

### **Chapter 261 Ren Xiaosu's promotion**

After the Office of Special Investigations located the private troops, they went back to make a report. On their way back, they heard others say that some problems had been encountered at the front line. The Divine Arms soldiers that were retreating had been killed at the front line of Mt. Fengyi by a sniper.

While heading back, they even saw the corpses of the Divine Arms officers being transported back to Stronghold 108. However, this had little to do with them. Their mission was considered complete since they had already located the whereabouts of the private troops.

The command center was constantly being shifted further north since nothing could be done if the generals kept remaining behind at the rear.

Currently, the command center was located 30 kilometers behind Mt. Tantou and was only around 80 kilometers from where Ren Xiaosu and the private troops were stationed.

When they got to the command center to look for Hu Shuo, they handed over the private troops' roster before reporting on the current situation of the private soldiers. They also expressed their doubts over how the five Divine Arms Battalion officers were supposedly killed by plants.

Hu Shuo sat in the tent and flipped through the roster. But after flipping through just a few pages, he noticed a familiar name. He instantly figured out a lot of things. He did not have to reason or think it through since that name was as good as the answer.

Hu Shuo let out a sigh. As it turned out, the Divine Arms Battalion had swapped their uniforms and vehicles with the private troops that guy was in.... In that case, they could only blame themselves for being unlucky. If they had exchanged their vehicles with any other private troops, an incident like this would have been avoided.

A Special Investigations officer asked when he saw Hu Shuo frowning, "Sir, what's the matter? Is there a problem with the roster?"

Hu Shuo came back to his senses and said with a smile, "No, I was thinking of something else."

"Oh." The Special Investigations officer heaved a sigh of relief. He thought he had missed out on some details. "Then should we conduct a thorough investigation of these private troops again? I feel like there's something off about them."

Hu Shuo said sternly, "These private troops already have their wages and benefits mostly withheld from them, and they don't have any means of communication with the outside world, so the problem shouldn't lie with them. There aren't too many people who know about the Divine Arms Battalion's secrets either, so we should still start investigating from the higher-ups."

"Yes, sir." The Special Investigations officer replied, "We'll focus on investigating the spy among those in the higher-ups then."

"Mhm." Hu Shuo nodded. "But don't touch anyone from the Li Consortium."

With the tone set, they would thoroughly investigate all higher-ups and leaders, except those who were family members of the Li Consortium.

Thinking about this, Hu Shuo couldn't help feeling somber. Who knew what other trouble Ren Xiaosu would cause?

At this moment, another Special Investigations officer came in from the outside and walked up to Hu Shuo. He reported in a whisper, "Sir, we found something unusual."

"What did you find?" Hu Shuo was taken aback.

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"An officer from the Supply Division has suddenly nominated someone for a promotion. It's like he's skipping the chain of command to promote a private soldier," the Special Investigations officer said.

Hu Shuo paused. "What's the name of the soldier who was nominated?"

"Ren Xiaosu." The Special Investigations officer asked, "Should we investigate them?"

Melancholic, Hu Shuo waved it off. "There's no need. Our Office of Special Investigations has to follow up on the big case that's the Divine Arms Battalion, so there's no need to trouble ourselves with such a trivial matter. There will definitely be issues of bribery and corruption within the private troops, so don't waste your energy on such matters."

The Special Investigations officer bowed his head. "Yes, sir."

After all the officers of the Office of Special Investigations left, Hu Shuo almost flipped the table. Ren Xiaosu was fucking running rampant! He had to be doing whatever he liked because he was banking on Hu Shuo not daring to touch him!

The private troops Ren Xiaosu was with were still encamped at the same spot. Even though a lot of them were close to starving to death, none of them dared to move outside in the face of a threat like the Brambles.

In the evening, a group of officers from the Personnel Division suddenly came to the camp. On the way here, they were grumbling, "We had to travel all the way here into these forested mountains just so that we could appoint an officer? Does this private troops' officer have no conscience? How dare he sell the comms radio in exchange for money!"

When they arrived, the private soldiers lifted the flaps of their tents and sized them up. "You people are?"

"I'm Tang Wanyi from the Personnel Division. Everyone, gather over here," Tang Wanyi said.

The private soldiers all lined up in front of Tang Wanyi with confused expressions on their faces.

Tang Wanyi asked, "Who is Ren Xiaosu?"

Ren Xiaosu walked out of the formation and said, "Reporting in, sir. I'm Ren Xiaosu."

"OK." Tang Wanyi glanced at Ren Xiaosu out of the corner of his eye. "Congratulations. As Liu Taiyu, the commander of the Iron Second Battalion, is still injured and unconscious, we are specially appointing Ren Xiaosu as the acting commander of the Iron Second Battalion to lead the troops and carry out operational orders."

Ren Xiaosu said excitedly, "Really, sir?"

"Why would I be lying? Come and sign your appointment letter," Tang Wanyi said disdainfully.

Ren Xiaosu hurried over to sign it and prepared to go back into camp after that. However, Tang Wanyi suddenly pulled him back. "Aren't you going to celebrate with us?"

"Celebrate?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "How should we celebrate? Why don't I do the splits for you, sir?"

Tang Wanyi was dumbfounded. 'Why would I want to watch you do the splits?'

Actually, this was something the private army practiced. Promoted officers were required to reward those from the Personnel Division with some kickbacks as a form of celebration. Tang Wanyi was aware that someone had spent more than 100,000 yuan just so that Ren Xiaosu would be promoted. It was obvious how much of a cash cow Ren Xiaosu was!

Why else would Tang Wanyi be willing to run all the way here? His legs were almost broken from traveling here!

If a promoted officer was not sensible and did not know how to honor his seniors, he could forget about getting promoted again in the future.

Naturally, Ren Xiaosu knew about this. However, he didn't plan on giving a single cent to this guy in front of him. Who knew if he would have an opportunity to run away from here soon? In that case, how could he possibly waste money on something like that!

Tang Wanyi said coldly, "Think about it carefully."

Ren Xiaosu played dumb. "What are you talking about?"

If there were not so many people around, Ren Xiaosu would have used his identity as a member of the Office of Special Investigations to arrest Tang Wanyi for being a spy. But thinking about it carefully, he knew that he shouldn't always be causing trouble for Hu Shuo. What if Hu Shuo really got annoyed?

Tang Wanyi was livid as he led his men away. This was the first time in many years that the Li Consortium's Personnel Division had encountered such a blockhead. He ordered those around him, "After we get back, put this Ren Xiaosu on the blacklist. Make sure he never ever gets promoted again in this life. When the war ends, I want him stripped of his rank!"

Ren Xiaosu looked at Chen Wudi and asked softly, "Wudi, what are they muttering about?"

Chen Wudi lowered his voice and said, "Master, they said they want you stripped of your rank at the end of the war."

Ren Xiaosu chuckled. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. The Li Consortium was so confident of themselves that they kicked off the war, yet the men under them were all a bunch of good-for-nothings. They were definitely not going to be a match for Qing Zhen.

In addition to that, the Yang Consortium's soldiers were also biding their time at the border while Li Shentan and Hu Shuo were stirring up trouble internally. It would be really difficult to say what would become of the Li Consortium at the end of the war.

Besides, it wasn't like Ren Xiaosu was planning on living here under the Li Consortium's rule anyway, so as if he cared about what happened to them after the war!

### **Chapter 262 Leading the troops out of a predicament**

After Tang Wanyi and the others left, Ren Xiaosu turned around and said to everyone in the private troops, "I was fortunate to be promoted to commander of the Iron Second Battalion. I won't use empty talk, but some of you probably already know about my capability. I'm the best at surviving in this wilderness. None of you will starve to death or end up getting killed by the plants for no reason if you follow me!"

Everyone looked at one another. How could he make such boastful claims the moment he got appointed as the new commander? Everyone knew that Ren Xiaosu was just a normal soldier. But now that he had gained such a huge promotion, everyone couldn't accept it.

Naturally, no one dared protest either. The sight of Ren Xiaosu dragging people around in the snow awhile ago was still fresh in everyone's mind. Their impression of Ren Xiaosu was that he was a relentless person.

But even though he was unrelenting, they did not believe the words he just said.

Everyone had already been starving for several days, and they also faced the threat of the Brambles outside. Some people felt that Ren Xiaosu becoming the battalion commander at this moment was no different from asking for trouble.

Someone from the reinforced company couldn't help but ask coldly, "Since you say that, and we've been starving for several days already, how are you going to help everyone look for food? We'll believe you if you can get us out of here alive and find food as well."

As these people from the reinforced company were originally Liu Taiyu's cronies, the sudden change in leadership was definitely going to be a little uncomfortable for them.

But anyone here could be the leader as long as they were capable enough.

Someone added, "Yeah, we don't even dare to walk too far. What if we encounter that plant again?"

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he gave an impassioned speech. “Since I’ve promised all y’all, I’ll definitely bring everyone out of this place. How about this? I’ll walk ahead, and y’all can follow behind me. As long as I remain unharmed, nothing will happen to you guys behind me, right?”

