

First Order 461

Chapter 461 A spent force

After arriving outside the manor, Zong Cheng realized he might have taken too big of a risk. The third ancillary branch was refusing to save him?

Zong Cheng was terribly upset as his ears were still ringing. Zong Cheng said coldly over the radio, "Fourth Brother, aren't you afraid the main branch will take revenge on you later if you refuse to help me? Our main house might not be able to do anything about the entire third house, but do you think you can get away if we're only fighting against you? There's only one supernatural being pursuing me, so the troops here are enough to handle him!"

Fourth Brother was the eldest son of the third ancillary branch, as well as the commander of the 1229th Battalion which was under the 107th Combat Brigade.

Fourth Brother lividly pondered this for a few seconds before saying, "Move the hedgehogs aside and let Zong Cheng through."

Seeing that the hedgehogs had been shifted away, Zong Cheng was overjoyed. Then he floored it and drove forward.

However, he did not stop after entering the defensive position and continued driving deeper into the manor. He was going to escape from the western entrance of the manor.

When Fourth Brother saw Zong Cheng continuing to flee, he felt that something was wrong. If the troops here were really enough to handle the supernatural being as Zong Cheng had claimed, why would he still need to run away?!

The Zong Consortium's Fourth Brother growled, "Zong Cheng, you treacherous bastard, you're despicable!"

"Sir, what should we do now?" the deputy commander of the 1229th Battalion asked.

"Defend the position! As if a supernatural being can take on an entire stronghold all by themselves!" the Zong Consortium's Fourth Brother said.

As the steam locomotive approached the manor, Ren Xiaosu resorted to his usual tactic again and started dropping grenades on the defensive line to break it up. In between, he also threw out four "fives" from the Explosive Poker deck he had. However, the power of four "fives" was much weaker than that of four "sixes."

Then three soldiers on the Zong Consortium's defensive position carrying RPG launchers fired at Ren Xiaosu!

As the steam locomotive was a really large target, how could the RPGs miss?

But as they waited for the RPGs to explode, they saw the huge steam locomotive transforming into black mist. A second later, an armored being sprang out of the mist.

While still in midair, he contorted his body and dexterously dodged the incoming RPGs by passing through the gaps between them.

When the armor-clad Ren Xiaosu landed on the ground, he started charging forward, making the entire ground quake as he did so. The Zong Consortium's soldiers felt a sense of powerlessness. Seeing that their bullets were totally ineffective against their enemy and with their RPGs missing him entirely, they didn't know how to deal with him!

However, Ren Xiaosu did not engage the enemies here any further. He was only looking to destroy the manor quickly with his grenades and kill as many of the enemy's troops as possible.

The third house was doomed.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu could not guarantee that all the places he had just attacked would end up getting destroyed, nor could he finish off the soldiers and members of the Zong Consortium who had survived the blasts. Whether or not they were killed was all down to luck.

After the third ancillary branch's manor was attacked, an old man crawled out from under the ruins. When the Zong Consortium's battalion commander saw that his father was alright, he immediately ran forward to help him up. "Father, let's retreat. We can't stay here any longer!"

The old man looked especially comical when the combover used to cover his bald head were scattered. He snapped, "Retreat? Haven't you realized by now? This is the main branch's scheme! Zong Cheng has more than a 1,000 soldiers under his command, yet he couldn't even stop a supernatural being? No matter how strong a supernatural being is, they don't have an endless amount of mental strength. So why was that supernatural being still up and running? It's obvious that Zong Cheng is taking this chance to eliminate his dissidents!"

The expression on this battalion commander's face turned extremely sullen. Earlier, when Zong Cheng entered the defensive position and continued fleeing, he had already thought that something was amiss.

The elder's expression turned dark. "That little shit, Zong Cheng, has turned against our Zong Consortium, so don't blame me for not caring about our family ties! Call the fourth branch immediately! We must unite against the main branch!"

After so many years of infighting within the Zong Consortium, Zong Cheng's first thoughts after encountering Ren Xiaosu's attack on Stronghold 146 was to lead him to wipe out the third and fourth ancillary branches. At the same time, he also wanted to use the third and fourth houses' strength to wear down Ren Xiaosu.

Meanwhile, after the third house was implicated, they did not choose to flee, nor mention anything about organizing a search party to hunt down Ren Xiaosu. Instead, they immediately wanted to join up with the other faction to get their revenge!

But when their call to the fourth ancillary branch connected, the person answering immediately said, "That little shit, Zong Cheng, brought a supernatural being to our manor. Hurry over here! We need reinforcements!"

The third house fell silent. It seemed that the fourth house was done for as well.

Stronghold 146 was in utter chaos now. However, Zong Cheng could no longer clearly hear the nearby explosions due to the ringing in his ears.

He looked in his rearview mirror and was surprised to see the armored being still chasing after him. However, it seemed to have slowed down somewhat.

Zong Cheng sneered to himself. He felt that his plan had probably succeeded. Zong Cheng did not even consider the possibility that Ren Xiaosu might be tricking him. Even if Ren Xiaosu were a god, he would still get tired after battling for so long!

He took a phone out of his pocket and called his father. As soon as the call went through, Zong Cheng quickly said, "Father, that Ren Xiaosu should be at his limits. I'll lead him to our manor right away, so get ready for battle. After we kill him, we can consolidate the resources left behind by the third and fourth houses."

On the other end, his father shouted, "Don't you fucking bring him here!"

But Zong Cheng could barely hear anything due to his tinnitus. He said, "OK, I'll bring him over right away!"

Then Zong Cheng ended the call and focused back on driving. He even looked at the fuel gauge. Although the gas tank was close to empty, there was enough for him to drive back to the entrance of his manor.

But as he was making his escape, Zong Cheng suddenly felt an inkling of danger. He saw the Shadow Door appear next to him in the vehicle, then felt a saber gently slash him before disappearing.

Zong Cheng was shocked. When the black saber disappeared, he immediately began to inspect his wound. However, he realized that it was just a superficial injury. Learning this, Zong Cheng felt slightly relieved. It looked like his enemy had missed.

But before he could dwell any further on it, the Shadow Door appeared again. He felt another slash that left a wound on him that was neither shallow nor deep.

Would Zong Cheng still not understand what was going on at this moment? His enemy was obviously trying to torture him!

Ren Xiaosu clearly had the chance to kill him, yet he did not seem to be in a hurry to do so.

Zong Cheng felt humiliated. This was his first time facing this type of situation.

There was nothing he could do but step harder on the gas pedal and continue to escape.

At this moment, Zheng Yuandong was standing on the roof of a tall building that overlooked the stronghold. He was stunned by what he saw.

Previously, he thought he had overestimated Ren Xiaosu's abilities. But right now, this Qing Consortium spy was finding it a little hard to believe. A lone supernatural being was absolutely dominating the entire Zong Consortium's Stronghold 146?

Zheng Yuandong knew that a lot of what was happening here was mainly opportunistic. For example, Ren Xiaosu had disrupted the entire Zong Consortium plan by attacking their military base. While the troops that were scattered around the stronghold wanted to return as reinforcements, they were not as mobile as Ren Xiaosu. Therefore, they could only rush back in small waves like servers sending dishes to a table in a 10-course dinner.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu would not have achieved this either if he were not ruthless enough.

Zheng Yuandong had seen for himself how Ren Xiaosu had used an unknown method to somehow blow up the Zong Consortium's defensive positions. Furthermore, he could even protect himself with steel armor, drive a steam locomotive, and not feel threatened by firearms and explosives.

Zheng Yuandong had taken a shortcut to the manor of the Zong Consortium's main house. When he saw how the third and fourth houses were destroyed, he knew that Ren Xiaosu's next target would most likely be the main house.

But Zheng Yuandong was worried about how Ren Xiaosu had wasted some time to destroy the manors of the third and fourth ancillary branches.

As such, the Zong Consortium's main branch had already reorganized some of the stray troops and gathered them outside of their manor.

Chapter 462 - A Surprise Attack

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A surprise attack

Smoke was rising up in the stronghold. What was initially a starry night had now turned into a smoky sky in the middle of the night. It was as though a calamity had suddenly descended upon the stronghold.

Zong Cheng was driving an off-road vehicle through the empty streets as he fled for his life.

Zong Cheng was covered with slash wounds as he tried unsuccessfully to evade the Shadow Door. It was a pest as Ren Xiaosu continuously tortured him throughout the pursuit.

Fortunately, a small group of reinforcements appeared and managed to delay Ren Xiaosu a little. This allowed Zong Cheng to get away from the endless torture of being cut by the saber.

The stronghold residents no longer dared to watch the commotion. All of them hid in their bathrooms at home, afraid that a sudden attack would deal them collateral damage.

The Zong Consortium troops scattered across the stronghold streamed towards the main branch's manor, with someone giving them orders to assemble through the radio.

The Zong Consortium's higher-ups in that manor were panicking. They could only hope that it was not too late!

Zheng Yuandong finally made it here as well. He concealed himself on the roof of a tall building and watched the situation unfold. The sky in the distance was filled with smoke and fire, like it represented the Zong Consortium's future going up in flame.

Although the Zong Consortium was beginning to collapse on the fronts, they could still rely on their vast territory to fight a strategic war if they compacted their defensive lines once more. As Fortress 178 had too few soldiers, if they continued to march into the heartland where Stronghold 146 was, the worry was that their battlefield would get overextended.

But everything changed with the arrival of a young man at Stronghold 146.

In fact, Zheng Yuandong had figured out what Ren Xiaosu was here for. Wasn't he just looking to kill the core figures of the Zong Consortium? Anyone could have guessed it! However, he did not believe that Ren Xiaosu could achieve that at the beginning.

