

First Order 271

Chapter 271 The lifesaving Heroes Battalion!

Ren Xiaosu and his men had expended their ammunition very quickly. The main reason for this was that everyone was inexperienced in fighting a battle. They had only fought once during the battle with the Qing Special Forces, and it even ended chaotically.

They did not even know how they had won against them. The post-battle conclusion was that the battalion commander was wise and outstanding enough to dupe their enemies to put down their weapons.

Now that they were in yet another battle, it was against a full-strength infantry regiment of 1,500 soldiers. Meanwhile, they only had around 500 people on their side.

No one other than Ren Xiaosu was aware that this infantry regiment was actually sent here to their deaths by Qing Zhen. So everyone would definitely feel a little flustered at the sight of them.

In their panic, their hands trembled, and they fired off their ammunition like it didn't cost a thing. They just kept their fingers on the trigger without letting go.

The troops at the other positions on the defensive front could only hear continuous gunfire and loud explosions coming from this side of the battlefield, but they did not know the actual situation of the battle over here.

Gradually, the infantry regiment below got so overwhelmed they lost all morale. When Ren Xiaosu noticed the barrels of the heavy machine guns turning red-hot, he scolded, "Why are all y'all so fucking stupid? Piss on the gun barrels to cool them!"

When the soldier who was responsible for feeding more ammunition into the heavy machine guns heard that, he immediately took off his pants and peed on a gun barrel. However, the heavy machine gunner ended up swearing, "Fuck, it's splashing all over my face!"

With the help of the Qing Consortium, a group of panicky amateurs had successfully defended the Li Consortium's high ground.

Many people would play down the power of heavy machine guns as they felt that it was just a gun no matter what. How could it be as powerful as artillery?

But war was never about specifications alone. The role of heavy machine guns in positional warfare was even more significant than one could imagine. In the history of humanity's wars, there was someone who had killed 3,200 people in a single day using only a heavy machine gun!

Seeing that the infantry regiment had been badly battered, Ren Xiaosu could finally use his binoculars to observe the other defensive positions.

But he was surprised by what he saw. Some of the Qing Consortium's soldiers had already penetrated the other elevated locations with the support of artillery fire. Meanwhile, the majority of the Li

Consortium's Position 313 had been bombarded into a mess, and the heavy fire positions deployed on the high ground were forcefully broken through by the Qing Consortium. This was a situation no one had expected before the battle began.

The camp's ground at the rear was no longer smooth but looked like it had been bombarded quite heavily as well.

However, it seemed that the Qing Consortium did not want to take out Position 313 in its entirety. Qing Zhen was well-versed in military tactics and knew well that they would definitely face the Li Consortium's frenzied counterattack if they seized Position 313.

The occupation of some hills often changed hands hundreds of times during a war. By the end of the war, the slopes would even get painted crimson red. Some people would even slip and fall when they stepped on the slopes as blood seeped deep into the ground.

Therefore, it did not mean a battle would end after the high ground was seized successfully. Immediately after the Qing Consortium occupied one of the hills, the Li Consortium would bombard them back with heavy artillery fire. At that moment, a large number of the Qing Consortium's soldiers who had just charged up would perish in an instant.

War is cruel. It doesn't care whether you have parents to support or if your son is waiting for you at home.

Everything that happened in war was to determine the final victory.

Ren Xiaosu raised his binoculars and gazed at the rear. His only focus was on the three mysterious tents. Or to put it better, he only cared about the movements of the nanosoldiers.

The defensive deployment map he had given away earlier was not considered particularly detailed. After all, Ren Xiaosu did not get to fully walk around Position 313, so he could only draw whatever he had seen.

But he had specially marked the tents the nanosoldiers were in and reminded Tang Zhou that they must bombard the area there with their artillery fire.

Naturally, it wouldn't be realistic to expect an accurate attack on the rear without any laser-guided weapons or detailed mapping. But as per their agreement, Qing Zhen put in even more money in order to fully bombard the area where the three tents were located.

Ren Xiaosu saw that the three tents no longer stood. There was only a pile of corpses and a pool of fresh blood on the ground. Seeing that, Ren Xiaosu got all excited.

Suddenly, the voice from the palace in his mind said, "Quest: Save a 100 people. You will receive five allocatable attribute points."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. He was wondering what excuse he could make to return to the rear. However, the palace immediately came up with a reason for him.

He took a look at the remaining few soldiers of the infantry regiment below them before shouting to Chen Wudi, "Wudi, follow me back to the camp to save the others. There are many wounded soldiers there!"

Then Ren Xiaosu even pointed to the combat platoon that included Jiang Wu's students to go with him.

Chen Wudi's eyes lit up. "OK, Master!"

The two of them turned around and rushed back towards the rear. Li Qingzheng was nearly scared out of his wits and said, "Battalion Commander, don't go! How are we going to handle this if you leave now!"

"Don't worry, just keep a careful watch on our position. The remainder of the infantry regiment won't be able to cause any trouble to us now!" Ren Xiaosu did not even turn around as he shouted to Li Qingzheng.

Li Qingzheng was dazed for a moment. He had thought they would have a tough fight here. But as it stood, they still had enough energy to go back to save the wounded.

Before this, everyone at Position 313 felt that Ren Xiaosu and his men were doomed.

But so far in this battle, even after some of the troops had entirely perished, the Heroes Battalion only suffered around a 100 casualties.

Although this number of casualties accounted for one-fifth of their total strength, there had been bullets and artillery shells flying all around on the battlefield. It was a miracle they had taken so few casualties!

With only a 100 casualties, they were able to annihilate the enemy's infantry regiment of 1,500. If news of this spread back to the Li Consortium's generals at the rear, they would be shocked!

Of course, saying that it was an annihilation would definitely be an exaggeration. But Ren Xiaosu would definitely brag like that.

Ren Xiaosu, Chen Wudi, and his men rushed all the way back to the rear of Position 313. At this moment, the camp was a mess. The command center's tent had collapsed and no one knew the whereabouts of Ma Kai.

Medics were running around in a bid to save the injured, but there were just too many casualties. How could they possibly save everyone?

But Ren Xiaosu's goal was clear. When he rushed back to the camp, he led Chen Wudi and the others to where the nanosoldiers used to be. Ren Xiaosu shouted, "Wudi, bring the others along and carry the wounded to get them treatment!"

Ren Xiaosu was already looking for any nanosoldiers who'd died. As smoke was lingering over the battlefield, he could not clearly see where the dead nanosoldiers were.

However, Ren Xiaosu's sense of direction was pretty good, so he quickly located the spot where the three tents were. Each time he encountered a nanosoldier, he would immediately get the palace to unlock and reset the nanomachines in them. After the process was completed, he quickly stored the nanomachines in his storage space.

There was a limit to the number of nanomachines a human body could hold. Moreover, Ren Xiaosu had harvested so many nanomachines by now that he could not hide them in himself anymore. He could only store them in his storage space.

The wounded were wailing in agony on the ground. Someone tried to pull Ren Xiaosu to a stop as he passed by, but he didn't even look at the person.

The wounded soldier was dumbfounded. 'Aren't you here to rescue the injured?'

Wait a minute. The wounded soldier recognized Ren Xiaosu and called out to him, "Ren Xiaosu! You're Ren Xiaosu! Save me, quickly!"

Ren Xiaosu, who had already made a circuit and collected all the nanomachines he could find, was still a little unsatisfied. When he turned around and heard the cry for help, he was stunned. 'Eh, isn't that Lin Qi lying on the ground?!

He chuckled and said, "I'm so sorry, I didn't notice you just now. How's your injury?"

Lin Qi struggled to say, "It's not the time to reminisce. You-".

But before he could finish speaking, Ren Xiaosu picked up a piece of shrapnel from the ground and stabbed it into Lin Qi's neck. Lin Qi looked up at Ren Xiaosu and only saw a stone-cold look in his eyes.

Ren Xiaosu lamented, "When I think back, it's such a pity the wolves failed to kill you last time."

Lin Qi's eyes widened, but he could not make a sound. So the wolves also had something to do with Ren Xiaosu? He fully understood now that this Ren Xiaosu was actually much stronger than he had thought at the beginning.

This was the last conscious thought Lin Qi had in this world before he succumbed to endless darkness.

Chapter 272 Quest complete!

The Li Consortium was really unlucky. Even with a hidden trump card like the nanomachines, they were unable to use it to maximum effect.

The Li Consortium lacked war experience, which resulted in some mistakes on the usage of the nanomachines. As Qing Zhen had mentioned before, combat troops like the nanosoldiers who possessed great strength and mobility should be deployed separately so that they could infiltrate the enemy's rear and carry out precision strikes.

For example, they could execute attacks on the enemies' power stations and arsenals or perform decapitation strikes. They should have used the Divine Arms Battalion separately so that the nanosoldiers would be more effective in their might.

But actually, it wasn't impossible to deploy the nanosoldiers together. If not for the existence of Ren Xiaosu, who was also the head spy of the Qing Consortium, the Divine Arms Battalion would still trouble the Qing Consortium greatly even if they were not at their full strength.

However, they were all killed.

