

First Order 851

Chapter 851: Too careless!

When the Pyro Company's special forces appeared, it was as good as announcing that the encirclement on Mt. Dashi was coming to an end. The barbarians in Longtan Canyon were either dead or wounded, while this last group of barbarians who had infiltrated Mt. Dashi were also heavily surrounded by T5081 and his subordinates now.

In fact, these special forces consisted entirely of T4s. Even in terms of average strength, they still had an overwhelming advantage over the barbarians.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were secretly observing the battle with their spotting scopes. They were about 700 meters away from the campsite, with the Qingyan River standing between them.

Before this, Ren Xiaosu had also guessed the barbarians might stake everything on this attempt to attack the camp. After all, this was a typical tactic that suicide squads would carry out after infiltrating enemy lines. So it was no surprise they did that.

However, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were a step too late. By the time they arrived, the machine gun position had already been taken out by the barbarians. Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin quickly searched for the most ideal sniping position to settle down at. But as soon as they found a spot, the T5 combatant suddenly came killing out of nowhere.

Ren Xiaosu was a little surprised by this turn of events. He had thought P5092 had no other way out, but he would never have expected the barbarians to be unable to threaten him at all.

In the battle on Mt. Dashi, P5092 resorted to conventional tactics and adopted a careful and steady approach in the early stages. But as they neared the end, he suddenly diverged from those methods. This was very exciting to watch.

Thinking about it, P5092 should be a rare talented commander among the Pyro Company troops.

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To be honest, Ren Xiaosu even had the thought of copying P5092's Army Warfare Leadership skill since he still had a Basic Skill Duplication Scroll with him.

However, the distance was too far for him to use the scroll as they were about 700 meters away from each other. Moreover, if he really wanted to learn a skill like this in the future, he could look for better candidates like Qing Zhen or Zhang Jinglin after earning enough Skill Duplication Scrolls.

When Yang Xiaojin saw Ren Xiaosu in a trance, she asked, "What are you thinking about?"

Ren Xiaosu said with a smile, "Even without us, they would still have been able to clear out the barbarians on Mt. Dashi. It might take a day or two longer, but the outcome would be the same."

He was lamenting because he realized his role in this battle was only the icing on the cake rather than being someone who provided them with timely assistance.

Faced with the invasion of tens of thousands of barbarians that were headed south, war was looming for the entire Central Plains against a whole other nation.

At that time, the Central Plains might eventually end up as the victor. But that would be the result of everyone fighting hard together, and definitely not the credit of only one or two individuals.

An individual's strength would appear insignificant in the face of the expeditionary army's barbarians that numbered in the tens of thousands. In this war, they needed more people like P5092 to step forward and display their intelligence to fight the barbarians to the end.

There was also a need for more Pyro Company soldiers to fight for the survival of mankind.

So what this war needed was many heroes, not just one or two.

Yang Xiaojin glanced at Ren Xiaosu. "Didn't we come here to take the pressure off the doctors? Why are you thinking so much? It's good enough that the doctors at the medical center won't have to overwork anymore."

"You're right." Ren Xiaosu chuckled, "We've also fulfilled our duties as doctors by coming here. Let's go, it's time to retreat!"

After that, they got up and headed back to the forward operating base.

The sun had already risen in the east. Golden-red rays of light shone through the layers of clouds from the distant sky. It seemed like today was no different from any other day as before.

But the barbarian corpses in the mountains, the dust on the soldiers' faces, and the blood on their bodies all reminded everyone that the real war had only just begun.

The battle at the camp was gradually coming to a stop. P5092 just stood on the sidelines without any intention of helping out.

He was deep in thought as he looked at the other side of the Qingyan River. The soldier next to him asked cautiously, "Sir, is something wrong?"

"If I'm not wrong, the snipers who killed the barbarians previously are on the other side of the river." P5092 said, "But they didn't make a move this time. I wonder who they really are and if we'll meet again on the battlefield."

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"Now that our battle with the barbarians is over, why don't we send some more people to investigate the snipers' identities?" a combat staff officer off the side asked.

“There’s no need for that.” P5092 shook his head. “It’s better not to complicate matters. Go and write a detailed report of this battle. I’m going to submit it to the higher-ups. It will be an important reference for our future dealings with the barbarians.”

During the battle at Mt. Dashi, the barbarians had revealed their shrewdness, craftiness, and fearless fighting style that did not match their bulky appearances.

This gave P5092 a feeling that the upcoming war might not go very smoothly. They would have to first understand their enemies before they could defeat them.

T5081 walked over slowly to P5092 after all the barbarians had been taken care of. “Now that the Battle of Mt. Dashi is over, it’s time for us to head north. As such, our collaboration with the main forces will also end here for now.”

In the command structure of the Pyro Company’s ORBAT, the special forces led by T5081 were not under the direct command of P5092. This was only considered a collaborative relationship. So when the mission was over, it was also time for T5081 and his troops to rejoin their unit.

P5092 nodded. “Great job. We’ll meet again on the northern battlefield.”

“Take care,” T5081 replied.

Just as T5081 was about to leave, P5092 suddenly asked, “By the way, there’s something I’d like to ask you. If you had to face over 40 barbarians by yourself with a sniper providing you cover from 600 meters away, are you confident of killing them all?”

T5081 shook his head. “No, some of these barbarians are nearly as strong as T4 combatants. It’s not difficult to kill a T5 combatant if there are over 40 of them.”

P5092 said with a sigh, “If you put it that way, I’ll have to reassess the snipers who helped us kill the barbarians this time. I wonder if it’s a good or bad thing for such experts to suddenly join the battlefield.”

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Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin returned to the forward operating base that evening carrying their field packs. When they entered the base, the soldiers at the gate did not even check their IDs and just let them through. They even saluted them and watched until they left their sights. This left Ren Xiaosu feeling happy.

Wang Jing received the two of them at the entrance of the medical center. “Did you manage to gather the herbs?”

“It’s all in here.” Ren Xiaosu patted the field pack on his back and said with a smile, “The herbs that I need could be found in the vicinity. It’ll be ready after I’m done brewing it this evening.”

Actually, Ren Xiaosu only had some very ordinary medicinal herbs in his field pack. As for concocting the black medicine, he just had to put on an act later.

“Did everything go well with the herb gathering in the mountains?” A nurse, who was standing at the side, asked in concern, “We heard that there was a battle on Mt. Dashi. The two of you didn’t go there, right?”

“Hahaha, how can we go to such a dangerous place like Mt. Dashi?” Ren Xiaosu laughed it off and said, “Someone warned us of the danger before we left. By the way, did any wounded soldiers get sent here in the past few days? Quick, bring me to them for treatment.”

Ren Xiaosu had not earned any gratitude tokens for several days already. Now that the source of the black medicine could be explained, he should quickly get back to earning more gratitude tokens!

But when he said that, everyone smiled and explained to him, “For some reason, there have barely been any wounded soldiers sent to the medical center for the past two days. We didn’t even get a single wounded person today. Since you’ve just returned, you should rest well. Don’t worry, we’ve already treated all of the wounded.”

With that, Ren Xiaosu was dumbfounded on the spot. He had only been worried that the doctors at the medical center would be overworked, so he decided to go out and kill some barbarians to reduce the number of casualties.

But what he did not expect was that by killing so many barbarians in one go, there ended up being no wounded people getting sent here the entire day.

He was too careless!

Chapter 852: What you see might not be the truth

Ever since Ren Xiaosu’s return, the forward operating base was bustling with people and activity. More and more of the Pyro Company’s main forces from multiple other locations arrived and assembled before rushing off towards the northern front line.

But amid this bustle, the activity in the medical center started to wane.

There were no wounded soldiers being sent over, and no one crying for help from the doctors at the entrance. There were no longer cries or wails in the medical center. The patients who had previously been treated had even started playing Fight the Landlord in the hospital. This made the doctors feel a little off.

They looked at the patients who were playing Fight the Landlord and thought that if it weren’t for the fact they had to maintain their physician image, they would even have joined them.

“Didn’t they say all the barbarians on Mt. Dashi have been killed? Why didn’t our soldiers suffer any injuries then?” The director of the medical center was a little doubtful. However, he couldn’t possibly check on this matter with those at the front line, could he? What was he going to ask? Question them why no one got injured in the battle? Wouldn’t that be sheer nonsense?

However, everyone knew this was just a temporary break. There would be even busier days waiting for them later. Most importantly, they should take advantage of this period to quickly adjust their mental and physical health.

Facing this situation, Ren Xiaosu undoubtedly found it the most unbearable. Having experienced that rapid accumulation of gratitude tokens, he suddenly did not know where he could earn more.

As such, Ren Xiaosu started making rounds to the various departments. When he saw some of the patients who were not treated with the black medicine yet to fully recover from their injuries, he ran over and asked, "It doesn't seem like your wounds were handled properly. Why don't we remove your bandages and treat them again?"