At this moment, Zong Cheng looked behind him through the rearview mirror and noticed the speed of the pursuing armored being was slowing down bit by bit. Zong Cheng immediately knew why this was as he had also used nanomachines before. They were starting to run out of juice!

Estimating the time, he knew Ren Xiaosu could not handle such a drawn out battle even if he had recharged the nanomachines during the pursuit.

As the manor was just in front of him, Zong Cheng floored it again. The soldiers outside the entrance automatically moved the hedgehogs aside for him. After Zong Cheng passed through successfully, they returned to their defensive formation. Those cold and unfeeling firearms and heavy weapons were all aiming at the end of the long street.

Although Zong Cheng's father was extremely furious by what he had done tonight, the Zong clan's patriarch could not bear to see his son die before his very eyes.

Zong Cheng's father was already 71 years old. Both Zong Cheng and Zong Xiang were born when he was at an advanced age, so they were extremely precious to him.

The Zong clan's patriarch used to have another son, but he died of lung cancer.

This was considered a secret within the Zong clan. Two years after the eldest son of the main branch had passed away, his wife got pregnant again. Initially, the members of the Zong Consortium were furious and thought the eldest son's widow had dishonored the family name. However, the Zong clan's patriarch stood his ground and took the widow, who was also his daughter-in-law, as his concubine.

In modern civilization, concubinage was a regressive practice. Further, she was his own daughter-in-law.

Only then did the Zong Consortium's higher-ups finally understand what had happened. So it turned out the Zong clan's patriarch had committed an immoral act. Who else could the widow's child belong to? It was clear the Zong clan's patriarch was responsible!

But the Zong Consortium's main branch was firmly in power, so everyone kept quiet as though nothing had happened. Even Zong Cheng and Zong Xiang were unaware of this.

However, there were also rumors within the family that Zong Cheng and Zong Xiang might not be the biological sons of the Zong clan's patriarch. After all, the patriarch was so old.

As for whether the patriarch had done any paternity tests, no one knew.

Zong Cheng had already driven into the manor. Initially, the patriarch wanted to punish him severely. But when he saw Zong Cheng's body covered in blood and wounds, he could not bear to do so anymore. He slapped his face, but that just made Zong Cheng's tinnitus even worse.

The patriarch held his anger back and said, "Stand aside. We'll talk about what you did after tonight."

Someone off to the side noticed that Zong Cheng was still in a daze, so they hurriedly pulled him aside.

The bulky armored being rounded a corner and appeared in front of everyone!

In an instant, all the firepower outside the Zong Consortium's manor burst with the intention of annihilating the enemy at the end of the long street. But the armored being did not slow down at all. Instead, it sped up and moved even faster!

Zheng Yuandong was standing on the roof of a tall building in the distance as he watched the scene unfold. Under the dark sky, the Zong Consortium's position was like an insurmountable mountain. A violent storm of firepower was created in the atmosphere, while the aggressive armored being approached it ruthlessly in an unpredictable fashion.

The sound of the steel armor stomping on the ground reverberated like a heavy war drum that was as loud as thunder!

“Is this kid really going to continue charging forward?” Zheng Yuandong mumbled, “The Zong Consortium has called so many troops back here, and Ren Xiaosu should also be at his limits now. He can’t be that fearless, right?”

But just as he finished, he discovered the armored being had picked up speed again.

The cold and unfeeling steel armor had remained quiet throughout the battle. But amid the silence, it seemed to be roaring at the Zong Consortium with rage. The clouds of dust that had been kicked up by stray bullets hitting the ground trailed behind the steel armor like a solitary flag waving in the wind as it charged forward!

“I’m convinced.” Zheng Yuandong sighed. Before this era of the rise of supernatural beings, he was the most elite Qing Consortium spy around. His assassination methods were extremely direct and efficient, and he was a remarkably strong fighter.

Even after this era began, Zheng Yuandong still felt that he could kill them even though they were supernatural beings.

But tonight, Ren Xiaosu had single-handedly upended his thinking. All of a sudden, he understood that the era he belonged to was truly over.

“No, I can’t accept this!”

In his boundless solitude, Zheng Yuandong’s gaze was fixated on the prominent armored being out in the distance. Suddenly, a resolute strength started growing in his heart. It felt like it was bursting with the force of erupting magma, the bombardment of artillery fire, and the destructive winds of a tornado.

That ambition that had accumulated in him over the years burst forth.

A second later, Zheng Yuandong looked at the armored being in astonishment. He had actually awakened his superpower?!

This was the power he had been desiring for a long time. Even after witnessing the birth of so many supernatural beings, Zheng Yuandong had yet to awaken his superpower.

But just as he was about to give up on that happening, the sight of how that young man battled on had triggered the immeasurable unacceptance in him.

This was what shocked Zheng Yuandong the most. He knew he would not have felt so agitated if he did not see that armored being charging forward with such an indomitable spirit.

“Since my power has been awakened, does it mean I can help him now?” Zheng Yuandong wondered.

But before he could come to a decision, he saw the armored being suddenly turn left and run away just as it was about to reach the Zong Consortium’s position.

Zheng Yuandong and the Zong Consortium’s troops were all dumbfounded by the sight. The armored being ran away just like that?

Whatever happened to that indomitable spirit?

Zong Cheng and the others were also confused by the events as they watched from the manor. The Zong clan’s patriarch frowned. He looked at Zong Cheng and asked, “What’s going on? Why did he run away?”

Zong Cheng said, “Can you speak louder?!”

The patriarch felt his blood pressure shoot up again and got the urge to slap Zong Cheng. But before he could do so, the orderlies around them shrieked in agony and pain.

The Zong clan's patriarch immediately turned around. The young man who had come to kill them had arrived behind them without anyone realizing it!

He was holding a black saber, looking invincible!

Chapter 463 - Comrades

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Comrades

After Ren Xiaosu pulled the trigger and shot his enemy, he did not let his guard down. Instead, he turned around and ran into the wilderness behind him. No one stipulated that there could only be two Zong Consortium snipers here in the mountain range. Who knew if there were actually three of them?

At this moment, the wound on his outer left thigh that was grazed by the sniper's bullet was still bleeding profusely. He had to limp along.

It was not that he could not endure the pain, but that his left leg was a little weak now since the muscle fibers were torn. No matter how strong his willpower was, he could not mend the muscle fibers in an instant.

So it was still those same words. The most dangerous moment when walking a tightrope was always the last three steps. Only those who could finish those three steps would be qualified to walk on a tightrope.

Ren Xiaosu had already exhausted quite a bit of his energy in this battle. Whether it be ambushing the guerrilla companies or outwitting the snipers, he had not encountered so many twists and turns before.

In reality, his enemy was not an elite sniper. In Yang Xiaojin's words, there were no elite snipers in the entire Northwest, and none of them were a match for her.

Besides, Ren Xiaosu was also not a schemer. He had only ever learned how to fight and hunt. In the past, his targets had always been mindless animals. But this time, he was hunting down someone who had a mind of their own.

If a true hunter were here, they would probably have scoffed at Ren Xiaosu's efforts. For example, should he have risked his life after the enemy's third shot, should he have pursued the enemy this far, or did he actually have a chance to kill that sniper but didn't realize it?

If Yang Xiaojin were present, she would probably think those snipers were extremely stupid and bad shots.

But no matter what, Ren Xiaosu was still making progress and learning from his experiences.

The deaths of his enemies were more important than anything else.

Ren Xiaosu hid in the bushes behind the mountain ridge for a long time. He wanted to see if there would be a third sniper out there and how the Zong Consortium's guerrillas would react.

After all, two snipers and two companies of guerrillas had perished here, so they couldn't possibly allow Ren Xiaosu and the others to get arrogant.

But it was also possible that the guerrillas would simply give up on defending the Beiwan River when they saw their enemies were not to be trifled with. That was also a possibility, but it still depended mainly on how their opponent chose to react.

After waiting for a long time, Ren Xiaosu did not see any more guerrillas getting sent here. It was as though they had given up on defending this mountain range.

After some thought, Ren Xiaosu decided to head back and join up with the Razor Sharp Company first. He wondered what it was like at the rear now after he had been out here hunting the enemy for almost two days.

All of a sudden, he saw a large number of troops heading straight for him from the north. Ren Xiaosu was shocked to discover they had not fucking given up on the mountain range yet. Instead, they had been taking some time to gather the troops to send a regiment directly into the mountain range. They were planning to wipe out their enemies in these mountains! They intended to surround him!

He had overplayed his hand! They were actually sending a full regiment to go after one company? This was going overboard.

Ren Xiaosu's head was starting to hurt. The Razor Sharp Company was still thinking about passing straight through here to get to the Beiwan River to blow up the bridge? How were they supposed to pass through now?

He turned around and stooped low to make his escape. He had to get out of their perimeter first.

While running away, Ren Xiaosu wondered if he could plant some Brambles to kill some of the Zong Consortium's soldiers. As there were too many of them, it would be unrealistic to wipe out the entire regiment. But it would be good enough if he could kill a portion of them.

However, Ren Xiaosu realized the sniper might have already reported to his rear forces about the possibility of some terrifying plants being hidden within the shrubs when he sought reinforcements.

As a result, the soldiers of the Zong Consortium's main troops did not even walk through the areas where shrubs were growing. They traversed the shady side of the slope where there was no vegetation while remaining extremely cautious.

Moreover, Ren Xiaosu had noticed that some of the Zong Consortium's soldiers were even carrying flamethrowers! With these around, the Brambles would be rendered useless. A fire could wipe them all out.

Even plants had their natural enemies.

