

First Order 381

### **Chapter 381 Fortress 178!**

When Ren Xiaosu saw Stronghold 178 from afar, he was in awe.

This stronghold was utterly different from any of the other strongholds he had seen. The towering and ancient stronghold was marred with “scars,” and there were even large areas of patched up scrapes. It looked like the stronghold had been through multiple collapses and reconstructions. Over and over again, bad luck came and went, but it remained standing nonetheless.

Even though the strongholds Ren Xiaosu came across in the past had shown signs of aging, their walls had never taken such serious damage before. Comparatively, they looked to be in really good condition.

But the walls of Stronghold 178 were different. At first sight, Ren Xiaosu got the feeling that this wall seemed to have tenacity built into it.

He suddenly understood why people referred to Stronghold 178 as a fortress.

This was a fortress-type stronghold that was truly built for war. There was far more attention put into the building of its defenses than any other strongholds that Ren Xiaosu had been to.

Zhou Yinglong said proudly, “We all call this Fortress 178. It’s totally different from those weak strongholds out there!”

Ren Xiaosu stood under the towering walls of Fortress 178, while the soldiers on the tall walls were on alert. But as they had arrived with Zhang Jinglin, the soldiers on the walls did not issue any warnings to stop them.

According to Xu Xianchu, a stranger would find it very difficult to get close to this stronghold. Without Ren Xiaosu’s recommendation letter, it would also have been impossible for him to get in.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, “I wrote a few recommendation letters for others as well. Did they come to Fortress 178?”

Xu Xianchu shook his head. “No.”

“Something must’ve happened to them then.” Ren Xiaosu sighed.

Then Ren Xiaosu dug a bullet out of the wall. “Why’re there bullets lodged in the walls?”

Fortress 178 was naturally constructed to defend against enemies. But from what Ren Xiaosu remembered, everyone had said that Fortress 178 was built to defend against wild animals.

Everyone said there were fewer wild animals in the interior because humans had chased them to the outer perimeter of the stronghold ring. Meanwhile, Fortress 178 towered over the Northwest to prevent a large number of terrifying wild animals from invading inland.

But how could bullets lodged in the wall be explained? It was obviously left behind by an enemy who had fired at the walls. And only humans knew how to use firearms.

Xu Xianchu smiled and said, "You'll understand in the future. In this era of firearms and explosives, the only true enemies of humans are humans themselves."

These words sounded somewhat familiar to Ren Xiaosu. A librarian named An Yuqian had said something similar before.

However, An Yuqian was referring to how science was uncontrollable and that humans would create a power so massive they could not control it in the end.

But Xu Xianchu was more straightforward, stating the enemies of Fortress 178 were also humans.

The thick and heavy gate of Fortress 178 slowly lifted. The rumble sounded like an enormous dragon roaring.

As the group walked in, everyone was surprised to find that although Fortress 178 looked old, it was unusually clean and tidy.

Ren Xiaosu had thought this place where burly men from the Northwest lived would be very dirty and messy, but that was not the case.

After passing through the gate, they ended up on a very long street. At the end of the street, a gigantic copper bell hung high above in a tower.

Xu Xianchu described to Ren Xiaosu, "This bell is a little different from the one at our previous stronghold. While the ones at the other strongholds are used for telling the time, the bells here at Fortress 178 only ring in warning. When the bell rings, everyone in the military prepares to fight to their deaths."

"When was the last time it rang?" Ren Xiaosu asked.

"Sixteen years ago." Xu Xianchu lamented, "It sucks that I wasn't here to see that sight. Many people in the interior don't even know there was a war here. Fortress 178 is like a barrier that holds all of the dangers and darkness on the outside."

There were many common folk on the streets, and they were all dressed in cloth clothing. Neon signs were rarely seen outside the shops, and there were barely any private cars driving on the road. Occasionally, the military would pass by in an off-road vehicle.

Curious, Wang Shengyin said, "This place looks really primitive."

Xu Xianchu said, "We don't have enough electricity. The new power plant at the outer perimeter is still being built. However, there isn't enough manpower in Fortress 178, so the construction process is very slow. We used to have a very large power station, but that was destroyed in the war."

"I don't think there's enough resources either." Wang Shengyin said, "The Northwest is quite suitable for planting cotton. There's a good amount of light, and water from the snow mountains and groundwater are also abundant. Why didn't you all grow more cotton?"

Xu Xianchu looked at her and said, "We have to make sure we can fill our stomachs first."

Ren Xiaosu looked at the sights around Fortress 178. To be honest, it was a little dingy. But for some reason, he found this place much more comfortable than any of the other strongholds.

When the pedestrians saw Zhang Jinglin's convoy passing through the streets, they did not deliberately fawn upon him. Instead, they greeted him as though they were old friends before getting back to their own business.

Xu Xianchu gave Ren Xiaosu a look. "Xiaosu, can that black medicine of yours be mass produced? We have some people here who got frostbite during the winter and can't seem to heal. Furthermore, we've always had a lack of medicine for our battles. If we had your black medicine, that would be great news for our Fortress 178."

Xu Xianchu had heard about Ren Xiaosu being a doctor in town, and Zhang Jinglin also knew about this.

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "There's no way to mass produce it."

Xu Xianchu was a little disappointed. "That's alright. When the trade routes are opened, we can start buying medicine from the Central Plains."

Fortress 178 lacked not only medicine, but also clothes, food, and so on. For Zhang Jinglin, who had just returned to Fortress 178, reopening the trade routes was an extremely urgent matter.

Zhang Jinglin had spent several months eliminating the turmoil in Fortress 178. Now it was time to consider the development of the fortress.

Xu Xianchu arranged for Ren Xiaosu and the others to stay in a small building. "This is where we entertain our guests. Please don't mind if it's a little bare."

Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "It's already quite nice."

Wang Shengzhi, Wang Shengyin, and the others might not have stayed in such a dilapidated place before, but since Ren Xiaosu had even lived in a shack before, there was no way he would mind it.

A little embarrassed, Xu Xianchu replied, "Xiaosu, your wound hasn't healed yet. I'll go to the Supply Division to apply for some medicine for you. However, we're missing a lot of drugs in the fortress, so I might not be able to get any...."

Ren Xiaosu smiled and said, "Don't worry, I still have some black medicine with me."

"That's good, that's good." Xu Xianchu rubbed his hands together and said with a laugh, "Then would you have any to spare..."

Xu Xianchu was a little embarrassed to say this out loud. One of the soldiers under him had gotten injured during his training, and his wound still hadn't healed. In fact, the Supply Division had run out of medicine, so he could only live with the injury. Now that Ren Xiaosu had come, rather than taking good care of him, he even ended up asking him for something. What the hell was he thinking?

But Ren Xiaosu stuffed a small porcelain bottle into Xu Xianchu's hands. "Don't mention it."

In the past, even when Xu Xianchu was at his lowest, he was still willing to give away the remaining half of his cornbread to Ren Xiaosu. In that case, Ren Xiaosu could not be petty towards Xu Xianchu.

### **Chapter 382 To fight or not to fight**

Fortress 178's sole existence was for the purpose of war. Therefore, it was destined to be different from the other strongholds ever since its emergence.

There were no shops selling a variety of things in the streets, nor were there any particularly well-dressed pedestrians. Some girls had already changed into long skirts for the spring season, but even their long dresses were made out of calico fabric.

The clothes of those in the fortress were very monotone and were mainly in shades of dark blue, dark green, or yellow.

At present, the textile dyeing techniques in Fortress 178 were still stuck at the most basic level. After wearing the clothes for some time, the color would start fading.

Just as Wang Shengyin had said, the Northwest was one of the most suitable places for growing cotton. However, there was a lack of that technology here. All of their focus was instead placed into developing their military industry, as well as trying their best to ensure that everyone had something to eat.

So who would have the time to involve themselves with bells and whistles?

After Xu Xianchu left, Ren Xiaosu, Wang Shengzhi, and the others walked out of the building and carefully sized up this legendary fortress.

The pedestrians on the street turned to look at them when they saw them, because other than Ren Xiaosu, the group looked a little out of place.

Wang Shengyin had also changed into a long dress, but the blue dress did not look like it could be produced here in the fortress. Wang Shengyin said that this blue was called Tiffany Blue, and it was a very popular color back in the Central Plains, as a female singer had worn it before.

Ren Xiaosu thought there probably wouldn't be celebrity singers in Fortress 178. The women he saw in Fortress 178 were all carrying a pole with baskets on both ends just like the men.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked Wang Shengzhi, "How do you think Mr. Zhang will handle the Zong Consortium?"

Wang Shengzhi raised his head and smiled. "You're hoping that Fortress 178 will help you get your revenge?"

"That's right," Ren Xiaosu admitted frankly. "But if it's not Fortress 178's own decision, I don't want to drag others down with me either. I can still manage a lot of things by myself."

Ren Xiaosu thought that if Fortress 178 was unwilling to send in their troops against the Zong Consortium and clear out the obstruction to the trade routes, he would have to infiltrate the Zong Consortium himself.

Anything Li Shentan could do, he could probably do as well.

Wang Shengzhi smiled and said, "Look at these pedestrians on the street."

"Hm?" Ren Xiaosu was taken aback.

"Everyone's taking the food in their homes out with carrying poles. But where are they taking it?" Wang Shengzhi asked.

