First Order 441

Chapter 441 Idiotic

Hope was always such a beautiful thing, and the mindset of the Razor Sharp Company was very simple. Wasn't it just crippling the Zong Consortium's mechanized troops from the perspective of cutting off their fuel?

However, reality was cruel. They were in an unfamiliar place and did not even know where the oil refineries were located.

When they found some refugees to ask for directions, the refugees answered all their questions enthusiastically. Furthermore, the refugees promised to keep it a secret.

But when the Razor Sharp Company arrived at the oil refinery and discovered that it was only a factory producing canola oil for cooking with, they were shocked!

After attacking three factories in a single day, they did not even come across one proper crude oil refinery and were exhausted to death. In the end, Ren Xiaosu was forced to bring everyone back to the uninhabited wilderness to figure out their next steps.

And so, the plan to attack the crude oil refineries was abandoned. They had already attacked three oil refineries, after all, so the Zong Consortium would easily figure out what the Razor Sharp Company was up to. As such, the actual crude oil refineries would most likely be heavily guarded by now.

"Then what should we do?" Jiao Xiaochen asked while smearing some cooking oil they had stolen onto a fish for grilling.

Actually, what Ren Xiaosu and the others did not know was that if they had taken the steam locomotive and headed straight to Stronghold 144 before the 131st Brigade arrived, they might have been able to destroy the Zong Consortium's granary.

After all, half of the garrison infantry regiment's troops had already been wiped out in their previous skirmishes, and a further three of their regimental commanders were killed one after the other, including a deputy commander who fled from his position. The remaining troops had fallen into disarray without a leader.

If they really launched an attack on the stronghold, the enemy might not be able to organize an effective defense against them.

Unfortunately, their intel was outdated. They still did not know they had already killed three of the 1237th Regiment's commanders.

"Then let's just destroy some of their factories as and when we encounter them." Zhang Xiaoman said, "Didn't we say that we could learn from the Qing Consortium's tactics? They just destroyed whatever installations they came across and wiped out the entire Yang Consortium's industry as a result."

Jiao Xiaochen said, rolling his eyes, "Can we compare to the Qing Consortium? They had over a 1,000 troops to fight their enemy."

Ren Xiaosu was not participating in the discussion with the Razor Sharp Company because he knew it would be very difficult for them to come to a conclusion. It was better for the Razor Sharp Company to not have any plans at all. By doing so, the enemy would not be able to sense a pattern in their attacks, and that would prevent them from being caught in a meticulously planned ambush.

On top of that, he was also wondering about the whereabouts of Zong Cheng at this moment. He had heard that Zong Cheng was in charge of the garrison troops at the Zong Consortium's main stronghold. Luo Lan even disdainfully said that the garrison troops were where the family members of the Zong Consortium got posted.

Ren Xiaosu looked at Zhang Xiaoman. "Where's the Zong Consortium's HQ?"

"In Stronghold 146. It's about 400 kilometers away from here." Zhang Xiaoman said in surprise, "Xiaosu, don't tell me you're thinking of attacking their headquarters? We don't have enough people for that. There should be at least a brigade garrisoned at Stronghold 146 right now. It's their headquarters, after all, so it'll definitely be different there."

"I'm not." Ren Xiaosu shook his head. "I was just asking."

He kept pondering this. That was a whole brigade they were talking about. It seemed like he could only wait for Fortress 178 to join up with them here before they could attack the Zong Consortium's main stronghold together. Otherwise, he would be seeking an early death if he led the Razor Sharp Company in by himself.

But at this moment, the sound of armored vehicles could be heard out in the distance again. It sounded like the armored brigade that was chasing after them had caught up.

Ren Xiaosu frowned. "How did they manage to find us?"

"I don't know." Zhang Xiaoman was a little confused. By rights, they should not have left any tracks when they left their previous campsite today.

"Let's not worry about that for now. That armored brigade can't move as fast as us. We can discuss that after we get away from here."

But just as they were about to leave, a young man suddenly walked over alone from afar with a knife in his hand. He looked at Ren Xiaosu and the others and, with a smile, said loudly, "I've finally found you people—".

Before he could finish speaking, Zhang Xiaoman reacted in double-quick time and started firing at him.

But to everyone's surprise, when the bullets arrived in front of the young man, a glow resembling a yellow honeycomb structure appeared and blocked the bullets.

"Why can't you let me finish speaking? That's so rude." The young man shook his head and said with a smile while looking calm and collected, "One of you here should be Xu Xianchu, right? And which one of you might that be?"

Right at this moment, a bright yellow glow suddenly appeared again behind the young man like an impregnable stronghold. But this time, the young man looked down in astonishment as the black tip of a blade emerged through his chest. Blood was flowing out from it as well. With that, he could no longer say another word.

Then Ren Xiaosu put the black saber away and closed the Shadow Door. He asked, "Who the fuck are vou?"

The young man slumped to the ground as the aura around him faded away.

Zhang Xiaoman replied, "He's probably a supernatural being from the Zong Consortium. Why does he look and seem kinda idiotic?"