The patient's expression immediately changed. "Thank you, but there's really no need..."

"Gratitude received from Liu Chengyang, +1!"

The patient could clearly see a glimmer in the young doctor's eyes!

Honestly speaking, Ren Xiaosu really did not expect to receive a gratitude token like this. He turned around and looked at the other patients. As a matter of fact, a lot of them had not fully recovered yet!

Ren Xiaosu continued dropping by at every department to search for even more patients. Suddenly, the entire medical center was in chaos until a doctor went up to him angrily and said, "I know you have excellent medical skills and the patients treated by your Trinity Institute recover very quickly. But are you trying to humiliate our other medical staff by telling all the patients that their wounds were not handled properly?"

Nearby, the other doctors were glaring at him as well. Ren Xiaosu had caused an outrage this time.

"Ahem, no, no. That's not really what I was trying to do." Ren Xiaosu was a little embarrassed as he explained himself quickly. As such, he had to drop the idea of collecting gratitude tokens for the time being.

After returning to their department, Wang Jing said analytically to Ren Xiaosu, "Don't worry, the war situation in the North has gotten extremely intense now. When all the main forces have assembled in the North, they'll definitely have to shift the medical center there to cope with the even more intense battles later on. There's no need to worry about having nothing to do."

The medical center they were at was a 100 kilometers from the front line. If the wounded were to be brought back from there to receive their treatment, it would probably be too late for them.

A commotion suddenly broke out in the forward operating base. Everyone in the medical center was wondering what had happened. Although it was usually quite lively around here, there was never a commotion as big as this. After all, the Pyro Company soldiers tended to keep to themselves more often than not. Even when they talked, they would not speak too loudly, so where was all the noisy chatter coming from?

When Ren Xiaosu and the others made their way out of the medical center to have a look, they were surprised to see a long convoy of vehicles outside the forward operating base. The Pyro Company troops were checking the vehicles one by one before letting them through.

The logo of the Qinghe Group was on those vehicles!

“Oh, I remember now. Wasn’t it reported that the Qinghe Group was looking to provide material assistance to the Pyro Company? They came to provide the supplies while the Luoyang City garrison troops will head north to participate in the war.” Liang Ce said excitedly, “I’ve always heard that Qinghe University is very liberal-minded. It’s just that I’ve never had a chance to witness it.”

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin looked at each other. They had been enrolled in Qinghe University. Back then, after the Battle of Luoyang City, the two of them became very well-known. The Qinghe Group even had their statues erected on Wangchunmen Boulevard.

Now that the Qinghe University students were here, they had better not get recognized by them!

But what surprised Ren Xiaosu even more was that after the Qinghe University students got out of their vehicles, they carried the medical supplies straight into the medical center.

Yang Xiaojin said in a low voice, “Don’t worry, they’re all fourth-year students. I don’t think they’ll recognize us.”

When they were at Qinghe University, Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were in their freshman year. Yang Xiaojin had always kept a low profile and did not interact with the others while Ren Xiaosu was in his armor when he rescued the Qinghe University students. So even if the students knew about them, they might not know what they looked like.

When Yang Xiaojin said that, Ren Xiaosu felt relieved.

Those several hundred students came to the entrance of the medical center in high spirits. But when they saw Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin, they were somewhat hesitant. That was because the two of them did not have their white coats on and looked a little too young to be doctors.

But that had nothing to do with them. What was most important was that they delivered the medical supplies to the doctors.

Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin went right back to their department’s office to have some tea and read the paper. Due to the fact that their department had played the most important role during the emergency treatments, it was located closest to the entrance.

As the students entered the medical center one after another, all of them had very excited looks on their faces.

However, when the students were greeted by the sight in the medical center, they were stunned. They had imagined this place to be a living hell where many wounded were lying in the hallways due to a shortage of beds. There should also have been a lot of people crying in pain.

The doctors in this medical center should be very busy as well.

But what they saw was an empty hallway in front of them, and the doctors were sitting inside their offices sipping tea and reading the paper. There were even some strange noises in the hallway.

“I call landlord.”

“I raise your bid.”

“I raise you further.”

“I’m the landlord!”

“A pair of threes!”

“Pass!”

The students were at a loss as they crowded around in the hallway with the supply boxes. Someone approached Ren Xiaosu, who was reading a copy of Hope Media’s newspaper, and asked, “Do you work in the medical center?”

Ren Xiaosu nodded. “Yes. Y’all must be here to send the material assistance, right? Thank you very much, but we have to wait for the medical center’s director to take them.”

But something unexpected happened. A male student questioned, “Didn’t they say the front line was being hard-pressed by the enemies? Where are the wounded? Why are there so few of them? The doctors here also have nothing to do. Aren’t they deceiving us?! We didn’t come all the way here just to watch you guys sip tea and read the paper.”

Ren Xiaosu frowned. “I know that y’all came here out of kindness, but what you see might not be the truth. Y’all should wait for the director to get here first before making any assumptions.”

Chapter 853: War correspondent

Ren Xiaosu felt the students could not be faulted for the misunderstanding. Judging from the current situation, it really did not look like this was a medical center. After all, no casualties could be seen being treated, so how could this place count as a frontline medical center?

As such, it was normal the students would misunderstand the situation.

Moreover, it was not only the students who got angry; even Ren Xiaosu was infuriated. As he did not see any further wounded soldiers being carried in today, the source of his gratitude tokens was also cut off!

At this moment, only Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin were on duty in the office as there were no wounded soldiers to treat. The others had already gone upstairs to the temporary staff room to sleep.

Ren Xiaosu said to the students, “Since y’all’re here to deliver the supplies, you’ll have to wait for the director to come and take them. If you still have any doubts, you can get the director to explain it to you directly.”

After that, Ren Xiaosu closed the office door and went back to reading his newspaper. Just a while ago, he was reading an article about Jiang Xu's condemnation of the Wang Consortium's inaction in the war.

"Eh," Ren Xiaosu asked Yang Xiaojin in a puzzled whisper, "there should be a lot of people from the Qinghe Group that came to the north this time. Look, it was reported in the paper that the people from Hope Media will also be here. They probably came to cover the news as war correspondents. Although a portion of the Luoyang City garrison troops have come as well, I didn't see any Riders with them just now. Could it be that the Riders have really cut ties with the Qinghe Group?"

"It's impossible for them to do that." Yang Xiaojin shook her head and said, "After all, their relationship used to be very close, so how could they cut ties just like that?"

"That's what I think too." Ren Xiaosu nodded.

Outside the department office, the students' indignant voices could be heard as Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin chatted inside like nothing was happening. It was as though the commotion had nothing to do with them.

Seeing that the students outside were close to breaking down the door, Ren Xiaosu frowned and went over to say a few more words to them. Honestly, he felt he could not fault them since they had come such a long way to deliver the supplies. Moreover, they were all here for the purpose of fighting off the barbarian enemies in the North. Therefore, it would be best not to affect their team spirit.

It was not like he was in charge of this medical center anyway, so there was no need for him to care about these matters since he was just a normal cardiac surgeon. However, he wondered where the director had gone.

But as soon as Ren Xiaosu opened the door, he heard someone shout from the other side of the hallway, "Why are you all blocking the Miracle Doctor's office door?"

Ren Xiaosu was stunned when he heard that. It was the patients who were chatting and playing cards in their wards who could no longer bear to watch this. They all walked out of their ward to shut down the students' grousing.

Ren Xiaosu's reputation in the forward operating base and medical center was no longer something normal doctors could match.

On one hand, Ren Xiaosu's medicine worked wonders in treating external injuries. On the other hand, Ren Xiaosu's enthusiasm in shaking hands with the patients touched them deeply.

The patients realized the young doctor really took saving lives to be his duty. As long as they thanked him, the Miracle Doctor would feel happy from the bottom of his heart.

Thinking about it, how respectable was a doctor who required payment only in thanks but not money!

So when the patients saw the Miracle Doctor's door being blocked, they wondered if someone had come here to make trouble for him. As such, they immediately dropped their playing cards and

surrounded the “troublemakers.” At this moment, the hallway was packed full of people, and the veterans were ready to start a fight!

A student who seemed to be the leader of the group said in a loud voice, “We kept hearing from others that the battle situation at the front lines was very intense and that there were a lot of casualties. That was why we came to the North bringing medical aid. But it turned out the situation was not as we had imagined. We were deceived!”

“Bullshit.” A Pyro Company soldier who was limping and wrapped in bandages said, “You don’t see anyone wounded around here because the main forces have already headed further north after they were done fighting the barbarians on Mt. Dashi. Since there’s no battles in the vicinity, of course there won’t be any wounded people!”

“You’re wrong!” The student replied, “Since battles were fought, where did all the wounded from those fights go?”

“That’s what you don’t understand.” The Pyro Company soldier said, “Why do you think we call him the Miracle Doctor? Applying his secret ancestral black medicine on an exterior wound will heal it in three days. If you don’t believe me, have a look at my hand.”

