platoon commander said calmly. As long as they were certain it was only one person, it would be easy to handle.

"Don't shoot yet. There might be troops nearby. This isn't a place where refugees would appear. It could be a nanosoldier from the Divine Arms Battalion that we're facing."

The Qing Consortium's combat troops carefully analyzed Ren Xiaosu's possible identity and motives in order to determine their next course of action.

They only came here after receiving intel that suggested the Divine Arms Battalion had disappeared shortly after setting off for this location. They expected the enemy would appear in these forested mountains.

As they discussed, someone attached a silencer to their muzzle. As the advance party, they couldn't alert their enemies. The battle would have to be fought quickly in secret.

"Advance!" The platoon commander said, "Adopt Offensive Approach Formation."

Under normal circumstances, the advance guard would generally only adopt three types of battle formations. One was the basic approach formation where the entire platoon would stand in a straight line with the lead person holding his gun up at full alert and aiming ahead, while the rest of the rear platoon members would keep their guards up and point their guns at the left and right flanks. The other was the defensive approach formation where one combatant would guard the platoon's rear by aiming their rifle in the opposite direction of advance.

Meanwhile, the offensive approach formation would have all the members advance in a staggered manner where the first, second, and third combatants would be at full alert and aim ahead. The second and third members would stand at staggered positions to the left and right rear behind the first member to provide covering fire.

Chapter 252 An old friend, Tang Zhou!

The Qing Consortium's troops advanced in a tactical formation. However, Ren Xiaosu still did not come out from behind the large tree as he was waiting

Although the campsite was about 500 meters to his rear, Ren Xiaosu didn't want to go back to call for reinforcements. After all, there was no one there he could count on other than Chen Wudi.

Jiang Wu's students would definitely be more than willing to help him, but the key thing was that the eight of them were intellectuals and they might not even know how to hold a rifle.

As for a group like the private troops, how could he possibly count on those incompetent people?

But what Ren Xiaosu was waiting for was for the Qing Consortium's troops to come a little closer!

When the Qing Consortium's combat troops stepped into the range of the Brambles, Ren Xiaosu was not in a hurry to make the vines attack. Instead, he waited quietly for this entire platoon to get into range.

Other than the spot Ren Xiaosu had dug up for the seed to sprout, the rest of the vines were concealed under the thick snow.

Just as the Qing Consortium's troops entered the attack radius, someone realized something was wrong. "Hang on, it feels like we're stepping on something."

Someone crouched down and cleared away the snow to reveal the brambles on the ground. "These crimson brambles look a little strange. I've never seen a plant like it before."

"Strange plants like this one are increasing by the day, so nothing is surprising about them. Don't tell me they can even attack people?" a soldier said as he cast a glance at it before resuming his watch on the surroundings.

However, the platoon commander frowned. "There's something odd about this. Don't move any further. We're withdrawing!"

Ren Xiaosu was surprised while hiding behind a tree that was a few dozen meters away. He did not expect the Qing Consortium troops to be so careful. Weren't they being overly cautious? Weren't they just some plants found in the wilderness? 'What are y'all so afraid of!'

Ren Xiaosu found it a little pitiful. The enemies had presented themselves to him, yet he did not even manage to kill a single one of them.

But what Ren Xiaosu didn't know was that these were the elite troops sent by Qing Yun to intercept the Divine Arms Battalion and that they were also very well-known throughout the entire Qing Consortium. These were just the scouting party, while the main force behind them were currently reorganizing.

How could a fighting force confident enough to inflict heavy damage upon the Divine Arms' nanosoldiers fall for a trap so easily?

If he had not incapacitated the Potato Shooter, he could have tested its capabilities.

The commander of the platoon suddenly said, "Friend, are you part of the Li Consortium's troops?"

When Ren Xiaosu heard this voice, he was stunned. "Tang Zhou?!"

The platoon commander was stunned as well. "Ren Xiaosu?!"

If there had been no interaction, then so be it. But now that the enemy had said something, it turned out to be someone he knew?

Previously, Tang Zhou had sent Qing Zhen and Luo Lan back to Stronghold 111 with the off-road vehicle. As soon as they got back there, Qing Zhen and Luo Lan were placed under house arrest by the Board. Meanwhile, Tang Zhou was deployed to the frontline troops where he reported directly to the forward operating base at Mt. Daping.

After he was reassigned to work under Qing Yun's troops, Qing Yun knew he still remained loyal to Luo Lan. So Qing Yun demoted him from the rank of captain to platoon commander and sent him to this elite force as a scout.

Many of the soldiers in this force used to be under Qing Zhen's command. Qing Yun had sent them here on the pretext of "intercepting" the Divine Arms Battalion, but how were they supposed to retreat from this place after successfully intercepting the Divine Arms Battalion?

Importantly, the Li Consortium had stationed their combat troops at the front lines of Mt. Fengyi, Mt. Shuanglong, and Mt. Tantou. Once the Divine Arms Battalion got involved in a battle there, the entire Li Consortium would launch an unbridled counterattack on these troops of the Qing Consortium.

Even if they ended up becoming heroes in the Qing Consortium's history books, they definitely wouldn't walk out of this mountain range alive!

So Qing Zhen immediately sent Qing Yun's trusted troops to negotiate with the Li Consortium after seizing command from him. What everyone was doing was essentially the same thing: removing dissidents from around them.

It was not to say that it was a cruel thing to do, but that war itself was very cruel anyway. If they could not maintain control of their leadership over the military, they could not win the war.

At this moment, Tang Zhou was still unaware that Qing Zhen had seized command of the military. When they were sent out here, Qing Yun did not even equip them with satellite phones or radio sets for communicating with headquarters. That was why when Qing Zhen asked if he could recall this platoon, the second-in-command had said, "It's too late."

Ren Xiaosu and Tang Zhou were on pretty good terms when they were still at Stronghold 109, and Tang Zhou also helped them out a lot. Since it was Tang Zhou who was here, this created an immediate opportunity for negotiations to ease the current situation.

Earlier, Ren Xiaosu was wondering why this platoon was so difficult to deal with. Just a few brambles on the ground was all it took to attract their attention? Now that he realized they were Luo Lan and Qing Zhen's troops, he suddenly felt "enlightened."

In his opinion, the men under Qing Zhen and Luo Lan were all elite soldiers with no cowards among them.

Ren Xiaosu shouted, "Come over here alone, let's talk!"

He wasn't willing to go over. After all, Tang Zhou was not the only person on their side. What if the others decided to shoot at him indiscriminately?

When Tang Zhou heard that, he was ready to step over the brambles to Ren Xiaosu when someone next to him whisper-shouted, "Platoon Commander, you mustn't go over! What if he's tricking you to get you over there?"

Tang Zhou shook his head. "Don't worry, we're old friends."

"Even old friends can change," someone reminded him anxiously. "Don't believe him so easily."

Tang Zhou smiled and said, "Don't worry, I trust him. Didn't I tell you guys before that Boss Luo and I were saved by someone while escaping from Stronghold 113 after it collapsed? He's the person who saved us. He and Boss Luo are good friends too... uh, I'm not exactly sure if they can be considered good friends."

Everyone around him was stunned by the impact of this twist as it proved a little too much for them to handle. So the other party was Tang Zhou's savior? But the real question was, why had he appeared at this place? What was he doing here squatting in the snow in the middle of the night by himself? Playing in the snow?

Tang Zhou carefully avoided stepping on the brambles and walked towards the large tree where Ren Xiaosu was. Ren Xiaosu got a little emotional as it felt rather nice to be trusted by others. Tang Zhou actually dared to come over by himself!

"Long time no see, what are you doing here?" When Tang Zhou reached the tree, he saw Ren Xiaosu standing there. He chuckled. "Is that the Divine Arms uniform you're wearing?"

Ren Xiaosu looked at him. "Let's sit down and talk."

Tang Zhou and Ren Xiaosu sat down crossed-legged on the snow. Tang Zhou placed his rifle aside and said, "Does this mean you've joined the Li Consortium?"

"Join them? My ass!" Ren Xiaosu said, "I fled with the escapees from Stronghold 109 and ended up getting conscripted into their military."

"Hahaha," Tang Zhou laughed. "But you're not yet as miserable as me. I've been sent here to die."