"To sell?" Ren Xiaosu said.

"The farmers live outside the fortress, while these are normal residents, so why would they be selling their food?" Wang Shengzhi said with a smile, "They've gathered up all the food they stored away to donate it to the military of Fortress 178."

"Why, though?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He really did not understand military matters. He had encountered an Advanced Army Warfare Leadership skill user but did not have a Skill Duplication Scroll on him to learn it at the time.

"This is Fortress 178's preparation for war. All the food has been handed over to the garrison troops to be allocated during the war," Wang Shengzhi explained with a smile. "If you've already decided on taking revenge against the Zong Consortium, you can put your mind at ease. If Mr. Zhang hadn't thought over it carefully, he wouldn't have asked me to come to the Northwest. He's already made his decision."

Fortress 178 sought to sell off their large mineral deposits to make the lives of the fortress residents better and obtain better military armaments as well. As such, they had to open the trade routes.

But the Zong Consortium would never allow all this to happen. Why would they allow outsiders to sleep soundly next to their beds? This was the inevitable outcome caused by the growth and development of an organization with a vested interest.

In a run-down meeting room in Fortress 178, a group of officers were arguing endlessly around a large sand table. Zhou Yinglong shouted, "I've long disliked the Zong Consortium. I'm sure everyone already knows those old fogeys at the Zong Consortium have deployed their weapons and troops to face our Fortress 178. What do you think they intend to do? I don't have to elaborate, right?"

“Everyone understands.” Someone said, “When I made a trip to the valley awhile ago, I discovered the Qing Consortium was also stirring up trouble there. However, Qing Zhen is not targeting our Fortress 178 in his schemes. All of his people have gone to attack the Yang Consortium, leaving only the Zong Consortium with a presence in the valley.”

“If we want to open the trade routes, it would be best to build it on the path that goes through Mt. Dingyuan. Wasn’t it a highway before The Cataclysm? That would be the fastest route to take. But Mt. Dingyuan is still being controlled by the Zong Consortium’s bandits, while Mt. Guan to its north acts as the Zong Consortium’s forward operating base,” Xu Xianchu analyzed. “So, even if we don’t attack the Zong Consortium directly, we still have to take back control of the front line at Mt. Dingyuan and Mt. Guan.”

“How do we do that?” Zhou Yinglong replied, “We don’t have enough manpower. We can fight, but occupying the territories is a bit of a stretch. How many people would you have to deploy there to guard against the Zong Consortium’s raids? And when the Zong Consortium cuts off the retreat route at Mt. Dingyuan, the soldiers there will immediately be left to fend for themselves. Just thinking about it makes me despair.”

“That’s right, Old Zhou’s argument makes sense. No one takes a long-term defensive position.” A burly man said, “The Zong Consortium is right in front of us. Those bastards have become too restless in recent years and are constantly fixated on Fortress 178 being their imaginary enemy. In the past, we stood guard at Fortress 178 to defend against the western enemies. It seems they’ve already forgotten all about the kindness that we’ve shown them!”

For the whole night, the entire conference room was noisy as everyone chipped in with their opinions. It was heated.

Meanwhile, Zhang Jinglin stood next to the sand table and looked quietly at the terrain mapped out on it. The sand table covered the entire Southwest and Northwest and even included a small area of the Central Plains.

All of a sudden, someone said, “But what if the western enemies come again while we’re attacking the Zong Consortium?”

Everyone started looking at one another. Zhou Yinglong hesitated and said, “They haven’t been here in 16 years. Wouldn’t that be too coincidental?”

The person who spoke up calmly said, “Because of the differences in our skin, hair, and ethnicity, our people have never been able to infiltrate their camp. By the same logic, they’re also unable to infiltrate our camp. Thus, neither side knows anything that’s going on at the other end, so how can you be so sure they won’t come? What if it’s really that coincidental? Then we’ll be stuck between a rock and a hard place.”

Fortress 178 had not been paying much attention to the Zong Consortium in many years, but it wasn’t because they were willing to accept this hyena’s insolence right at their doorstep. Rather, they had a more important mission that left them unable to spread their forces too thin.

Zhou Yinglong and the others felt a little aggrieved. They had to accept that their mission came first.

The Zong Consortium, the Qing Consortium, the Yang Consortium, and even the Central Plains were not required to thank them for it, but a mission was a mission.

Suddenly, Zhang Jinglin said, "We will fight."

The meeting room fell silent. Everyone could hear each other's breathing. There was a glimmer in the eyes of Zhou Yinglong and the others as their cheeks flushed red. It was the rush of blood they would experience before every big battle.

Regardless of the points of view brought up in the meeting room, or how different all of their opinions were, only Zhang Jinglin's words mattered.

Once Zhang Jinglin had made his decision, it meant that war was inevitable.

### **Chapter 383 Razor Sharp Company**

Zhang Jinglin slowly said, "Everyone's considerations are not wrong. On one hand, the Zong Consortium has entrenched themselves at the northern side of the trade route. As long as they are still there, we can forget about opening up the trade route from our place to the Central Plains. By controlling the front lines of Mt. Dingyuan and Mt. Guan, it shows that they know what they're doing."

Zhang Jinglin continued, "On the other hand, the enemy from the west may attack us at any time. If we split up our forces to go to the Zong Consortium, we might not be able to defeat the western enemies. But even if they don't coincidentally attack while we're away, some of our troops will still be lost in the conflict against the Zong Consortium. At that time, we might not be able to defeat the western enemies when they come either."

At the end of the day, they were just arguing over these two possibilities for the entire afternoon. Zhang Jinglin had already decided after taking into consideration all details. He thought for a moment and said, "There's definitely that risk, but if we don't clear the trade routes, Fortress 178 will only continue weakening. As you all know, we've sent some people disguised as refugees west and discovered that place is becoming more and more prosperous. Meanwhile, we're held back in our current situation with no resources, no technology, and no new talents. We're even running out of clothes to wear!"

"We might control a lot of mines, but they can't turn into our strength." Zhang Jinglin said, "If this goes on, Fortress 178 might not be able to stop our enemies from the west in another ten years. So we have no choice but to make a change now. We have to survive this disaster before we can talk about the future."

Zhang Jinglin had made himself clear. It was not that he did not consider the risks involved, but that with the risks they were facing, fighting the Zong Consortium and opening the trade routes was their best option.

Rather than waiting to die, he might as well have a go at it.

Zhang Jinglin knew that Fortress 178 was much stronger and resolute than the rumors said, but their current plight was also much more dangerous than the rest of the world imagined

But Zhou Yinglong and this group of rowdy people couldn't care less about Commander Zhang's considerations. As long as Zhang Jinglin gave the word that they were going to fight, they would fight.

Whether they won or lost was something to think about in the future. All they had to do now was fight!

The conditions at Fortress 178 might not be comparable to others, but this damned group of people were definitely the strongest in their execution of orders.

Then Zhang Jinglin said, "Tomorrow, we'll hold a meeting at the same time to discuss our strategy. If you're late, stand and listen as your punishment. You won't be allowed to speak."

When the others heard this, they hurriedly guaranteed that no one would be late. They would definitely not drink tonight.

Zhang Jinglin added, "Zhou Yinglong, arrange for that young man named Ren Xiaosu to join the Razor Sharp Company under your command. Let him start from the rank of private."

The moment he said that, the entire conference room became even quieter than before. It was as though they could not even hear the sound of breathing. They looked like they wanted to ask Zhang Jinglin something, but Zhang Jinglin did not even give them a chance to say anything and walked out of the conference room.

When Zhang Jinglin left the room, the officers sitting at the sand table exploded. "Was Commander referring to the Razor Sharp Company he used to be in?"

"Apparently, two other previous commanders also started in the Razor Sharp Company. Does Commander view that boy as his successor? Old Zhou, you were the one who brought that boy in. What's up with him?"

The Razor Sharp Company was a very special existence. No one had ever explicitly stipulated that the commander of Fortress 178 needed to serve in the Razor Sharp Company first.

But as it stood, every previous commander had come from there. They were all sent by the previous commander before them to train where it was the most dangerous and then slowly work up the ranks.

As the name "Razor Sharp Company" suggested, it was the most dangerous fighting force to be posted to. They were often tasked to take on the most insurmountable missions, and only those who could survive the Razor Sharp Company would convince the others in Fortress 178.

It wasn't about how the Razor Sharp Company was really strong, but that being part of it would put anyone in the most perilous of situations. You would have to spend time in the most dangerous places to know the fate you were putting your soldiers in with the orders you gave.

Eventually, after several commanders served their tour of duty, the Razor Sharp Company became an even more special existence. Although no one said anything, everyone knew that whoever suddenly got posted to the Razor Sharp Company was definitely someone the commander paid special attention to. As long as this person could survive and convince the masses, he would go on to become the next commander of Fortress 178.

16 years ago, Zhang Jinglin had once posted a person to join the Razor Sharp Company, but that person perished in the war. And now, he had sent Ren Xiaosu to the unit... and he was someone none of them knew!

Zhou Yinglong looked at everyone's burning eyes and felt a little anxious. "What are y'all looking at me for? I've only known him for a couple of days. That kid's also a refugee and has even lived in the valley. He looks rather soft and weak and is injured too, but I'm not sure how he got injured. But from the looks of it, he doesn't look like he can fight well, so how is he gonna survive in the Razor Sharp Company?"