When he saw this, Ren Xiaosu thought he did not want to create any unnecessary trouble. So he ran all the way back to the other end of the mountain while limping.

The Zong Consortium's commander at the Beiwan River seemed to be really outraged by all of this. He seemed extremely determined to kill Ren Xiaosu no matter what.

While Ren Xiaosu was escaping, he realized these Zong Consortium soldiers always seemed to track down his exact location. Due to his injury, he was planning to shake off the Zong Consortium first before joining back up with the Razor Sharp Company. However, his plan was foiled.

During his escape, he hid on a ridge and observed his pursuers. He was surprised to see a dozen-odd Zong Consortium's soldiers holding leashes for several huge hounds. The hounds were so large they could drag people off by themselves. Even those well-built adult soldiers were unable to keep them under control with the leashes.

Ren Xiaosu felt that these hounds could even be ridden as mounts.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly realized it was the smell of blood. Due to his outer left thigh that had been grazed by the enemy sniper's bullet, an open wound had formed. It not only slowed him down a lot but also left behind a scent trail. Although he had already applied the black medicine onto the wound, that could not cover up the smell of blood.

It seemed like that was the reason why the Zong Consortium's soldiers were able to keep chasing after him.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not have any better ideas to deal with these hounds. He could not just get rid of the smell by throwing away his bloodstained clothes. He could only try to find a stream and follow it all the way back to where the Razor Sharp Company was.

But there was no such stream in the vicinity.

By the next afternoon, the Zong Consortium's soldiers let the hounds loose and allowed them to pursue Ren Xiaosu freely after realizing they still had not caught up with him after wasting so much time.

This put Ren Xiaosu in a fix. Even though he was injured, he could still move faster than the Zong Consortium soldiers. But the hounds were different. These animals had also fucking mutated!

The dozen-odd hounds did not have a single ounce of fat and could navigate through the mountains like they were moving on flat ground.

Ren Xiaosu looked at the shadow clone in the palace. The shadow clone had still not returned to its original form. He really had to be careful not to let anything hit the shadow clone between its brows again in the future. He would have to prepare a helmet for it just in case.

Seeing that the dozen hounds were getting closer, Ren Xiaosu made ready to fight!

He would not be afraid of these hounds if not for the Zong Consortium's firepower at their rear!

Ren Xiaosu would have to kill the hounds out here as he did not wish to lead the Zong Consortium to where the Razor Sharp Company was.

But at this moment, he heard the ratatat of a machine gun coming from the hills on both sides of Crow Pass. Ren Xiaosu even heard someone shout, "Ren Xiaosu, get over here! We'll cover you!"

He saw the Razor Sharp Company had already built a simple fortification on the hills on either side of Crow Pass. Fu Rao was shooting mercilessly at the hounds with a heavy machine gun he was wielding in his hands. In just a few seconds, he had already killed six or seven of the hounds that were chasing after Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu heaved a sigh of relief. Was this what it felt like to have the support of comrades? When you needed to catch a breather, there would be someone standing behind you to shelter and protect you.

“What are you still standing there for? Get over here! Why are there so many fucking hounds chasing after you? Ren Xiaosu, how many enemies are pursuing you?” Zhang Xiaoman lamented, “Where did you go...”

Chapter 464 - A Surprise Attack By The Armored Brigade

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A surprise attack by the armored brigade

Ever since Ren Xiaosu entered Stronghold 146, he had been fighting by himself. Even though he encountered Zheng Yuandong, who was a Qing Consortium spy, the man merely showed him the way forward and never participated in his battles.

Just as Zheng Yuandong had said, his personal safety still took precedence over other matters even if Luo Lan had requested him to assist Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu could understand that since it was how the world worked.

But things were different after the Razor Sharp Company broke into the stronghold. While Ren Xiaosu was injured, this group of lunatics set up terrifying heavy machine guns in the streets of the stronghold and claimed the lives of the pursuing Zong Consortium soldiers, providing shelter and protection for Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu was leaning against a wall as he pressed down on his wounds. As there were shops and residential buildings on both sides of the street, some residents in the house behind him were shivering in fear at everything that was going on. But even in his battle to seek revenge tonight, Ren Xiaosu was still very careful to not cause the deaths of any innocent residents. This was all because Zhang Xiaoman had previously said that Fortress 178 had its own set of principles they abided by.

“How did y’all manage to find me?” Ren Xiaosu wondered.

The Razor Sharp Company was unfamiliar with the layout of Stronghold 146. Furthermore, Ren Xiaosu had been fighting a highly mobile battle tonight, so it should have been difficult to locate him.

Zhang Xiaoman smiled while reloading. “After we got into the stronghold, there was a fortune teller waiting for us at the gate. He even pointed out your position to us. At first, we didn’t believe him. But after that, we actually heard gunshots coming from the position he pointed to.”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. “Is the fortune teller you’re talking about a thin, middle-aged man with a mustache who wears a pair of sunglasses and holds a banner that has the words ‘Divine Foresight’ written on it?”

“Eh?” Zhang Xiaoman was amused. “How did you know?”

The Zong Consortium’s troops had been thoroughly defeated by the Razor Sharp Company’s heavy machine guns. In fact, that momentary burst of fire earlier had even beaten many of the Zong Consortium’s soldiers into submission. The soldiers in the off-road vehicles could not even fight back in the face of the heavy machine guns peppering them.

If it were under normal circumstances, these Zong Consortium troops would certainly not be so fragile. But now that more than half of the Zong Consortium’s higher-ups had either been killed or wounded, the morale of the Zong Consortium’s troops was affected.

So when the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company saw their enemies screaming in defeat, their morale was lifted. Jiao Xiaochen asked, “Xiaosu, you know that fortune teller too?”

“I guess so.” Ren Xiaosu was a little puzzled. Could that fortune teller be the real deal? But why would he guide the Razor Sharp Company to save him?

Zhang Xiaoman said with a smile, "He's one of our Fortress 178's people. I've only heard of him, and I didn't expect to bump into him here."

Ren Xiaosu was completely dumbfounded. "He's from Fortress 178?"

"That's right." Zhang Xiaoman smiled and said, "Before we came here, the intelligence director, Wang Fengyuan, called and informed us that someone would receive us at Stronghold 146. He managed to match the code word with us, so that fortune teller is indeed an agent of Fortress 178 assigned here to the Zong Consortium in the north. He's in charge of the planted spies over here."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt that something was amiss. He said unhappily, "That guy's code name is 'Divine Foresight'?"

"No, his code name is 'Great Hoodwinker.' I heard that his code name used to be 'Divine Foresight,' but it was changed to 'Great Hoodwinker' because he's always scamming his comrades of their pay."

Ren Xiaosu suddenly did not feel so good. He had believed 80% of the fortune teller's words. But now that he thought about it, it could have been Zhang Jinglin who told him about Ren Xiaosu having kin who was not related to him by blood.

And he still had the cheek to say, "The Northwest is where you will prosper." Could it be that Zhang Jinglin or Wang Fengyuan were "channeling" their attempts through the Great Hoodwinker to try to make him stay?

Regarding the fortune teller's prediction that the Zong Consortium's higher-ups would be gathering these few days, that was probably intel they had received about a meeting that would be held soon. Then, through the fortune teller, Ren Xiaosu would be guided on how to wipe out the Zong Consortium's higher-ups.

So when Ren Xiaosu asked this Great Hoodwinker to divine his future for him, the man immediately fell silent. How could someone like that fucking be trusted?!

But how did the fortune teller know about Li Qingzheng? Could it be that he was also a swindler during the time he spent in the South?

Even at this moment, Ren Xiaosu was skeptical about him. He felt that there was something strange about this Great Hoodwinker.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Has the Great Hoodwinker always been assigned here in the North?"

"I dunno," Zhang Xiaoman replied.

Ren Xiaosu felt that he wouldn't get to the bottom of this for the time being, so maybe he should treat his injuries first....

While the Razor Sharp Company was firing at the Zong Consortium's troops, Jiao Xiaochen saw Ren Xiaosu using his fingers to directly extract the bullets out of his wounds. He saw Ren Xiaosu in such great pain that his veins were throbbing. His face was flushed red, but he never made a sound.

This group of gruff men from the Razor Sharp Company were totally shocked. Everyone liked to boast about how they were such warriors, especially when it was politically convenient to be known as a warrior back at Fortress 178. If one could not bear hardship, everyone would make fun of them.

But no matter how tough they were, they still wouldn't resort to extracting bullets from their wounds personally.

After the Zong Consortium troops were completely defeated, the entirety of Stronghold 146 was a mess. Zhang Xiaoman and the others gathered around Ren Xiaosu. "Do you need anesthetics? Your wounds look—"

But before they could finish speaking, Ren Xiaosu had already extracted the second bullet. He clenched his teeth and applied the black medicine onto his wounds. "That's OK, I'll recover in three days."

All of a sudden, Zhang Xiaoman and the others heard the rumbling of armored vehicles rolling on hard ground. The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were shocked. "Fuck, could it be that armored brigade?"

They had come across the 131st Brigade at the edge of the Zong Consortium's territory. At that time, they were even chased into hiding in a gully on two occasions.

After the armored brigade left, the captured deputy regimental commander guided the Razor Sharp Company to plunder a military factory and got their hands on some vehicles. Then they took a shortcut and rushed to Stronghold 146.

On the way here, they did not encounter the armored brigade again. As such, they forgot about them.

But when they heard the sound of the armored vehicles, Zhang Xiaoman and the others looked horrified. No matter how ferocious they were earlier, they could not possibly face an armored brigade head on!

"Run! Let's get out of here quickly!" Zhang Xiaoman roared.

Ren Xiaosu asked weakly, "What's the matter?"