With that, the patient removed his bandages and said, “I was one of those wounded in the last batch of casualties sent here two days ago. At that time, my wound was so deep the bone could even be seen. But now, the wound has healed up. If it wasn’t because I suffered a fracture as well, I would’ve been discharged today.”

After he said that, all of the patients at the side who had been treated by Ren Xiaosu revealed their wounds and reported when they had undergone their surgery.

Yang Xiaojin stood by the office door and listened. The patients were defending Ren Xiaosu with the utmost sincerity.

At this moment, some people came in from outside the medical center. They were even carrying some photography equipment with them. The leader of this group said with a smile, “What’s going on? Why is everyone standing around here?”

The student said indignantly, “Chief Editor Ji, we’ve been deceived. There aren’t that many wounded people here at all.”

Ren Xiaosu was stunned when he heard the words “chief editor.” He looked at Chief Editor Ji and realized he actually knew him. Wasn’t this the deputy chief editor of Hope Media, Ji Yi?

Ren Xiaosu had met him during the battle in Luoyang City.

That night, Ji Yi was busy overseeing the publication of the next day’s newspaper at the headquarters. After Ren Xiaosu protected Hope Media’s headquarters in the battle, Ji Yi and Jiang Xu expressed their gratitude to him together.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not expect that Hope Media would actually send a chief editor to conduct interviews on the battlefield this time. This was enough to show just how much emphasis Hope Media placed on this war.

As soon as Ji Yi appeared, the students stopped making a commotion. Meanwhile, the director of the medical center and the commander of the forward operating base rushed over to welcome Ji Yi. This was also enough to show the standing of the Hope Media chief editor within the entire Alliance of Strongholds.

Although Hope Media did not possess any military or authority, their status in people's hearts could not be measured by money or power.

When Ren Xiaosu saw Ji Yi, Ji Yi noticed him as well. However, the latter was clearly more surprised than Ren Xiaosu!

At the same time, the commander of the forward operating base also arrived. He walked over with a big smile and said, "Chief Editor Ji, I only just received notice that you were coming to the front lines. Sorry for not welcoming you at the door."

However, Ji Yi said, "I'm sorry, I've got to talk to an old friend first. Can everyone please wait a moment?"

Then Ji Yi headed straight to Ren Xiaosu and said with an excited look, "Sir, what are you doing here? After we parted ways that day..."

Just as Ji Yi was about to catch up on the past with Ren Xiaosu, the entire hallway suddenly went quiet. The students looked at one another as they did not expect Chief Editor Ji to actually know this young man.

Someone also realized that Ji Yi seemed to have addressed Ren Xiaosu as "sir"?! Surely they must have misheard it, right?

Ji Yi continued rambling, "Sir, how have you been recently? Before coming here, Chief Editor Jiang was just mentioning you to me. Sir..."

Seeing that the situation was not right, Ren Xiaosu quickly pulled Ji Yi into his office and stopped him from addressing him as "sir" in front of everyone.

Chapter 854: Finding Zhang Xiaoman

When the office door closed, the patients, the students, the director of the medical center, and the commander of the forward operating base were left staring at one another in the hallway. No one could understand what was going on here.

To the students of Qinghe University, Ji Yi was a person of extremely high standing. Jiang Xu was the honorary principal of Qinghe University, and on top of that, he also taught the humanities and political

science. Ji Yi was also a full professor at Qinghe University. In Luoyang City, these two people had extremely good reputations and were no different from celebrities.

Yet the respected Chief Editor Ji Yi actually addressed a young man as “sir”? This left the students who were reprimanding Ren Xiaosu earlier at a loss.

“Just who is that young man?” A student muttered, “Chief Editor Ji seems to respect him a lot. This is definitely not an act.”

“I’m not sure who he is, but since Chief Editor Ji is so respectful towards him, we probably acted too rashly earlier. Let’s apologize to him later...”

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The students did not harbor any bad intentions. They only came here because they had a burning passion to protect their homes. That was why Ren Xiaosu did not confront them directly just now.

Students their age might look like they already had a mind of their own, but actually, they tend to have a lopsided view of things and were easily misled by what they saw.

Actually, if Ren Xiaosu were not a doctor, the students might just associate him with that young man who saved Luoyang City. But the difference between a doctor who saved lives and that of someone who went on a killing spree was simply too vast.

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As a result, the students did not even think in that direction. To say nothing of the students, not even Ji Yi dared to believe it.

As the students were whispering among themselves, the director of the medical center asked the commander of the forward operating base, “Isn’t he a doctor from the Trinity Institute? Why haven’t I heard of someone with his reputation in the Trinity Institute?”

“I’m not sure.” The commander of the forward operating base shook his head. “A P5 commander who was leaving the forward operating base had specifically instructed us to look after him. It seems that he’s also on very good terms with that P5 commander....”

When P5092 left the forward operating base with his troops, he had indeed instructed them to take care of Ren Xiaosu. His standing within the Pyro Company was basically the same as Jiang Xu’s status in Luoyang City. Even if it was not as high, it wouldn’t be that much of a difference.

“T” represented the combat strength of an individual, while “P” represented the command authority levels. These designations ran parallel to each other.

In other words, a P5’s combat strength might only be at the level of a T4, but as they were commanding officers, they would generally not participate in close combat.

T5s and P5s were on the same level in principle, and they enjoyed the same treatment. But when it came to actual combat, T5s would be under the orders of P5s.

P5 was the highest rank within the command structure. Go any higher than that and it would be the five bosses of the Pyro Company. Therefore, a P3 commander in charge of the forward operating base would definitely bear in mind what P5092 had instructed him to do.

At this point, the commander of the forward operating base was also a little puzzled. Where did this young man hail from?!

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu interrupted Ji Yi's rambling in the office and bluntly asked, "You're the one leading the team conducting interviews on the front line this time?"

"Yes." Ji Yi nodded and said, "Being a war correspondent is a very dangerous job, so I have to lead by example. I can't just hide behind others while they do the job. But you, sir—"

"Stop calling me 'sir.' Mr. Ji, you don't have to be so polite with me. I'm not used to hearing that either." Ren Xiaosu corrected the way Ji Yi addressed him before asking, "I saw in the recent editions of Hope Media's newspapers that Chief Editor Jiang Xu has been condemning the Wang Consortium a lot. Has Hope Media beefed up the security measures at HQ? The Wang Consortium has been making a lot of risky moves these days, so don't let them hurt the chief editor."

Ji Yi gave a bitter smile. "I've warned the chief editor, but you should also know him very well. No one can persuade him otherwise. Actually, before I came here, the Wang Consortium's people had already gone to look for the chief editor to have a talk. However, he refused to see them. To avoid suspicions, he did not even let them into the building. But I don't think the Wang Consortium will do anything shocking over some news articles, right?"

Ren Xiaosu sighed. "Hopefully not."

"Oh right, when did you suddenly become a doctor?" Ji Yi wondered, "Are you... undercover? Are you planning on doing something to the Pyro Company here? Do you need my cooperation?"

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "I really came here to save lives. Right now, I'm just a normal cardiac surgeon. By the way, it's so dangerous being a war correspondent. Aren't you afraid?"

Ji Yi smiled. "I was a little scared at first. But now that I know you're on the front lines as well, I suddenly don't feel that scared anymore."

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As someone who had personally witnessed how strong Ren Xiaosu was, Ji Yi trusted in the presence of his savior. It was as though nothing would happen to him as long as Ren Xiaosu was here.

As he was saying that, there came a sudden knock on the door. The commander of the forward operating base stood outside the door and said, "Sorry to disturb you, but there's an urgent matter."

Ren Xiaosu opened the door and asked, "What's the matter?"

The commander of the forward operating base said solemnly, "We've just received orders from the main command center on the front lines that our soldiers in the north have engaged in a frontal battle with the barbarians. We need to transport our supplies in this forward operating base to the north, and all the medical center staff will also have to head north. A new medical center will be set up at the rear of the front line there."

This forward operating base had been established to connect the south of the supply line at Mt. Dashi to the northern front line. However, it was still more than a 100 kilometers away from the front lines in the north. If the wounded needed to be transported back here from the north for treatment, it would be too late.

So setting up a new field hospital nearer to the front line was of extreme urgency.

Ren Xiaosu said, "I'll go and tell Elder Wang Jing and the others so that we can set off as soon as possible."

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Outside Stronghold 144 in the Northwest.

Five supply trucks gradually approached the stronghold. Along the route from the Central Plains to the Northwest, Fortress 178 had set up six checkpoints in total. These checkpoints were responsible for conducting inspections in case anyone transported any undeclared dangerous goods into the Northwest.

However, these five trucks continued driving without being stopped along the way. Whenever the trucks reached a checkpoint, someone would have already informed them to let the vehicles through.

During this period, no one carried out any inspections of the vehicles.