"Sent here to die?" Ren Xiaosu wondered, "What do you mean?"

"Currently, someone called Qing Yun is in charge of our military forces. Mr. Qing Zhen and Boss Luo have been placed under house arrest at the villa in Stronghold 111 and are stuck there for the time being. I was immediately demoted after transferring to Qing Yun's forces, and he also placed many of Mr. Qing Zhen's former men in the force and made us come to intercept your Divine Arms Battalion."

Ren Xiaosu reacted with a strange expression. "Then y'all are heading in the wrong direction. I'm not from the Divine Arms Battalion; I'm just a part of the private troops..."

Chapter 253 Quadruple identity, Ren Xiaosu!

Ren Xiaosu explained patiently to Tang Zhou, "I was conscripted into the private army. On the way here, those bastards from the Divine Arms Battalion suddenly stopped us and demanded to exchange their uniforms with us. They even took the trucks we were traveling in, leaving us with no choice but to trek through the wilderness of the mountains on foot. They're also making us hurry on with the journey in such heavy snowfall..."

Ren Xiaosu related all that had happened, dumbfounding Tang Zhou. "So it was like that? It seems like the intel we received was wrong. But it's already a little too late to pursue them now. We'd have to cross several military zones to get to them, but we can't possibly get past those places."

"Why do you still want to go there then?" Ren Xiaosu asked puzzledly. "Shouldn't you already know that even if you manage to intercept the Divine Arms Battalion, you're unlikely to return alive regardless of whether y'all can emerge victorious against them?"

Tang Zhou said with a serious look, "It's my duty to obey orders. As frontline soldiers, we can't have such thoughts. We might not return alive, but as long as it's for the sake of victory in war..."

Ren Xiaosu sighed. "I can't understand this sense of belonging that you have, but it isn't like the Qing Consortium is treating you that well either."

"No, it would be humiliating for Boss Luo if I suffer a defeat at the front line and news gets out that it was his soldiers who messed up the mission." Tang Zhou said, "Since they have been confined in Stronghold 111, I have to do well on their behalf."

"Alright then." Ren Xiaosu lamented, "It looks like your relationship with Fatty Luo is pretty sincere. But since there's no way to attack the Divine Arms Battalion, why don't you just withdraw from here? Go back and talk to the Qing Consortium's commanding officer. Tell them not to send over any more of the remaining troops to Mt. Fengyi, lest I get hurt."

Tang Zhou was stunned. "We can't get in contact with HQ right now. When we came out here, we were prepared to die. If we can't complete the mission, we won't have the dignity to go back."

Ren Xiaosu felt that if there were more people like Tang Zhou in the Qing Consortium, they would probably win any battle they participated in.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "How many people are there in your force?"

"300 or so." Tang Zhou said, "It wouldn't be convenient to move around in the mountains if we had too many people. Otherwise, we could easily get discovered by enemies."

Ren Xiaosu snapped, "Then why the fuck are y'all even planning to fight the Divine Arms Battalion? They have over a 1,000 people there!"

"That can't be right." Tang Zhou was stunned for a while. "Didn't they say the Divine Arms' main force has been deployed to the front line at Mt. Ping to face the Yang Consortium? Our intel says there's only over a 100 of them out here."

"I think that was also part of their plans. The commander of the private troops was also surprised by this fact." Ren Xiaosu replied, "Your intel is definitely not accurate. I've seen them with my own eyes, so I'm certain."

"Then we're done for." Tang Zhou sighed and said, "We can't complete our mission."

However, Ren Xiaosu felt a tinge of regret as he chatted with Tang Zhou. He had been harping on how he was here to investigate spies as a part of his Office of Special Investigations duties, but in the end, he was the one who exposed the Divine Arms Battalion's plans in an instant...

Ren Xiaosu pondered this. From the Li Consortium's point of view, wasn't he doing what a spy would do?

He could not have expected he would have to bear the burden of all these unwanted identities at his young age. He was a member of the Divine Arms Battalion, the private army, the Office of Special Investigations, and also a spy of the Qing Consortium...

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "Can everyone in your platoon be trusted?"

"Don't worry." Tang Zhou whispered, "They're all our people. It's not only this platoon, but all of the elite troops who're on our side, other than the commander, second-in-command, and a few of their men. Besides, the commander was also sent here just because Qing Yun doesn't like him."

"Our people" was probably referring to those who were loyal to Qing Zhen and Luo Lan.

Ren Xiaosu said, "Why don't we do it this way? Y'all wait and take cover here in the mountains. I'll lead some of the Li Consortium's troops over when I encounter those who I think you might be capable of defeating."

Tang Zhou's eyes lit up. "You can do that?"

Currently, Ren Xiaosu's plan was to see whether the Divine Arms Battalion could be beaten to retreat from the main battlefield to reorganize if the Qing Consortium knew their whereabouts. If the Divine Arms Battalion's numbers were abruptly reduced after suffering heavy casualties, he could have a chance at collecting their nanomachines.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Tang Zhou. "If you have a satellite phone, can you get in touch with HQ and relay the intel?"

Tang Zhou hesitated for a moment before saying, "Yes, but we don't have one."

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "That's fine, I have one."

To be exact, Ren Xiaosu was not saying that he had one, but that the five officers from the Divine Arms Battalion had one.

Ren Xiaosu felt that he was really going further and further down the path of colluding with the enemy this time.

At night, it was quite lively at the private troops' campsite. Li Qingzheng and the others took quite a bit of effort to start the campfire. Although a lot of smoke was produced at the beginning, it was nothing compared to keeping themselves warm.

If no one started a campfire, the entire campsite would have just gotten through the night as it was. But after Li Qingzheng and company set up a campfire, the others got so envious they also went to build one. Suddenly, the entire campsite began to light up.

Not only could they keep themselves warm with the campfire, but they were also able to roast the buns they had brought with them. If they still continued to eat their food cold in this sort of weather, it would really make them feel cold on both the inside and outside.

When Ren Xiaosu returned, Li Qingzheng and the others were chatting by the campfire. Li Qingzheng's first reaction when he saw Ren Xiaosu was to ask, "Xiaosu, where's the wild boar? You didn't manage to catch it?"

"Wild boar?" Ren Xiaosu then recalled the reason he had given Chen Wudi. "Oh, right, I didn't manage to catch it. It was too fast and I didn't want to venture out too far."

"Here, have a bite." Li Qingzheng handed Ren Xiaosu a burnt bun and said, "Earlier on, the people from Divine Arms said we'll be setting up camp here. We'll resume our journey northwards to Mt. Fengyi after the snow stops falling."

"OK," Ren Xiaosu acknowledged absentmindedly. The thing going through his mind right now was how to get his hands on the satellite phone from the Divine Arms Battalion. It wouldn't be easy to obtain it from them. The Divine Arms soldiers kept the satellite phone close to them and never let it out of their sights.

It looked like there was no other choice but to kill these officers of the Divine Arms Battalion. It wouldn't be a bad solution since he had been eyeing the nanomachines in their bodies for some time now. Moreover, Ren Xiaosu felt these regular troops of the Divine Arms Battalion would have more nanomachines in them than Lin Qi's group!

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu called some of Jiang Wu's students over to the side and asked, "What have y'all been studying recently? Have you learned anything related to mechanics? If —and I'm just saying if-y'all are required to design some simple armor, could you do it?"

Ren Xiaosu disliked the idea of having nanomachines inside his body to support himself like the Divine Arms soldiers did. His own body was strong enough, but he lacked a defense system. So he only used the nanomachines in his body to form a simple armor that covered his body. There were no complexities he adopted for the structure of the armor. But now Ren Xiaosu was wondering if he should start relying on the power of knowledge.

Didn't Zhang Jinglin always used to say that knowledge could change one's fate?

The student named Wang Yuchi gave it some thought before saying, "It's a little beyond what we know since it could involve mechanical belt drives, screw drives, chain drives, worm drives, hydraulic drives, pneumatic drives—"

"Don't tell me what I can't understand," interrupted Ren Xiaosu. "All I'm asking is whether y'all know or not?"

Wang Yuchi said calmly, "Yes."

