

Chapter 561 Defending the city

In the past, no one from the three consortiums in the Southwest had thought of the Experimentals as a threat before. This was because the consortiums believed they were just a bunch of unintelligent beasts. They thought they could get rid of the Experimentals once and for all after they were done settling their inter-consortium matters.

But by the time Qing Yi headed to the south to take care of the Experimentals problem, the Qing Consortium came to realize that the intelligent being among the Experimentals was not easy to deal with.

As of now, humans would have to treat the Experimentals as beings with the same intelligence level and carefully deal with them.

For example, right now, the Zhou Consortium troops would have never expected the Experimentals to be holding the refugees and captive soldiers as hostages to advance towards the stronghold. This made the Zhou Consortium commander standing on the stronghold walls very troubled.

Although the commander of the Zhou Consortium troops had calmly given the order to open fire, there were still the elderly and children among the refugees held hostage. After this battle was over, this commander of the Zhou Consortium troops would very likely be bugged by his conscience.

Not everyone could be fully cold-blooded and heartless. He was only making the most rational and calm choice based on the situation.

The heavy machine guns mounted atop the stronghold walls started firing. In the dark of the night, the muzzle flashes produced were like fire-spitting dragons. It even resembled meteors shooting across the sky.

Everyone on the stronghold walls was watching this sight quietly. Old Li and Qin Sheng saw the refugees being ripped apart by the bullets, and some of them were even people they knew. Just recently, they had delivered some medicine to those refugees and received a basketful of wild chicken eggs in return.

Old Li had promised them at the time that he would purchase some coats for twelve of the refugee children. But before he could get the clothes for them, those twelve children had perished.

However, neither Old Li nor Qin Sheng stopped the Zhou Consortium troops from opening fire, because they knew this was the best option they had. Although the Riders were honorable people, they were never taught to be benevolent.

Amid the gunfire, the Experimentals mixed into the crowd of people were also shot by the heavy machine guns. When they realized the humans had opened fire, they immediately pulled back.

They retreated out of the heavy machine guns' range at the fastest possible speed and disappeared into the forest.

Some of the machine gunners seemed to have gone crazy as they kept shooting at the Experimentals even though they were running off. However, this group of Experimentals seemed to have undergone some kind of training. While they were retreating, they even did so by running in zigzag patterns and trying their best to avoid getting shot.

The commander of the Zhou Consortium troops had already tried his best to draw in the Experimentals so that they could cut off their retreat. But this time, their barrage of gunfire was only able to kill several hundred Experimentals at most. As the Experimentals fled, the garrison troops on the stronghold walls were also able to see for themselves just how much strength these creatures had.

However, before the garrison troops could breathe a sigh of relief, the other garrison troops in the south suddenly roared on the radio that they were under attack!

“What’s going on? Didn’t the Experimentals just retreat?” someone said in a stunned voice.

“This is bad. That was just a feint earlier!” the commander of the Zhou Consortium’s troops said, clenching his teeth.

Earlier, the Experimentals had mobilized a large number of forces to attack the stronghold. They even forced all the refugees to move in front as shields for them and pretended they were going to attack the stronghold from this side.

As a result, the Zhou Consortium’s troops had to resort to transferring some troops away from the south and north gates at the last minute in a desperate attempt to defend this side of the stronghold. However, those reinforcements had only managed to get halfway to the western walls when they received orders to turn around and head back to their original positions.

It turned out that even though the Experimentals at the west gate had looked like they were launching a very powerful attack, it was only used to divert the attention of the stronghold’s garrison. In fact, the Experimentals had other plans that now seemed even more devious than they expected.

The commander of the Zhou Consortium troops issued an order on the radio frequency. “Defend the south gate! We must not allow the Experimentals to ascend the stronghold walls!”

Just five minutes earlier, everyone had witnessed how strong the Experimentals were. If such monsters were to climb the stronghold walls and engage them in close combat, it would probably only take ten minutes for their entire defense network at the southern walls to collapse.

As he spoke, the commander of the Zhou Consortium troops could already see Old Li and Qin Sheng rushing towards the south gate. Even the Pyro Company’s 15 members followed close behind.

Both parties were very decisive in their actions. Once there was danger of the south side falling to the Experimentals, they knew exactly where they were needed most.

If the Experimentals managed to get to the top of the stronghold walls, they were the only ones who could drive them back down.

Ren Xiaosu quietly watched through his spotting scope from high ground in the distance. However, he did not know what was happening.

He could only see small, blurry, black figures atop the stronghold walls dashing madly towards the south. Could more Experimentals have appeared at the south gate?

However, Ren Xiaosu still did not make his move. He was considering if he should even participate in this battle.

During the mad dash to the southern walls, the difference in strength between the Riders and the Pyro Company members became obvious. The two Riders were running ahead without even needing to catch their breaths. Furthermore, they were pulling farther and farther away from the Pyro Company members. Behind them, the Pyro Company members desperately tried to catch up to Old Li and Qin Sheng, but they just couldn't do so.

One of the commanders of the Pyro Company members suddenly said, "Don't try to keep up with them. We're just gonna tire ourselves out if we do that. Save our energy and prepare for close combat later. We mustn't let the Experimentals get up on the walls."

The garrison troops in the south could hold the defenses for a while. Meanwhile, it would take time for the Riders to rush from the western walls to the southern walls. It would take at least twenty minutes for them to get there. Old Li and Qin Sheng could only pray that the Zhou Consortium's garrison troops on the southern walls fought hard enough to not fall to a quick defeat!

Now, Ren Xiaosu was also rushing towards the south side. He thought that if Old Li and Qin Sheng could not hold the line, he could at least help if he were closer to the area.

Ren Xiaosu thought that if the Pyro Company members he had always been annoyed with were willing to take a stand at this time, how could he continue to sit idle? Would that not make him worse than the people he hated?

Everyone was running madly about. The Zhou Consortium troops that were returning to their positions in the south were also sprinting on top of the stronghold walls. But as they ran, Old Li and Qin Sheng slowly overtook them.

Ren Xiaosu was also leaping from roof to roof inside the stronghold. However, before he could get close to the walls, the two Riders had already arrived at the south gate. Just as Old Li and Qin Sheng got there, the Experimentals managed to climb to the top of the walls. Kicking off hard against the wall, their fully gray figures pounced, like they were flying, towards the heavy machine guns mounted at the top of the walls. It seemed that they were most afraid of those weapons now. The first group of Experimentals that ascended the walls were on a mission to destroy all of their opponent's heavy firepower!

But before they could do so, Old Li collided into an Experimental in midair with the strength of an off-road vehicle and sent it hurtling down to the bottom of the stronghold.

Ren Xiaosu immediately found another vantage point to watch everything unfold through his spotting scope. He could see that whenever Old Li threw his punches, there would be a dazzling radiance in the

follow-through. Even though Old Li was several meters away from the other Experimentals, he could still land those dazzling punches on them through the air!

It was not only Old Li who could do that. Even Qin Sheng was fighting in a similar style. The dazzling radiance followed every punch they threw!

Ren Xiaosu was stunned by what he saw through the spotting scope. What the hell was this? Were Old Li and Qin Sheng this fearsome? It was no wonder they dared to stroll around in the wilderness so freely.

Chapter 562 Wave after wave

Old Li and Qin Sheng worked very well together. Their combat style seemed to be mainly focused on Old Li as the lead fighter while Qin Sheng stayed at his side to complement his attacks. The dozen or so Experimentals that had climbed up the stronghold walls were actually unable to get near them for a while. Any time an Experimental tried to get close to Old Li, it would immediately get knocked back by Qin Sheng with a punch or be sent flying down to the bottom of the stronghold walls.

Ren Xiaosu could see through his spotting scope that the young man named Qin Sheng was still not used to his power yet. So he was not as confident in combat as Old Li was. But even so, Qin Sheng's punches were still capable of breaking the Experimentals' bones.

While Old Li and Qin Sheng were fighting the Experimentals, the Pyro Company members also arrived. They immediately formed a new line of defense around the two Riders to stop any Experimentals that had just climbed up the wall. The Pyro Company members had willingly become Old Li's support, with the battle solely centered around Old Li.

The strength of Pyro Company had always been measured by the quantity, not quality, of its members. Of course, this did not apply to their more advanced fighting forces.

At the very least, those in the Midnight and Dusk squads were well aware of their own capabilities. That was why they always fought in teams of five.

For example, to fight head-on against a Rider-level supernatural being like Old Li, their Dusk squad would require at least 15 members.

Of course, this was only hypothetical. The relationship between the Pyro Company and the Riders was still very good, so there was no reason for them to fight.

Mass producing supernatural beings was what the Pyro Company was strong at.