When the five trucks came to a stop outside the stronghold, the drivers got out of the vehicles and opened the trailers. Wang Yun and the others could be seen sitting and resting inside with their eyes closed.

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A driver smiled and said, "I'm sorry for the discomfort caused to you all by having to hide in the back of the truck for so long. You can disembark now. We've arrived."

Wang Yun opened his eyes calmly. "There's nothing to be sorry about. We've been through worse than this before, so this is nothing in comparison."

On that day, they had nearly encountered the Pyro Company troops after escaping from Stronghold 31. Later, when they entered the Wang Consortium's territory, the Great Hoodwinker had already arranged for the trucks to escort them to the Northwest secretly.

After all was said and done, the Great Hoodwinker was still very dependable this time.

“Sir, where do we go now?” Wang Yun’s subordinate asked while looking at the northwestern stronghold.

Wang Yun thought for a moment and said, “We have to find someone called Zhang Xiaoman first.”

Chapter 855: Taking advantage of me again!

The Great Hoodwinker did not follow Wang Yun, Ji Zi’ang, and the rest to the North this time as there was still plenty of intelligence-gathering to do once war broke out in the North. He also wanted to take advantage of the chaos to recruit more talent for the Northwest.

The Northwest’s field intelligence unit had already quietly started preparing a plan called “The Prosperous Northwest” that was aimed at recruiting more ambitious people to join in the developmental efforts of building up the Northwest after the war ended...

However, they would definitely not take any real action for now since they needed to stand united against a common enemy. The Great Hoodwinker was only making plans for the future.

Therefore, Wang Yun and the others still needed to find the person responsible for liaising with them after arriving in the North, and that person was Zhang Xiaoman.

As Wang Yun took in the sight of Stronghold 144 in front of him, he could see many merchants traveling back and forth through the open stronghold gate. Some of the merchants had just arrived from the Central Plains while others were preparing to return to the Central Plains with goods purchased in the Northwest.

Outside the stronghold where the original town stood, it had turned into a huge wholesale market after going through multiple expansions. There were people peddling their wares in the marketplace while shop owners from the stronghold came to replenish their goods.

The entire town was full of life and bustling with activity.

Ji Zi’ang viewed the sights and asked, “Have you been to the Northwest before this?”

“Yes.” Wang Yun nodded and said, “When I was still active in the field some years ago, I came to the Northwest to hunt down some traitors. At that time, the Zong Consortium was still in charge of this place.”

“And what did the Northwest look like back then?” Ji Zi’ang asked.

“At that time, I did not enter the stronghold and only stayed in town for a short while. Back then, the town was no different from those in the Central Plains. You could even say that the refugees here had it much tougher than those in the Central Plains. After all, there’s a lack of resources in this region,” Wang Yun recalled. “But it’s completely different now. Even the town in Luoyang City is not as prosperous as the Northwest.”

“Yeah.” Ji Zi’ang nodded. “How could this be the town we imagined? Perhaps we made the right choice after all.”

Wang Yun walked up to a hardware wholesaler and asked, "Bro, where do you come from?"

"Me? I was born and raised right here in the Northwest," the middle-aged man answered with a smile. "Why do you ask?"

"We just came from the Central Plains, so we wanted to ask about the situation here. Bro, did you come from the stronghold?" Wang Yun asked. In his opinion, these people were likely to be stronghold residents. How could refugees possibly have the capital to start a business?

"No, I'm a refugee," the middle-aged man said with a smile.

"Then where did you get your capital from?" Wang Yun asked.

"Fortress 178 approved of small, interest-free loans saying that it would help us start a business. I heard that refugees are also eligible to apply, so I went for it," the middle-aged man explained with a smile.

Wang Yun was stunned. Even though all the consortiums' banks provided loan services, they had to evaluate the borrower's eligibility and ensure they had some assets to put up as collateral before lending the money.

But the refugee in front of them definitely did not have any assets that could be mortgaged. Furthermore, he had never heard of any consortium banks that would lend money to refugees, especially not interest free!

Although they were called loans, it was actually more like a subsidy. This was a sum of money that could help refugees turn things around in their lives.

The middle-aged man smiled and said, "There isn't a distinction between refugees and stronghold residents here in the Northwest anymore. Everyone is free to enter and exit the city, so it's not like the IDs of the refugees are any different from the ones that the stronghold residents are carrying."

Wang Yun lamented, "Fortress 178 is so resolute and daring."

When the Wang Consortium opened up a stronghold to refugees some time ago, the entire world felt they had made a very bold decision at the time. However, no one expected the Northwest would completely eliminate the class differences between refugees and stronghold residents.

Of course, the stronghold residents would definitely despise the refugees a little. But over time, since refugees essentially looked no different from stronghold residents, no one would be able to tell them apart.

Wang Yun and the others were witnessing the enormous changes in the Northwest that had only taken a few months to implement. They were truly shocked, but for some reason, they also felt motivated. They were inspired by this vibrant scene as well.

They managed to locate Stronghold 144's garrison troops later that afternoon. Wang Yun handed over a letter personally written by the Great Hoodwinker at the entrance of the barracks. "Please pass this letter to Regiment Commander Zhang Xiaoman."

The soldiers at the entrance were taken aback. Then an officer ordered, "Go and send the letter to the brigade commander."

When he said that, Wang Yun was taken aback as well. Didn't the Great Hoodwinker say his son was only a regiment commander? It seemed like he had recently been promoted.

However, Wang Yun could understand that. After all, Fortress 178's territory had suddenly expanded many times over after they took control of the entire Northwest. Hence, they needed more soldiers to guard this piece of land. That was why the veterans in the military would quickly be promoted to take the more important positions.

After some ten minutes, a soldier said to Wang Yun, "Everyone, please come in. Our brigade commander would like to meet y'all."

When they entered the barracks area, Wang Yun noticed there were several hundred military transport trucks and even resupply vehicles parked along the road. This made for quite a spectacular sight to behold.

Wang Yun said softly, "It looks like the Northwest is preparing to go to war. Look at those trucks and the troops who are constantly moving supplies into them. If it's not for the war, there wouldn't be a need for such turnout."

"War? With whom?" Ji Zi'ang frowned. "Could it be the Qing Consortium?"

At this moment, Zhang Xiaoman came over to welcome them. He looked at Wang Yun enthusiastically. "I read the letter. I welcome all of you in joining our Fortress 178. I've already sent news of your arrival to Wang Fengyuan. He'll send someone to take you all to Fortress 178. Do any of you have any objections to this arrangement?"

Wang Yun shook his head. "No objections. Your father already informed us of the arrangements before we came here."

"My dad?" Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. "My dad told you that?"

When Wang Yun saw Zhang Xiaoman's reaction, he was also stunned!

Wang Yun looked at the letter written by the Great Hoodwinker in Zhang Xiaoman's hand and probed, "The Great Hoodwinker was the one who said that. Isn't the Great Hoodwinker your father? Zhang Husheng? Do you know Zhang Husheng?"

Zhang Xiaoman flew into a rage and threw the letter to the ground. "That old bastard is taking advantage of me again by going around and spreading lies! My father is working in a factory at Fortress 178 right now!"

Wang Yun was confused. Ji Zi'ang was confused too.

Honestly, Wang Yun could never have expected the Great Hoodwinker to even be spouting nonsense about something like that. And judging from Zhang Xiaoman's angry expression, it was probably not the first time the Great Hoodwinker had taken advantage of him!

All of a sudden, Wang Yun did not even know how to criticize that Great Hoodwinker. It was true that not a single word of truth came out of his mouth, so one could only rely on themselves to judge whether he was lying.

Zhang Xiaoman calmed down and said, "Since Wang Fengyuan's people will arrive at Stronghold 144 tomorrow, you all can stay in the camp today. I still have something very important to do, so I won't be giving you a tour of the place."

Wang Yun suddenly asked, "Is the Northwest getting ready for war?"

"I don't have to hide it from you all." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Our infantry brigade will also start heading north tomorrow to defend against the northern enemies together with the Central Plains."

Wang Yun was stunned. "Are you all going to help the Wang Consortium and the Pyro Company?"

"No." Zhang Xiaoman shook his head. "We're not going there to help them. We're doing it for the people of the Central Plains."

Wang Yun and Ji Zi'ang looked at each other. There was nothing beneficial to the Northwest for supporting the Central Plains, yet Fortress 178 still made a decision like that.

Suddenly, Wang Yun said firmly, "We'll go with you then. You'll need someone familiar with the Central Plains, and I happen to already have all the maps of the Central Plains in my head."

Zhang Xiaoman thought for a moment. "I've got to seek instructions from the higher-ups regarding this. However, you all have just been through an arduous journey from the Central Plains, so there's actually no need for you to risk your lives with us Northwesterners."

Wang Yun thought for a moment before replying, "We are also from the Northwest now."

Chapter 856: Trusted troops

The 8th Infantry Brigade serving under Fortress 178 in the Northwest set off from Stronghold 144. However, when the troops were deployed this time, the Northwest did not even bother to conceal their movements as they hurried directly for the battlefield in the Central Plains.