Everyone was at a loss for words. Some people were instantly moved when Ren Xiaosu said he would lead the way personally. They didn’t expect he would have such courage!

If there really were those terrifying plants along the way, Ren Xiaosu would surely suffer the misfortune first since he would be walking ahead. If Liu Taiyu had been conscious, he would probably have ordered other people to lead the way instead of himself. He would definitely not lead by example like Ren Xiaosu!

Although none of them believed someone this good still existed in these wastelands, wasn’t there a living example standing right in front of them?

Ren Xiaosu said righteously, “Everyone, pack up all of your belongings and tents quickly. We’ll set off in an hour. I’ll walk ahead while you follow me! I’ll help everyone search for something to eat!”

The private troops who were all made up of refugees were not cultured people. History had proven that the less cultured a person was, the less likely they would question people and matters around them. Once they got herd mentality, they could be more prone to blindly following orders.

They could never have guessed the plant was actually planted there by Ren Xiaosu...

If it were other people leading the way, they might really end up getting into trouble with the plant. However, Ren Xiaosu would definitely be safe doing so.

After the troops set off, Ren Xiaosu led them northwards and avoided all of the Brambles. Some of the vines suddenly emerged from under the snow and started moving threateningly at Ren Xiaosu. However, Ren Xiaosu just stood clear of its attack range.

In the eyes of these private soldiers, it was as though Ren Xiaosu was imbued with the power of the gods!

Someone shouted from behind for him to be careful, but Ren Xiaosu just turned around and said compassionately to them, “In order to lead you to safety, my sacrifice is nothing in the big picture.”

Ren Xiaosu felt that he was a great person. He was actually leading these private troops out of the predicament he had created!

Tears were streaming from someone behind Ren Xiaosu. “Thank you, Battalion Commander!”

“Thank you, Battalion Commander!”

Ren Xiaosu continued advancing while counting the gratitude tokens he received. Good, he had gained yet a few more gratitude tokens. Although there were several dozen private soldiers thanking him, only a few people’s gratitudes were sincere.

Someone from the reinforced company whispered, "It looks like he really is competent. It might be a good idea if we follow a good leader like him in these current times."

The company commander said calmly, "Let's observe the situation for now. It isn't such a big deal if he just gets us out of here. I'll only be convinced if he can successfully lead us to some food as well."

In reality, it did not matter to Ren Xiaosu whether he could convince them since he wasn't planning on doing so in the first place. His priority was to bring them to the designated location he had discussed with Tang Zhou.

The people behind him were not even sincere when they thanked him. He had helped them find a way to sneak into the forward operating base to dine, but he was still immediately betrayed by them. Chen Wudi, who was kind-hearted enough to help someone in need, was described as a fool as well.

Ren Xiaosu neither sympathized with these people nor did he intend to become true comrades with them.

By this time, they had left the Brambles "plantation." Ren Xiaosu turned around and said to everyone, "Those vines very likely only grew in that small patch there, so there's no need to worry about them anymore."

Everyone heaved sighs of relief in response. Someone said, "Then can we rest now?"

Some of them were about to sit right down in the snow. The private troops were lazy like that.

But Ren Xiaosu continued, "We still can't rest. I promised that I'd search for food for y'all, so let's overcome the difficulties ahead of us first! And I have already come up with a good plan!"

When they heard they might get something to eat, everyone became excited. Even the reinforced company's soldiers had run out of food a day ago. Everyone was so hungry they were lightheaded.

Ren Xiaosu headed into the mountains. But before he could even take two steps, he saw a hollow high in a tall tree next to him. He climbed the tree and reached into the hollow.

Everyone was wondering what Ren Xiaosu was doing. But when Ren Xiaosu withdrew his hand from the inside, a squirrel escaped from within in a flurry while Ren Xiaosu held a fistful of pine nuts and dried fruits they had never seen before!

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Everyone, go around and look for similar hollows in the trees like this one. There should be enough food for everyone to fill their stomachs a little. Tell me if anyone discovers a cave or a rock cleft. That's where our dinner for tonight is going to be!"

"What's going to be in the cave?" someone asked curiously.

Ren Xiaosu jumped down from the tree. As he stuffed a pine nut into his mouth, he said, "After snakes store enough fat in the bodies, they start hibernating(1) for the winter. When that happens, they become very vulnerable to humans. Also, they prefer to be in groups when they hibernate. If we can find a cave, we'll basically have found a den of snakes, and we can eat roasted snake for our dinner tonight!"

A ton of venomous snakes, bugs, and ants could be found in the southwestern region. Whenever Ren Xiaosu ventured into the wilderness in the past, he would always be exceptionally alert to this.

But most snakes usually ended up as food during their hibernation process. This was further helped by the fact that snakes preferred hibernating in groups. They did this to coil together to keep warm and reduce water loss in their bodies.

30% of snakes that did not hibernate in groups did not survive the winter.

So some of the braver refugees would head into the mountains to search for snake dens during the winter. If they found one, it would be a great harvest for them, and they would be able to live more comfortably for the entire winter.

And Ren Xiaosu was the bravest person in this group of refugees.

### **Chapter 263 Ren Xiaosu's first battle!**

Under Ren Xiaosu's leadership, the large group of private troops swept through the forested mountains like a swarm of locusts. As long as there was something edible, they did not miss any of it.

During this period, Ren Xiaosu found three snake dens and caught over 200 hibernating snakes. In addition, some of the snakes were particularly fat. Ren Xiaosu and his men killed all of them before they could even wake up.

This time, everyone was convinced they would get fed as long as they followed this Iron Second commander. This had essentially become a conviction in all of their hearts.

Li Qingzheng chuckled and said, "Xiaosu, you're really resourceful. There's no lack of food wherever you go."

In this wilderness, it was an incredibly exceptional skill to be able to find food wherever one went.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu turned around to the reinforced company and was taken aback. "Eh? Where's Liu Taiyu?"

The reinforced company's soldiers had been taking turns to carry Liu Taiyu. But as they walked on, Liu Taiyu suddenly disappeared.

Li Qingzheng said softly to Ren Xiaosu, "I saw them secretly dump Liu Taiyu on the side of the road just now. I think they're finding you more reliable than Liu Taiyu, so they're pledging their loyalty to you now."

Ren Xiaosu found this rather lamentable. As the former Iron Second Battalion commander, Liu Taiyu had been "dumped" just like that. If the reinforced company could dump Liu Taiyu today, they could also dump Ren Xiaosu tomorrow in the same manner. Who would dare to desire such "loyalty"?

This incident reminded Ren Xiaosu once again that hardly anyone in the Iron Second was good. So he should not take his role as battalion commander too seriously.

The commander of the reinforced company walked up to Ren Xiaosu and said with a smile, "Battalion Commander, why don't we set up camp here tonight? I think we already have more than enough food."

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "It's been hard on you guys, but we still have to walk a little further since it isn't safe here."

"Alright then, I'll get everyone to endure it a little more." The reinforced company's commander walked away with a smile. As long as they had food to eat, everything else could be discussed.

The reason why Ren Xiaosu did not want to set up camp here was not that it was unsafe, but that he still had not led the private troops to the designated location yet.

The troops continued marching. Although they still had not eaten yet, everyone was very energetic and motivated.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu saw some smoke spiraling up in the valley ahead of them. He called the reinforced company's commander over and said, "Could friendly forces be up ahead? Let's go and have a look. We can say hi to them and ask for directions to see if we're heading the right direction to Mt. Fengyi."

"OK," the reinforced company's commander replied.

Then Ren Xiaosu quietly ordered Li Qingzheng and the rest of the platoon, "I want all of you to head to the back of the troops. Watch the others and ensure that no one leaves the group. If anyone attempts to run away, deal with them as you would with deserters and shoot them on the spot. If a fight breaks out, I want all of you to take cover somewhere in case you get hit by stray gunfire."

Li Qingzheng was stunned. Since Ren Xiaosu was saying this, it was clear he already knew who was in the mountains on the opposite side. He was deliberately trying to lead these private soldiers over there! Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu seemed absolutely sure that an intense battle was going to take place!

What was going on? Why did Ren Xiaosu know that?

Li Qingzheng suddenly remembered that Ren Xiaosu had been going outside very often during the past few days. Could something have happened over that period?

After another half an hour's walk, the private troops arrived at the entrance of the valley. The reinforced company's commander said with a smile as he walked in, "I wonder what troops would camp in a ravine like this. They could be another group of private soldiers just like us."

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "I guess so."

In reality, Qing Yun's trusted troops could easily travel on the main mountain paths here. As long as they were willing to place their weapons down when negotiating with the Li Consortium, no one would have them killed. However, Qing Zhen requested for them to keep their movements a secret in case a spy from a third party found out about their negotiations.



After all, it wouldn't be good if either of the other two organizations found out that the Qing Consortium was negotiating with both of them at the same time.

Therefore, the troops who had been sent here to negotiate could only make their way over in secret. When they reached the designated location, Qing Zhen would get in touch with the Li Consortium's higher-ups and arrange for a meeting where they would personally come down into the mountains for secret negotiation talks.