Ren Xiaosu's expression changed. When they were making their way through the mountains to the Beiwan River, someone had seen his shadow clone. That was probably how the enemy determined that Xu Xianchu was among their company.

He couldn't allow this supernatural being to continue rambling. Otherwise, his secret would be exposed. Zhang Xiaoman and the others had still not seen his shadow clone yet. Thus, he went straight for the kill. But Ren Xiaosu had not expected him to die so easily.

Ren Xiaosu also knew that the overall quality of supernatural beings in these times was quite inconsistent. Not everyone had combat experience, and some of them could even be quite arrogant too. Yang Xiaojin had told him that a supernatural being in the Central Plains had immediately announced that they were going to rule over the entire Central Plains after their power was awakened. In the end, that supernatural being was killed in the shooting spree that ensued.

There were also those who said they wanted to protect the peace but ended up getting killed as well.

In any case, there were all kinds of people out there, and not everyone was as careful as Wang Congyang.

However, the supernatural being they met today was exceptionally stupid. Who knew how the Zong Consortium had raised him?

"Forget it, let's not bother with him anymore. We have to move since our position might've been compromised." Then Ren Xiaosu summoned the steam locomotive for them to get away from here, leaving behind the corpse of the supernatural being alone in the wilderness. The Razor Sharp Company did not even give him another look.

But what Ren Xiaosu did not know was that this supernatural being was actually arrogant for a reason. That was because in the three months since he had been recruited by the Zong Consortium, they had

been testing the hardness of his "defense system." Subsequently, they discovered that he was even able to block artillery shells that were fired at him from reaching his body.

Therefore, the sudden appearance of this supernatural being was actually to stall the group before the armored brigade arrived. If it were anyone else, they might not have been able to keep the Razor Sharp Company from escaping

But to his surprise, there was really nothing that Ren Xiaosu's black saber could not cut. The palace had said that it was the sharpest weapon of all, and it seemed like it was really not lying. It was definitely the sharpest weapon with nothing else coming close.

Thus, the supernatural being perished.

Ren Xiaosu and the Razor Sharp Company rode the steam locomotive off into the distance again. When Zong Wu, who was pursuing them from behind, saw that they had gotten away again, he cursed angrily, "I thought you all said that the guy was a very powerful supernatural being? Why can't he even stall the enemy for a while?! Piece of shit!" Then Zong Wu looked at the other supernatural being standing next to him and said, "Are you also a piece of shit?"

That supernatural being's eyes twitched. "I'm definitely more powerful than him, but my expertise is in locating other supernatural beings, not fighting them. I've already sought out so many supernatural beings for the Zong Consortium..."

Zong Wu waved him off impatiently. "Alright, alright, I get it already! So where are they now?"

"My power can only be used three times a day, and I've already used it three times today. Furthermore, the effective range cannot exceed a 100 kilometers."

"And you dare say that you're not shit."

Zong Wu was starting to get anxious over his gold, so how could he still be in the mood to play nice with this supernatural being?

When this supernatural being heard that, he got a little annoyed. He did not bring up the doubts he had either. Based on the power of his perception, it was clear that there was only one supernatural being among the enemy. So then, why was everyone saying there were two, or even three of them?

Wasn't that really strange?

Chapter 442 The deputy regimental commander helps clear things up

Ren Xiaosu and the Razor Sharp Company were having a discussion on the train, and Zhang Xiaoman wondered out loud, "How did the armored brigade find us?"

"I don't know. Could the things we took from that factory we destroyed have GPS trackers on them or something?" Jiao Xiaochen asked.

"It can't be. We only took away some cooking oil from there and nothing else. There wasn't really anything valuable anyway." Zhang Xiaoman asked everyone, "Did y'all take anything with you?"

"No." The soldiers all shook their heads. "We're in the middle of a war, so why would we do something so stupid that we affected our comrades? We definitely did not steal anything."

"Then could we have a spy among us?" Zhang Xiaoman scolded, "Who's the traitor? I'll give you a chance if you own up right now!"

"I think you look more like the spy!"

"That's right, I also think that the captain looks like a traitor."

A proper discussion had suddenly devolved into a nonsensical bantering. Ren Xiaosu said calmly, "There's definitely no spy in our company. It should be a supernatural being with related powers that found us, I think? Since the Zong Consortium thinks so highly of us, and even sent an armored brigade after us, there's no reason they would only send one supernatural being to do the job. There must be another one out there."

If there were a spy, it would not have been so easy for them to take out the enemies at the Beiwan River and Mt. Qiangwan. The infantry regiment of Stronghold 144 would also not have found them so difficult to handle either.

Moreover, the fatality rate of the Razor Sharp Company had always been extremely high. Sending a spy in would be too risky since the spy would most likely get killed once they reached the front line. No matter how stupid the intelligence agency's director at the Zong Consortium was, they would not place a spy in the Razor Sharp Company. There was little value in that and the chances of dying were extremely high.

