

First Order 401

Chapter 401 A happily married life

The war had started the moment the Razor Sharp Company took Mt. Guan. There was no official declaration of war, with the first gunshot fired being the bugle call.

Attacking Shichuan Village was a very minor interlude in the entire war. Both Second Company and Third Company had come along with Razor Sharp Company to Shichuan Village as this was not a place they could wage a battle on their own.

From here on out, they would be facing the Zong Consortium's regular troops. These regular troops had been put through systematic military training and had shot countless targets before. The only thing was they had never officially been on the battlefield before. Compared with the bandits they faced earlier, these troops were on a completely different level.

According to Zhang Xiaoman, the troops of the Zong Consortium were not that much weaker than those from Fortress 178. The only difference was their experience and ability to adapt on the battlefield. There was also a difference in what they had learned during their desensitization training.

Some of the Zong Consortium's new recruits would throw up, get disgusted, and become fearful when they saw intestines spilling out and legs getting broken. However, the veterans of Fortress 178 would not.

At the forward operating base, Zhou Yinglong got the orderlies to hand out pen and paper to everyone.

"What's this for?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

Zhang Xiaoman raised his head and gave him a look. "To write your will."

"Will?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment.

"On the surface, it's to let everyone write down whatever they want to say. If they don't make it back after a battle, the Administration Division will deliver the letters to their family. You can consider it a letter to pass down any instructions after your death. If the soldiers manage to return, they can go to the Administration Division and redeem their letters," Zhang Xiao Man explained. "But we just call this thing a will."

"That sounds like bad luck," Ren Xiaosu said with a smile.

"There's nothing unlucky about it." Zhang Xiaoman shook his head. "Those who step onto the battlefield should be able to make light of death. Actually, we didn't understand it at first, but after fighting so many enemies outside Fortress 178, we're numb to it."

"Then who are you writing to?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"My parents," Zhang Xiaoman said, "and my wife too."

"You're married?"

“Listen to what you’re saying. I’m almost thirty years old.” Zhang Xiaoman chuckled and said, “Can’t I have a wife?”

Ren Xiaosu felt a little embarrassed. He did not really understand the concept of marriage, so he assumed everyone else was single like him. Thinking about it, since Zhang Xiaoman was the company commander, he couldn’t be that young.

“What does being married feel like?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“It’s not too bad, I guess. There’s always a hot meal waiting at home,” Zhang Xiaoman said as he wrote out his “will.”

“Are you happy?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

Zhang Xiaoman chuckled and looked up. “You must be hankering for love, huh? Why are you so interested in this? Let me put it this way. I’ve been happily married for one year.”

“That sounds pretty nice,” Ren Xiaosu said.

Beside him, Jiao Xiaochen laughed loudly and said, “You don’t get it. He’s been married for ten years.”

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

Then Zhang Xiaoman asked, “Aren’t you going to write your letter?”

Ren Xiaosu hesitated for a moment. “I don’t know who I should write it to.”

All the warriors of the Razor Sharp Company fell silent. They realized this was probably the reason Ren Xiaosu had fought so desperately against the Zong Consortium.

After leaving the forward operating base, they could only travel on foot. In the battle plan, they would arrive at the outskirts of Shichuan Village on the third day. But from the moment they stepped out of the forward operating base, they had to be on full alert. This was in case the Zong Consortium’s troops had set up an ambush near Shichuan Village.

Ren Xiaosu asked, “Shichuan Village is located on a plain. Although its outskirts are forest, it should be quite difficult for us to break through into Shichuan Village, right?”

A rifle in his hands, Zhang Xiaoman explained, “We’ll use the mortars to attack first. Their range of three kilometers is enough for us to stay outside the range of the enemy’s HMGs. Once we create an opening, we can move on to urban combat.”

“Are you confident?” Ren Xiaosu asked skeptically.

“If that doesn’t work out, we’ll get the artillery troops behind to take out their large-caliber artillery and bombard them.” Zhang Xiaoman said, “There’s definitely a way.”

On the night of the second day, the sound of gunfire rang out from both sides. From where the Razor Sharp Company was, heavy machine guns could be heard firing in the distance.

Zhang Xiaoman frowned. "Second Company and Third Company have been ambushed. We should be careful too!"

Everyone had expected the Zong Consortium to set up an ambush outside of Shichuan Village, so it was not a surprise. Second Company and Third Company were probably prepared for this as well.

A gunshot suddenly rang out in front of them as well, but it sounded like it came from far away.

Zhang Xiaoman and the others instinctively took cover behind a tree by the side of the road, but no bullets flew at them.

"That's strange. Who's firing?" Zhang Xiaoman asked in confusion. "Let's continue moving forward!"

But after the Razor Sharp Company advanced several hundred meters, they still did not reach where they thought the enemy was. There were not even any gunshots anymore.

"Something's not right." Zhang Xiaoman frowned and said, "We're the ones taking the main path. Is the Zong Consortium trying to mislead us? Fu Rao, Lin Ping'an, I want the two of you to take point and scout!"

It was not that Zhang Xiaoman liked ordering Fu Rao and Lin Ping'an around when there was danger, but that there had to be designated scouts in the company. When a dangerous situation arose, these scouts would be tasked with charging ahead first. This was just a division of responsibilities.

Fu Rao and Lin Ping'an crouch walked through the forest and felt their way forward. However, before they could get far, the two of them turned back. "Captain, something's wrong. The people ambushing us are all dead. They've been wiped out!"

"There was only a single platoon manning the MG position, and all 30 of the soldiers there died just a while ago. They were still bleeding when we got near them," Lin Ping'an added.

Zhang Xiaoman looked suspiciously at Ren Xiaosu. "You did this?"

"No." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "Ain't I right here?"

"That's true." The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were also a little stunned. "Who helped us take out that MG nest? And their throats were slit? Only a supernatural being is capable of that, right?"

Everyone was puzzled. A mysterious supernatural being had suddenly appeared on the battlefield and done good deeds for them?

The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were not fools. This was clearly done by Ren Xiaosu, but they did not have any evidence of it.

To be honest, everyone still did not know what kind of power Ren Xiaosu had.

Zhang Xiaoman tried to test Ren Xiaosu again. "It really wasn't you?"

"It really wasn't me," Ren Xiaosu said innocently.

Zhang Xiaoman came to the machine gun position where he found a corpse and touched the area between the man's thumb and index finger. "There's no thick calluses, so they shouldn't be trained soldiers. This group was probably put together with refugees or soldiers from the private troops."

"They're just cannon fodder." Jiao Xiaochen said, "It looks like the Zong Consortium is trying to use cannon fodder to wear us out first."

"Predictable." Zhang Xiaoman said, "There won't be a lack of enemy troops in Shichuan Village. A conservative estimate says there's over a 1,000 of them. But the good news is that most of the enemies we'll encounter should be very weak. They might not even have a proper understanding of what targeting range is."

Shichuan Village was not a very important place to begin with. The Zong Consortium had only garrisoned it because they wanted to be a pain in the ass to Fortress 178's forward operating base.

Chapter 402 As long as we're still around

Actually, Zhang Xiaoman and the others' suspicions were correct. Ren Xiaosu's shadow clone was the one that had taken out the heavy machine gun position. Right after they had set off, he had been using his shadow clone to scout ahead in case they were ambushed.

After experiencing some setbacks, Ren Xiaosu learned how to be more careful and cautious.

However, this was not something to be happy about because he had learned to be this way through someone's suffering.

The level of enlightenment for every individual was equivalent to the depth of their anguish.

Second Company and Third Company's positions were some distance away, with the gap between each of the three companies maintained at around two kilometers. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu's shadow clone was only effective within a one-kilometer radius, so he could not send it out to help them.

Suddenly, Zhang Xiaoman said, "Continue marching. We're still a day away from Shichuan Village. Don't let up. We might encounter another ambush at any time."

The Zong Consortium had placed the refugees and private troops at the front lines. With just a single heavy machine gun, they could make Fortress 178's front line troops suffer heavy losses. This was a kind of bizarreness that only happened in the era of firearms and explosives.

As they marched, Zhang Xiaoman asked Ren Xiaosu, "I've actually been quite curious for a while, but you're not very interested in getting promoted, are you?"

"Mhm." Ren Xiaosu said, "After the war, I might be heading to the Central Plains."

"Wait!" Zhang Xiaoman suddenly felt that something was not right. "You're saying you'll leave Fortress 178 after the war?"

“That’s right.” Ren Xiaosu said, “I have to go find my family. The day before yesterday when y’all were writing your wills, everyone had loved ones that they could write to. But when I wanted to write mine, I realized that there was no one for me to write to.”

“Is the Zong Consortium the cause of this?” Zhang Xiaoman asked.

“Yes,” Ren Xiaosu said calmly.

Zhang Xiaoman realized it was no wonder Ren Xiaosu was so ruthless towards the Zong Consortium. He even volunteered to lead the main attack for their mission. So it turned out that he actually had a grudge against them.

Although Ren Xiaosu did not usually show any anguish, everyone could clearly feel the loneliness emanating from him. For example, when everyone gathered around the campfire, Ren Xiaosu would sit by himself and look up into the starry sky. Or when everyone was laughing and chatting after a meal, Ren Xiaosu would lean against a big tree and look out into the distance. No one knew what was on his mind.