However, Qing Zhen had no intention of negotiating with the Li Consortium. Right from the beginning, he was only thinking of leaving Qing Yun's trusted troops here to die in the Li Consortium's territory.

When the private troops went into the mountains, the commander of the reinforced company stunned. He saw the other party dressed in the Qing Consortium's black military uniform and instantly realized they were not the Li Consortium's private troops at all. So the Qing Consortium's troops had infiltrated their territory!

When the Qing Consortium soldiers saw the soldiers of the Divine Arms Battalion coming over, their instincts were to raise their hands. "We're the representatives of the Qing Consortium who have come to negotiate!"

Hundreds of others gradually walked over from the Qing Consortium's camp as well. Ren Xiaosu saw they had already raised their guns and were ready to shoot at any moment.

However, they remained very suspicious of the situation. Were these a thousand of the Divine Arms Battalion's soldiers in front of them? Why would they encounter the main force of the Divine Arms Battalion here?

Ren Xiaosu asked suspiciously, "How can you prove that you're here for negotiations? Why haven't we received any notification?"

"Our frontline commander, Qing Zhen, is currently in talks with your higher-ups. If you don't believe it, you can check with them," the Qing Consortium soldier said.

Ren Xiaosu sneered, "Put down your weapons to express your sincerity. Don't worry, our Divine Arms Battalion won't harm any unarmed troops."

The Qing Consortium's soldiers looked at one another while their officer clenched his teeth and considered the proposal. To be honest, he didn't expect to encounter the Divine Arms Battalion here, and he knew very well that they would not stand a chance against a 1,000 of their soldiers with only 400 of them.

Since they were here to negotiate, they would only return alive if the talks proceeded smoothly. Even if they managed to defeat them and run away at this moment, could they escape the Li Consortium's territory? But even so, would a proper military unit like them just place down their weapons after a few words from their enemies?!

The atmosphere got even more tense!

The reinforced company's commander was already trembling. It was not only him; all the private soldiers were also feeling the same.

How could any of them imagine that their Iron Second commander would be so ballsy as to even impersonate the Divine Arms Battalion to force the enemy to capitulate! So what if they were wearing the uniforms of the Divine Arms Battalion?

While they were stuck in a stalemate, Ren Xiaosu suddenly said, "Why don't we each take a step back? I'll hand over our reinforced company's commander to you as hostage to show our sincerity."

The reinforced company's commander was speechless. When did he become an offer of sincerity?! Whoever wanted to volunteer could go instead!

But before he could react, he was pushed out by Ren Xiaosu and stumbled across to the Qing Consortium's camp. When a group of their people pointed their guns at him, he was dumbfounded!

Ren Xiaosu said coldly, "If y'all still think that's not enough, I suspect that you aren't sincere at all and that you aren't here to negotiate!"

The Qing Consortium's officer slowly replied, "Attention, put down your weapons!"

But while the Qing Consortium's troops were putting down their weapons, Ren Xiaosu took out a pistol and shot the Qing Consortium's officer dead. Everyone was dumbfounded as the crack of the gunshot reverberated through the valley!

How could he go back on his words?!

Ren Xiaosu roared, "They're defenseless now! Those who kill the Qing Consortium's troops will have rendered a great service. Follow my lead!"

The people behind him were dazed. Some of them followed right after him and rushed forward as well. Although some of the soldiers tried to run away, Li Qingzheng's group was watching them from behind with their guns. Li Qingzheng raised his firearm and said with a grin, "Let's see who dares to escape!"

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Their entire group was suddenly forced to fight as they rushed forward with their guns. The battle descended into chaos and some people did not even know what was going on.

Seeing Ren Xiaosu rushing forward so fearlessly, they subconsciously followed him and started shooting mercilessly!

When the Qing Consortium's soldiers saw this, they immediately pulled out the pistols they had hidden up their sleeves. In fact, they were only willing to put down their weapons earlier because they still had guns hidden. They were not really unarmed!

When Ren Xiaosu who was furthest in front flicked his wrist, a reinforced company soldier went in front of Ren Xiaosu and shielded him.

The wrist flick was so concealed it looked like the soldier had decided to block the bullet for Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu shouted in distress, "Don't!"

At this moment, the reinforced company's commander was lying on the ground with blood oozing from his mouth. He was the only person who saw what Ren Xiaosu did.

He mumbled, "What the fuck..."

No one heard what the company commander said amid the intense gunfire.

### **Chapter 264 Heroes**

"What? A battalion of private troops has wiped out a group of troops from the Qing Special Forces?!" a general exclaimed in a command center. "You aren't joking, right? Has it been confirmed yet?"

The staff officer in front of the general said, "It's absolutely true. It just happened yesterday. We had our people rush to the scene to confirm it after getting the news from a soldier called Chen Wudi they sent back to give a sitrep. The soldiers they killed should be from the Qing Special Forces. It's just that we do not know why this group of Qing troops would enter our military's hinterlands or how they got in."

"How could you allow our enemies to infiltrate so easily? You might as well wait until they arrive at our HQ's doorstep before you realize they're here!" the general roared.

The staff officer hemmed and hawed before saying, "We suspect they were sent here to carry out a decapitation strike, so they deliberately traveled in the mountains. They did not bring a full-strength force with them because they wanted to travel quickly and quietly to avoid detection."

"How did all of them get wiped out then?" the general asked in a composed voice after calming down.

"We have written statements from the private troops who mentioned they were from the Iron Second Battalion. They said they were able to wipe out their enemies this time because their battalion commander is wise and courageous. He took advantage of the Divine Arms Battalion's uniforms they were wearing to fool the Qing Consortium soldiers into believing him and then immediately launched an assault after forcing them to disarm," the staff officer said.

"Why does this account sound so weird?" the general wondered. He felt that something was amiss, but he did not know where the problem lay.

"I also find it quite weird. However, it does make sense that the Qing soldiers were aware they wouldn't be able to defeat the Divine Arms Battalion." The staff officer said, "How should we handle this matter?"

"How many people from this battalion of private troops died in the battle?" the general asked.

"400. It's equivalent to the number of deaths our enemies suffered," the staff officer said.

The general said with heartfelt emotion, "A battalion of private troops was actually able to wipe out the Qing Special Forces and their casualties did not even exceed our expectations? This is a great triumph! This is exactly the triumph we need now!"

The staff officer immediately understood what the general meant. Everyone had been very optimistic about the Divine Arms Battalion's mission and hoped they would lead them to their first victory in the war. It would have boosted the morale of the military.

However, the higher the expectations, the greater the disappointment. The Li Consortium's higher-ups and generals were crestfallen at the defeat of the Divine Arms Battalion. In the combat meetings held over the past two days, everyone in the command center seemed overwhelmed by a sense of defeat. The combat staff officers did not even dare to cough openly in fear of getting reprimanded.

But now it was great news that they heard a battalion of private troops had wiped out the troops of their enemy's Special Forces.

At their level, they did not actually care about how many soldiers died in the battle. All they were concerned about was how this result would affect the overall situation!

The general said, "Report this to the Board immediately, and request for the battalion of private troops involved to be commended. I want to rename the Iron Second Battalion to the Heroes Battalion. The active battalion commander will be officially appointed as a major as part of the Li Consortium's combat troops. On top of that, I want them to be equipped with the best gear we have."

The staff officer was stunned for a moment. This was going to set a precedent for their entire military organization!

Even though there were military ranks in the private army, their soldiers were never officially appointed any rank. Therefore, the officers of the private army were just like regular employees, and they could even pay bribes to get appointed to certain positions in the organization. However, the Li Consortium had never considered the private soldiers as their people before.

But with an official appointment now, everything was going to be different. Someday Ren Xiaosu might even get transferred to the Li Consortium's regular troops and hold an important position!

As for reporting to the Board, that was only standard protocol. At a time like this, the Board would not interfere with decisions regarding the appointment or removal of an officer. As long as the move was beneficial to the war, they would not stop it from happening

But suddenly the general said, "After these private troops have been equipped with their gear, deploy them to our most impregnable defensive line. I've received intel that the overall commander of the Qing Consortium military has changed to Qing Zhen."

"What's that supposed to mean?" the staff officer asked after a slight hesitation.

"Qing Zhen is an extremely prideful man. It would be really embarrassing if word of his Special Forces getting wiped out by our private troops got out. How could a proud person like him possibly tolerate a

failure like that?" The general tapped his fingers on the table and sneered, "Send these private troops to our most impregnable defensive line to let Qing Zhen fight them. Let's wear out his military forces!"

The staff officer finally understood that the general was planning on using these private troops to lure Qing Zhen into a battle at their most robust position on the battlefield.

The battlefield was a large chessboard, and the players involved could not show any emotion. So what if they were the Heroes Battalion? They were still just chess pieces. The sacrifice of the Heroes Battalion would make them martyrs for others.

When the staff officer left, he suddenly thought of a saying: "The merciful cannot control the military; the fair cannot manage wealth." The ancients had always been right in such regards.

Full of pent-up anger towards Ren Xiaosu, Tang Wanyi of the Personnel Division had just returned to the command center. When he came back, he was ready to write up some dirt about Ren Xiaosu so that he could deal him a fatal blow at a critical point in the future. Heh, how could he expect to survive in the military after offending someone in the Personnel Division? How nonsensical!