The 17 supernatural beings on the stronghold walls were moving together like a sharp arrow, with Old Li spearheading the attacks on the Experimentals. Wherever he went, the others would follow and give him their support.

Only by constantly taking down the Experimentals that had climbed up the stronghold walls could the Zhou Consortium's troops continue using their heavy firepower to cut off the advancement of the Experimentals emerging from the forest in the distance.

Old Li also knew their role was to engage in close combat with the Experimentals atop the stronghold walls. As for killing the Experimentals on a larger scale, they would still have to rely on firearms to

achieve that. Therefore, they would have to guard this area, as the Zhou Consortium troops were the true protectors of the city.

At this moment, the Zhou Consortium troops that had responded to the reinforcement calls at the western walls earlier finally got back. They did not even look at the battle on Old Li's side and immediately started setting up a new firing point not too far away.

A soldier said in fear, "Sir, the Experimentals have climbed onto the stronghold walls!"

"What's there to be afraid of?" A battalion commander of the Zhou Consortium troops sneered, "These people helping to guard the stronghold are not even afraid yet, so what are you afraid of? Just do your part well. Your family and friends need you to defend the city for them. What you should be doing now is pulling the trigger and stopping those Experimentals from advancing, not being scared of them."

His men clenched their teeth and started firing the heavy machine gun they had just set up. They acted as though they could not see the terrifying Experimentals roaring at them just some dozen meters away.

In the battle to defend the stronghold, be it the Zhou Consortium, the Pyro Company, or the Riders, everyone was trying their best to do what was necessary of them. They were no longer children, so they had to understand that only by doing their duty could the stronghold be protected.

When Ren Xiaosu saw this, he was a little shocked.

He had experienced wars before and was personally involved in the one that happened in the Northwest some time ago. He had even declared war against an entire stronghold by himself.

But those were wars between humans.

Now that humans were facing an external enemy, the different organizations had abandoned their own interests and positions to fight together on the same side. This was a completely different kind of feeling.

The 15 Pyro Company members were probably sleeper agents hiding in Stronghold 74. Their original mission might have been to capture supernatural beings in the stronghold, but now they had put everything aside so they could help to fend off external enemies.

The Experimentals on the southern walls were gradually getting pushed back, and some of the Experimentals that had climbed up were even jumping off the walls by themselves. This probably signaled the Experimentals were about to retreat.

Ren Xiaosu silently turned around and left. It looked like he would not have to take action this time. Old Li and Qin Sheng's skills were comparable to his, so with those two around, the Experimentals would not find it easy to summit the stronghold walls.

However, the Experimentals' attack was still ongoing.

All of a sudden, chaos broke out in the southwest of the stronghold. The logistics troops there started screaming, and residents were running out of their houses and fleeing for their lives towards the center of the stronghold. It was like something extremely terrifying was chasing them.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly raised his head and looked up at the stronghold walls. The battle over there was still going, and it looked like the Zhou Consortium troops had yet to react to this new group of Experimentals that had infiltrated the stronghold.

But there was no gap in the defensive line on top of the stronghold walls, so how did these Experimentals get in?

Ren Xiaosu picked up his spotting scope again and was surprised to see a one-meter-wide hole in the southwestern walls where Experimentals were crawling out from.

And the reason the logistics troops and residents were screaming was because of the sudden appearance of these monsters!

Only at this moment did Ren Xiaosu feel shocked. As it turned out, no matter how strong the Experimentals' attacks were earlier, all of their attempts were just to cover for this group of Experimentals that had infiltrated.

Those Experimentals had been preparing for who knew how long and had actually dug a tunnel that led into the stronghold from the wilderness outside.

What Ren Xiaosu did not know was that the Experimentals had left the Qing Consortium's territory a long time ago and been in the Central Plains for a while now. However, be it Old Li or the Zhou Consortium troops, everyone thought they had just gotten here.

Of the many preparations the Experimentals had made, they were all done for the sake of this tunnel.

The moment they dug closer to the stronghold, the main forces of the Experimentals began their attack. All of that was not for anything else but to attract the attention of the forward facing troops. The Experimentals had used the commotion caused by the humans firing their weapons to drown out the sound of their digging of the tunnel.

It was only at this moment when the tunnel was completely dug through that the real attack began.

Ren Xiaosu felt a chill running down his spine. He had also faced the Experimentals before, but to know they could already apply their intelligence in battle? To plan wave after wave of strategic attacks against their enemy?

Then could there come a day when the Experimentals might use humanity's own cannons to attack their cities?

Ren Xiaosu looked at that tunnel. As it wasn't wide enough, not many Experimentals emerged from it.

But if these Experimentals destroyed the defense network of the stronghold from the inside or climbed the stronghold walls from behind and took out the heavy machine gun nests, that would probably be very troublesome.

Ren Xiaosu put away his spotting scope and went against the flow of the fleeing crowd. If even the Pyro Company had stepped forward to help, there was no reason for him to keep standing back.

Weren't they just some Experimentals?

In the crowd, his white-masked shadow clone was already rushing towards the Experimentals to attack. When one of the Experimentals saw the shadow clone, it pounced. However, the shadow clone leaped up and grabbed the Experimental's gray, tough, and rough face with its hand and shoved it violently into the ground.

One knee on the ground, the shadow clone released its grip from the Experimental. The Experimental was no longer moving. The brain of this monster had been smashed into paste by the attack, and even the stone path on the ground had cracked!

The other Experimentals that were chasing after the humans gradually came to a stop. They turned towards the shadow clone and surrounded it.

Chapter 563 Everyone's duty

This time, it was the shadow clone that became the main fighting force of the battle. A dozen Experimentals had surrounded the shadow clone, but they were not in a hurry to attack.

Among the Experimentals, one of its leaders let out a hoarse roar. It was apparently communicating with its companions on how to deal with the "human" in front of them.

These creatures had departed from the normal speech of humans. They were communicating more like beasts with one another.

But while the Experimentals did not make a move, the shadow clone did.

Seeing that more and more Experimentals were emerging from the underground tunnel, if they weren't immediately taken care of, their numbers aboveground would only start increasing.

These dozen or so Experimentals were clearly just stalling for time so their companions at the back could join them on the surface.

The shadow clone leaped up and flew straight over the head of an Experimental and towards the exit of the underground tunnel.

When that Experimental saw they could not stall the shadow clone, it tried to tangle up the shadow clone in midair with tooth and claw. But to its surprise, the shadow clone seemed to have expected it to make a move and slashed back at it.

The black saber sliced through the howling wind with a buzzing sound. Before the Experimental could even make contact with the shadow clone's body, it was severed in half!

The shadow clone did not stop moving. The moment it landed on the ground, it rushed straight for the underground tunnel. The Experimentals that were charging towards the center of the stronghold behind the shadow clone immediately went after it. They wanted to guard the underground tunnel's exit for the other Experimentals so they could come aboveground safely!

This seemed to be an irrevocable order given by that intelligent being among them.

Six Experimentals went to higher ground and pounced at the shadow clone from behind. Although their appearances were like humans, their crawling motions and gray skin made them look like huge spiders. They were extremely weird-looking.

Just as the Experimentals behind were about to lunge at the shadow clone from above, the shadow clone suddenly bent over and avoided their pursuit by sliding away.

One of the Experimentals was just about to exit from the underground tunnel when it saw a figure sliding on the ground. With a slice, its head was cut off.

The Experimental's body fell limply back into the tunnel and onto its companions that were preparing to emerge from the ground.

The Experimental below let out an angry roar as it pushed its companion's corpse aside. Just as it tried to exit the tunnel, its head was pierced by a black saber that suddenly appeared above it.

In just a short moment, four Experimentals had died to that black saber. That black saber was so sharp it could even penetrate the bodies of the Experimentals when bullets could not.

The bodies of these four Experimentals were blocking the tunnel exit while the shadow clone stood on top of their corpses. Listening to the indignant roars of the Experimentals that were stuck in the tunnel, the shadow clone turned its "gaze" to the Experimentals aboveground.

The Experimentals on the street that had surrounded the shadow clone looked at the unfeeling white mask and black saber dripping with a murky liquid. All of a sudden, they felt a little scared.

The human before them was capable of killing them like he was cutting grass. If he were outside the stronghold, they could easily kill him by outnumbering him. However, there were only eight or nine Experimentals inside the stronghold right now. As such, they actually felt they were the weaker side.

In the blink of an eye, this human had single-handedly stopped the final trump card in their wave of attacks on the stronghold.

Old Li and the others saw this scene from the edge of the stronghold walls. In a brief glimpse, they saw the shadow clone facing all the Experimentals alone and even managing to seal off the tunnel.

Qin Sheng looked at the back of the "human" and suddenly felt the other party emanated an aura of invincibility.