It was only when Ren Xiaosu joined the Razor Sharp Company that it suddenly became a very important fighting force.

Therefore, Ren Xiaosu's guess was that this was the doing of a supernatural being.

After all, it was very difficult for normal people to understand the miracles of supernatural beings.

"If this armored brigade still manages to find us despite our attempts to get away, then what?" Jiao Xiaochen asked. "I'll be very disgusted if we can't shake them off our tail."

Just the thought of being pursued by more than 4,000 troops and not knowing when they would catch up really made them nervous.

"That supernatural being must have some way of finding us." Ren Xiaosu frowned as he thought about it. Not even a supernatural being could be omniscient and be able to find anyone they wanted. There had to be conditions for a power like this.

The shadow clone had a maximum control range of only one kilometer, and the Shadow Door's maximum effective distance was also at one kilometer. Therefore, he did not believe that the enemy's supernatural being's power was not limited by distance as well.

Actually, the person whose expertise was searching for other supernatural beings had made great contributions to the Zong Consortium.

Take, for example, the only three supernatural beings around someone like Qing Zhen. Including the one who had shielded him from the sniper attack and died, there were four of them.

This was not to say there was a lack of supernatural beings in the Qing Consortium's territories. People like Wang Congyang and Xu Xianchu also lived under the Qing Consortium rule, but they stayed hidden by keeping a low profile as they were not willing to use their powers to work for others.

Therefore, there were still quite a lot of supernatural beings around. Ren Xiaosu felt that the number of supernatural beings within an organization's territories should be in the double digits at least, but not all of them had been identified yet.

However, it was different at the Zong Consortium's territories. For example, that kinda idiotic supernatural being Ren Xiaosu and the Razor Sharp Company had encountered earlier, as well as Han Yang who had been hunted down by Yang Xiaojin, they were all found by this person who could sense the existence of other supernatural beings. After locating them, they were forcefully recruited into the Zong Consortium's military.

Of course, the Zong Consortium was not harsh on them. They were all treated very well so they could be brainwashed into serving the organization.

Meanwhile, this supernatural being who could locate other supernatural beings played too important a role. Just for this mission alone he had an entire company of recon troops assigned to protect him. This recon company was only responsible for protecting him and did not have to do anything else.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while before turning the steam locomotive away from the Zong Consortium's territory at full speed. He wanted to see if he could shake off this armored brigade by getting as far away from them as possible.

But after traveling for quite some time, Ren Xiaosu suddenly saw an off-road vehicle up ahead driving east. Due to the bad conditions of the road, the off-road vehicle was not moving too fast.

"Eh? Why's an off-road vehicle all the way out here?" Zhang Xiaoman asked. "There should be no presence of the Zong Consortium's military in this remote area."

"I wonder who it is." Jiao Xiaochen said, "But it's someone from the Zong Consortium for sure, so why don't we kill them?"

"Don't get anxious." Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, "Whoever's in that off-road vehicle is definitely at least an officer. Let's capture them and see if we can get anything from an interrogation."

At this moment, the deputy commander of the 1237th Regiment was driving the off-road vehicle by himself to escape from the Zong Consortium's territory. He did not even bring his wife along, or it would definitely have aroused the suspicion of others.

At this moment, his wife might just be cursing at him back at Stronghold 144.

But he had to flee! The Zong Consortium's headquarters had suddenly said that he would be promoted to the position of regimental commander, but that damn unit from Fortress 178 was precisely targeting whoever was the regimental commander!

Although, this deputy commander wasn't very sure of that either. It could have just been a coincidence that three of their regimental commanders were killed one after the other, but he still could not help but feel very nervous.

But while he was fleeing, he suddenly noticed the steam locomotive approaching him in the rearview mirror. Alright, that confirmed it! He was now sure that the opponent was really out to kill the commanders of the 1237th Regiment. He had fled this far away, yet they were still chasing after him! 'This is fucking crazy! I already said that I don't want to be the regimental commander!

However, this was also not exactly a coincidence. After all, the deputy commander was just trying to escape, while the Razor Sharp Company was doing the same too. As both parties were essentially going in the same direction, how could they not run into each other?

If the steam locomotive traveled further for another 100 kilometers or so, Ren Xiaosu would even get to see Li Shentan again.

The appearance of the steam locomotive quickly forced the off-road vehicle to stop. The deputy commander was also very decisive in doing so. He got out of the vehicle with his hands in the air. "I surrender! Don't kill me! I already said that I won't become the regimental commander, so why are you still pursuing me? I'm really not going to be the regimental commander!"

Ren Xiaosu and the others hopped out of the steam locomotive with puzzled looks on their faces. What the hell was this guy talking about?

"What regimental commander?" Zhang Xiaoman pointed his gun at the deputy commander and slowly approached him. "Is there anyone else in the vehicle?"

"No, there's no one other than me!" The deputy commander was close to tears when he saw Zhang Xiaoman's fierce expression. There were more than a 100 people surrounding him, so he felt like he wouldn't survive this even if he had ten lives!