But at this moment, someone lifted the Personnel Division's tent flap. A combat staff officer came in with a document tucked under his arm and said, "Who's in the Personnel Division?"

Tang Wanyi immediately put on a placating smile and said, "Over here!"

Everyone used to say that other than the chief of staff, normal staff officers held no real authority. But in wartime, these staff officers had the most presence around the generals. If any of them badmouthed you in front of the higher-ups, you would probably not survive the backlash. And it would be even worse if the staff officer was a favorite of the leaders!

Although the staff officer was submissive before the generals, he was not so polite with those in the Personnel Division. "Execute the order on this appointment document. The private troops' Iron Second Battalion will be renamed the Heroes Battalion, and Ren Xiaosu will be appointed with the rank of major. Equip the battalion with supplies and then deploy them to the designated battlefield at the indicated time."

Tang Wanyi was stunned. "What? Ren Xiaosu? Appointed to major?"

Tang Wanyi was a smart person and knew what was going on!

The staff officer gave Tang Wanyi a look from the corner of his eyes and said, "What? You have a problem with that?"

"No, I wouldn't dare. I'll get to it immediately," Tang Wanyi said bitterly. What the fuck? He had to travel all the way back there again after just returning?!

Before the staff officer left, he said, "It seems like you have a grudge against this Ren Xiaosu. But let me remind you, his rank is higher than yours now. Besides, he's now a war hero who will be the role model for our entire military. If you've offended him before, you had better reconcile with him quickly. Know what your priorities are."

Tang Wanyi even wondered if Ren Xiaosu and him were destined to be at odds with each other!

On that very night, Tang Wanyi arrived at the private army's camp once again. This time, his attitude was much better. He not only brought the appointment document but also five truckloads of food rations and another five truckloads of weapons!

But that was not all. Even the trucks were left behind for Ren Xiaosu and his men so they could use them to get to the front line quickly.

Tang Wanyi looked at Ren Xiaosu and said with a smile, "Sir, I'm sorry if I offended you last time. You're a magnanimous person. If there's anything else about me you're unhappy with, please tell me clearly. Tell me, what can I do to get your forgiveness?"

Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought. "Why don't you do the splits for me?"

Tang Wanyi was speechless.

### **Chapter 265 Previously kept secret**

The pedestrians in Stronghold 108 were all rapidly walking down the street. There were no signs of prosperity in this place anymore. Instead, a depressing atmosphere had set in.

Some noodle shops on the sides of the streets were already closed for the night. A lot of people were lining up in jewelry shops to purchase gold bars. However, the price of gold in the stronghold was already skyrocketing.

Military vehicles often drove past on the roads, as if the atmosphere of war was still not distinct enough.

A curfew had already been implemented in the stronghold. After 10 PM, any pedestrians found on the street would get sent to the Public Order Division to be detained without room for negotiation.

In peacetime, the stronghold residents liked relying on "connections" to get things done. If someone committed a misdemeanor, everything would be alright if they could find an acquaintance to sort out the matter.

But it was different now. It would be tough for those who got sent the Public Order Division to get out until after the war was over.

Connections had suddenly become useless.

Before the curfew time, a thin girl wearing a cap went into a hardware shop. As her hair was short, her long and beautiful neck could be glimpsed under her shoulder-length hair that covered it. She was dressed in well-fitting athletic wear. When she raised her arm, the attire emphasized the outline of her slim waist.

She gently knocked on the roller shutter door six times in a row, then paused for two seconds before rapping harder once more.

Someone immediately raised the roller shutter, and the girl bent down to get into the shop.

The owner of the shop was balding. He smiled and said, "You came from the north?"

"Mhm." The girl said, "Update me on the current situation."

"Nothing special has happened. It's rumored that the Divine Arms Battalion suffered a disaster while retreating from the Qing Consortium's territory. They were attacked by a mysterious sniper on their way back,"

"Next piece of news, I already know about this incident," interrupted the girl before the shop owner finished.

The shop owner was surprised to hear that but did not probe further. "There's something else. A battalion of private troops wiped out the Qing Special Forces at Mt. Tantou's front line yesterday. That was quite sensational news. After all, everyone knows what the private army is capable of. Who would have expected them to defeat the Qing Special Forces? And there's something else. I haven't gotten my hands on the Li Consortium's defensive deployment map yet. Once I have it, I'll send it in to the higher-ups immediately."

Half of the girl's face was hidden under the shadow of her cap. She replied, "There's no need to update me about things like the defensive deployment map, I won't be participating in this war. Right now, I need you to help me look for a young man called Ren Xiaosu."

"OK, I'll keep it in mind." The owner said softly, "Do you have any clues on where to start looking?"

The girl thought for a moment before answering, "You can start with wherever something unusual has happened."

"Unusual?" The owner said, "Nothing unusual has happened recently."

"That can't be." The girl seemed to remember something and said, "Bring me the list for that group of private soldiers."

The shop owner was stunned. Did this girl suspect that the young man named Ren Xiaosu was among these private soldiers? Because it was somewhat unusual that these private troops were able to defeat the Qing Special Forces? Who was that young man? Why was this girl placing such a great deal of importance on him?

Concurrently, in the Li Consortium's Research Facility 613, a middle-aged man in a white coat came out of a research laboratory. He said, "Bring in the next batch of samples."

With those words, the pretty secretary immediately called the sample storage room to inform them. Then the manager of the sample storage room checked on the time the samples were delivered here. He counted out a 100 bottles of nanomachine samples before sending them over to the lab.

One of the bottles was labeled with a note: "Nanomachines started behaving abnormally after tested on a candidate with 0% sync rate."

Elsewhere, several operators were looking at the corpses of some nanosoldiers in a nanomachine reclamation factory. They were preparing to reclaim the nanomachines in these corpses before proceeding to unlock and reset them.

Huge robotic arms hovered over the bodies as the operators controlled them. The operators were already numb from facing corpses like these all day long.

Outsiders might not know what experiments the Li Consortium was carrying out, but the staff here had been doing the same reclamation operations on a large number of corpses every day. They were not concerned about how these corpses came about, where they came from, or where they would go.

They were only concerned about whether too many corpses would get delivered here tonight and affect the time they finished their shift.

Of course, they were only allowed to return to their closed-door dorms after work since this was a top-secret job. There was even an entire company of soldiers that watched over them.

But it was still much better than having to face these corpses. At the very least, they could still drink free beer or watch videotapes or the like after returning to their dorms. In a way, their daily lives were not exactly that boring.

At this moment, the robotic arm buzzed and vertically descended to a corpse lying flat on a stainless steel bed. There was a needle-like catheter attached to the front of the robotic arm that could be inserted under the skin.

The operator pressed a key on the control panel. But a second later he was stunned. "Why isn't it reclaiming the nanomachines?"

A coworker next to him said calmly, "There could be some problems. Try again."

"OK." After that, the operator on the control panel tried to extract the nanomachines again. But still, nothing happened. "Should we manually operate it? Team leader, please authorize me. I need permission for the manual operation process."

A middle-aged man came over and entered a long password into the control panel. He instructed, "Try using the C2 remote access protocol."

When the robotic arm remained motionless, the middle-aged man frowned and said, "It's still not working? There's only the C1 remote access protocol left to try? But I don't have the permissions to access it. I'll need to seek approval from the Board first."

But the operator froze. "Team leader, nothing's gonna work. The nanomachines in his body... are gone!"

The military trucks were humming noisily as they made their way north on the mountain roads. Li Qingzheng sat in the driver's seat and roared in high spirits, "Xiaosu, you're amazing. How did you end



up becoming a major in the Li Consortium's regular troops in the blink of an eye? You're gonna have such a bright future! Do you know that being a regular soldier of the Li Consortium is completely different in status from being in the private troops?"

Ren Xiaosu pulled a long face next to him. "Enough bullshit, I'll take over driving for a while..."

"That won't do. There are still other soldiers in the back of the truck, and we're driving next to a cliff as well." Li Qingzheng turned down his battalion commander's request as he was really afraid of an accident happening. It would be alright to let Ren Xiaosu drive on a flat road, but he did not dare to let him touch the steering wheel while they were traveling on a mountain road. This was even after Ren Xiaosu had been promoted to battalion commander.

Their lives were more important!

The private troops had had their weapons upgraded. Although their total strength had been reduced to 511 people after the previous battle, everyone was now equipped with automatic rifles. Moreover, they were also given plenty of ammunition and even had four heavy machine guns attached to the battalion.

Although their equipment was still inferior to the Li Consortium's combat troops and they were not even given any rocket launchers, it was much better than what the other private troops had.

Li Qingzheng rubbed the steering wheel as he said with a chuckle, "It wasn't until today that I finally feel kinda like a soldier! This feels just like a dream. I never could've expected we'd wipe out the Qing Special Forces!"

### **Chapter 266 Live targets on the battlefield**

Li Qingzheng was in a joyous mood. Not only did they upgrade their gear, but they were also given a resupply of rations. More importantly, Ren Xiaosu had immediately promoted him to commander of the reinforced company after being appointed major. As such, Li Qingzheng had even more soldiers under his command now.