Killing the Experimentals was nothing surprising, but scaring them to the point of not daring to make a move was not something that just anyone could achieve.

From the beginning to the end, Ren Xiaosu did not participate in the battle personally. That was because it was enough for him to have the shadow clone fight on his behalf. Meanwhile, he was lying on the roof of a tall building in the distance where he could fire his sniper rifle at any moment.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not act rashly. His shadow clone was enough to deal with these Experimentals. If he were to casually fire a shot and reveal the presence of a sniper here, it would be very easy for the Anjing House or the Pyro Company to associate it with Zhou Yingxue.

But that would still be very unlikely.

If it really became necessary for him to take a shot, Ren Xiaosu would no longer care whether his actions would reveal anything.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu saw a young man rush against the flow of the crowd and towards the battlefield.

That person's stride was delicate, and it did not look like he was a supernatural being. In fact, he might not have even gone through any physical training before, so after running for a while, he started panting heavily. Breathing in such a way could easily hurt the lungs.

There was a camera hanging from the young man's neck as well as a dark blue badge. Ren Xiaosu could not see what was written on it, but he could guess the young man was probably a reporter.

The stronghold residents now understood the kinds of monsters they were facing. They had been complaining about how the Zhou Consortium had mobilized a large number of forces to tear down many of the residences in the city and built defensive fortifications in their place. They had even conscripted all of the adult men into the army, with only a small number of them escaping the call-ups. This made the residents of the stronghold very unhappy at that time.

But when they personally saw how easily the Experimentals could tear apart humans, they finally recognized what the Zhou Consortium troops did from the bottom of their hearts. Only when their own interests and lives were threatened did they understand the significance of the Zhou Consortium troops.

But while the residents were fleeing in a panic, a reporter was actually rushing towards the scene of the battle just so he could gather firsthand news to report about. Ren Xiaosu did not quite understand what went through the minds of these reporters.

A moment later, the Experimentals in the underground tunnel seemingly retreated. Meanwhile, the Experimentals facing the shadow clone suddenly tried to escape. They turned around and got far away from the shadow clone, the Experimentals running to a manhole cover. One of them stretched out its gray hands and tried to pull open the manhole cover to get into the sewers.

However, the manhole cover did not budge!

If not for the fact that the Zhou Consortium troops had already welded the manhole covers shut in advance and stopped these Experimentals from escaping into the sewers, their presence in the

stronghold would probably contribute to extreme instability later on. Who knew what they would do after they got back out?

If the Experimentals hid in the sewers and escaped separately, not even the shadow clone could catch up to all of them.

The direction where the Experimentals were escaping towards was where that young reporter was standing. There were not many residents around that reporter anymore as everyone had already fled.

He stood in a daze on the street and stopped in his tracks. When the young reporter saw the Experimentals surrounding the manhole cover, he was astonished. But his reporter's instinct kicked in, and he kept pressing the shutter button of the camera he was holding.

Behind those Experimentals, the shadow clone had come chasing after them. The white mask the shadow clone was wearing looked extremely out of place in the camera's viewfinder. The calm expression on the mask seemed to form a stark contrast with the fleeing Experimentals.

Of course, the welded manhole covers could not stop the Experimentals. They used their arms to break the manhole cover apart. But just after they escaped inside, an explosion came from the sewers. Ren Xiaosu had used Shadow Door to cast ten grenades beneath the manhole and forcefully blow them back up to the surface.

But they were still intact Experimentals when they went in. By the time they were blown back out, they had turned into fragmented pieces of Experimentals.

Only at this moment did the Zhou Consortium's emergency response force in the stronghold arrive.

Chapter 564 A brief calm

Ren Xiaosu did not want to have any dealings with the Zhou Consortium troops, nor did he want to get involved with the Pyro Company. After all, he had manipulated "Old Xu" into killing quite a few of the Pyro Company members in that incident at East Lake. In a sense, they would surely have quite a huge grudge.

So by the time the Zhou Consortium's emergency response force arrived, Ren Xiaosu had already left.

After three waves of attacks and probing, the Experimentals had completely retreated this time. As the saying went, "Three strikes and you're out!" Having failed to take Stronghold 74 with three straight attempts, there was no need for the Experimentals to continue wasting their efforts here. Instead, they should be going back to the drawing board to identify their next opportunity.

But the Experimentals did not retreat too far away. They seemed to have taken shelter in the forest outside Stronghold 74, but no one from the Zhou Consortium dared to go into the forest to check.

To be honest, none of those from Stronghold 74 who had participated in the defense of the stronghold had expected that a group of what everyone thought of as beasts would actually give them such a tough time. They nearly even managed to break into the stronghold.

If it weren't for the white-masked man suddenly appearing and blocking off the breach, based on the time it took for the Zhou Consortium's emergency response force to arrive, Stronghold 74 would be in danger by now.

As a matter of fact, if those Experimentals had managed to get in and cause damage, not only would it cause panic and chaos among the stronghold residents, they would also try their best to destroy the entire defense system of the stronghold.

However, the Experimentals probably did not expect that their siege with three different tactics in a row would end up in failure.

After the Experimentals retreated, Stronghold 74 experienced a brief calm.

The battle lasted from night until dawn. Old Li, Qin Sheng, and the others were sitting on the stronghold walls exhausted. As the morning sun shone on their faces, a gust of cold wind blew. Only then did Old Li and Qin Sheng realize their clothes were drenched in sweat, and sitting out here in the wind made them exceptionally cold.

At this moment, a staff officer from the Zhou Consortium came over to greet them. "Honored friends from the Riders and the Pyro Company, please take a shower and get a change of clothes. After you all get some rest, we would like to invite everyone to a debriefing. The Experimentals will definitely return, so we have to summarize any mistakes we made in this battle."

Old Li struggled to get up. There was even a wound on his arm he had gotten when he was accidentally scratched by an Experimental during the battle. He smiled and said, "This wound shouldn't make me become like them too, right?"

The staff officer shook his head. "That won't be happening. The Experimentals have to inject a drug to assimilate humans into their kind."

"You guys seem to know a lot about the Experimentals?" Qin Sheng asked.

"The Qing Consortium shared that information with us." The staff officer said, "It was also the Qing Consortium that warned us the Experimentals might attack Stronghold 74 this time. If it weren't for them informing us and buying us time to deploy our troops in advance, we would've really been in trouble this time."

"So that's how it is," Old Li mumbled. "The Qing Consortium... is quite different from what the rumors say."

The Riders and the Pyro Company went into the stronghold to take hot showers. This time, the Pyro Company's participation in the battle left them with four dead. However, the remaining members did not seem to feel sad at all. It was as though they were not friends with their squadmates.

After everyone sat down in the meeting room, the Pyro Company's commander in Stronghold 74 said bluntly, "Who was that in the white mask? Is he someone from your Zhou Consortium? He's already appeared twice in your Zhou Consortium's strongholds so far. We thought he was with the Anjing House, but by the looks of it now, it seems he has a closer relationship with your Zhou Consortium!"

Zhou Xingwen, the commander of the Zhou Consortium troops, said calmly, "He isn't related to the Zhou Consortium. We think he might have shown up in Stronghold 74 by coincidence. Let's talk about the

upcoming battle to defend the stronghold. First of all, I'd like to thank all of you for your help so far. Without all of you, we couldn't've defended Stronghold 74."

The Pyro Company's commander said calmly, "There's no need to thank us. We all have the responsibility to stand up against a common enemy of humanity. Our Pyro Company members at Stronghold 73 will also be rushing over with the next group of Zhou Consortium reinforcements."

Old Li suddenly said, "But your Zhou Consortium's emergency response force in the stronghold still needs to be on high alert and move a little faster. If the Experimentals can dig a tunnel, they can easily dig ten more. Everyone's seen how strong those monsters are. It will only take them a few days to dig a tunnel into the stronghold."

Zhou Xingwen nodded and said, "Our emergency response troops have failed in their duties this time. Furthermore, we have underestimated the Experimentals."

After a short discussion, the main point of the meeting was to optimize the current defense plan.

Old Li and the others prepared to head to the Zhou Consortium's camp to get some rest. After all, they were also very exhausted from the battle.

At this moment, the Pyro Company brought up the matter again. "I suggest that your Zhou Consortium find that person wearing the white mask. Our Pyro Company can promise we'll temporarily set aside our grudges and fight alongside him. With such a person around, it'll be much easier for us to handle the situation should the Experimentals break into the stronghold."

Zhou Xingwen sighed and shook his head. "It won't be easy to find him."

However, Old Li did not seem bothered by that. "Don't worry. Since he's stepped forward to help this time, he'll definitely show up again the next time."