Chapter 254 Hunting nanosoldiers

Ren Xiaosu knew Wang Yuchi and his classmates were all top students. In order to get into university, they had long since started picking up knowledge beyond their level. But he constantly wondered what a few high school students were capable of. However, Ren Xiaosu realized now that he had underestimated Jiang Wu's students. Jiang Wu had used her life, dignity, and principles to protect them, and they had not embarrassed her.

Wang Yuchi thought for a moment and said, "It's impossible to ask us to design something too intricate. All we can do is try to reduce drag as much as possible and do our best to further improve on the design of the mechanical transmission structure—"

"You don't have to explain it, that'll be enough!" Ren Xiaosu gave a wave of his hand. "Design a rough draft first, then improve on it after y'all get the chance to further your studies!"

"But, Monitor, I don't really understand you. Why do you want such a thing?" Wang Yuchi raised his doubts, "First, we don't have the materials. Second, the power source of this armor—"

Ren Xiaosu gave another wave of his hand. "Don't worry about that. We'll definitely have it!"

Ren Xiaosu knew very well that the problems raised by Wang Yuchi were actually solvable with the use of the nanomachines. However, he could not tell Wang Yuchi the truth as of yet.

Wang Yuchi and the other students just stared dumbfoundedly at Ren Xiaosu. Forget it, there was no need to explain any further.

The students could guess their class monitor had probably discovered something good again. Was he going to take advantage of someone again?

When Ren Xiaosu looked at the nearby officers of the Divine Arms Battalion again, it felt as though he was looking at his brand-new armor.

Ren Xiaosu had already come up with a new plan. If Tang Zhou could relay the news back successfully, there would only be a few routes from the main battlefield that the Divine Arms Battalion could retreat by. He would need to figure out the situation in these coming days before making his move so that he could successfully collect enough nanomachines for his armor. But he wondered how strong Tang Zhou and his men's combat capabilities were. They shouldn't be too weak, right?

The heavy snow had been falling nonstop in the forested mountains. It wasn't only snowing on the Li Consortium's side; all three organizations were stranded in their various battlefields by the heavy snowfall.

As the roads were blocked by the deep snow, no vehicles could pass through. In some places, the snow even reached crotch level on the soldiers. It was impossible to fight a war in these conditions.

The snow was the true weapon of mass destruction here.

The impasse on the battlefield that had been like the hot barrel of a just fired machine gun was suddenly cooled down by the snow.

Ren Xiaosu and everyone else at the campsite were taking shelter in their tents. No one was willing to go outside to make a trail in the snow, not even the Divine Arms officers.

Ren Xiaosu was the only person who went out every night until the morning when he came back to sleep. While he slept, Chen Wudi would keep watch by his side. No one was able to get close to him.

Over the past few days, many people eat all their rations of buns. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu would return carrying a lot of potatoes with him every day. He would bring back 28 or 29 potatoes each time. In any case, their group would definitely have something to eat every day. However, no one knew where Ren Xiaosu had dug the potatoes up from.

As a matter of fact, their platoon did not seem like they had ever lacked any food.

When Ren Xiaosu woke up, Li Qingzheng asked curiously, "Xiaosu, what have you been busy with for the past few days? Why are you always going out when evening comes?"

Ren Xiaosu said tiredly, "I've been digging for potatoes for y'all. We can't just rest on our laurels, now can we?"

When he said that, the entire platoon of soldiers was moved to tears. "Platoon Commander, you are such a good person! Thank you, Platoon Commander!"

As Ren Xiaosu watched his number of gratitude tokens increase again, he knew he was getting closer to unlocking his new weapon.

In reality, he had not been going out to dig up potatoes. Instead, he was meeting up with Tang Zhou every night to discuss their upcoming plans.

Tang Zhou and his men had a detailed map of the battlefield, which saved Ren Xiaosu a lot of trouble. But after looking at the map, Ren Xiaosu still thought it would be safer if he personally made a trip to check out the locations. As such, he had been going around for the past two days to the best ambush sites located near two routes they identified the Divine Arms Battalion would retreat by.

This action moved Tang Zhou to tears. "Xiaosu, you're really a good friend of our Qing Consortium!"

Ren Xiaosu looked at Tang Zhou and said, "I'm going to steal the satellite phone for y'all tomorrow. Do you think Qing Zhen and Luo Lan still stand a chance of making a comeback? I found that it was pretty nice being friends with Luo Lan."

"They will." Tang Zhou replied decisively, "Mr. Qing Zhen and Boss Luo definitely won't remain under house arrest for long. We're all waiting for that day."

"Fatty Luo will be very touched if he hears you say that." Ren Xiaosu said, "We'll meet here again tomorrow evening. I'll give you the satellite phone then."

The meeting place they had chosen was a little further away from where Ren Xiaosu had planted the Brambles as he feared he would get seen.

"Didn't you say there's five of those nanosoldiers?" Tang Zhou asked, "Do you need us to assist you?"

As Ren Xiaosu turned to leave, he said, "No need, I have Chen Wudi by my side."

Ren Xiaosu was not actually planning on letting Chen Wudi do anything this time, but he had to say that to Tang Zhou. After all, it would not be easy to deal with five nanosoldiers. Even though he had a good relationship with the Qing Consortium, he still did not want them to gain a clear idea of his powers.

When the next morning arrived, Ren Xiaosu walked back to the campsite with a rabbit held tightly in his arms. Everyone could see Ren Xiaosu's figure from afar.

Someone stood at the entrance of the campsite and exclaimed, "Where did he catch that rabbit? It's so big!"

The Divine Arms officers were also starting to run out of field rations. Besides, how could eating field rations every day be better than barbecue? So when these officers saw the rabbit in Ren Xiaosu's arms, their eyes popped out of their skulls.

But all of a sudden, the huge rabbit in Ren Xiaosu's arms started struggling. Then Ren Xiaosu fell to his ass in the snow as though overwhelmed by its struggle. The rabbit leaped and bounded away!

A Divine Arms officer said anxiously, "Why didn't you hold it more tightly!?"

Ren Xiaosu anxiously said, "Chase after it, quick! If you don't, I'll have caught it in vain!"

When the five officers of the Divine Arms Battalion heard that, they didn't think too much and just activated the nanomachines in their bodies. Their explosive speed was even faster than that of the rabbit!

Ren Xiaosu watched from behind with eyes narrowed. These troops truly had more nanomachines in their bodies, judging by the fact that Lin Qi could not even reach such a speed.

A large group of people at the campsite pursued in the direction of the fleeing rabbit against the falling snow. But at this moment, a surprising turn of events took place. They saw a big, red net of brambles suddenly enclosing on the spot where the five officers were standing and trapping them!

The thorns of the brambles immediately pierced their skin. But more terrifying was the officers seemingly having their blood sucked out by the thorns into the vines!

The officers of the Divine Arms Battalion gave their all and tore through the red net. The five of them fell out of it and gasped violently for air. But before they could recover from their shock, another wave of crimson vines on the ground attacked!

There was seemingly no end to the number of crimson vines!

All of those who were following in pursuit behind them retreated in fright when they saw this terrifying sight!

Chapter 255 Cooperating for a win-win situation

The crimson vines were savage and horrifying. These Divine Arms nanosoldiers were resorting to using the strength of their nanomachines to tear themselves out of this terrifying plant's grasp. But every time they broke free from some of the vines, new ones would wrap around them again. The sharp thorns on the vines pricked into these officers' bodies and attempted to suck out every last drop of blood from them.

But the most frightening thing about these brambles was the endlessness. It felt as though there was no end to them regardless of how they tried to tear through it all.

None of the private soldiers who caught up dared to go forward and rescue them. The moment they saw those brambles, they started to back off together. Some of them even fell into the snow in their panic.

Only Ren Xiaosu knew that these Brambles were not as strong as they looked. Although they were weakening the Divine Arms officers by drawing out their blood, they didn't have an infinite number of branches.

At this moment, one of the Brambles had all of its branches completely torn away.

However, Ren Xiaosu had planted four seeds all in the same location just for assurance.

When the officers of the Divine Arms Battalion felt their strength getting sapped, they shouted to the private soldiers, "Come and save us!"

But how would a mob like the private troops be willing to go forward to help? It was more likely they would run away than help!

When Ren Xiaosu saw this, he heaved a sigh of relief. He was most worried that some of the private troops would go and attempt to save them. After all, no matter how strong the four Brambles were, they couldn't possibly stand up to nearly a 1,000 people ripping at them.