Someone added, "The commander wasn't exactly a fighter back then either, but that's not a problem as long as he's ruthless enough."

Someone chuckled. "Commander was a medic at that time who wasn't even willing to fire a shot. How can you compare them? Why don't you talk about how many people Commander saved back then?"

Xu Xianchu was starting to get unhappy. "How can you say that about my bro? How can my bro possibly be weak? When we went on an expedition into the Jing Mountains, it was all thanks to him that we managed to get out of there safely."

Zhou Yinglong was surprised before saying, "Oh, that's right! Ren Xiaosu is Old Xu's bro. We should ask him for details."

"Xu Xianchu, you punk, why weren't you more upfront about it? If you know things, tell us!" A big man chuckled and said, "Hurry up and fill us in."

"He's a refugee from the town outside Stronghold 113. Someone in the stronghold wanted to go to the Jing Mountains and was trying to find a guide in town. In the end, everyone said that if they wanted to go to the Jing Mountains, Ren Xiaosu was the only one who could take them there," Xu Xianchu recalled. "The team went looking for him first, but he pretended to be ignorant as he didn't want to go. Later on, it seemed like they offered him something before he agreed to bring them. Oh right, I think he was Commander Zhang's student too as Commander Zhang was the teacher at the town's school at that time. He specified Ren Xiaosu as his substitute teacher after that because he wanted him to take over running the school."

Everyone looked at each other. He was supposed to take over the school? But now Commander Zhang was planning to let Ren Xiaosu take over at Fortress 178?

Although everyone would not defy Zhang Jinglin's wishes, it would still depend on whether Ren Xiaosu was qualified enough to take over Fortress 178. If Ren Xiaosu could not convince the masses, even Zhang Jinglin would not force it ahead. This was the usual practice at Fortress 178.

Even if you were given a herd of ferocious beasts, you needed to be able to control them. That was the logic behind it.

Everyone felt that Zhang Jinglin's arrangement was too sudden, as Ren Xiaosu was still an outsider and no one knew him yet.

Someone asked Xu Xianchu, "What's Ren Xiaosu like?"

"There's no question about his morals." Xu Xianchu said, "In any case, I trust him."

Someone asked Xu Xianchu again, "Is your bro also a supernatural being? What kind of power does he have?"

These words immediately stunned Xu Xianchu. "Back in the Jing Mountains, he could carry an adult man with just one arm. He must be a supernatural being, but I don't really know what power he has."

The group of burly men in the conference room were stunned. 'You call yourself his bro when you don't even know what his power is? You serious?'

### **Chapter 384 Observing Ren Xiaosu**

Xu Xianchu explained, "The environment he grew up in is a little different. He was always plotting against the refugees in town since childhood, so it's normal that he hides his thoughts deep inside. But don't underestimate him. Just think, how many people can escape unscathed on so many occasions after a stronghold collapses..."

Everyone looked at one another. It was still too early to say for now. If he were the real deal, he could definitely stand up to their scrutiny. The war was going to happen no matter what, so the Razor Sharp Company would definitely be deployed at the forefront of the other fighting forces. At that time, it would be clear to all whether Ren Xiaosu was a hero or a zero.

Regarding the matter of a young man named Ren Xiaosu being shoved into the Razor Sharp Company, everyone in the military of Fortress 178 found out overnight. This made everyone quite curious about what Ren Xiaosu was like.

To the burly men of Fortress 178, this was clearly an important matter as it involved someone Zhang Jinglin regarded as his successor.

When Xu Xianchu was fast-tracked for promotion, everyone thought Xu Xianchu stood a chance of being considered and wondered if the tradition of the fortress commander emerging from the Razor Sharp Company would finally be broken.

But from the looks of it, it seemed like Xu Xianchu had not been chosen by Commander Zhang as a candidate to be his successor. It seemed that tradition would still remain tradition.

Rumor had it that Ren Xiaosu was a supernatural being. However, it did not seem like he would be very good at fighting with that weak and frail body. Everyone was a little curious as to whether Ren Xiaosu could even survive the war.

The next morning, when Ren Xiaosu walked out of the building where his group was staying, he saw a group of burly men squatting on the sidewalk.

The moment he appeared, the group of men lowered their voices and whisper-shouted, "He's out! That's him!"

“Why’s he so skinny?!”

“Can he even take a few punches?”

“He’s not gonna get killed the moment he steps onto the battlefield, right?”

Ren Xiaosu immediately put his guard up. Were they here to find trouble with him? Was this group of burly men blocking the way to seek a fight with him?

Although his injuries had not fully healed yet, he was not afraid if anyone tried to find trouble with him.

But once these burly men saw Ren Xiaosu, they retreated. Ren Xiaosu was left standing there in a daze, not understanding what was going on.

Zhang Jinglin had not discussed anything with him prior. In fact, Zhang Jinglin’s arrangements might not be a good thing for Ren Xiaosu at all.

That was because once Ren Xiaosu joined the Razor Sharp Company, everyone would watch his every move, and any mistakes he made would be scrutinized even harder. The moment he showed any signs of cowardice, everyone would think he was not qualified enough.

Everyone would look at him through a magnifying glass to see if he deserved to be so highly regarded by the commander.

And what made him so highly regarded?

But Zhang Jinglin did not care about that. He only told Ren Xiaosu that if he wanted to take revenge and personally bring down the Zong Consortium, he would have to first join Fortress 178’s military.

Ren Xiaosu agreed to it, of course.

Then Zhang Jinglin asked him what kinds of troops he was planning to join and offered him the chance to choose for himself.

Ren Xiaosu answered he would like to go wherever it was the most dangerous. Whichever unit could kill the most enemies, he would go there.

Zhang Jinglin asked him if he wanted to reconsider it, but Ren Xiaosu said he had already made his decision and would not go back on his word.

Revenge was the only motivation that pushed Ren Xiaosu to go to Fortress 178.

Zhang Jinglin smiled and said: “Alright, I’ll arrange for you to be posted where it’s the most dangerous then.”

At the time, Ren Xiaosu felt that something was going to happen, but he did not know what exactly was going on.

In the afternoon, Xu Xianchu came over and told him to report to the Razor Sharp Company. This company was going to be under the command of Zhou Yinglong, the commander of the Forward Strike Battalion.

When Ren Xiaosu was told, he did not think much of it since it was his own request.

But Xu Xianchu reminded him repeatedly, "Xiaosu, it's said that the Razor Sharp Company comes back with less than 10% of its troops after every war, and it's not even uncommon for everyone to get wiped out, so you must be careful when you're there. After you return safely, my future in Fortress 178 will be in your hands."

These words absolutely confused Ren Xiaosu.

Xu Xianchu drove Ren Xiaosu to the west side of Fortress 178 where the Razor Sharp Company was garrisoned. As they drove in, Ren Xiaosu realized that all the soldiers in the military base stopped whatever they were doing and turned to look at him.

Zhou Yinglong was already waiting inside. He glanced at Xu Xianchu before chuckling and saying, "Old Xu, go on back now. It'll be fine to leave him here with us."

Xu Xianchu raised an eyebrow. "We don't even know if you'll survive this war or not."

Zhou Yinglong spat and said angrily, "Stop jinxing me. I won't die even after you've died."

Xu Xianchu sneered and said, "Do you have a cauldron like I do?"

Zhou Yinglong did not say anything else. Just as Ren Xiaosu had guessed, Zhou Yinglong was a supernatural being as well. Otherwise, he would not be in such a dangerous place like the Forward Strike Battalion.

After all, it wasn't like there were a lot of supernatural beings in Fortress 178 either.

But Zhou Yinglong knew his own power was not strong as Xu Xianchu's. Everyone had witnessed the might of Xu Xianchu's cauldron before.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu realized the soldiers in Fortress 178 were really casual when talking about death. It was as common as eating. There was not much fear in their eyes. He wondered what kind of environment created such a group of soldiers.

Even in spring, Fortress 178 was very cold. Sometimes, it would even start snowing by August or September out here, as more than half the year would be spent in wintry conditions.

After bidding farewell to Xu Xianchu, Zhou Yinglong led Ren Xiaosu inside the military base. As they walked, he said, "Our Forward Strike Battalion has always been a place where we fight the tough battles. You might not know it since you came from outside the fortress, nor do I know if you've ever experienced war before, but I just want to warn you so you don't go onto the battlefield and get caught off guard."

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "Don't worry, Battalion Commander, I won't."

Since he had been posted to this unit, he was someone's subordinate. Naturally, he would have to obey his orders. Ren Xiaosu was not surprised that Zhou Yinglong would say that either, so there was no need for him to deliberately talk back.

Zhou Yinglong glanced at him and continued, "I heard Old Xu mention you before. I know you've killed people before and that you're a supernatural being. However, bullets have no eyes on the battlefield. Even supernatural beings aren't that lucky. There's still a difference between war and killing people."

Zhou Yinglong was very clear. Although Ren Xiaosu was very powerful, war was a totally different matter.

War was like an avalanche, and even supernatural beings could not defy the force of nature. It was good to not be scared, but one couldn't be overconfident either.

In the makeup of troops at Fortress 178, there were 30 people in each platoon. Each company consisted of four platoons, so a normal company would generally have about 120 soldiers each.

But the Razor Sharp Company was a reinforced company. They also had their own cooks, quartermasters, radio operators, and medics. The company commander was a captain who was assisted by a non-commissioned officer.