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When Ren Xiaosu returned to the hotel, a drowsy group of people were sprawled out on the couches in the hotel lobby. Meanwhile, Zhou Yingxue was still wide awake as she held her pistols, on full alert. The ten plainclothes guards from the Wang Consortium did not sleep either. They had found some knives and iron rods in the hotel to protect themselves with.

Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that these people did not seem as useless as he thought, and that they were just a little too inflexible when doing things.

Honestly, Ren Xiaosu even suspected these soldiers might not have been on the battlefield before. After all, there had not been any wars in the Central Plains in recent years, so it would not be unexpected if these soldiers had not seen blood before.

Furthermore, no organizations would send their elite soldiers to protect a female celebrity.

A plainclothes guard looked at Ren Xiaosu, who had just returned, and asked with a frown, “The fighting out there has been going on for the entire night, and you disappeared for the entire night as well. Where did you go?”

Ren Xiaosu glanced at him. “I went to help defend the city. What’s that gotta do with you?”

“There’s no traces on you to suggest that you fought, yet you’re saying you helped defend the city?” The plainclothes guard sneered.

However, Ren Xiaosu had no intention of arguing with him. Instead, he walked over to Zhou Yingxue and asked, “Anything happen in the night?”

“No, they were all quite compliant.” Zhou Yingxue shook her head. “Was it really the Experimentals that attacked?”

“That’s right.” Ren Xiaosu nodded. “I saw it with my own eyes. Also, we definitely can’t underestimate the intelligence of the Experimentals anymore. And their numbers are constantly increasing. If only we had exterminated them at Stronghold 113, this wouldn’t be happening right now.”

“At that time, the entire Southwest was in chaos. Who would have time to worry about them?” Zhou Yingxue sighed.

“Alright, go back to your room and get some rest. I don’t think the Experimentals will be returning anytime soon,” Ren Xiaosu said.

Zhou Yingxue said, “Why don’t you go and get some rest instead? I’ve just been sitting around all night, so I’m not tired at all. As for you, you must’ve engaged the Experimentals in close combat, right?”

Off to the side, the plainclothes guard shot them a look but did not say anything. He only sneered. That was because the way Ren Xiaosu had spoken to them earlier was way too unpleasant, so they found it very difficult to have a good impression of him.

Chapter 565 Hints of disorder

Ren Xiaosu thought for a moment and said to Zhou Yingxue, “Then I’ll head upstairs for a few hours of sleep first. Wake me up when it’s noon.”

“Sure.” Zhou Yingxue nodded.

But before Ren Xiaosu could head upstairs, he suddenly saw someone riding a green bicycle on the road outside. Two green cloth bags were hanging behind the bicycle with the words “Hope Media” written on them.

Ren Xiaosu ran out and asked, “Is that today’s newspaper? Give me a copy. Why are y’all still working at this time? You don’t look like someone who delivers newspapers.”

The cyclist was wearing a suit, and most newspaper delivery workers did not dress like this.

The person delivering the newspapers said with a smile, “We’re the staff of Hope Media. The people who usually deliver the newspapers are hiding at home, so we have no choice but to send the newspapers ourselves.” Then the cyclist handed a newspaper to Ren Xiaosu. “The newspapers in Stronghold 74 today don’t cost anything. They’re free of charge.”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned for a moment before saying, “Thanks.”

When the plainclothes guard in the lobby saw Ren Xiaosu taking a newspaper, he also went to get a copy. Whenever they passed through a stronghold, Fang Zhi would usually be the one to purchase the newspapers for the day.

Ren Xiaosu flipped open the newspaper. The newspaper today was a little strange, with four entire pages dedicated to reporting about the Experimentals’ attack on Stronghold 74.

The main point of the first page reported that the spokesperson of the Wang Consortium had told the media that they would send their troops to support the Zhou Consortium whenever they were called upon. They were willing to assist the Zhou Consortium to drive back the enemy together and exterminate the Experimentals in the south part of the Central Plains.

However, the Zhou Consortium rejected the Wang Consortium’s offer and told the media to let the Wang Consortium know they should not take advantage of this crisis. This was a common enemy of humanity they were dealing with, so if they really wanted to help, all they needed to do was to transport some supplies. There was no need for them to send their troops as the Zhou Consortium’s army was sufficient to deal with the problem.

Ren Xiaosu was amused. These two consortiums had started tearing into each other in the newspapers. It looked like the Zhou Consortium believed the Wang Consortium was up to no good by wanting to send their troops over. After all, no one would possibly allow another organization’s troops to freely march into their own territory. Who knew what the fuck the other party was really up to?

When he flipped the newspaper to the next page, the content was much more substantial. Hope Media actually explained the battle in detail, but it was mainly based on the perspective of the reporters who were at the scene. They then provided an addendum based on an interview with the Zhou Consortium’s higher-ups.

There was even an emphasis on the strategy the Experimentals had adopted. Everyone who thought the Experimentals were just a bunch of wild animals was shocked when they read this.

The more cultured had always looked down on the less cultured. In the eyes of many consortiums, the Experimentals were just barbaric beasts that could be eradicated with firearms. But now, the reports on the Experimentals would probably refresh their understanding of those creatures.

When he reached the third page, it was filled with pictures of moments from the battle that three of Hope Media’s reporters stationed at Stronghold 74 had captured. For example, when the Riders and the Pyro Company were fighting on the stronghold walls and killing the Experimentals, Ren Xiaosu couldn’t

even see the happenings clearly at the time, yet those reporters still managed to photograph them using their extremely expensive cameras.

On this page, there was great affirmation given to the Pyro Company by Hope Media. They were praising them for setting aside their beliefs in order to fight the enemy together. They also reported the Pyro Company members at Stronghold 73 had already joined the reinforcements and were currently heading to Stronghold 74.

As far as everyone could remember, this was probably the first time Hope Media had praised the Pyro Company.

While the Pyro Company and Qinghe Group had always been on good terms, Hope Media was always critical of the Pyro Company's actions.

When he reached the fourth page, Ren Xiaosu was surprised to discover that the most eye-catching photo actually turned out to be "Old Xu."

In the picture, "Old Xu" was wearing a white mask while the Experimentals were running away in fear. This picture was a little shocking as it had captured the details very clearly.

In fact, the reporters from Hope Media had taken a lot of pictures, but in the one that was chosen to be published, the figure of "Old Xu" appeared a little blurry. Only his tall and upright posture, as well as that conspicuous white mask, could be seen clearly. Meanwhile, the clearest part of the picture was the expressions of the Experimentals.

It was no longer the fierce expression they had but one of fear.

The headline on this page was even titled "The Era of Gods."

This newspaper had elevated the status of supernatural beings to such a high degree that even the terrifying Experimentals could only serve as an embellishment to them.

Of course, there was a lot of glorification in this. After all, everyone who participated in the battle knew the most terrifying thing about the Experimentals was their numbers. Even the Pyro Company could not compare to their numbers and their cruelty.

As Ren Xiaosu read the newspaper, Zhou Yingxue was also reading from his side. She kept glancing at Ren Xiaosu as she read, then whispered, "Master, that's you, isn't it?"

Ren Xiaosu whispered back, sounding surprised, "How'd you guess? Is it that obvious? Did you tell from the figure or something?"

"That's not it. You purposely wore your clothes to appear slightly more cumbersome, so it's not possible to tell from the figure. But I didn't see any mention of you in the entire newspaper, so I just felt that this person might be you. After all, you're the only one fearsome enough to scare the Experimentals away," Zhou Yingxue muttered.

Ren Xiaosu was speechless. Zhou Yingxue had actually used process of elimination to deduce that it was him? Because she did not see any mention of him in the newspaper, she felt that this really strong person was him?

In any case, it did not matter whether this person wearing the white mask was Ren Xiaosu or not, the flattering was already accomplished.

However, while the two of them were whispering, a plainclothes guard nearby laughed and said, "Didn't you claim you joined in the battle? Why didn't I see you in the newspaper then? Or were you just hiding somewhere?"

Ren Xiaosu shot him a look and ignored him. He did not want to encourage the guard. Among those present, not even Mu Wan'ge knew the person wearing the white mask was him. After all, it was Ren Xiaosu himself who saved Mu Wan'ge back then.

So since he wanted to conceal his identity, he could not reveal it so casually, lest he incur the wrath of the Pyro Company after the war was over.

Ren Xiaosu continued flipping through the newspaper. The entertainment section had a mention of Li Ran, but even that was related to the battle at Stronghold 74. Reportedly, the concert had been canceled due to the situation in the stronghold.

Then the breaking of glass came from the streets outside the hotel. The noise woke Li Ran and the others. Li Ran wrapped herself in a blanket and opened her sleepy eyes. "What's going on?"