The officers of the Divine Arms Battalion only had themselves to blame as they did not once help the private troops during the entire journey. So everyone watched from the sidelines when they saw the officers in distress. Some people were even gloating in their fear.

Ren Xiaosu blended into the crowd and watched impassively. This incident could be considered a test of the Brambles' power. He believed they would definitely come out on top if facing a single, lone nanosoldier.

Although the Brambles were effectively fixed to a spot and could only be used as a trap, it was cost-effective enough since it only took one gratitude token to get a chance at finishing off a nanosoldier.

The only thing that Ren Xiaosu was unsure of was whether there were even more powerful nanosoldiers within the ranks of the Li Consortium's military.

Yes, there would certainly be more.

But in terms of their ranks, these five officers were not high ranking at all. As such, there had to be even stronger nanosoldiers in the Li Consortium.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu whisper-shouted within the crowd, "Run! Head back to the campsite and take cover!"

Although he did not shout very loudly, it seemed like the "run" he uttered had some sort of a magic to it. It made everyone run back to the campsite as fast as they could, as though they would be safe if they just hid there.

Ren Xiaosu did not hang around since he would have plenty of time to collect the nanomachines later on in the night. As of this moment, he didn't need to rush things. It would be bad if he somehow revealed his intentions here.

Meanwhile, the GPS device and satellite phone were also being held onto by one of the officers of the Divine Arms Battalion. When Ren Xiaosu collected the nanomachines later, he could take them together and give them to Tang Zhou.

When they got back to their tent, Li Qingzheng was still in a state of shock. "Xiaosu, what the hell was that? It was way too scary!"

Ren Xiaosu panted, "Yeah, I was scared to death too!"

"Do you think those Divine Arms officers will survive?" Li Qingzheng asked.

“I think it unlikely. When I was running back here, I saw them already running out of strength when I turned around to look. It won’t be possible for them to break free from those vines,” a member of the platoon said.

At this moment, everyone was not really concerned about whether the officers of the Divine Arms Battalion survived. Or rather, most people at the campsite couldn’t wish more for the Divine Arms officers to get killed by the brambles. Their relationship had started on bad terms. Furthermore, if the officers managed to survive, they would definitely blame them for not trying to rescue them.

Everyone at the campsite was sticking their heads in the sand. When night fell, some soldiers from the reinforced company went to everyone’s tents to force collusion.

The soldiers from the reinforced company came to Ren Xiaosu and his platoon’s tent and threatened, “When the officers of the Divine Arms Battalion went chasing after the rabbit, they were so fast that we couldn’t catch up to them. After we arrived at their location, it was too late.”

This group of people were afraid of getting punished by the Li Consortium. As such, they chose to collude with nearly a 1,000 other people in grand fashion. Not only that, the soldiers of the reinforced company even threatened them by saying, “If anyone mentions a word about this, it will not end well for everyone here. So if you’re smart, you better keep your trap shut!”

Ren Xiaosu wanted to thank the soldiers of the reinforced company.

The Divine Arms officer who knew Ren Xiaosu’s true identity as a member of the Office of Special Investigations was dead, but the soldiers of the reinforced company were unaware. Otherwise, they would not have dared to threaten him like this.

On the very same night, Ren Xiaosu secretly went to where the Divine Arms Battalion soldiers had died. This time, the amount of nanomachines he harvested was far beyond his expectations. Just from the five of them, he gathered enough nanomachines to complete the armor on two of his arms.

Indeed, the regulars of the Divine Arms Battalion were incomparable with Lin Qi and his group of cannon fodder.

When Ren Xiaosu headed north with the satellite phone, Tang Zhou was waiting there for him. The first thing Ren Xiaosu did when he saw Tang Zhou was to remind him, “Remember to only talk about the Divine Arms Battalion after getting in touch with your HQ. Don’t mention anything about me. I’ll be in deep trouble if the Li Consortium has a spy planted on your Qing Consortium’s side!”

“Yes, yes.” Tang Zhou nodded happily and said, “I definitely won’t reveal anything about you. I still know about the principles of protecting our spies.”

Ren Xiaosu felt that something was wrong with his wording. When did he become a spy of the Qing Consortium?

He reminded again, “Remember to tell your HQ to not kill all of the Divine Arms soldiers. Otherwise, our cooperation ends here.”

Ren Xiaosu could not handle the Divine Arms Battalion by himself. After all, they had a 1,000 people in total. Therefore, if he wanted to get his hands on more nanomachines, he would have to first wear down the entire formation of the Divine Arms Battalion with the help of the Qing Consortium.

This was his true purpose in cooperating with Tang Zhou. As for whether they could continue cooperating in the future, that would have to depend on whether the cooperation with the Qing Consortium goes well this time.

At this moment, Tang Zhou said with some hesitation, "You know that I was banished out here, so Qing Yun might not listen to me. He would wish for nothing more than to kill the entire Divine Arms Battalion since that would bring him great honors. It's a good opportunity for him to establish his credibility in the military."

"Then can we lie to him a little?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "Can't we just tell him that there are only a 100 people in the Divine Arms Battalion?"

Tang Zhou shook his head and said, "If I said it in that manner, there would be Qing Consortium soldiers who would die for nothing. Those soldiers are innocent. And if Boss Luo and Mr. Qing Zhen learned of this, they certainly wouldn't spare me."

Ren Xiaosu pondered this before saying, "Or you can just tell me where the Divine Arms Battalion will meet their end in battle?"

Tang Zhou was stunned. "Why do you want to know?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "As comrades, I would like to mourn their deaths."

Tang Zhou was speechless. What nonsense was this? Mourning for his comrades after sending them to their deaths? Tang Zhou was not convinced by what Ren Xiaosu just said at all. He was not stupid!

Chapter 256 Ambushing the Divine Arms Battalion

After agreeing on what time to meet the next day, they went their separate ways.

Some people at the private troops' campsite did not even dare to step out of their tents after seeing how the Divine Arms officers were killed by the Brambles. None of them were willing to go out and look for food even though they were starving.

At this moment, the ground was covered with a thick layer of snow. They did not know whether there were still more of the Brambles buried under it. If they took a wrong step, it would result in their deaths.

But this was exactly what Ren Xiaosu wanted so it would be more convenient for him to act alone.

When Ren Xiaosu went out to meet Tang Zhou the next night, Tang Zhou said ecstatically the moment they met, "Boss Luo and Mr. Qing Zhen have succeeded in seizing command of the military. They're the ones calling the shots in the military now!"

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Didn't you say they were under house arrest at Stronghold 111?"

"It's like this," Tang Zhou explained, "Boss Luo and Mr. Qing Zhen were sent to serve as military advisors. When they got there, they killed Qing Yun, and Mr. Qing Zhen took over as commanding officer of the Qing Consortium's military on the front lines."

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. "That can happen? Is no one going to oppose them?"

"If they send someone else to replace Qing Yun at this time, the Qing Consortium would probably not be able to take part in the war anymore," Tang Zhou analyzed. "If the Yang Consortium and the Li Consortium take advantage of the situation, the entire Qing Consortium will be in grave danger."

"Alright then." Ren Xiaosu believed Qing Zhen had probably been eyeing this opportunity before he dared to act so recklessly. But still, Qing Zhen was... really ruthless.

Tang Zhou said, "Mr. Qing Zhen agreed to cooperate with you. Their fighting forces have already gone on ahead to the ambush location to wait for the arrival of the Divine Arms Battalion. Furthermore, Mr. Qing Zhen has expressed that he will not wipe out the Divine Arms Battalion as agreed and hopes that our cooperation will proceed smoothly."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. Qing Zhen was quite a dependable person. At least he was better than that Qing Yun Tang Zhou had mentioned. However, Ren Xiaosu said, "Don't just tell me all that. Shouldn't the Qing Consortium be promising me something more practical?"

Tang Zhou was stunned for a moment. "I didn't bring that up, but I can tell Mr. Qing Zhen about it. He's never been petty about such things before."

"That's more like it." Ren Xiaosu broke into a smile.

But Tang Zhou asked in wonder, "Why are you stopping us from killing everyone in the Divine Arms Battalion? After all, there shouldn't be much of a relationship between you and them since you were conscripted into their military."

