

First Order 421

Chapter 421 Helping the attack on the Beiwan Bridge

Not including Qing Zhen and Luo Lan, the officers Ren Xiaosu was most familiar with in the Qing Consortium were Tang Zhou and Xu Man.

Tang Zhou was Luo Lan's trusted aide, and Ren Xiaosu had saved his life before. Meanwhile, Xu Man, as Qing Zhen's trusted aide, was the one who had been put in charge of consolidating the northern bandit groups.

When Ren Xiaosu saw Tang Zhou, Tang Zhou waved cheerfully at him. He also signaled to the other Razor Sharp Company soldiers to show that he was not armed.

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "You're really quite bold to come over here without any weapons."

"What's the point of carrying a weapon?" Tang Zhou also smiled and replied, "There are so many people here, and with you around, I'd still end up dead even if I had a weapon on me."

Zhang Xiaoman and the others watched quietly from the sidelines. They realized that Ren Xiaosu seemed to be very familiar with this person from the Qing Consortium. Moreover, the way this Qing officer spoke also suggested he understood Ren Xiaosu very well and knew how fearsome he was.

"Isn't your Qing Consortium fighting a war in the South? Why have you suddenly come up here to the North?" Ren Xiaosu asked. The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company perked their ears up and listened. This was what they were most concerned about as well.

Tang Zhou said, "Boss Luo has received intel from his spy in the Zong Consortium. He knows you just won a battle against the Zong Consortium in the mountain range, so he sent me here to look for you."

"How does Fatty Luo know that I'm in the Razor Sharp Company?" Ren Xiaosu asked in turn.

Tang Zhou smiled but did not say anything. Ren Xiaosu immediately understood it to mean that the Qing Consortium also had spies in Fortress 178.

It looked like Qing Zhen and Luo Lan had done quite a bit of prep work.

Just comparing the intelligence gathering alone, Fortress 178's efforts were not as good as the Qing Consortium's.

Getting back to the topic, Ren Xiaosu asked again, "So what are y'all doing here?"

"Mr. Qing Zhen believes you guys are here because you want to blow up the Beiwan Bridge. However, he said that there's more garrison troops stationed here than you think. He was worried that something would happen to you, so he sent us here to help," Tang Zhou said.

Zhang Xiaoman felt a tingling sensation. When Ren Xiaosu went to war, he could even get outside support?!

What was the relationship between Ren Xiaosu and the Qing Consortium? The Qing Consortium was already engaged in a very tough war with the Yang Consortium in the South, but they were still willing to send some of their troops to support Ren Xiaosu?

Importantly, it was the Qing Consortium's mechanized infantry that had come this time. They were a force that would come in handy if they were placed on the other front.

Tang Zhou added, "Boss Luo mentioned he wanted to send you a nice present to congratulate you on moving to your new home once you settled down at Mt. Kushui. However, he didn't expect that things would turn out this way."

When Ren Xiaosu heard this, he felt a sharp pain in his heart. He took a deep breath and said, "And?"

"Boss Luo wanted me to ask you something on his behalf." Tang Zhou took a look at Ren Xiaosu's face and asked, "If he says that he didn't know anything about Zong Cheng's attack on you, would you believe him? The Qing Consortium did not have anyone inside Mt. Guan. We only had spies planted at Mt. Dingyuan."

This had been troubling Ren Xiaosu ever since he discovered the Qing Consortium spy at Mt. Dingyuan. He would have liked to know if Luo Lan had known about this matter at that time, but there was no way to ask him that.

Even if Luo Lan had known about it, he had no obligation to inform him. So Ren Xiaosu could not possibly seek an answer from him. Although he did not ask, Luo Lan took the initiative and had Tang Zhou bring this up with him. Luo Lan was hoping to eliminate any bad feelings on Ren Xiaosu's part by trying to be upfront about it.

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "I'd believe him." Since Luo Lan was so honest about it, there was no need for him to make things difficult.

Tang Zhou continued, "Boss Luo said that you and him had scrapes of death together, and you also helped the Qing Consortium on more than one occasion. After our war with the Yang Consortium ends, he'll send someone to help you find your friends downstream. If Fortress 178 can't wipe out the Zong Consortium by then, he'll also come to the North to assist you."

Nearby, Zhang Xiaoman said unhappily, "Who are you looking down on? Our Fortress 178 will definitely end the war earlier than y'all!"

Tang Zhou chuckled, "You don't have to yell at me. Those were Boss Luo's own words."

Luo Lan was a very loyal fat man with a strong sense of brotherhood. Ren Xiaosu had quite an understanding of Luo Lan after having known him for so long

This was probably because Ren Xiaosu had saved Luo Lan's life. Therefore, the way they got along was always a little different. Although Luo Lan kept claiming that he had already repaid the favor, it was still something he kept close to his heart.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "What about those troops you came with?"

“Oh,” Tang Zhou replied, “they’re under orders from Mr. Qing Zhen to help you guys attack the Beiwan Bridge. You helped the Qing Consortium a great deal with what you did at Position 313. If it weren’t for you, I’m afraid that many of our soldiers would’ve died. Mr. Qing Zhen still thinks about that now.”

Zhang Xiaoman gasped. The Qing Consortium’s mechanized infantry had suddenly left their Southern Front and headed north just so they could help Ren Xiaosu fight a battle? What the hell was with Today? Was there something wrong with the world?

Even though Zhang Xiaoman and the others knew that Ren Xiaosu was very strong, that was purely based on his combat strength. Putting aside his combat capabilities, his status shouldn’t be that different from them since he was also a normal person.

But what happened here tonight subverted their expectations.

What happened to that refugee he claimed he was?

Everyone knew that both Qing Zhen and Luo Lan were very influential in the South.

It might seem rather easy to send a group of mechanized infantry to help attack the Beiwan Bridge, but if they really wanted to destroy the Beiwan Bridge, that effort could easily cost them tens of millions of yuan to achieve.

Luo Lan was truly sincere about helping Ren Xiaosu. At the very least, he was spending cold hard cash to help.

Actually, there had to be some intentions to stir up the situation in the North as well. The outcome of the war in the South would soon be decided, and some even assessed that the Qing Consortium would annex the entire Yang Consortium within half a year.

If Fortress 178 or the Zong Consortium were to move to the South during this time, that would interfere with their plans and create many unnecessary problems.

As such, the Qing Consortium wanted to speed up the progress of the war between Fortress 178 and the Zong Consortium to stir up the entire Northwest and Southwest. That way, no one party would have the energy to meddle in each other’s affairs, which was probably what Qing Zhen wanted.

But no matter what Qing Zhen’s goal was, Ren Xiaosu would still appreciate his help. Anyone was a friend as long as they helped attack the Zong Consortium. Besides, Luo Lan was genuinely sincere in helping.

After saying that, Tang Zhou prepared to bid farewell to Ren Xiaosu. “We can’t stay here for too long. After we attack the Beiwan Bridge, we still have to return to the Southern Front. Mr. Qing Zhen only gave us a fortnight to accomplish this objective.”

Ren Xiaosu said, “Please give him my thanks. When this war is over, I’ll definitely make a trip to Stronghold 111.”

“It’s good to hear you say that.” Tang Zhou chuckled. “Well then, let’s meet again at Stronghold 111!” Then Tang Zhou turned around and left.

Zhang Xiaoman finally reacted at this moment. “Hurry up and contact Commander Zhou. This is a big fucking deal!”

When they finally managed to put the call through, Zhou Yinglong’s group was probably still on their night march. As such, he sounded a little impatient. “Didn’t I tell you to reorganize yourselves at wherever you are? Don’t tell me there’s trouble again?”

“No.” Zhang Xiaoman quickly explained, “A group of the Qing mechanized infantry suddenly appeared where we are and said that Qing Zhen and Luo Lan are offering to help Ren Xiaosu blow up the Beiwan Bridge. They’re advancing towards the Beiwan River right now. What’s more, they mentioned that Qing Zhen only gave them a fortnight to complete their objective. It seems to me that they’ll be storming the target!”

Zhou Yinglong was confused by what he heard. What did this have anything to do with the Qing Consortium? What the hell was this? Just what kind of a person had Commander Zhang chosen to be his successor?

Chapter 422 No man left behind

At first, everyone was worried about the operation to blow up the Beiwan Bridge. But now, they no longer had to worry about it.

Zhang Xiaoman felt that everything seemed to always go quite well in battle when fighting alongside Ren Xiaosu. Never mind the battle at Shichuan Village, now that they were attacking the fully reinforced Beiwan River, the Qing Consortium stepped forward and said, “Don’t fear, we’re friends with Ren Xiaosu, so let us fight for you!”

Could he fucking be the “chosen one”? No wonder Commander Zhang chose him!

Of course, Zhang Xiaoman also wondered if Commander Zhang had done so because he valued the close ties between Ren Xiaosu and the Qing Consortium.

“Then what are we going to do now?” Zhang Xiaoman sat on the ground and pondered things. “If the Qing Consortium helps us attack the Beiwan River, we won’t have anything to do.”

Suddenly, the Razor Sharp Company became the idlest troops in all the Southwestern and Northwestern battlefields.