When Ren Xiaosu walked out to take a look, he was surprised to see a group of people smashing the glass windows of a general store and a grocery store.

After they smashed the windows, a large group of people rushed inside in search of food.

With someone setting the precedent, more and more people joined in the act of larceny. Such acts would spread like a contagion, but it was an extremely base behavior.

"The aftereffects of the Zhou Consortium's food commandeering has started." Ren Xiaosu sighed and said, "After Stronghold 74 was put in lockdown for several days, and with the grocery stores emptied out by the Zhou Consortium troops, many of the residents don't have anything to eat anymore. Hunger can really drive people to do anything."

Chapter 566 Wartime chaos

When Ren Xiaosu saw that some of the stronghold residents were starting to make trouble, he immediately closed off the hotel's main entrance. There were already a lot of things going on in the stronghold, so he was thinking of going back to his room to ponder how to deal with the situation. But with the ruckus now, he had lost the mood to think about what to do next.

After this group of people barged into the grocery store, they realized all the food in it had already been emptied out by the Zhou Consortium troops. Some of them even tried to charge into the store's

warehouse, but when they saw the Zhou Consortium soldiers guarding it, they did not dare to go over and cause trouble.

Following that, these people started targeting the restaurants in the stronghold. As restaurants usually prepared a lot of food, there would definitely be rice, noodles, spices, and cooking oil stored there.

Some of the restaurants had already been locked up. When the owners who were hiding inside were just rejoicing that they still had some food left, the restaurants had their doors smashed open by the looters, and everything inside the restaurant was taken away.

The Zhou Consortium's emergency response force started to intervene and took control of the situation. After capturing a group of looters, the chaos only stopped for a brief while before getting more chaotic again.

They discovered the Zhou Consortium did not send out as many emergency response troops as they had thought. Moreover, rumors were saying that getting put away in prison would not really affect anything in the future. After the war, whoever got caught would simply be released. Besides, they would have food to eat while they were in prison too.

And so, Stronghold 74 became even more chaotic.

Stronghold 74 had never encountered such a situation before. As such, the public's opinion was not handled in a timely enough manner, and that allowed the rumors to spread like wildfire across the entire stronghold. That was why the Zhou Consortium had to come forward to refute the rumors. They also said the Zhou Consortium did not have much rations and that they had to prioritize the supply to the Zhou Consortium's troops. After all, the soldiers had to defend the city and could not be starved.

But the rioters would not accept the explanation at this point in time. They even argued why the army should be prioritized when everyone was human, and that all of them should enjoy the same rights!

Among these rioters, most of them were just going with the flow. However, there were a few who were enjoying this disturbance and had been leading others to create more trouble with them.

If this were during the battle, these people would definitely not dare to cause such a disturbance. But didn't the newspaper say the Experimentals had been repelled after three attack attempts on the stronghold? To the rioters, the Experimentals could definitely not get in.

Gradually, they were no longer satisfied with just filling their stomachs. The next morning, incidents of gold shops getting broken into started occurring. When some people got a taste of what they could do, they even tried to break into the banks. However, there were troops stationed at the banks, and the rioters were immediately fired upon with warning shots. This finally scared all the rioters away.

Later, a group of women came out onto the streets to make another scene. They were requesting that the army allow the men of their families to go home to them. For this cause, they even rolled out a banner to make their demands known.

There was a valid reason for these women to be making a scene here. Their heads of the family had all been forced to join the army, but some men who escaped conscription started harassing them every now and then. They were fighting to have their men come back home so they would be protected.

Zhou Xingwen, the commander of the Zhou Consortium troops, had been frowning for the past two days. He still needed to think about how to deal with the Experimentals' next attack on the stronghold, yet he was getting disturbed by these troublesome events taking place in the stronghold.

A staff officer next to him said, "Why don't we send the conscripted men back home first?"

"We can't let them leave." Zhou Xingwen frowned. "If those people are allowed to go back, it'll only get more chaotic in the stronghold! Lock them up at the construction site and release them after we're done fighting the Experimentals! We'll leave it to the emergency response force to suppress the public disorder!"

"But there's still a lot of reporters in the stronghold. If they—"

"Then chase them away!"

Less than two days later, the chaos in the Zhou Consortium's stronghold finally calmed down a little. However, that was only on the surface. Secretly, there were still rioters ganging up and committing robberies in the night.

They had already finished raiding the restaurants for food, so these people were now starting to think about stealing from the hotels.

Li Ran and the others were in the hotel lobby discussing their countermeasures when a group of people smashed open the hotel's entrance.

After these rioters rushed into the lobby, they were stunned because they recognized Li Ran!

To be honest, the rioters did not expect to meet a big star like Li Ran here. Everyone immediately restrained themselves and some even approached her for an autograph.

Li Ran glanced at Zhou Yingxue smugly. However, when she was signing autographs for the rioters, a middle-aged man reached out and tried to hug her. Li Ran pushed him away angrily. "What are you doing!?"

That rioter said, "I super like listening to your songs. I just want a hug, that's all."

As he said that, the middle-aged man took the opportunity to hug her again. However, Li Ran slapped his face.

Someone in the crowd suddenly shouted, "What's the big deal about a celebrity? Can a celebrity condescendingly slap anyone they like? We're gonna get a hug today no matter what. Let's see who can stop us!"

Li Ran was stunned. Everything was fine just a moment ago like it was a fan meeting. But in the blink of an eye, the situation turned chaotic.

Seeing the group of people swarming towards Li Ran, Zhou Yingxue looked at Ren Xiaosu. However, she only saw him looking up at the ceiling like it was none of his business.

The plainclothes guards who were responsible for protecting Li Ran rushed out at once. They landed some hits on the rioters standing at the front of the group with the metal rods in their hands.

These rioters were the type to bully the weak and fear the strong. Seeing that the plainclothes guards were really fierce, they immediately cowered with their heads in their hands and stepped back.

Ren Xiaosu watched from the side. He thought this group of plainclothes guards were still quite useful in such a situation. The ten of them worked very well together, with some of them blocking the front while others stayed on the sides to cover the rest.

After all, they had undergone proper military training before, so it wasn't like they couldn't deal with just a few rioters.

But amid the scuffle, the sound of a gunshot left everyone stunned. The plainclothes guards who were chasing away the rioters with the metal rods were also stunned on the spot. As they were soldiers, they were even more aware of the might of firearms. If they were to get shot at such a time, they might not survive.

One of the rioters with a bruised face was holding a pistol. He said, "Let's see who dares to touch me!"

It was completely silent in the hotel lobby. Even his fellow rioters were shocked. That rioter roared, "That female celebrity, get over here. I want you to follow me. I'll let you come back here when I feel like it—"

Midway through his sentence, a figure suddenly dashed past, and the pistol in the rioter's hand disappeared.

Ren Xiaosu tossed the pistol to a plainclothes guard. "Carry on and take over from here." With that, Ren Xiaosu headed upstairs to do some reading. He acted like he had just done something trivial.

When the rioters saw the plainclothes guard pointing the black barrel at them, they immediately dispersed.

However, something even more surprising happened. After the rioters left, a lot of women started arriving when they heard rumors there was food in the hotel Li Ran was staying at. Furthermore, this was where women were protected.

So a lot of women came running to Li Ran to seek protection.

Li Ran did not make the decision on her own. She purposely went to Ren Xiaosu's room to ask if she could take in these women. Ren Xiaosu only gave her a look and told her to make the decision herself.

If she wanted to protect them, she would have to protect them herself. Ren Xiaosu and Zhou Yingxue were only responsible for her safety.

Chapter 567 The reinforcements get ambushed

Although Ren Xiaosu said that Li Ran could make the decision herself, she could tell that Ren Xiaosu did not want any further trouble. Therefore, she decided to just hide in her hotel room and let Fang Zhi deal with turning away the women who had come to seek refuge.

And a well-known company in Stronghold 74 suddenly organized a food drive. The stronghold residents could swipe their ID cards in exchange for receiving some porridge, and everyone would get two servings per day.

There were a total of 41 porridge stands set up across the entire stronghold. In an instant, all of the stronghold residents took their pots, bowls, and pans to collect the porridge.

Ren Xiaosu went to take a look for himself. The porridge given out at the porridge stands was not too thin either. At the least, it would not be a problem for the stronghold residents to survive on.

Upon swiping one's ID card on a black device at the porridge stands, if a green light were shown, porridge would be served to the resident. A red light indicated the resident had already collected their share of the porridge, so the organizers would not dispense any porridge to them.

Many of the stronghold residents tried to claim more than they were allotted, but none of them succeeded in getting extra.

Ren Xiaosu wondered if the Zhou Consortium was behind this company. After all, the entire stronghold's food supplies were in the hands of the Zhou Consortium. But why didn't the Zhou Consortium organize the food drive in their own name?