180 people used to be in the reinforced company. But after the battle, the entire reinforced company had nearly been wiped out by the Qing Consortium.

That was mainly because Ren Xiaosu had deliberately arranged for the reinforced company to follow close to him and made them the main fighting force in that battle. How could there be no casualties in a war? After all, bullets are blind!

At the time, everyone realized that Ren Xiaosu had also rushed out furthest to the front. So why had all the people around him died, yet he was left unscathed?

After the battle ended, Ren Xiaosu even led everyone to mourn for their dead comrades. He said with a very sorrowful look, "Our brothers in arms led a great life and died such a glorious death. Some of them fought bravely, and others even died saving me..."

How could those soldiers from the reinforced company possibly give up their lives to save Ren Xiaosu? The others might believe it, but Li Qingzheng and Jiang Wu's students were not convinced.

But nobody minded. In this era, the living had no time to grieve for the dead.

Besides, it wasn't like they had a foundation of friendship with them to begin with.

This time, they were under orders of command headquarters to head northwards and had been requested to join up with the garrison at Position 313 where a large group of the Li Consortium's combat troops were also stationed.

Usually, private troops would not get deployed to important strategic locations like Position 313 to provide support. But the situation with the Heroes Battalion was a little different. No one could say for sure if they were still considered as private troops or not.

After all, none of the battalion commanders in the private army had been given official appointments before, and no private army had ever defeated any of the Qing Consortium's combat troops either.

Let alone the private troops, not even the Li Consortium's regular troops were a match for the Qing Consortium's regular troops.

On their way there, they passed two forward operating bases. The treatment they received when they entered the FOBs was different this time. The commanders of the FOBs even welcomed them with great hospitality when they arrived, and they were served good food that included delectable meat dishes.

Not only did they have food to eat when they arrived, but they also found it unnecessary to pack some buns to take with them on departure. The people from the FOBs would load up baskets of buns onto the vehicles and even gave them beef jerky to bring along!

This made Ren Xiaosu feel somewhat uncomfortable. There was no room for him to make use of his street smarts!

When the commander of the FOB sent them off, he said with a smile, "I wish you all the best going forward. When you get to Position 313, we hope to hear about the glory of our Li Consortium's combat troops again..."

He took 20 minutes just to bid farewell to them. It was undeniable that he was fawning upon them.

Actually, this was just how the Li Consortium's system was structured. When a new star rose, the sycophants would always think this would be a good opportunity to pander to those above them. If they did not do it now, it would be too late when the new star reached the top!

But after they resumed their journey, even Li Qingzheng noticed something was off. "Xiaosu, I've realized that everyone seems to know we're heading to Position 313. Something doesn't feel right."

The movement of a fighting force was generally kept confidential, and it was the same even for the private troops. Friendly forces were not allowed to ask about each other's battle plans without authorization from the higher-ups!

But it was really odd this time. It seemed that someone was deliberately telling everyone that the Heroes Battalion was headed for Position

313!

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "What do you think is the reason for that?"

"Are they using us to bait the Qing Consortium?" Li Qingzheng wondered. He was taking a shot in the dark as he wasn't certain about it either. After all, his views were the same as any other refugee's. It was very sharp of him that he was able to guess this.

Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "So that's how the Li Consortium treats their heroes. I suppose they're too smart for their own good."

"What do you mean?" Li Qingzheng asked curiously.

Next to them, Chen Wudi piped up, "What my master meant was, how could anyone not have guessed it when even you were able to think of it?"

Li Qingzheng was speechless.

However, Ren Xiaosu was also aware that this was a very obvious move. The Li Consortium was openly telling the Qing Consortium that the private troops who had humiliated them would be at Position 313 and was challenging them to go there.

If they did not dare to go, it would also be considered a blow to the Qing Consortium's morale. But if they did, they would have a fierce battle on their hands.

Actually, the Heroes Battalion was only a pawn on the overall battlefield. They were a drop in the ocean.

Position 313 was located on the sunlit slope of Mt. Shuanglong. Tens of thousands of the Li Consortium's combat troops were garrisoned on the front lines that stretched all the way from Mt. Tantou to Mt. Shuanglong, passing through Mt. Fengyi in the middle.

Meanwhile, the front line at Mt. Qingsheng in the west that faced the Yang Consortium was even more heavily garrisoned with soldiers. Just at this location alone, tens of thousands of soldiers were traveling to and from the front line on a daily basis.

So their 500-strong battalion was nothing compared to that!

But fighting a war would never be as simple as solving an equation. The generals needed to play every move carefully and fight for every point that was up for grabs.

But the general who made this strategic decision could never have expected that Ren Xiaosu had already discussed matters with the Qing Consortium.

Li Qingzheng was getting extremely worried, but Ren Xiaosu was not one bit worried. He acted like he was just heading north for a holiday getaway.

Li Qingzheng looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, "Xiaosu, aren't you worried?"

Chen Wudi corrected, "It's 'Battalion Commander!'"

Li Qingzheng snapped, "You're really worthy of being your master's lackey!"

By now, everyone knew that Chen Wudi was a little mentally ill. He called himself the reincarnation of the Great Sage while Ren Xiaosu was the reincarnation of Tripitaka.

However, they did not have any issues with him. If anyone in the troops had any difficulties, Chen Wudi would definitely help them as long as they were sincere in asking for help.

It was really rare for a good person like that to appear in a world like this.

When they thought about it sometimes, it was really ironic how only those who were mentally ill were willing to be good people.

Ren Xiaosu, who was resting next to Li Qingzheng, opened his eyes and looked at him. "You can rest easy. With me around, nothing will happen."

He could not just say to Li Qingzheng, "Don't worry, I'm the Qing Consortium's head spy planted in the Li Consortium. They won't attack the place I'm at."

He could only beat around the bush.

Although Li Qingzheng admired Ren Xiaosu a lot, he still could not help but ask, "What if they focus their forces on attacking us for the sake of getting revenge?"

Ren Xiaosu got impatient. "If you let me drive for a while, I'll answer you right away!"

Li Qingzheng immediately gripped the steering wheel tight. "In that case, I don't want to know."

Ren Xiaosu was annoyed.

Suddenly, a hawk skimmed over their vehicle at low altitude. Ren Xiaosu looked out of the window and saw the bird probably had a wingspan of more than four meters. What an awe-inspiring sight!

These days, it would be challenging for any air forces to engage in aerial activities with those ferocious flying beasts up in the skies. The main difficulty laid in taking off since they would easily be targeted by these flying beasts.

Wars between humans in the past were a little more diverse than this current era. Then was a time when "those that could fly were not necessarily birds, and those that could swim were not necessarily fish."

But now armored brigades and artillery units were the keys to victory since only land battlefields were left to fight on. Meanwhile, nanomachines had become the most significant variable in current wars.

The Yang Consortium's armored brigade quietly arrived at the front line of Mt. Ping at this moment.

In the Yang Consortium's battle plans, the armored brigade would work with two infantry brigades to tear apart the Li Consortium's defensive line with a 40-kilometer-wide breach within three days once

the war broke out. That would leave all of the Li Consortium's defensive anchor points at the front line of Mt. Qingsheng ineffective.

But of course, the Li Consortium were not sitting ducks either.

Since everyone still had their trump cards hidden, no one would know what the outcome would be until after the curtain was lifted.

### **Chapter 267 No harm in having more skills**

Li Qingzheng had expected soldiers to welcome them when they arrived at Position 313. He even thought they would volunteer to serve them warm meals. After all, that was always the treatment they were getting throughout the journey.

But when Ren Xiaosu led the private troops and arrived at Position 313, Li Qingzheng realized that the soldiers in this military camp did not seem welcoming of them. Their attitude was clearly different from those at the FOBs they had stopped by before coming here.

The soldiers in the transport trucks passing by were looking at them coldly. When the private troops reached the camp, not even a single person was there to welcome them.

Li Qingzheng scratched his head at the entrance of the camp. "What's going on? Are we not welcome here?"

Ren Xiaosu chuckled and said, "Anyone but the soldiers at Position 313 would be welcoming of us. Just as Chen Wudi mentioned earlier, if even you could guess that we got sent here to become live targets on the battlefield, surely the commanding officer at Position 313 also reached the same conclusion."

Li Qingzheng finally realized why they were so welcomed at the FOBs. It was because everyone was looking forward to their upcoming performance here on the battlefield. But they were not welcome at Position 313 because their arrival meant that Qing Zhen would most likely send a large force here.

How could the soldiers at Position 313 be in a good mood when they knew they would probably have to fight their toughest battle soon?

But Ren Xiaosu did not care about this in the slightest. He went straight through the camp entry procedures at the sentry post and strolled in with his force of 500-odd private soldiers.

At this moment, an officer blocked Ren Xiaosu's path. When he looked at the soldiers behind Ren Xiaosu, he saw them all standing ungainly and without proper bearing. How was this supposed to be a unit capable of participating in a battle?