They had to communicate this matter to Zhou Yinglong. As a result, Zhou Yinglong made a quick decision. He ordered the Razor Sharp Company to get to Mt. Qiangwan in two days and attack that defensive anchor point together with the rest of the Forward Strike Battalion. They would coordinate a simultaneous attack with the Qing Consortium so that the Zong Consortium would be unable to react on this battlefield.

As for whether the Qing Consortium could blow up the Beiwan Bridge or not, Fortress 178 had backup plans if the Qing troops failed. So there was no need for them to tag along with the Qing Consortium to the Beiwan River.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the translucent shadow clone in the palace and said, "Can we leave a day later?"

Zhang Xiaoman estimated the time. "No, we're still more than a 100 klicks away from Mt. Qiangwan. Even if we force marched, we'd just barely make it there in two days."

Under normal circumstances, the average distance that troops could cover while marching with a heavy load was around 50 kilometers per day. If they force marched, they could travel at a speed of 10 kilometers per hour. However, they would not be able to move that fast as they had to carry a pack that weighed more than 30 kilograms each while maintaining their stamina.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said, "Alright then, let's just be pretty cautious during the journey."

Without the shadow clone leading the way, the risk factor would increase greatly. He was hoping that they could wait until the shadow clone had returned to its original state before they set off again. But Zhang Xiaoman would definitely not listen to him. Military orders could not be disobeyed.

The next morning, the Razor Sharp Company set off towards Mt. Qiangwan in the northwestern direction. On their way there, Zhang Xiaoman did not drop his guard once. The three best soldiers, Fu Rao, Lin Ping'an, and Ren Xiaosu would constantly take turns to be the point man to scout ahead.

When Ren Xiaosu saw that Zhang Xiaoman was taking the situation seriously, he finally felt at ease. He even volunteered to be on point for longer, walking in front of the formation for two-thirds of the time.

Ren Xiaosu said he was fine with being on point throughout their march. But Zhang Xiaoman and the others disagreed, saying that there was no reason why he should be handling it all by himself. Since they were comrades, they could not let him bear the risk alone.

At noon, Fu Rao had just moved to the front of the formation to take point when Ren Xiaosu heard a gunshot in the mountain pass ahead of them. What followed was a cry of pain from Fu Rao.

He was stunned for a moment before he heard Zhang Xiaoman yelling at them to go prone. "Find a place to take cover! There's enemies in the mountain pass!"

The company went prone and could see Fu Rao lying on the ground in the mountain pass with his abdomen bleeding. He shouted, "It's not an ambush! It's an encounter! Our enemy is an entire company, leave me!"

Ren Xiaosu watched silently as the scene unfolded. Encounters were all too common in war, but they were a little unfortunate. When they encountered the enemy in this mountain pass, they could see Fu Rao ahead of them but not the enemy hiding in the pass.

Zhang Xiaoman whispered, "An encounter implies that the enemy didn't expect to see us here either. It seems that these troops were thinking of detouring to get to the rear of our Forward Strike Battalion."

Some of the troops at Mt. Qiangwan got deployed to the Beiwan River as reinforcements, but Fortress 178 didn't know if all of them had really gone there.

Bang! Another shot rang out from the pass. The enemy that was hiding behind the ridge shot at Fu Rao again.

The enemy was guarding the narrow terrain of the pass. If anyone rushed over to save him, they would also get shot. However, the enemy was more worried that their opponents would not rush over to save their comrade. As such, they decided to slowly torture Fu Rao in an attempt to lure the Razor Sharp Company into charging forward.

But Fu Rao was very tough too. He knew what he was facing. So he did not even whimper when the second shot hit him in the leg.

“Don’t worry about me! Contact the Forward Strike Battalion and surround them!” Fu Rao roared.

Ren Xiaosu wanted to throw a grenade at the enemy. But if the enemy discovered that there was a supernatural being here after the first grenade dropped, they might kill Fu Rao immediately and retreat in haste. The Razor Sharp Company could definitely win this encounter with Ren Xiaosu, but Fu Rao would die!

Ren Xiaosu got up and slowly made his way towards Fu Rao through the mountainous terrain. Zhang Xiaoman said anxiously, “This is the enemy’s plan. We can’t fall for it. You and I are soldiers now, and Fu Rao knows what he needs to do. Everyone should also know that if I were the one laying on the ground, I wouldn’t want y’all to rescue me either!”

Ren Xiaosu looked back at Zhang Xiaoman and said calmly, “I already said no man left behind.”

Zhang Xiaoman looked at Ren Xiaosu in shock. He suddenly felt faith burning inside him.

He saw Ren Xiaosu’s pupils turn crimson again, the depths of his eyes swirling with magma.

Ren Xiaosu started running fast as a cheetah. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu’s words were still echoing in Zhang Xiaoman’s mind.

Zhang Jinglin had said to Ren Xiaosu, “Life should be a candle, burning brightly from tip to end.”

The dark world was about to crumble. But before it truly crumbled, that flame should not be extinguished.

And that was what Ren Xiaosu was obsessed with!

Zhang Xiaoman lowered his voice and said, “If Ren Xiaosu successfully gets to him, block off the opening at the pass, and don’t let the enemy seize the chance to shoot at them.”

Ren Xiaosu bounded out. The entrance of the pass was an open door, while the mountainous terrain were the walls next to it.

When Ren Xiaosu leaped across the four-meter-wide “door” along the “wall,” it felt like his entire body had flown across at a low altitude.

While “flying” in midair, Ren Xiaosu grabbed Fu Rao’s arm and used the momentum to pull him away from the “door”!

When the Zong Consortium’s soldiers saw Ren Xiaosu’s figure, they started firing wildly at him. However, they couldn’t pull their triggers quicker than it took Ren Xiaosu to get to Fu Rao!

But in the instant Ren Xiaosu flew across the entrance, he identified the enemy’s position. Before he landed back on the ground, he threw out three grenades at the enemy.

Zhang Xiaoman shouted, “Charge! Show them no mercy! Where are the medics?! Get over there and save them!”

The moment Ren Xiaosu dropped back to the ground, he laid Fu Rao flat. Due to the inertia of the rescue, he had dislocated Fu Rao’s arm. Ren Xiaosu said to Fu Rao, “I’m sorry. It was difficult to control my strength.”

Fu Rao laughed dryly and said, “Why the fuck are you talking about strength control?! It’s great that I don’t have to die! Where’s the medic? Get over here! I feel like I can still be saved!”

Ren Xiaosu said to the medic who rushed over, “Extract the bullets first, then use the black medicine that I gave you and apply it on his wounds.”

Once he finished speaking, he took the lead and charged at the mountain pass!

Chapter 423 Witnessing history get made

Fu Rao, who was feeling extremely lucky just a moment ago, was now whining in pain. His injuries were like the ones Ren Xiaosu had suffered back then. Such internal injuries would only slowly heal after the black medicine that was applied onto the skin was fully absorbed. Ren Xiaosu reminded him repeatedly not to take it orally, otherwise, who knew what effect it would have on him?

When Ren Xiaosu and the others returned after taking care of the Zong Consortium company, Fu Rao struggled to get up and thanked Ren Xiaosu.

In the earlier situation, everyone knew the best option for the Razor Sharp Company was to let Fu Rao die a swift death before they avenged him.

If it were the past, everyone would definitely have done the same if they were stuck in a similar impasse.

Zhang Xiaoman looked at the way Fu Rao was moving and scolded, “Your dislocated arm has been reattached, huh? You’re all good again now, huh? Lie down and get some rest already! Brothers, set up the stretcher for him. You better fucking lie on the stretcher obediently til you’ve recovered from your injuries.”

His face pale, Fu Rao said to Ren Xiaosu, “Thank you.”

“Gratitude received from Fu Rao, +1!”

These words of gratitude were worth a great deal because it was given for a truly lifesaving act. Ren Xiaosu smiled and told Fu Rao to get well soon. After that, he went to the medics to get his wound bandaged as well. Ren Xiaosu had also been shot in the shoulder when he sprinted out during the skirmish.

However, Ren Xiaosu knew that it would take at most three days for this type of injury to be completely healed by the black medicine.

While the medic bandaged Ren Xiaosu's wound, he said in surprise, "Ren Xiaosu, your muscles so strong that the bullet only penetrated an inch?!"

Everyone gathered around Ren Xiaosu and looked at his wound with curiosity. "Wow, is your skin bronze and bones steel?!"

Zhang Xiaoman was sitting cross-legged on the ground next to Fu Rao. Rather than going over to look at Ren Xiaosu's wound, he was thinking about something else with his head lowered.

Fu Rao looked at Zhang Xiaoman and asked, "Captain, what's on your mind?"

"Nothing much." Zhang Xiaoman said softly, "Before I set off for the war, I told my wife that I might not make it back this time. After all, we know just how dangerous it is in our Razor Sharp Company. So I made it clear to her in advance so she wouldn't get too upset."

Fu Rao did not say anything and listened to Zhang Xiaoman talk to himself. "The people in Fortress 178 have had this thinking since childhood that it's some kind of honor to die in battle. But if we really had a choice, who'd be willing to die in a gods-forsaken place like this? Don't you think?"

Fu Rao kept quiet for a moment before saying, "Who wants to die?"