When Ren Xiaosu came down from Mt. Guan drenched in blood, Zhang Xiaoman had clearly sensed his rage dissipating.

“Did you kill the bandits on Mt. Guan?” Zhang Xiaoman was referring to the main forces who had disappeared from Mt. Guan.

“No.” Ren Xiaosu shook his head. “My little bro killed them.”

Zhang Xiaoman choked a little. Ren Xiaosu was already this ferocious, yet he had a younger brother who could wipe out an entire mountain of bandits? What kind of a family was this?

Of course, Ren Xiaosu did not explain much.

“But if you leave, wouldn’t the commander have placed you in the Razor Sharp Company for nothing?” Zhang Xiaoman asked.

“Does the commander have other intentions by putting me in the Razor Sharp Company? I was the one who asked to be posted to the most dangerous unit,” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

“Um, it’s nothing, it’s nothing,” Zhang Xiaoman said. He felt that everyone might have misunderstood the entire situation. How could someone who was going to leave Fortress 178 after the war become the commander of the fortress? Or did Commander Zhang have other ideas?

Throughout their journey, there were a total of three ambush points. Without exception, the heavy machine guns were all taken out by someone.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "It's not like Zhang Jinglin has any combat skills, so why do all y'all listen to him?"

This doubt had always been on Ren Xiaosu's mind. This group of gruff men from the Northwest respected strong people the most. Although Zhang Jinglin was very capable and had saved many people in the past, that should not be enough to give him command over this forlorn hope, right?

Zhang Xiaoman shook his head. "I don't know, but someone said the commander should never be made to bear arms. Killing others is our job. All the commander has to do is to say who he wants us to kill and how to kill them."

When Zhang Xiaoman used the radio to report to Zhou Yinglong that they had arrived at the rendezvous point, Zhou Yinglong was shocked. "Second Company and Third Company are still on their way. How'd you get there so quickly? Did you encounter any ambushes on the way?"

"The ambushes we encountered were all taken out by a mysterious supernatural being," Zhang Xiaoman said honestly. "We don't know who did it either."

"It wasn't Ren Xiaosu?" Zhou Yinglong asked.

"We also suspected it could have been him, but he was with us the whole time." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Battalion Commander, should we go and provide support to Second Company and Third Company?"

"Negative. The companies have their own routes to take. We can't mess up the plan." Zhou Yinglong said, "They're not under a lot of pressure either, so they'll only be delayed by a bit. The enemies who ambushed them aren't experienced."

"Then what should we do now?" Zhang Xiaoman asked.

"Familiarize yourselves with the terrain first, and make preparations to capture Shichuan Village while waiting to rendezvous with Second Company and Third Company. The other fighting forces of the Forward Strike Battalion will be arriving the day after tomorrow." Then Zhou Yinglong ended their conversation.

Zhang Xiaoman ordered, "1st, 2nd, and 3rd Platoons, you get a short break. 4th, 5th, and 6th Platoons, follow me and start building some simple fortifications to prevent our enemies from coming out of Shichuan Village and ambushing us."

As a matter of fact, even though Zhang Xiaoman was always seen scrounging at the forward operating base and constantly requesting more armaments, he became a fully qualified company commander once he got onto the battlefield. He would unequivocally handle whatever needed to be done during battle.

Through the dense forest, Ren Xiaosu was looking at Shichuan Village in the distance. The abandoned town's high-rise buildings had long collapsed, and all that remained were the tattered two-story buildings.

Zhang Xiaoman said from next to him, "Even the concrete and metal that humans relied on for survival is no match for the effects of time. As long as there's maintenance done on them, those tall buildings will all collapse in a matter of 200 years. In another 500 years, there won't be any buildings left standing here. The cities of humans are not as sturdy as we imagined them to be."

"As long as we're still around, that's good enough," Ren Xiaosu remarked.

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned before smiling and saying, "That's absolutely right. It's fine as long as we're still around."

As they were quite close to Shichuan Village, they could not start a campfire. Otherwise, they would end up becoming targets for artillery fire from the town.

Ren Xiaosu expressed his understanding when he heard this reason. Then, as he had nothing better to do in the middle of the night, he ran far away and started a few campfires out there. As expected, just as the fire burned bright, the artillery from Shichuan Village locked on to the locations where the fires were burning and commenced a heavy bombardment.

Zhang Xiaoman and the others who were sitting behind some sandbags were confused when they heard the artillery fire. They were wondering who the enemies in town were attacking

When Ren Xiaosu came back after a while, Zhang Xiaoman asked, "Where'd you go?"

"Oh." Ren Xiaosu explained, "Didn't you say that campfires would attract the artillery? I went out to start some campfires. I thought that it'd be good if I could make them waste their shells. The troops in this Shichuan Village are an isolated force, so they definitely can't restock their ammo. Who knows? We might be able to reduce the number of casualties on our side this way."

Ren Xiaosu was just giving it a try and did not really think he would succeed.

Meanwhile, Zhang Xiaoman was thinking about what he had just done. He wondered how Ren Xiaosu's mind even worked in the first place.

Chapter 403 Bickering before battle

The sound of artillery fire from Shichuan Village was intense. Ren Xiaosu had lit up as many as seven campfires out there. Meanwhile, the Zong Consortium's soldiers did not think too much and decided to bombard those areas first.

Actually, it was very chaotic on the battlefield. Most of the time, the officers would not even have time to consider their actions too carefully, and it was normal to fight the moment they spotted their enemies.

Only a small number of commanders could remain calm in the chaos and take the right course of action. And it was these commanders who would emerge victorious from a battle. Some would then go on to become famous military leaders.

The artillery fire quickly put the Second Company and Third Company, who were currently storming the machine gun positions, on high alert. When they heard the sound of the bombardment, they thought the Razor Sharp Company had already started the attack on the town!

Importantly, the battle plan was for the three companies to rendezvous before launching an attack on the town. It was practically impossible for a single company to capture Shichuan Village, and the casualty count would definitely be disastrous as well.

Both Second Company and Third Company called in to Zhou Yinglong at the rear in unison. They were hoping he could stop the recklessness of the Razor Sharp Company. Although the Razor Sharp Company had just accomplished great things by taking mountain forss, there were two things in a battle that all soldiers were afraid of. One was cowardice, and the other was arrogance.

An army cocksure of its invincibility was doomed to defeat.

When Zhou Yinglong heard about the situation at the front line, he got anxious. He quickly found a radio operator to contact the Razor Sharp Company in the hopes they could still get through to them.

In the end, the call went through very quickly. Zhou Yinglong said anxiously, "Did you guys start attacking Shichuan Village already? Zhang Xiaoman, are you crazy? Didn't I tell you to wait until you joined up with Second Third Companies before launching an attack? If your Razor Sharp Company suffers heavy casualties, I'll hold you responsible!"

Zhang Xiaoman said innocently, "Battalion Commander, we're eating right now. We didn't start attacking Shichuan Village."

Zhou Yinglong was taken aback. "Are you sure? Then what's with the sound of the bombardment?" Zhou Yinglong could still hear the artillery bombardment on the other end while holding the receiver to his ear.

Zhang Xiaoman patiently explained, "I told Ren Xiaosu earlier that since we were very close to Shichuan Village, we shouldn't light any campfires or risk ending up as targets for the enemy. In the end, he ran off to a faraway place and started many campfires. He said he wanted to make the enemy at Shichuan Village waste some of their shells...."

It went silent in the call. Zhou Yinglong had not expected a situation like this. He said in a daze, "Where's Ren Xiaosu?"

"Oh yeah, where's Ren Xiaosu?" Zhang Xiaoman looked around but could not find Ren Xiaosu. Then he saw another group of campfires lighting up in the distance. He said numbly, "He went out to start a few more campfires."

But this time, the Zong Consortium's troops in Shichuan Village seemed to have realized that something was amiss. They gradually stopped their bombardment.

But after waiting half the night, Zhang Xiaoman did not see another campfire light up. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu had also not returned yet.

He muttered to Jiao Xiaochen, "I wonder what Ren Xiaosu's up to now?"

When dawn was about to break, Ren Xiaosu finally came back. Zhang Xiaoman leaned forward and sniffed. He could still smell gunpowder on Ren Xiaosu. "Where have you

been?”

“When I saw that Second Company and Third Company still hadn’t arrived even after waiting for so long, I thought I’d go help them,” Ren Xiaosu explained.

Zhang Xiaoman froze. He realized he had underestimated Ren Xiaosu’s ferocity. He still had the strength to go and help his allies.

As they were speaking, Second Company and Third Company finally arrived. The commander of Second Company was still wondering as they walked over, “I wonder who helped us destroy that MG position with a grenade...”

Zhang Xiaoman glanced over at Ren Xiaosu. At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was squatting behind the bushes and quietly watching the silent Shichuan Village in the distance.

Zhang Xiaoman did not say anything else. He turned to Second Company and Third Company and said, “Why have you only just arrived?”