"What did you mean by that just now? What about the regimental commander?" Ren Xiaosu asked with a frown.

The deputy commander was also confused. "Aren't you specifically hunting down our 1237th Regiment's commanders?"

Zhang Xiaoman and the others looked at each other in confusion. What the hell was he going on about? When the deputy commander gave them a detailed explanation, the soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company only had two words: "Holy shit!"

"We've killed three regimental commanders already?!" Jiao Xiaochen was shocked.

Ren Xiaosu was extremely shocked as he listened to the deputy commander's account. Meanwhile, the deputy commander looked at the Razor Sharp Company and thought to himself, 'What's with the shocked expressions on all of your faces?'

"We should at least be worthy of a Star Medal now, right?" Fu Rao mumbled.

"I bet it's even possible that we'll get awarded the Nebula Medal..."

Ren Xiaosu cut him off and said, "Don't get off topic. Are there any supernatural beings within the Zong Consortium who are good at finding people?"

The deputy commander was taken aback but said, "Finding people? I don't know about that, but I do know there's a supernatural being who's good at searching for other supernatural beings."

Chapter 443 Raiding Stronghold 144!

The Razor Sharp Company had been in the Zong Consortium's territory for some time now. While they had gained many victories, they were essentially running around like headless chickens due to a lack of intel.

How blind was the Razor Sharp Company on the battlefield? Most of the time, they only knew they had won but did not know who they had won against, they didn't know who else was coming to attack them.

But now that they had suddenly caught the deputy commander of the 1237th Regiment, the Razor Sharp Company was suddenly enlightened through him on what they had achieved.

Ren Xiaosu was still most concerned about why the armored brigade was constantly able to find them, and he was able to find out about this as well from this deputy commander. "So there's actually someone who can find other supernatural beings, and he even managed to recruit quite a few of those he found? Did you say that he can only sense the presence of other supernatural beings who are within a radius of a 100 kilometers?"

"That's right. He was even escorted to Stronghold 144 to search for a supernatural being who lived there. I only found out there was someone like that at that time."

The deputy commander sat on the ground obediently and accepted his interrogation. Off to the side, Fu Rao asked softly, "Did we really kill three regimental commanders?"

"Yes, Li Mingli, Zong Jing, and Zong Han. Of these three people, Zong Han was originally the brigade commander at the Beiwan River..."

Fu Rao was overjoyed. Based on what this deputy commander was telling them, their Razor Sharp Company had really achieved something great! The Star Medal that was worth 50,000 yuan was surely in the bag now!

This time, the money he owed for his mother's medical bills could finally be repaid!

Meanwhile, Zhang Xiaoman chuckled as he looked at the deputy commander and said, "If we didn't encounter you, I wouldn't've known that I was so awesome!"

Beside him, Jiao Xiaochen said, "What's that got to do with you? Shouldn't it all be thanks to Ren Xiaosu?"

Zhang Xiaoman glared at Jiao Xiaochen. "No wonder your jawline seems more chiseled now. So it was because you've been practicing talking back to others in recent days, huh?"

Jiao Xiaochen was at a loss for words. 'What the hell are you getting at?!'

As for the deputy commander, he did not even dare to make a sound for fear of angering this damn crowd.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked, "We discovered that an armored brigade is pursuing us. Why? Our unit's so small. There's no need to deploy an armored brigade after us, right?"

"The higher-ups thought that a lot of you had infiltrated our territory in the rear," the deputy commander explained cautiously. "But I don't really know about the armored brigade since that was after I left."

"Then what's going on at Stronghold 144 right now? What's the situation with your 1237th Regiment?"

"Before I escaped, the troops of the 1237th Regiment were in a state of disarray." The deputy commander said softly, "There weren't many garrison troops who stayed behind in Stronghold 144 in the first place, but a further half of them were taken out by your unit afterwards. I can't be sure of what happened after I fled, but I guess there's no one left in Stronghold 144 to manage the troops. As for the other officers of the 1237th Regiment, they're mostly divided and not on good terms."

"I know what we should do now!" Ren Xiaosu exclaimed.

During that afternoon, the Razor Sharp Company brought the despondent deputy commander with them and made their way to Stronghold 144.

At this moment, the armored brigade should still be tracking them in the northward direction. However, the tracking radius of that supernatural being was only up to a 100 kilometers. The steam locomotive had gone far beyond that distance and shaken them off long ago.

The armored brigade might sound like an intimidating force, but the marching speed for tanks and armored vehicles in the wilderness would not go beyond 60 kilometers per hour. Most tanks these days could only travel at a maximum speed of around 80 kilometers per hour on flat terrain. With that kind of speed, how could they possibly catch up to the Razor Sharp Company?

Therefore, the Razor Sharp Company had to compete in speed with the armored brigade at this moment! You want to pursue and kill us, right? Happy chasing then! Good luck!

When the steam locomotive arrived at the gate of Stronghold 144, it completely ignored the garrison troops on top of the walls that were firing their machine guns at it. Before the garrison troops could adjust the angle of their close-range guns, the steam locomotive had already smashed right through the gate.