The reason the Razor Sharp Company was so well-equipped was so they would have the ability to fight as an independent force.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "Battalion Commander Zhou, is the Razor Sharp Company really that strong?"

Zhou Yinglong gave it some thought. "They aren't necessarily as strong as you might imagine. They're just a bunch of drifters who've gathered together. Normally, they're real slackers in their daily lives, but they've never lost once in a military exercise. They're well-versed in digging up electrical cables and can fight for a position on the battlefield as well. They're really as shameless as you can get."

### **Chapter 385 The Razor Sharp Company is invincible**

When Fortress 178 decided to launch a war against the Zong Consortium, the entire place suddenly started bustling with activity.

Most consortiums would usually distribute most of their fighting forces across various strongholds in order to gain complete control over each stronghold. For example, it would be enough for the Qing Consortium to station one brigade in a stronghold during peacetime, while an independent regiment was enough for the weaker strongholds.

Only Stronghold 111 where Qing Zhen was located would have more fighting forces garrisoned there.

But it was different for Fortress 178. Since this was their only base, practically half of the fortress would be garrisoned by troops. Furthermore, the residents of the fortress and those living outside it, as well as some of the scattered settlements in the area, served the military as well.

But unlike other strongholds, there wasn't a distinction between the refugees and residents of Fortress 178. Those who worked beyond the walls would even receive additional subsidies for being stationed outside.

In winter, those who lived outside the fortress would be allowed to enter the fortress with a valid pass. Of course, approval for these passes was still relatively strict.

The total military strength of Fortress 178 reached up to 80,000 troops, and they were an entirely first-class fighting force as well. Meanwhile, the Zong Consortium's army claimed to have as many as 200,000 soldiers.

The difference between their military strength was too great. But it was also perhaps because of this significant difference that the Zong Consortium had become so daring in recent years, destroying the main traffic arteries connecting Fortress 178 and the outside world.

But Ren Xiaosu realized the burly men at Fortress 178 did not seem to mind the stark contrast in their military strength.

According to Xu Xianchu, the number of soldiers was no longer the key to victory in modern warfare. The intelligence, technology, courage, and experience of the army was what mattered.

Although the Zong Consortium had many soldiers, they were all recruits who had been drafted into the military, with many of them being refugees. Once they were deployed onto the battlefield, these recruits would be blindsided by their inexperience.

The difference between veterans and recruits was like the distance between the heavens and the earth.

Ren Xiaosu felt that Zhang Jinglin was not a reckless person. Since Zhang Jinglin had decided to start the war, he must be confident he could win it.

By this point, Zhou Yinglong led him to where the Razor Sharp Company's camp was. The members of the Razor Sharp Company had already been waiting at the entrance for a long time. They all had their arms around each other's shoulders as they started sizing up Ren Xiaosu.

Ren Xiaosu was also wearing the Razor Sharp Company's uniform that had been delivered to him by Xu Xianchu. The patch on his arm was a bayonet, representing the Razor Sharp Company.

Zhou Yinglong said softly, "It's quite different here in the Northwest compared to the South. If this were the South, everyone in the military would probably treat you courteously if Commander Zhang assigned you to the Razor Sharp Company. But here in the Northwest... we're all curious to see whether you're really qualified to join us."

Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. What did he mean? All he wanted was to seek revenge by being assigned to the most dangerous unit. That was it! Could it be that it was extremely difficult to join the Razor Sharp Company?

Zhou Yinglong did not continue speaking. He said to the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company who had surrounded them, "Why have y'all gathered around instead of packing your stuff? You'll be the first ones to set out for the battlefield early next morning. I'm hereby giving you half a month to take Mt. Dingyuan."

"Those bandits at Mt. Dingyuan are nothing. We'll beat them as soon as we arrive." Someone asked, "Battalion Commander, is the person next to you Ren Xiaosu?"

"Yes, he is." Zhou Yinglong said, "Remember, don't get too carried away."

When Ren Xiaosu heard Zhou Yinglong say "don't get too carried away," he felt like something was wrong. Were they about to put him in his place or something? And why did it seem like he had suddenly become a celebrity here in Fortress 178?

But as soon as Zhou Yinglong finished speaking, he turned around and left, leaving no chance for Ren Xiaosu to ask any questions.

The 180 or so members of the Razor Sharp Company came up to Ren Xiaosu, including the chow squad who were holding kitchen knives. Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. How was this a fucking military camp? Why did it feel like this was a seedy shop operated by bandits?!

But Ren Xiaosu was only here to get his revenge on the Zong Consortium by killing them. All he wanted to do was fight the Zong Consortium on the battlefield, so he didn't need to establish a good relationship with these soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company.

Ren Xiaosu lifted his shirt and exposed the wound on his right side. He said, "Are y'all gonna hit a wounded person?"

But to Ren Xiaosu's surprise, these thugs standing across from him just laughed and said, "Don't worry, we won't be too heavy-handed."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. They were even fucking OK with beating up the wounded?!

A wise man did not fight when the odds were against him. As soon as the voice trailed off, Ren Xiaosu turned around and ran away. If he wasn't fighting to kill, taking on more than a 100 people proved too much for Ren Xiaosu to handle. Moreover, he still had not recovered from his internal injuries!

The thugs of the Razor Sharp Company roared, "Get him!"

Whenever a recruit joined the company, they would be put in their place by the veterans. If they couldn't be beaten into submission, what if they disobeyed their orders later on? Of course, this was a hugely pretentious rationale to give. The true reason was that these veterans were bored and had nothing better to do.

As the saying went, no discord, no concord. No one would bear any grudges after joining the company for a while.

However, something odd happened today. This recruit turned tail and ran away?! But where could he run off to? The Forward Strike Battalion's base was only so big, after all, and surely he had to come back to sleep tonight, right?!

But the crux was that Ren Xiaosu ran away so fast he shook them off in an instant!

As the large group of people chased after Ren Xiaosu, they saw him quickly slipping into the barracks in another area. The men of the Razor Sharp Company dived in right after him.

When Ren Xiaosu entered the barracks, he saw a dozen-odd people drying their blankets in the sun. He rushed up to one of them and punched that person to the ground. "The Razor Sharp Company is invincible!"

The burly Northwestern men who were drying their blankets were all stunned and could not react for several seconds.

One of the men grew angry. "We still haven't fucking settled the score with the Razor Sharp Company for the previous military exercise, and now they've actually picked a fight with us?!"

Then he shouted into the barracks, "Second Company, get out here now! We have a fight on our hands!"

When the thugs of the Razor Sharp Company entered this area, they saw the members of Second Company running out of their barracks. The Razor Sharp Company's commander shouted, "Old Li, step aside. It's none of your business..."

But when Second Company's Commander Li looked at his comrade who had been punched to the ground, he said, "Step aside? Fuck you! Brothers, get them!"

The Razor Sharp Company's commander also turned furious. "Hey, sore loser!"

When Old Li heard this, he got even angrier and threw a punch.

It only took a few seconds for everything to happen. No one had time to think. But if they had had the time, it would certainly not have ended up like this.

Zhou Yinglong frowned as he watched from a distance. What the fuck was with this?! On the first day of Ren Xiaosu's arrival, the Razor Sharp Company and Second Company had immediately descended into a mass brawl? More than 300 people were fighting one another, and some of them even had their shirt collars torn off in the scuffle!

It was very common for people to pick a fight with one another within the military bases of Fortress 178. In most situations, the commanding officer would usually let the soldiers fight all they wanted. It was like these tough men in the fortress thought that being a little bloodthirsty was a prerequisite to them becoming soldiers.

But how on earth did this fight escalate into a brawl?!

“This is way too fucking ominous,” Zhou Yinglong said.

Ren Xiaosu, who was standing next to him, also lamented, “Yeah.”

Zhou Yinglong spun around. “Since when were you standing next to me!”

Reserved, Ren Xiaosu replied, “I just got here a moment ago.”

### **Chapter 386 Swiftly taking Mt. Dingyuan**

Zhou Yinglong looked at Ren Xiaosu. He took a deep breath and asked, “Why did they start fighting?”

Ren Xiaosu blinked. “I dunno, maybe they had some disagreements. Battalion Commander, aren’t you going to stop them? Didn’t you say that the Razor Sharp Company would be heading out to Mt. Dingyuan?”

Zhou Yinglong was stunned for a couple seconds before he stopped caring about Ren Xiaosu. He ran to where the fight had broken out. “Everyone, stop fighting. Razor Sharp Company, I want all of you to return to your barracks and assemble within ten minutes. Since you’re all so energetic, I don’t think you need another day’s rest, right? You can head straight for Mt. Dingyuan in that case!”

Zhou Yinglong’s words still held a lot of weight in the Forward Strike Battalion. It seemed that the two companies were also very used to this. Even though they were fighting, the two sides immediately stopped once Zhou Yinglong stepped in.

The Razor Sharp Company turned around and ran back to their own barracks.

Military orders were not to be taken lightly. If they were asked to assemble in ten minutes, they would have to do it within ten minutes and not a second later.

Before they left, the members of the Razor Sharp Company saw Ren Xiaosu standing next to Zhou Yinglong unscathed. When they thought about what had just happened, they nearly vomited blood.