Both Second Company and Third Company were puzzled. “Didn’t y’all encounter any ambushes last night?”

“We did!” Zhang Xiaoman said, “If our Razor Sharp Company can be stopped with just a machine gun, we’re willing to give up our name of ‘Razor Sharp’ to y’all!”

The faces of both Second Company and Third Company’s commanders darkened. Zhang Xiaoman was too fucking arrogant recently!

“Was it really that easy for y’all to take out the MG nests?” Second Company’s commander said unhappily, “The trenches they dug were so effective that even our mortars couldn’t cause any damage to them. Zhang Xiaoman, don’t get too cocky. We don’t care about getting the ‘Razor Sharp’ name.”

What the Second Company and Third Company’s commanders did not know was that the Razor Sharp Company did not even encounter any living enemies in the course of their march. However, this did not stop Zhang Xiaoman from full-on mocking them.

“Don’t stray from the subject.” Zhang Xiaoman said, “Rest up during the day. We’ll start by launching an aggressive attack on Shichuan Village at midnight. Our Razor Sharp Company will be responsible for creating an opening, so y’all better not drag us back.”

The moment he said that, the commanders of Second Company and Third Company got so angry they nearly lost their appetites! However, this was the culture at Fortress 178. As long as you were good at fighting, it wouldn’t matter how tough your words sounded!

Even though Second Company and Third Company were angered by this, they had to accept it. During their rest, all they could think of was how to win back their reputation during the attack on Shichuan Village.

The commander of Second Company quietly held a meeting with his officers. "I don't want any of us losing our reason later just to prove our worth, understand?"

The officers said, "Understood, sir!"

The company commander's responsibility was not only to lead in a battle, but also to know when to remind their soldiers to be cool-headed. Fighting a war was a matter of life and death, so one must not allow their emotions to rule their heads.

But immediately after the commander of Second Company was done speaking to his men, he heard Zhang Xiaoman loudly say, "Everyone, don't be in a hurry when attacking Shichuan Village tonight. It's fine even if we allow Second Company and Third Company to get the credit. We're a team, after all, so our Razor Sharp Company shouldn't be hogging all the contributions, right?"

This time, Second Company's commander nearly vomited blood.

It was normal to have some friendly bickering before a battle. They were all veterans with a lot of battlefield experience and knew how to put aside their emotions when going into battle.

Zhang Xiaoman was on very good terms with Second Company and Third Company. Otherwise, he would not dare to talk nonsense like this before a battle.

The commander of Second Company turned around and looked in the direction of the Razor Sharp Company. He saw Ren Xiaosu sitting alone with his eyes closed. Someone in the company muttered, "That's Ren Xiaosu, right? I heard he scaled a 700-meter-high cliff with his bare hands during the attack on Mt. Dingyuan."

"Are you serious?" A Second Company soldier asked skeptically, "Even Battalion Commander Zhou couldn't do that, right?"

When Jiao Xiaochen heard the discussion about Ren Xiaosu in Second Company, he remarked, "When Ren Xiaosu came back early in the morning, he said he went to help you guys. Weren't y'all asking who helped you to take out the MG nests? It was him."

The commander of Second Company was stunned. Jiao Xiaochen would not lie about such a thing. "I heard he's a supernatural being, right? What's his power?"

Jiao Xiaochen went silent for a moment. "We don't know either."

For a second, all of the soldiers at the camp looked at Ren Xiaosu either intentionally or unintentionally. They all had the same thought on their minds: 'Is this the person Commander Zhang chose? No wonder that the commander chose him.'

Chapter 404 Power revealed

At 3 AM, most people would easily start falling asleep. However, Zhang Xiaoman did not think the enemy would be sleeping at this time. It was easier to breach the enemy's machine gun positions under the cover of night.

Zhang Xiaoman quietly led the Razor Sharp Company forward. They could not rashly approach Shichuan Village because there were sure to be machine guns waiting in the windows.

The effective range of heavy machine guns tended to usually be between 1,000 and 2,000 meters. Some machine guns could even reach a range of 3,000 meters or 5,000 meters. However, once the range exceeded 500 meters, most shots from a machine gun would lose accuracy. Whether or not they could hit someone purely depended on luck.

Meanwhile, Zhang Xiaoman had set up some mortar positions 2.9 kilometers away from Shichuan Village, the maximum range at which they were effective. He was planning to destroy the buildings on the periphery of the village first.

They did not need the mortars to inflict a lot of casualties. All they needed was for them to bring down the buildings and turn them into rubble. That would create a natural defensive barrier for Fortress 178's soldiers to get close to Shichuan Village.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Jiao Xiaochen skillfully adjusting the mortar's angle. He suddenly asked, "Where's the most terrifying part of urban combat?"

Zhang Xiaoman thought for a moment and said, "Every room with a window could be turned into an enemy position."

"Then why don't we just demolish all the buildings and flatten them?" Ren Xiaosu said.

Zhang Xiaoman chuckled. "You make it sound so easy, but how are we going to achieve that? How many mortar rounds would we have to waste for that?"

Ren Xiaosu stopped talking. He was hesitating about whether he should use the steam locomotive to flatten the buildings. It would definitely be painful for him, but he felt that such a method would be very useful. After all, the old buildings couldn't withstand the impact of the steam locomotive.

What was impossible for Zhang Xiaoman and the others was only one of the many methods that Ren Xiaosu could choose to use.

But after some thought, Ren Xiaosu realized this was not his only way to launch an attack on the enemy. It would be better to choose a more conservative approach. If the steam locomotive crashed into the buildings, he might just vomit blood again from the pain.

At this moment, Jiao Xiaochen said at the side, "Captain, all preparations are complete!"

Zhang Xiaoman glanced at Second Company before saying softly, "Other than Jiao Xiaochen and those who are operating the mortars to provide cover, the rest are to advance with me. Jiao Xiaochen, keep this in mind: Don't allow the enemies in Shichuan Village to reinforce their defenses on the periphery. Attack them with everything you've got!"

Right now, Zhang Xiaoman was most worried about the required time for them to charge three kilometers. In that duration, the enemy was fully capable of reorganizing themselves to stop them from

entering the town. Therefore, the accuracy of Jiao Xiaochen's mortar bombardment would become crucial in their charge.

Jiao Xiaochen was put in a difficult spot. "Captain, it's too far. Furthermore, when we fire our mortars, the enemies will also fire back at us. We'll need to keep changing our positions!"

"I don't care about that." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Our lives are in your hands!"

Then Zhang Xiaoman led his men forward. Ren Xiaosu followed close behind him while Jiao Xiaochen was left with a problem at the rear.

The firing of mortars whooshed from the back. The Razor Sharp Company had deployed six mortars, and they were firing at Shichuan Village all at once.

After firing, Jiao Xiaochen shouted anxiously, "Run! Switch locations and fire again!"

The soldiers from Razor Sharp Company adroitly carried the mortars and ran off, in case the bombardment from Shichuan Village turned them into live targets.

Ren Xiaosu wondered, "Won't they have to readjust the angle and range when they get to another spot? That'll delay the covering fire, won't it?"

"No." Zhang Xiaoman said, "That's Jiao Xiaochen's expertise. No one in the entire army is better at it than him."

Ordinarily, mortars would never be used in this way, because every time they shifted positions, it would take an extremely long time to recalibrate the trajectory of fire. However, Jiao Xiaochen's expertise enabled the Razor Sharp Company to become this mobile. Many of the other fighting forces had tried to recruit Jiao Xiaochen into their ranks, but they were all stopped by Zhou Yinglong.

As they were talking, the second wave of mortar rounds hit Shichuan Village. Ren Xiaosu watched as the buildings on the periphery of Shichuan Village collapsed into rubble, forming cover for the Razor Sharp Company.

Meanwhile, the artillery in the town started firing at the suspected area where the mortar fire was coming from. But by then, Jiao Xiaochen had already fled with his men.

This was a great strategy, indeed.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Jiao Xiaochen is an expert. How did he master it?"

"If you're afraid to die, you can train hard," Zhang Xiaoman panted.

As soon as the enemies in Shichuan Village saw the mortar bombardment, their soldiers immediately moved towards the periphery and tried to re-establish a defensive line.

But the platoon Jiao Xiaochen was leading had set up another mortar shelling. The third wave of artillery fire happened to be right in the path of the enemy's movements and intercepted them!

Back when the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were eating and bragging to each other, someone said how great it would be if all of them could become supernatural beings. Jiao Xiaochen said at that time that if he were a supernatural being, he would definitely find it very easy to lug the mortar around.

Zhang Xiaoman, Jiao Xiaochen, and the others did not have any superpowers. They had become an integral part of the Razor Sharp Company in the Forward Strike Battalion purely through their hard work.

Zhang Xiaoman and the others were approaching the rubble. He looked up ahead at Shichuan Village and saw a small, two-story building still standing not too far away. However, he could not make out if there were any enemies behind the dark window.

If there were a heavy machine gun nest set up inside that building, many of the Razor Sharp Company's soldiers would probably have to die here.

But were they going to stop fighting just because people would die? Taking casualties in war was unavoidable!