Over the past few months, Hope Media, which originally did not have any presence in the Northwest, had also set up new branches in the two main cities of Fortress 178 and Stronghold 144.

Meanwhile, the print runs of their newspaper in the other strongholds were handled by distribution vendors.

With regards to the Central Plains' overall war situation, the Northwest's high-profile announcement of their participation to defend against the northern enemy was enough to lift everyone's spirits.

Although the Alliance of Strongholds had been established for over 200 years, this was probably the first time the Central Plains people were so united again.

These lands had experienced an extended period of separatism. After a displacement in culture and the consortiums' carefully curated curriculum, a lot of people even forgot that they used to be compatriots before The Cataclysm and should therefore be united as a nation.

And now, it seemed everyone in the Central Plains was infuriated by the Northerners' action of massacring a city. The words "rousing" and "victory" also started appearing more in Hope Media's newspapers.

Although Fortress 178 had agreed to Wang Yun's request to travel together with the 8th Infantry Brigade, Wang Yun, Ji Zi'ang, and Wang Yun's subordinates were not given any appointments for the time being. It seemed they would have to wait until the war in the North was over first.

During their march, everyone was surprised that Wang Yun and Zhang Xiaoman had become very good friends.

In fact, the two of them had completely different personalities, and their habits and interests were not similar at all. However, they still ended up becoming friends!

Was it because Wang Yun admired the Northwest's selflessness? No.

Was it because of Zhang Xiaoman's warm hospitality? It was not that either.

It was because both of them shared a "hatred" for the Great Hoodwinker.

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The Great Hoodwinker had single-handedly held together this hard-to-come-by friendship.

Wang Yun sat in the vehicle and asked, "When we parted ways with the Great Hoodwinker, I heard you were only a regimental commander. How'd you get promoted so quickly? You said that your father works in a factory. Could it be a military supplies factory? You have good connections?"

Ji Zi'ang turned around and looked at Zhang Xiaoman as he was particularly interested in this matter. He wanted to know whether there were any privileged classes in the Northwest.

"No, can y'all not look at me that way?" Zhang Xiaoman said with a laugh, "My father works in a factory that produces socks. I only took a few days to become a brigade commander. But do you think I can really lead an infantry brigade to victory in battle? It's not like I'm a genius at leadership!"

Wang Yun and Ji Zi'ang were stunned at his response. It seemed there was some other reason behind Zhang Xiaoman's appointment as brigade commander.

Zhang Xiaoman chuckled. "Although I like to brag, I know very well what I'm capable of. I could still manage when I was leading the Razor Sharp Company, but when I became a regimental commander, I realized there was still too much I needed to learn. Soon after learning to be a regimental commander, I was suddenly made a brigade commander who had to lead soldiers to victory. That's something that I can't do yet."

"Could it be that Fortress 178 has another purpose in sending you to the Central Plains?" Ji Zi'ang wondered. "I don't think that's appropriate, right? Now that the Central Plains is facing a war, it should be time for us to be united. The Northwest has never participated in the power struggles between the organizations, so there's no reason they would send troops for other purposes at a time like this."

"No, no, no. You're thinking about the wrong thing." Zhang Xiaoman chuckled. "Let me ask you all a question first. Where's our Northwest's future commander?"

"In the Central Plains. He was the one who saved us," Wang Yun said.

"That's right. At first, I couldn't understand why the commander would assign me to the Central Plains. Later, I actually realized that the troops were not for me but the future commander to lead." Zhang Xiaoman said with a glint in his eyes, "If it were the other veteran commanders who got assigned to the Central Plains, they might not be willing to accept the arrangement and the future commander would not be able to command the troops. What if they disobeyed his orders? But it's different for me. The commander knew that I would definitely not oppose the future commander, so he sent me to fight this war instead."

The other brigade commanders, such as Zhou Yinglong, Chai Zhilong, and the others, had been leading their troops into battle for many years and already had their own methods when it came to fighting a war.

So if these people were to join up with Ren Xiaosu in the Central Plains, they might not listen to him.

It was not that they despised Ren Xiaosu or refused to accept him as their future commander, but they would still have their own opinion on things.

But Zhang Xiaoman was different. First of all, he felt a little guilty after being fast tracked for promotion. Second, when he was in the Razor Sharp Company, he had always worked under Ren Xiaosu's command. His position as the company commander was practically in name only.

Therefore, Zhang Xiaoman immediately guessed the reason for sending him to the Central Plains. As if they would trust him for his leadership ability! It was clear he would be assisting Ren Xiaosu in developing his first group of trusted troops.

Actually, Zhang Xiaoman had become Ren Xiaosu's trusted subordinate since their time in the Razor Sharp Company.

Furthermore, when Wang Yun and Ji Zi'ang requested to travel together with the troops, the fortress commander had agreed to it very quickly. These two were supernatural beings. At that time, Zhang

Xiaoman thought to himself that Commander Zhang had really put in a lot of effort to help Ren Xiaosu build up his support base.

But then again, Ren Xiaosu saved both Wang Yun and Ji Zi'ang, so they would naturally become his trusted subordinates.

After this war, Ren Xiaosu would not have to start from scratch if he needed to be deployed to the front lines the next time. By then, he would already have a group of soldiers who had worked together before, even if it was only one infantry brigade.

Zhang Xiaoman suddenly asked, "How did the future commander save you guys? It wasn't stated in the letter, so why don't y'all tell me in detail."

"The two of us were being held in the secret prison. When the Great Hoodwinker was brought in first, he realized he could not rescue us by himself..." After Wang Yun said that, he could not help but get angry.

Then Wang Yun described the prison break in detail and also told him about the destruction of Stronghold 31. Zhang Xiaoman lamented from the bottom of his heart, "Future Commander is really as fearsome as ever."

Ji Zi'ang suddenly asked, "I heard from the Great Hoodwinker that all your fortress commanders must come through the Razor Sharp Company. Is that true? Is the future commander also from the Razor Sharp Company?"

"You've asked the right person!" Zhang Xiaoman said proudly, "I humbly admit that I'm not talented in leading troops. Back then, I was the company commander of the Razor Sharp Company that our future commander was part of! We followed our future commander's lead and fought all the way from Shichuan Town to Stronghold 146 in the north."

"Wait a minute," Ji Zi'ang was taken aback a little. "If you were his company commander, why were you the one following his lead in fighting your way north?"

"Ahem, those details are not important." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Disregarding all of that, we really went through thick and thin with him. But after fighting that war, do you know why we were convinced by him?"

"Because he destroyed Stronghold 146 single-handedly?" Wang Yun asked.

"No." Zhang Xiaoman shook his head and said, "Although there aren't many powerful supernatural beings around, they aren't considered rare either. Does it mean that we have to comply just because they're powerful? No! We were convinced because he told us that he wouldn't leave any man behind, and in the end, all of us really survived and made it back home."

Chapter 857: A new contest

The Pyro Company's main forces had gathered 70 kilometers away in the vast plains and forest north of Mt. Dashi. They were planning to establish a defensive line that stretched 31 kilometers long, and currently, only seven kilometers of the construction was complete.

A large number of refugees and stronghold residents had been deployed to the front lines. Besides engineers and maintenance workers, all able-bodied male adults were recruited for the construction as well.

After these refugees and stronghold residents arrived here, their only job was to race against time and build the defensive line as quickly as possible.

Several hundred brick kilns at the rear were working nonstop to fire bricks, and due to that, the amount of silt dug up from the nearby river had caused the channel to widen by more than ten times.

It was an extremely shocking sight. If someone were to look down from above, the defensive line could be seen extending horizontally outwards to the left and right.

In Hope Media's article, they reported that when foreign enemies came attacking, a new Great Wall in human history would rise once more.

Initially, the plains to the north of the New Great Wall did not have a name. But it had been named the Dingyuan Plains[1]. That was because the Pyro Company was aware the barbarian troops were called the expeditionary army. As such, they planned to stop the barbarians at the Dingyuan Plains and send them back where they came from when the opportunity arose.

Actually, the main purpose of this war was to effectively wipe out as many of the barbarian troops as they could.

If they just defeated the barbarians without killing enough of them, the opponent might just make a comeback after some years.

As the terrain of the Dingyuan Plains was flat, the Pyro Company could maximize the power of their firearms and explosives against the barbarians.

Prior to this, the Pyro Company was most fond of fighting battles on complex terrain, because they had an overall stronger physical fitness. Once a battle broke out against their enemies in the mountains, be it the Kong Consortium or the Wang Consortium, they could only scurry away like frightened rats.

Even if the Kong Consortium had more troops than the Pyro Company, they would also be slowly worn down by the Pyro Company. This was a huge advantage the Pyro Company had over the Kong Consortium with their stronger physical fitness.