"I don't have time to explain. Get into the vehicle!"

With that, a group of people carried Ren Xiaosu into their vehicle. Then they stepped on the gas and drove off in the opposite direction of the armored brigade.

The Zong Consortium troops in front were taking cover at a corner of the street to discuss their countermeasures. The only remaining regimental commander of the Zong Consortium's combat brigade was trying to contact the Zong Consortium's higher-ups, but he realized he could not reach anyone of them.

But when they heard the roaring of engines, someone peeked out and nearly pissed his pants. "They're charging! Regimental Commander, they're charging!"

The regimental commander also quietly sneaked a peek and was surprised to see the Razor Sharp Company's vehicles speeding towards them. The regimental commander nearly pissed his pants as well. "Run, run, run!"

All of a sudden, the entire stronghold was plunged into chaos again.

Chapter 465 - Tears Of Humiliation

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Tears of humiliation

Zheng Yuandong, who was already planning to leave Stronghold 146, was still standing on the roof of the tall building and thinking about life.

But midway through his thoughts, he saw a heavily armed armored brigade entering Stronghold 146 via the east gate.

Zheng Yuandong was a spy whose main responsibility was keeping tabs on the decisions of the Zong Consortium's higher-ups and the movements of their key fighting forces. However, he never heard anything about the Zong Consortium deploying an armored brigade to Stronghold 146 before.

However, he was very familiar with the structure of the Zong Consortium's military forces. He immediately noticed the insignia of those troops and realized it was the 131st Brigade! Didn't these troops get fucking led away by Zong Wu? Why had they come back here again?

The situation in the stronghold right now was basically this: The defeated Zong Consortium troops were being pursued by the Razor Sharp Company, which in turn was being pursued by the armored brigade. It was total pandemonium with everyone driving their vehicles around in panic.

The Zong Consortium troops at the front were driving hastily as they were scared out of their wits by the Razor Sharp Company. They did not even stop their vehicles for a moment as they fled from the east to the west.

After driving for more than ten kilometers, they were about to reach the west gate.

Suddenly, the west gate opened. It seemed that some of the Zong Consortium soldiers were also starting to abandon their posts and had opened the gate to escape.

The regimental commander of the Zong Consortium troops said in a trembling voice, "Of all the troops in the stronghold, why must they chase us?"

A soldier suddenly said, "I think I hear the sound of armored vehicles and tanks behind us."

The regiment commander grew ever more flustered. "What? Fortress 178's armored brigade has arrived as well?"

They could not even see what the situation behind them was, much less notice the unit insignia of the pursuing troops at the rear. As the regimental commander held a very high rank in the military, he knew full well that there were no friendly troops in the vicinity. Therefore, he assumed the sound of the armored vehicles belonged to Fortress 178.

As they fled in panic, their ability to think rationally was destroyed. Although it was unrealistic that Fortress 178's campaign would have reached here already, these troops could no longer think properly. If even Stronghold 146 could be rampaged through by a lone supernatural being, what was impossible?

Zheng Yuandong was stunned by this sight. He watched with his own eyes as the three forces tried to overtake each other until all of them finally disappeared into the distance.

“Whatever, it’s none of my business. I’ll just return to the Qing Consortium.”

The entire Northwest had descended into chaos. If Zheng Yuandong wanted to leave, now was the best time to do so.

After the Razor Sharp Company and armored brigade exited from the stronghold’s west gate, they started driving south. The Zong Consortium troops ahead of them were nearly driven to despair. Didn’t they already escape from the stronghold? So why were those people still chasing after them? Did they not want Stronghold 146 anymore?

Zhang Xiaoman and the Razor Sharp Company did not stop driving or attack the vehicles in front of them.

They were clearly very close to the enemy ahead of them, but there was only one path, and it was only wide enough for two vehicles to drive side by side on. If any vehicles ahead of them rolled over, the Razor Sharp Company would get caught between the wreck and the armored brigade behind them.

Suddenly, one of the Zong Consortium soldiers took a look behind. “Eh, the vehicles they’re driving look like those from our military. Could they share the same radio frequency?”

The regimental commander turned around to have a look and realized it was true.

He immediately had the soldier in the passenger seat try every frequency to see if he could get in touch with the Razor Sharp Company and discuss some workaround to the situation.

Sure enough, after he switched to an encrypted frequency and shouted into it, a reply came from the other end.

The regimental commander was overjoyed. "Friends from Fortress 178, please don't pursue us anymore. We'll be retiring to the countryside to farm, so can you guys please stop?"

However, the other party answered, "No!"

The regimental commander turned furious and shouted, "Do you really have to be so ruthless?"

The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company looked at each other, then at the armored brigade not too far behind them, and realized they did not know how to respond.

The Zong Consortium troops in the front roared, "Then surely we can stop our vehicles! We'll surrender! Fortress 178 doesn't kill captives, right?!"

Zhang Xiaoman was starting to get anxious. "No stopping, keep driving! If you dare stop, I'll kill you!" 'There's only one fucking road out here and the shoulder's full of muck, so if y'all stopped here, wouldn't we get blocked as well?'

When the regimental commander in front heard this, tears of humiliation rolled down his cheeks. 'Why aren't you accepting our surrender? Must you really force us to flee?'

"Could those fucking Fortress 178 troops think that it's fun to torture us like this?"

"That might be possible..."

But at this moment, one of the soldiers finally saw a full view of the armored brigade that was the farthest back while making a large turn. He wondered, "Wait a minute, isn't that armored brigade in the rear our comrades?"

"What?!" The regimental commander was surprised. He did not care about the danger anymore and peeked out to look back. The paint on the exterior of the armored brigade clearly showed them to be their Zong Consortium troops.

The regimental commander picked up the vehicle's walkie-talkie and started laughing arrogantly. "To the pursuing troops of Fortress 178, my advice to you all is to surrender quickly. You're clearly surrounded by us, so what're you trying to bluff!"

But just as he finished speaking, he was greeted by a hail of bullets from behind. The regimental commander was so frightened that his hands trembled again.

Zhang Xiaoman's voice came from over the radio, "My advice to you is to keep driving. We don't know if anything will happen to us, but if you dare stop, y'all will definitely be the first to suffer!"

The Zong Consortium's regimental commander nearly started shedding tears of humiliation again. He swore into the walkie-talkie and said that the Razor Sharp Company would definitely pay the price, and that the Zong Consortium's troops behind them would never let them off.

On the Razor Sharp Company's side, Jiao Xiaochen sat in the back of a truck and wondered, "Wait a minute, even though we're in range of the tank behind us, why didn't they open fire at us? Furthermore, the Zong Consortium's armored brigade is way too quiet back there."

Zhang Xiaoman said unhappily, "Something must be wrong with them. Why else would we have gotten forced into taking cover in the gully twice without being attacked? I think they should've discovered us back then, but I wonder why they didn't open fire on us?"

At that, Ren Xiaosu widened his eyes. "Tell me, what happened?"

Jiao Xiaochen related the incident and said curiously, "I feel that something strange is going on."

A conjecture popped into Ren Xiaosu's mind. He ordered, "Turn, let's not follow these defeated Zong Consortium troops anymore. The armored brigade behind us probably isn't here to attack us but to chase after the Zong Consortium's troops in front of us."

Then the Zong Consortium's troops in front saw the Razor Sharp Company turning into the wilderness through their rearview mirrors. The regimental commander immediately felt a sense of relief. He had been saved. But after being chased around like a dog for so long, how could he just let the matter rest?

The regiment commander shouted to his soldiers, "They've been intimidated by us, but we can't just let them escape like that—"

After the Razor Sharp Company departed, the Zong Consortium troops were the only ones left in front of the armored brigade. With a loud boom, the armored brigade's tank to their rear opened fire!

The Zong Consortium's regimental commander was stunned. He could only watch helplessly as the truck at the back of his convoy suddenly turned into a fireball. "What's going on?"

The soldiers started crying. "Regimental Commander! The armored brigade is here to attack us!"

Chapter 466 - Total Strength

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Total strength: 184, present strength: 183

The other day, when Li Shentan hypnotized the armored brigade, he had ordered that they could only kill the Zong Consortium soldiers and not the innocent.

Li Shentan's hypnotism could be called magical and was different from Zong Cheng's superpower that allowed him to turn a person into an obedient machine. Li Shentan's power allowed him to insert specific commands into a person's subconsciousness.

The targets hypnotized by Li Shentan would even have the ability to think on their own. To put it simply, they could distinguish between who the Zong Consortium soldiers were and who were not.

Although Ren Xiaosu and the Razor Sharp Company were also driving the Zong Consortium's vehicles, they were dressed in refugee clothing.

Therefore, even though the armored brigade was chasing after the Zong Consortium troops from behind, they could not indiscriminately kill the innocent Razor Sharp Company that was blocking their way.

But once the Razor Sharp Company departed from the chase, the armored brigade immediately started firing at the Zong Consortium troops.

How could a group of routed soldiers stand up to a full armored brigade?

Or rather, the strongest defensive unit that remained across the Zong Consortium's strongholds in the entire Northwest right now was Stronghold 146's garrison brigade, with the rest of the Zong Consortium troops still involved in the battle at the front lines.

Therefore, the 131st Brigade did not have any worthy opponents in the rear.

The soldiers of the 131st Brigade were sitting quietly in the armored vehicles. As they had not rested for a long time, dark circles were appearing under their eyes.

But they could not sleep, at least not until the moment they were finally at death's door.

The Razor Sharp Company watched as the armored brigade drove off, then turned to look at Ren Xiaosu. "What's happening?"

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while. "I think someone called Li Shentan might be controlling them."