Meanwhile, the situation at Position 319 right now was a little better. The Qing Consortium was only planning on feigning an attack there, so they were a little surprised when concealed nanosoldiers suddenly appeared at the rear of the battlefield. It caught the Qing Consortium off guard and the nanosoldiers nearly even destroyed their heavy firepower in the rear.

But it was different at Position 313. The Li Consortium's secret weapon would remain a secret since the nanosoldiers were all dead before they could even come out of their tents.

In addition, the greatest advantage of the nanomachines was that they could be recycled. The first batch of nanosoldiers did not matter at all as the nanomachines in them could be recycled by the organization after they died. The recycled nanomachines would then be used to put together another group of nanosoldiers.

But after Ren Xiaosu came to the Li Consortium, there were fewer and fewer nanomachines that could be recycled. Ren Xiaosu had single-handedly turned a renewable weapon into an expendable weapon.

This time, Ren Xiaosu had harvested a considerable amount of nanomachines. Not counting the external armor for his leg, he might even be able to share the remaining nanomachines with Jiang Wu's students after giving some of them to Yan Liuyuan.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu saw some of the nanosoldiers' field packs scattered on the ground. He opened one of them and found a heavy, metallic, black box inside. He wondered what it was used for.

Eh? Ren Xiaosu's eyes lit up. Could it be possible that this thing was used for wireless charging?

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu picked up three of the intact boxes and stuffed them into his storage space. Whether they were useful or not, he would just take them.

He wasn't going to take any chances!

Today, Ren Xiaosu had given the defensive deployment map to the Qing Consortium that enabled them to take out Position 313 successfully while eliminating Qing Zhen's dissidents at the same time.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was also able to harvest a lot of nanomachines thanks to the Qing Consortium. It could essentially be described as a win-win scenario.

Only the Li Consortium ended up as the loser.

At this moment, the Li Consortium troops stationed at the front line of Mt. Qingsheng was up against the Yang Consortium's armored brigade and infantry division. The battle over there was even more intense than the battle here between the Qing Consortium and the Li Consortium. The Yang Consortium had yet to breach the Li Consortium's defensive line because there wasn't a character like Ren Xiaosu over there.

Chen Wudi and the others had already located quite a few wounded and were carrying them towards the medical center. Ren Xiaosu casually picked up a wounded soldier in the camp and placed him over his shoulder before catching up with the rest of the group.

When they arrived at the medical center, the nurses and doctors were all covered in blood. Ren Xiaosu spotted Colonel Ma Kai lying here as well, but he was unconscious.

When the nurses saw Ren Xiaosu and his men, they were all stunned. These people were not medics, so why were they helping to carry the wounded here?

The doctor asked, "Which ORBAT are you from?"

Chen Wudi said proudly, "We're from the Heroes Battalion!"

When one of the wounded soldiers heard that, he was stunned. "Weren't y'all at the front line? Why do you look totally unaffected?"

Ma Kai was awoken by the noise. When he saw Ren Xiaosu, he flew into a rage. "Did you abandon your posts?"

Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "How can you say that? Our Heroes Battalion is an honorable unit, so how could we do something like abandoning our posts? We've already wiped out the enemy's infantry regiment. That's why we can help out our fellow comrades!"

"What?" Ma Kai exclaimed. "Even if you want to lie, you should at least make up something sensible. How could you have wiped out the infantry regiment with only fucking refugees in your troops!"

Ma Kai had studied the Qing Consortium's troops a lot. He knew the infantry regiment was not only made up of infantry troops. Without mentioning their heavy weapons like RPGs and mortars, the defensive front would still have crumbled once the enemy broke through and deployed their laser-guided weapons!

The fucking Heroes Battalion was made up of refugees and issued with only four heavy machine guns, yet they claimed to have wiped out an entire infantry regiment? Were they dreaming or something?

Everyone thought the Heroes Battalion would get annihilated on the battlefield. But they were all still alive and kicking by the end of the battle. It was as though they were completely unaffected by the attack!

Everyone in the medical center found this outcome unacceptable!

Ren Xiaosu giggled. "You'll understand if you go outside and have a look at the battlefield. I don't have time to waste with you now. There are still other people waiting to be saved by me."

Since Ren Xiaosu had finished collecting the nanomachines, he would have to start doing the quest seriously. As the requirement of the quest was to save a 100 people, he was still far from completing it, having only saved one person just now.

This was the first time the palace had informed him in advance about the reward when assigning him a quest. Furthermore, the reward this time was for five allocatable attribute points.

Previously, the quests only rewarded him with either 1.0 Strength or 1.0 Dexterity each time. But for this quest, he could choose the allocation of the points himself and would even be awarded with five points. It could be said that the reward this time was rather generous.

Thinking of this, Ren Xiaosu rushed outside. Two medics happened to just be carrying a stretcher back. When Ren Xiaosu saw them, he immediately shouted, "Put that down, I'll carry it!"

The medics were startled. "It's fine, you don't have to. We can carry it by ourselves."

Ren Xiaosu's expression darkened. He pointed his pistol at the medics. "I said let me carry it. Don't you understand what I'm saying?!"

Chen Wudi sighed from behind. "Master's killing intent is so strong even when saving people."

All of a sudden, reinforcements sent from the rear arrived at Position 313. Just as Qing Zhen had predicted, additional troops would be deployed here from the rear to engage in a seesaw battle with the Qing Consortium after Position 313 and Position 319 were subjected to fierce attacks.

And this was exactly what Qing Zhen wanted to see.

Ren Xiaosu carried the wounded soldier into the medical center and watched the newly arrived troops at the same time. He discovered a very strange group of soldiers among them. The soldiers were extremely disciplined and orderly in their movements and gave Ren Xiaosu an odd feeling.

But he had no time to care about this as he carried on fulfilling his quest requirements by snatching even more wounded soldiers to save.

This quest alone delayed Ren Xiaosu for about an hour. When Ren Xiaosu heard the palace informing him he'd completed the quest, he immediately allocated 4.0 points to his Dexterity and 1.0 point to his Strength.

Ren Xiaosu's current Strength was now as high as 10.5, and even his Dexterity had reached the level of 10.1. Ren Xiaosu's muscles were further refined once more, and his entire body became leaner again. He now looked like a young man who did not exercise much, but he actually possessed amazing strength.

The voice from the palace said, "Due to your Strength and Dexterity attributes exceeding the threshold..."

Just as Ren Xiaosu tried to listen to what the palace had to say, a surprising turn of events occurred in the medical center. As such, he lost interest in what the palace was saying and looked at the medical center instead.

He saw someone in the medical center yelling angrily at Chen Wudi, "Get lost! If not for the presence of your Heroes Battalion here at Position 313, would Qing Zhen deploy his main forces to attack us? I don't need your hypocritical help to save people here!"

When Ren Xiaosu looked at Chen Wudi, he saw Chen Wudi walking out of the medical center quietly without saying a word.

Ren Xiaosu patted him calmly on the shoulder. "Let's go, we'll head back to our position for now."

"OK," Chen Wudi replied in a low voice.

"I wonder if the infantry regiment attacking our position has been fully defeated yet." Ren Xiaosu said, "If they're all dead, we can go and loot some equipment off them or something."

"OK." Chen Wudi still replied simply.

"What do you want to eat tonight?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Master, can we have some fried rice with sausage?"

Everyone in the medical center watched as the two walked away. They didn't even know what to say.

Chapter 273 A thorough investigation of the missing nanomachines

The battle was not over yet. After Ren Xiaosu and Chen Wudi made their way back from the rear, the intense battle at the front line was still ongoing. But once the Qing Consortium's soldiers charged the high ground, the battle reached an impasse.

While the soldiers at the other positions battled for their lives, Ren Xiaosu lit a fire and got ready to cook after returning to their elevated position. It was time for dinner, and he had brought along pots and pans, after all.

Ren Xiaosu felt that they could not skip meals even though they were fighting a war. Furthermore, Chen Wudi was even craving fried rice with sausages.

Hearing artillery fire blasting the high ground next to them, Li Qingzheng hesitated before asking, "Is it really alright for us to start eating at a time like this?"

"What's wrong with that?" After Ren Xiaosu lit the firewood, he placed the metal pot over it. "Didn't we already complete our mission? Besides, we're still fighting the battle anyway. We're still pinning down that infantry regiment halfway up the mountain."

Even though the regimental commander was still alive, he no longer wanted to attack this high ground. More importantly, they had rushed halfway up the mountain in a single breath all for the sake of providing laser guidance for a missile attack from the rear. In the end, Qing Zhen stranded them here where they could see bullets whizzing past their heads whenever they looked up. Without any supporting firepower from the rear to cover them, they could not escape even if they wanted to!

This battle made the regimental commander want to give up!

At this moment, Li Qingzheng said, "There aren't many soldiers still standing in that infantry regiment. Why don't we charge down and surprise attack them?"

Ren Xiaosu decisively rejected his suggestion. "Our mission is to defend this high ground properly, and that's all we have to do!"

Regardless of whether they would suffer any casualties from charging down at the enemy, Ren Xiaosu was unwilling to take this risk. After all, Ren Xiaosu was already annoyed and unhappy about the fact that they had been deployed to the most dangerous position of all.