But it was different now. Even though the barbarians did not use firearms and explosives, they were much fitter than the Pyro Company's troops.

Using the Pyro Company's own strength as a comparison, their average combat power would be between T1 and T2, while almost all of the barbarians were rated as T3s.

Moreover, after the battle at Mt. Dashi, P5092 had submitted a very detailed combat report. One of the important points to take note of was that there were also stronger individuals among the barbarians.

The barbarians had already faced off with the Pyro Company's main forces multiple times in the region between the Dingyuan Plains and the New Great Wall. However, they were still at the stage of probing each other's strengths.

The Pyro Company's 3rd Division led by P5092 had already arrived and garrisoned the strategic location assigned to them along the front lines.

However, the first thing P5092 did was not to consolidate the military and defensive line but to hang the barbarian corpses they had killed at Mt. Dashi in a very prominent area beyond the defensive line.

Hundreds of wooden stakes were suddenly erected outside the New Great Wall where P5092 was standing. The barbarian corpses hanging from them swayed like tattered rags in the wind.

After all, the massacre at Stronghold 176 had really angered everyone in the Central Plains, including the Pyro Company.

And P5092 was trying to provoke the barbarians.

To achieve this, he even ordered the main forces that went into Mt. Dashi to not let any barbarians escape. After killing them, they loaded all their corpses into the trucks and transported them to the front lines.

Crows were circling in the sky as though they could not wait to devour the barbarians' corpses. However, the Pyro Company soldiers did not care and just let the birds eat to their heart's content.

P5092 knew the barbarians' scouts must be observing this place secretly, and that would be enough for him.

His deputy commander who was standing off to the side whispered, "Sir, if you do that, you're probably going to make the barbarians very angry. I hope they won't concentrate their attacks on our lines when the time comes."

P5092 stood atop the New Great Wall in this era of the wastelands. He saw it stretching far into the distance until he could no longer see the end of it.

He said coldly, "Let them come then. That's exactly my intention."

At 11 o'clock that night, dozens of flares were suddenly launched into the sky from the New Great Wall, releasing a tremendous amount of heat and light.

When the flares reached their apex, they began falling back to the ground slowly. With that, the Pyro Company soldiers on the Great Wall could clearly see thousands of barbarians running on the ground from the north with the aid of the flares' illumination.

P5092 calmly looked at this sight. "So we really managed to provoke them? Their advance guard has turned out in full force. Hand down my orders to open fire on any who enter within range. Show them no mercy."

His deputy commander asked, "What if they run away?"

If they opened fire as soon as the barbarians got within range, that would mean their opponent could get out of their area of fire by retreating a little. Then it would be very difficult to kill more of them.

P5092 could not possibly be unaware of this. The high-ranking Pyro Company officer took off his black sheepskin gloves and said, "It's alright. Just proceed according to my plan."

The Pyro Company soldiers continued firing more flares into the sky. Someone watched the incoming barbarians in the distance and muttered, "Those barbarians sure can run fast. It almost looks like they're brown bears. If they get near us, our defensive line will probably be torn apart in an instant. Wait, look! The barbarians at the front look like they're dragging something."

A moment later, someone suddenly issued the order. "Open fire!"

Heavy machine gun rounds were visible to the naked eye when fired during the night. When the heavy machine guns were fired into the distance, they formed a trail resembling a long whip lashing at the barbarians' advance guard!

The garrison troops at the other locations on the Great Wall were alarmed by the battle over here. They all took out their binoculars to observe. Someone radioed over to ask P5092 if they needed any reinforcements. However, P5092 replied there was no need.

Everyone could see through their binoculars that the most well-built barbarians who were running at the front had suddenly placed large shields more than two meters tall in front of them!

Five barbarians held up a shield at the same time, and it was specially made from multilayer compressed leather. They continued advancing at a very fast speed even though the shields were extremely massive and solid.

It was so heavy that five barbarians were needed to hold one up together even with their strong physical fitness.

When the machine gun bullets finally impacted the shields, it sounded like heavy rain hitting the ground. The top layer of the leather shields started cracking all around when they were hit by the bullets. But to everyone's surprise, the heavy machine guns were unable to fully penetrate the shields!

The deputy commander was shocked. He did not know what the shields were made of. If they allowed the enemies to get far closer before opening fire, they might have been able to approach the base of the wall relying on those shields alone. Then, with their strong physical fitness, they could climb up the Great Wall and tear apart the defensive line.

The deputy commander glanced at P5092. "Sir, were you expecting them to have a strategy like that?"

“No, I just thought it was better to play it safe. We can’t be too greedy on the battlefield.” P5092 shook his head. “At the very least, we definitely should not think about wiping out the enemy before figuring out their actual strength. Get ready to launch the mortars. Be careful, the battle tonight is only just beginning.”

Chapter 858: Contest and outcome

The sound of heavy machine guns firing in the night was deafening as red-orange tracers spat out of them in a cascade. Meanwhile, the barbarians’ advance guard kept pushing closer and closer towards the Pyro Company.

The soldiers felt their adrenaline pumping nonstop amid the sights and sounds.

“Do these barbarians really think they can break through the defensive line like this?” a Pyro Company soldier murmured. He turned his head towards those heavy machinery covered by celadon tarps as they silently stood guard on the walls.

P5092 watched quietly as the barbarians got closer and closer holding the leather shields in their hands. Next to him, his deputy commander said, “Sir, we can’t wait any longer. If we still can’t penetrate their shields by the time they get within 300 meters of us, our defensive line will be at risk.”

But even in this situation, P5092 said nothing, because the last group at the rear of these several thousand-strong barbarians who stretched across several kilometers had still not entered the zone he wanted them to be in.

He mentally calculated the distance in his mind. It wasn’t until a moment later that P5092 said, “Artillery, open fire.”

When the soldiers suddenly pulled the tarps off on the walls, the rapid-fire artillery cannons underneath were revealed. In P5092’s 3rd Division, the pride of the troops was definitely not their higher than normal physical fitness, but their artillery.

There were two special infantry brigades in the 3rd Division and each infantry brigade was made up of 18 artillery batteries. An individual fighting force consisting of six artillery batteries would then concentrate their artillery fire together to complete a rapid area of fire on a single target.

When necessary, this huge artillery formation could even form into a much larger “artillery company” to attack targets within the same area.

Back at Longtan Canyon, the artillery company had only displayed a small part of their capabilities. And now, it was time for the 3rd Division to shine. It was precisely because of this reason that P5092 dared to hang the barbarian corpses outside his defensive zone. He did not mind if the barbarians came to attack his defensive line at all.

On the contrary, he was hoping the barbarians would get even more enraged and charge in even closer.

Although the artillery were only equipped with 76.2 mm caliber rapid-fire howitzers, they could fire at an amazing speed of 20 rounds per minute. With this rate of fire, their accuracy would definitely be compromised. However, P5092 did not seem bothered at all.

As the barbarians were fast-moving targets, it would be meaningless to emphasize accuracy. Instead of aiming carefully, they might as well just bombard the area with artillery fire.

When the barbarians came within a kilometer of them, the rapid-fire light artillery on the walls roared to life. Compared to these, the heavy machine guns earlier sounded like the barking of a dog. These cannons were the true beasts!

The grand formation of artillery guns had only fired their first round, but it destroyed the charging barbarians' formation instantly. The leather shields they relied on for cover were utterly worthless against the heavy shelling of the artillery.

The Pyro Company soldiers on the Great Wall almost wanted to start cheering. All of them were enraged when they heard about the massacre at Stronghold 176. Moreover, someone even mentioned the scouts had seen the barbarians piling up the corpses of the stronghold residents into small hills outside the city to announce the strength of their expeditionary army.

Someone once read about sporadic records of a war that happened before The Cataclysm in a book, and it was mentioned that a Central Plains civilization had also experienced a massacre before during a war. The death toll in that war numbered as many as hundreds of thousands, with most of the victims being innocent civilians.

That battle was termed "National Humiliation Day" and everyone had to commemorate it.

In the present day, the massacre of Stronghold 176 had sent ripples throughout the Central Plains. Everyone was now fully aware that this war was one of national survival, and that it would not end until either side had perished.

Ever since the massacre at Stronghold 176, there was no possibility of peace talks in this war.

When the artillery began bombarding the area with fire, the barbarians finally started retreating. When faced with the powerful firearms of the Central Plains, they had no choice but to retreat.

However, P5092 was way too composed. He had waited until the barbarians were within a kilometer of them before ordering his artillery to open fire. So even though the barbarians were retreating now, many of them would not survive the bombardment.

Of the advance guard that were made up of several thousand barbarians, it would be considered fortunate if a few hundred of them could walk out of this place alive.

The deputy commander asked, "Sir, should we pursue them?"

"Yes." P5092 said coldly, "Carry out the Plan B I drafted. The rest of you, hang the corpses of these barbarians after dawn and make more of them remember this place."