Ren Xiaosu spat out a mouthful of blood. However, he just looked at the deputy commander as though it was nothing and said, "Where's the granary!"

The deputy commander said numbly, "To the east."

When he decided to flee, it was not only because he did not want to accept the role of regimental commander, but that he was also worried about being accused as a spy and getting arrested. After all, three regimental commanders had died while he was their second-in-command. At the same time, the enemy seemed to be able to predict where the regimental commander would show up. So would you dare to say that it had nothing to do with you, the second-in-command?! The link was too obvious!

Perhaps they might not touch him while the war was still going on, but someone would surely be held accountable after the dust had settled.

The deputy commander knew he was not a spy, but Ren Xiaosu looked at him as though he was suggesting: You are now!

Ren Xiaosu said kindly to the deputy commander, "You're now an unofficial member of our Razor Sharp Company, so strive to perform well and be a useful person to our stronghold and bring glory to it!"

The deputy commander felt a sense of bitterness. He had intended to ask if he could be released after Stronghold 144's granary was destroyed, but when he saw Ren Xiaosu's gun pointing at him, either intentionally or unintentionally, he did not dare to speak anymore.

Who could he possibly reason with?!

Just as this deputy commander had said, Stronghold 144 was as good as a paper tiger at this moment. It was not as daunting as the Razor Sharp Company had imagined it to be, and the garrison troops in the stronghold were completely unable to organize an effective defense.

The steam locomotive continued making its way to the granary located in the east of the stronghold. The warehouse over there occupied an extremely large area, and the harvest from the fertile farming settlements near Stronghold 144 for the past five years were all stored there.

There was a checkpoint equipped with heavy firepower located right in front of the granary, while the high walls surrounding it were protected from entry by barbed wire.

However, the steam locomotive driven by Ren Xiaosu did not enter the granary through the main entrance. Instead, it crashed through a wall and charged in. "Zhang Xiaoman!"

"Sir!" Zhang Xiaoman replied.

"We'll only set fire to the granary from aboard the train. Don't get any ideas about fighting anyone, ya hear me?"

"Yes, sir!" Zhang Xiaoman replied excitedly.

But this left the other soldiers with a strange look on their faces. Why was Zhang Xiaoman suddenly acting like a platoon commander under Ren Xiaosu?! 'Fucking Zhang Xiaoman! For someone who's always giving off the vibes of an upright person, you're actually starting to pander to the future Commander?!'

The Razor Sharp Company was leaving a trail of destruction in its wake, so it was too late for the 131st Brigade, which was still in the north, to head back to Stronghold 144. By the time they made it back here to help out, the entire Stronghold 144 might have been wiped out already.

After the Razor Sharp Company had broken into Stronghold 144, someone suggested that they fire at the residents to create chaos. However, Zhang Xiaoman firmly stopped that from happening and said that Fortress 178 would not do such things.

The stronghold's Water Dragon Division was in charge of emergency services like firefighting, but how could they put out fires faster than the Razor Sharp Company was starting them?

Meanwhile, when the remaining garrison troops of the 1237th Regiment saw that the situation had turned hopeless, they decided to stop fighting back and simply packed their belongings to flee from the stronghold!

No matter the outcome, the 1237th Regiment would bear responsibility for what happened here. So if they did not flee now, it was not as though their lives would be good after the dust settled. Everyone knew how ruthless the Zong Consortium was when it came to handling such matters!

While the garrison troops were escaping, someone even said, "Was that the deputy commander that I saw on that train?"

The commander of Third Company said harshly, "I said long ago that he'd likely be a spy, but all of you did not believe me back then!"

Chapter 444 The Zong Consortium's plans

"Why do I feel like our attack on Stronghold 144 seems way too easy?" Ren Xiaosu asked puzzledly, "Could something go wrong? We had better be careful."

More than half the granary was burning, but the armored brigade was still only making its way back from the north at this moment. By the time the armored brigade arrived back at the stronghold, the Razor Sharp Company would probably have already scooted off somewhere.

The Razor Sharp Company met with almost no resistance from the stronghold. Although it was quite chaotic inside the stronghold, that was mainly due to the residents panicking. Next to him, the deputy

commander was at a loss for words when he heard what Ren Xiaosu said. 'You call this easy? You've already killed three regimental commanders, while I, the second-in-command, have also fallen into your hands. So what do you mean by easy? Is that even something a human would say?'

As the granary burned, Ren Xiaosu realized that one-third of it was actually empty. He asked the deputy commander, "Have the grains been transported to the front line already?"

"No," The deputy commander shook his head. "The generals bought most of it up before the war began using a number of different identities."

"You mean they have to buy their own food when they go to war?" Ren Xiaosu was stunned. "No, they were planning to sell the grains to the residents once the war started. The higher-ups don't actually know about this. The generals said that if the grains were sold to them first, they would make up for the reserves once the grain prices dropped back down, and no one would discover it. After all, the original battle plan did not require too much food." The deputy regiment said, "At least, it wouldn't all be used up."