It wasn’t until this moment that the Second Company soldier who was beaten up at the beginning started slowly getting up off the ground. When he saw Ren Xiaosu, he shouted, “He was the one who hit me just now, and he even yelled ‘the Razor Sharp Company is invincible’ at me!”

Ren Xiaosu said in seriousness, “You’ve got the wrong person.”

Zhou Yinglong raised his eyebrows and told Ren Xiaosu, “I want you to assemble with everyone as well.”

Ren Xiaosu replied, “Yes, sir!” Then he ran towards the Razor Sharp Company’s barracks.

When he entered the Razor Sharp Company’s camp, the Razor Sharp Company was already standing in a block formation with their field packs on their backs. Ren Xiaosu said, “Recruit Ren Xiaosu reporting in.”

The 180-odd men from the Razor Sharp Company looked at Ren Xiaosu speechlessly. The company commander was so angry he smiled. "Good on ya, Ren Xiaosu. You're the only one in Fortress 178 who's capable of making our Razor Sharp Company look like dumbasses. Amazing!"

Ren Xiaosu said politely, "But I'm also part of our Razor Sharp Company."

The company commander barked, "Get your ass in formation and fall in with 1st Platoon. I'll teach you a lesson after the war is over."

The company commander looked at the Razor Sharp Company that had assembled in a block formation and was about to lecture them. However, the men standing before him all looked bruised and swollen, while their uniforms were also in tatters. One of the soldiers' noses was still even bleeding. However, he did not fidget or wipe the blood off as he was currently standing in formation.

When the company commander was greeted by this sight, his heart shattered. What the fuck did they do to deserve this!

Zhou Yinglong walked over while humming a little ditty. The company commander said to him, "Reporting in, Battalion Commander, Razor Sharp Company has assembled. Total strength, 184. Present strength, 184. End of report, sir!"

Zhou Yinglong nodded as he looked at the Razor Sharp Company in the block formation. He snapped, "Look at the state you're in! You've got 60 more men than Second Company, but why does it seem like you're all useless?! Didn't y'all do really good during the exercise, and you even captured our command center too? Where's that arrogance now, eh?"

As he spoke, Zhou Yinglong stood in front of the Razor Sharp Company and started laughing...

Ren Xiaosu stood in formation and thought to himself, 'Just by looking at the way Zhou Yinglong leads his soldiers, he's probably not an ordinary person either.'

Zhou Yinglong continued, "We also don't have enough uniforms to go around at our fortress, so I wonder if y'all will be mocked when you step on the battlefield wearing your current attire? Zhang Xiaoman, I hope you haven't forgotten that you've pledged to take Mt. Dingyuan within half a month. Alright, time for y'all to set off."

The Razor Sharp Company's commander stood at attention and yelled, "Battalion Commander, don't worry! If we don't take Mt. Dingyuan within half a month, I'll commit suicide."

As soon as he finished speaking, the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company standing in block formation roared, "Battalion Commander, don't worry! We'll win the opening battle!"

Only at this moment did Ren Xiaosu finally feel some bloodlust from this group of thugs. Earlier, they were thinking of beating up a wounded person. Their behavior was too immoral!

After Zhou Yinglong left the barracks again, Zhang Xiaoman loosened up. He looked at Ren Xiaosu and said, "Good fucking job, kid! You've made our Razor Sharp Company lose all honor."

Ren Xiaosu said softly, "Yes, sir, yes."

"Jiao Xiaochen!" Zhang Xiaoman called over 1st Platoon's commander. "Ren Xiaosu will be assigned to your platoon from now on, so keep an eye on him. If he disobeys any orders, beat him to death."

Jiao Xiaochen muttered, "Captain, you saw how fast he ran just now, right? Even if we want to beat him up, we might not even be able to catch him."

"Cut the crap. We're setting off." Zhang Xiaoman turned to Ren Xiaosu and said, "Now that you've joined the Razor Sharp Company, be prepared to suffer. I don't know how you lived in the past. You might be used to eating well and never having to sleep in the wilderness, but from today onwards, know that the good days of the past are over!"

Ren Xiaosu did not reply. He would simply have to prove he could handle it.

The Forward Strike Battalion was the advance guard of Fortress 178. They not only had to capture cities and territories, but also played a part in verifying if the mapping of the battlefield was accurate. They would then report any intel back to headquarters to guide the Engineering Battalion in their bridge building and road paving missions to establish a forward operating base.

The armor and artillery could only reach the Zong Consortium after the bridges, roads, and FOB had been set up properly.

And the Razor Sharp Company was the advance guard of the Forward Strike Battalion. They would be the first to face and overcome any difficulties.

It was not without reason that all of the previous candidates for the role of fortress commander were trained in the Razor Sharp Company. If they did not gain experience with the toughest company, how could they possibly become good commanders?

This way of setting an example had carried on to this day. As such, all the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company were expecting even more from Ren Xiaosu. This person could end up becoming the commander of Fortress 178 in the future, but was he up to it?

Ten military transport trucks were assigned to the Razor Sharp Company by Zhou Yinglong. They weren't only used for transporting people. They also transported heavy machine guns, mortars, and other firearms. If they wanted to capture Mt. Dingyuan without this equipment, that would be a pipe dream.

After getting into the vehicles, the company commander, Zhang Xiaoman, was still analyzing the map in his hands. "There's a group of bandits holding Mt. Dingyuan, but it's hard to be sure at this moment that there won't be any of Zong Consortium's regulars mixed in among them. So we've gotta be careful when we attack them."

Ren Xiaosu was also sitting in the same vehicle as the company commander. He quite agreed with Zhang Xiaoman that they definitely could not treat the bandits at Mt. Dingyuan and Mt. Guan as normal bandits.

Zhang Xiaoman continued, "We don't have much time. There might still be a spring on Mt. Dingyuan, so it's not feasible to cut off their water supply. Any of you have any good ideas?"

Zhang Xiaoman looked around for someone to offer a suggestion, but no one said a thing. In the corner, Ren Xiaosu also sat with his eyes closed without saying a word.

Zhang Xiaoman's gaze fell on Ren Xiaosu. "You look like you have a lot of ideas. Tell me, how should we fight this battle?"

"Just fight?" Ren Xiaosu said. Since he had never been to Mt. Dingyuan before, he didn't even know what the terrain there looked like. So how could he think of a strategy?

Zhang Xiaoman scorned, "The bandits might even be armed with heavy machine guns, mortars, and RPGs. Do you know how many people will die if we launch a head-on attack? Do you think you're like Xu Xianchu, who has that invulnerable shadow with a black cauldron, and that you can simply force your way through the battlefield?"

Ren Xiaosu's mouth twitched. "I'm just a private, so I'll obey your orders."

Zhang Xiaoman nodded. "That's the correct attitude."

### **Chapter 387 A pledge**

In the truck, Ren Xiaosu listened as the thugs of the Razor Sharp Company discussed their plans to break through the defensive line at Mt. Dingyuan. They not only had to think about how to break through at Mt. Dingyuan, but also consider the possibility of the enemy's reinforcements arriving from Mt. Guan.

The reason Mt. Dingyuan was difficult to capture was because the Zong Consortium's bandits were supporting them from the front line of Mt. Guan. In peacetime, the two groups of bandits looked wholly unrelated. But when war broke out, these two groups were clearly fighting on the same side.

So if they attacked Mt. Dingyuan, they would have to face the threat from Mt. Guan at the same time.

When the convoy was about to leave Fortress 178, someone suddenly stopped the convoy from the front. It turned out that Wang Shengzhi and Wang Shengyin were both waiting at the east gate. Zhang Xiaoman jumped out of the truck and asked, "Is there anything I can help you with?"

Wang Shengyin said, "Ren Xiaosu is in your company, right? We learned he would be heading out to the front line today after speaking to Commander Zhang. We're just planning to bid him farewell, so we won't really delay your journey."

Looking at Wang Shengyin's appearance, Zhang Xiaoman realized she was obviously one of the people from the Central Plains. He said unhappily, "When the troops are setting off for war, how can they be asked to wait just because someone wants to say goodbye? Get out of the way already. He's a soldier of my Razor Sharp Company now, so I won't allow him to meet you two."

Zhang Xiaoman was already a little unhappy to begin with. How could his troops be stopped in their journey over such a trivial matter? What the hell?

Wang Shengyin said with a smile, "I'm sorry, we won't say goodbye to him then. Can you hand this gift to him? Let him know that we'll also be leaving Fortress 178 in three days. When we return to the Central Plains, we'll definitely help him to find his friend named Li Shentan."

"Alright, alright." Zhang Xiaoman waved them off impatiently. "I'll hand it to him."

Then Zhang Xiaoman jumped back up into the truck and quickly led the convoy through Fortress 178's gate. The copper bell behind them at the end of that long road stood at the center of the fortress unchanged. A group of soldiers watched Wang Shengyin, who was getting further and further away and muttered, "How enviable..."

At the moment, Wang Shengyin was still waving goodbye at the convoy. Meanwhile, Wang Shengzhi smiled throughout without a word.

Zhang Xiaoman handed the present to Ren Xiaosu and said, "During wartime, you shouldn't be in a relationship. There's only life and death to think about in war, understand?"

Ren Xiaosu did not reply. He took the box and opened it. He discovered it was a box of pea cakes, took one out, and stuffed it into his mouth. Then he gave the rest of the cakes to Zhang Xiaoman and said, "Y'all can share it."