With that, the main forces of the Pyro Company's 3rd Division started launching their attack. The artillery on standby atop the walls were excited by the sight of the army pressing on.

They drove their off-road vehicles mounted with heavy machine guns northwards to complete the final harvest on the battlefield.

But P5092 still did not show any joy of victory on his face. He ordered someone to bring over a pair of binoculars as he quietly looked into the distance.

There was a forest more than ten kilometers north of the Great Wall. Until now, the Pyro Company troops had been trying to determine the strength of the expeditionary army hidden in there. However, they lost contact with all of the scouts that went inside for reconnaissance.

No one knew what was hidden in there. Was it only the advance guard? No, P5092 was sure there were more of them.

The main forces of the 3rd Division were getting closer and closer to the forest. Meanwhile, the barbarians who survived the bombardment ran towards the forest as fast as they could.

Gradually, the formation of the 3rd Division's main forces began to break up due to the rough terrain. Some of the companies had charged too far ahead while others had fallen behind.

When the troops at the front were about to get within two kilometers of the forest, gunfire also lit up in the forest to everyone's surprise.

The Pyro Company troops farthest ahead were immediately gunned down by heavy machine guns, and the sound of mortars could even be heard in the forest.

But a moment later, the barbarians hiding in the forest realized that other than the few hundred Pyro Company soldiers farthest ahead who were killed, the soldiers had immediately retreated when they were still 4.5 kilometers away from the forest. It was as though they were aware of their range and left in advance!

The barbarians realized the main forces of the 3rd Division had not fallen behind at all. Instead, those at the back had deliberately not kept up with the leading forces. It was just that the main forces had pursued them with such aggressiveness that the barbarians could not figure out if they had done it on purpose.

Furthermore, no one noticed that the flares in the sky had stopped at some point. This seemed to also be a detail that was carefully planned for the feint attack. Without the illumination of the flares, it would be even more difficult for the barbarians to discern the disposition of the Pyro Company's main forces.

In this brief contest, a lot of people had not expected that the barbarians could also use firearms and explosives. Before this, everyone thought they only knew how to attack with axes!

But P5092 had used the lives of several hundred people to let the other Pyro Company commanders know the barbarians were in fact more cunning than they had thought.

But regardless, P5092 emerged victorious again in this brief contest.

Next to him, his deputy commander asked, "Sir, how did you know the barbarians could use firearms and explosives?"

Plan B was only a feint. Right from the beginning, P5092 was not intending to wipe out all of the remaining barbarians. He only wanted to use a forlorn hope to test the waters and find out the actual situation.

Although some people had died in this battle, it was absolutely worthwhile for the commander to be able to use the lives of several hundred people to obtain such important intelligence in a huge war like this.

Just as Ren Xiaosu had concluded, even though the Pyro Company was fighting against the enemies from the North, it would not affect their ruthless and cold nature.

If this victory required P5092 to sacrifice himself, he would probably do it without any hesitation.

They were not only ruthless to others but also on themselves. All they wanted was the final outcome. The process did not matter to them at all.

"Although they lost their manufacturing know-how for firearms and explosives, everyone knows how powerful such weapons are." P5092 said slowly, "After the fall of Stronghold 176, a lot of military weapons were left behind, so there was no reason for the barbarians not to use them. But before getting a confirmation, I couldn't guarantee it. Go and look for the intelligence agency. I want to know before dawn what kind of other heavy weapons Stronghold 176 had."

After that, P5092 turned around and descended the Great Wall. As it would be a prolonged war, there was no need for him to tire himself out on the Great Wall.

Chapter 859: Best opportunity for a sneak attack

In the battle at the front lines, more than 2,000 barbarians were sent in an attempt to break through the defensive line. In the end, they were all killed.

But after the battle, the other Pyro Company officers realized this was only a strategy the barbarians had used to lure the main forces of the Pyro Company into the forest. It seemed that sacrificing those 2,000 barbarians was no big deal for them.

Those barbarians had gotten their hands on Stronghold 176's heavy weapons, yet they deliberately chose not to use them. Instead, they made the Pyro Company get accustomed to their no guns combat style and waited for their main forces to give chase before springing a beautiful ambush on them.

Meanwhile, P5092 used the lives of several hundred Pyro Company soldiers in exchange for this important intelligence.

It was as though the two sides were competing on who could be more ruthless. Although the chess pieces in front of them were all human lives, the commanders did not get emotional about it.

Some people said that after the battle, P5092 had spent the night alone in his command tent and did not sleep, speak, or eat. It was like he was quietly thinking about something, but no one could verify that. Honestly, most people were not bothered by it either.

They only knew that P5092 was the superior tactician this time. He took out nearly 2,000 of the barbarians' troops during the feint for almost nothing and even obtained an extremely important piece of intelligence.

Ren Xiaosu and the others at the medical center did not rush to the front lines on that day. They had to wait for the supplies in the forward operating base to be fully loaded onto the vehicles before heading north with them.

It was very time-consuming to load the supplies onto the trucks as the quantity required by more than a 100,000 soldiers was far greater than one could imagine. Several thousand people and countless vehicles were deployed during this period just to transport these supplies.

Only after war had begun did everyone realize there were not enough resources.

On the same night that everyone from the Qinghe Group had arrived at the forward operating base, the Qinghe University students started setting up a makeshift stage in the base. They even brought along some audio equipment in preparation for putting on a cultural performance for the frontline soldiers who were on their rotational breaks.

Come to think of it, it was not like these university students could go into battle anyway, so that was all they could do.

Interestingly, while the other organizations had their own cultural troupes made up of civil officer corps, the Pyro Company did not have any such entertainment "soldiers."

The role of cultural troupes was not only to entertain the soldiers. Usually, their shows, sketches, and songs would be filled with political agendas too.

The performances were all stories of fearless leaders leading by example, and the songs they sang were in praise of heroes. The cultural troupes would motivate the troops before a battle, and this was also one of the necessary ways to improve political awareness.

But the Pyro Company did not bother with such things. Their troops' political and ideological training was already complete when they first joined the military, and it had become deeply rooted in their subconscious.

This made the Pyro Company soldiers even more ruthless, and they would never become deserters in wars. This was an advantage the other consortiums did not have.

During the war between the Pyro Company and the Kong Consortium, although many deserters had fled south, none of them were from the Pyro Company.

However, after the stage was set up, the Pyro Company soldiers who were on their rotational breaks would also watch curiously like normal people. They would check out the performers who already had their makeup done, especially the women entertainers in their short skirts.

The show had not started yet. When an actress came out from backstage to look for an employee, the Pyro Company soldiers started wolf-whistling at her with their arms around each other.

If one were to only look at this scene, it would be really difficult for them to imagine how these Pyro Company soldiers would look when they headed into battle.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Mr. Ji, are you the one leading the Qinghe Group this time?"

"Other than the garrison troops, I'm indeed the one leading the party. After all, I also hold a position at Qinghe University," Ji Yi said with a smile.

"Oh, then please tell everyone to be careful." Ren Xiaosu muttered, "The front lines are different from school. I also once studied at Qinghe University, so I know that the teachers have never taught the students how to face an enemy."

Ji Yi was stunned. "But we're at the rear, and it's not like I'll take them to the front lines. But before we set off, I already reminded everyone. There's only one rule for everyone to observe on this field trip, and that's that our party will not accommodate one person more or one person less."

This time, it was Ren Xiaosu's turn to be stunned. He wondered what Ji Yi meant by one person more.

Ji Yi patiently explained, "We'll be spending several months together in the North this time. As there will be male and female students mixing with each other every day, what if..."

Ren Xiaosu felt a sense of respect for him. "Mr. Ji is an insightful man indeed."

The commander of the forward operating base, P31921, came over and said with a smile, "Since the two of you are here, I'd like to inform you that the first group of troops transporting the supplies will set off tomorrow. All of you will also be heading north together with the group."

When Ren Xiaosu saw P31921, he said, "I don't think it's a good idea to put on a cultural show at this time. Although that FOB is at the rear, all of the Pyro Company's main forces have already headed to the front lines. In fact, the defensive forces here are even weaker than before."

Ren Xiaosu was now one of the few people who had fought against the barbarians. The barbarians' craftiness displayed at Mt. Dashi was still fresh in his mind. Back then, even he had almost thought the barbarians could be taken out in one fell swoop in Longtan Canyon. In the end, they were so bold they actually attacked the camp.

Had it not been for P5092's preparedness, it might really have spelled big trouble for the Pyro Company.

Although Ren Xiaosu managed to arrive in time back then, the barbarians had almost broken through the machine gun position in that attack.

So Ren Xiaosu became more vigilant after the battle at Mt. Dashi. In the future, he could not assume there was any place that was absolutely safe when facing the barbarians. Only then could he survive the war.

Ji Yi, standing next to Ren Xiaosu, was stunned. But as he was only a reporter, it was not convenient for him to express his opinions on this matter. After all, he did not understand the concerns.