Although Ren Xiaosu and his men had defeated the Qing Special Forces, the nature of the refugees in the troops remained unchanged. Not only were their postures unsightly, but they were also wearing their uniforms sloppily.

Initially, the officer at Position 313's campsite had been thinking, 'Since they're already coming over, so be it. It's not so bad if a group of truly elite troops got deployed here anyway.'

But from the looks of it now, this "Heroes" Battalion must have gotten really lucky in their previous battle!

The officer frowned at Ren Xiaosu and said, "You're Ren Xiaosu, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's me," Ren Xiaosu said with a smile.

"How do you lead your soldiers?" The officer sneered. "They aren't even standing in an orderly fashion. Don't you normally drill?"

"Who are you?" Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "Are you looking down on our Heroes Battalion?"

The officer choked a little before saying, "I'm Ma Kai, the commanding officer at Position 313. I'm a senior colonel! I personally oversaw Position 313 getting built from the ground up, so I know the defensive fortifications here like the back of my hand!"

Ren Xiaosu quickly grabbed his hand tightly and said, "Great job. You're exactly the kind of down-to-earth person who can get things done that the organization needs!"

Ma Kai was speechless. The reason why Ma Kai had said that was to make Ren Xiaosu understand that he was the one who called the shots at Position 313. Even if the fucking Heroes Battalion had to come here, they would still have to listen to his command. So how did it end up with Ren Xiaosu extending his regards to him?!

Ma Kai said with a dark expression, "Don't play dumb with me. I don't know how you managed to defeat the Qing Special Forces, but in my eyes, you people are just pieces of dog shit sent here by the higher-ups to implicate us. I hope that you all will know your place and don't think that you are really heroes. Adjutant Zhang, bring them to where they will be holding. Don't come out here and make trouble for us if it's no business of yours."

No one in the private troops dared to say a word. Although they had been basking in glory on their way here, they were immediately brought back down to earth once they arrived at this place. But Ren Xiaosu did not say anything. He just observed the surrounding terrain as he followed Adjutant Zhang and walked north.

Position 313 was the general name given to this defensive front. It was a defensive anchor point for the entire front line at Mt. Shuanglong and was located in the northernmost part of the whole battlefield. It was also the closest to where the Qing Consortium's combat troops were.

The entire defensive front covered an area of over 66 hectares<sup>[1]</sup> and extended into the hinterlands of Mt. Shuanglong. In modern-day battles, it wouldn't be enough to just defend the high ground. If anyone were foolish enough to only do that, they would easily die to an enemy's artillery bombardment.

However, it would be a huge mistake if anyone thought that a defensive front was helpless in the face of modern-day artillery attacks.

Sometimes, normal people in the stronghold would often have conversations over drinks about the "Theory of the Omnipotence of Missile Weapons." But only those who had actual combat experience

would understand that for a missile to hit its target accurately, it would require the sacrifice of many human lives in order to pinpoint the precise location of the enemies.

Additionally, there were also vehicle-mounted short-range air defense (SHORAD) systems deployed at strategic defensive positions that worked very well against subsonic missile weapons such as grenades, mortars, and rockets, which were not guided and would not be able to get past these air defense systems.

Humans did not purely focus on studying the different means of attacks. In the current day, whoever possessed a more advanced defense system would gain a greater advantage with the same level of firepower.

It might be possible for the Qing Consortium to bombard the area with artillery fire, but who could afford to shell an area as large as the whole battlefield? Every single artillery shell cost money!

The purpose of war is to plunder benefits. If the expenditure outstretched the benefits gained at the end of this war, it would not be considered a victory at all.

As Ren Xiaosu kept walking, he looked at the unfamiliar-looking midsize military trucks. They were parked behind the bunkers, but he did not know what their purpose was.

After all, he did not gain any knowledge in this area back when he copied Yang Xiaojin's skills. As Ren Xiaosu still had an unused Skill Duplication Scroll on hand, he was considering whether he should use it on Colonel Ma Kai to gain some solid war expertise.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu said in his mind, "Use the Skill Duplication Scroll."

The voice from the palace in his mind intoned, "One of the target's skills will be randomly copied."

"Randomly copied target's amateur Morra skill. Do you want to learn it?"

Ren Xiaosu was dumbfounded on the spot. What the fuck is this Morra skill about?

The Five Greats, the Six Obediences!?[2]

Ren Xiaosu felt a pinch in his heart. The Li Consortium's prohibition of alcohol was not being seriously enforced at all. They even had a Li Consortium officer that played Morra? Was no one going to do anything about that?

Never mind that he ended up copying something like the Morra skill, but it was even an amateur skill? If he were going to depend on this skill in a drinking competition, he would probably end up losing really badly!

However, Ren Xiaosu was already aware that the probability of learning something useful was relatively low when using the Skill Duplication Scroll. Successfully copying and learning Luo Xinyu's superpower most probably exhausted all of his luck in recent years. So he was not particularly disappointed about not learning any useful skills this time.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu asked the palace, "What is Ma Kai's proficiency in leadership command?"

"This information can be revealed if it's for a former target you've attempted to learn from. He has advanced proficiency in Army Warfare Leadership," replied the voice from the palace.

Ren Xiaosu was rather startled to learn that he was actually an expert in this field. It was no surprise then that he was appointed as the commanding officer of Position 313.

In the end, Ren Xiaosu still went ahead and learned the Morra skill.

After all, it would be a waste not to learn it. There was no harm in having more skills.

He had even learned the jumping rope skill, so would it harm him to learn an amateur Morra skill? After all, there was no disgrace in being passionate about wanting to learn something!

### **Chapter 268 On the verge of war**

As Position 313 Covered a very large area, those who were unfamiliar with the place might even get lost here.

Ren Xiaosu said to Adjutant Zhang, who was leading the way, "Um... can you bring us a map so we can choose where to establish our defensive position?"

Adjutant Zhang turned back around and looked at him. He said, "The commander has already chosen a spot for you all. All you need to do is to defend your position well. Soldiers on the battlefield only have to obey their orders and shouldn't be questioning them."

Ren Xiaosu curled his lips but did not say anything. In truth, it did not really matter to him. Since Tang Zhou had already informed Qing Zhen that he would be deployed to Position 313, the Qing Consortium would attack anyone but him now.

He had only made that remark as he wanted to see if he could choose a convenient spot to leave the camp from to get in contact with Tang Zhou.

It didn't matter even if he was not allowed to. That was not a big issue.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized that Chen Wudi had been rather quiet. He asked, "What's the matter?"

Chen Wudi said, "Master, I heard a lot of people in the camp saying that they want to send us to our deaths."

"Oh, that?" Ren Xiaosu replied, "Don't worry, even if all of them get wiped out, we'll still be fine."

Chen Wudi had already awoken his super hearing. Ren Xiaosu tested it out with Chen Wudi before and discovered that he could hear what was being said even if he was just speaking in a whisper from a kilometer away.

But this power had its effects on Chen Wudi, because he could hear the "evilness" in this world.

The ancients were particular about being strait-laced. As the saying went, one should pay restraint themselves even while in private.



But most people couldn't conduct themselves that way. People were used to talking behind others' backs as dark sides got amplified when in private. The opinions they could not express openly intensified in the shadows.

And Chen Wudi could hear all of those things now.

If Ren Xiaosu had this power, he would definitely not be burdened by it. After all, he was not innocent himself.

But it was different for Chen Wudi.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Chen Wudi and asked, "Can you ignore it?"

"No." Chen Wudi shook his head and said, "They're saying the troops here have already chosen the most dangerous position for us to guard. As long as Qing Zhen's troops come attacking, we'll be the first to die."

"What else did they say?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"They also said that we deserve to die as it would save them from getting roped in." Chen Wudi said dejectedly, "But it wasn't our decision to come here. We didn't even offend them."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu said, "They're the ones at fault."

"Master, what is our purpose in seeking scriptures from the Western Paradise?" Chen Wudi asked.

Ren Xiaosu pondered the question for a moment. "So that we can lead a comfortable life?"

Chen Wudi was stunned for a moment. "Master, are you being serious? Shouldn't it be for the deliverance of all living creatures?"

Ren Xiaosu patiently advised, "You must save yourself before you can save others. Isn't there a saying that goes 'don't judge others by your own metric'? In simple terms, that means you should get rich first before helping others get rich with you. Only by doing it first can you—"

Chen Wudi put his head in his hands and interrupted, "Master, can you stop explaining for a moment? Let me process this for a moment..."

On the same night Ren Xiaosu arrived at Position 313, Luo Lan secretly arrived at the Yang Consortium's Stronghold 88. Furthermore, Luo Lan was also being unusually low-key as he only brought two orderlies with him this time.

Although the Yang Consortium's higher-ups held secret talks with Luo Lan, no one in the outside world even knew he had gone there or what they discussed.

But at midnight that night, the Yang Consortium's armored brigade and two infantry brigades suddenly started pushing south and were expected to arrive at the Li Consortium's front line at Mt. Qingsheng within the next two days. They had actually taken the initiative to kick off the war.