When Chen Wudi got scolded at the medical center, did they stop to think for a moment if it was the Heroes Battalion's decision to come to the front line?!

Even without Ren Xiaosu, the Qing Consortium would still have made a feint attack on Position 313. But even a feint attack would still be carried out with real bullets, albeit with a little less firepower. A lot of people would still have died in the end.

It was not as though everyone would just be standing there and taunting during a feint attack!

As they were discussing this, Ren Xiaosu was cooking the rice and dicing the sausages.

A group of soldiers from the Heroes Battalion went to defend the high ground while another group squatted down beside the large pot and waited to eat.

Ren Xiaosu split his focus while cooking and looked into the palace at the same time. He remembered that the palace was trying to explain something earlier on, but as Chen Wudi was getting yelled at then, he did not manage to hear the explanation.

Ren Xiaosu was taken aback when he read the record of what was typed on the palace's brass typewriter. The line of words was written as such: "Strength and Dexterity attributes have exceeded the threshold point. 'City Buster' has now been enabled. Upon activation, the ability will double the host's Strength and Dexterity for 30 seconds. There will be a cooldown time of one day before the next usage."

What was this about?

Why would an ability like that appear all of a sudden? Although the duration of usage seemed a little short, Ren Xiaosu would have an equivalent of 21.0 Strength and 20.2 Dexterity after activating it.

If this ability were used well, it would be extremely effective. He might even be able to catch his enemies off guard with it.

But what was the threshold point the palace was talking about? Was it reaching 10 points in his attributes? Did it mean that he would gain another ability every time he exceeded 10 attribute points?

So it turned out that there would be additional rewards whenever his physical fitness surpasses a certain level!

Thinking of all this, Ren Xiaosu added the sausages into the pot and gave it a few stirs with a ladle.

Li Qingzheng was watching from close by. The fried rice was still not ready yet, but the high ground next to their position had already changed hands twice in this period. Such an intense battle was going on over there.

But something felt strange. The Qing Consortium was no longer sending any more troops to attack them at this position.

When the fried rice with sausages was done, Ren Xiaosu immediately scooped out a bowl for Chen Wudi. This bowl of fried rice was scooped in a particular way for him. After Chen Wudi took it from Ren Xiaosu, he realized the bottom of the bowl was full of meat!

Ren Xiaosu left the ladle into the pot and said, "Alright, you guys help yourself. The battalion commander isn't going to serve you all!"

After saying that, Ren Xiaosu went and sat next to Chen Wudi. "How does it taste?"

"It's delicious." Chen Wudi smiled brightly, his lips glistening with oil. "Master, why do you treat me so well?"

Ren Xiaosu already realized that the more Chen Wudi came into contact with the evilness of this world, the more clearheaded he became.

Chen Wudi no longer addressed Luo Lan as Benbo'erba like before when he saw him and would often keep silent and even remain so for long periods. As a result, Chen Wudi was now beginning to sound more like a normal person whenever he spoke.

Ren Xiaosu did not know whether it was a good or a bad thing. He sighed and said, "When I listened to Mr. Zhang's lessons in the past, I once thought about being a good person. But I gave up after realizing that it was not easy to be good."

When Chen Wudi heard that, he got back to eating and did not say another word.

Ren Xiaosu continued to lament, "Sometimes, I feel a little ashamed whenever I see you. That's because the light in my heart has probably already been extinguished. So even though I'm clearly not a good person, I still hope that you'll be a good person. Perhaps that makes me a little hypocritical. But it's only when I'm trying to protect you that I get this misconception. It's like the light in me hasn't been snuffed out yet."

Somewhere in Stronghold 108, there was a huge secret base deep in the basement of a garment factory. Hu Shuo had attempted to thoroughly investigate this place, but his people had never been able to infiltrate it.

This place was under the direct jurisdiction of the Li Consortium's Board of Directors, and it was only responsible for matters related to the nanomachines.

Very few people knew there was still a small armed force here in the basement of the garment factory.

An incandescent white light was hanging from the ceiling in a room underground. A middle-aged man was sitting in front of a blackboard and thinking about something. He was holding a dossier regarding the recent theft of the nanomachines.

The middle-aged man's name was Li Dingding, and very few people knew of his existence. He was a Li Consortium Shadow, and like Qing Zhen, carried out all shady business dealings for the organization.

But unlike Qing Zhen who always put himself out in the open and even had control of the military, Li Dingding always remained hidden in the shadows.

Li Dingding was going through the dossier at this moment. A lot of the evidence in it was pointing to a supernatural being named Xu Xianchu, a suspected spy of the Yang Consortium, who had probably come here to gather nanomachine samples for the Yang Consortium.

However, Li Dingding felt that something was amiss after reading the file. If he was just collecting some samples, why did he end up obtaining so much?

Importantly, the nanomachines were stolen from dozens of corpses that had been recovered by the organization. This was not just about stealing samples! He wondered what the hell the previous investigator had been doing

Li Dingding sneered, "Buncha fools."

The dossier in his hands was very detailed, and it even included the entire timeline from when Lin Qi and his group entered the mountains, to the Divine Arms Battalion's preparations for the attack on the Qing Consortium, as well as the daily updates given by the Divine Arms Battalion, etc.

But even after browsing through the documents for a long time, he still couldn't figure out anything.

At this moment, someone knocked on the door. Li Dingding said, "Come in."

The person handed him a new set of documents. "Sir, the higher-ups have assigned us a new case. There's been a batch of nanomachines that were damaged, and it seems that it was caused by someone whose synchronization rate was 0%."

Chapter 274 Separately interrogated

The nanomachines were damaged?

Li Dingding frowned and asked, "What's going on? That person with the 0% synchronization rate couldn't be found?"

"No, there were a lot of people who did the synchronization test that day. Many of them were even refugees—that's why the lab staff didn't record everyone's test results other than those who scored above 80%." The subordinate said softly, "However, we have the roster of the troops who did the test that day. Here it is..."

Li Dingding got so angry he almost laughed. Looking at the thick roster in his hand, he said, "What a fucking bunch of slackers! How can they be so lazy about such matters? But why did a case like that get transferred to me? Can't you all handle it yourselves?"

"It's not like that." The subordinate lowered his head and said, "The Board has specifically instructed for you to handle the case. They said the nanomachines have had their installed protocols removed."

Li Dingding was stunned by the words.

He knew all about these nanomachines because he mainly dealt with matters related to them in his usual work. But as far as he knew, it was impossible for an installed protocol on the nanomachines to be removed. This kind of operation could only be done after the nanomachines were reclaimed at the factory for confidential processing, and that even required authorization from the board to grant access to the C1 remote access protocol.

It was no wonder the Board was entrusting this matter to him. It was a case that involved the Li Consortium's top secrets!

Li Dingding said, "Alright, you may leave."

He then browsed through the files alone. He had not expected he would need to handle another case when the previous case was still not finished.

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After he was read through a file, Li Dingding started getting a headache. Other than the thick roster, there was nothing here that could provide him with any useful clues.

Li Dingding picked up another file and read through it quickly. But about 10 minutes after he started, he was stunned. 'No, that's not right! Something is fishy here!'

He promptly picked up the previous file and read it quickly and thoroughly. Within two minutes, Li Dingding broke into a smile.

He had noticed something unusual while looking through the roster: repeated names.

Li Qingzheng, Ren Xiaosu, Chen Wudi, and Wang Yuchi...

The names of those people in this platoon had appeared three times in these two sets of documents!

The first instance was in the roster of the outpost.

The second instance was in the roster of the private troops that switched uniforms with the Divine Arms Battalion.

The third instance was in the roster of the physical examination that day.

Li Dingding always believed frequent coincidences could turn out to be the answer.

Something was fishy about this platoon. Or at least, there was something off about those who belonged to this platoon.

Li Dingding picked up the phone and said, "Arrest Ren Xiaosu and Li Qingzheng's Eighth Platoon from the private army's Iron Second Battalion."

But the person on the other end of the line said, "Are... you sure you want to arrest them?"

Li Dingding frowned and said, "Do my words not hold authority anymore?"

"It's not that." The person on the other end of the line said, "I know those people. Ren Xiaosu is now the role model for the entire military. The Iron Second Battalion has also been renamed to the Heroes Battalion, and Ren Xiaosu is even its battalion commander..."

Li Dingding was dumbfounded. What kind of a fucking twist was this?!

The person in the call continued, "If you're sure he's guilty, we'll arrest him right away. But if you only suspect him, we have to keep a low profile. Currently, they're the only ones in the military who have won a battle and wiped out the Qing Special Forces. Furthermore, they're fighting in the battle at Position 313."

In fact, being hailed as an example for the military had created a really good protective umbrella around those in the Heroes Battalion. Normal people would not dare to lay a finger on role models like them so easily. Besides, they were engaged in battle as well. If something happened to these role models, who would be responsible for the morale of the troops?

Even Li Dingding wouldn't say he could bear the consequences.

Li Dingding laughed. "I'll personally make a trip to Position 313 and handle this matter in secret."