Instead, they had this company do it on their behalf?

Besides, when Ren Xiaosu saw the people who were giving out the porridge, they all looked really burly. Some of them even had tattoos on their necks and looked like gangsters.

Since the stronghold residents had food to eat now, the chaos did not last for too long. Moreover, Hope Media's newspaper published a piece of news saying the Zhou Consortium troops from Stronghold 73 had already regrouped and were setting off to Stronghold 74 to exterminate the Experimentals. Their strength totaled 14,000 soldiers.

Many people felt the war was probably coming to an end, so they would be suicidal if they caused any further trouble.

These people only dared to make a scene while the Zhou Consortium was too busy to care about them. Now that the Zhou Consortium was free to deal with the disorder, it would be no more difficult than stepping on an ant.

Based on the normal speed of a march, the reinforcements should take around three days to reach the vicinity of Stronghold 74. However, due to the urgency of the situation, they were likelier to arrive in two days if they force marched.

Li Ran and the others were cheering in the main lobby. Even Ren Xiaosu had a smile on his face. It seemed that Stronghold 74 could get off the hook this time, and the Experimentals had to retreat back into the mountains.

But on the afternoon of the next day, Stronghold 73's 2nd Division that was on its way to Stronghold 74 as reinforcements suddenly encountered a dense group of Experimentals that charged down from the forested mountains while they were walking on a mountain path.

As the path was narrow, and the Experimentals were charging at them from high ground, the 2nd Division's tanks were unable to do much.

On the left was a mountain, and on the right was a cliff.

The Experimentals had been planning for a long time to use this position as an ambush spot.

However, 2nd Division was prepared for this. They had expected the Experimentals would attack the reinforcements along the way like the previous time, so the armored vehicles that were mounted with heavy machine guns were always on guard to prevent an Experimental ambush on the formation.

The soldiers in the armored vehicles immediately turned the heavy machine guns toward the Experimentals and placed them in their sights.

Moreover, the infantry troops' automatic rifles were even equipped with grenade launchers this time, and much of their ammunition was replaced with white phosphorus munitions.

White phosphorus munitions included grenades, artillery shells, and other types of bombs. The body of the ammunition would be filled with phosphorus and would automatically ignite on contact with air and burn until it completely reacted.

Normal bullets could not penetrate the Experimentals' bodies? Then use white phosphorus against them!

It seemed like this was also the first time the Experimentals had encountered an individual combat weapon that could cause enough effective damage to kill them. As a result, the first group of Experimentals that rushed at their enemy were all burned to death. The entire forested mountain started burning as the originally emerald green mountain range was engulfed in flames.

Just as 2nd Division thought victory was in their grasp, hundreds of Experimentals suddenly climbed up the mountain and launched another attack from the other side.

When they used the white phosphorus munitions again, the Zhou Consortium troops realized they had used it in the wrong situation. After the Experimentals that had already rushed near them were hit by the white phosphorus, they wouldn't instantly burn to ashes. However, the burning flames that were brought into the crowd of soldiers caused even more casualties to the Zhou Consortium troops!

Once it came down to close combat, the white phosphorus became a double-edged sword. Although it was capable of killing enemies, it also hurt their own troops.

The Experimentals were also much harder than normal soldiers. As such, before the Experimentals could die from the fiery attacks, the Zhou Consortium's own soldiers had already fallen to the burning flames!

Furthermore, some of the soldiers were shocked to discover there were another dozen or so Experimentals that were completely different from the others.

The other Experimentals moved around by crawling, but these dozen or so Experimentals were actually walking upright all the time!

In a split second, these dozen or so Experimentals charged into the 2nd Division's formation. Some of the soldiers had used the white phosphorus to hit one of them, but it seemed totally unaffected by the flames burning on its body. They watched the Experimental charge to the front of an armored vehicle and grab the wheels with its bare hands. Then it threw the armored vehicle down to the bottom of the cliff to the right.

The heavily armored vehicle tumbled down the mountainside, and even the sturdy frame of the vehicle was shattered!

When the soldiers saw this sight, they were all shocked. They had not expected such a ferocious existence among the Experimentals!

How powerful was it to be able to flip an armored vehicle with its bare hands?!

These dozen-odd Experimentals zipped through the Zhou Consortium troops with no intention of prolonging the fight. When they encountered the standard infantry, they would charge into them with their bodies and break the soldiers' bones. When they encountered an armored vehicle, they would throw it right off the cliff.

These Experimentals were the strongest warriors in their entire race and were completely focused on crippling the heavy firepower of the Zhou Consortium troops. They did not seem to know what fear was and were extremely powerful.

They were like a sharp knife that stabbed right at the hearts of the Zhou Consortium troops, and it was even twisted in for good measure.

While the Experimentals advanced, the Zhou Consortium soldiers tried to fire at them with their guns. However, the Experimentals were moving too quickly.

They were able to move freely within the Zhou Consortium troops, taking out the normal soldiers in the process like they were up against children.

This was the result of overwhelming strength and speed.

Although there weren't many of these Experimentals that walked upright, their destructive power on the battlefield was simply too great!

A minute later, just as one of the Experimentals was about to crash into a soldier like they had been doing, that soldier suddenly took the initiative to charge it. The moment the two parties collided, the explosives in the soldier's arms immediately went off. Both the soldier and that Experimental were blown into pieces.

The huge blast sent the surrounding soldiers flying up. Even the armored vehicles nearby were rattling from the explosion, the shockwave killing some of the soldiers who were standing close to the impact zone.

In this ambush battle, this seemed to be the only way the Zhou Consortium troops could effectively stop the Experimentals.

More and more soldiers started using this method as they sought to die together with the Experimentals. During this wave of attacks, the Experimentals also learned to be smart. They would charge in while steering clear of the humans and only destroy the armored vehicles and tanks. They avoided going headfirst into the soldiers.

As a result, some of the soldiers died in vain. Although the explosives were detonated, the Experimentals managed to avoid getting caught in the blasts.

Chapter 568 Isolated and helpless

Once the Experimentals started avoiding the soldiers, the rate of their casualties began to decrease. Meanwhile, the armor of 2nd Division were beginning to get hit hard.

But what surprised the Experimentals was that some of the humans whose physical fitness was second only to theirs had also started these suicidal attacks against them.

The Pyro Company members carried the explosives on their backs as they searched for traces of the Experimentals on the battlefield. As long as they saw any Experimentals, they would charge at it in a bid to take the enemy down together with them. It was precisely because the Pyro Company was participating in the battle that the chaotic situation had reversed.

30 members of the Pyro Company had joined the reinforcements this time, a total of six squads comprising three Midnight and three Dusk squads.

Their physical fitness was not as good as the Experimentals that walked upright, but it was enough for them to launch a suicide attack against these creatures. They were trading a life for a life!

Before this, the Zhou Consortium soldiers did not really take a liking to the Pyro Company members, because they always felt they were too shady and did not communicate well with the Zhou Consortium's troops.

But at this moment, everyone admired them from the bottom of their hearts.

The Pyro Company that clearly did not have a good reputation was now standing up to fight alongside them.

They had always heard of some supernatural beings who were particularly powerful that existed in the Central Plains. But where were those supernatural beings now?

Very quickly, only two out of the dozen or so Experimentals that walked upright were left after the suicide attacks. And without the help of these walkers, the Experimentals found it very difficult to get past the 2nd Division's heavy machine gun positions.

Just as hope started growing in all the soldiers and commanders of 2nd Division, someone suddenly shouted, "Another dozen walking Experimentals are climbing up the mountain!"

But it was too late by the time that was said.

Suddenly, one of the Experimentals carried a strange-looking bag of items and charged into the Zhou Consortium troops. Following that, dust and pieces of flesh were sent flying everywhere with a loud bang.

The 2nd Division's commander who was watching from afar was dumbfounded. This time, it was the Experimentals launching suicide bombings against them.

The Experimentals were starting to use firearms and explosives!

The commander of 2nd Division had a heavy expression as he said, "Retreat, orderly retreat!"

Whenever a time like this came, it was always difficult to make any decisions. If a portion of the troops were going to evacuate, it would mean a portion of them would have to stay behind forever. In fact, some of the soldiers might even get assimilated into new Experimentals.

In the end, the Experimentals' numbers did not really decrease by much after the battle. Furthermore, if the soldiers with stronger physical fitness were turned into Experimentals, they might even end up as those walking Experimentals that were exceptionally strong.

The Experimentals seemed to have their own selection criteria for new Experimentals.

The Qing Consortium had calculated the statistics before. It seemed the Experimentals had a 7% chance of choosing someone to be assimilated as one of them.