"We can't die even if we want to now." Zhang Xiaoman said with a helpless smile, "A lunatic has suddenly appeared on the battlefield saying he'll make sure that all of us survive and won't leave a man behind.... What a fucking lunatic!"

Zhang Xiaoman would be turning 30 this year. He had lived in Fortress 178 for 27 years and spent three years assigned to an outpost outside of the fortress.

His days at the outpost were very difficult. He had neither any communication nor entertainment to speak of, and the weather was also very cold all year round due to the outpost being situated at a high altitude making it rare for him to perspire.

To prevent the soldiers from developing renal failure, they did their physical training around a stove just so they would sweat.

During fall, winter, and spring, they couldn't even drink water since it froze into ice. Their comrades on sentry duty had to chew on ice if they wanted to have a drink of water.

A decade of hardship, yet their dreams remained. Most people probably never understood just how miserable it was to chew on ice.

Zhang Xiaoman was prepared to die when he set off for this war. Just as he had said, “How can there be no casualties in war?”

When a soldier died in battle, his comrades would knock out one of his teeth and bring it back to Fortress 178 to place below the copper bell if their bodies couldn't be brought back for burial. In that sense, it would be regarded as bringing their dead comrades back home.

This was so their souls could return to their hometown.

All of the veterans said that the fallen of Fortress 178 would watch over them whenever the copper bell rang.

But it was a little strange this time. A lunatic had sprung out of nowhere and claimed he would bring all of them back home alive.

“Only a lunatic would say and do something like that, right?” Zhang Xiaoman asked Fu Rao.

Fu Rao said calmly, “But I like this lunatic. I'm not only glad but also feel honored to be his comrade.”

“You feel honored?”

“He'll be the commander of our Fortress 178 in the future. And right now, you and I are both witnessing history get made.”

After some reorganization, Zhang Xiaoman led everyone back to the place where the battle had broken out. He thought for a while and said, “Listen, we might encounter even more of the Zong troops on our way to Mt. Qiangwan. Why don't we change into these dead soldiers' uniforms and pretend we're a Zong company?”

Ren Xiaosu rolled his eyes. “What if Battalion Commander Zhou's Forward Strike Battalion encounters us and strikes us down in one shot?”

Zhang Xiaoman was left speechless for a moment. “We can just take a detour and not run into him, can't we?”

“But there are a lot of bullet holes and bloodstains on the dead's uniforms. If you pretend to be a defeated company, it might not be obvious at first glance, but any observant person will wonder why you can still fucking move and jump around after getting shot in the chest.” Jiao Xiaochen said in a speechless manner, “Captain, can you stop fantasizing? Also, wouldn't they recognize their comrades?”

Zhang Xiaoman analyzed, “Look here, see if my analysis is correct. The Zong Consortium claims to have more than 200,000 soldiers. Are you sure they'll recognize each other when they bump into one another on the road? For our troops at Fortress 178, we all live in the same stronghold for most of the year and can't avoid seeing one another. Even if we don't know everyone, we'll still look familiar to each other. But their soldiers are normally scattered across a dozen strongholds, so it'd be natural if they don't know the others since they're only being mobilized for the war.”

Everyone looked to Ren Xiaosu. Zhang Xiaoman's face darkened. "I'm the fucking captain here, so why're all of you looking at Ren Xiaosu when I'm the decision maker? Are the words of a private more effective than mine?!"

Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness to Zhang Xiaoman, "It really won't work."

"OK..." Zhang Xiaoman replied.

Jiao Xiaochen piped up, "After wiping out four enemy companies in this battle, we still haven't suffered any casualties yet. Not even the Recon Battalion's pathetic Flying Eagles are capable of that."

The Razor Sharp Company of the Forward Strike Battalion and the Flying Eagle Company of the Reconnaissance Battalion had always been at odds with one another. The top ten competitors of the military combat tournaments were always from the Flying Eagle Company. They were accurate marksmen, well-versed in combat, knew many skills, and even had snipers within their ranks.

To them, the Razor Sharp Company was just a group of thugs who resorted to more unconventional methods while they were the real elites.

Meanwhile, from the Razor Sharp Company's point of view, they were the ones who could fight and win tough battles. If the two sides encountered each other in a military exercise, they were destined to be rivals.

Of course, they both won some and lost some. The Razor Sharp Company had won 30% of the time while the Flying Eagle Company won the other 70% of the time.

Now that they had achieved such great success, they had definitely outperformed the Flying Eagle Company. Zhang Xiaoman suddenly said, "I've always disliked the Flying Eagles. They don't call each other by their real names in the bases and use code names instead. What the hell is up with that pretentious act?!"

Chapter 424 Attacking the harbor

When Ren Xiaosu heard Zhang Xiaoman say this, his eyes lit up. "If you're unhappy about them having code names, we can give ourselves code names as well."

"Oh, right!" Zhang Xiaoman became excited and exclaimed, "My code name shall be 'Screw the Flying Eagles'!"

"Then my code name will be 'Screw the Zong Consortium'! Fu Rao, you look like you're in a vegetative state lying on the stretcher, so you can be called 'Vegetable'!"

Fu Rao was instantly enraged while lying on the stretcher. "Why should I be called 'Vegetable'? I'm totally fine!"

"Since you claim to be fine, show us that you can walk by yourself!"

Fu Rao was speechless.

These gruff men from the Northwest started laughing. Just half a day before, Fu Rao was dramatically calling out to be left there to die while Ren Xiaosu insisted on saving him.

But half a day later, they were back to bantering with one another. Perhaps this was what comrades were.

At this moment, everyone looked at Ren Xiaosu and asked, "Xiaosu, what's your code name?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said with a smile, "My code name is 'Thanks.' You can just call me 'Thanks' from now on."

Fu Rao and Zhang Xiaoman were confused.

Everyone realized that Ren Xiaosu would really resort to anything just to make them thank him. Ren Xiaosu was the one who suggested giving themselves code names. But actually, he was waiting for them to take the bait!

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was so happy that it felt like he was in a dream. If so many people called him that every day, wouldn't he harvest a huge number of gratitude tokens soon?

Ren Xiaosu looked at the others. "I'm still a little unfamiliar with the code name I gave to myself. Why don't you all call me it a few more times so I can get used to it?"

However, Zhang Xiaoman and the others turned around and left, ignoring him.

"Hey, is that how you treat your comrade? What's the big deal with calling me by my code name!"

"Hey, hey, say my code name!"

And so, the plan to assign everyone in the Razor Sharp Company a code name died off just like that.

But before the Razor Sharp Company could advance any further north, they received another new order from Zhou Yinglong. This time, Zhou Yinglong wanted them to infiltrate from the rear of Mt. Qiangwan to destroy the ferries in the harbor there.

A tributary of the Beiwan River was north of Mt. Qiangwan. By destroying the harbor, they could prevent any defeated troops from leaving by the river after Mt. Qiangwan got captured.

Since they intended to win the war, they could not allow the enemy to have a chance to regain their effective strength.

Upon receiving this order, Zhang Xiaoman and the others could not rest anymore. They immediately infiltrated from the east side of Mt. Qiangwan and arrived at a destination about 10 kilometers east of the harbor within a day and a half.

At this moment, artillery was booming from Mt. Qiangwan. Supposedly, the Forward Strike Battalion and some reinforcements who arrived there later had been attacking the place for two days. But based on Zhou Yinglong's estimations, it seemed like the enemy was still going to put up a fight for another

week before capitulating. Therefore, Zhou Yinglong ordered the Razor Sharp Company to destroy the Zong Consortium's route of retreat in advance.

Zhang Xiaoman was watching the garrison forces at the harbor through his binoculars from a hill. "I guess most of the troops have gone to join the battle, so there's only one company stationed here now. Something also looks a little strange. Look, they're loading some stuff onto the ferries. I wonder what they're moving."

"If it's only one company, they'll be easy to attack," Ren Xiaosu said.

Currently, the Razor Sharp Company did not regard any enemy troops of the same tactical grouping as a threat. Zhang Xiaoman said, "It's better to attack them sooner rather than later, so let's do it now. After we take the harbor, we'll retreat immediately and join up with Battalion Commander Zhou."

They were going to conduct the operation immediately. The garrison troops at the harbor seemed to be moving around in a hurry. The soldiers were loading stuff onto the ferries with all their might with their guns slung over their shoulders.

There were seven medium-sized ferries docked at the harbor. When Ren Xiaosu and his company appeared, the Zong Consortium soldiers were all shocked. Before they could organize any effective resistance, the entire company was blown apart by Ren Xiaosu.

But all of a sudden, the radioman at the rear shouted, "Captain, Battalion Commander Zhou wants to speak with you!"

After instructing Ren Xiaosu and the others to blow up the ferries, Zhang Xiaoman walked over with a bewildered look. Weren't they in the middle of a battle? Why would they radio him at a time like this?

When he answered the call, he heard Zhou Yinglong shout, "Where are you right now? Have you arrived at the harbor?"

Zhang Xiaoman said proudly, "We didn't fail. We've already captured the harbor. We're blowing up the ferries right now."

Zhou Yinglong's voice cracked as he shouted, "Hurry up and retreat! All of you, retreat now!"

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. "Why? Did y'all lose the battle?"