By nightfall, the battle at Position 313 stopped. After the arrival of the Li Consortium's reinforcements, they immediately recaptured the positions on the high ground they lost earlier. It was almost as though they were doing whatever it took to push back the Qing Consortium's troops.

In the evening, a wave of cheers reverberated across Position 313. However, Ren Xiaosu felt that the Li Consortium was celebrating their victory too early.

Although he did not know why Qing Zhen wanted to attract all of the Li Consortium's frontline troops here, the Qing Consortium's temporary retreat was not proof of who had won.

War had never been this simple.

In the night, a convoy of off-road vehicles suddenly drove to Position 313. After a brief interaction with the highest-ranking general at Position 313, they headed straight for the defensive position where Ren Xiaosu and his men were.

Ren Xiaosu had been constantly observing the rear with his binoculars. As such, his attention was already on these noteworthy vehicles when they drove in earlier. Ren Xiaosu got an ominous feeling about this. He even had the feeling that they were specifically here for him.

When the convoy got to the high ground, none of their people mentioned what they were here for. Instead, an officer holding a list of names called out, "Ren Xiaosu, Li Qingzheng, Chen Wudi... all 16 of you, get in the vehicles and follow us back Position 313's camp!"

Ren Xiaosu and Li Qingzheng looked at each other. He was startled as he realized the names the officer called out were all the members of their platoon.

Before they assembled for the war, the outpost's platoon strength was at 30 soldiers. One of the soldiers was even forcibly taken from another platoon.

But now, there were only 16 members left in their platoon after fighting two battles.

Ren Xiaosu was tempted to force his way out of this situation. But since they had already named him explicitly, it would be too easy for them to locate Yan Liuyuan and the others in the stronghold by following the clues. If Yan Liuyuan got caught, the situation might turn out even worse than it already was.

Right now, the soldiers around them were lowkey aiming their guns at them. If Ren Xiaosu ran away at this time, all eight of Jiang Wu's students would probably perish here.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu realized that the 30 soldiers who tried to surround them all looked like nanosoldiers.

Li Qingzheng whispered, "Xiaosu, what's going on?"

"Don't worry, let's go with them for now." Ren Xiaosu decided to follow these people back to the camp at Position 313 first. He needed to wait for an opportunity, but he could not tell the others about his plan yet!

Back at Position 313's camp, two military tents had been specially vacated. It seemed like those who had just arrived were very high-ranking officials of the organization. Even Position 313's recently assigned general behaved very politely to them.

After these people arranged for Ren Xiaosu and his men to sit in a tent, a middle-aged man smiled and introduced himself. "Good evening, everyone. My name is Li Dingding. I'm just here to investigate some matters, so please don't panic too much. After all, you're our Li Consortium's war heroes. If there are any misunderstandings during this period, please forgive me."

Even though Li Dingding spoke in a polite manner, Ren Xiaosu felt that his intentions were not good. Furthermore, he had singled out their platoon for the investigation, so there was a high chance they had already found out something. It was just that Ren Xiaosu did not know how much information had already been revealed.

But that didn't matter to him. Ren Xiaosu was just waiting for an opportunity.

Chapter 275 Treachery and loyalty

Li Dingding glanced at the roster and said, "Wei Jiangyu, please come with me to the other tent. I have some questions for you."

More than 10 soldiers armed with guns were keeping guard inside the military tent Ren Xiaosu and the others were in. Although Li Dingding had expressed that he was just going to ask some questions, he had actually confined all of them in here. Furthermore, these soldiers might even be nanosoldiers.

Li Qingzheng asked softly, "Xiaosu, will we get betrayed?"

"I don't know." Ren Xiaosu shook his head calmly. Although he did not know what Li Dingding was trying to investigate, he wasn't sure if anyone would betray him even though all of them had supported each other so far along the way.

Wei Jiangyu was taken to the other tent where a table and chairs had already been set up.

Li Dingding asked, "Has anything strange happened in your platoon recently?"

Wei Jiangyu shook his head. "No, sir."

"Let me refresh your memory a little," Li Dingding smiled and said, "The wolf pack, the nanosoldiers, Li Qingzheng, Ren Xiaosu..."

At this moment, something interesting happened. Li Dingding was only testing him by throwing out some unrelated words. But when he brought up "the wolf pack," Wei Jiangyu's pupils constricted. When he mentioned "the nanosoldiers" and "Li Qingzheng," his pupils went back to normal. Then when he said "Ren Xiaosu," his pupils constricted again.

Pupillary response is usually caused by a reaction to light. When there is a greater intensity of light, the pupils constrict to decrease the amount of light entering the eye to protect it from damage.

But pupillary constriction can also be affected by one's emotions. When a person is nervous, the pupils will shrink in size. Similarly, the pupils will dilate if a person gets excited.

As for pupils that became fully dilated, that would mean the person died.

Just like Li Shentan had said, the subconscious was in control of too many secrets of the human body, yet the subconsciousness could not be controlled by humans.

Li Dingding smiled as he switched to a comfortable sitting position and said to Wei Jiangyu, "How about this? I'll put it another way. If you can tell me about all the strange goings-on in your platoon, I'll reward

you with a 100,000 yuan and a stronghold resident status as well. I can even find a job for you so you'll have nothing to worry about for the rest of your life."

Wei Jiangyu covered his mouth and refused to say anything. How could he know whether Li Dingding was speaking the truth?

Li Dingding called for someone to bring in a bag of items. "I've already prepared a 100,000 yuan in cash and a stronghold ID card for you. Check for yourself."

Wei Jiangyu was stunned for a moment. This was the real thing! This person must have quite the authority if he could even create the ID card!

All of a sudden, Li Dingding grabbed the bag back from Wei Jiangyu's hands. "You're really fortunate. Since you're the first to be interrogated, you can seize on this opportunity. If you tell the truth, those that come after you will not be as lucky. But even if you don't speak, I'm sure someone else will be willing to. When that happens, not only are you not going to get the money, but you'll also face jail time."

Li Dingding was already prepared with the carrot and the stick.

Wei Jiangyu said in a low voice, "Fine, I'll talk. Ren Xiaosu secretly left the outpost on many occasions. After we got deployed here to Position 313 in the north, he would also always go out during the night before returning in the morning. Wang Yuchi and the other students all knew Ren Xiaosu from before as they had escaped from Stronghold 109 together, and Chen Wudi is also Ren Xiaosu's disciple..."

In the other tent, Chen Wudi suddenly sighed and whispered, "Master, we've been betrayed."

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu expressed that this was within his expectations.

"Should we force our way out now?" Chen Wudi asked quietly.

"Wait awhile longer."

At this moment, Li Dingding had a broad smile on his face. It was simply too easy to gain a breakthrough when it came to these refugees. Money and status as a stronghold resident had always been his go-to weapons when it came to interrogating them!

With this breakthrough, he was no longer afraid the others would not speak.

After Wei Jiangyu left the tent, Li Dingding called for another person to get interrogated. As a result, he received even more information!

"When we were at the outpost, the wolves would send food over."

"I saw Ren Xiaosu leaving the outpost secretly on the night before the disappearance of the two officers."

"Before those five Divine Arms Battalion officers leading the private troops died, Ren Xiaosu was also always leaving the campsite."

“Before the Qing Consortium’s attack last night, Ren Xiaosu also left the defensive position that we were guarding.”

All of the claims were pointing at Ren Xiaosu, the commander of the Heroes Battalion. Li Dingding did not need to have any evidence. Since he was not a judge, it would be unnecessary for him to gather evidence to prove something.

The people around Ren Xiaosu and Chen Wudi were called away one after another. Li Dingding looked at Li Qingzheng in front of him. “The others have already confessed, so you might as well confess too. If you do, you can even get some money...”

Li Qingzheng said with an obsequious smile, “I can even get some money? Sir, I love money the most.”

Li Dingding smiled even more. “Alright, start speaking then.”

“But I don’t know anything. There’s nothing strange about our platoon. Don’t listen to their lies.” Li Qingzheng said, feeling insulted.

“I’m warning you, don’t force my hand.” Li Dingding sneered. “Do you think I really need your statement? I suppose you prefer going to prison for the rest of your life, huh?”

Li Qingzheng took a deep breath and said in seriousness, “It doesn’t sound too bad. At least I’ll have my meals provided for me.”

Li Dingding started clapping. “I’ve finally met a brave man. Not bad, not bad at all. You probably don’t even know what fate is awaiting you. Take him back and bring the eight students over together.”

Throughout the interrogation, Ren Xiaosu had been all smiles. Meanwhile, Chen Wudi would whisper things to him from time to time. However, Chen Wudi was not as happy as him because he had thought that everyone would be better than this having been comrades for such a long time.

After Li Qingzheng returned to the tent, he remained silent. Ren Xiaosu did not say anything to him either and just smiled at him. When the eight students returned, Wang Yuchi stood inside the tent and sneered at his other comrades. “Even dogs are more loyal than you people, you buncha garbage!”

“That’s enough, sit down,” Ren Xiaosu said with a smile. What did not disappoint him ultimately was still how Jiang Wu’s students were as tough as they appeared to be. Jiang Wu had not made her sacrifices for them in vain.