He lowered his voice and whisper-shouted, "Those who aren't afraid to die, attack with me. Watch out for that window on the second floor—"

Before he could finish speaking, he suddenly saw Ren Xiaosu hold a grenade in his hand and extend it into a shadow.

A second later, an explosion burst from that second-floor window that he was worrying about a moment ago. With a loud boom, a huge cloud of dust was blown out of the window while cries of the Zong Consortium's soldiers came from the inside!

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. "What kind of fucking power was that?!"

But Ren Xiaosu did not stop moving. He ran towards the rubble as he said, "If you think there's a spot where it might be dangerous, tell me. As long as it's within a kilometer, let me handle it."

Zhang Xiaoman was shocked. Urban warfare was at its most dangerous when it was too difficult to deal with enemies hiding behind windows during a close-quarters fight.

But with Ren Xiaosu's power, it was as though he was a born nemesis for enemies in urban combat. No matter how well one hid, as long as enemies were suspected to be in a building, they would be greeted with a dropped grenade.

In the past, the Razor Sharp Company would always have a hard time when they had to fight in urban settings, because there wasn't really a good strategy for such battles. All they could rely on was Jiao Xiaochen's long-range cover fire to suppress the enemies for them.

But things were different now. They no longer had to be afraid of anything!

Zhang Xiaoman suddenly asked, "Wait, was it because of you that we didn't find any grenades at Mt. Guan and Mt. Dingyuan?"

Ren Xiaosu was about to explain when Zhang Xiaoman said, "Don't explain! In the future, you don't have to hide the grenades we seize anymore. They're all yours to keep!"

Chapter 405 Staunch

Zhang Xiaoman looked at Ren Xiaosu like he was a treasure.

He was a military man, so he only required a moment to understand what the ability to drop a grenade accurately from a kilometer away could do for their assaults and sieges.

They could take out machine gun positions easily, as well as freely engage in urban warfare without breaking a sweat. If they encountered any defensive bunkers when attacking high ground, they would not have to worry either. The enemy's fortifications on land were paper-thin in Ren Xiaosu's presence!

Zhang Xiaoman said excitedly to Ren Xiaosu, "From now on, whoever tries to take any grenades from you is as good as trying to take my life!"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "That's not nice, is it?"

As he spoke, he stuffed a second grenade behind another dark window. The Zong Consortium soldiers who were about to sweep their machine guns were blown out of the window by the grenade.

Curious, Zhang Xiaosu asked, "Xiaosu, where do you even keep these grenades? I don't see any hand grenades on you. Is this one power or two powers?"

Serious, Ren Xiaosu answered, "I only have one power, and it's to open up a dark passage to a dimension with a small storage area I can put stuff in."

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu felt this explanation was very illogical. After all, the Shadow Door did not have the ability to open another dimension.

However, even the supernatural beings themselves did not fully understand superpowers. Even if he made up something to fool an ordinary person, the other party would still believe them no matter how unbelievable it was. After all, these were already superpowers they were talking about, so why would they be based on logic?

Zhang Xiaoman was startled by Ren Xiaosu's explanation. He called over his platoon commanders and said to them, "Remove all the grenades on everyone and hand them over to Ren Xiaosu. We're going to start advancing in the direction of the artillery. Ren Xiaosu, I want you to blow up all of the arty!"

Ren Xiaosu had already saved more than a dozen boxes of grenades from the bandit lairs, with each box containing twenty grenades. Meanwhile, the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were given three grenades each as standard issue by the Supply Division of Fortress 178.

There were a total of 184 people in Razor Sharp Company. Excluding the platoon that stayed behind to man the mortars, there were a total of 154 people on the front line. The number of grenades they had numbered several hundred!

So when Ren Xiaosu grouped all of them together in his storage space, he felt so nervous his scalp went numb.

The Razor Sharp Company was sneaking through the rubble as they advanced. Whenever there was a spot where the enemy could be hiding, Zhang Xiaoman would remind Ren Xiaosu to bomb it from a distance.

On the flanks, Second Company and Third Company had similarly infiltrated into Shichuan Village. They could only watch helplessly as the Razor Sharp Company left them far behind in their wake.

Second Company and Third Company's mission was to provide cover for the Razor Sharp Company on both flanks. But from the looks of it, the Razor Sharp Company did not look like they needed any support! The exploding of grenades could be heard everywhere inside Shichuan Village. What was even more surprising was that the Razor Sharp Company did not even encounter a "proper" enemy!

What the hell was going on?!

The buildings still standing in Shichuan Village stretched for up to six kilometers, and the Razor Sharp Company had only taken half an hour so far to advance 500 meters in!

They had planned to take this town within a fortnight, but it seemed that the Razor Sharp Company would only need two to three days to clear out the entire town now!

However, Zhang Xiaoman did not want to get greedy and risk advancing farther. Their enemies on the flanks were still there. If Second Company and Third Company could not keep up with their progress, they might very well find themselves surrounded by the enemies in Shichuan Village.

And there was also the problem of whether there was a sniper in this town. On top of that, no one knew whether there might be any traps hidden underground. Thus, it was better to wait for the other two companies to join up with them first before continuing the assault.

Zhang Xiaoman suddenly raised his arm and shouted for the troops to change their route. They were going to head towards Second Company to provide support, with Ren Xiaosu in charge of blowing up enemies while the rest provided cover for him. They would also have to verify that the enemies in the buildings they had passed by were all dead.

Although some enemies had been blown up by the grenades, they were still looking to take the fight to the Razor Sharp Company to the bitter end. If the enemy ambushed them at this time, that would be horrible. The number of people who died from fighting in this tough battle wasn't the horrible fact, but that their carelessness could lead to the death of comrades. The former was unavoidable, but the latter was a matter of attitude.

Second Company was still having trouble dealing with a machine gun position behind a window at an intersection. Suddenly, an explosion rang out behind that window, and the enemy soldiers and machine gun were blown out from it!

When the commander of Second Company looked up, he saw Zhang Xiaoman waving to them. "Catch up! We're gonna provide support for Third Company!"

A soldier from Second Company mumbled, "What does he think urban warfare is? He's moving so freely?!"

By midnight, the Razor Sharp Company, Second Company, and Third Company were finally assembled together in an empty building. The soldiers upstairs from the Razor Sharp Company had set up several heavy machine gun nests and were on high alert to their surroundings. Downstairs, Zhang Xiaoman was holding a meeting with the commanders of Second Company and Third Company. "Hand over your remaining TNT and grenades to us."

The commander of Second Company turned unhappy. "Hand them over to all y'all? Then what're we going to use!"

Meanwhile, the commander of Third Company was worried about something else. "All of us are in this building. What if the enemy bombs this place? Wouldn't we be annihilated right here?"

"Don't worry." Zhang Xiaoman said calmly, "All the artillery in Shichuan Village has been destroyed by our Razor Sharp Company!"

"What the hell are you talking about?" The face of the Second Company's commander darkened. "The artillery positions are still at least 700 meters away from here. Tell me, how could you possibly have destroyed them all?"

"That's confidential, so how can I tell you?" Zhang Xiaoman laughed. "I've gathered you all here for nothing other than telling you how ferocious our Razor Sharp Company is. Grenades are a divine weapon when put into our hands. It's a waste to let y'all hold onto them!"

The commander of Second Company thought of how difficult it was to bring everyone together at one point. So it was just because he wanted to ask for their ammunition?

By now, they had advanced about two kilometers into Shichuan Village. With still a lot of enemies remaining on the northern side, there would be quite a few tough battles left to fight. So Zhang Xiaoman made Ren Xiaosu count the number of grenades they had left and realized there were not enough.

The eyes of Third Company's commander darted around as he suddenly said, "Zhang Xiaoman, be honest and tell us what you want the grenades for. Earlier, I saw one of the enemy's MG nests get destroyed before you even arrived. What exactly is going on?"

Zhang Xiaoman turned around and looked at Ren Xiaosu, seeing him nod his head. Only then did Zhang Xiaoman say, "Ren Xiaosu's power lets him throw grenades anywhere he wants within a one-kilometer radius. It won't drop more than a meter from where he wants it to land! So y'all understand now, right? Hand the grenades to us and let the Razor Sharp Company clear a path forward. When the time comes, we can all share the credit!"

The commander of Second Company was still reluctant. "If we give you all our grenades, what are we going to—".

"Li Haichen, you better think this through." Zhang Xiaoman cut him off. "We're in a war now, and those machine gun bullets are whisking past everyone blindly. Is your Second Company's mission more important, or are the lives of your soldiers more important? Besides, by handing over the grenades to us and letting the Razor Sharp Company forge a path ahead, the mission can still be completed all the same!"

The commander of Second Company hesitated before finally saying with a sigh, "Alright, you can have them all! We won't take a share of the credit either. Whatever really takes place should be reported as such. Our Second Company doesn't want leftovers!"

Zhang Xiaoman happily gave him a thumbs up and said, "Alright, Second Company, you sure are staunch!"

Then Zhang Xiaoman turned to the commander of Third Company. "So is Third Company just as staunch?"

The commander of Third Company was annoyed. "Zhang Xiaoman, stop fucking rubbing it in!"