"It's not that we lost the battle, but that all the enemy positions at Mt. Qiangwan have been abandoned. Those bastards of the Zong Consortium took advantage of the moment we temporarily withdrew from the mountain and escaped. They only left some soldiers behind to cover for them. The main forces are probably heading towards you as we speak!" Zhou Yinglong shouted.

Zhang Xiaoman felt his scalp tingle. "Zhou Yinglong, fuck your grandpa! Why didn't you say so earlier!"

Then Zhang Xiaoman disconnected and shouted, "Pack everything and retreat!"

But just as he finished speaking, everyone heard chaotic screaming erupt!

No one could have fucking expected this. Didn't they say it would still take another week for the enemy at Mt. Qiangwan to capitulate? So why were they retreating in advance?

What they did not know was that the Qing Consortium's mechanized infantry in the Northeast had already blitzkrieged the Beiwan River and captured the position by storm.

The garrison troops at Mt. Qiangwan started panicking because of this. They did not know whether the Qing Consortium would turn their sights to them after they were done attacking the Beiwan River.

Meanwhile, the Zong Consortium's headquarters wondered what the Qing Consortium was up to. Were they going to join in the conflict and start a full-scale war against the Zong Consortium, or would they leave after pulling off that attack? They did not want to end up becoming the next Li Consortium. Didn't the Li Consortium get wiped out like this?! Therefore, the Zong Consortium decided to draw back all of their defensive lines and see what the Qing Consortium was up to.

However, this made life difficult for the Razor Sharp Company. It was too late for them to get away now. Several loud explosions boomed at this moment as Zhang Xiaoman turned around and saw Ren Xiaosu and the rest of the Razor Sharp Company throwing TNT into the cabins of the ferries. Six of the ferries had already turned into massive fireballs and were burning so fiercely that the surface of the river resembled a fiery cloud.

Zhang Xiaoman said in a panic, "Stop, stop blowing them up! We have to fucking keep one for ourselves!"

The garrison troops of Mt. Qiangwan had almost reached the harbor. When Ren Xiaosu saw that there was at least one battalion of soldiers making their way over, he asked, "What's the matter?"

"Get on board! We're gonna escape on a ferry!" Zhang Xiaoman roared.

The Razor Sharp Company had only this path of escape left. All the other routes were blocked by the Zong Consortium soldiers who were retreating from Mt. Qiangwan!

The Zong Consortium soldiers in the distance sank into despair when they saw that the ferries had all been blown. Someone picked up a heavy machine gun and fired at the ferry that Ren Xiaosu and company were on. Fortunately, the powerful recoil sent most of the bullets flying up into the air, only managing to hit one person from the Razor Sharp Company.

Zhang Xiaoman shouted on the ferry, "Do any of you know how to drive this?"

"We don't have anything like this in the vicinity of Fortress 178, so of course we don't know how to drive it," Jiao Xiaochen muttered.

Zhang Xiaoman crawled towards the cabin and said, "We have to get this running even if we don't know how! If the ferry doesn't move, we're all gonna die!"

Chapter 425 What can I do? I'm also very desperate

When they heard they were gonna die, all of the Razor Sharp Company turned anxious. Everyone crawled into the cabin to figure out how to start the ferry.

Someone grumbled, "If I had known, I would've captured some of their troops alive. Since they were the ones who drove the ferry here, they'll definitely know how to operate them."

Jiao Xiaochen looked at the person who said that and responded unhappily, "Hindsight's 20/20. Were we even thinking of getting away on the ferry? Aren't we only doing this because we got cornered in the harbor?"

Everyone was frantically pressing random buttons. As a result, someone tripped off something on a fluke, and the engine started running

Everyone got excited. "The engine's going!"

"We're saved, hahaha! Heaven hasn't forsaken our Razor Sharp Company after all!"

But at this moment, someone said curiously, "But the ferry still isn't moving."

Then everyone saw Ren Xiaosu dash out of the cabin. Zhang Xiaoman shouted at him, "Don't go out there. The fucking enemies are everywhere outside."

"There's a rope tying the ferry to the dock that has to be cut off," Ren Xiaosu said.

"Even so, you still can't go outside! You will be killed in the crossfire if you step out there like this." Zhang Xiaoman roared.

Ren Xiaosu got an idea. He took out his saber and activated Shadow Door to reach the mooring line. But as Ren Xiaosu was unsure of where the rope was exactly, he started slashing randomly at the area.

The Zong Consortium soldiers who were running towards the harbor were stunned when they saw a hand appear out of thin air and slash a black saber around. For a moment, they were so stunned they were even afraid to charge forward!

"Hey, it's moving. The ferry's moving!" Zhang Xiaoman exclaimed.

Ren Xiaosu had finally managed to cut the mooring line. The Zong Consortium's deserters could only watch with a forlorn expression as the bullethole-riddled ferry started moving slowly towards the middle of the river.

When they got a little farther, Ren Xiaosu and the others finally came out of the cabin. They watched helplessly as they got farther away from the shore. As they watched, they even puked their guts out.

No one in the Razor Sharp Company had been on a ferry before. Therefore, even though the ferry had only been moving for a dozen minutes, the troops were already puking so hard they nearly fainted.

Those who wanted to take the ferry did not make it aboard, while those who did not want to take the ferry were now drifting on it to some unknown destination.

The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company looked at their dejected enemies on the shore and thought to themselves, 'What can we do? We're also very desperate.'

At this moment, the Razor Sharp Company heard a choking sound as the ferry's engine grew weaker. Zhang Xiaoman asked, "What the fuck is happening?"

"I dunno..."

The ferry was gradually losing power, and it seemed like it had been damaged when the enemy was firing that heavy machine gun at it!

"What fucking luck!" Zhang Xiaoman did not know whether to laugh or cry. He mumbled something unintelligible as he continued puking on the deck, "Quickly contact Medallion Commander Joe and have him come and rescue us!"

But the radioman replied meekly, "Captain, our radio has been damaged."

"What!" Zhang Xiaoman's eyes widened. "That radio is a weapon with the same value as your life! How could you let it get damaged? Do you think I won't boot you into the river?"

At this moment, everyone turned around and looked at the radioman. The radio set he was carrying on his back was utterly shattered. The radioman said in dismay, "When the enemy was shooting at us with the heavy machine gun from shore, I was in a hurry to get aboard and allowed the radio to be hit."

Zhang Xiaoman sighed. "Forget it, the radio probably saved your life. It's good that you aren't dead."

The Razor Sharp Company's troops sat on the deck and looked around in hopelessness. No one knew where the powerless ferry was going to take them.

Now that even the radio set was damaged, they had truly become an isolated fighting force of.

They could not contact the main forces of Fortress 178, and neither could Fortress 178 contact them.

"Will we end up drifting to the Zong Consortium's territory like this?" Jiao Xiaochen asked softly.

"Can you stop saying such depressing things..."

Zhang Xiaoman suddenly smiled. "That's why they say that unexpected events can happen all the time on the battlefield. Do you remember what I used to say? Everything lies with fate, and no one has any control over it. No matter how many battles you've won in the past, fate will still deal you a bad hand if it really wants to.

"And sometimes, it can be extremely strange as well. It will seem like fate is hellbent on fighting you and not others..."

Too many unexpected things could happen in war. People even used to say that 30% of a victory in war was determined by tactics and strength. The remaining 70% was dependent on whether God wanted to keep you alive and let you win the battles.

After puking for the longest time, the Razor Sharp Company's troops were getting hungry. However, they had already left the forward operating base for some time and had only brought along seven days' worth of field rations with them. They did not have many provisions left.

Zhang Xiaoman led his men to search for supplies in the cabin but later realized it was completely bare. He asked in a startled manner, "Didn't we see the Zong Consortium's garrison troops loading stuff onto the ferries? Why isn't there anything here?!"

"I don't think they had enough time to load anything onto this ferry...."

When he heard that, Zhang Xiaoman said angrily, "Look at you guys. Couldn't you have searched the ferries for supplies before deciding which ones to blow up?"

Ren Xiaosu and the others laughed. "Captain, you didn't tell us you wanted to leave one untouched. Weren't we told to blow up everything?"

Turning around, Zhang Xiaoman started preparing the Razor Sharp Company for worse. "Everyone, we don't have many rations left, and we don't know when we can reach shore. So for those of you who are seasick, stop throwing up. Even if you feel like throwing up, you should hold it in...."

Ren Xiaosu was standing on the deck of the ferry. He did not feel nauseous at all and was looking out at the vast Beiwan River covered in mist.

Zhang Xiaoman walked next to him and asked, "What're you thinking about?"

"About where we'll end up drifting to," Ren Xiaosu said.

Zhang Xiaoman sighed and said, "We have no way to ask for help now, and we can't determine where we're heading. Who knows what we'll encounter next? If we drift towards the northern shore, that'll be the Zong Consortium's territory!"

But the more they feared it, the likelier it would happen. The ferry was still drifting in the middle of the river, but they were clearly getting closer and closer to the Zong Consortium's territory in the north based on reference points on both sides of the shore.

"Don't worry," Ren Xiaosu said. "I will make sure everyone survives and that no man gets left behind."

After he said that, Ren Xiaosu turned around and walked back into the cabin. The Razor Sharp Company's troops watched as though magic were being performed as he threw out a wild boar, a goat, a box of hardtack, and a large box of bottled water from inside the cabin.