Ren Xiaosu and Chen Wudi were the only two people who were not interrogated yet. Li Dingding seemed to have deliberately arranged for them to be interrogated last.

Li Dingding already knew where the problem lay.

Suddenly, Li Dingding lifted the tent flap and came in. Looking at Ren Xiaosu and Chen Wudi, he said with a smile, “You’re the only two left. Is there anything you wish to say?”

“Wait awhile more,” Ren Xiaosu said.

“What are you waiting for?” Li Dingding was stunned.

As he finished speaking, a sharp and ear-piercing noise rang out in the air. Then a loud explosion shook the ground.

It was the sound of artillery fire. In the early morning, the war had been escalated again! The Qing Consortium was back!

In that instant, Ren Xiaosu sprang into action and charged at Li Dingding. “It’s time!”

If he had made his move earlier, the commotion here would have attracted the many soldiers who were guarding Position 313. So Ren Xiaosu was waiting for an opportunity when no one would notice what was going on here, and that opportunity was when the Qing Consortium restarted the attack!

At this moment, the soldiers at Position 313 could hardly even look after themselves. Who would have the time to pay attention to them?

“Die!” Ren Xiaosu roared.

Ren Xiaosu’s armor immediately covered his entire body as he grabbed Li Dingding by the neck with one hand and slammed him into the ground.

A silvery glow flared up all over Li Dingding’s body in his blood vessels. He already had his guard up against Ren Xiaosu as he had guessed that he was a supernatural being!

But the moment the two of them exchanged blows, Li Dingding realized with despair that Ren Xiaosu seemed to have an overwhelming advantage over him!

Chapter 276 City Crusher!

Li Dingding had come prepared. Unlike Lin Qi, the test subject, he was one of those in the Li Consortium with the largest amount of nanomachines in their bodies. His synchronization rate was as high as 94%!

Although there were a lot of people with a synchronization rate above 80%, only a rare few would come close to a 100% synchronization rate.

Besides that, Li Dingding had also brought 30 elite nanosoldiers with him, and these people were much stronger than the average nanosoldier of the Divine Arms Battalion.

But when Ren Xiaosu jumped in front of him, Li Dingding suddenly found that he did not even have time to dodge. It was not because he was too slow, but that his opponent was too fast!

Moreover, the appearance of the armor really shocked him. Although Li Dingding knew it was made of nanomachines, he wondered just how many nanomachines were needed in order to create a strong armor like it?

Previously, he could not figure out where all the nanomachines had disappeared to. But now he finally understood. Just how many nanosoldiers did he have to kill to get them? Could it be that all the dead nanosoldiers were killed by Ren Xiaosu right from the beginning?

Just as expected, the answer had laid in the many coincidences!

But what shocked him the most was the time it took for Ren Xiaosu to finish covering his body with the armor. It had only taken him a moment!

The insiders of the Li Consortium knew well that since the synchronization rate went from low to high, it meant there was a difference in the efficiency of controlling the nanomachines. The lower the synchronization rate, the slower the nanomachines could be operated after receiving a command.

But for Ren Xiaosu?

The time it took for his opponent's armor to be formed was remarkably fast. Even Li Dingding knew he would absolutely not be able to achieve such a speed.

But he was already at a synchronization rate of 94%. If even he could not achieve that, then just how high could Ren Xiaosu's synchronization rate be?!

It was already too late to think about that. Ren Xiaosu had Li Dingding's neck firmly in his hands through the cold and menacing armor. Li Dingding could feel his entire body being lifted up into the air. Then that hand tightened its grip and slammed him right into the hard ground. In that instant, Li Dingding felt like he was being wrapped in a strange sense of weightlessness!

He attempted to break free from the grasp but found that the nanomachines he was so proud of were totally useless in the face of his opponent's strength!

All his struggles were in vain. His opponent was simply too fast and too strong!

How could a human being reach a speed like that?!

With a loud crash, Li Dingding's head, neck, and back were slammed into the ground. He could even feel all his bones getting utterly smashed while the nanomachines that were being used to strengthen his musculoskeletal frame were disintegrated.

Li Dingding was sprawled out on the ground facing up. The empty gaze in his eyes could only see Ren Xiaosu's face hidden behind a mask of armor. He was exuding a look of menace and resolve.

It only took a split second for all this to happen, and the surrounding nanosoldiers that were standing guard did not even have time to react. They had not expected Ren Xiaosu to actually try to kill someone with so many of them surrounding him!

Furthermore, they had not even seen anything like that menacing armor before! The Li Consortium had only taught them how to use the nanomachine as an assistive tech, but they never told them the nanomachines could be used that way!

The nanosoldiers raised their guns and started shooting at Ren Xiaosu. Wang Yuchi shouted in a low voice to the other students, "Get down!"

It was as though they had discussed this beforehand as Wang Yuchi, Li Qingzheng, and the students all dropped to the ground at the same time. The bullets that hit Ren Xiaosu's armor only making clinks on impact. They did not cause any effective damage at all!

As the nanosoldiers fired their weapons, a gold-and-black staff suddenly came swinging in. Chen Wudi yelled, "Whoever dares hurt my master shall die!"

The front end of the Golden-Hooped Rod suddenly grew in size and length. It hit the three nanosoldiers right in the waist like a club. When the cudgel was swinging in the air, it made a terrifying whooshing sound and created a vortex of air behind it!

Based on previous tests, nanosoldiers were definitely enough to deal with typical supernatural beings. However, Li Dingding and his men had not expected that the two supernatural beings in this tent were not the usual supernatural beings!

Li Qingzheng was lying on the ground with his hands protecting his head and muttering, "I knew it... I just knew it..."

In the blink of an eye, the nanosoldiers lost the rhythm of their attacks. As they had too little combat experience against supernatural beings, they couldn't tell who the bigger threat was between Chen Wudi and Ren Xiaosu.

Moreover, as the tent was not that big, this environment ended up being even more suited for Ren Xiaosu and Chen Wudi to unleash their superpowers in.

Some of the nanosoldiers turned their guns on Chen Wudi. But after firing half a magazine of bullets at him, Chen Wudi was still totally unscathed!

A golden glow kept shimmering around Chen Wudi's body. When a bullet hit his shoulder, traces of the golden armor would become visible there before disappearing again. When the other nanosoldiers concentrated their firepower on him, a wave of bullets rained down on Chen Wudi and caused his golden armor to become completely visible.

It was the toughest armor in the world, so tough that not even a 100,000 lightning strikes from the Heavenly Palace could destroy it. Chen Wudi said calmly, "Are you all done shooting? It's my turn now!"

Then Chen Wudi disappeared from the nanosoldiers' view. Only Ren Xiaosu's voice could be heard in the tent. "Cover the left while I take the right!"

Ren Xiaosu charged over and rammed into the nanosoldiers without any fanciful moves. It was as though a mountain had hit them. Two totally helpless nanosoldiers were sent flying out of the tent, and they even tore a large hole in the tent as they flew out!

In a normal situation, other people would probably have already noticed that something strange was going on here. However, with the Qing Consortium coming back for another attack, it had created an excellent opportunity for Ren Xiaosu.

The nanosoldiers landed on the ground outside and couldn't get up anymore. It felt like all of their bones were broken.

If they only suffered a few broken bones, the nanomachines in their bodies could have filled the fractures and mended them quickly.

But they had broken too many bones!

The artillery fire outside was even more intense than the earlier wave the Qing Consortium had carried out. The tent with a hole in it was flapping hard in the strong winds created by the bombardment.

Ren Xiaosu stood next to the hole and looked behind him. Only these 20 nanosoldiers remained standing in front of him, while the night sky behind him was abuzz with noise.

The nanosoldiers knew their guns were useless against this armor. One by one, the nanosoldiers discarded their guns and drew their nanoswords from their waists!

Ren Xiaosu drew his black saber from out of thin air and broke into a smile with the pattern on the face armor also seemingly revealing a smile. "Whatever you have, I have too. But whatever I have is much more than all of you combined! Let's start counting down: 30 seconds!"

"What do you mean, '30 seconds?'" The nanosoldiers got even more uneasy when they heard that. They did not even dare to take the initiative to attack him now.

Ren Xiaosu said, "The last 30 seconds of your lives."

The next moment, he muttered silently in his mind, "City Crusher!"

His pupils hidden behind the face armor turned crimson in color.

Chapter 277 I don't have a choice

When strength was like the magma in a volcano's crater, any creature that fell into it would melt straight away in its scarlet flames.

Humans had never stopped yearning for power. Otherwise, the Li Consortium would not have created something like the nanomachines and put them to military use.

Ren Xiaosu could feel a raging fire in his body. As he raised his saber and stepped forward, the nanosoldiers could only watch him move past them with shocked expressions on their faces. They had wanted to raise their nanoswords and slash Ren Xiaosu, but his overwhelming speed at this moment made them feel like they were moving in slow motion.

When that black saber slashed across one of the nanosoldier's chest, it smoothly cut through the nanosword he was holding in front of him, and his body was also cleanly severed in two.

One of the nanosoldiers couldn't dodge in time and was rammed into by Ren Xiaosu with his armor. The nanosoldier could feel his chest collapsing, and his blood felt like it was being compressed inside with no outlet of escape. As a result, it ruptured out of his blood vessels.