If 2nd Division were to retreat now, they should be able to retain two-thirds of their troop strength. After all, a division with more than ten thousand troops was not that easy to defeat.

But the commander of 2nd Division was more concerned about the fact that if the Experimentals were capable of using firearms and explosives, it would make it even more difficult for Stronghold 74, which was isolated and helpless, in future sieges.

They could only hope the Experimentals did not know how to drive tanks.

The Experimentals did not chase after them either and only watched silently from the forest with ferocious expressions as the Zhou Consortium troops retreated.

Meanwhile, the forest by that mountain path was still burning with raging flames. As the fire spread further, it left behind only dark ashes and ruins in its path.

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When news of the reinforcements' defeat reached Stronghold 74, the stronghold residents felt like they were struck by lightning.

It became obvious that the porridge given out at the porridge stands had suddenly become very thin, as though there were almost no rice grains in it.

It wasn't that there was no more food left in Stronghold 74 but that the Zhou Consortium troops were preparing to fight a prolonged war.

If the reinforcements could not make it here, it would be left to them to continue defending the stronghold, and no one knew how much longer they would have to fight for.

When some of the residents realized there were barely any rice grains in the porridge, they immediately started making a fuss at a porridge stand. They shouted at the person who was giving out the porridge, "Look at how thin the porridge has become!"

With that said, these people actually flipped the porridge stand!

However, after the porridge stand was destroyed, the men in charge of the stand rushed out and started beating up the troublemakers with sticks. The people who had flipped the porridge stand were beaten beyond recognition.

The men who attacked them were extremely fierce. They were absolutely making an example out of these people to establish their dominance!

Very quickly, a reporter brought a photo he had taken and went to the Zhou Consortium to ask for an explanation. The Zhou Consortium's reply was that this company was not a business arm under them, but that they would definitely investigate the matter thoroughly.

An hour later, the Zhou Consortium announced the perpetrators had been fired and considered that an explanation to the residents.

When Ren Xiaosu heard about this, he laughed. He had been wondering why the Zhou Consortium did not run the porridge stands in their own name. So it turned out it was because they could explain themselves to the media if anyone got beaten up at the stands.

After the troublemakers got beaten up, they could just fire the people running the stands and wash their hands of the matter.

This "company" was purely used for taking any blame.

This was not a pretty move, and it could even be considered a little underhanded. However, no one dared to make trouble at the porridge stands anymore. Even the residents who previously caused trouble in the stronghold had settled down. They understood the beatings at the porridge stand was a signal: The Zhou Consortium's patience was running thin, so they had better not go looking for trouble.

Three days passed, and all that the stronghold residents were thinking about was collecting porridge at the porridge stands.

A week passed, but there were still no updates from the reinforcements that were supposed to be arriving. It seemed like the Zhou Consortium troops were also in a difficult position and did not know how to deal with the Experimentals.

The entire stronghold seemed to be getting more and more depressed by the day. There were very few pedestrians out on the streets. Even if there were, they were also begging for food on the sidewalk. The trees on the streets did not even have any bark left as they had been stripped bare and eaten.

It was not that the Zhou Consortium was not handing out food on purpose. Rather, they did not have much rations anymore. Even the food for the Zhou Consortium troops had been reduced. To express solidarity with the army, Zhou Xingwen even moved into the military barracks where he lived and ate with the rest. This showed he did not get any special treatment, and that all of them were going through this difficult time together.

Li Ran and the others were somewhat glad that Ren Xiaosu had told Fang Zhi to bribe the private troops' officers and bought some military rations from them. Otherwise, they would all be starving by now.

However, Ren Xiaosu specifically instructed them, "Don't use the hotel's kitchen when you're cooking. There's an exhaust fan in there. Also, close the doors tight and don't let the smell get out."

Fang Zhi controlled all their food, and Ren Xiaosu did not take any extra for himself. Li Ran carefully asked Ren Xiaosu, "I heard from Fang Zhi that the food we bought can only last for another two days at most. What are we going to do next?"

After all, the tour group had many staff members. Even though they bought some food back, it would not be enough to feed everyone.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Li Ran's expectant gaze and shook his head. "I don't know what to do either."

"If there really aren't any reinforcements coming, can you and Zhou Yingxue save me from here?" Li Ran asked anxiously.

Ren Xiaosu looked at her and answered, "I don't know."

Chapter 569 Never coming back

Based on what everyone thought, the Zhou Consortium could definitely exterminate the Experimentals within a week. Since the Experimentals were not successful in attacking the city at the start, once the Zhou Consortium started a full-scale retaliation, the Experimentals would not even stand a chance. But reality proved this false. More than a week had already passed since the day the Experimentals

attacked the city for the first time, yet Stronghold 74 did not even see any signs of the reinforcements arriving.

When Li Ran and the others first started eating the rations, they did not control the amount of food they ate. Everyone just ate as usual, so the food they bought previously was almost gone.

Zhou Yingxue even warned them at the beginning, but everyone felt the war would be over soon. When the time came, they would not be able to leave with the food either, so they might as well finish it all. Hence, Zhou Yingxue did not say anything else. At most, she could just eat the potatoes with her master. It wasn't like the lives of these people had anything to do with her anyway!

At this point, Li Ran and the others were starting to worry about the food shortage when they saw how hopeless the situation had become. However, they remembered that Zhou Yingxue had warned them earlier, yet they did not heed her advice.

As such, they were embarrassed to ask for Zhou Yingxue's help to think of a solution. Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was unaffected by the situation as he could not even be bothered with them.

Of course, it was because they were not in a dire situation yet. If they got really hungry, these people would probably even be willing to eat tree bark, not to mention begging others for help.

But at that time, it would be difficult to say if there would still be any bark left on the streets.

In any case, Ren Xiaosu wasn't panicking. He would go out every day to check on the situation in the city to see if any Experimentals had come to attack. Nothing else mattered to him.

The food he'd hoarded in his storage space was enough to last him and Zhou Yingxue for another three months at least. Furthermore, there were many varieties of food, like the entire herd of wild boars he had killed. There were still three of them left.

Two days later, Li Ran and the others kept wondering why they could smell a faint aroma of meat inside the hotel. However, when they searched for the source of the smell, they could not find anything. They even thought they might be hallucinating from hunger.

That was until they saw the gloss of oil on Zhou Yingxue's lips.

Zhou Yingxue did not seem to have any intention of eating inconspicuously. The pork was given by her master, after all, and it wasn't like she stole or seized it from anyone, so she did not have the obligation to share it with others, right?

On that same day, something extremely strange happened.

There were soldiers lying behind the defensive fortifications on the top of the stronghold walls when they saw an Experimental crawling over at high speed with something hanging in its mouth.

Everyone was a little puzzled by the sight. What was the Experimental coming here for? To surrender? Could infighting have arisen among the Experimentals as well?

The Experimental came to the bottom of the stronghold walls and dropped whatever was in its mouth before turning around and retreating back into the dark forest.

The garrison troops on the stronghold walls looked at each other and quickly lowered someone in a gondola car to pick up the item the Experimental had dropped. They found a white cloth.

When Zhou Xingwen heard about this, he ran to the top of the stronghold walls and took the white cloth from the soldier's hands. On it were a few words written in fresh blood: "Negotiations. Come alone."

Instantly, Zhou Xingwen's scalp tingled. The Experimentals actually knew how to write and even used the term "negotiation"?

Humans negotiating with the Experimentals? How was that supposed to be carried out?

Old Li and Qin Sheng rushed over as well. The Pyro Company members, who were already on the stronghold walls when the Experimental came over, started explaining the situation to them. Old Li suddenly said, "I'll go!"

Qin Sheng turned to look at Old Li. "Teacher, you can't go. There's probably at least ten thousand Experimentals still in that forest."

"It's OK." Old Li waved the white cloth in his hand and said with a smile, "Someone has to go see what the Experimentals are up to, right? I have no children, no partner, no worries, and my only disciple has also graduated. I should be the one to do this."

The Zhou Consortium officers nearby did not say anything. They were definitely not going. They felt a deep admiration for Old Li when they heard he was willing to volunteer.

And it did not seem this Rider was scared either from the way he was laughing and chatting.

Old Li's smile gradually faded. "Moreover, it's obvious there's an intelligent being that's controlling those Experimentals. If the other party wants to negotiate with me, I might just be able to get close and kill it. If that happens, this crisis involving the Experimentals will probably be resolved as well."

As for what came after that, Old Li would definitely get surrounded and killed by the other Experimentals after taking out their leader. No matter how powerful he was, it would be impossible for him to take on that many Experimentals.

However, he did not say anything regarding the consequences. Since he had decided to go, he would have to prepare to die.