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. "How can you let us have the snacks when it was given to you by a girl? Kid, what are you thinking?"

Ren Xiaosu stayed silent for a moment before saying, "It tastes bad."

Zhang Xiaoman was speechless.

The group of soldiers around him snatched the snacks from Zhang Xiaoman's hands and said, "If he doesn't want them, let us have 'em. It's so nice to have a girl send you something to eat, yet you're still being picky?"

Ren Xiaosu was sitting in the corner. He knew his relationship with Wang Shengyin was not what the soldiers thought. They had only known each other for a little more than ten days. It hadn't even been a month yet.

Perhaps Wang Shengzhi felt he would be useful in the future, so he quickly expressed his good intentions to him while they were still here.

But no matter what, Ren Xiaosu would not trust these "friends" he had only known for a little more than ten days. As for what would happen after Wang Shengzhi found Li Shentan, he did not care.

Judging by what Li Shentan and Si Liren were capable of, Li Shentan could definitely get away unscathed even if Wang Shengzhi had ulterior motives.

But when he tasted the pea cake, he was reminded of Yang Xiaojin. He wondered where that cap-wearing girl was now.

All of them probably thought he was dead.

Even Ren Xiaosu himself did not think that he had any hopes of survival at that time.

Before he could get revenge, Ren Xiaosu did not intend to get involved with other people. He would just treat them as passersby in his life.

Suddenly, Ren Xiaosu said, "Company Commander, why don't we attack Mt. Guan head on instead?"

"Are you fucking crazy?" Zhang Xiaoman said with his mouth full of pea cake. "My pledge was to attack Mt. Dingyuan. Also, it's more difficult to attack Mt. Guan than Mt. Dingyuan!"

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "Didn't you say that we have to prevent the reinforcements at Mt. Guan from coming to support Mt. Dingyuan during our attack? So even if we attack Mt. Guan, there should also be reinforcements coming from Mt. Dingyuan, right?"

Zhang Xiaoman pondered what he said. Then he realized Ren Xiaosu was implying that they should pretend to attack Mt. Guan first, then lay in ambush to pick off the reinforcements from Mt. Dingyuan when they headed to Mt. Guan.

This suggestion suited the Razor Sharp Company's soldiers' taste.

After all, positional defense still played the part of the "meat grinder" in modern warfare.

The officers of Fortress 178 were required to learn military knowledge during weekdays. Even though these men did not like studying, they still enjoyed reading case studies of wars preserved from before The Cataclysm.

One of the case studies detailing a battle for an airport perfectly explained what modern positional warfare was about. The attacking forces were ten times the number of the defensive troops, and they also possessed 122 mm howitzers and attack choppers. But even in those circumstances, it still took three months for the attackers to take the airport. During the battle, both sides suffered countless casualties.

This case study proved that as long as one side did not have a fully mechanized force and powerful aerial strikes they could depend on, positional warfare had to be taken seriously.

Whatever equipment they had, their enemies would have as well. In fact, the defenders would have also planted land mines, booby traps, and other forms of traps.

Bombarding the target with firepower required a huge price and intel on the enemy's firepower deployment, earned by sacrificing lives.

If it weren't for Ren Xiaosu, who had given the defensive deployment map to Qing Zhen, it would have taken Qing Zhen a very long time to take Position 313. At that time, the deadline set by the Qing Consortium's headquarters was only one month.

A lot of people thought the era of positional warfare was no longer applicable in modern warfare, but that wasn't the case at all.

The "Theory of the Omnipotence of Missiles" had still not reached full omnipotence yet.

In the case study Zhang Xiaoman and the others had read, the positions that were quickly conquered were bombarded by the air force. But now it was those flying beasts in the sky that were the overlords of airpower. Humanity's planes were too fragile in comparison.

The Razor Sharp Company was currently up against two bandit lairs. Although they could call for supporting fire to bombard Mt. Dingyuan and Mt. Guan, what do they do after that? How were they going to fight the remainder of the Zong Consortium's troops?

It was just two fucking bandit lairs. The real battle had not even started yet.

Zhang Xiaoman pondered things for a while. "But we might not be able to handle it when we get attacked on both sides."

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Even if we don't attack this way, we'll still have to face attacks from both sides, right?"

"That's true." Zhang Xiaoman said, "But what if the reinforcements from Mt. Dingyuan don't come to support them if there isn't enough pressure on Mt. Guan?"

Ren Xiaosu said firmly, "Then we'll put the pressure on them. Just leave it to me."

"Will you pledge to that?" Zhang Xiaoman asked in surprise.

"Yes!"

The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company in the truck suddenly felt something was wrong. They were still worried that a recruit like Ren Xiaosu would have his legs turn to rubber once he was on the battlefield. But why did it seem like Ren Xiaosu was more hellbent on seeking battle than they were?

Wasn't Ren Xiaosu rumored to be a supernatural being? No one knew where he got the confidence to talk big.

### **Chapter 388 War fanatic**

Since they had decided to attack Mt. Guan to lure the Mt. Dingyuan bandits out of their lair, they would have to quietly sneak into the valley in case their movements were discovered.

The Zong Consortium had spies all over the Northwest. Fortress 178 was planning to eliminate the bandits in the valley first in case they caused any trouble to the forward operating base when the real war began.

Zhang Xiaoman believed it would be harder to take Mt. Guan, but Ren Xiaosu did not think so. That was because some of the bandits had already died in the terrible earthquake when Yan Liuyuan's curse hit them. He was guessing those bandits must have come from Mt. Guan.

At that time, they were in the vicinity of Mt. Kaolei, and the nearest bandit lairs were at Mt. Tangwang and Mt. Guan. However, the bandits at Mt. Tangwang had already been recruited by Wang Congyang. So the only possibility was that those bandits were from Mt. Guan.

However, Ren Xiaosu did not mention a word about this. It seemed that Fortress 178 did not know about the battle in the wilderness yet, as the Zong Consortium was still locking out the news.

Fortress 178 was between 5 and 600 kilometers away from that battlefield at that time. No matter how massive the explosions and firepower were, no one would hear anything if they were in the fortress.

But Ren Xiaosu knew that if it were really as he had guessed, Mt. Guan was definitely not going to be as difficult to overcome as they had thought. Instead, it would be much easier to attack than Mt. Dingyuan.

The Razor Sharp Company started behaving like mice when they suddenly abandoned their trucks and moved in the gullies with their guns and artillery supplies. By lying low in the daytime and only becoming active at night, they were trying their best not to get discovered by the enemy.

When they were resting in the shadows of the gullies during the day, Zhang Xiaoman said to Ren Xiaosu, "Although I don't know what your superpower is, I'll still believe you since you said you could put pressure on Mt. Guan. But you better not tell me that you can't do it when we get there. If you can't do it, I'll be sure to shoot you regardless of who you are."

Ren Xiaosu did not reply to him as he cradled his automatic rifle and lay against the gully with his eyes closed.

Everyone was slowly eating their field rations. As they were now secretly trying to enter the valley, they were not allowed to set up cooking fires.

But Zhang Xiaoman and the others were surprised by how Ren Xiaosu could bear more hardship than they could. While everyone was resting, they would always require rotations for sentry duty. The other soldiers were so sleepy they kept complaining, but Ren Xiaosu never once grumbled about anything. If he was asked to perform his sentry duty, he would just do it. He was also fine with it when he had to perform his duty for a little longer.

Zhang Xiaoman observed and realized that Ren Xiaosu was really serious and responsible when he was on sentry duty.

The Razor Sharp Company's commander muttered, "As expected of someone chosen by the commander."

Everyone was expecting something more from Ren Xiaosu, not because they had something against him, but because when they found out he could become the next commander, they wondered, 'In what way is he better than me? Why should he be considered as a candidate for the role of commander?'

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu not only had to perform sentry duty, but he also took turns with everyone to carry the heavy machine guns and mortars during their march. The machine guns were really burdensome, and the mortars were only slightly lighter at about 15 kilograms each. Although it was very uncomfortable to carry them for long distances, it was still within acceptable limits.

Meanwhile, the 12.7 mm heavy machine guns weighed 25 kilograms each, and they even had to carry their own rucksacks too. The route they had to take to get to Mt. Guan and Mt. Dingyuan was still at least another 100 kilometers away, and the terrain was difficult to traverse. Some soldiers even got abrasions on their shoulders after carrying the weapons.

But Ren Xiaosu never once complained.

Ren Xiaosu looked very skinny at the moment because his Strength and Dexterity were balanced. At the beginning, Zhang Xiaoman deliberately made things difficult for Ren Xiaosu by making him suffer.

But to Zhang Xiaoman's surprise, Ren Xiaosu was not careless at all when carrying the machine gun even though he looked thinner than all of them. He even volunteered to shoulder some of the burden for his comrades.

This was just how it was in the army. If you were tough and capable, you would get respected. If you were a weakling, you would get looked down on.

In just these few days of their march through the wilderness, everyone's impression of Ren Xiaosu changed for the better. This kid was really tough and capable!

The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company vaguely thought to themselves, 'He's too not bad after all.'

But it did not mean he had fully been accepted. Whether he was qualified to be the next commander would not depend only on physical strength and perseverance.