Ren Xiaosu did not have any actual proof of that, though. Even though their Razor Sharp Company was clearly within range of the armored brigade, they did not get fired upon. Ren Xiaosu just felt that something was off. It was just his intuition.

Thinking of what he had witnessed back at the Li Consortium's stronghold, the people who were hypnotized by Li Shentan would basically push themselves to their limits as though they had gone crazy, so this armored brigade would probably not last much longer either.

Seeing that the armored brigade was heading straight for the next stronghold, Ren Xiaosu thought that Li Shentan might have just done Fortress 178 a huge favor. Or was Li Shentan's intention actually to help Ren Xiaosu?

But no matter what, this armored brigade would definitely bring a great surprise to the Zong Consortium.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "How's the war going for Commander Zhang and the others in the south?"

"It's still going well, but the Zong Consortium is putting up quite a resistance on the battlefield. Although we'll definitely win, there'll have to be some sacrifices on our side as well." Zhang Xiaoman sighed.

"Besides, Xiaosu, the Zong Consortium will definitely plunge into chaos now that you've killed more than half of their higher-ups," Jiao Xiaochen said.

When Ren Xiaosu heard that Fortress 178 could win the war, he felt more at ease. However, the deputy commander who had been captured by them said, "That might not be the case. Zong Ying is the frontline commander of the Zong forces, so he's still pretty well respected by the military. Besides, he's been expanding his influence in recent years too. Because of that, the Zong higher-ups have kept him in check for the past three years. Now that the Zong higher-ups are no longer in control, who knows? He might just take the opportunity to consolidate the Zong Consortium and become the new—"

"That won't do. I'll have to inform the commander about this," interrupted Zhang Xiaoman.

Then he dialed a number on the satellite phone and repeated the deputy commander's words to Wang Fengyuan. However, Wang Fengyuan said, "Don't worry, Zong Ying won't survive beyond tonight."

After saying that, Wang Fengyuan hung up.

Zhang Xiaoman and the others exchanged glances. Ren Xiaosu said, "It seems like Commander Zhang has a plan to deal with him."

Truth be told, Fortress 178 did have contingency plans for that. Ever since Xu Xianchu ambushed the Zong Consortium troops in the Gobi, those contingency plans started taking effect one after another. For example, there were still quite a few lucky survivors from the Zong Consortium's third ancillary branch in Stronghold 146 who were looking to escape, but they were suddenly met by that fortune teller who stopped them from leaving.

At the front lines, Zong Ying did not even know danger was approaching.

After being in hiding for over a decade, Zhang Jinglin had destroyed the Zong Consortium as soon as he returned to the Northwest. From this moment on, Fortress 178 would no longer have any opponents in the Northwest. Only the Qing Consortium and Fortress 178 remained in the entire Southwest and Northwest, which were separated by a river.

If anyone else had gone to ask Wang Fengyuan, he would definitely not have revealed anything to them. Only the Razor Sharp Company could receive such treatment and get some information out of him.

Not everyone was capable of destroying Stronghold 146.

When the Fortress 178 commanders at the front lines heard that Stronghold 146 in the north had been taken by the Razor Sharp Company, jealous expressions appeared on their faces.

Zhang Xiaoman and the Razor Sharp Company had completed their mission. There was basically nothing left for them to do on the battlefield. The Razor Sharp Company had already received their orders to march back south to rendezvous with Zhou Yinglong's Forward Strike Battalion where they would reorganize themselves before returning to Fortress 178.

Zhang Xiaoman said happily, "We'll definitely earn the Nebula Medal this time since half the Zong higher-ups were killed by our Razor Sharp Company. We're clearly just a company, yet it feels like we're a brigade instead."

"Ptui." Jiao Xiaochen scolded jokingly, "You're such a shameless captain. What we achieved was obviously all Ren Xiaosu's credit. What has it got anything to do with you? Without Ren Xiaosu, we might not even have survived to now."

"But Ren Xiaosu is also part of our Razor Sharp Company." Zhang Xiaoman said unhappily, "We're in the same unit, understand?"

As the exhausted soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company sat in the vehicle, they felt a sense of relief. Everyone knew the war in the Northwest was finally coming to an end. The remaining battles had nothing to do with them.

But when everyone thought back on the details, it seemed like it was just as Jiao Xiaochen had described. If Ren Xiaosu were not around in this war, they would probably have died long ago.

They had captured Mt. Dingyuan and Mt. Guan, attacked the Beiwan River to distract the enemy's firepower from the main forces, crossed the river at Mt. Qiangwan into the Zong Consortium's territory, took out the logistic lines of Stronghold 144, wrecked their military factories, and eventually destroyed Stronghold 146 entirely.

It was no wonder the commanders at the front lines felt a little jealous. Although the Razor Sharp Company did not really engage in any tough battles, they had done more than what most of the other fighting forces had contributed, and all of this was even achieved with only 184 of them!

Someone sneaked a glance at Ren Xiaosu, who was sitting in the vehicle. After this war, there would probably be no one who would not be convinced by Ren Xiaosu, right?

Of course, Ren Xiaosu was still far from being qualified as the fortress commander since knowing how to fight and being an able commander were two different matters.

But there was still plenty of time in the future. Everyone felt that this young man would grow up to be like Zhang Jinglin and become the backbone of Fortress 178 someday.

Ren Xiaosu, meanwhile, quietly leaned back in his seat and watched the dust and smoke get swept up by the strong wind in the distance . No one knew what he was thinking right now.

When the troops were about to arrive at the rendezvous point, it was already evening. Zhou Yinglong had been waiting at the entrance of the camp for a long time. Not only Zhou Yinglong, but Wang Fengyuan, Zhang Jinglin, and the other important commanders were here as well.

The rendezvous point was the Northern Headquarters of Fortress 178.

After Zhang Xiaoman and the Razor Sharp Company jumped out of the vehicles and limped, Zhou Yinglong kicked him and said, "Why are you pretending to be injured when you're not?"

Zhang Xiaoman quickly stood to attention and said with a cheeky smile, "It makes us appear even more valiant, no?"

As they spoke, the Razor Sharp Company assembled behind Zhang Xiaoman. Zhang Xiaoman shouted, "Count off!"

"1!"

"2!"

"..."

"182!"

Throughout the counting off, the voices of the Razor Sharp Company's soldiers were sonorous. However, the count-off ended at 182. Zhang Xiaoman thought that something was not right. "Why are we short one person?"

There should be 184 of them in total, including Zhang Xiaoman himself. But why was one of them missing?

Jiao Xiaochen wondered, "Hey, wait a minute, where's Ren Xiaosu?"

"That's right! Where's Ren Xiaosu!"

Zhang Jinglin stood calmly in front of the formation. Many of the commanders had only stayed behind because they wanted to see what that legendary Ren Xiaosu looked like. But in the end, Ren Xiaosu had disappeared?

Zhou Yinglong looked at Zhang Xiaoman. "What's wrong with you? How could you lose Ren Xiaosu?"

Zhang Xiaoman was also starting to get anxious. "Did any of you see Ren Xiaosu just now?"

"Yes, he was still around a moment ago. He was just sitting there in the bed of the truck. I dunno where he suddenly disappeared to."

"Yeah, I saw him as well!"

Zhang Jinglin sighed. "Never mind, leave him be."

Zhang Jinglin knew that Ren Xiaosu had temporarily joined Fortress 178 because of the Zong Consortium. But it was also because of the destruction of the Zong Consortium that he had left again. His heart did not belong here, after all.

Wang Fengyuan whispered, "Could he really have felt estranged?"

Zhang Jinglin shook his head and said, "It's not important." Then Zhang Jinglin looked at Zhang Xiaoman and said, "Carry on."

Zhang Xiaoman stood to attention and swung his hand up energetically close to his ear in a salute. "Reporting in, Commander! The Razor Sharp Company has assembled. ..."

Zhang Xiaoman was full of pride when he spoke. But now that the Razor Sharp Company was short one person, he somehow felt very empty and miserable inside.

Ren Xiaosu actually left without bidding farewell.

Thinking back on the times they spent together for the past month or so, the difficulties and dangers they faced were deeply imprinted in their minds.

As he kept speaking, Zhang Xiaoman grew depressed. Zhou Yinglong snapped at him, "Haven't we already won the war? So what's with that expression of yours?!"

"Battalion Commander, sir! We had made an agreement that no man would get left behind, but we've failed to bring Ren Xiaosu back with us!"

Everyone suddenly fell silent. No one had ever expected that the entire Razor Sharp Company would truly survive the war.

The dying sun blood-red. [1]

[1] This is the last line from the ci poem, Loushan Pass, by Mao Zedong. Mao wrote this poem after the Red Army defeated the KMT after a fierce battle and occupied the pass. | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loushan_Pass |

Fierce the west wind,

Wild geese cry under the frosty morning moon.

Under the frosty morning moon

Horses' hooves clattering,

Bugles sobbing low.

Idle boast the strong pass is a wall of iron,

With firm strides we are crossing its summit.

We are crossing its summit,

The rolling hills sea-blue,

The dying sun blood-red.

Chapter 467 - Zong Cheng's Death

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Zong Cheng's death

As the Zong Consortium's battle continued in the north, an off-road vehicle was speeding towards the Central Plains. The sky was vast and blue while the ground stretched endlessly into the horizon. As the vehicle drove on, it resembled a comet shooting across the sky with an exhaust trail.

It was as though getting here made it feel like the troubles of the war were cast far away.

But instead of taking the main road, this vehicle suddenly made a detour at some point and drove into the extensive mountain range.

The young man deliberately parked the off-road vehicle in an extremely remote place and got out. He took out all of his belongings before pushing them over into a ravine.