This was what Xiaoyu had prepared for him back when she found out that he could carry a lot of supplies with him. He had already spent the money to add a vacuum preservation function for his storage space, so these things would not turn bad no matter how long they were stored in it.

Ren Xiaosu said to his comrades of the Razor Sharp Company, "I reckon we'll run aground on the northern shore within three days. If y'all don't want to die, you should preserve your strength. We'll have to fight our way out when we get to the Zong Consortium's territory."

Zhou Yinglong had already reported to Zhang Jinglin that the Razor Sharp Company had been forced to board a ferry to escape. Meanwhile, Zhang Jinglin locked down this news in case the Zong Consortium organized their forces to go and capture them.

Chapter 426 Who does he think he is?

Zhang Jinglin had given Zhou Yinglong half a month to take Mt. Qiangwan. For this reason, he even sent an additional artillery battalion to provide greater fire support. However, no one expected the Zong Consortium's troops to abandon their position at Mt. Qiangwan after the Qing Consortium defeated them at the Beiwang River.

If everything went according to plan, they would have escaped and preserved their remaining troops. But unfortunately for them, their ferries were blown up by Ren Xiaosu and company.

The Zong Consortium had already drawn back their defensive lines entirely while Fortress 178's Engineering Battalion was successful in building a pontoon bridge across Blackstone River. The bridges that were constructed through current engineering technology and mechanical building equipment had no problems supporting mechanized troops crossing on them.

Once Fortress 178 built up their defensive line on the other side of the river, this road leading up north would finally be considered completely opened.

If everything else went smoothly, Fortress 178 would continue northwards to take the front line at Mt. Wuchuan, and there would be no further obstacles hindering them from traveling up north.

However, it could be foreseen that the front line at Mt. Wuchuan would truly turn into a bloody battlefield from here. Countless soldiers of the Zong Consortium and Fortress 178 would get buried there and never return home.

The Qing Consortium's mechanized infantry had already left and were returning to their own front to continue the fight against the Yang Consortium. It seemed like it was just as Tang Zhou had told Ren Xiaosu, that they did not have any intentions of fighting in the war in the Northlands. They were only here to send him a gift on Luo Lan's behalf.

Meanwhile, Zhou Yinglong was very satisfied with the outcome of the battle at Mt. Qiangwan. Although they also suffered casualties, it was much fewer than he had expected.

When they gave chase towards the river, the Zong Consortium's troops on the shore were forced to jump into the river one after another. However, Zhou Yinglong was shocked to see some shadows chasing and biting the Zong Consortium's troops under the surface. In just a few minutes, the yellowish river turned blood red.

The rivers these days were not safe anymore.

Fortunately, the spring floods that Ren Xiaosu's group were caught in were only snow melt from the mountains and had no strange creatures mixed in upstream.

Zhou Yinglong stood by the river and gazed at its surface. He attempted to establish communications with the Razor Sharp Company but could not get through at all.

He got his subordinates to check whether any of the Zong Consortium's troops had relayed the news of Ren Xiaosu's group back to the Zong Consortium's headquarters, but they found out it did not happen.

The Zong Consortium knew that someone had taken their ferry away, but they did not know where it was headed.

Logically, anyone who did not want to die would not directly navigate the ferry towards the Zong Consortium's territory.

Everyone thought the Razor Sharp Company would return and join up with the Forward Strike Battalion soon after seizing the ferry. However, the Razor Sharp Company simply disappeared after that.

After all, no one would have guessed that they would be so unlucky as to have their engine damaged by the enemy.

At this moment, Zhang Xiaoman, Jiao Xiaochen, and the others were lying on the deck and looking up at the starry sky. The view of the vast galaxy in the night sky made them feel a little more relaxed.

However, they were definitely not in the mood for stargazing but were lying on the deck so that it would be more convenient for them to puke into the river. Having puked for the entire afternoon, there was nothing more for them to vomit other than water.

Zhang Xiaoman spoke up feebly, "I think we should've stayed on the shore and fought the Zong Consortium soldiers."

"Yeah, that's right..." Jiao Xiaochen replied, "I heard from Battalion Commander Zhou that whenever he gets so tired at the military base and goes home on his days off, he immediately recharges once he hears his son call him 'Daddy.' Hey, how about this? I feel like I'm dying now, so can you all call me 'Daddy!'"

Someone shouted, "Fuck you! If I had any strength left now, I would get up and beat you up!"

Honestly, the members of the Razor Sharp Company would definitely have beat up Jiao Xiaochen if they were not currently seasick.

Next to them, Lin Ping'an asked, "Since y'all are married, you can talk with your wives if you wanna have kids. I don't even have a girlfriend! Before setting off for our campaign, I wanted to confess to a girl but was too scared to do it in the end."

"Why didn't you do it?" Zhang Xiaoman asked.

Lin Ping'an hesitated for a while. "Because an officer from the armored brigade is also wooing her. I feel like I'm inferior to him,"

Lin Ping'an, who was usually unafraid of most things, had turned cowardly in the face of such matters.

Zhang Xiaoman said unhappily, "There's many others who are a lot more outstanding than you. Who does he think he is!"

Lin Ping'an was speechless. 'Was I fucking asking you to comfort me?'

"But seriously, Ping'an, it's possible that you'll be promoted at least several ranks when we return. Once your rank is higher than his, you won't be afraid anymore."

Suddenly, everyone started getting concerned about their futures as well. As a company, they had already wiped out five companies of the enemy forces. Moreover, nobody knew if they might win even more glory with Ren Xiaosu in the future.

But most importantly, everyone felt they would return home alive. This was the faith Ren Xiaosu had instilled in them.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu walked onto the deck as though he were totally fine and took out a rope with a hook tied to its end.

There was a piece of meat hanging off the metal hook, and Ren Xiaosu cast it out into the water.

Lying on the deck, Zhang Xiaoman said helplessly, "How fucking frustrating. This seasickness is making us all feel like we're dying, yet he's in the mood to fish?!"

But surprisingly, a fish immediately took the bait after the makeshift hook was cast into the water.

Ren Xiaosu tugged on the rope as the fish struggled with all its strength in the water to get loose. But Ren Xiaosu was not in a hurry either, so he waited for it to slowly get tired. He was mainly worried that the line would snap if he tried to forcefully pull it in.

After the fish stopped struggling in the water, Ren Xiaosu slowly retrieved the line and was surprised to see a huge black fish hanging from it.

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"Isn't this a snakehead[1]? But it looks twice as large as what I've seen before," Ren Xiaosu muttered. "And its teeth are sharper as well."

Suddenly, the snakehead fish slipped out of Ren Xiaosu's hands and fell onto the deck's floor.

However, the fish did not stay put in that position. Instead, it flopped over to Zhang Xiaoman with its mouth wide open. Zhang Xiaoman was scared to death. "Hey, hold down that thing! Ren Xiaosu, you did that on purpose, didn't you? How can you not hold onto a fish with your immense strength?"

Ren Xiaosu sighed as he held the fish tightly in his hands. "We can't see the underwater world, so we don't know what changes it's gone through. Anyway, let's try not to fall into a river like this. Who knows what might be hiding underneath? But this isn't necessarily a bad thing either. After The Cataclysm, humans have not reestablished the fishing industry on a large enough scale. After such a long period of reproduction, the fishes in the river alone might be enough to provide food for all the people in a stronghold."

With Ren Xiaosu's fearsome combat strength, people tended to neglect that he was a wilderness survival master as well.

Then Zhang Xiaoman climbed to his feet and grunted, "Look, is that the shore in the distance? The current's pushing us towards it!"

As the saying goes, shit happens. In the end, they were still pushed towards the Zong Consortium's territory by the current.

Chapter 427 A lone fighting force

As the ferry slowly approached the shore, a group of people lay on the deck and looked around cautiously. Zhang Xiaoman said, "There's no lights out there, but it's clear that there aren't really any buildings on the shoreline. There probably aren't any enemies around here."

"This should be a very isolated place. We might've already drifted past the area where the Zong Consortium's military is garrisoned." Jiao Xiaochen analyzed, "We're traveling at about 11 kilometers per hour on the river. Since it's already been an entire day, we're already very far away from the front, having drifted for more than 200 kilometers."

"But we still have to be careful. It won't be good if we encounter some refugees and they reveal our whereabouts," Zhang Xiaoman said in a serious tone.

"If we encounter any refugees, do we kill them?" Jiao Xiaochen asked.

"This war has nothing to do with refugees, so don't kill those innocent civilians." Zhang Xiaoman said with a frown, "Have you forgotten about the rules of Fortress 178?"

"But..." What Jiao Xiaochen wanted to say was that since they had now ventured into enemy territory, it might be a disaster for them if their whereabouts got exposed by any refugees they met.

However, Zhang Xiaoman refuted, "No buts! How are we any different from the Zong Consortium if we kill civilians indiscriminately?"

"Alright then," Jiao Xiaochen acknowledged.

Actually, this would increase the risk factor for the Razor Sharp Company. However, Fortress 178 had principles, so no one could really say whether this was the right decision or not.

Of course, Fortress 178 would not be so popular with the Northwestern people if they were not so principled.