At this moment, Zhang Xiaoman did some calculations and said, "Mt. Guan is around 30 kilometers away from Mt. Dingyuan. If the bandits on Mt. Guan seek reinforcements from Mt. Dingyuan, those bandits will probably arrive in about half an hour. We have to dig trenches and set up an ambush on the road in advance. Or else we might not be able to defeat those fucking bandits."

Ren Xiaosu said, "This gully is already a natural trench."

"That's true." Zhang Xiaoman suddenly asked, "Are you really confident in putting pressure on Mt. Guan and forcing them to call for reinforcements?"

Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "I already pledged to do so."

The signalers from the Razor Sharp Company were constantly in touch with the Forward Strike Battalion behind them. The Forward Strike Battalion had set off the day after the Razor Sharp Company had departed. At this moment, they should be 60 kilometers behind them.

However, the Forward Strike Battalion's target was neither Mt. Guan nor Mt. Dingyuan. They had to set up a defensive line in the north to prevent the Zong Consortium's counterattack on the south after they successfully took Mt. Guan and Mt. Dingyuan.

Of Fortress 178's military corps, other than a full brigade that was tasked with staying behind to defend the fortress, the rest were preparing to head out to the battlefield.

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Captain, does the Zong Consortium really have 200,000 soldiers?"

Zhang Xiaoman said with a sneer, "How dare the Zong Consortium claim to have 200,000 soldiers when their territory is so small? Oh, wait, if we include the refugees and private troops they recruited into their forces, it seems there might really be 200,000 of them. But our Fortress 178 can fight down to our last soldier. The Zong Consortium's so-called brigade would probably lose all their morale once a few hundred of their soldiers get killed."

Only then did it dawn on Ren Xiaosu that the Zong Consortium was just like the Li Consortium. Not only did they draft the incapable refugees, but they recruited the incompetent private troops into their forces as well.

If the Qing Consortium did the same, Ren Xiaosu estimated they could come up with more than 400,000 troops.

But what was the use of such troops?

Ren Xiaosu asked, "Then how many real troops does the Zong Consortium have?"

"About 90,000." Zhang Xiaoman said, "But this was intel from last year."

Ren Xiaosu nodded. He suddenly felt that this battle was no longer that difficult to fight even though Fortress 178 only had 75,000 troops on the battlefield.

But why did it feel like Fortress 178 was not that strong? Was he getting a false impression?

Ren Xiaosu felt that there was something strange about this. If Fortress 178 only had these fighting forces, even if they could remain standing here in the Northwest, it would definitely not be enough to awe a real consortium.

Besides, Luo Lan had wanted to kill Zhang Jinglin, but Qing Zhen refused.

Did Qing Zhen allow Zhang Jinglin to return to the Northwest so he could keep the Zong Consortium in check, or was it because he wanted Zhang Jinglin to continue keeping guard for the humans in the interior and prevent another foreign war from breaking out?

Perhaps it could be for both reasons too. Ren Xiaosu felt that Qing Zhen might not be that fanatic who was only obsessed with fighting wars.

## **Chapter 389 Don't alert the enemy**

The Razor Sharp Company's march was not slow. They continuously laid low during the day and only came out at night for three days in a row. Even this group of thugs were starting to feel a little tired.

They would not be so tired if they were marching normally, mainly because they still had to carry their supplies, ammunition, and firearms with them. The Razor Sharp Company had four heavy machine guns with them and were supplied with more than 20 ammo boxes.

At the beginning, Ren Xiaosu kept a very low profile and carried the heavy machine gun with the other soldiers. Two people were on a gun, rotating pairs every three hours.

But as he kept walking, Ren Xiaosu felt it was very inconvenient for two people to carry the machine gun since they had to synchronize their pace and footsteps. As such, he simply had his teammate let go and carried the gun by himself.

Zhang Xiaoman had thought Ren Xiaosu was overestimating himself. How could he carry that thing weighing 25 kilograms on top of his field pack all by himself? He might be able to carry it for a while, but try carrying it for three hours!

But everyone eventually realized it was unusual. Ren Xiaosu was actually able to carry the fucking heavy machine gun weighing 25 kilograms by himself effortlessly, and he was not even panting!

One hour later, Zhang Xiaoman and the others thought Ren Xiaosu would already be tired. However, Ren Xiaosu switched to carrying the machine gun in his other hand and continued carrying it forward.

Two hours later, Zhang Xiaoman and the others thought that surely he would be tired by now. However, Ren Xiaosu simply switched back to carrying it with his previous hand like it was not heavy at all.

After three hours, Ren Xiaosu passed the heavy machine gun to his comrades who would be taking over and said, "It's your turn now."

This time, everyone from the Razor Sharp Company was secretly surprised. Was Ren Xiaosu a beast? Fortunately, they did not end up fighting Ren Xiaosu in the military base. With his strength, he could probably kill others with just a punch, right?!

Zhang Xiaoman was a little jealous. "Is this what it means to be a supernatural being?"

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu heard the voice from the palace in his mind say, "Quest: Help your comrades lessen their burden."

Ren Xiaosu was stunned. He had not received a quest from the palace for nearly a month. He wondered what kind of reward it would be this time.

When they were about to arrive at the specified location on the fourth day, Ren Xiaosu purposely chose a time when his comrades had become extremely tired to help them carry their supplies. He would carry them for a while before letting them carry the supplies again.

His comrades were all moved to tears. Ren Xiaosu was such a good guy, and he was really helpful to everyone too.

When Ren Xiaosu took their boxes of supplies, everyone thanked him for it. Ren Xiaosu thought to himself that even though the Razor Sharp Company's soldiers were like thugs, they were rather sincere in their gratitude. He actually managed to receive gratitude tokens from all of their thanks.

During his previous battle, Ren Xiaosu had used his Explosive Poker cards like they did not cost a thing. So he only had around a 100 gratitude tokens left from the originally 900-odd gratitude tokens he had accumulated

And now, Ren Xiaosu would have to be exceptionally hardworking as he started earning the gratitude tokens all over again.

Although Zhang Xiaoman was the company commander, he was always one to lead by example. He also helped carry whatever everyone was carrying without slacking off one bit.

When it was Zhang Xiaoman's turn to carry the supplies, Ren Xiaosu was about to take the ammo box from his hands, but Zhang Xiaoman refused to let him do so.

In fact, Ren Xiaosu did not bear any grudges against them for trying to beat him up. He even volunteered to help his comrades out, making everyone feel really embarrassed about how they treated him.

When Zhang Xiaoman looked at Ren Xiaosu, who was about to take the ammo box from his shoulder, he immediately said, "It's fine, you don't have to. I can carry it."

However, Ren Xiaosu did not budge. He said with a dark expression, "Let go!"

Zhang Xiaoman subconsciously let go of his hand, and Ren Xiaosu grabbed the ammo box. Even if he could carry it, Ren Xiaosu wouldn't allow it. Wouldn't that delay the progress of his quest?

Initially, Ren Xiaosu thought he could complete the quest by just helping them carry one or two ammo boxes. But after testing, the palace updated him that the quest was only 1% complete. It meant he would have to do it a hundred times before the quest would be considered complete.

There had always been a better reward for the more challenging quests he was given. Ren Xiaosu was starting to look forward to the reward this time.

But Ren Xiaosu suddenly felt like something was missing as he carried the ammo box. He looked back at Zhang Xiaoman and said, "Aren't you going to thank me?"

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned before muttering, "Thank you..."

"Gratitude received from Zhang Xiaoman,

+1!"

Zhang Xiaoman said from behind, "Don't push yourself too hard, preserving your combat strength is the most important thing."

Ren Xiaosu had been carrying something on his shoulder all day. But even when the rest of the troops looked really tired, Ren Xiaosu looked fresh.

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu stopped in his tracks. "Someone's coming!"

In that instant, all the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company went prone inside the gully. Ren Xiaosu was shocked when he looked back at them. His comrades were way too cautious!

It wasn't until ten seconds later that they heard a motorcycle in the distance. It seemed to be coming from the east, so that could only mean it was someone from Mt. Dingyuan.

Zhang Xiaoman lay on the ground and said to the others, "Don't alert the enemy. We can't be discovered—"

Before he could finish speaking, the bandit riding the motorcycle suddenly screamed in the distance. Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. "What was that? Who's screaming when I was just saying to not make a sound? Didn't I say to stay hidden and not alert the enemy?"

"Captain, the scream came from way over there. It's not our people."

"From over there?" Zhang Xiaoman was puzzled. "Wait a minute, where's Ren Xiaosu?"

When they cautiously poked their heads out of the gully, they saw that Ren Xiaosu had snapped the bandit's neck and left him lying on the ground.

Ren Xiaosu took off his Razor Sharp Company's uniform and put on that bandit's clothes. Zhang Xiaoman was shocked. "What're you doing?"

Ren Xiaosu said, "I'll push the motorcycle and head up Mt. Guan. I noticed earlier that it'd take around an hour to walk up the mountain road. In exactly an hour, I want 'all to start firing the mortars at the mountain. You don't have to worry about whether it's accurate. Just create a distraction. After that, prepare to intercept the bandits coming from Mt. Dingyuan. There's no need to worry about me."

The Razor Sharp Company's soldiers looked at one another. Was Ren Xiaosu planning to head up Mt. Guan all by himself?!

Zhang Xiaoman asked, "Are you gonna be fine by yourself?"

"Yes." Ren Xiaosu nodded. "Don't worry, I'm not looking to die."