Ren Xiaosu patiently explained, "I want to help the Yang Consortium collect some samples of the Li Consortium's nanomachines."

Tang Zhou seemed to figure something out and smiled ambiguously. "Oh, I see. When I left Stronghold 109, I felt like there was something special between you and Yang Xiaojin. She even carried you on her back back then. Say, why didn't you go to the Yang Consortium then? Although you were conscripted, there should've been opportunities for you to leave. Our intel tells us the Li Consortium does not enforce strict controls at the beginning."

Ren Xiaosu did not explain much and let Tang Zhou assume whatever he wanted...

Tang Zhou would never figure out that the reason he did not go to Stronghold 88 was because he did not know where it was.

...

The next day, the expected time of the Divine Arms Battalion's surprise raid against the Qing Consortium was coming. Although the roads had been sealed off by the heavy snow, the Divine Arms Battalion was still pushing on with their journey.

In the eyes of the Divine Arms Battalion, their purpose here was to sneak attack their enemies.

People outside did not know how mobile the Divine Arms Battalion was, nor how their soldiers' physical fitness was greatly enhanced with the use of nanomachines. Therefore, if no one expected them to be able to continue trekking in the heavy snowfall, it would be their best opportunity to strike.

The Divine Arms Battalion's major looked at his GPS as he led his troops in forging a path in the snow. He said, "We'll be arriving at the Qing Consortium's logistics base in half a day. I want everyone to be extremely careful. After we destroy the Qing Consortium's baggage train, we'll evacuate from there immediately. We'll then wait for our nanomachines to recharge before we launch another surprise attack on their other forces!"

But as he finished, a loud explosion boomed in the distance. After getting stunned for a moment, the Divine Arms Battalion's major shouted, "Retreat! Avoid the arty fire!"

The major of the Divine Arms Battalion had immense amounts of combat experience. In an instant, he realized they had been ambushed by the Qing Consortium and that the loud explosion was from the Qing Consortium's artillery fire!

The first thing he shouted was for his troops to retreat, not throw themselves prone, because the Divine Arms Battalion was an ultra mobile force. If they retreated immediately, they would still have a chance to outrun the range of the artillery fire. But if they went prone here, only death awaited them.

Since the Qing Consortium had come prepared, could they escape these attacks by just going prone?

But still, his words were too late.

They could hear the faraway artillery fire crackling like firecrackers followed by successive explosions within the forested mountain!

The snowy ground around the Divine Arms troops was breaking apart as artillery shells plowed down on them. Qing Zhen wasn't planning on giving them a chance to get close.

The Divine Arms soldiers traveled within the forested mountains at high speed. Some of them were even quick enough to avoid getting caught in the trajectory of the artillery shells and got clear of the maximum kill radius of howitzers.

But the barrage of artillery fire was too numerous. With just a single volley of artillery fire, more than half of the Divine Arms soldiers got killed or wounded! Even if they had the nanomachines, it didn't mean they could withstand shelling. When a 120 mm HE shell containing 3.5 kilograms of TNT was launched out of a howitzer, it could wipe out all life within a four-meter radius in a flash! In addition, all of the Divine Arms soldiers within a 25-meter radius of an artillery shell's landing spot would get hit by a huge blast wave and shrapnel, resulting in an effective kill zone!

The gods had never once bestowed weapons on humans, but humans still forged their own sword that could even kill gods.

Fortunately for the Divine Arms major, he did not die from the bombardment. But all he felt was despair. No matter how well-trained they were, they still could not match the Qing Consortium's preparedness in this battle. But the Divine Arms major could not understand why the Qing Consortium would be waiting here in ambush.

They had been very cautious in their movements. At the start, they pretended they were heading for the Yang Consortium's front line before secretly rerouting to here. They even swapped their uniforms and vehicles with the private troops.

After changing their identities, they had not met any friendly forces, but disaster still struck in the end.

Just how was the news leaked?!

Seeing that fewer and fewer soldiers were still alive around him, the Divine Arms major knew they were done for. Even his status as a family member of the Li Consortium would not protect him from punishment for losing this battle.

At this moment, Qing Zhen was standing in front of the Qing Consortium's defensive line and looking calmly in the direction of the Divine Arms Battalion. He put up his hand. "Alright, stop firing."

The soldiers around him did not inquire why. At a time like this, they should have obviously been pursuing their enemies in victory.

Besides, Qing Zhen had even specifically had them change the 152 mm shells to the 120 mm ones. No matter how they looked at it, it seemed like he was showing mercy to their enemies. However, the soldiers under Qing Zhen's command would never doubt his decisions.

But nobody understood how Qing Zhen had managed to find out the Divine Arms Battalion would be coming here. Could it be that Qing Zhen's moles had already infiltrated deep into the Li Consortium? He even knew the whereabouts of the most mysterious Divine Arms Battalion? That was too terrifying!

Suddenly, Qing Zhen laughed and said, "I think the Li Consortium has not fought a war for too long. They don't even know how to take advantage of the good weapon they have in their hands. Even when dealt good cards, they all go to waste in their hands."

Chapter 257 Finding the spy within three days!

The Qing Consortium's soldiers were getting pumped up from having just defeated the legendary Divine Arms Battalion of the Li Consortium. However, Qing Zhen immediately gathered from this ambush that the nanosoldiers were actually not that weak. If they hadn't received the intel in time, the Li Consortium would have really caused them a great deal of trouble.

Qing Zhen did not underestimate the Divine Arms Battalion's nanosoldiers and placed an unusual amount of emphasis on them.

Next to him, Qing Zhen's trusted aide asked, "Do you mean the nanosoldiers shouldn't be deployed in such a fashion?"

Qing Zhen said, "If these nanosoldiers were commanded by me, I would deploy each platoon separately to infiltrate through the forested mountains. They only need the intel supplied by personnel planted within the Li Consortium to easily coordinate a decapitation strike[1]."

His aide nodded and said, "I see. Sir, you are indeed wise."

Qing Zhen looked at him calmly. "I'm not telling you this so you can suck up to me but to arrange for more people to protect me."

"Ah?" The aide was taken aback and could not understand why Qing Zhen was saying this.

Qing Zhen sighed and said, "The Yang Consortium's nanosoldiers might be arriving soon. They're much smarter than the Li Consortium, so we have to strengthen our defense forces immediately."

Then Qing Zhen looked out into the distant snowy lands that had just been plowed by the artillery fire. He wondered, "Why is he everywhere?"

The soldiers around him were even more confused by this. Who was he referring to?

The atmosphere in the Li Consortium's command center was extremely depressing. A middle-aged general sat at the end of the long table in the room with a somber and sullen expression. Although all the seats at the table were filled, no one was saying anything.

"The Divine Arms Battalion has suffered a crushing defeat." The middle-aged general said, "All I want to know is why the Qing Consortium was aware of our Divine Arms Battalion's operations beforehand."

Still, no one spoke.

In reality, a lot of the others were also puzzled by this. The Divine Arms Battalion had to keep the command center updated every day of matters like their battle plans' execution and current location. Everything had been proceeding smoothly, but a disaster still happened when they got close to the Qing Consortium's territory.

Based on the description of the Divine Arms officer, the Qing Consortium clearly knew which direction the Divine Arms Battalion would approach from, so they set up an ambush in advance. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to inflict such a large number of casualties on the Divine Arms Battalion.

The Li Consortium had been concealing their strength and biding their time over the years. But now that war had suddenly broken out, everyone was looking forward to seeing the Divine Arms Battalion's capabilities. In the end, they were almost wiped out by the Qing Consortium even before the battle had begun!

Why? Where did it all go wrong!

The middle-aged general looked to Hu Shuo on his left and said, "A spy must have leaked the information. As Director of the Office of Special Investigations, you did not sniff out the spy in time. So you'll be bearing the main responsibility. However, this isn't the time to mete out punishment. You must sort out the issues in your Office of Special Investigations to make amends for your mistakes."

Hu Shuo kept quiet as he looked calmly at the table in front of him. Honestly speaking, he was very puzzled as well.

Although he had other motives for staying in the Li Consortium, the Office of Special Investigations had always been functioning normally. An espionage battle would prove to be the most critical component during wartime. Sometimes, having the right intelligence could even influence the outcome of a war.