In fact, some of the commoners living in the Zong Consortium's territory were even saying that they were secretly leaning more towards Fortress 178 after war was declared between the Zong Consortium and them.

Ultimately, everyone felt they could live a better life and possibly get taxed lower if Fortress 178 managed to drive the Zong Consortium away.

"But where should we go after we get ashore?" Fu Rao suddenly wondered. His gunshot wound had been healing for three days after the black medicine was applied to it. "In the area, the only route we can take to get back is by crossing the Beiwan Bridge, but that's already been destroyed by the Qing Consortium. Besides, there might also be a lot of the Zong troops stationed there, so how are we gonna get back?"

"We'll simply not go back then!" Zhang Xiaoman waved it off and said, "Our Forward Strike Battalion is mainly responsible for fighting during the early phase of the war. The Forward Strike Battalion's mission ended after Mt. Qiangwan and the Beiwan Bridge were conquered, so it'll become the armored brigade's performance for the rest of the time. Why should we go back at this time?"

"We're not going back? Why must we compare ourselves with the armored brigade? Our firepower isn't as strong as theirs anyway. Despite us winning so many battles, they'll definitely still be the ones credited with winning the war," Jiao Xiaochen said doubtfully.

Zhang Xiaoman said, "That's why we have to fight for the honor. Only those who are commended will be remembered by others, understand?"

"It's pointless," Jiao Xiaochen muttered.

"Why is it pointless?" Zhang Xiaoman asked with a sneer, "Do you know the highest mountain in the world?"

Jiao Xiaochen shook his head. "No."

Zhang Xiaoman was stumped by his response. He had wanted to say that people only remembered the highest mountain in the world, not the second or third highest ones. However, the illiterate Jiao Xiaochen did not even know the highest mountain in the world, so how was he supposed to make the point that he wanted to make?

Ren Xiaosu piped up, "Didn't Battalion Commander Zhou say that the fortress's main forces will be fighting the war at the front line of Mt. Wuchuan, which is north of Blackstone River? How long do y'all think the battle will

go on for?"

"At least three months." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Although I despise the Zong Consortium, there's way too many soldiers gathered at the Mt. Wuchuan front line, so it's gonna take us several months to defeat them. Besides, our difference in strength is still quite relative since the Zong Consortium is also a

modern army. If our Commander wants to break through the front line at Mt. Wuchuan, it won't be that easy. They might even end up fighting for up to half a year too."

Once the front line at Mt. Wuchuan was broken through, the Zong Consortium's defeat in the war could basically be announced in advance.

Ren Xiaosu said, "At this moment, all of the Zong forces will surely assemble at the front line of Mt. Wuchuan. So their rear guard will definitely be spread thin. Why don't we attack their industry in the north then? Since those factories are located outside the strongholds, their garrison forces must be extremely weak. Some of the factories probably don't even have any private troops stationed there!"

Zhang Xiaoman's eyes lit up. "That's a good idea. Ren Xiaosu, how did you come up with something like that?"

"It wasn't my idea." Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "This method is what the Qing Consortium used against the Yang Consortium. Currently, the Zong Consortium's situation is quite similar to the Yang Consortium's. They're both defenseless in the rear."

Qing Zhen's means of dealing with the Yang Consortium had shown Ren Xiaosu the way.

Zhang Xiaoman and the others looked at one another. If they were a normal company, they would never be able to disrupt the entire industry of the Zong Consortium in the north. From what the Qing Consortium had gathered, the Zong Consortium had organized enough bandits to form an entire regiment.

But they could still choose to attack some of the factories!

Jiao Xiaochen said with a smile, "That's a really good idea. We won't even have to wreak havoc since just giving the Zong Consortium a headache will work. Let's make a plan and see which of the Zong factories we should attack."

But when these words were spoken, Ren Xiaosu was taken aback. He said, "What I meant was, we should attack all of them..."

Everyone on the deck fell silent again. Zhang Xiaoman gave a hollow chuckle and said, "Oh, stop joking!"

"I'm not joking." Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, "Y'all probably haven't come across the private troops of the strongholds for many years. The regiment formation has been a mess for a long time. They probably can't even hit the bullseye at 50 meters at a gun range."

"What if the Zong Consortium deploys their regular troops to pursue us?" Zhang Xiaoman asked in surprise.

"Then we run." Ren Xiaosu said, "Don't worry, I have a way to deal with that."

Everyone from the Razor Sharp Company thought that Ren Xiaosu was just a supernatural being with two superpowers, which was already very formidable.

But actually, Ren Xiaosu still had a trump card up his sleeve. It was a move that would deal the Zong Consortium and Zong Cheng the fatal blow. It would be the straw that broke the camel's back!

With a thud, the ferry ran aground on the shore. The Razor Sharp Company jumped off the boat one after another, and in just two minutes, they finished assembling and began to infiltrate the coast in a wedge.

In a place they were unfamiliar with, it was unthinkable to spread out their forces. So they had to move together as a group. They would either survive together or die together.

Looking down from above, the forces of Fortress 178 and the Zong Consortium were distinctly separate from each other in the south and the north. In the east, a route led to the Central Plains, while the Gobi Desert was to the west and stretched all the way to the Alxa League[1] in the north.

But now, there was a strange company mixed among that distinct distribution of fighting forces as the Razor Sharp Company advanced north.

As Zhang Xiaoman walked in formation with the others, Ren Xiaosu had already sent his shadow clone out while nobody was paying attention. Suddenly, Zhang Xiaoman said, "Brothers, we can't call for reinforcements this time. This is a treacherous path we're walking, and none of us can turn around. If I die, y'all must remember to bring my molars back home."

Ren Xiaosu said coldly, "You'd better not die. If you do, I'll knock all of your teeth out before I choose a good-looking one to bring back."

Zhang Xiaoman shuddered in fear. "You're too fucking ruthless."

Chapter 428 The Zong Consortium's contingency plan

At Qing Consortium's Stronghold 111, the manor that stood on Mt. Ginkgo had been empty for some time.

After the coup in the Qing Consortium, Qing Zhen did not choose to stay at that luxurious manor. Instead, he moved into the barracks of Stronghold 111's garrison and lived alongside the soldiers. He ate his meals every day in the chow hall and rejected any special treatment that the kitchen police offered him.

At the beginning, the Qing Consortium's soldiers who were his supporters were saying how it would be difficult to get to see him in the future. But to their surprise, they got to see him almost every day now.

In their private conversations, the generals even said that Qing Zhen was too compassionate towards his subordinates. They felt that a lot of people might learn they could win the support of their subordinates by living in the same conditions and not seeking to be treated with special privileges. But knowing so did not mean they would practice it as well.

But when Qing Zhen heard what was being said about him in private, he admitted frankly that he had moved into the barracks because he was afraid of getting assassinated. Living under the same roof with the troops and sharing the same meals was because he was worried about being poisoned.

When the generals heard this, they did not know how to respond. However, they were already used to hearing him speak hard truths in such a casual manner. When they were planning the coup, Qing Zhen told them they might die if they charged up Mt. Ginkgo. But didn't they still do it in the end?

So after the generals learned about Qing Zhen's worries, they all reassured him that the military base near Stronghold 111 was the safest place of all. No matter how powerful the supernatural being that broke in was, they would never walk out of the place alive.

Qing Zhen could only shake his head and smile, because he knew very well how difficult it was to deal with the supernatural beings these days. Moreover, the supernatural beings were still getting stronger.

At this moment, Qing Zhen was standing in front of a huge sand table. However, the terrain on the sand table was not the Southwest but the Northwestern battlefield between Fortress 178 and the Zong Consortium.

There was a clear and distinctive separation between the red and blue flags on the sand table. The blue flag represented the Zong Consortium in the north, while the red flag represented Fortress 178 in the south.

Suddenly, Qing Zhen picked up a tiny red flag and seemed like he wanted to place it somewhere in the north. But he didn't know where to place it.

Next to him, Luo Lan, who was making eyes at the secretary, suddenly asked, "And which fighting force does this flag represent?"

"The Forward Strike Battalion's Razor Sharp Company," Qing Zhen replied calmly. "If you harass my secretary again, I'll have Qing Yu throw you out."

"Would that child, Qing Yu, dare to throw me out?" Luo Lan brushed it off. He slapped the secretary's butt and said to Qing Zhen after harrying her out, "Since you don't lust after women, why not let me have her rather than having others take advantage of her?"

"I bet you're running out of the black medicine Ren Xiaosu gave you." Qing Zhen glanced at Luo Lan. "Let's see what you're gonna do when it runs out."

Luo Lan felt a pain in his chest. "I forgot to tell Tang Zhou to get some more black medicine from Ren Xiaosu when I sent him north. Dammit!"

"Ren Xiaosu and the Razor Sharp Company have already passed the Beiwan River and are continuing north." Qing Zhen remarked, "If something happens to him, you're gonna be out of black medicine for the rest of your life."

"What? Why's he heading further north? The Zong troops are all over the place there," Luo Lan said in surprise. "When did this happen?"

"About two days ago. The news was relayed back a little late this time." Qing Zhen thought for a moment before saying, "I wonder if he was forced to go there or if he chose to do it so he could kill the

enemy himself. So don't ever underestimate a supernatural being's determination for vengeance. That's also why I chose to move into the barracks."