Over a dozen nanosoldiers had surrounded Ren Xiaosu. When a nanosword slashed his back, it only left a scratch on the armor without causing any damage to his skin.

The scratch on the armor rippled outwards in a horrifyingly hideous fashion.

In this instant, the nanosoldiers realized this was how the nanomachines should be used!

When Ren Xiaosu's strong physical fitness was paired with the armor, it made him into a battering ram as he barged his way around intimidatingly.

One of the nanosoldiers was beginning to feel scared. He did not know what he could do to defeat this strong and powerful "machine" in front of him. He was overwhelmed with a sense of powerlessness!

He picked up a gun from off the ground and began shooting indiscriminately within the tent while shouting, as though that would eliminate the fear he was feeling.

But a second later, his shouts abruptly stopped. The black saber Ren Xiaosu had plunged into his chest caused his lungs to quickly fill up with bloody foam.

Ren Xiaosu slowly pulled the black saber out. "Wudi, how you doing?"

Chen Wudi swung the Golden-Hooped Rod over his shoulder. "Done!"

Only then did Ren Xiaosu return his armor and store the black saber back into the palace. He looked at the mess he had created around him, though the tent remained standing.

However, it seemed like the situation was not good. Ren Xiaosu looked over at his "comrades" lying on the ground. Some of them had been shot dead when the nanosoldiers started firing wildly, while others were crying with their heads in their arms.

But Ren Xiaosu did not care about how they were doing. He looked at Li Qingzheng, Wang Yuchi, and the others. "Anyone hurt?"

Ren Xiaosu frowned when he discovered bloodstains on Wang Yuchi's leg. Several of the students were also wounded, but Li Qingzheng was fine.

Wang Yuchi's face was covered in sweat. "My leg got hit by a bullet. I think it might be broken. Monitor, go and check on others. I think they're also injured."

Ren Xiaosu counted them. Five students were injured, and they were even injured quite badly. He would have to remove the bullets in their bodies first.

"We can't stay here any longer." Ren Xiaosu said, "Let's grab a truck and escape from here. We'll take this chance to head back to Stronghold 108 while the others are busy with the battle out there!"

This crisis made Ren Xiaosu realize there were already people who could link together all of what had happened so far. It would be even more dangerous if he continued to stay in the Li Consortium's territory.

Ren Xiaosu said to Chen Wudi, "Carry the wounded out and wait for me there."

Li Qingzheng automatically helped to carry the wounded out as well. After everyone was outside, Ren Xiaosu broke the necks of the remaining "comrades" one by one. He could not keep them alive as they knew too many of his secrets.

He took out everything like pots and pans, shovels, hammers, and whatnot from his storage space, leaving only the gold and food. Then he placed all of the nanomachines he had gathered from the nanosoldiers into the storage space.

After doing so, Ren Xiaosu walked out of the tent and carried the wounded together with the others.

Position 313 had descended into chaos by now. No one would notice them, as the Qing Consortium's artillery fire was so intense it was unimaginable. Even the other fighting forces that passed them by had thought they were the wounded returning from the front line.

"There's a vehicle over there!" Ren Xiaosu whispered, "The driver is still in it, so we'll have to steal it!"

They were now very close to the entrance of the camp at Position 313. As long as they could grab a vehicle, they would be able to get out of here. No one would discover their whereabouts in this chaos.

But at this moment, a group of strange soldiers ran in from outside the camp. Ren Xiaosu got a bad feeling as these soldiers were moving too orderly, and their eyes looked unfeeling.

This was a full-strength battalion that consisted of 500 people!

Ren Xiaosu lowered his head and tried to lead Chen Wudi and the others past this battalion of troops quietly. However, the officer at the very front called out to them, "Which ORBAT do you all belong to?"

His voice was mechanical and calm. Li Qingzheng immediately went up and explained, "We're from the 7th Infantry Regiment. We've just returned from the front line after getting injured, and we're heading to the medical center."

The officer glanced at Ren Xiaosu and the others before saying, "Bring me to the location the Heroes Battalion is guarding."

Ren Xiaosu clenched his fists tightly. These people were also targeting him?!

What could he do? If there were really 500 nanosoldiers here like Ren Xiaosu had thought, he and Chen Wudi would not be able to defeat them even if they were demigods.

Moreover, it would be too eye-catching if they fought out here in this open area!

While Ren Xiaosu was urgently trying to come up with something, he heard Li Qingzheng say with a laugh, "Sure, I'll bring you all there."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. Then he watched Li Qingzheng turn around and smile wryly at him. "Quickly get to the medical center and don't delay your treatments. I'll join up with you guys after I bring these officers to the Heroes Battalion."

Dumbfounded, Ren Xiaosu said, "You..."

"Don't worry about me." Li Qingzheng said with a smile, "I couldn't be happier to do this. Enough, go on ahead."

Then Li Qingzheng turned around and headed resolutely for the high ground where the Heroes Battalion was located without looking back.

It was the same for life as in war. There wouldn't usually be time to give a heroic speech or have any sentimental talks since unexpected things could happen at any moment. And then familiar people and familiar smiles would get taken away from you.

Ren Xiaosu decisively turned and walked towards the truck. "Don't anyone look back."

Wang Yuchi struggled to say, "Monitor..."

Ren Xiaosu whisper-shouted, "I've already said that I'm not a good person! That light of mine has already fucking gone out!"

Wang Yuchi and the others were at a momentary loss for words. They did not even know what light Ren Xiaosu was referring to.

Only Chen Wudi understood what he was talking about. He remembered what his master had said to him in the afternoon: "If I'd had the option, I'd've liked to be a person with a light in his heart, but I don't have a choice."

It was not that he did not want to choose, but rather that life had never given him this option before. He could only see two ways forward. One was to live, the other was to die.

This was what the wastelands were.

Chapter 278 The depreciated Qing Consortium currency

As the rear of Position 313 was a vast emptiness, Ren Xiaosu drove all the way south to Stronghold 108 without having any trouble after stealing the truck.

When they were going the other way earlier, it had taken them half an hour just to get their identities verified. Now that all of the soldiers had been deployed to the front lines, only the sentries guarding the firearms and logistics remained behind to prevent spies from sneaking in.

However, this frontline head spy of the Qing Consortium was about to leave instead. He did not even have time to inform Tang Zhou about it.

It was all quiet in the truck. Ren Xiaosu just stepped on the gas the entire way while Chen Wudi, Wang Yuchi, and the others said nothing

On the road back to Stronghold 108, Ren Xiaosu nearly broke into a cold sweat when they arrived at a checkpoint, in fear that the soldiers here would stop them.

He straight-up flashed his Office of Special Investigations ID at them. With that, no one dared to stop him from passing through.

Ren Xiaosu realized that his arrest warrant was still under wraps. Otherwise, Li Dingding would not have had to keep his investigations so secretive.

What he wanted to do now was to quickly rush back to the stronghold before the Li Consortium issued orders to go after him. Then he would find an opportunity to take Yan Liuyuan and the others away!

As for where they could go, they could think about it later.

Currently, the flames of war had also engulfed the roads in the north leading to the Yang Consortium's Stronghold 88. Although the Yang Consortium's armored brigade had just made headway at Mt. Qingsheng's front line during the night, they were cut off from the rear by a mysterious group of nanosoldiers before they could stabilize the battlegrounds. This made the battle reach even more of an impasse.

Therefore, even if Ren Xiaosu were to head north, it wouldn't be feasible for him to go either to the Qing Consortium or the Yang Consortium.

But if there were really no other way, Ren Xiaosu would just have everyone hide out in the wilderness. Although wild animals and poisonous bugs in the southwestern region were rampant, he had the Brambles in his possession now. Who knew if he could trade for other types of seeds someday? If that happened, they would not have to face such tremendous pressure while living in the wilderness.

It only took Ren Xiaosu about four hours to return to the stronghold. If not for the uneven mountainous terrain that was difficult to travel through, he could have driven even faster.

Ren Xiaosu flashed his ID when he reached the stronghold gate. He kept an eye on the guards' expressions in case something unexpected happened.

However, the garrison soldiers did not say anything. They were very polite and just let them through, and there was nothing unusual about their expressions.

Ren Xiaosu could finally heave a sigh of relief. The Li Consortium would probably not have expected that the person they wanted to arrest would actually return to the stronghold at such a time.

But they needed to be even more careful here. If the Li Consortium discovered them, they would have nowhere to escape to.

After getting into the stronghold, Ren Xiaosu parked the truck. "Change into your own clothes and get some rest. I'll think about how to locate Liuyuan and the others."

Chen Wudi calmly got out of the truck. "Blargh!"

“Wudi, what’s the matter?” Ren Xiaosu asked in surprise.

“Master, I’m OK... blargh!” Chen Wudi, the self-proclaimed reincarnation of the Great Sage, had boasted he was not afraid of anything was now only fearful of his master’s driving!

Bullets and whatnot were only physical attacks; his master’s driving was a magical attack. It was different.

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, “Wudi, this won’t do. How can you get motion sickness so easily? Look at the others, they’re all fine.”