Qin Sheng wanted to stop him, but before he could say anything, Old Li stopped him. Old Li smiled and said, "This is really exciting, isn't it?"

...

In the afternoon, Old Li rappelled down the stronghold walls and walked into the forest alone. But just as he entered the forest, he discovered there were Experimentals constantly moving around and surrounding him in the shadows.

The Experimentals did not attack Old Li. Instead, they opened up a path for him to walk straight into the depths of the forest.

Old Li stepped on soft leaves as he walked. Fall had passed, and the leaves that had fallen onto the soil had turned to duff. Old Li's ending was not going to be that different from the fallen leaves; it was just a matter of time.

Thinking this, Old Li strode forward with long strides. He looked at the Experimentals next to him like they were nothing.

After walking for about two kilometers, Old Li saw an Experimental sitting at a campfire in front of him. It was holding a tree branch in its gray hand, a sparrow impaled on it.

Old Li stood still and surveyed his surroundings silently. He wanted to see if there would be a chance for him to kill the other party. However, before he made his move, he still needed to hear what it had to say first.

But how were they going to talk? Through writing?

While Old Li was letting his imagination wander, the Experimental suddenly laughed hoarsely. "I've seen you before. That evening, you were up on the mountain with a young man beside you. Why isn't he here as well?"

Old Li was shocked. So this Experimental could actually speak!

The Experimentals mutated from humans, so it should be quite normal that they could speak a human language. But still, Old Li found it very unusual!

The Experimental's voice was extremely hoarse and sounded like two pieces of sandpaper scraping against each other. "Don't be so surprised. I'm also human. We only became like this because we wanted to cure our illness. It's just that some of us are lucky like me to be able to gradually regain our sapience, while the others unfortunately turned into monsters."

Old Li frowned but did not say anything. What the other party was telling him was an information overload.

The Experimental looked at him and waved the sparrow on the stick while saying with a smile, "This is for you. I used to like eating roast meat too. But now, I prefer raw and bloody meat more. Sometimes, I even like to eat something that's rotting for a change of taste. You can just stand over there. If you get any closer, you'll die here. You don't have to think about killing me. Your kind can't." With that, the Experimental threw the sparrow to Old Li.

Old Li accepted the sparrow graciously. He raised it to his mouth and tore off a piece of meat from it. As he chewed, he asked, "Isn't it better to be human? Meat only tastes good if it's cooked."

“That’s exactly why I’m looking for you.” The Experimental said in a hoarse voice, “Help me find someone. If you can find him, we’ll return to the forest, or we can head south and never come back again.”

Chapter 570 The person the Experimentals are looking for

“We came from the Pyro Company’s Lab 39. Prior to The Cataclysm, the laboratory had been researching various kinds of cancer treatments. But their drugs were the disapproved kind, so only those who were on the verge of death dared to try it,” the Experimental said slowly.

Old Li wished he could memorize every word the Experimental was saying because the information given was way too important. Any missing bits could lead to a mistake later on.

In addition, what the Experimentals did not know was that the Riders were also searching for that secret laboratory of the Pyro Company. The person they were looking for was also in there.

However, too much information had gone missing after the Cataclysm. As the founder of the Riders had also died in that event, not even the Pyro Company and the Qinghe Group knew the whereabouts of the Qinghe Group’s heir. All that the founder left behind was a message saying that his son must still be alive.

This matter became an obsession to the Riders. As long as they could not find that child, they would not be at peace even in death.

Before Old Li’s master passed away, he only left one instruction for him: Find the Rider’s heir.

Now that the Experimental was saying this, Old Li’s heart suddenly started pounding. He wondered if the Riders and the Experimentals were actually looking for the same person.

Even if that weren’t the case, could that Rider’s heir have also turned into an Experimental? Or could he be the Experimental right in front of him?

Old Li probed, “Since you’ve gotten back your sapience, what did you used to do?”

“Me?” The Experimental smiled. “I was the heir of some corporation.”

Old Li was stunned. “Is it Qinghe?”

He was about to go crazy. The descendant of the original Rider had actually become an Experimental? How was he going to explain this to the other Riders?

However, the Experimental shook its head and said in a hoarse voice, “I’m from the Li Consortium, a corporation from before the Cataclysm. You’ve probably never even heard of it before.”

Old Li was so pleasantly surprised he was about to burst into tears. Everything was fine as long as the person they were looking for wasn’t this Experimental before him!

Wait a minute, then could the Qinghe heir really be one of the Experimentals?

At the thought of this, he started feeling conflicted again.

The Experimental looked at Old Li and said gloomily, "There were only several hundred people in that laboratory, and they came from all over the world. Everyone spent a lot of money to get the Pyro Company to treat those of us who were about to die. But what the Pyro Company didn't tell us was that their research carried a high risk, and even they themselves were not confident of curing our diseases.

"It would've been fine if I just died, but they actually turned me into this inhuman." The Experimental sneered and said, "I heard the Pyro Company's still doing great now, and that's really disappointing."

Puzzled, Old Li asked, "So you want us to capture the Pyro Company's people for you to take revenge on?"

"No." The Experimental shook its head. "The person I want you to find is someone like me, a test subject. However, his illness was fully cured."

"Even if he was cured, how could he still be alive after 200 years? Even if he had a long life, he would've already died of old age," Old Li said curiously.

The Experimental asked, "Am I dead? Adding up the time that's passed, I'm probably over 200 years old as well."

"You mean you've obtained immortality?!" Old Li was shocked again. He felt the information he was getting today would be enough to shock him for an entire year.

The Experimental sneered. "You'll have to ask the Pyro Company about that. They were the ones who turned us into these carriers of cancer cells. If cancer cells are immortal, then we're immortal too."

"Then the person you're looking for..." Old Li gulped. Even though he was very experienced and knowledgeable, he had never heard of such a thing before.

The Experimental said, "He should have also escaped from the laboratory not too long ago. A few years ago, during an earthquake, a crack appeared in the laboratory we were in. All the patients who were locked up inside started to wake up, but the Pyro Company had chained us up before The Cataclysm to prevent us from escaping. As a result, we were trapped in there for a very long time. But the person who escaped was different. As the only one who was truly cured, he did not get chained.

"After the crack appeared, he also woke up from his slumber. I roared to him in hopes that he could bring us to see the light of day again, but I only heard his footsteps fall silent." The Experimental's voice became heavier. "He's different from us. According to the Pyro Company, he looks no different from a normal human on the surface. Only when he's tested will it be discovered that the cell nuclei in him are all heterokaryotic. Just, the heterokaryotic cells are uniformly divided in him. The Pyro Company even described such cell structures as a work of art."

Old Li felt his scalp go numb. "Can he still be considered human?"

The Experimental gave a strange smile and said, "Of course! The Pyro Company identifies him as more powerful... a Homo novus, a Neo-Human."

“So why do you want us to help you find him?” Old Li asked.

“So we can find a way to cure ourselves, of course!” the Experimental roared. After it fell into this state, it became extremely enraged. “Find him and hand him over to me. As long as I can find a way to cure us, we’ll never step into the Central Plains again. This is a very good deal. If you can’t find him, I’ll be sure to turn the Central Plains into my kingdom!”

Old Li felt it was already considering itself a king.

“But you’ll have to give me some clues on where to start.” Old Li said, “Just knowing that his cells are all heterokaryotic doesn’t help, I can’t possibly drag over everyone in the world and test them, or biopsy them to observe their cells under the microscope, right? This wouldn’t work, and that wouldn’t work either....”

The Experimental said angrily, “I don’t have time to chat with you. Just go and find him. There aren’t any clues here, but he definitely won’t be average upon stepping back into the human world. Maybe you can ask the Qing Consortium what clues they have. If you can’t find him in seven days, I’ll slaughter the entire city. No one in that stronghold will survive.”

Throughout, the Experimental did not give Old Li a chance to get close enough to decapitate it. And Old Li had also given up on the idea of decapitating it. The influx of information he received was too heavy. He had to hurry back to the stronghold and discuss their next step with the others.

Furthermore, he had to ask the Pyro Company’s headquarters to see if they had any information regarding this matter.

They had always been like headless flies as they went to the various laboratory sites with the Pyro Company, only to never discover any traces of that Rider’s heir in any of them.

Due to The Cataclysm, the Pyro Company had lost a great deal of precious information. Not even one in ten of their researchers remained, and it was already fortunate that four or five out of a thousand researchers managed to survive The Cataclysm. As for the Riders, they had also lost all pictures of the heir due to The Cataclysm. All these years, they could only use their words to describe that person’s looks: Considered handsome...

As if they could fucking find him based on that!

They knew the descendant of the Rider was named Ren Xiaobei. If they could locate Laboratory 39, they might just find the list of the laboratory staff at that time!