He probably did this so no one would discover his whereabouts. This young man was extremely careful and took so many precautions to hide his tracks. In fact, to avoid whatever he was trying to avoid, he even planned to trek across the treacherous mountain range.

The young man wore a backpack. The water and food he had inside were enough for him to trek all the way to the Central Plains on foot.

Suddenly, this young man turned his head and looked at his homeland with a hint of nostalgia and hatred on his face. He promised himself that he would return someday.

But when he turned back around, someone on a small hill in the mountain range ahead smiled at him and said, "What are you looking at?"

The young man was shocked. He turned around and drew a pistol from his waist, ready to shoot. He reacted like a bird startled by the twang of a bow.

But as he turned around, the man sitting on the hill chuckled and snapped his fingers. Then the young man's face turned blank.

"Let's play a game." Li Shentan said with a smile, "The game is called 'Twenty Questions.' So, what's your name?"

“Zong Cheng, Zong Xiang,” the young man answered.

Li Shentan was stunned. “Why do you have two names? Besides, Zong Cheng doesn’t look like you.”

“I used to be called Zong Xiang, but now I’m known as Zong Cheng,” the young man answered. “I planted a seed within Zong Xiang with my superpower and turned him into a puppet.”

Li Shentan was a little surprised. Even he did not expect that Zong Cheng would possess such a power. Thinking about it, wouldn’t this mean that Zong Cheng would be as good as immortal as long as he planted a part of his consciousness in others?

Furthermore, the Zong Consortium’s members had probably not realized this was something that could be done.

Within the Zong Consortium, both Zong Cheng and Zong Xiang could be considered competitors. Since there could only be one patriarch of the organization, there would have to be clearly defined winners and losers.

Both Zong Cheng and Zong Xiang were from the main branch of the family. Previously, some people from the third and fourth ancillary branches tried to sow discord between them, but little did they know that Zong Cheng had put Zong Xiang under his control a long time ago.

Moreover, Zong Xiang continued living in the Zong Consortium like a normal person, so no one discovered that something like that could have happened.

This power was way too strange. If the other organizations’ leaders were to also fall under Zong Cheng’s control, wouldn’t it be extremely easy for him to bring them down?

Although Zong Cheng could only control a small number of people, Li Shentan had not expected this power could actually get branched into a different power.

Li Shentan asked, "Do you have any other 'seeds' out there? Is it the same for everyone you gain control over?"

"No." Zong Xiang said, "The seeds are extremely rare. Only by controlling a fixed group of people for an extended time can I draw on their mental strength to create the seeds. There was supposed to be another seed out there, but I didn't have the chance to use it."

"That's good." Li Shentan said with a smile, "It's such a disgrace that I have a similar power as someone like you."

At this point, a flash of anger and struggle appeared on Zong Xiang's face. It was as though he was trying to break free from Li Shentan's control. But before he could really react, his consciousness was once again suppressed by Li Shentan.

Li Shentan's superpower seemed to be a natural "nemesis" against other mind controlling supernatural beings such as Zong Cheng.

Li Shentan posed a few more questions to him regarding the Zong Consortium's war efforts and found out that the Zong Consortium was plagued by multiple crises and could no longer resist Fortress 178.

He also found out about how the 131st Brigade had gone back to Stronghold 146 and caused a huge ruckus there.

Li Shentan said with a helpless smile, "To think that rather than helping, I nearly got in his way instead? But what happened sounds quite interesting."

To someone like Li Shentan, interesting things had become something he looked forward to in life.

"Alright!" Li Shentan thought for a moment and said, "That's it for my questioning. You can end your life now."

When he said that, Zong Xiang's expression suddenly distorted. It seemed like there was a constant struggle between unacceptance and anger within him. Li Shentan sighed and said, "It seems that I'm still not strong enough to make a supernatural being choose between life and death."

Then Li Shentan picked up a stone and flicked it between Zong Xiang's eyes. Only at this time could Zong Cheng be considered truly dead.

Off to the side, Si Liren looked at Zong Xiang's corpse, used to seeing things like this. "Big Brother Shentan, where do we go now? To Fortress 178?"

"No." Li Shentan shook his head and said, "I think Ren Xiaosu will probably leave the Fortress 178 troops very soon. That's not where he wants to be, at least not for now."

"Then where are we going?"

"We should go and do something more interesting," Li Shentan said with a smile. He looked at the case on Si Liren's back and teased, "When they said you were a carrying pole back then, I didn't believe it at first."

Si Liren wrinkled her nose. "I'm not a carrying pole. Stop calling me that."

"Sure, little carrying pole."

Li Shentan turned around and headed off in the direction of the Central Plains. Hu Shuo was nowhere to be seen, and no one knew where he had gone.

...

The war in the north continued. Zong Ying, the commander at the front lines, immediately summoned all of the Zong Consortium's generals at the battlefield to a meeting after receiving news that Stronghold 146 was in trouble.

But the moment the generals stepped in to the headquarters, they were immediately arrested. Then Zong Ying arranged for his trusted aide to carry out the consolidation process.

Of the generals here, Zong Ying had the most troops under him. The other generals had not expected Zong Ying to be so ruthless and decisive to arrest them immediately after trouble broke out back at Stronghold 146.

Zong Ying said to them, “The Zong Consortium is currently facing a crisis, so we need to be united.”

What he meant by “united” was that they should submit to Zong Ying and let him lead them. And since everyone was arrested, they could not refuse his proposal to unite together.

The Zong Consortium’s generals looked at one another. They were not expecting Zong Ying to immediately bare his fangs now that the majority of the Zong Consortium’s higher-ups had been taken out or injured.

But one of the generals could not understand. “We’ve already been defeated in the war. Even if you control all of the frontline troops now, you still can’t win against Fortress 178, isn’t that so?”

“We’ll head north.” Zong Ying said, “We have to continue marching north of Stronghold 146. This place isn’t safe anymore. We can rebuild when we get farther north and wait for our chance to make a comeback.”

The generals were taken aback. Was Zong Ying planning on bringing everyone to the Northern Steppe? Were they supposed to completely abandon everything they currently had?

Not only that, Zong Ying was even planning to take these frontline troops on a pillaging expedition as they made their way north. They would take whatever valuable items from the Zong Consortium’s strongholds and turn them into ruins.

As for what would happen to the stronghold residents after that, it was something for Fortress 178 to consider.

Someone asked, "How should we shake off the pursuit from the Fortress 178 troops?"

"I'll have Zong Xing to help me deal with them, of course. If we head another 170 kilometers north, we'll arrive at Fuzhi Bridge. After we cross it, we can blow up the bridge. Since it will take several days for Fortress 178 to build a pontoon bridge, there'll be enough time for us to make our retreat," Zong Ying explained.

Zong Xing was one of the few veteran generals left in the Zong Consortium. When everyone started to withdraw from the front lines, Zong Xing still held his ground and fought for every inch of territory.

Normally, neither the younger generals nor the veteran generals were too fond of each other. The veterans always felt that the young ones did not feel a sense of belonging to the clan.

But what Zong Ying uttered here decided the fate of Zong Xing.

Zong Ying looked at the Zong Consortium's generals and said with a smile, "There'll always be a need for sacrifices in war. Of course, what I mean is the sacrifice of others."

Chapter 468 - Zong Ying's Death

We are gradually moving the data to a new site. You can read and request novels at: MixedNovel.Net

468 Zong Ying's death

The Zong Consortium troops at Mt. Wuchuan were suddenly withdrawn, and only one unit was left behind to put up a stubborn resistance at the most dangerous position on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the rest of the troops started plundering through their own territory. The Zong Consortium strongholds in the north were being looted by their own forces.

On the same evening, Zong Ying's troops arrived at Fuzhi Bridge. As he stood on the bridge and watched the transport vehicles passing by, he suddenly sighed and said to his second-in-command next to him, "I wonder when we can return after going north this time. Remember, bring along the refugee fishermen from the various strongholds, as well as those who specialize in animal husbandry."

In reality, Zong Ying had already been scheming to retreat north for some time. He had not expected things to go so smoothly and that someone would actually give him a hand in getting rid of the majority of the Zong Consortium's higher-ups.

The Northern Steppe was situated outside of the stronghold perimeter. It was a place where wild beasts ran rampant.

But what threat could those wild beasts possibly pose to professional soldiers?

His second-in-command said, "A lot of our troops have deserted over the past few days, but they've all been caught and killed."

"Well, it's very normal that some people tried to escape." Zong Ying said with a smile, "In their opinion, they would rather become refugees than go north to herd sheep. Don't worry, killing a few people and streamlining our troops as we make our way there isn't exactly a bad thing, and we can make use of it to intimidate the other soldiers as well. After all, it'll be a tough life from now on."

For now, Zong Ying wanted to use an extreme form of coercion to band these routed Zong Consortium troops together and bring them north.

These troops would be his investment.

They wouldn't even need an armored brigade once they get to the Northern Steppe. After all, mechanized troops would be useless without fuel.

His second-in-command asked, "Commander, when can we return here?"

"We'll return when Fortress 178 and the Qing Consortium start fighting." Zong Ying laughed and said, "No two tigers can share the same mountain, so there'll definitely come such a day. How can Qing Zhen possibly give up on the lucrative North when he's such an ambitious person? Let's go, we'll just wait and see."

In truth, Zong Ying did not know whether he could return here. Even if Fortress 178 and the Qing Consortium started fighting, the Zong Consortium would not have the strength to re-enter the stage. They would only be able to watch others perform on the stage while waiting in the wings.