He turned around to look and saw one of the students vomiting so hard he almost fainted. With that, Ren Xiaosu did not continue speaking. He asked the palace, “What’s my driving proficiency?”

The voice from the palace said, “Unable to detect any driving skills.”

“...Alright...”

Their plan was to locate Yan Liuyuan first. But after thinking for a long time, Ren Xiaosu still couldn’t come up with any ideas. After all, this was such a huge stronghold. When they were hurrying to the front line, they did not talk about how to contact each other again. So now the only way was to get Hu Shuo to solve that problem for them.

But how was he supposed to find Hu Shuo?

When Ren Xiaosu started asking around for directions on the streets, he flat-out asked how to get to the Office of Special Investigations. However, no one was able to answer. It seemed that the Office of Special Investigations was a really secretive unit.

At this moment, Chen Wudi said, “Master, even though the bullets in them have already been taken out, we don’t know how to set their bones. If we drag this out any longer, they likely aren’t gonna be able to walk normally again.”

Ren Xiaosu frowned. All of Wang Yuchi and the others’ injuries were gunshot wounds. Although Chen Wudi had already helped them remove the bullets and applied the black medicine to their wounds, anyone could easily recognize these as gunshot wounds if they were sent to the hospital. It would be even more troublesome if they attracted the attention of Stronghold 108’s garrison troops!

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment. Since they could not find Hu Shuo, they had to make Hu Shuo find them.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu heard someone quarreling in a provisions store nearby. “We don’t accept the Qing Consortium and the Yang Consortium’s currency here. Their money is as worthless as paper now. If you don’t have our Li Consortium’s currency, don’t come here and shop.”

A woman got down on her knees in the provisions store and started crying. “My family hasn’t had anything to eat for the past two days. Can’t you just sell me some rice? This is the money my family used for their investments in the past. It’ll definitely appreciate again after the war is over!”

Ren Xiaosu watched all of this quietly. However, he did not say anything.

After the war broke out, all provisions would get supplied to the military with priority. This led to the shortage of food in Stronghold 108, which was closest to the front lines.

Ren Xiaosu realized that even the stronghold residents would not get to lead a comfortable life when there was a war.

Suddenly, the voice from the palace said, "Quest: Help 10 stronghold residents who are suffering from the war."

Hardy har har. Ren Xiaosu ignored it when he saw this quest. As he was still on the run, how the fuck would he have the capacity to help others?!

But Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment. He turned around and said to Chen Wudi, "Let's go, I got an idea."

After he said that, he got in the truck. He stepped on the gas pedal and started driving around the stronghold. He only came to a stop when he found a gold shop. Ren Xiaosu entered the gold shop and bluntly asked, "Do you accept gold?"

The shop owner's eyes lit up. "Sir, how much gold would you like to exchange?"

Since the war was still ongoing, the most valuable item was gold. Moreover, gold was still appreciating in value. It used to go for several hundred yuan per gram in the stronghold, but the price of a gram now had almost appreciated to over a thousand yuan.

"Don't ask me how much I want to exchange." Ren Xiaosu said as he looked at the shop owner, "Let me ask you this: Do you have any Yang Consortium currency here?"

"Ah?" The boss got overjoyed. The gold shops in the stronghold usually performed some financial services as well. For example, they used to allow businessmen to convert currencies of the various organizations. Some businessmen were willing to convert them here as long as the transaction fee was lower than what the Li Consortium's banks charged.

Unfortunately, a war had broken out, and he was holding both the Yang Consortium and Qing Consortium currencies with him. Their money was currently even more worthless than paper!

But the young man in front of him actually wanted to trade for the Yang Consortium's currency at this juncture? Had he lost his mind?

Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, "Do you want to exchange it or not?"

“Yes! Of course I want to! Why wouldn’t I want to exchange it!” The owner of the gold shop had been holding onto the Yang Consortium’s currency for some time now and hadn’t been able to get rid of it. If someone wanted to trade for it now, of course he would gladly accept it.

He did not care whether Ren Xiaosu would suffer a great loss because of this. How many people were already suffering because of the war? One more person wouldn’t make a difference at all!

Chapter 279 Make money, make money, make money!

What the owner of the gold shop did not know was that Ren Xiaosu did not care whether the Yang Consortium’s currency had depreciated here or not. That was because the palace only required officially issued currencies. It was all the same no matter which organization’s currency it was!

It could be said that the currently devalued Yang Consortium currency was just right for Ren Xiaosu’s requirements. Moreover, the money he traded for would also be useful if he really went to the Yang Consortium’s territory in the future.

After all, the Yang Consortium’s currency would not depreciate in its own territory. Only the Qing Consortium and the Li Consortium currency would depreciate there.

Ren Xiaosu had not expected that the war would still bring him a windfall like that when they came back to the stronghold. He did not even know how he should thank the Li Consortium for this.

With the chaos going on outside during the war, no one would really care if he was just selling off a little bit of gold. So this was a good opportunity to get some of it off his hands.

It was no wonder some people often said that those who made money during a war were filthy rich. Ren Xiaosu could deeply understand the meaning of this now. When war broke out, much of the order that was in place would get disrupted.

The shop owner said with a smile, “Young man, how much gold do you have? I’ll take however much you have.”

He asked the owner, “How much of the Yang Consortium’s currency do you have! I’ll trade for however much you have!”

He was that generous!

The shop owner lowered his voice and said, “I have 240,000 yuan here. Right now, a gram of gold can be exchanged for 8,000 yuan of the Yang currency!”

“240,000 yuan is kinda low...” Ren Xiaosu was already so rich that 240,000 yuan no longer interested him.

After all, his gold stash would hardly look any different if he took out 30 grams of gold to exchange for this amount.

No, Ren Xiaosu felt he had missed out on something very important.

He suddenly thought of something and asked, "How much of the Qing currency do you have then? I'll trade for both of them!"

The shop owner was ecstatic. "Young man, you're doing a good deed. I really have you to thank! I still have 310,000 yuan of the Qing currency!"

"Gratitude received from Liao Yizhong, +1!"

The voice from the palace said, "Quest is 10% complete."

Ren Xiaosu was shocked. The palace had mentioned a quest to help ten stronghold residents who were suffering from the war. As it turned out, the owner of the gold shop fell under this category as well.

After thinking about it carefully, it did seem like that was the case. With all that money stuck on hand, this fellow had been suffering from insomnia for several days.

With that, Ren Xiaosu knew how he should complete the quest.

Ren Xiaosu immediately convinced himself from the bottom of his heart that he was not a war profiteer. He was only helping out the stronghold residents that were suffering in the war!

Ren Xiaosu knew that he was twisting words and logic, but how else could he make himself feel better?

Well, he could just convince himself!

Ren Xiaosu did not immediately head to the other gold shops but went back to the military truck first. He pulled down the tarp to cover the back of the vehicle so that no one outside could see what was going on within.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Wang Yuchi and the others and said, "What I'm about to do is absolutely confidential. You cannot tell anyone about it, including your female classmates."

"Can we tell Ms. Jiang, though?" Wang Yuchi asked. Wang Yuchi still hadn't recovered from his injuries. But his pain went away after the black medicine was applied.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment. "Yes, you may."

Earlier, Ren Xiaosu had thought of a way to treat the broken bones Wang Yuchi and the others had gotten. The method was to distribute some of the nanomachines to them so they could use them to help set and mend their broken bones.

That would be the best way for now. It was better than having to go to the hospital.

Ren Xiaosu was willing to escape with these students because they had not betrayed him during Li Dingding's interrogation. Since Chen Wudi had super hearing, he couldn't be wrong about this.

If this were the past, Ren Xiaosu would definitely not have revealed to them the nanomachine secret. But now, the situation had changed. Ren Xiaosu was willing to share more about it with them.

Furthermore, he had a few too many nanomachines in his storage space now and couldn't use all of them on himself. If the Li Consortium found out about this, they would probably be grossed out by it as many of their soldiers still hadn't been allocated any nanomachines. However, this guy had robbed them of so many nanomachines, and he could even reset, unlock, and pair them again all by himself!

However, he was required to pay 20,000 yuan as a processing fee to the palace in order to transfer the nanomachines to Wang Yuchi and the others. That was why Ren Xiaosu had to go straight to the gold shop to exchange his gold for money. Otherwise, he couldn't have afforded the fee.

Wang Yuchi and the others looked at each other and said, "Monitor, don't worry. We'll never tell anyone about the secret we'll hear today."

"Put out your hands." Ren Xiaosu said, "I'm giving y'all some nanomachines!"

Wang Yuchi and the rest were stunned. Although they did not understand much about nanomachines, was it really possible to just give it to them like that? Shouldn't there be some encryption or something like that?

But when they looked at Ren Xiaosu's expression, it seemed to suggest it wouldn't be a problem.

But as the nanomachines were too precious, Wang Yuchi pulled his hand back. "Monitor, the nanomachines are more useful for you. What will you have if you give those nanomachines to us?"

Ren Xiaosu was getting impatient. He grabbed Wang Yuchi's hand and said, "Why are you so slow? I have plenty!"

Wang Yuchi and the others were stunned. Since when did their class monitor become so generous?