Although Hu Shuo had sniffed out quite a few spies recently in his course of duty, he kept some of them around in preparation for his future plans. But keeping them around did not mean he did not care about them. The identified spies remained under the surveillance of his Office of Special Investigations and were earmarked for greater use in the future. However, none of these spies could gain access to the secrets of the Divine Arms Battalion.

Suddenly, someone said, "The private troops who swapped uniforms and vehicles with the Divine Arms Battalion haven't arrived at the assigned strategic location yet. I suspect this incident could be related to them."

The middle-aged general frowned. "Why didn't anyone report about an important matter like this earlier?"

"Previously, the Divine Arms officers who were assigned and traveled together with them would report their whereabouts daily. However, we suddenly lost contact with them yesterday," the officer said.

"Search for this group of private troops immediately and confirm their location within the next three days!" the middle-aged general ordered.

"Yes, sir!" the officer answered.

The middle-aged general said, "Meeting adjourned. The strategy must be put into place ASAP. The news of the Divine Arms Battalion's heavy losses will spread to the Yang Consortium very soon. We have to be prepared for the Qing Consortium's and the Yang Consortium's counterattacks. General Hu, remain behind."

After everyone else dispersed, only Hu Shuo remained seated. The middle-aged general said, "The leaking of the Divine Arms Battalion's operations is of great importance. The spy is likely to hold a high rank within the organization, so I'll give you three days to find out who it is!"

Hu Shuo looked up and said, "OK."

The middle-aged general did not bring this up earlier because he suspected the spy was among those attending the meeting. The reason why he did not punish Hu Shuo was that, first, he was the Director of the Office of Special Investigations and had been working for the Li Consortium for decades with few

mistakes made, earning merit and toiling hard for the organization. Second, this war was intricately linked with Hu Shuo as well. If they replaced the Director of the Office of Special Investigations at this time, chaos would probably be caused down the road.

But the middle-aged general was probably not expecting that trouble would originate from Hu Shuo himself.

Two days later, Ren Xiaosu, the perpetrator of the Divine Arms Battalion's defeat, was hidden somewhere in an ambush in the snowy ground. There was a dirt road beside him that was paved by the Li Consortium just before the war broke out.

After Qing Zhen had driven the Divine Arms Battalion to retreat, he not only informed Tang Zhou of their victory, he also told him which route of retreat the Divine Arms Battalion was taking

Ren Xiaosu used this information for basis that the Divine Arms Battalion would likely use the road in front of him.

As the Divine Arms Battalion had suffered heavy losses, they would definitely need to retreat to the forward operating base behind them to reorganize. That would then be a chance for Ren Xiaosu.

He did not include Tang Zhou in his plan. On one hand, there were too many people on Tang Zhou's side and their presence would easily be sensed. On the other hand, Ren Xiaosu did not want Tang Zhou to know what actions he would take and his true reason for keeping some of the Divine Arms Battalion alive.

Ren Xiaosu went through the plan in his mind. Since the Divine Arms Battalion was in such a pathetic state, the trump cards he left behind should be enough to deal with the remaining defeated soldiers, right?

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu heard the sound of footsteps on snow and got excited. Here they come!

As Ren Xiaosu hid in the thick snow next to the road, he nearly stopped breathing.

He left a tiny hole in the surface of the snow to observe the outside world. But a moment later when Ren Xiaosu saw the Divine Arms Battalion's soldiers, he was shocked!

He saw two of the Divine Arms Battalion's soldiers limping towards the ambush site he had set up. Ren Xiaosu felt unwell at the sight. He had requested Qing Zhen leave some of the Divine Arms Battalion alive, but he only left two of them for him in the end?

Ren Xiaosu was a little confused by this. Why didn't he just leave one soldier alive then? Was he purposely trying to gross him out?

Eh?

Ren Xiaosu had been lying in the snow for the past two days. Probably, few people in this world had as much resolve as him. But Ren Xiaosu realized this was what he had been waiting for after lying in the snow for the past two days.

'No, that can't be right.' Ren Xiaosu thought that something else unexpected must have happened. Qing Zhen couldn't possibly have spared only two of the Divine Arms soldiers.

Chapter 258 A mysterious sniper

Ren Xiaosu carefully recalled the information Tang Zhou had told him. Tang Zhou mentioned that the Qing Consortium defeated the Divine Arms Battalion two days ago, but he did not say how many of them were pushed back in defeat.

But since their cooperation was going so well, there was no reason for Qing Zhen and Tang Zhou to trick him. And even though Qing Zhen was arrogant, he had always been reliable and trustworthy. Something must have gone wrong in between this period.

As Ren Xiaosu watched the two nanosoldiers walking towards him, he was surprised to see them looking all out of sorts. This didn't make any sense.

They were back in the farthest stretches of the Li Consortium's territory where different groups of Li Consortium troops were stationed every dozen or so kilometers apart. So the Divine Arms Battalion should not be this frightened when they had already made it back to here.

Could they have encountered other enemies along the way?

Wait a minute, could it be Li Shentan? Ren Xiaosu knew that Li Shentan had led an entire combat brigade and disappeared with them, and that he also held a grudge against the Li Consortium. He might have really led that combat brigade to the battlefield and slain the Divine Arms Battalion from the rear.

The moment these two wounded soldiers of the Divine Arms Battalion walked onto the Brambles, Ren Xiaosu wrapped the vines around them tightly. The two wounded soldiers of the Divine Arms Battalion were already severely injured and couldn't put up a fight.

When Ren Xiaosu was sure that no one else was around, he jumped out of the snow. The two Divine Arms officers were shocked to see someone emerge from the snow. The terrifying Brambles seemed to have been manipulated by someone!

Ren Xiaosu did not kill them immediately but came up to them with a frown and asked, "Where's the rest of the Divine Arms Battalion?"

One of the officers of the Divine Arms Battalion endured his pain and said through clenched teeth, "Who are you! Who on earth are you! Why are you wearing the uniform of our Divine Arms Battalion?"

Ren Xiaosu glanced at the uniform he was wearing, then snapped, "Weren't y'all the ones who forced us to swap?"

The two Divine Arms officers were stunned. What did he mean? Wait, they suddenly remembered this. So this young man standing before them was actually a soldier from the private army?! But why was there someone hidden among the private troops who could control these terrifying plants? He had to be a spy! This young man had to be a spy!

The two Divine Arms officers realized something. One of them roared, "The Qing Consortium only ambushed us because you revealed our whereabouts to them!"

"Ahem, what are you talking about? Why can't I understand what you're saying?" Ren Xiaosu asked, "Let me ask again, where's the rest of the Divine Arms? Were they attacked by a strange force? If no one wants to answer, I'll ask again later."

"They're about 20 kilometers behind us. If you have the balls, go and look for yourself," one of the Divine Arms officers said fiercely.

Ren Xiaosu acknowledged them before decisively killing them with the Brambles. He was rather suspicious about why these two men were acting alone. He would probably have to head further north before he could finally learn what had happened.

He collected the nanomachines from the two men, looted the belongings in their pockets, and placed the rifles into his storage space.

His storage space was emptier now after much of the food had been consumed during the time they were back at the outpost.

However, Ren Xiaosu wasn't in a hurry to leave yet. He dug around in the snow for some time before he found the dozen or so playing cards he had hidden.

He had thought that many of the Divine Arms Battalion's soldiers would pass by on this route, so he even resorted to using the Explosive Poker cards. But as it turned out, he had wasted all his efforts and also wasted quite a few gratitude tokens by planting more than ten Bramble seeds in the area.

Although he could retrieve the Explosive Poker cards, he could not pull the Brambles out of the ground after they had been planted.

After Ren Xiaosu recollected all of his Explosive Poker cards, he headed north. He was still in the area of Mt. Tantou and would reach the boundary of Mt. Fengyi by heading further north. Walking in the snow was not exactly difficult for him, but he had to be careful in case he revealed his presence.

When Ren Xiaosu set off, it was morning. By the time he arrived at Mt. Fengyi, it was already afternoon. But soon after cresting a hill, Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He saw an officer of the Divine Arms Battalion lying on the ground in front of him. A large area of the snow was tainted pink by his blood. The blood did not look like it had flowed out of him but splattered instead!