"But it's too dangerous. Why don't I send a platoon to cover you?" Zhang Xiaoman said.

"There's no need for that." Ren Xiaosu shook his head and said, "I'll help y'all pin down the bandits on Mt. Guan first. If the situation goes south, I'll retreat. As long as I can lure the bandits out from Mt. Dingyuan, everything that I do there will be worth it."

Zhang Xiaoman turned serious. "You're a brother of our Razor Sharp Company from now on. If you sadly sacrifice yourself there, I'll make sure our comrades back at the fortress learn that you were a brave man."

How could there be no deaths in a war? There would surely have to be some sacrifices if they wanted to win the war.

The Razor Sharp Company's current mission was to take Mt. Dingyuan. If they could not complete their mission on time, it would delay the progress of the entire army.

They were going to be in for a tough battle.

But 1st Platoon Commander Jiao Xiaochen suddenly wondered, "Why would you have to push the motorcycle up the mountain? Wouldn't it be better to ride it?"

Ren Xiaosu was silent for a while. "I don't know how to ride it."

Zhang Xiaoman was speechless, as was Jiao Xiaochen. All of the Razor Sharp Company's soldiers were speechless.

### **Chapter 390 I've already taken Mt. Guan**

After Ren Xiaosu pushed the motorcycle and set off, Zhang Xiaoman quickly led the Razor Sharp Company in digging the trenches.

After all, Ren Xiaosu was not well-versed in military knowledge. Although the gullies could indeed save them a lot of steps, there was still a need to work on them before the gullies could be useful as trenches. They needed to select the most suitable position for the ambush and set up emplacements as well.

It would take an hour for Ren Xiaosu to head up the mountain and probably another hour for the reinforcements from Mt. Dingyuan to reach this location. So there wasn't much time left for Zhang Xiaoman and the others to get ready.

As Jiao Xiaochen led the group to construct the trenches, he muttered, "I thought the commander sent us a weakling, but it turns out he's the best."

"Do y'all feel that he has a grudge against these bandits?" someone wondered. "I feel like he really wants to fight these bandits and the Zong Consortium until he kills them all."

"I can feel it too." Zhang Xiaoman sighed. "There's some sort of ferocity deep in that kid's bones. He could kill someone just like that without batting an eyelid. Before we could even react, he finished off that bandit."

"When he was pushing the motorcycle to go up the mountain just now, I could sense a killing intent in him."

"You must've fucking listened to too many stories! You can even sense something like killing intent now? Get out of here!"

Zhang Xiaoman was sitting in the trenches and estimated the time. "Are the mortars ready?"

"Captain, our mortars definitely can't hit the mountain since their effective range is only three kilometers." Jiao Xiaochen wiped away his sweat and said, "Should we get a little closer? That way, we

can still provide some cover for him. Our mortars are probably still a bit far from the bandit lair on Mt. Guan to effectively hit them.”

“No.” Zhang Xiaoman shook his head. “Our most important task is to wipe out the bandits coming from Mt. Dingyuan. It’s not that I don’t want to provide cover for him, but our mission must be completed. We can only talk about other matters after the mission is done.”

“What if he—”

“There’s no ‘what ifs,’” Zhang Xiaoman refuted. “It’s an honor for a soldier to die on the battlefield. Since he’s decided to go, he must have some skills to keep himself alive. Don’t ever underestimate a supernatural being. Have you forgotten how strong old Xu’s superpower is? And Ren Xiaosu might even be stronger than Old Xu?”

Supernatural beings had now become a variable on the battlefield. They were sharp daggers that could kill the enemy as soon as they were stabbed in the right position.

When it was time, Zhang Xiaoman immediately ordered Jiao Xiaochen to launch the mortars and create a distraction. After the mortars exploded, intense gunfire suddenly came from the mountainside.

Someone said, “It seems like the bandits on Mt. Guan have already started fighting. Are we really not going to support him?”

“I think I just heard a train whistle. Did I hear wrong?”

“He definitely can’t deal with them by himself. No matter how powerful a supernatural being is, they’re still afraid of bullets. Why don’t we attack Mt. Guan first?”

Zhang Xiaoman said coldly, “Keep your guards up, all of you! Our current enemies are the bandits from Mt. Dingyuan, not the bandits here at Mt. Guan!”

But at this moment, the gunfire on the mountainside subsided. Zhang Xiaoman frowned. “Why have the gunshots stopped so quickly? Has he retreated already, or did he sacrifice himself?”

“He sacrificed himself, more than likely.”

Based on last year’s intel, there were at least 700 bandits gathered up on Mt. Guan. No matter how powerful Ren Xiaosu was, he could not possibly wipe out all the bandits by himself.

Moreover, there should be gunshots from the pursuing bandits if Ren Xiaosu had fled down the mountain. But right now, they couldn’t hear any gunshots at all. This suggested the battle on the mountain had already ended.

Therefore, the most reasonable explanation was that Ren Xiaosu had overestimated his own strength when he said he would pin down the bandits on Mt. Guan. In the end, his plan backfired on him.

“But the reinforcements at Mt. Dingyuan won’t come over here to give support if the battle’s ended so quickly. Then our plan is ruined.” Jiao Xiaochen sighed. “What should we do now? Should we retreat?”

“Wait awhile longer.” Zhang Xiaoman said, “What if the bandits from Mt. Dingyuan rush here? We can fight as many of them as we can then. Our enemies have motorcycles that allow them to travel freely in the valley while we retreat on foot. If we evacuate at this moment, we’ll be caught up to very soon by the enemy. If that’s the case, we might as well defend this position and fight back.”

The soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company leaned against the trench walls, hugging their guns. “The commander is really unlucky. The two candidates he chose so far have both ended up dead.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about.” Zhang Xiaoman said calmly, “On the battlefield, you never know when someone will die.”

However, the Razor Sharp Company waited for nearly an hour in the trenches at the foot of the mountain. They did not see any bandit reinforcements coming from Mt. Dingyuan, nor did any bandits charge down from Mt. Guan to kill them.

“This feels a little strange.” Zhang Xiaoman wondered, “We exposed our position when we fired the mortars earlier, so why’re the bandits on Mt. Guan not coming down to attack us? Never mind that the bandits from Mt. Dingyuan did not come, why aren’t the bandits on Mt. Guan coming down either?”

But at this moment, a soldier poked his head out and saw someone walking slowly on the mountain road towards them. The figure was covered in blood and prominently stood out in the dusty landscape.

“Isn’t that Ren Xiaosu? He’s still alive?!” Jiao Xiaochen exclaimed.

They had been speculating and coming up with many scenarios, but never had they thought Ren Xiaosu would be walking out of the mountain alive!

When the calm-looking Zhang Xiaoman heard Ren Xiaosu’s name, he immediately got out of the trench and ran towards him. He circled Ren Xiaosu for a while and asked, “Did you get injured? How did you manage to escape? Medic! Medic, get over here!”

Ren Xiaosu stayed silent for a moment before suddenly saying, “I’m sorry, I didn’t complete the mission.”

Zhang Xiaoman chuckled when he saw that Ren Xiaosu was alright. “It’s good enough that you’re still alive. I said that you were too overconfident. How could you possibly pin down the bandits on Mt. Guan all by yourself? Follow me into the trenches. When the bandits charge down, we’ll still have a tough battle to fight!”

Ren Xiaosu said, “No, what I meant was that I killed them so fast they couldn’t even call for reinforcements from Mt. Dingyuan.”

Everyone from the Razor Sharp Company was stupefied. ‘Is it fucking appropriate for you to say something so ruthless while putting on a sad face like that?!’

Zhang Xiaoman asked in bewilderment, “You aren’t joking, right?”

Ren Xiaosu said, “The bandits of Mt. Guan almost turned out in full force for a battle last month, but they were all killed. There were only about a 100 bandits left on Mt. Guan, so they weren’t as strong as y’all thought.”

“Aha!” Zhang Xiaoman was stunned for a moment. “But how do you know about it?”

Ren Xiaosu did not reply. He suddenly missed Liuyuan a little.

Zhang Xiaoman and the others still felt that something was wrong. Even with only a 100 bandits left on this mountain, the battle should not have ended this quickly, right?! In that case, did it mean that Ren Xiaosu had killed all the bandits on the mountain single-handedly?!

“Are you sure the bandits on the mountain are all dead?” Zhang Xiaoman asked in confirmation. “You better not joke around in the military!”

Ren Xiaosu said, “There’s still some HMGS and a lot of ammo left on the mountain, so I think we should go up and get them. We don’t have enough ammo, after all.”

“That’s not what I was asking about...” Zhang Xiaoman was a little speechless.

An hour later, Zhang Xiaoman was looking at the bodies lying around the bandit lair on Mt. Guan. Then he said to a radiotelephone operator, “Notify Commander Zhou. I’ve gotta give him a sitrep.”

The RTO walked over with a portable radio. When Zhang Xiaoman took the handset, he heard Zhou Yinglong shouting on the other end: “Maggot, why’re you looking for me at a time like this? Are you thinking of giving up because you feel you can’t take Mt. Dingyuan? Lemme tell you, you already pledged to do it, so even if you can’t, you’ll still have to fight!”

Zhang Xiaoman said in a speechless manner: “Battalion Commander, we’ve already taken Mt. Guan. We will be attacking Mt. Dingyuan tomorrow....”