Oh well. It seemed that this time, Ren Xiaosu had inadvertently helped to cover up for the Zong Consortium's generals who had secretly stashed away the grain reserves. With everything burned down, no one would know that a third of reserves here had gone missing.

However, Ren Xiaosu was unhappy that even though their attack on the granary had a huge impact on the war, it was definitely not enough to deal a fatal blow to the Zong Consortium. As their food reserves had already been spread out, the Zong Consortium would surely have a way to get back all those missing grains.

At this moment, all of the generals in the Zong Consortium's headquarters looked very solemn. Zong Ying suddenly slammed his fountain pen onto the table. "What the hell is with that Zong Wu? We've already allowed him to lead his 131st Brigade to hunt down the enemy, and even sent two supernatural beings to back him up, so how did he allow the enemy to set fire to Stronghold 144 right under their noses? And what are the garrison troops at Stronghold 144 doing? Can't they even organize a defense? How could they let the enemy burn down the granary just like that!" Zong Ying was about to explode. "I want their regimental commander executed—"

Before he could finish speaking, Zong Ying suddenly remembered the 1237th Regiment did not currently have a commander, and even the second-in-command had run away too. He did not even have someone to pin the blame on to blow off steam!

A general said, "Commander, since things have come to this point, we have to think of a countermeasure."

"Gather all the grain reserves from the various strongholds, and the grains that you people are holding, I want them handed over as well. This matter determines the success or downfall of the consortium, so stop with your selfish little schemes! Did you think I didn't know what you've done?" Zong Ying sneered.

He meant to gather all of the grain reserves of the entire Zong Consortium to send to the front line, including whatever grains he could collect from the residents of the various strongholds.

There were also a lot of grainstuffs that were in the possession of the generals.

When they learned that a war was imminent, many of the generals had wantonly started purchasing an increased amount of grains and hoarded them. They knew that when war broke out, food prices would increase.

As half a kilogram of rice was only worth about a yuan or so, most people wondered how something like that could make anyone any money. But during a war, the price of rice could go up to five, or even ten yuan.

At that time, the stronghold residents would not want to starve to death, right? Therefore, whatever money they had would eventually fall into the hands of the generals who hoarded the grains.

Who wouldn't want to earn ten times the profits? They were looking to rip off the strongholds' residents!

Suddenly, one of the generals said, "What should we do with the troops from Fortress 178? We can't just let them continue to make trouble in our rear, right?" Zong Ying also felt very helpless about this. He knew that if the Razor Sharp Company were allowed to continue making trouble as they wished, he would most likely end up with no time to focus on fighting the war. But now that they knew what the Razor Sharp Company was capable of, they felt there was almost nothing they could do about them. The blitzkrieg was the coordinated use of aircraft, tanks, artillery, armored and mechanized infantry, and other types of armed forces to create an overwhelming local superiority in combat power to break through the enemy's defenses. This allowed the forces to quickly get past any tactical maneuvering to encircle the enemy in order to eliminate them.

Now that there were no longer aircraft, they could only rely on their tanks for such tactics.

If a tank moving at 60 kilometers per hour on the battlefield could be called a blitzkrieg, what would the opponent who could travel at 120 kilometers per hour be? Comparing the speed of their tanks to the steam locomotive, it was just as good as a tractor. How could they possibly chase it! "We'll implement our contingency plans in advance." Zong Ying said coldly, "If Fortress 178 thinks they can win the war just like that, they're underestimating our Zong Consortium! I'm gonna massacre Fortress 178!" On that night, multiple pontoon bridges in Blackstone River remained still in its choppy waters. This was the supply line Fortress 178 relied on for their march to the front line, and it was also a lifeline for them. Hence, these structures were bound to be built very sturdily. Every day, the Engineering Battalion repaired and maintenanced them.

But in the dark of night, more than a 100 speedboats started approaching the pontoon bridges on Blackstone River in a frenzy. At first, these speedboats were being rowed with oars by the soldiers in them. This way, they were able to quietly approach the bridges until they were about ten kilometers away.

But once they got to within ten kilometers of the pontoon bridges, the engines of the speedboats roared to life as they flew towards them. On these speedboats were also large quantities of TNT!

When Fortress 178's defending troops near Blackstone River discovered this, it was already too late. They fired their heavy machine guns and tried to intercept the speedboats, but there were too many of them. Furthermore, it seemed like all of the enemy troops were determined to fight to the death and did not mind sacrificing themselves.

Explosions could be heard everywhere. Before the speedboats crashed into the pontoon bridges, the Zong Consortium soldiers on the speedboats activated the detonators attached to the TNT.

The instant the detonators ignited, the TNT went off and broke all the pontoon bridges in half.

As the Zong Consortium soldiers recklessly crashed into the pontoon bridges and detonated the explosives, the bridge Fortress 178 relied on to cross the river broke apart and drifted downstream.