Ren Xiaosu finally understood the strangeness of this. As the Divine Arms officers were retreating, they encountered a sniper. Everyone else in the Divine Arms Battalion was dead except for the two he saw earlier!

Before they died, the two Divine Arms officers had even wanted to dupe Ren Xiaosu, who they realized was a spy, into heading to the battlefield where a sniper was lying in ambush. Because Ren Xiaosu was wearing the Divine Arms uniform, he would also end up as a target for the sniper by coming here.

These Divine Arms officers were pretty unrelenting. The first thing they wanted to do before they died was not to beg for mercy but to lure Ren Xiaosu here into a trap.

But the sniper should have already left. The time that Ren Xiaosu spent here in the snow concluding what had happened was definitely enough for a skilled sniper to kill him. However, no one opened fire at him even after so much time had passed.

And it should have already been a while since the sniper conducted his mission here. There was no reason why the sniper would stay around when the mission to eliminate the Divine Arms Battalion was completed.

But why would a sniper mysteriously appear here? Could it be a Qing Consortium sniper? No, it shouldn't be. The only Qing Consortium soldiers behind enemy lines were Tang Zhou and his men, which Tang Zhou had confirmed.

Then who else could it be? The Yang Consortium!

Ren Xiaosu searched around in the snow for some time, but he was a little disappointed when he found the sniper's bullet. It wasn't the silver-gray bullet the Saboteurs used. This bullet also did not have the special pattern engraved on it that the Saboteurs carried around.

But of course, this was to be expected. There had to be a lot of troops and snipers from the Yang Consortium out on the front lines. Meanwhile, Yang Xiaojin, who was also a family member of the organization, had only just returned to the organization to recover, so how could she possibly return to the battlefield so soon?

Yang Xiaojin should still be at Stronghold 88.

Ren Xiaosu went around to look for any traces of the Divine Arms officers. He could gather a few more nanomachines for every one of them he found.

It was a fantastic harvest this time around, seeing how his armor was near to completion.

But then he heard the sound of engines coming from the mountain roads in the south before he could locate all the corpses of the Divine Arms officers. Ren Xiaosu frowned as the sound grew closer. It had to be the Li Consortium's people if they were heading north at this time. They must have seen the Brambles and the two dead Divine Arms officers.

Ren Xiaosu immediately tossed greed aside and ran towards the snowy mountain. He would still have many opportunities to collect nanomachines in the future. But if his identity were exposed, that would be very troublesome.

One of Ren Xiaosu's greatest strengths was that he could always maintain his rationality when faced with huge temptation, like the time when he had to give up on the gold back in the Jing Mountains.

The ambush on the Divine Arms Battalion went much smoother than Ren Xiaosu had expected. He did not even have to do much since the mysterious sniper had already helped him kill 99% of his enemies.

But the sudden appearance of this mysterious sniper had also made the situation weirder.

Chapter 259 The Office of Special Investigations' probe

While running towards the mountain, Ren Xiaosu roughly estimated that even though he only had time to gather 14 of the Divine Arms officers' nanomachines, it was more than what Lin Qi and his group had. If he created an armor to protect himself now, he would have enough nanomachines to cover every part of him except for an area the size of one of his calves.

In a battle, he would definitely not fuss over the form of the armor and just aim to protect his vital parts as much as possible. But by estimating this way, it would facilitate his understanding of how many nanomachines he had obtained so far.

As Ren Xiaosu fled from the battlefield, there was something on his mind. While collecting the nanomachines just now, he saw many dead Divine Arms officers lying in the snow. He had counted several dozen dead Divine Arms officers. If it were a normal sniper who killed them, surely they wouldn't be so incredibly lethal, right?

Furthermore, once the sniper fired a shot at these nanosoldiers, the rest of the Divine Arms officers would have quickly moved away. Judging by the speed of the Divine Arms officers, it would be impossible to kill so many of them if the sniper was not a crack shot.

Ren Xiaosu was certain these people had attacked the sniper's position just by observing the way they died. They had tried to dodge the sniper's bullets with their speed and attempted to locate and kill the sniper. They failed, however.

Meanwhile, the two Divine Arms officers who had fortunately survived were probably already wounded in the first place, so the others allowed them to retreat first. This was why they managed to survive while the others were all killed!

These were the Divine Arms soldiers, after all. Even if they were demoralized after their strategy failed, and they were defeated by the Qing Consortium, they were still a highly regarded unit of the Li Consortium. How could a sniper kill over a 100 of them so easily as they retreated?

Could the sniper also possess a Perfect Firearms Proficiency like Yang Xiaojin? But how could there be so many expert marksmen in the world?

To be honest, Ren Xiaosu somehow felt that the sniper could very well be Yang Xiaojin. However, the evidence proved otherwise. Moreover, there was no reason why Yang Xiaojin would appear here.

Ren Xiaosu went to look for the Potato Shooter and collected the allocated quantity of potatoes for the day before returning to camp.

"Xiaosu, you're back?" Li Qingzheng happily took the potatoes from Ren Xiaosu's arms. "We've got to be careful when we make our meals. I heard that those in other tents have already run out of food. Some of them are so hungry they went out to look for food even though they're afraid."

"They should have done so earlier." Ren Xiaosu said as he dusted off the snow from his body, "Now that their physical strength and energy have reached their lowest points, I'm afraid they won't even have enough strength to look for food."

Chen Wudi went to Ren Xiaosu and helped him dust off the snow he couldn't reach. He even handed him a piping hot potato and said, "Master, have some."

Ren Xiaosu took a look at the sky outside. "We've already camped here for four days. I'm afraid that everyone has already run out of food except for us. If we continue wasting our time here, everyone will die."

"It's not only us." Li Qingzheng sighed and said, "We have only a 1,000 of us here, but more than 20,000 private soldiers are starving across the entire battlefield, and they were all done in by the private troops' commander. If everyone had enough to eat, it wouldn't be so difficult to endure this. But it's different now since thousands of people might die of starvation once the blizzard passes."

Then a commotion broke out in the camp. Ren Xiaosu lifted the tent flap to see what was going on. But he could not see what was happening due to the tents blocking his view.

"Y'all remain in the tent. I'll go and have a look outside." Ren Xiaosu then walked out of the tent. He noticed many of the others in the camp had also come out of their tents. It seemed like a commotion had broken out at the southernmost side of the camp behind them.

"What is going on?" someone asked.

"I don't know. I just came out here after hearing the commotion. Could a fight have broken out over there?"

Someone said indifferently, "They still have the energy to fight when everyone is starving?"

Ren Xiaosu ignored them and continued walking south. When he almost reached the end of the camp, he saw others not from the private army!

An unusual-looking platoon was standing there and questioning someone at the border of the camp. As Ren Xiaosu approached, he heard their conversation. "Why're you all stationed here? Why didn't you reach the strategic location at the indicated time? Where is the commanding officer? Get him out here to answer our questions!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. These people were not wearing the uniforms of the combat troops but the Office of Special Investigations' uniforms!

He quickly realized they were probably here to investigate the incident involving the Divine Arms Battalion. A series of chain reactions must have started after the Divine Arms Battalion was ambushed by the Qing Consortium.

Since their group of private troops had swapped vehicles and uniforms with the Divine Arms Battalion, they would definitely be the prime suspects of the Office of Special Investigations' probe.

After Ren Xiaosu figured the situation out, he blended back into the crowd as he did not wish to interact with the Office of Special Investigations yet.

The commander of Liu Taiyu's reinforced company came over and said, "Our commander is still semiconscious after getting kicked by one of the Divine Arms officers. When he regained consciousness, he started running a fever. It was also the Divine Arms Battalion's decision to encamp here."

The commander of the reinforced company practically pushed all responsibility to the Divine Arms Battalion. After all, dead men tell no tales.

A person from the Office of Special Investigations frowned. "Where are the Divine Arms? Tell them to come out for questioning."

When Ren Xiaosu heard that, he thought that the Office of Special Investigations' tone was way too arrogant. He was yelling for the Divine Arms Battalion as though he were ordering his subordinates around. It was no wonder no one thought it was unfair when he used his identity as a member of the Office Special Investigations to reprimand others.

However, the company commander explained, "The officers of the Divine Arms Battalion stubbornly chased after a rabbit in a hunt two mornings ago. In the end, they got attacked by some unknown vegetation. All five of the Divine Arms officers died as a result. If you don't believe it, go ahead and question the others."