The Yang Consortium's armored brigade moved out from the front line of Mt. Ping and led the advance. Meanwhile, the infantry division on the flank closed down on Mt. Qingsheng from the north with the intention of containing the enemy's firepower. As long as this defensive line was broken, the Li Consortium's defenses in the west would no longer be effective.

Meanwhile, the Qing Consortium also made a move on their side. It was as though they had discussed it beforehand. That night, a group of mechanized infantry suddenly rolled in from the north.

As the long stretch of mechanized infantry column meandered along on the mountain paths, the lights on the vehicles looked like torches shining in the night. Several engineering battalions were quickly building bridges and paving roads as they moved on the paths. Their speed was so fast it was unbelievable.

Meanwhile, special forces had already been deployed onto the battlefield to scout ahead for enemies.

Some of the Li Consortium's troops had still been holding at the FOBs to reorganize their forces, but all of them got deployed to the front lines by the evening.

The 13 defensive positions at Mt. Qingsheng were brightly lit as the entire camp was illuminated by huge spotlights. Meanwhile, the military camp was filled with the angry voices of the Li Consortium's officers shouting.

When a military truck drove in, the soldiers jumped out from the back of the vehicle and rushed to their assigned spots without stopping

Ren Xiaosu was sitting on a hill and looking behind him. The spot their battalion was assigned to was at the northernmost area of Position 313. Just as Chen Wudi had heard, it was Colonel Ma Kai who had arranged for them to guard this position and send them to their deaths.

All they had were four machine guns. They were not even issued a rocket launcher, much less being given any mortars. It would be a miracle if they could defend their position with the weapons they had.

So when the soldiers at Position 313 met Ren Xiaosu and his men, they looked at them as though they were looking at the dead. No one believed they would survive.

When Chen Wudi sat down next to Ren Xiaosu, Ren Xiaosu said to him, "Immediately let me know if you hear anything unusual. We should also have our guards up against Qing Zhen in case he goes back on his word."

"OK." Chen Wudi nodded vigorously.

While sitting at this relatively elevated position, Ren Xiaosu could vaguely spot the soldiers at the camp running back and forth a kilometer or two behind them. There were people directing the vehicles with glowing red batons. People were also constantly walking in and out of the command center at the rear.

However, Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt that something was odd about the three huge tents that were standing quietly in the camp. While there were people busily going in and out of the other tents, those three tents remained idle, undisturbed by anyone. There weren't even any soldiers who went near it.

What was with this? Could it be the Li Consortium's classified zone?

At this moment, Li Qingzheng walked up with an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder. "Xiaosu, I'm feeling a little panicky..."

"Don't panic, there's nothing to panic about." Ren Xiaosu laughed and said, "At most, we'll just run away when the Qing Consortium's combat troops start attacking us."

"You're taking it so lightly. How can we run away just like that?" Li Qingzheng shrugged as he sat next to Ren Xiaosu and whispered, "A group of scouts have just been deployed from here. I heard them saying that it seemed like the Qing Consortium's troops are coming here to get their revenge."

Ren Xiaosu started frowning. Could there be a change of plans?

He turned around and looked at the camp behind him. Suddenly, he had an inkling that a lot of people there were subconsciously looking at them at this moment.

As the war was on the verge of breaking out, everyone at the camp bore a grudge against this "Heroes" Battalion. Even the rearguard troops who had just arrived at Position 313 were horrified when they heard the Heroes Battalion was here. Everyone had the feeling that the Qing Consortium would definitely attack this place first.

Although it was difficult to predict who would win the war, no one felt that the Heroes Battalion could survive this battle.

Chapter 269 The Heroes Battalion requests battle!

Ren Xiaosu had tasked Li Qingzheng and Chen Wudi with setting up the defenses. The Qing Consortium's troops would definitely have to construct some basic defensive fortifications first after arriving here and would not attack immediately.

The attackers would need to build up their defensive front as well. After all, retreating soldiers would still have to have someplace to treat their wounds and rest at.

Ren Xiaosu had been observing the three suspicious tents and even had Li Qingzheng bring a pair of binoculars to him. The binoculars thing had come with their newly issued equipment, and Ren Xiaosu found it extremely handy.

After all, a supernatural being's hearing and vision did not improve significantly after awakening their powers. The change to their vision was mainly in how it processed movement, not the distance they could see up to.

But that general who was so determined to appoint Ren Xiaosu could probably not have expected him to use it to observe their Li Consortium rather than the Qing Consortium.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu saw a small group of people emerging from one of those tents. However, these people were keeping a very low profile. They were dressed in the uniforms of normal soldiers and did not interact with anyone.

But Ren Xiaosu was surprised to find he actually knew someone from this group. Wasn't one of them that posturing Lin Qi who had been to their outpost previously? Wait, so were these three military tents all hiding the nanosoldiers from the Divine Arms Battalion?!

Ren Xiaosu had found it a little regrettable that one of the "legs" of his armor was still missing. However, it looked like it had shown up when he least expected it.

Ren Xiaosu looked around and headed into the mountains alone when he noticed no one was paying attention to him. The soldiers at Position 313 were all avoiding their location like the plague. But it also made it more convenient for Ren Xiaosu to head out.

He had just trekked a kilometer west when someone suddenly whispered from behind a large tree in front of him, "From the north comes a monk."

Ren Xiaosu said, "From the south comes a mute. Come on out."

After Ren Xiaosu said that, Tang Zhou emerged from behind the tree.

Tang Zhou asked, "Have you all settled down at Position 313 yet? I can only move around on my own for now. There are scouts patrolling the vicinity, so we'll get discovered if we move in larger groups."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu asked, "So are y'all planning to attack Position 313?"

Tang Zhou said frankly, "Actually, it might look like we're preparing to launch an aggressive attack on this place, but we're just trying to attract the main forces of the Li Consortium from the front lines of Mt. Shuanglong and Mt. Fengyi to here. We aren't planning on sacrificing too many of our people here."

Ren Xiaosu frowned. From the looks of it, the Li Consortium and the Qing Consortium would get caught in a deadlock here for quite a while. Even if they were going to engage in a battle, it wasn't going to get serious. But why did they want to attract the Li Consortium's main forces over? He could not understand what was going on.

Qing Zhen had to have some other plans.

Tang Zhou continued, "But we'll launch an attack on Position 313 and Position 319 at the same time after midnight. The Li Consortium's main forces at the rear will only come over if we attack more aggressively. Of course, we'll definitely only be feinting an attack on your Position 313. We'll be sending some of Qing Yun's remaining soldiers your way too. They aren't well-equipped and will not pose any threat to the defensive front you're guarding."

Tang Zhou said this in order to dispel Ren Xiaosu's concerns. After all, they still had opportunities for further cooperation.

But Ren Xiaosu said in a serious tone, “Y’all can just launch an attack on Position 313 without worrying about me. Attack it to your heart’s content. I’ll draw a simple map of our defensive deployment for you, but go easy on our Heroes Battalion when you attack us!”

The defensive deployment map was very crucial. Without it, the Qing Consortium would have to pay the price of an infantry brigade if they wanted to figure out how the heavy firepower was distributed at Position 313.

But Tang Zhou became very confused by this. What had gotten into Ren Xiaosu? He was even requesting a battle now?

“Did we succeed?” Ma Kai asked as he knitted his eyebrows in the command center.

A combat staff officer said, “We attempted to blow up the temporary bridge they had constructed, but our men were discovered by them before they could even get close to it. As our spies have been thoroughly cleaned out from the Qing Consortium, we can only hold our ground for now. Based on the intel relayed by the scouts, the Qing Consortium has divided their troops to head in separate directions.”

“They’re coming in separately?” Ma Kai asked, “Where are they headed?”

“One of them is headed here to Position 313, while the other is headed to Position 319.” The combat staff officer said, “But we can’t ascertain how their forces are distributed.”

Position 313, where they were located, and Position 319 were the defensive anchor points of the entire battlefield’s front line. These two locations closely supported each other, and as long as they remained standing, the entire battlefield would be stable.

Hence, the Qing Consortium would not be able to avoid these two fronts if they wanted to break through the defensive lines at Mt. Shuanglong.

The combat staff officer said, “The only weakness that Qing Zhen has is that he bears grudges and values the morale of his army too much. That’s also the reason why the higher-ups have sent the fucking Heroes Battalion to Position 313. Therefore, I feel that he will still send his main forces here to Position 313.”

“No.” Colonel Ma Kai shook his head and said, “You’re wrong about that. I’ve studied the intelligence of the battles that Qing Zhen has waged. Although his military strategy on the battlefield might look like it varies a lot, which in turn confuses people, he will never take risks or be greedy for success. A few years ago, Qing Zhen faced the Pyro Company at Mt. Taifu when he was still an inexperienced combat commander. He could obviously chase victory by pursuing his enemies, but he suddenly chose to retreat. It requires a lot of courage and wisdom for a young man in his early twenties to do that. It was also proven later that the Pyro Company indeed had a backup plan at that time, but they couldn’t do anything when the Qing Consortium’s troops started retreating.”

Everyone seemed to think that Qing Zhen’s behavior was unpredictable and full of tricks. He tended to like using unconventional methods to fight his battles. But Ma Kai felt that Qing Zhen was projecting a false image.