But politics was always a mixture of truth and lies. Even if Zong Ying did not have any intention of returning, he could not tell his soldiers. Only by giving these people a glimmer of hope would he be allowed the time to consolidate his power.

All of a sudden, a water arrow shot out from the river under the bridge. Zong Ying was utterly shocked when he sensed danger. No one expected such a surprising turn of events to happen here!

This was an attack by a supernatural being!

Zong Ying quickly pulled his second-in-command in front of him to block the water arrow attack. But when the water arrow was about to hit, it suddenly lost shape and transformed into many fine water needles.

Zong Ying hid his entire body behind his second-in-command. In that instant, his second-in-command was riddled by the needles.

The nearby supernatural being who was responsible for protecting Zong Ying finally reacted and spat a cloudy mist.

The cloudy mist transformed into a majestic hawk in the air and hovered over Zong Ying's head, ready to protect him at all times.

But before Zong Ying could breathe a sigh of relief, a huge, translucent killer whale jumped out of the turbulent river and leaped over the bridge.

The killer whale was formed from water. As it leaped over everyone's heads and landed back into the river, it caught the hawk in midair and dragged it down into the water.

The supernatural being next to Zong Ying coughed up blood and collapsed to the ground with a depressed look.

However, the attack did not stop there. Suddenly, some dark clouds started gathering in the sky and snowflakes began falling.

The falling snowflakes were as sharp as blades, and they quickly pierced through Zong Ying's chest before disintegrating into nothingness.

Zong Ying fell to the ground.

This ambitious general of the Zong Consortium failed to realize his ambitions in the end. But there was nothing much to feel indignant about before he died. The supernatural attack he witnessed here today was obviously not done by a single person. Several supernatural beings had worked together to ensure he was killed.

And the variation of attacks in the water clearly told Zong Ying that his successful destruction of the pontoon bridge at Blackstone River that day was just a deception to trick him into thinking that Fortress 178 was out of retreating options, and it was not that they could do nothing about those speedboats he sent.

Before Zong Ying died, he gave a mental sigh. The old era was over, after all.

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After being briefed, Wang Fengyuan looked at Zhang Jinglin and said, "Commander, Zong Ying is dead. Just as you had expected, they were intending to leave via Fuzhi Bridge. Commander's foresight is amazing!"

Zhang Jinglin said with a smile, "So you've also learned how to flatter others, huh? If their intentions were to shake us off, that was the only route they could have taken. This isn't about having amazing foresight."

Everyone thought Fortress 178 did not really have any supernatural beings in their service, but that was not the case at all.

In Wang Fengyuan's words, "Their superpowers came from being frozen."

The soldiers had suffered daily hardships at the border outposts. In winter, their breaths would even condense into ice when they exhaled. That freezing and harsh environment hammered out their strongest willpower.

But it was not enough to just freeze. They also had to possess the most sincere belief in the world.

Did the soldiers choose to be in such a harsh environment for themselves? Of course not! Was it for meritorious service and promotion? It was not that either.

They did it because they wanted to protect the stronghold.

Therefore, belief and hardship were indispensable factors for the awakening of their superpowers.

Yang Xiaojin had once said to Ren Xiaosu, "When a disaster comes, mental strength becomes the highest caliber of weapon humanity has in the face of danger."

While wild animals evolved to become stronger, and plants turned more bizarre, what was it that humans had? Evolution of mental strength was the proper path for humans to embark on.

But of course, it didn't mean that everyone would become supernatural beings just because they had suffered hardships. The secret force in Fortress 178 that was made up of supernatural beings was also another secret that Wang Fengyuan kept.

Wang Fengyuan continued, "Commander, the frontline troops have captured a supernatural being. He's the one that can locate other supernatural beings. According to him, he found an opportunity to escape after the 131st Brigade defected. He intended to return to the front line at Mt. Wuchuan, but he got captured by us instead."

"Oh?" Zhang Jinglin's interest was piqued. "Bring him in."

Then the supernatural being was pushed into the headquarters by several people outside. It was a plump young man, and he was shouting, "I can help you guys locate other supernatural beings. After you find them, you can round them up and place them under your control. I'm very useful, so don't kill me!"

Zhang Jinglin asked him with great interest, "What is your effective detection range?"

"I can locate any supernatural being within the radius of a 100 kilometers." The delicate-looking supernatural being shouted, "There must be more supernatural beings hidden in Fortress 178. I can help you to find them."

Chapter 469 Alliance

Zhang Jinglin looked at the supernatural being in front of him and said with a smile, "Do you have any other superpowers? What's your name?"

"My name is Xun Yeyu." The fair-skinned fatty said, "And no, I don't have any other powers."

Zhang Jinglin nodded and said to Wang Fengyuan, "Bring him to Fortress 178 and see if we can locate any other supernatural beings living there. However, there's no need to force them to join us. Just record their powers in a register."

Xun Yeyu's eyes widened. "You're only registering them? Aren't you going to place them under your control so they'll work for you?"

"Our Fortress 178 does not need to resort to restricting the freedom of others in exchange for their strength." Zhang Jinglin said with a smile, "Have a nice stay in Fortress 178, and don't get yourself involved in the war anymore."

Then Zhang Jinglin had someone take Xun Yeyu away.

The Zong Consortium had completely lost control of their strongholds in the north. Actually, Zhang Jinglin knew that Zong Ying would withdraw from the front line, but he did not try to stop him.

If those troops put up a fierce resistance at Mt. Wuchuan, it would only serve to increase the casualties that Fortress 178 suffered.

Furthermore, since Zong Ying had taken the initiative to pull out of the battlefield with his troops, would the remaining generals who harbored their own plans be able to organize an effective resistance the moment Zong Ying died?

Some of them would simply occupy a stronghold in hopes they could become the overseer. But once the Fortress 178 army arrived, these people would immediately lose will and surrender the stronghold.

Everything they did was futile in the face of overwhelming strength.

Fortress 178 had already deployed an extremely professional team to handle the takeover of the strongholds. This unit had a very clear purpose and operated meticulously. They would forcefully clean up the old ruling hierarchy in the strongholds by killing them.

This directive had been established long ago as Fortress 178 did not have time to deal with such pests courteously.

At this moment, Wang Shengzhi's organization sent another delegation to discuss the matter of opening up the transportation lifeline with Fortress 178.

Previously, they did not have an in-depth discussion about it because Zhang Jinglin had yet to conquer the entire Northwest.

The consortium Wang Shengzhi belonged to was extremely influential and powerful in the Central Plains, and they formed a triumvirate with two other consortiums. The remaining consortiums in the region simply served to accentuate the big three, or perhaps, just had no ambitions to expand further.

Therefore, Wang Shengzhi previously stated to Zhang Jinglin that both sides would get their demands. Fortress 178 wanted the resources of the Central Plains, while the Central Plains was eyeing the resources that Fortress 178 had. However, the Wang clan would only deal with whoever was fully in control of the Northwest. Otherwise, it would be meaningless.

Although Wang Shengzhi had rushed to make the trip to the Northwest, it did not mean he would bend his principles to reach a deal.

Now that Zhang Jinglin had become the ruler of the Northlands, they could finally start discussing all kinds of deals.

However, Zhang Jinglin simply smiled and expressed that he was not qualified to be the ruler of the Northlands. How could a frail scholar be worthy of such a title? But someday, a new ruler would surely appear in the Northwest, and that was something that even he was eagerly awaiting.

The representatives of the Wang clan were a little surprised. Why did the words “a new ruler would surely appear someday” sound like what the ancient tribes would say? And it even carried a hint of feudal superstition too?

Zhang Jinglin said with a smile, “That was what our Great Hoodwinker claimed, but I believe that person will definitely return someday.”

There were only a few key points brought up in the discussion.

They first talked about the minerals and resources Wang Shengzhi needed, then discussed how to set the prices and what resources would be exchanged between the two sides, as well as how to collect the tariffs. Then they proceeded to talk about how to build the controlled access highway to link up the Northwest and the Central Plains and how it would be managed. Wang Shengzhi’s intention was that they would take charge of restoring all the accessways, whether it was the railway or the highway.

However, Zhang Jinglin rejected Wang Shengzhi’s goodwill and expressed that the Northwestern people should resolve the issues in the Northwest by themselves. The Northwestern people would restore the Northwestern accessways, while the Central Plains people would repair the Central Plains portion. That way, neither party would be on the losing side.

Third, Wang Shengzhi proposed they send troops to expel the wild beasts in the vicinity of the trading routes so as not to affect the safety. However, that offer was also turned down by Zhang Jinglin.

Seeing that they were planning to construct a railway that led to the Central Plains from the Northwest, the commanders of the fighting forces of Fortress 178 did not know whether it was a good thing or not.

But in the end, Zhang Jinglin still felt it would not be feasible for them to remain content with staying here in the corner of the Northwest for the long term. If they had to face the enemies further northwest, they would have to obtain the resources they were lacking to progress.

What surprised Zhang Jinglin was that Wang Shengyin, the younger sister of Wang Shengzhi, was still part of the delegation this time.

Wang Shengyin was also a little fatigued after having to travel back here again from the Central Plains. But when she arrived at the headquarters of Fortress 178, she pretended to casually ask about Ren Xiaosu’s whereabouts. She asked why she had not seen Ren Xiaosu around, and if he was injured or had been killed in action.

It was only then that she learned of all the things Ren Xiaosu had done in the North, including his departure from Fortress 178 without farewell.

Even the people of Fortress 178 did not know where Ren Xiaosu had gone.

Wang Shengyin appeared a little crestfallen at this.

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At the same time the visitors from the Wang clan were here, Luo Lan represented the Qing Consortium and also dropped by the Northlands. He was here to discuss an alliance between them and Fortress 178.