News of Li Shentan's revenge on the Li Consortium had already begun to spread, with several versions, either from the rumor mill or as told by those in the inner circle of the Li Consortium, going around. They were all about how that young man had buried the entire Li Consortium into the Underworld. Even people in the Central Plains probably knew about this.

"This is the era of 'The Rise of Gods.'" Qing Zhen said with a sigh, "In the end, we have two supernatural beings around us, and one of them loves money too much."

Nearby, Zhou Qi, who was lying in an armchair and pretending to be sleeping, opened his eyes and said, "Please don't insinuate things in my presence. Is it wrong of me to love money?"

Qing Zhen glanced at Zhou Qi and continued, "At this point, I think that Ren Xiaosu's superpower is still to be determined. I'm afraid that the Zong Consortium will have a problem on their hands now that he's headed north into their territory."

Luo Lan walked to the sand table. "Where do you think he'll go?"

Qing Zhen thought for a moment before answering, "No matter where he goes, he'll definitely appear in front of those Zong Consortium hyenas at the end."

Then Qing Zhen placed the red flag down on the position of Stronghold 146. "Pass along my orders. If our planted spy at Stronghold 146 encounters him, I want him to do his best to assist Ren Xiaosu. In comparison, I'd rather be neighbors with that damn group from Fortress 178."

As Stronghold 146 was the Zong Consortium's headquarters, Luo Lan could not understand why Qing Zhen was so sure that Ren Xiaosu would go there.

"Who do you think will win between the Zong Consortium and Fortress 178?" Zhou Qi asked.

"It's a smart move for the Zong Consortium to compact their defensive line. They know it'll be difficult to fight Fortress 178 if their field army is scattered across the wilderness, so they might as well take the fight to the front line at Mt. Wuchuan," Qing Zhen said with a smile. "Once the real war kicks off, it'll be easy to lose sight of the important information in battles or have situations where orders are not conveyed properly even with the aid of modern comms. Also, the Zong Consortium will definitely have a contingency plan. After hiding in cowardice for decades, the hyena must have some kind of trump card for daring to bare their fangs all of a sudden."

"A trump card?" Zhou Qi asked, "So you think the Zong Consortium will win?"

"No." Qing Zhen shook his head and said, "We'll be underestimating Zhang Jinglin if you put it that way. I'm guessing he's waiting for the Zong Consortium to play their trump card first. Once the Zong Consortium initiates that plan, they'll be presenting the entire Northwest on a platter to him."

Although Luo Lan and Zhou Qi could not understand what Qing Zhen was trying to say, they knew he had already figured something out.

Zhou Qi muttered, "Why are you acting so mysterious? You should quickly think of a way to deal with the Yang Consortium instead of talking about the Zong Consortium all the time. Have you got nothing better to do?"

"The Yang Consortium is no longer a threat to us," Qing Zhen said calmly.

At this moment, an officer walked in and said, "The Yang Consortium's envoy has been escorted here. Would you like him to come in?"

"Mhm, bring him in," Qing Zhen said.

The Yang Consortium's envoy was escorted into the command center. However, he looked very comical as he was all bound up. This was probably because the troops were worried that he would try and assassinate Qing Zhen.

But the Yang Consortium's envoy was not angry. He put on a smile and said, "Dear Mr. Qing Zhen, patriarch of the Qing Consortium, I'm here to speak with you on behalf of Yang Lichen."

"Don't waste my time. If you have something to say, speak," Qing Zhen said lightly.

The envoy looked at the people around him. He had planned on holding secret talks with Qing Zhen and had mentally imagined how to emulate the ancients and be a good lobbyist. However, he was tied up the moment he came in and had several guns pointed at him as well. In such a situation, he really couldn't fake it any longer.

He said bluntly, "Yang Lichen wants to form an alliance with you. Currently, there are expectations for him to become the Yang Consortium's CEO. If you help him out, he's willing to gift you both Stronghold 97 and Stronghold 99 once the deed is done."

Chapter 429 A real life fairy tale

Everyone in the command center fell silent. Zhou Qi and Luo Lan stared at the envoy like he was a fool. However, they did not say anything.

Qing Zhen smiled ambiguously at him and said, "How would Yang Lichen like me to help him?"

"He'll supply you with the defensive deployment map of the front line at Ziyang, and you'll only be required to help him destroy the garrison there." The envoy put on an ingratiating smile and said, "To show our sincerity, I even brought the defensive deployment map with me."

Qing Zhen raised his eyebrows and smiled at Zhou Qi. Then he said to the envoy, "How do I know that your defensive deployment map is real? Leave it with me first. I'll decide whether to help your boss after I analyze it. Enough! Men, take him out. And make sure he leaves the defensive deployment map behind."

With that, a group of fierce soldiers escorted the Yang Consortium's envoy out.

Zhou Qi jumped to his feet and said, "Is he a fucking idiot or what? Why are they still fighting among themselves at a time like this? Does he think we're playing games with the Yang Consortium? And what did he mean by gifting Stronghold 97 and Stronghold 99 to us? Who gave him permission to gift us something we already own?"

Qing Zhen said calmly, "Yang Huaiyin from the younger generation of the Yang Consortium is the one guarding the front line at Ziyang. As for Yang Lichen, he's also a family member of the Yang Consortium. However, he was cast aside years ago and was made overseer of a stronghold to take charge of the factories' production levels in its vicinity."

"Hehe." Luo Lan laughed and said, "Reality will always be stranger than fiction. The things you encounter in real life don't happen in stories. It's no wonder that Yang Lichen was ostracized. So it's because he's actually an idiot."

"In the battle at Stronghold 88, the Li Consortium's nanosoldiers charged in and went on a frenzied killing spree. I suspect the nanomachines in their bodies were controlling them rather than the other way around." Qing Zhen said, "In that battle, the Yang Consortium's core figures were basically all in Stronghold 88. Now that the Yang Consortium is without a leader, the entire Yang Consortium has started fragmenting. Thus, many of those who used to be ostracized would rather fight for control of the Yang Consortium than think about how to win the war."

Yang Lichen was not the only one who sent their people here. Others had done the same.

Of course, not all of them were that stupid. The majority of them said they would stop resisting and hoped to be granted an official position in the stronghold in the future. Meanwhile, people like Yang Lichen were difficult to find even among the idiots.

The outside world thought the Qing Consortium would get exhausted in the war with the Yang Consortium. But in reality, the Qing Consortium was just putting on a front.

After all, the Southwest and Northwest were not the only places in this world. There was also the Central Plains.

"But there's also smart people in the Yang Consortium." Qing Zhen said with a smile, "Yang Huaiyin, who is taking charge of the front line at Ziyang, he said he didn't want to resist anymore and sought an official position. He even sent the defensive deployment map of the front line at Ziyang to me. However, the defensive deployment map wasn't entirely real. He was trying to set a trap for me."

Luo Lan said with a sigh, "For a huge organization like the Yang Consortium with their glorious past, who would've expected them to end up in this state?"

Qing Zhen looked at the sand table and said calmly, "You should never reveal your trump cards or intentions. Else, you can only wait to be slaughtered. This chess game is not over yet."

"Oh, right." Luo Lan asked, "What are we gonna do about the Experimentals to the south?"

Qing Zhen frowned slightly. Ever since the Li Consortium was destroyed, and with both the Qing Consortium and the Yang Consortium's forces returning to the North, the South's defenses were practically empty. The Qing Consortium could not possibly keep too many fighting forces guarding the South. So the territories that used to be under the Li Consortium's control were no longer able to hold back the Experimentals.

After the Yang Consortium's defeated troops escaped with their tails tucked between their legs, Qing Zhen left a brigade in the South to ward off the Experimentals. But with so many strongholds in the region, how could a single brigade defend them all? Besides, their main objective there was to take over the strongholds and force the former officials to surrender their assets.

In less than two months, the Experimentals had occupied yet another stronghold and turned it into their territory.

It was like a purgatory filled with demons in the fallen stronghold.

If the Qing Consortium had not left behind an entire brigade, perhaps even more people would have died.

Qing Zhen thought for a while and said, "Let Qing Yi know that he has 15 days to capture the front line at Ziyang. After that, he is to lead the troops south to exterminate the Experimentals. I don't want to see any more people dying."

For a person who had orchestrated the entire war in the Southwest to suddenly say that he did not want to see any more people dying sounded extremely absurd. However, no one knew what Qing Zhen was thinking at this moment.

Luo Lan asked, "After they defeat the Yang Consortium, the soldiers will be exhausted. Shouldn't we let them rest rather than making them head south immediately? Why don't you use--"

"No, we can't use that," Qing Zhen interrupted. "We can't simply do as we please with some things."

Luo Lan stood up and dusted himself off. "Alright then, I'll oversee the takeover of the Yang Consortium's strongholds. I think those old fogeys should be quite rich. After the war's over, it can't be that our Qing Consortium keeps getting poorer, right? You're not suited to handle such rotten matters, so leave it to me."

Now that Qing Zhen was the Qing Consortium's CEO, he had to take care of his image. Hence, Luo Lan volunteered to take charge of the seizure of people's assets.