Chapter 406 Wiping out the Zong Consortium

Ren Xiaosu stared blankly at the hundreds of hand grenades placed in front of him and was at a loss for words. Second Company's Commander Li Haichen looked at Zhang Xiaoman and said, "Remember this: We gave the grenades to you so you can help reduce the number of casualties to our Second Company and Third Company. Don't take the grenades and venture out too deep into enemy lines. Otherwise, even if you manage to achieve something great, I'll still report y'all to the commander."

In the end, Zhang Xiaoman managed to move Second Company's Commander Li Haichen by giving the reason that this would help reduce the casualties for their side. During the attack on Shichuan Village last night, Second Company suffered more than ten casualties. They were all good friends who trained and got along well with each other. Any achievements in battle were not as important as staying alive, and this was the consensus among the officers of Fortress 178.

When it was time to fight the tough battles, they would fight the tough battles. But if there was a better choice, they would definitely prioritize the survival of their troops.

"Don't worry one bit." Zhang Xiaoman said with a smile, "We're sister units, so why would we do something like that? Come, come, Ren Xiaosu, put away these grenades. We'll continue attacking after night falls."

Ren Xiaosu watched quietly as Zhang Xiaoman negotiated with Second Company and Third Company. A group of soldiers were smoking and chatting off to the side, and some of them had even taken off their shoes. The entire building was filled with a strange odor that was mixed with the smell of cigarettes. However, the cigarettes were different from those the private troops of the other strongholds smoked. Even while the soldiers were chatting, their guns remained in their arms at the most convenient positions.

Old Xu had mentioned to him that Fortress 178 was a different kind of place. At that time, Ren Xiaosu thought that since they were all strongholds, how different could they be? But now he understood what Xu Xianchu meant when he saw how different it really was.

Ren Xiaosu put away the grenades while asking Zhang Xiaoman, "I think we should be more careful during our attack. The layout of Shichuan Village is very complex, and the Zong Consortium has recently built some new buildings. We can't guarantee that they might not have some tricks up their sleeves. I get the feeling that our attack on Shichuan Village has gone too smoothly."

Things that went too smoothly would always make Ren Xiaosu a little uneasy.

Zhang Xiaoman didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "You call this easy? If it weren't for the fact that you could accurately drop those grenades, do you know how many of our people would have died in this town? You didn't know, but Battalion Commander Zhou was prepared to sacrifice the entire Forward Strike Battalion here."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "Is it that serious? He's prepared to sacrifice the entire Forward Strike Battalion for this urban combat?"

"That's right." Zhang Xiaoman sighed and said, "Only by taking Shichuan Village and clearing out the long-range artillery emplacements hidden here can the troops in the rear regroup at the FOB with no worries and carry out the next stage of the battle plan."

Next to them, Jiao Xiaochen added on, "Wars these days are all about modern firearms and explosives. Our Forward Strike Battalion's role is to clear all obstacles during the early stages of the war. After that, we'll take on the temporary role of scouts to handle infiltration and recon in order to patch any missing map intel for the rest of our troops. We have basically no involvement in the main battles after that."

"Then did we get sent here as cannon fodder?" Ren Xiaosu frowned. Why did it sound no different from being cannon fodder to him?

But Zhang Xiaoman immediately rejected any suggestion of that. He said seriously, "We're not cannon fodder. Fortress 178 has never required cannon fodder to win a war. It's just that the division of our fighting forces is different. Today's sacrifices will lead to a victory for the rear forces. This is also the reason why all the candidates for the successor of Fortress 178's commander must come through the Razor Sharp Company. Only those who have risked their lives before have the right to ask others to fight for him."

Ren Xiaosu was silent. Jiao Xiaochen clapped him on the shoulder and said happily, "Commander Zhang came from the Razor Sharp Company. If we're really cannon fodder, and if the commander was willing to be cannon fodder as well, then what makes us so special that we can reject the notion of that?"

Understanding dawned upon Ren Xiaosu. It was probably because of the current commander leading by example that Fortress 178 was such a cohesive force.

So what did it mean when Zhang Jinglin specially arranged for him to join Razor Sharp Company after he had said that he wanted to be posted to the most dangerous unit in the fortress?

“How long are we going to fight this war?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“Until the Zong Consortium is completely destroyed, of course! We’re going to fight all the way northeast til we reach Mt. Pingluo.” Zhang Xiaoman said, “Until a hyena like the Zong Consortium is totally destroyed, there won’t be any peace in the Northwest.”

That night, right after the sun set, the Razor Sharp Company led an attack into the interior of Shichuan Village.

During the day, the enemies in the town seemed to have received orders to take back the lost ground. But in urban warfare, it was always the attackers who were at a disadvantage. The route the enemy had chosen to break through was exactly where Second Company and Third Company were stationed.

The two company commanders were already filled with anger, and the more they thought about it, the more pent-up they got. Now that the enemy had come knocking on their door, they would definitely strike at them mercilessly.

When they broke through the enemy lines, the machine gun positions they captured still had heavy machine guns and ammunition that could be used. However, Zhang Xiaoman and the others from Razor Sharp Company did not take them because they were already carrying a lot of weight.

Now that all of these firearms and ammunition were in the hands of Second Company and Third Company, they wanted nothing more than to rain down a hail of bullets on the enemy. Several walls even collapsed from the heavy gunfire.

Li Haichen was roaring with rage from behind a machine gun as he fired at the enemy ruthlessly.

The defenders of Shichuan Village made several waves of attacks, but they were unable to break through the defensive line Second Company and Third Company had set up. They were forced to retreat.

After the second day of surprise attacks ended, the Razor Sharp Company led the rest of the troops to advance five kilometers into Shichuan Village. Only a small portion of the Zong Consortium’s troops were still putting up a stubborn resistance in some buildings in the north.

This battle made the defenders of Shichuan Village extremely sullen as they had thought their firepower could hold back the enemy. In this urban warfare, there were more than a dozen emplacements with sufficient firepower. There were also many soldiers hidden within buildings, ready to snipe any of the invaders.

But after two days, they suddenly felt like their defensive positions had been constructed out of paper. They simply could not hold back Fortress 178’s soldiers.

Sometimes, they would even get hit by a grenade before they saw any signs of the enemy!

It was too frustrating!

According to their initial plans, they would be laying waste to the entire Forward Strike Battalion of Fortress 178 here in Shichuan Village. But in the end, all it took was three companies from the Forward Strike Battalion to capture Shichuan Village.

In fact, if this hadn't been urban combat, the effects of the grenades going off in an open space would not have caused as much destruction as it did.

But now, the dark houses that were supposed to act as a defensive barrier for the garrison ended up turning into targets for Ren Xiaosu to attack.

The next night, Battalion Commander Zhou Yinglong felt a little numb when Zhang Xiaoman gave him a sitrep. Zhou Yinglong had asked Commander Zhang Jinglin for more time to complete their mission. Only by having more time could they comfortably capture Shichuan Village in battle.

As such, the armored brigade to the rear temporarily slowed their advance. But as soon as he bought some time for the Forward Strike Battalion, Zhang Xiaoman, who was at the front lines, actually told him they might be able to take Shichuan Village by the next day?

Chapter 407 Adapting to the situation

People tended to get fatigued very easily when fighting a battle. On the battlefield, one couldn't sleep in peace, and only true warriors could endure such mental exhaustion.

As the third night approached, Zhang Xiaoman ordered a firearms inspection while he gave everyone a pep talk. "I want all of you to fill your magazines to full. We'll be putting an end to this battle tonight. I know you're all exhausted—"

"We aren't, Captain." Jiao Xiaochen chuckled and said, "Ren Xiaosu has been forging a safe path forward for us on the front lines all this while, and we're just here acting as his support, so we don't feel tired at all."

Zhang Xiaoman was speaking his most commonly used lines to motivate the troops before the final battle. Essentially, the closing stages of a battle was when it would get most dangerous, so he was hoping to lift the spirits of his troops and let them face the fight in tiptop condition.

He was never one to be good at giving pep talks. Therefore, he thought it would be better to speak while everyone was resting. But in the end, it turned out to be totally unnecessary.

After two days of high-intensity fighting, the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were each more pumped up than the last.

This was unlike any of the battles they had fought in the past. They'd never had it so easy before.

Zhang Xiaoman said with a sigh, "Forget it. Let's just get it over and done with. Everyone, take note. Battalion Commander Zhou and the other commanders suspect they hid some very destructive weapon systems inside this town. So if the enemy gets forced into a corner on the final day of battle, they might choose to activate those weapons."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Did Battalion Commander Zhou say what might be hidden in this town?"

“Probably weapons like artillery or something.” Zhang Xiaoman said, “We still lack good intelligence gathering at Fortress 178, so we don’t have a clear idea of how large the garrison here is or what weapons they have.”

On the intelligence gathering front, Ren Xiaosu really admired the Qing Consortium. Qing Zhen had made a most comprehensive preparation for the war and thought about potential futures as well.

Meanwhile, over at Fortress 178, the entire stronghold ran in a near leaderless state after Zhang Jinglin went away for more than a decade.