Luo Lan's offer was clear: Both sides would get along as friendly neighbors and not interfere with each other's affairs, as well as cooperate with each other to guard against the Central Plains.

In other words, he regarded the Central Plains as potential enemies and wanted to prevent them from plotting against the Southwest and Northwest.

Of course, there were also disagreements about this among the commanders of Fortress 178. "The Qing Consortium is overly ambitious. They can't afford to deal with us yet as they are currently busy taking over the Li Consortium and Yang Consortium's strongholds. If we get along peacefully with them now, what'll happen when they start a war with us in the future?"

"That's right. I heard that the Experimentals in the South are giving them a headache. After the Qing Consortium's main forces captured the front line at Ziyang, they immediately turned around and headed back south. This shows that the Qing Consortium does not have the capacity to deal with us for now. That's why they're suggesting that we get along peacefully."

Zhang Jinglin glanced at them and said, "I've already made up my mind to sign an alliance treaty with the Qing Consortium. However, there's one condition we must reject. We cannot allow the Qing Consortium to build their railway to connect with ours."

Wang Fengyuan said in a low voice, "Commander, the concerns everyone's brought up are valid too."

Zhang Jinglin sighed and said, "If another war breaks out at this time, wouldn't our situation be the exact same to what the Qing Consortium is going through? If we start warring again, the Qing Consortium's main forces will immediately be deployed here to the North. Then the South will truly become a paradise for the Experimentals. If that happens, who knows how many people will have to die?"

Wang Fengyuan understood what Zhang Jinglin meant. He intended to let the Qing Consortium focus on dealing with the threat of the Experimentals first.

That was the most crucial matter for now.

"What else does that Fatty Luo want?" Zhang Jinglin asked.

"He's also looking for Ren Xiaosu." Wang Fengyuan said, "I told him that Ren Xiaosu has already left our territory."

Nearby, one of the generals muttered, "Why are all of them looking for Ren Xiaosu? This is so odd."

Half a month later, the Razor Sharp Company was the first of the troops to return to Fortress 178. When they entered the fortress, the residents lined the streets to welcome them back. Someone held up a red banner that read: "Welcome home, war heroes!"

Zhang Xiaoman wore the Nebula Medal on his chest. This award was the highest honor he could receive in Fortress 178.

There was a joyous atmosphere on both sides of the street as children followed behind the military transport trucks. A middle-aged woman stuffed whole baskets of eggs into their vehicles, while Lu Yao, the goddess of the fortress, organized a concert put on by the cultural troupe for these victorious warriors.

When Lu Yao saw them, she also asked, "Which one of you is Ren Xiaosu?" However, Zhang Xiaoman and the others were at a loss for words.

Looking at the cheering crowd in the fortress, Zhang Xiaoman really wished Ren Xiaosu could be here to enjoy this honor with them.

They were only given this honor because of Ren Xiaosu.

Zhang Xiaoman had another Nebula Medal in his possession that belonged to Ren Xiaosu. For now, it would be placed with him for safekeeping.

Zhang Xiaoman somehow felt that the young man would return someday. At that time, he would personally help Ren Xiaosu wear the Nebula Medal.

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Chapter 470 The Anjing House

Stronghold 73 was located at the intersection of three rivers in the south of the Central Plains, but come every summer, the blazing hot sun in the sky would vaporize the water in the river.

When the seasonal plum rain^[1] passed over the middle and lower reaches of the river, the high atmospheric pressure system would affect airflow in the lower altitudes and inhibit rain clouds from forming, leading to summer droughts as the surface temperatures reached extreme highs.

As such, Stronghold 73 was also known as "The Furnace."

In an official residence on the north side of Longyang Avenue, some people were arguing endlessly in a clan meeting that was in progress. More than a dozen luxury cars were parked in the square outside the official residence. The chauffeurs were standing in a corner smoking and chatting as they waited for the big shots to come out.

Inside the conference room, someone said in a loud voice, "The Wang clan in the north has already opened up their trade route with the Northwest. If we let them carry on developing, wouldn't that make us sitting ducks?"

Someone retorted, "Don't always be spoiling for a fight. Our priority now should be to continue our spread east. The Qinghe Group over there cannot be underestimated."

The person who made the retort was a bearded, middle-aged man. He had a calm look on his face, and his black tie and dark blue military uniform made him appear exceptionally solemn.

The person who spoke earlier sneered, "Zhou Shiji, the Qinghe Group is content with exercising sovereignty within their own territory and has never gotten involved in any competition for resources in the Central Plains. What's there to be afraid of? I don't think you realize yet who our true enemy is."

"It's not that I deem the Qinghe Group to be an enemy, but I've heard that they've mastered how to create superhumans. My opinion's that we should get our hands on a similar method first." The bearded, middle-aged man adjusted the pen and paper in front of him and placed them neatly together.

"But they don't seem to have that many superhumans in their organization," someone else countered.

"In this current climate, it's time that we start paying more attention to superhumans."

Internal strife was playing out between the main and conservative factions of the clan, but this meeting was destined to have no outcome.

It took another two hours before these Zhou Consortium big shots finally walked out of the official residence. One by one, the important figures from the conservative faction bid farewell to the representative of their faction, Zhou Shiji. There was even someone who invited him for drinks, but he turned them down.

As Zhou Shiji walked down the gravel road in front of the official residence, the protocol officers and security personnel were waiting in front of the car. After the protocol officer opened the car door for Zhou Shiji, Zhou Shiji nodded at him before getting into the car.

The luxury black car drove out of the official residence with two motorcycle escorts in front and behind. The assistant officer sitting in the front passenger seat held a document and said, "The people who met up with the Qinghe Group have returned. They said the other party rejected our proposal as usual."

Zhou Shiji was resting with his eyes closed and his expression showed no signs of being affected.

Someone was watching the movement of the convoy with a pair of military binoculars on a roof of a tall building in the distance. When the person was sure of it, he turned around and brought out three white doves from a cage behind him and tossed them into the sky.

The sound of the white doves' flapping wings would make anyone joyful.

Elsewhere, someone was cautiously hiding in a residence and watching that tall building.

When he saw three doves taking flight from the tall building, he said to his three armed companions next to him, "The target is taking the route that was briefed to us. Get ready to fight."

"This assassination attempt can only succeed. Failure is unacceptable!"

“Do you think we’ll get the chance to join the Anjing House after we pull off this job?”

Based on what they said, the Anjing House sounded like an organization rather than a temple. After all, it didn’t make sense that one would only be able to join a temple after killing people.

But at this moment, a young man suddenly walked out from the shadows next to them. He let out a foul breath and said with a grin, “I’ve finally found y’all. However, the Anjing House is not a place that characters like you can join.”

These four hitmen quickly pointed their guns at the young man. “Where’d you pop out of? Were you hiding in the kitchen all this while?”

Holding a glass of juice in his hand, the young man chuckled softly and said, “Don’t get so anxious. Let me finish my juice first.”

As he spoke, the four hitmen’s gun barrels twisted like a pastry twist.

Five minutes later, the young man walked out of the building. There was a bright scarlet stain on his white shirt that indicated the fate of the four hitmen in the building.

He frowned at the sight of the bloodstain, then reached up to wipe it clean.

When the stronghold bell rang out in the distance, the white doves in Ping’an Square got alarmed by the sound and took off into the sky.

Then the young man took out a paper crane from his pocket and wrote on it, “Mission accomplished. Please deposit the commission into my account. The targets are extras that don’t know who the mastermind is.”

After the message was written, the paper crane took flight into the sky by itself and crossed the turbulent river, going north.

This paper crane would help to bring back news of what had happened here. As it flew among the white doves, it did not look out of place at all.

As for where the paper crane would fly to, the young man did not know either.

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On a mountain road in the north, a young man was trekking across the treacherous mountains. He was moving down the river, apparently searching for something along the way. But at the same time, he seemed afraid he would miss something.

The mountains here were yellowish brown, and only after heading further east did the landscape start transforming into a grassy green.

The young man looked a little disappointed when he did not find any tracks here.

But it was also a good thing that he did not see any corpses since that would mean the people he was looking for might still be alive.

He walked and walked until half a month had passed. Actually, he could probably have crossed the mountain range within four or five days if he had traveled at full speed. But as he was searching for tracks along the way, it delayed his travels by quite a bit.

The young man slowed when he heard a ruckus up ahead. Before he could walk much further, he saw a group of refugee workers in safety helmets cutting wood.

When these workers saw the young man, they were stunned. "Friend, where did you come from? Why did you walk out of the mountain range?"

"Actually, I lost my way and got here by accident. I'm from the Northwest." The young man said with a smile, "Bros, where are y'all from?"

"We're lumberjack refugees from Stronghold 61." The oldest lumberjack wondered, "The Northwest? A lot of people fleeing there have arrived here recently. I heard that there's a war going on. Did you escape from the war?"

"Yes." The young man smiled and said, "I escaped here to get away from the war. The fighting there is too deadly."

"Oh, I heard that the superhumans over there are extremely powerful. Someone escaped from Stronghold 146 and is staying in our town. They claimed that Stronghold 146 was destroyed by a young superhuman. Are the superhumans these days that fearsome? They can even destroy a stronghold by themselves?"

The young man was stunned before replying with a smile, "I dunno about that. I haven't been to Stronghold 146 before."

"Oh, news doesn't really flow that well over there, so it's understandable that you don't know about it." The lumberjack nodded. "My name is Xu Yahui. If you're lost, you can come back with us later and settle down in town. But you definitely won't be allowed into the stronghold. Friend, how should I address you?"

The young man smiled. "Thank you, bro, I'm Ren Xiaosu."