The people from the Office of Special Investigations looked around, bewildered. The private soldiers surrounding them quickly nodded and said, "We couldn't catch up no matter how hard we chased after them. When we finally got there, we saw them already dead."

These people had agreed to collude on this event as they felt a little guilty for not attempting to rescue those officers.

The platoon commander of the Office of Special Investigations frowned and said, "Bring me to your commander. After that, we'll head to the place where you said the Divine Arms officers died!"

Ren Xiaosu was not exactly panicking at this moment. Since all of the private soldiers here were trying so hard to cover up for him, what did he have to worry about?

The commander of the reinforced company led the Office of Special Investigations into the camp. They first checked on Liu Taiyu's condition and the person charged with inspecting him nodded to the platoon commander and said, "He does still have a high fever. His body probably got inflammation after suffering internal bleeding from the kick."

The platoon commander of the Office of Special Investigations said to the reinforced company's commander, "Hand over the private troops' roster to me. We'll head over to the spot where the Divine Arms officers met their demise right now."

Chapter 260 Gaining yet another identity

Upon reaching the location of the trap, the Office of Special Investigations' people frowned. They saw the Divine Arms officers tangled up and dead in the vines. "They were attacked by this strange plant after pursuing the rabbit here?"

They had wanted to check their wounds to see if there was anything unusual about the deaths. After all, this was the first time they'd heard of plants attacking humans. At the beginning, they didn't quite believe it.

But when they saw the brambles, they all believed it as the plant looked savage and ferocious. Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu was controlling the Brambles and moving them in a threatening manner the moment they approached a little. It looked extremely terrifying!

Someone from the Office of Special Investigations said, "You all will continue to encamp here. Do not act without permission."

After giving those orders, they left. In truth, they did not have a better way of handling this either. They could not go around and question over a 1,000 private troops as that would take too much time and effort.

Furthermore, they were just here to find out the private troops' location. As for investigating the spy, that would be left for later. Right now, they needed to quickly relay the situation back to the Office of Special Investigations.

Ren Xiaosu looked on as they left. It seemed like the Li Consortium was also aware there was a spy among them, but they didn't know how to approach the investigation.

After the people from the Office of Special Investigations left, Ren Xiaosu went out at night to meet Tang Zhou as previously agreed. When Ren Xiaosu arrived at the meeting place, he bluntly asked, "Did the Qing Consortium send out any snipers here?"

Tang Zhou was taken back. "No, and we don't even have a sniper in our troops either."

"Something is odd." Ren Xiaosu wondered, "When I went to search for what was left of the Divine Arms Battalion, I discovered roughly several dozen of them killed by the same sniper."

"Are you exaggerating? There aren't too many snipers who're capable of that." Tang Zhou gave his analysis. "Your friend, Yang Xiaojin, possesses such an ability. Could it be her?"

"Ahem." Ren Xiaosu said, "It's probably not her since the bullets aren't marked as Saboteurs. Are there any even more skilled snipers in the Yang Consortium?"

"No." Tang Zhou shook his head. But then he remembered something. "Eh, that's not right. Over a decade ago, there was precisely someone that skilled. Yang Xiaojin probably learned her marksmanship from him too, but I think he's quite old now. I think he might be Yang Xiaojin's uncle based on their relationship? He's no longer as physically able to move around freely as he likes on the battlefield, so I doubt it would be him."

"Could there be other forces that have joined in the war as well?" Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“Unlikely.” Tang Zhou thought for a while and said, “There’s no reason why other forces would get involved in this war. It’s very difficult for foreign forces to reap any benefits here in our southwestern region. Only the Pyro Company would take advantage of this event to seek out any supernatural beings under the guise of acquiring their blood.”

“Is no one going to do anything about them?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Of course they will. The three organizations in the southwestern region have already reached a consensus to kill anyone from the Pyro Company when they encounter them. However, the Pyro Company has resorted to conducting their business secretly and will only distribute leaflets to normal people wherever they can,” Tang Zhou replied.

“Have they caught any supernatural beings yet?” Ren Xiaosu asked curiously.

“There’s a few. Most supernatural beings who have just gained their superpowers haven’t experience a change in their mindsets yet. Since they want to make money, the Pyro Company’s offer is the fastest way for them to get rich.” Tang Zhou said, “The Pyro Company is specifically targeting the sort of person who has just awakened their powers but have zero experience in combat.”

“Alright then.” Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, “I guess there really are idiots like that.”

“But the Pyro Company won’t join the battlefield for sure. They will only hide behind the stronghold walls,” Tang Zhou said.

Ren Xiaosu was starting to feel that it was very likely that Yang Xiaojin was the sniper. Everything but the bullet seemed to suggest it was her who did it.

Although many snipers existed in this world, only a few were capable of killing that many Divine Arms officers.

But what was Yang Xiaojin doing behind enemy lines by herself? Was it just for the sake of destroying the Divine Arms Battalion?

Suddenly, Tang Zhou said, “Mr. Qing Zhen called me to say that he’s sent over a group of Qing Yun’s people as envoys to discuss an alliance with the Li Consortium, and that if you are interested, you can finish them off.”

Ren Xiaosu kept quiet for a long time. So after the Qing Consortium helped him defeat the Divine Arms Battalion, he was supposed to help Qing Zhen get rid of his dissidents in

return?

Ren Xiaosu asked, “Isn’t Qing Yun already dead? Why does he still want to kill this group of people?”

Tang Zhou explained, “After our combat brigade was disbanded, many of our men were assigned to various different forces and ended up getting bullied by Qing Yun’s troops very often. Moreover, the methods they used to push our people around were horribly mean. So Mr. Qing Zhen doesn’t want

these people to return to the Qing Consortium's territory. Even if you don't want to kill them, Mr. Qing Zhen would still have them killed."

Ren Xiaosu remarked, "Then just let him kill them."

"We were thinking the Li Consortium would consider it your merit if you killed them instead. The higher your position in the organization is, the more beneficial it'll be to all of us," Tang Zhou said with a smile.

"How many of them are there?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"400," Tang Zhou replied.

"Then how am I suppose to fight them?" Ren Xiaosu said in a speechless manner, "Headbutt them? Never mind that our private troops have hardly any combat strength, I'm also not their commander either."

Tang Zhou suddenly whispered, "Mr. Qing Zhen said that as long as you're willing, he can help you become the private army's commander. The management of the private army has always been extremely lax and promotion within is always based on how much one can pay."

Ren Xiaosu kept getting the feeling that the battlefield was about to get more chaotic. What the hell was even going on anyway?

But it seemed that Qing Zhen already had a high-ranking spy within the Li Consortium who could actually manipulate the appointment and removal of officers within the private troops!

This was not going to be as simple as Tang Zhou had proposed. No matter how lax the management of the troops was, it wouldn't be possible to simply use money to buy such a high-ranking position. The Qing Consortium had to have a very influential person inside the Li Consortium before he dared to make such boastful claims. At the very least, this person was able to make changes to the private army's database of officers.

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Aren't you afraid that I'll compromise your secret agent?"

"Mr. Qing Zhen said that you're much more important than the agent now." Tang Zhou said, "Of course, we'll arrange for him to leave the Li Consortium secretly to avoid any potential issues if something happens to you."

"Alright then." Ren Xiaosu accepted it reluctantly.

Tang Zhou said, "However, his evacuation is going to be difficult as well. Since the Office of Special Investigations is investigating the spy now, he might not be able to escape."

Ren Xiaosu reacted with a strange expression. "Why not let me take care of that?"

"What?" Tang Zhou was stunned.

"You might not believe it when I tell you this," Ren Xiaosu said calmly. "I've only told you about my identity as a private soldier. However, I'm actually also a captain in the Office of Special Investigations."

Tang Zhou was dumbfounded right then and there. Weren't you supposed to be helping the Yang Consortium collect samples of the nanomachines from the Divine Arms Battalion? How did you become an Office of Special Investigations officer as well?! Could the Yang Consortium have already infiltrated the Office of Special Investigations?!

Ren Xiaosu explained, "I can't go into too much detail with you as the current state of affairs is a little complicated."

Honestly, even Ren Xiaosu thought he had too many identities. And the way he got them was very strange as well.