Although there was a stand-in commander during that period, he was a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. As a result, the Northwestern man who had risen through the ranks of the military was mainly focused on ensuring their military readiness by constantly training and cycling the troops. He did not really develop the economy nor establish any intelligence gathering infrastructure, as those were not aspects he was good at.

During the day, the defenders of Shichuan Village launched a wave of frenzied attacks against the Fortress 178 troops. But after that wave was repulsed, there were no signs of activity from them anymore.

At that time, Zhang Xiaoman thought the Zong Consortium had learned their lesson after being beaten back. However, the shadow clone Ren Xiaosu had left outside started lurking behind enemy lines. He discovered the Shichuan defenders had slowly retreated during the attack.

Ren Xiaosu thought about it carefully. This attack probably acted as cover so the troops behind them could withdraw from the town, right? Only by retreating this way would Zhang Xiaoman and the others not detect them. But why were the defenders of Shichuan Village retreating?

Ren Xiaosu did not have time to think too much. “Captain, why don’t we retreat?”

“Retreat? We just won the battle and you’re calling for us to retreat?” Zhang Xiaoman asked in surprise.

“There’s danger here,” Ren Xiaosu said in a serious tone.

Zhang Xiaoman frowned. “We headed out here to the front line precisely because there’s danger, so how can we retreat? And if we retreat too far, much of the ground we gained will be lost for nothing.”

“The Shichuan Village defenders in the rear are retreating right now. There must a reason for that!” Ren Xiaosu said.

“How do you know they’re retreating? Haven’t you been here all this while?” Zhang Xiaoman waved it off. “We’ve fought all the way here, so we can’t retreat!”

“If we managed it before, we can do it again.” Ren Xiaosu said anxiously, “Let’s retreat! What if the Zong Consortium bombards the entire town with artillery?”

“How could that be possible? We only have three companies storming this town. If they bombard the area with artillery, that’ll be no different from shooting a mosquito with a cannon.”

Zhang Xiaoman was just about to keep speaking when he realized he had been lifted up by Ren Xiaosu. Zhang Xiaoman was alarmed. "Put me down!"

However, Ren Xiaosu ignored what he was saying. He picked up Zhang Xiaoman and sprinted for the periphery of the town.

The action he took dumbfounded everyone in the Razor Sharp Company. Zhang Xiaoman roared on Ren Xiaosu's shoulder, "Put me down, Ren Xiaosu. If you disobey my order, I'll kill you!"

Ren Xiaosu said as he ran, "If there were only three companies here, the Zong Consortium definitely wouldn't have fought so hard. But if the Zong Consortium knew that I was here as well, that would be different."

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. For a while, he did not understand what Ren Xiaosu was trying to get at.

Meanwhile, the Razor Sharp Company, Second Company, and Third Company were still caught in a daze. Zhang Xiaoman suddenly sighed on Ren Xiaosu's shoulder and shouted, "Let's all retreat! Ren Xiaosu, if you don't give me a satisfactory explanation afterwards, I'll be sure to court-martial you."

All the soldiers and officers looked at one another. What else could they do but retreat?

When they retreated all the way outside of Shichuan Village, Ren Xiaosu still kept on running for another two kilometers before stopping

Zhang Xiaoman nearly vomited from the bumpy ride on Ren Xiaosu's shoulder. Putting everything else aside, Ren Xiaosu's stamina was amazing. He ran several kilometers while carrying a person weighing over 50 kilograms without any problem!

But just as Ren Xiaosu placed Zhang Xiaoman on the ground, the Razor Sharp Company saw a huge fireball erupt in Shichuan Village. Explosions also burst from afar.

Even though they were several kilometers away, everyone could feel the ground shaking.

It was not an artillery bombardment. In fact, an artillery bombardment was not even required. The explosives left behind by the defenders of Shichuan Village was all it took for the entire abandoned town to get swallowed in a sea of fire.

Zhang Xiaoman stared at this sight in a daze. "How fucking evil! If we didn't leave, I bet all three of our companies would've died."

He did not pursue the issue of Ren Xiaosu forcefully carrying him away. At this moment, the soldiers from Second Company and Third Company were looking at the sea of fire with lingering fear in their minds.

Because of the explosions, everyone heard ringing in their ears.

“How did you know the enemy retreated?” Zhang Xiaoman looked at Ren Xiaosu curiously.

“I don’t wanna talk about it,” Ren Xiaosu answered bluntly.

“Alright.” Zhang Xiaoman did not probe further. Instead, he thought for a moment before saying, “But you still have to listen to orders in the future. Have you forgotten that I said,”

“Captain, you said that we had to know how to adapt to the situation,” interrupted Ren Xiaosu

Zhang Xiaoman looked at Jiao Xiaochen. “Did I say that?”

Jiao Xiaochen answered honestly, “Yes, sir.”

Zhang Xiaoman laughed. This was the joy of having survived a disaster. He solemnly said to Ren Xiaosu, “Thank you.”

“Gratitude received from Zhang Xiaoman, +1!”

This was truly a lifesaving act. Had it not been for Ren Xiaosu’s quick reaction, all three companies would have been wiped out in the explosions.

No matter how you put it, Ren Xiaosu’s arrival had certainly given their lives greater security.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu looked at his gratitude log in the palace and turned his gaze to the others.

Chapter 408 Reaping gratitude tokens

Having managed to save lives, and so many of them in one fell swoop, how could Ren Xiaosu possibly pass up the opportunity to earn some gratitude tokens?

There were 184 men in the Razor Sharp Company. After two battles, not a single one of them had died. Meanwhile, Second Company and Third Company were not reinforced companies, so they only had 120 people each. With a small number of casualties suffered, Ren Xiaosu had saved a total of 397 people.

Everyone looked at Ren Xiaosu and did not quite understand what he wanted. When Ren Xiaosu saw they had missed the hint, he explicitly expressed, “Ahem, shouldn’t y’all thank me for saving your lives?”

Zhang Xiaoman was confused. Both Second Company and Third Company were too.

They had never come across such a thick-skinned person before!

Although he had saved their lives, straight-up asking for their gratitude was too strange a request. Did he had some sort of condition that needed fulfilling?

It was not like they knew Ren Xiaosu needed gratitude tokens, so they just treated it as some strange fetish of his!

But even if they thought that, since their savior had made such a request, everyone would definitely not want to make it awkward for him. Second Company’s commander, Li Haichen, took the lead and thanked him first, followed by the others who did the same.

Ren Xiaosu calculated the number of gratitude tokens he got and was surprised to see that all 397 people across the three companies had earned him a gratitude token each. None of them was insincere!

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu realized all his tricks to try to earn gratitude tokens previously were too shameful. Only by sincerely saving someone could he get gratitude tokens easily.

Including the gratitude tokens he had earned earlier, Ren Xiaosu's gratitude tokens now surpassed 800 again.

Zhang Xiaoman suddenly asked, "Ren Xiaosu, I remember what you just said on the run out here about the Zong Consortium not hesitating to use their artillery shells to bombard this area due to your presence? What'd you mean? Do you have a vendetta with the Zong Consortium?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and answered, "I was just saying. Don't take it seriously."

He could not explain too much. When he barged into the Zong Consortium's defensive front, he had used the Shadow Door to throw the Explosive Poker cards at their forces. Back then, not all the Zong Consortium's soldiers were killed, so Zong Cheng would definitely know he possessed that power.

Although he had also used the Shadow Door multiple times during the urban combat, those who encountered it should all be dead. So Zong Cheng should not know he was still alive, right?

If Zong Cheng knew that Ren Xiaosu was still alive, he would probably not be able to eat or sleep well.

Zong Cheng had to be badly hoping to kill him, just as how he really hoped to kill Zong Cheng.

Seeing that Ren Xiaosu did not want to talk about it, Zhang Xiaoman said, "According to the plan, we should have garrisoned Shichuan Village after we completed our mission. But now that the entire town has been destroyed, it looks like our plan will have to change. Let's contact Battalion Commander Zhou and see where we should go next."

The radioman immediately radioed Zhou Yinglong. Zhou Yinglong asked blankly, "What? You've captured the town already?"

Zhou Yinglong used to be shocked by the ferocity of the Razor Sharp Company. But now, he was getting used to it.

"Mhm." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Shichuan Village has been destroyed. I wonder how many explosives the Zong Consortium buried in that town. They actually blew up the entire place."

"What?!" Zhou Yinglong was shocked. "Then are y'all alright?"

Zhou Yinglong was an expert at fighting wars, so he could immediately tell how dangerous it was when he heard what happened. However, Zhang Xiaoman calmly replied, "Fortunately, we discovered the enemy's movements in time and ran the hell out of Shichuan Village."

Zhou Yinglong felt that listening to the situation reports each day was really making his heart weaker. It was never as agitating as this in the previous wars they had fought!

However, it was a good thing they had managed to capture Shichuan Village. From now on, there would no longer be any threats in the surroundings of the forward operating base.

Zhou Yinglong said, "Return to the FOB to regroup. You'll mop up the wilderness with the entire Forward Strike Battalion in two days."

The "mop up of the wilderness" was to circle the forward operating base in a radius of 120 kilometers to eliminate any hidden threats. This was to prevent the Zong Consortium from leaving any guerrillas in the wilderness.