Previously, Luo Lan had also overseen the seizure of the Li Consortium's territories. The officials and businessmen of the Li Consortium got horrified whenever Luo Lan's name was mentioned. That was because Luo Lan's methods for pilfering their assets were known to be brutal.

Some of the officials who used to work for the Li Consortium insisted they did not have any money at all because they did not want their gold to be seized.

However, all of them still ended up confessing after they were hung from their roofs and severely beaten for three days and three nights by Luo Lan.

There were also methods like not allowing them to sleep and physical torture that Luo Lan resorted to. These were all methods that were used to deal with spies, so how could the officials possibly endure it?

As of this moment, it was unknown how many people were cursing him behind his back. Everyone was claiming that Luo Lan was a cannibal.

But all the assets that were seized by Luo Lan would get put into the Qing Consortium's account. He did not keep any of it for himself.

Quoting Luo Lan, why would he need the money when his brother was the Qing Consortium's CEO? He didn't even have to pay out of his own pocket wherever he went.

Qing Zhen was previously the Qing Consortium's Shadow. And now, Luo Lan looked like he had become Qing Zhen's Shadow.

Qing Zhen looked at Zhou Qi. "I want you to make a trip to the Central Plains. Things are already brewing over there, so it's time to act."

"You seem quite trusting of me this time." Zhou Qi said with a grin, "Weren't you afraid I would turn against you at the last minute? But now you're actually assigning such an important task to me?"

Qing Zhen said, "No one can afford to pay you what I paid."

Zhou Qi whistled. He no longer carried himself in a cultured and respectable way anymore and acted more like a mercenary. He said with a smile, "Boss's generosity knows no bounds! The war in the Southwest will be over soon, and the entire Southwest will be flying the flag of the Qing Consortium. Looks like I made the correct decision back then!"

However, Qing Zhen suddenly said after a long silence, "I don't think it's worth being happy about."

Qing Zhen stood next to the sand table and looked at the entire layout. Luo Lan suddenly remembered that his younger brother once said he actually preferred cultivating flowers to this.

Chapter 430 The petty Wang Congyang

On the only route from the Northwest to the Central Plains, Li Shentan, Si Liren, and Hu Shuo were sitting under the shade of trees to avoid getting heatstroke. Leaning against the tree trunk, Li Shentan sighed and said, "The weather is really getting hotter and hotter these days. I wonder when the war in the Northwest will end."

Little Liren was scooping out a watermelon with a spoon next to him. The huge case she had been carrying was on the ground by her side. Si Liren looked up at Li Shentan. "Didn't you say that we're going to the Central Plains? Why'd we end up coming here? We've been here for three days already. Big Brother Shentan, what exactly are you waiting for?"

“Well, didn’t Ren Xiaosu join Fortress 178 to fight the Zong Consortium?” Li Shentan said, “He must want to kill everyone from the Zong Consortium, dontcha think?”

“Mhm.” Si Liren nodded.

“Then look at it this way. Since the Zong Consortium has so many people, there’s probably gonna be some of them who’ll go into hiding in the Central Plains to avoid the calamity. So we’re here to help Ren Xiaosu catch the fish that slip through his net.” Li Shentan chuckled and said, “In this way, no one from the Zong Consortium will escape.”

“Are we going to capture them?” Si Liren asked in seriousness, “But where are we gonna lock them up?”

“Uh, that was just an example. We’re actually gonna kill them.” When Li Shentan talked about killing people, it looked like it was nothing to him.

Hu Shuo had been meditating next to them. Li Shentan looked at him and said, “Grandpa, are you sure this is the only route for the Zong Consortium’s people to head to the Central Plains?”

Hu Shuo said with his eyes closed, “No, there’s many other routes leading east. But if they’re driving, this is the only road they can take for now. How can those self-important people who’re used to living comfortably in the strongholds possibly try to pass through the treacherous mountains on foot? If they had the courage, they wouldn’t be fleeing to the Central Plains.”

“That’s true.” Li Shentan nodded.

Hu Shuo’s mental fortitude was excellent. Even in the wilderness, he did not show any signs of being fazed, nor did he feel bored about meditating with his eyes closed.

All of a sudden, the sound of vehicles approaching from afar rumbled. Li Shentan said with a smile, “Here they come!”

These vehicles had traveled here from the Northwest. As Fortress 178 did not have access to this road, so it could only be someone from the Zong Consortium.

Li Shentan and Si Liren started approaching the convoy. They had already decided not to let any surviving members of the Zong Consortium leave here.

Si Liren waved her hand, and the huge chest flew towards her like it was light as a feather, allowing her to carry it on her back at will.

But just as the convoy was turning past a hill, Li Shentan and Si Liren saw a steam locomotive speed out of nowhere in the wilderness and smash ruthlessly into the convoy, flipping over all of the vehicles. The steam locomotive that appeared out of thin air was moving extremely fast. It looked like this was premeditated.

The vehicles that had been hit were sent rolling across the ground. When these vehicles finally came to a stop, the people inside were either dead or injured.

The vehicle at the head of the convoy had even been squashed like a can of sardines.

When the people who were still alive tried their best to climb out of the vehicles, the steam locomotive with four carriages that had just gone past turned around and smashed into them once more. It looked like it was determined to kill everyone in the convoy.

Li Shentan, Si Liren, and Hu Shuo watched, their jaws dropping. They were about to make a move, but little did they expect that someone even more violent than them would appear.

What was going on? Who had such a huge grudge against the Zong Consortium?

“Wh-Who is that?” Li Shentan said in surprise.

“It’s probably someone seeking revenge,” Hu Shuo said. “Let’s watch from the shadows for now.”

Although there were trees around here, the view of the surroundings was relatively clear. The person controlling the steam locomotive should have spotted them, yet they did not attack them.

After all, Si Liren was floating in the sky with a huge chest on her back, so it was obvious that the three of them were not to be trifled with.

The steam locomotive slowly dissipated. It had not killed everyone in the convoy yet, and one of the vehicles even managed to escape nearly unscathed.

Wang Congyang stepped out from behind a hill at this moment. He was the one who had been controlling the steam locomotive.

Wang Congyang glanced at Li Shentan’s group in the distance, then crouched beside the rearmost overturned off-road vehicle of the convoy and sneered, “Don’t go any further. Return and tell that bastard, Zong Cheng, that our score hasn’t been settled yet. I’ll have plenty of time to settle things with you people in the future, but for now, I’ll be happy to get the interest.”

Wang Congyang was someone who would seek revenge over the smallest of grievances. Otherwise, he would not have kept making trouble for Ren Xiaosu.

He not only possessed capability and courage but also a high level of restraint. Although he was from one of the earliest batches of supernatural beings to awaken their powers, he constantly remained under the radar and was willing to suffer the disdain of his superiors in the private troops. That was why Wang Congyang would not foolishly seek an opportunity to kill Zong Cheng after Zong Cheng had plotted against him. However, he definitely wanted to get back at him for it. If he had the chance to get his revenge, he would undoubtedly take it.

Shouldering his backpack, Wang Congyang walked to the other off-road vehicles, acting like no one was around as he pried open one of the trunks and took out the gold in it.

After taking away a portion, he suddenly said to Li Shentan, “It was fate that we met. Thank you for not interfering. Someone from the Zong Consortium is diverting the gold in this vehicle to the Central Plains.

I've only taken half of it. You guys can have the rest." As Wang Congyang spoke, he slowly retreated backwards. He was so cautious that he did not even want to approach Li Shentan's group.

Stunned, Li Shentan watched this play out. To be honest, they had not expected this turn of events. He asked Wang Congyang, "Did you have a grudge against the Zong Consortium?"

"Of course," Wang Congyang replied. "What's in that chest you're carrying?"

Li Shentan glanced at the case on Si Liren's back and said, "You talking 'bout this? There's a statue of a deity inside it."

Wang Congyang was stunned. He thought the little girl was carrying something valuable, but how could he have known it would turn out to just be a statue? Then he asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, we also have a grudge against the Zong Consortium.... Well, I guess it's considered a grudge." Li Shentan laughed and said, "Why don't you stay around? We can kill the Zong Consortium's people together."

Wang Congyang smiled. "I appreciate your kind offer, but I'm used to being alone and not making friends with others. So let's just bid farewell."

Wang Congyang was a bold but careful person. He had never felt any sense of belonging to any organization or force and would never trust anyone either. He was just pursuing a good life. Yes, it would be fine if he kept living in wealth.

Li Shentan said with a smile, "You said it yourself. It was fate that we met. My name is Li Shentan. What's yours, brother?"

Wang Congyang's pupils contracted. How could he not have heard of it before? This name had already spread throughout the entire Southwest and Northwest. However, he had not expected to encounter this demon here!

Wang Congyang said cautiously, "I'm just a nobody, so there's no point mentioning it."

Li Shentan said with a smile, "It looks like you've heard of my name."

Wang Congyang said with a smile, "How can I not have heard of the Demon Whisperer? I just wonder why you guys are here."

During their conversation, Wang Congyang retreated backwards quickly and conjured the steam locomotive once more. Then he jumped onto it and fled into the distance.

Li Shentan stroked his face. "Am I that frightening?"

Si Liren giggled and said, "No."

Li Shentan watched the steam locomotive depart and sighed. "I guess only such emotionless people with no attachments to the world can survive in this chaotic world."