In an instant, Fortress 178's troops were split between both sides of the river again. The Fortress 178 troops on the northern shore could no longer retreat, while their supply lines had been cut off.

The commanders on the northern shore all turned to Zhang Jinglin. "Commander, what should we do? We're—"

Zhang Jinglin, who was at the military base, frowned as he looked into the distance at the inferno on the river. "Get ready for a last stand!"

However, the plans of the Zong Consortium were still not finished. A group of the Zong Consortium's elite troops had already set off from the Alxa League behind them, plunging into the Gobi Desert like a sharp knife, as they headed straight for Fortress 178 in the Northwest!

Chapter 445 A precarious situation

To the west of the Alxa League was the vast Gobi Desert. In this day and age, no one would venture there for no good reason as that was a truly deserted place.

So when the war began, even though everyone knew the distance between Fortress 178 and the Zong Consortium's Stronghold 146 was not particularly far, very few people would even have any ideas about using the Gobi in their plans.

If a military unit wanted to pass through there, it was basically a pipe dream.

However, the Zong Consortium had been plotting to take over Fortress 178 for a long time.

The territory the Zong Consortium occupied had far fewer resources than Fortress 178, the Qing Consortium, and the Yang Consortium. In fact, the level of their resources could not even compare with that of the Li Consortium.

Therefore, expanding to seek further resources was something the Zong Consortium had to do. Only with a large amount of resources could they support their ambitions.

But where were the resources? At Fortress 178, of course!

Importantly, Fortress 178 occupied a broader territory beyond the Northwest. The land in that territory held 90% of the mineral resources that were available to the Alliance of Strongholds, as well as a vast amount of natural gas, crude oil, and various types of metal ores.

In the Zong Consortium's view, these resources were simply wasted in the hands of that damn group from Fortress 178 if they did not make use of them.

Several years earlier, the Zong Consortium had quietly established a secret troop to transport supplies into the Gobi. And now, they had established a massive forward operating base in a little oasis within the desert.

All of this was done so that one day, a ferocious army could make use of this forward operating base to pass through the Gobi and deal a fatal blow to Fortress 178.

Actually, the Zong Consortium already knew that Fortress 178 was going to attack Mt. Wuchuan from the southern bank of Blackstone River. They also knew their Zong Consortium's route to the south for any incursions would be cut off once Fortress 178 blew up the Beiwan Bridge. However, everything was still going according to the Zong Consortium's plan. This was because Fortress 178 would also not have a path of retreat.

Zong Ying had received some very reliable intelligence a long time ago. Currently, there was only one independent brigade garrisoned in Fortress 178, with the rest of the stronghold's forces deployed in full force for the war.

As a result, the almost defenseless Fortress 178 was now like a deserted island with no one to protect it.

As long as the Zong Consortium could occupy Fortress 178, even if Zhang Jinglin and his men repaired the pontoon bridge, they would have no home to return to, nor would there be any fortress left for them to defend.

When the supplies for Fortress 178's troops got cut off, the Zong Consortium could manipulate them at will.

According to Zong Ying's calculations, his troops would cross the Gobi Desert and reach Fortress 178 in another seven days for the confrontation!

Zong Ying narrowed his eyes as he wondered if Zhang Jinglin had already guessed all of this by now. He assumed so, since cutting off their path at Blackstone River showed his plans pretty obviously. But so what if he could guess it? There was no way that Zhang Jinglin could stop him from occupying Fortress 178.

Troops were sacrificed as cannon fodder so he could lure Zhang Jinglin to the northern shore of Blackstone River. In the end, he was the superior tactician.

Although there was a small episode in between involving the Razor Sharp Company, that was not too great of a concern. Even if that company was extremely capable, they couldn't affect the big picture.

Although the granary had been burned down, the Zong Consortium could still last for a month with their food reserves. This one month would be enough for him to bring the Fortress 178 troops to their knees. After all, Zhang Jinglin would be cut off from his supply lines as well, wouldn't he?

At the thought of being able to defeat Zhang Jinglin, a military leader long famous, Zong Ying felt an uncontrollable sense of excitement in his heart.

At his position, only power and unprecedented victory could arouse his desires.

Meanwhile, the armored brigade's Commander Hu Xingzhi, who was standing beside Zhang Jinglin, looked at him and said, "Commander Zhang, the Zong Consortium has cut off our main forces' retreat route. They must be plotting something against us. Sir, please think of something."

Zhang Jinglin looked at Hu Xingzhi. "We must make a stand. Everyone, we'll have to take Mt. Wuchuan as quickly as possible if we want to make it out of this alive. Inform the Engineering Battalion behind us to quickly rebuild the pontoon bridge, and check how long they will need!"

A staff officer hesitated for a moment before saying, "We asked about that earlier. The Engineering Battalion on the southern shore said that it would take ten days! They could build a simple pontoon bridge instead; that will be faster, but it's useless if the mechanized infantry can't cross the river on it."

Ten days...

Even if they could rebuild the pontoon bridge within ten days, they would still need another seven days to get back to Fortress 178. That would be too late!