In the tales of teahouse storytellers, war was a struggle between the strategies of the talented. For Zhou Yinglong and the rest, war was just about getting the details right.

Just establishing a forward operating base required some extreme care and caution.

Only then would Commander Zhang have the foundation to execute his strategy.

After all, even skyscrapers had to be built on a good foundation!

Zhang Xiaoman finished communicating on the radio. He said with a grin, "Gentlemen, we can head back to the FOB and nap! Let's get the chow hall to make us some delicious food. We're the men of the hour!"

In the command post, Zhou Yinglong was sitting at the end of the table. If not for the Forward Strike Battalion's special status, a battalion commander like him would not have the right to sit here.

The command post was considered sacred to the troops of Fortress 178. Every time the soldiers passed by the command post tent, they would imagine the day they could also sit in there to report about the battles.

At this moment, Zhang Jinglin looked at Zhou Yinglong with a smile and said, "You just went outside for a moment and can't hide the joy on your face now that you're back. What happened? Did your wife give birth to your second child?"

"Commander, what're you talking about?" Zhou Yinglong said happily, "How can I possibly be contacting my wife when I'm in the base? I'm happy because my Forward Strike Battalion has already captured Shichuan Village! Luckily, they didn't fail!"

Zhou Yinglong's cocky expression was exactly the same as Zhang Xiaoman's when he mentioned how fortunate it was they'd succeeded.

Actually, the entire Forward Strike Battalion had the same attitude.

“Oh?” Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, “Didn’t you ask me for more time to complete the mission the day before yesterday? You said it wouldn’t be easy to take Shichuan Village and even tried to reason with me how difficult urban warfare was. So why have y’all suddenly achieved the objective today?”

Zhou Yinglong rolled his eyes and said, “That Ren Xiaosu you had join the Razor Sharp Company is a badass. Even if I personally joined the battlefield, the mission would not have gone so smoothly.”

“Let me hear about it,” Zhang Jinglin said calmly.

“That kid’s superpower is to open up a portal to anywhere within a one-kilometer range. This power seems to be specifically made for urban warfare.” Zhou Yinglong praised, “He can cripple an MG nest with a grenade from one kilometer away! Hell yeah!”

Zhang Jinglin smiled at the people around him and said, “Zhou Yinglong told me at the beginning that he didn’t want Ren Xiaosu, saying that he looked too skinny to fight. But I reckon that he won’t let Ren Xiaosu leave if someone tries to steal him away.”

Zhou Yinglong mumbled, “What I meant back then was that I don’t want useless people. I realize he’s useful now, and he even contributed greatly too!”

Meanwhile, the group of commanders at the table were thinking that Zhou Yinglong was too good at sucking up to others. He knew that Commander Zhang wanted to hear about Ren Xiaosu, so he specifically chose to share Ren Xiaosu’s heroic deeds with him...

But everyone knew that Zhou Yinglong was telling the truth, because Zhou Yinglong would not dare to lie in front of Commander Zhang.

Someone spoke up, “Just being capable isn’t enough. What’s he like?”

Everyone was judging Ren Xiaosu as a candidate to be the next fortress commander. So, capabilities aside, his conduct was something that mattered to them as well.

Chapter 409 Stupidity and bravery

When Zhang Jinglin assigned Ren Xiaosu to the Razor Sharp Company in the war room, he was making his stand clear. Moreover, he even placed Ren Xiaosu under the spotlight and illuminated him for everyone to see.

As the commander’s choice, if he could not convince the masses or lead by example, Zhang Jinglin would not force the matter.

But since Zhang Jinglin made the choice, he was not afraid of everyone finding fault with his decision.

Back then, if Zhang Jinglin did not admire Ren Xiaosu, he would not have allowed Ren Xiaosu to become the replacement teacher of the school. However, Zhang Jinglin had not expected Ren Xiaosu to come this far at that time.

At that time, Zhang Jinglin had thought about getting Ren Xiaosu to be the schoolteacher because that arrangement would not affect the progress of the students. If Ren Xiaosu was a normal person, he would not be thinking about pulling him into this whirlpool of authority either. But even though he did not pull him in, Ren Xiaosu walked straight into it himself.

What Fortress 178 needed was not a good person as its leader. But of course, they could not be a bad person, or worse, a belligerent boor. When Zhang Jinglin first started looking at the commanders around him, he was surprised that none of them were suitable choices.

Until Wang Shengzhi delivered Ren Xiaosu right to his doorstep.

Actually, Ren Xiaosu was not the best candidate either. However, Zhang Jinglin felt that the young man had drive, and as long as he had that kind of motivation, his future was something Zhang Jinglin thought would be worth looking forward to.

However, these commanders believed the young Ren Xiaosu was only lucky to be chosen by Zhang Jinglin. Meanwhile, Zhang Jinglin was thinking that Ren Xiaosu might not even be willing to remain at Fortress 178.

Zhou Yinglong could not answer the question about Ren Xiaosu's character. "He should be alright..."

To be honest, Zhou Yinglong only cared about the sitreps. Why would he worry about whether Ren Xiaosu was a good person? To Zhou Yinglong, everything was fine as long as they won the battles.

Zhang Jinglin tapped his fingers on the table. "Hu Xinzhi, Chai Zhilong, your armored brigade and infantry divisions will need to get to the FOB a-sap. I'll give you two three days. Fu Hong, your Engineering Battalion will need to hurry to the Blackstone River within half a month and build a bridge crossing there..."

Numerous orders were issued from Zhang Jinglin's mouth as everyone realized this was not the time to be worrying over Ren Xiaosu. They still had a tough battle on their hands!

When the Razor Sharp Company returned to the forward operating base, Zhang Xiaoman went to the makeshift chow hall and shouted, "Lin Yuze, where's Lin Yuze?"

Lin Yuze, who was the manager of the makeshift chow hall, walked out with a smile on his face. "Hey, if it isn't Captain Zhang, our war hero."

"Make some good grub. Our brothers are hungry after coming back from the front lines. We're gonna shower first. After we're done showering, we wanna see the piping hot dishes ready. Braised pork and braised chicken, those are two dishes we demand!" Zhang Xiaoman shouted.

Lin Yuze smiled and said, "Don't worry, I'll make 'em just for you! There's even barley wine for you to drink. Just be sure to not sneak it out of the base. After today, you can't drink anymore."

Normal soldiers couldn't request the dishes they wanted or drink alcohol. Even an officer like Zhou Yinglong was not allowed to do so, as all officers and men were treated in the same regard.

However, war heroes were different. They could freely request whatever food they wanted that even the fortress commander could not eat. This had always been the tradition in Fortress 178. You would be given whatever you wished to eat after winning a battle!

Rules like these made the men in Fortress 178 understand one thing, and that was how they definitely had to win all their battles!

Allowing the Razor Sharp Company to drink alcohol was due to the fact that they would not be going on any new missions for the next two days. They were back to regroup and rest, after all, but not letting them sneak the alcohol away was in case they drank before their next battle and end up delaying everything.

Zhang Xiaoman swaggered out of the chow hall so much that even his shoulders were overflowing with arrogance. He was as smug as he could get.

When the soldiers from the Engineering Corps saw him, they laughed and said, "Zhang Xiaoman, you're so damn fucking cocky!"

Zhang Xiaoman smiled and said, "Can't I be cocky after returning victorious from a battle? The mission that Old Zhou set for me was to capture Shichuan Village within half a month, but we managed to do it in three days!"

But just as he said that, Zhang Xiaoman felt his ass get kicked. When he turned around and saw it was Zhou Yinglong, he immediately smiled and said, "Battalion Commander, how have you been these past few days?"

Zhou Yinglong's face darkened. "Don't embarrass yourself. Hurry up and shower already."

"Ah, alright!" Zhang Xiaoman turned around and ran off.

One could take a hot shower at the forward operating base, with the facilities here much more complete than expected. When Ren Xiaosu heard it was possible to take a hot shower, he wondered how these soldiers did it.

When everyone took off their clothes and walked into the showers, Jiao Xiaochen was shocked when he saw Ren Xiaosu. While wearing clothes, he thought that Ren Xiaosu looked quite thin. But now he felt Ren Xiaosu's muscles exuded an aura of strength.

After they showered and dressed, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to see two girls in nurse uniforms standing at the entrance of the showers.

Ren Xiaosu thought they were waiting for the other soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company, but when the two girls saw Ren Xiaosu, their eyes lit up. One of the girls took the initiative to walk up to him and whispered, "When you first arrived at the FOB, I took notice of you. Here, this hand cream is for you."

With that said, the girl grabbed the other girl's hand and ran off. The Razor Sharp Company's soldiers behind him were all jealous when they saw this scene. "I'm jealous again..."

"Why is Ren Xiaosu so popular with the ladies..."

Jiao Xiaochen smiled and said, "We're just a group of rugged men from the Northwest. The moment Ren Xiaosu arrived, we were knocked off our perches. Also, the entire military knows he's a supernatural

being and that Commander Zhang thinks highly of him, so of course the girls would try to get to know him.”

As he finished speaking, an orderly ran over. He looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, “Are you Ren Xiaosu?”