However, the commander of the forward operating base, P31921, explained with a smile, "Miracle Doctor, you're probably still unaware that the barbarians in Mt. Dashi have been annihilated by the main forces led by Commander P5092. We're safe here. Moreover, Commander P5092 specifically requested that the Qinghe Group put on this cultural show. As subordinates, we have to carry out the orders of the commander seriously."

"Oh, I see." Ren Xiaosu did not say anything else.

When the cultural show began, it got off to a rousing start. With a youthful spirit, the female university students onstage sang and danced energetically in their short skirts.

The stands around the stage were filled with Pyro Company soldiers. Other than a few soldiers who were on rotational duty, almost everyone attended the show with their folding chairs under the command of their respective platoon commanders.

They sat in a very orderly manner while watching the show. The spacing between them was exactly identical, so it truly looked quite spectacular.

The onstage students looked dazzling and glamorous, but their shows had nothing to do with politics. Someone even started singing Li Ran's new song that was about a romance.

But while Ren Xiaosu was watching the show, he got an ominous feeling that kept growing stronger.

When Yang Xiaojin noticed his frowning, she asked, "What's the matter?"

Ren Xiaosu suddenly said to the people from the Trinity Institute, "Everyone, get into a vehicle and hide inside. Hurry up! Liang Ce, if anything happens, just drive off with everyone and wait for us on the route to Mt. Dashi!"

"What's the matter?" Wang Jing asked in uncertainty, "Is something going to happen? But there's no movement from the Pyro Company troops. Aren't they also watching the show?"

"There's no time to explain. All y'all need to leave." After that, Ren Xiaosu went to look for P31921 to cancel tonight's cultural show. Although he was unsure if the other party would listen to him, he still had to let him know.

It was not that Ren Xiaosu was being overly suspicious, but that this cultural show was too loud. With the speakers amplifying the sound, anyone could hear it from several kilometers away. As long as someone took a look from the mountains in the distance, they would know what was going on at the forward operating base.

The barbarians had infiltrated from the North. What if they had not been totally wiped out at Mt. Dashi? From a different perspective, if the barbarians were already aware there was a forward operating base here and Mt. Dashi was the supply line, would it be possible that they might still have some barbarians secretly keeping watch on this place?

If they did, it would be the best opportunity for them to conduct a sneak attack tonight. Because the Pyro Company soldiers who were watching the show were not even carrying any weapons.

Chapter 860: Guardian angel

So Ren Xiaosu's assessment of the current situation was not without reason. He had put himself in their shoes and thought that if he were a hunter, when would it be the best opportunity to hunt?

It was just like how he had deduced where and when the barbarians would appear in Mt. Dashi.

Everyone from the Trinity Institute found it a little unbelievable. This was a forward operating base at the rear after all. Didn't they say the barbarians had already been annihilated at Mt. Dashi? Why did Ren Xiaosu suddenly say that something was going to happen here then?

However, they still followed his instructions even though they did not understand what was going on. This was due to their trust in Ren Xiaosu. After all, they had witnessed how Ren Xiaosu had performed a "craniotomy" on Kong Erdong with their own eyes. That was a fucking operation that did not bother with suturing the wound, and Ren Xiaosu was not a normal person at all!

Just as Wang Jing and the others proceeded to leave, Yang Xiaojin tugged at Ren Xiaosu's arm and handed him a spotting scope. "Looks like your judgment was right. We do have a situation."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "What'd you see?"

"I saw a figure moving within the mountains at my 5 o'clock. But it's only one person," Yang Xiaojin said.

"How far is he from us?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"About 1,900 meters in a linear direction," Yang Xiaojin estimated. "It's still not too late to tell the people at the forward operating base to heighten their alert."

But just as she finished speaking, the crack of a gunshot suddenly rang out in the forward operating base.

Ren Xiaosu immediately turned around to look. The enemy had arrived faster than he had expected. So then, who was that figure in the mountains? Could it be someone responsible for giving the orders but did not participate in the battle?

Based on the principles of war, since the battle had started, it was unnecessary to leave someone in the mountains as an observer. As the barbarians did not have any communication equipment, they didn't need to have someone give orders from afar.

"There's only one person in the mountains?" Ren Xiaosu asked Yang Xiaojin.

"That's right. At first, I thought it might be the enemy's scout, but that doesn't seem to be the case anymore. Now that I think back on it, although I didn't get a very clear look at the other party, his attire didn't look like what the barbarians wore," Yang Xiaojin said.

The forward operating base was already in chaos.

The gunshots were a little muffled with the loud music playing on stage, but those watching the show were all soldiers, so how could they possibly not distinguish the sound?

The Qinghe University students on the stage were still trying their best to perform when they suddenly saw the soldiers in the audience get up and make a mad dash in one direction.

"That's where the armory is. The Pyro Company soldiers should be heading there to draw their weapons. But it feels like it's already a little too late," said Ren Xiaosu as he observed the situation. As the gunshots got closer and closer to them, he could already vaguely hear the screams of the Pyro Company soldiers. "I'll go and occupy the high ground and help them stall for time!"

...

The perimeter of the forward operating base was surrounded by barbed wire. To prevent a surprise attack, nine-meter-tall sentry towers were erected around the base with two soldiers manning each of them.

But the wire fence on the west side of the forward operating base had already been cut apart. Moreover, the soldiers on the three sentry towers located near the opening were killed by huge axes thrown at them from the shadows. The barbarians were so well-prepared the soldiers did not even have a chance to fire a warning shot.

As blood flowed through the floor of the sentry towers, the purple blood dripped onto the ground and mixed with the soil.

Initially, everything was being carried out quietly, so when the barbarians broke into the forward operating base, they did not meet with any effective resistance. It wasn't until they got past the perimeter and were unable to conceal themselves any longer that everyone in the forward operating base slowly realized what had happened.

The Pyro Company soldiers started assembling, but the barbarians were already charging at them. Their plan was very obvious, and that was to intercept the soldiers on their way to the armory!

As long as the Pyro Company soldiers did not grab their firearms, they would be vulnerable against the barbarians.

When the few hundred Qinghe University students saw the barbarians charging out, they finally realized that it was an enemy attack!

Suddenly, the students were flustered. Ji Yi shouted from the audience, "Everyone, jump off the stage. We have to flee east!"

The students did not even have time to remove their makeup as they screamed and ran from backstage to escape with Ji Yi.

Amid the chaos, everyone did not even know which side was east. Ji Yi skidded to a halt because he saw a small group of barbarians blocking their path.

The giant axes in the barbarians' hands glinted under the bright and vibrant stage lights. Ji Yi forced himself to calm down and said, "Boys, stay behind with me! Girls, run in another direction!"

Ji Yi knew how strong the barbarians were. He had personally heard from the Pyro Company soldiers that if the barbarians ever got close to them, even they could not survive.

When he recalled Ren Xiaosu's warning, he regretted not getting the students to leave sooner. He already knew Ren Xiaosu was no ordinary person, but he still took the chance in hopes that nothing bad would happen.

But it seemed too late to say anything now.

Ji Yi decided to make one last desperate stand while looking around with his peripheral vision in search of Ren Xiaosu's whereabouts. There was only one thought in his mind. As long as Ren Xiaosu were here, he and the students would not have to die.

However, Ji Yi could not find Ren Xiaosu even after searching for some time. Ren Xiaosu was clearly here watching the show just now, so where did he disappear to in the blink of an eye?

Besides Ren Xiaosu, the members of the Trinity Institute were also nowhere to be seen. Ji Yi felt a sense of distress when he realized Ren Xiaosu might have escorted them away already.

But all of a sudden, a sniper rifle rang out. Ji Yi and the students saw a barbarian's chest burst apart in front of them.

The bullet went through the barbarian from his back and forcefully knocked him to the ground. He couldn't be any deader than he was.

Ji Yi's eyes lit up as he roared, "Students, don't be afraid. Someone has come to save us!"

Right after that, another two barbarians were killed as gunshots rang out again. The small group of barbarians looked around in panic, but they could not find who had killed their companions!

Snipers? Was it the two snipers from Mt. Dashi?

Thinking of that, the seemingly fearless barbarians instinctively looked for cover!

The dozen or so of them were only responsible for creating chaos all over the place. They wanted to make a move on this group of seemingly weak students but did not expect to get targeted by the mysterious snipers instead.

Ji Yi suddenly felt relieved. He realized Ren Xiaosu had not abandoned them.

That was right! How could Hope Media's guardian angel possibly leave them in the lurch?

When the sniper rifles rang out, Ji Yi realized it was Ren Xiaosu and Yang Xiaojin. After all, there was a sniper who became famous after Ren Xiaosu participated in that bloody battle on Wangchunmen Boulevard back in Luoyang City.

Perhaps other people might not be aware of it. But the Hope Media reporters, who had always been paying close attention to Ren Xiaosu, all understood that wherever Ren Xiaosu was, that woman sniper would be too and vice versa.