The combat staff officer was taken aback for a bit. "What do you mean?"

"I think that it's very likely they will feint an attack here at Position 313 to throw us off before focusing their attacks on Position 319." Ma Kai analyzed, "Qing Zhen is not someone who is blinded by hatred. Moreover, he only lost a group of his Special Forces this time, so it shouldn't even be tantamount to him seeking vengeance."

The combat staff officer echoed, "Colonel Ma Kai, you're really discerning of the situation on the battlefield. I'm in agreement with your opinion."

Ma Kai said, "Tell our fighting forces to get ready. Once we confirm that the Qing Consortium is only faking an attack on Position 313, we'll have to be ready to support Position 319 at immediate notice."

The combat staff officer nodded and said, "Any further instructions?"

Ma Kai replied, "The position where the fucking Heroes Battalion is defending is unimportant to the overall situation, so if the Qing Consortium does feign an attack here, I don't want the other fighting forces to give them any support."

The combat staff officer was shocked. Was he thinking of just leaving the Heroes Battalion to die?!

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

A few consecutive explosions blasted and shook the ground. Everyone in the command center was stunned. That was the sound of artillery fire!

Immediately after, intense gunfire rang out through the night sky as war broke out in an instant!

What was going on? Why did the Qing Consortium suddenly launch an attack?! Had they gone crazy?

A soldier rushed in from outside and shouted, "The Qing Consortium's main forces are approaching Position 313! Although our vehicle-mounted SHORADs have managed to intercept their mortar shelling, it seems like they've gotten their hands on our defensive deployment map and are concentrating their firepower on where our heavy weapons are deployed!"

Ma Kai wore a solemn look. Wasn't this slap to the face delivered a little too quickly?!

### **Chapter 270 Qing Zhen set me up!**

Sometimes when enemies made their attacks, they would have to rack their brains for several days just to find a breakthrough point. Even with heavy firepower, they still would not know where to start attacking. Even if they wanted to carry out a full coverage attack, they would not be able to do it.

In normal circumstances, the more ruthless commanders would just send in cannon fodder to get an understanding of the actual situation. Thousands of lives would be wasted just to find out where the heavy weapons were located on the defensive grounds.

But it seemed like the Qing Consortium was fully aware of that right from the beginning. They even knew where the SHORADs at Position 313 were deployed. The SHORADs were very expensive and should only be deployed at strategic locations in case the front got bombarded with artillery fire.

But the moment Qing Zhen began his attack, he ordered a barrage of mortars to be fired at the strategic locations like they didn't cost money, effectively making a "one-for-one exchange" by destroying the Li Consortium's SHORADs with his cheap mortar shells.

If Ma Kai and his men had known their defensive deployment map had been leaked, they would have been more conservative in their deployment of the SHORADs. But they didn't know!

How could they have known that the so-called commander of the Heroes Battalion would turn out to be the most important spy of the Qing Consortium? He even gave away the defensive deployment map just like that.

Just one round of unexpected mortar bombardment had nearly destroyed all the SHORADs at Position 313!

This move by Qing Zhen was disgustingly effective.

The defensive deployment map was simply too important. Qing Zhen had intended to break through the defensive line at Position 319. But with the emergence of this deployment map, he immediately changed his strategy.

If Qing Zhen did not have the defensive deployment map, a large quantity of those mortar shells would have been wasted. But with it, he could achieve a closer and more accurate strike, forcing the SHORAD forces to be up to their ears in work.

Although the Li Consortium's development of armaments had been going well and their talent pool was bulging, they had basically not fought in any large-scale battles in recent years. Even a talent like Ma Kai, who had a thorough understanding of warfare, was nothing but a novice.

No matter how much theoretical knowledge a person had, it would still take some time to put this knowledge into practice and gain valuable lessons.

It was unfortunate that they were facing Qing Zhen who did not have any intention of affording them time to grow.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu led the Heroes Battalion to their position located on a small hill on the mountain. There was a small bunker with heavy fortifications around it, while a 43-degree slope laid in front of them.

As Ren Xiaosu looked down from up here while lying prone behind the defensive fortifications, the soldiers of the Heroes Battalion were trembling next to him while holding their guns.

Listening to the continuous artillery fire that was booming in the distance, Li Qingzheng asked in a quavering voice, "Battalion Commander, will the Qing Consortium bombard us with their mortars? We won't be able to hold them off!"

"What are you afraid of?" Ren Xiaosu said, "It's not like they've started bombarding us!"

At this moment, the Qing Consortium's soldiers could faintly be seen approaching at the foot of the mountain where their battalion was positioned. Ren Xiaosu roughly estimated there to be over a 1,000 of them. This was an infantry regiment!

"Are we going to fight them?" Li Qingzheng asked.

"Yes, of course we're going to fight. Why shouldn't we fight when we have the terrain advantage?" Ren Xiaosu said, "Let's wait for them to get a little closer!"

"Any closer and they'll be within distance of hurling their grenades over," Li Qingzheng said anxiously.

"There's no need to panic. Everything is well within my control," Ren Xiaosu said calmly.

When the Qing Consortium's infantry regiment got halfway up the mountain, Ren Xiaosu suddenly shouted, "Open fire!"

The four heavy machine guns in the bunker spewed tongues of flame. The machine gun bullets hit the mountainside and splashed mud all around. When one of the soldiers got hit by a bullet in the arm, his arm broke!

Although the Qing Consortium soldiers wanted to rush up, they could not do so. They tried shooting at Ren Xiaosu and his men's location, but the advantage of the defensive fortifications was simply too great.

In order to tackle this kind of high ground in modern warfare, the most common method was for troops to charge forward until they were within distance of the enemy. Then they could choose to bombard the target accurately with artillery fire using precision laser guidance.

This laser guidance was used to point out the target's location accurately so that the supporting troops could send in missiles from the rear.

They had already tried their best to charge up the mountain. A soldier was holding up a laser guidance device, but no supporting fire came from behind even after he pointed it at the bunker for a long time.

The regimental commander lost all hope and lamented, "Qing Zhen set me up!"

Actually, he understood that Qing Zhen definitely wanted to get rid of him quickly since he was in Qing Yun's camp and was not cooperative with Qing Zhen in his battle plans either.

But he did not expect Qing Zhen to be this treacherous. He was brave enough to use the outcome of the war to trap him? If they could not secure this front, what would happen if it affected the big picture?



But what he did not know was that Qing Zhen had absolutely no intention of securing this front, because he had already made a deal with Ren Xiaosu!

“Regimental Commander, what should we do now?” a soldier shouted out amid the heavy fire coming from the mountain.

“Use the rocket launcher!” the regimental commander roared.

With a loud boom, a soldier who was carrying the rocket launcher was blown away by an explosion. The rocket had exploded before it could even be launched!

“Regimental Commander, what are we gonna do now?!”

“Charge!” The regimental commander clenched his teeth and said, “After we charge up, we’re gonna blow up this position with our grenades. That’s the only way we can survive. There shouldn’t be too many soldiers defending this position, so we still have hope!”

A stupid way to storm high ground was by throwing hand grenades. After the attacking soldiers advanced to a close enough distance, they would throw the grenades to blow up the defensive position. When that was successful, the soldiers at the defensive position would no longer be able to stand.

So grenadiers in the military used to play an extremely important role. Whoever could throw grenades most accurately would survive and enjoy the spoils of war.

Of course, this method was gradually eliminated with the advancement in firepower. Unless it was a desperate situation, no one would do it this way anymore.

They had been issued with an unserviceable rocket launcher, and after charging halfway up the mountain, they realized they had no supporting fire.

This left the regimental commander in despair. Qing Zhen had even pushed him to the point where he had to resort to such an obsolete tactic.

Several of the brave grenadiers in the troops immediately continued to advance. After they got to the designated distance, they threw their grenades over!

Everyone midway up the mountain became quite excited. It seemed like the troops who were guarding this position on the mountain were quite inexperienced for them to get close enough to throw their grenades!

After waiting for a short while, the grenades that were thrown over detonated. However, the explosion sounded very soft.

The regimental commander was a smart person. So when he heard the sounds of the explosions, he growled, “Qing Zhen, you treacherous fool, you’ve gone too far! How could you issue us with dummy grenades!”

Although the training grenades were not dummy grenades, their explosive power was extremely weak. The explosions would only produce a sound but were not enough to kill anyone. Moreover, they looked exactly the same as a real grenade.

The regimental commander was nearly in tears. It was only then that he realized how unscrupulous Qing Zhen really was. He did not even leave a way out for them!

As Ren Xiaosu kept firing on the hill, he was treating this as practice for his Advanced Firearms Proficiency. He was using the automatic rifle in such a way that it felt like a sniper rifle in his hand. One shot, one kill, that was how accurate he was!

Ren Xiaosu said to Li Qingzheng at this moment, "See, we're the Heroes Battalion after all. The opposing Qing troops are not a threat to us at all."

Li Qingzheng believed it immediately. That was because he also felt very relaxed when dealing with the enemy.

At this moment, the other soldiers of the Heroes Battalion also realized that war did not seem that terrifying after all.