To be honest, Ren Xiaosu had already estimated the amount of nanomachines he had in his storage space. Even if he gave away some of them to these eight students, he would probably still have more than enough left for Yan Liuyuan.

Although Yan Liuyuan already had enough nanomachines to cover his entire body, he was still young. He would still grow in the future.

It almost felt like how parents would think when getting new clothes for their children. As they would always plan for the long term, parents tended to choose loose-fitting clothes for their children so they could wear them for a longer time.

The voice from the palace said, "Total: Eight people. A fee of 160,000 yuan will be charged."

Ren Xiaosu felt the pinch in his heart. He said in his mind, "Don't use the Yang currency. Charge it to the Qing currency instead."

After all, they might be going to the Yang Consortium after this, so it would be better to use the Qing Consortium's currency first and save the Yang Consortium's currency for the future.

The nanomachines started moving from Ren Xiaosu to Wang Yuchi through their connected hands.

After the transfer finished, Wang Yuchi and the others were already attempting to control their nanomachines. Ren Xiaosu asked, "Can y'all command them at will?"

Wang Yuchi shook his head. "Every time I try to control them, there's a delay of about half a second before it executes my command. It feels very awkward."

"Mhm, that's because your sync rate is a bit low." Ren Xiaosu nodded and said, "But y'all should keep exercising and training your reaction speed. That should help to decrease the time delay. As long as it's within point-two seconds, I don't think you'll have many problems when dealing with normal supernatural beings."

"OK." Wang Yuchi nodded. He then started to use the nanomachines to heal his bones, but the process was excruciatingly painful. The nanomachines had to piece the fragmented bones back to their original position.

However, Ren Xiaosu watched these students not even make a sound while they were setting their bones back in place.

Chapter 280 Encountering Hu Shuo again

Ren Xiaosu got back into the driver's seat and continued to look for the next gold shop. Of course, he was not entirely doing this for money. There was something more to his plan.

When Ren Xiaosu entered the gold shop this time, he bluntly asked to sell his gold for the inflated banknotes with a sense of familiarity. As these gold shops did not have that many bills on hand, Ren Xiaosu could only trade for an average of 500,000 yuan per shop with a mixture of Yang Consortium and Qing Consortium currency.

But since he could exchange for the currencies, receive gratitude tokens, and even help out the stronghold residents that were suffering because of the war, it was basically killing three birds with one stone. So why not?

When Ren Xiaosu finished visiting the tenth gold shop, the voice from the palace said, "Quest complete. Awarded Basic Skill Duplication Scroll."

Ren Xiaosu was a little disappointed. He was hoping he could get a Perfect Skill Duplication Scroll to use on Chen Wudi. After all, his disciple's superpower looked really strong.

Unfortunately, it would be pointless to use the Basic Skill Duplication Scroll on Chen Wudi. This disciple of his had no other outstanding abilities other than his superpower.

The moment the quest was completed, Ren Xiaosu counted that he was left with 5.41 million yuan. The piles of money he hoarded in the storage space dazzled him a little. The money seemed to glow.

In the past, he could never have imagined he would have so much money.

“C’mon, Wudi, let’s find a restaurant to eat at.” Ren Xiaosu said generously, “It’ll be my treat, so please eat whatever you want. Those of you who aren’t injured can come along as well, but those who are injured will have to bear with it. We’ll bring back some food for y’all after dining.”

However, they could not find a restaurant even after looking around for a while. When they came to a sit-down restaurant, Ren Xiaosu went in after looking at the menu and said, “I want everything on the menu except for this, this, and this!”

Chen Wudi said, sounding worried, “Has Master’s sickness gotten worse?”

But at this moment, the voice from the palace suddenly said, “It’s been detected that the host is carrying a large amount of money. Confirm unlock of higher tiers of storage rights?”

Ren Xiaosu felt the pinch. The palace was really seizing every opportunity to use up his money. But he still stuck by what he had said before, that money was meant for purchasing things to strengthen himself with. After all, there was nothing else that he could use the money on for now. In that case, how could money that couldn’t be used be worth more than having a portable storage space?

Currently, he only had 15 cubic meters of storage space, which wasn’t even enough to store his supplies sometimes.

Ren Xiaosu said, “Unlock! Wait...”

However, he saw more than half of the money he had in his storage space suddenly disappear. Meanwhile, the storage space expanded rapidly. Ren Xiaosu’s soul ached as he asked, “How many storage tiers did you unlock in one go?”

He had wanted to tell the palace not to unlock so many tiers of storage space, but it was too late! Ren Xiaosu even suspected that the palace was deliberately doing it quickly so that he would not have the chance to save any money!

The voice from the palace said, “240 cubic meters have been unlocked at a total cost of 4.8 million yuan. On top of the original storage space, the host now has access to a total of 255 cubic meters.”

Unlocking 16 cubic meters of storage space: 320,000 yuan.

Unlocking 32 cubic meters of storage space: 640,000 yuan.

Unlocking 64 cubic meters of storage space: 1,280,000 yuan.

Unlocking 128 cubic meters of storage space: 2,560,000 yuan.

After unlocking a total of four storage tiers, the cash Ren Xiaosu had left on hand was only 610,000 yuan.

Then he heard the palace say, "Confirm unlock of the vacuum preservation function? A vacuum preservation area will be zoned out at a cost of 200,000 yuan."

Ren Xiaosu's expression darkened in response. "Hah, unlock."

"Confirm unlock of the plant cultivation function? A—"

"Unlock, unlock, unlock!" Ren Xiaosu retorted, "Is money the only thing you fucking know? Don't you think you're charging for way too many items?!"

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu realized he only had 10,000 yuan left. The plant cultivation function actually cost him 400,000 yuan?!

What do you call being knocked back to square one? This was what you call being knocked back to square one!

Chen Wudi looked at Ren Xiaosu sitting quietly at the table with his face flushing and blanching. Then he asked, "Master, are you feeling unwell?"

Ren Xiaosu glanced at Chen Wudi before turning around and shouting to the shopkeep, "Boss, I was just joking when I ordered the dishes just now, please don't mind. We'll just have a bowl of white rice each."

Chen Wudi was confused.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu could not be so stingy either. In the end, he still ordered some dishes.

But halfway through their meal, several people wearing the uniforms of the Public Order Division suddenly entered the restaurant. One of them said loudly, "Who does that military truck parked outside belong to? Someone has reported you for exchanging a large sum of other organizations' currencies and are in unlawful possession of oxidized gold. Your gold must have been obtained illegally, right?"

Ren Xiaosu thought, 'They're finally here.' He held up his Office of Special Investigations ID and said to the people from the Public Order Division, "Come here."

The people from the Public Order Division were dumbfounded right then and there. How unlucky could they be to bump into the Office of Special Investigations here?!

The three of them walked over fearfully. "Please don't take it wrong, it's just a misunderstanding..."

Ren Xiaosu said as he ate, "You guys from the Public Order Division are really trying to blackmail me for my gold, huh?"

The people from the Public Order Division were shocked. They had indeed come here in an attempt to get the gold for themselves upon finding out about it. When one of the gold shop's owners reported the matter to them, he mentioned the young man must still have a lot of gold in his possession.

But they had not expected to clash with a member of the Office of Special Investigations.

However, one of the Public Order Division's people explained with an obsequious smile, "You've misunderstood, we're only carrying out our duty."

Ren Xiaosu said unhappily, "Y'all don't have to worry yourselves over such matters in the future. Our Office of Special Investigations will be taking over from here on out."

"Is the Office of Special Investigations in charge of that?" The people from the Public Order Division were dumbfounded.

"Yes, from now on, anything that your Public Order Division cannot handle will be handled by our Office of Special Investigations. Anything that your Public Order Division might be able to handle will also be handled by our Office of Special Investigations." Ren Xiaosu said, "Go back and repeat word for word what I just said to your superior."

The three members of the Public Order Division turned around and left. This was a big deal. The Office of Special Investigations was attempting to seize their authority!

Half an hour later, someone pushed open the restaurant's door again. When Ren Xiaosu saw the person coming in, he was amused. It turned out to be Hu Shuo!

Hu Shuo sat down across from Ren Xiaosu with a dark expression. When he saw Ren Xiaosu's relaxed look, he said angrily, "I've only just gotten back to the stronghold, so what's this I hear about my Office of Special Investigations taking charge of the Public Order Division?"

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "I'm just expanding our business!"

"You must be looking for me, right?" Hu Shuo snapped, "What do you want from me? You're still in the mood to eat now? Do you know that the covert unit has already arrested Li Qingzheng and is on the way back to the stronghold?"

Ren Xiaosu stayed silent for a moment in response. "When will he reach the stronghold? Where will he be held? And what's with those mysterious troops you're talking about?"

"The Li Consortium has gone crazy." Hu Shuo let out a sigh. "Those mysterious troops are very likely to be soldiers fully under the control of the nanomachines and have extremely strong combat capabilities. When the same group of mysterious troops were deployed to the battlefield at Mt. Qingsheng's front line, the Yang Consortium's troops there were immediately defeated. This group of soldiers is fearless and unafraid of death."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "The nanomachines actually have an effect like that?"