“Yes, I am,” Ren Xiaosu said.

“Commander Zhang has summoned you. He wishes to see you.” The orderly showed him the way.

Ren Xiaosu turned around and said to Jiao Xiaochen and the others, “Y’all can eat first. I’ll be there in a bit.”

“Alright, we’ll leave some for you,” Jiao Xiaochen said in envy. He had actually been summoned to meet the Commander on his

own.

When Ren Xiaosu arrived at the command post tent, only Zhang Jinglin was inside. He was standing deep in thought in front of the sand table. Ren Xiaosu walked in and said, “Teacher.”

When Zhang Jinglin heard that, he was taken aback before smiling and saying, “I haven’t been addressed that way in a long time.”

Ren Xiaosu also smiled and said, “I really miss the school days.”

Zhang Jinglin glanced at him before sighing. “We can’t go back to those days.”

“Teacher, why have you called me here?” Ren Xiaosu asked.

“I just thought of chatting with you to catch up.” Zhang Jinglin said with a smile, “The Razor Sharp Company has participated in two tough battles consecutively without anyone dying. Is that to your credit?”

“Not really.” Ren Xiaosu gave it some thought and said, “There was also some luck involved.”

“Do you know how hard it is to lead a company on the battlefield without anyone dying?” Zhang Jinglin asked.

“I know it’s very difficult.”

“If you know how difficult it is and still insist on achieving it at the risk of injuring yourself, that’s called stupidity,” Zhang Jinglin said calmly.

Ren Xiaosu remained silent for a moment before replying, “Same goes for bravery.”

Chapter 410 The second weapon finally gets unlocked!

When Zhang Jinglin heard Ren Xiaosu's reply, he burst into laughter. "Well said! Same goes for bravery, huh?"

In reality, Zhang Jinglin did not know that for Ren Xiaosu, ensuring the survival of all his Razor Sharp Company's comrades had become an obsession in the course of his revenge. That obsession dictated whether he was qualified to protect some things.

The things Ren Xiaosu wanted to protect in the past had been destroyed by the Zong Consortium. This led to Ren Xiaosu looking back on his beautiful vision from before and thinking about whether he could protect anything in this chaotic world.

As a result, he had even taken on the survival of the Razor Sharp Company as his personal mission. Only by ensuring that the Razor Sharp Company remained intact could he have the right to go to the Central Plains later to search for his family and friends to continue living in this chaotic world.

"I can sense conflict within you." Zhang Jinglin said calmly, "It's exactly the same as when I was young. Back then, everyone wanted me to pick up a gun, saying how the battlefield needed soldiers who could fire a gun, how it was no place for a useless medic. Sometimes, even I wondered if my persistence was correct, and whether I should also pick up a gun and attack alongside them?"

Zhang Jinglin continued, "At that time, I was thinking about bending to the will of this chaotic world. Only that way could I live a better life."

"What happened?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Persistence is persistence. Being correct doesn't matter." Zhang Jinglin said, "Never deny yourself. Life should be a candle, burning brightly from tip to end."

Ren Xiaosu silently muttered the words to himself. "Life should be a candle, burning brightly from tip to end."

He suddenly realized Zhang Jinglin might have called him over because he saw the conflict inside him, so he wanted to tell him these words.

Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, "Where do you plan on going after destroying the Zong Consortium?"

"To the Central Plains." Ren Xiaosu said with certainty, "I want to find Big Sister Xiaoyu, Yan Liuyuan, and the others and bring them back."

"Hm." Zhang Jinglin asked again, "Will you return to Fortress 178?"

"I'm not sure." Ren Xiaosu could not answer that question.

"You should know why I had you join the Razor Sharp Company. I won't stop you from going to the Central Plains, but if there's something you wish to protect, then Fortress 178 is your best choice."

Ren Xiaosu said in a serious tone, "Commander, if you don't let me go and eat now, there won't be any food left."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly remembered he had just come out of the shower and had not eaten yet.

When Ren Xiaosu arrived at the chow hall, Zhang Xiaoman was already on the verge of blacking out.

Ren Xiaosu sat nearby and ate the food everyone had left for him. However, they had kept so much food for him that it felt like they were afraid he wouldn't have enough to eat.

Zhang Xiaoman dragged Ren Xiaosu to drink with him, but Ren Xiaosu refused to drink anything at all. When Zhang Xiaoman realized he could not persuade Ren Xiaosu, he turned around to look for someone else.

While drinking, Zhang Xiaoman suddenly hugged Jiao Xiaochen and said, "Wei Yunlin, I missed you."

Jiao Xiaochen quickly pushed Zhang Xiaoman off and chided him with a laugh, "You miss your wife now?"

Someone laughed at Zhang Xiaoman while drinking and said, "Your wife getting married to you is like sticking a flower in a cow pie!"

Zhang Xiaoman sobered up a little and said unhappily, "If she's a flower, then cows ain't gonna shit anymore!"

"Stop acting like it was a pity to marry her. You don't know what kind of a treasure you've picked up. All you know is how to pretend to be tough when you're outside," Jiao Xiaochen said with a laugh.

Ren Xiaosu was an outsider in the noisy chow hall. He might be obsessed with keeping the Razor Sharp Company alive, but even now, it was very difficult for him to feel like he truly belonged in the Razor Sharp Company.

And he had the same feeling for Fortress 178 as well.

Lin Yuze, the manager of the chow hall, was watching the Razor Sharp Company with his arms folded and laughing. He smiled at the chefs beside him and said, "See that? These are the war heroes of our army. They're the ones who fought in the two battles recently, and they even won both of them."

Someone muttered, "Chief Lin, is that young man sitting by them and eating also from the Razor Sharp Company? Why does it feel like he doesn't fit in?"

Lin Yuze turned his gaze to Ren Xiaosu and saw him eating quietly. He looked unaffected by the noise around him. "Is he the guy called Ren Xiaosu?"

"Rumor has it that Ren Xiaosu's a beast in battle, yeah? I heard that half the credit for capturing Shichuan Village goes to him. That young man looks so soft it doesn't fit the descriptions at all!"

But then Zhang Xiaoman came up to Ren Xiaosu in his drunken stupor and clutched Ren Xiaosu's left hand. "Bro! If it weren't for you, our brothers wouldn't've made it back this time. Thank you again for saving our lives!"

Then Lin Yuze and the chow staff watched with their jaws hanging as Zhang Xiaoman knelt on the ground to thank him. He nearly even kowtowed to Ren Xiaosu!

When someone had too much to drink, they were fucking capable of doing anything!

Ren Xiaosu had not finished his meal yet, but he quickly pulled Zhang Xiaoman up. “Can you fucking stop drinking already?!”

But while he was pulling Zhang Xiaoman up, his comrades from the Razor Sharp Company beside him also came over to toast him. “Thank you, Ren Xiaosu, for saving our lives!”

Ren Xiaosu did not expect his second weapon to get unlocked while everyone in the chow hall was watching.

After this group of Northwestern men had too much to drink, they started thanking him to no end. They easily said it seven or eight times in a row, and all of them were even sincere in their gratitude!

Ren Xiaosu was wondering if he should keep some alcohol in his storage space in the future. When they had nothing better to do, he could get his comrades of the Razor Sharp Company together for a drink or two...

The voice from the palace said, “You have reached the number of gratitude tokens required to unlock the side quest’s weapon. Confirm unlock?”

Ren Xiaosu took a deep breath. “Unlock!”

The palace suddenly filled with a faint glow. Along the circular walls of the palace, a display cabinet that was originally shrouded in a dark fog brightened. The black mist within it slowly dissipated as well.

Ren Xiaosu looked at it and saw a large, black sniper rifle stored inside the long and extensive display cabinet.

Ren Xiaosu was guessing if the second weapon would be another saber, a sword, or perhaps, a bow?

But he did not expect a sniper rifle.

He was even more surprised that the sniper rifle also appeared on the back of the shadow clone.

It was like his originally unrelated skills would eventually undergo a chemical reaction and combine.

There were two black sniper rifles and two black sabers. When the sniper rifle was revealed behind the black mist, Ren Xiaosu immediately understood the properties of the sniper rifle. It had an effective range of 2,800 meters and did not need to be loaded with any bullets, and even the bullets could be conjured with his mind. He could also switch between incendiary bullets and armor-piercing bullets as he wished.

These days, the most effective sniper rifle in the world only had an effective range of 2,300 meters.

“Effective range” referred to the typical engagement distances in normal situations. As long as someone wasn’t shooting at a specific target, bullet drop need not be considered.

If a sniper calculated the trajectory precisely and had good marksmanship, hitting a further target would not be a problem at all.

For example, the maximum effective range of a sniper rifle was 2,300 meters. However, the longest recorded kill was at 2,475 meters.

Wait! While Ren Xiaosu was exploring the black sniper rifle in his mind, he discovered a type of bullet he had never seen before.

Under normal circumstances, there were generally several types of sniper bullets: white, red, green, brass, orange, and so on. The difference in color was to differentiate between normal lead bullets, armor-piercing bullets, incendiary bullets, and tracers.

But what was this black-tipped bullet?