Suddenly, Zhou Yinglong ran back from the front line. "Commander! Commander! The Razor Sharp Company has called in!"

Everyone was startled. They never expected the Razor Sharp Company that was behind the enemy lines to actually reestablish communications with them.

The Razor Sharp Company had just finished their attack on Stronghold 144. Not only did they burn down the granary there, but they also stole a satellite phone from within the stronghold. It was only then that they were able to contact Fortress 178's troops again.

Zhang Jinglin took the satellite phone and answered it. On the other end of the line, Zhang Xiaoman's loud voice yelled excitedly, "Commander Zhang? Is that Commander Zhang?"

"Yes, this is Zhang Jinglin, please speak," Zhang Jinglin said calmly. "We've burnt down the granary at Stronghold 144 and wiped out seven or eight of their companies. We even killed three regimental commanders of their 1237th Regiment, and the deputy regimental commander is in our hands now," Zhang Xiaoman said cockily, as though he were afraid Zhang Jinglin would not award them the Nebula Medal. He thought he should list all of their contributions in one fell swoop.

The commanders beside Zhang Jinglin were stunned. They had not expected the Razor Sharp Company would achieve so many important objectives. It was no wonder the Zong Consortium had to deploy their

troops back to deal with them in the rear. Was this even a fucking company? Even an independent brigade would most probably not achieve what they had done.

The Razor Sharp Company was simply too fearsome!

However, everyone did not cheer up because the current situation of the war could no longer be changed by burning down a granary, killing a few regimental commanders, or wiping out several companies. However, Zhang Jinglin smiled and said, "You all did very well, but you have to be careful as well."

"Commander Zhang, don't worry, we suffered no casualties at all!"

The commanders started gritting their teeth. None of them could have imagined the Razor Sharp Company could do so many things without suffering a single casualty.

Zhang Jinglin laughed and gave Zhang Xiaoman a few instructions before handing the phone to Zhou Yinglong. He did not mention a word about Ren Xiaosu throughout the entire call, but everyone knew Ren Xiaosu must have done a great job in this battle.

Zhou Yinglong took the phone and said to Zhang Xiaoman, "Alright, we know y'all've done well, but now's not the time to go over all of your achievements. Retreat to a safe location. We're in a precarious situation over here."

Zhang Xiaoman was stunned. "Precarious?"

Zhou Yinglong hesitated for a moment and sighed as he briefly explained the current situation. The Razor Sharp Company's soldiers beside Zhang Xiaoman were all listening to the call as well. Everyone was suddenly at a slight loss of what to do. How did the situation suddenly turn so disadvantageous for them?

Furthermore, the Zong Consortium might even capture Fortress 178 soon? Zhang Xiaoman thought about his wife and child. What about that girl Fu Rao liked? What about everyone's dream lover, Lu Yao?

Zhang Xiaoman said anxiously, "Don't worry, Battalion Commander. If they can attack Fortress 178, we can also take the fight to their Stronghold 146. Those old geezers of the Zong Consortium's Board are all located in Stronghold 146. If we kill them, the Zong Consortium will immediately descend into chaos."

Zhou Yinglong scolded him with a laugh. "What are you talking about? There's an entire brigade garrisoned in Stronghold 146 right now, so do you think you can attack them that easily? Hurry and get out of there! I want y'all to flee in the direction of the Central Plains,"

But before he could finish speaking, he was interrupted by another voice. "Is Mr. Zhang still listening? Can I just ask if it'll be of any help to the situation if we destroy Stronghold 146?"

Zhang Jinglin stayed silent for a moment before saying, "Yes." "Alright, I'll go and attack them then."

The commanders listening to the call from the side felt that this voice sounded a little unfamiliar, but they all knew it was probably Ren Xiaosu talking.

But this Ren Xiaosu was way too arrogant. How could the Razor Sharp Company possibly be capable of taking Stronghold 146?

Zhang Jinglin sighed and said, "It's impossible for you all to destroy Stronghold 146." "Mr. Zhang, do you still remember what you told me?" Ren Xiaosu asked calmly. "You said that if one knows how difficult the situation is and still insists on doing it at the risk of injuring themselves, that is called stupidity. But do you remember what my response to you was?"

Zhang Jinglin recalled the moment Ren Xiaosu had told him that the same went for bravery.

Chapter 446 Lone operation

Zhang Jinglin attempted to persuade Ren Xiaosu not to take such a risk. However, Ren Xiaosu seemed to have made up his mind already. He did not give Zhang Jinglin the chance to continue talking and ended the call.

By rights, with Zong Ying as the commander of the military, the battle over here should not have been affected even if the Zong Consortium were attacked in the rear. But in reality, that wasn't the case at all. The reason the Board was the Board was that they had absolute influence and control over the military. It was just that they had temporarily appointed Zong Ying as the commander-in-chief.

Currently, the various fighting forces were temporarily under Zong Ying's command. After the war ended, Zong Ying would only be the commander of his own fighting force and would still need to listen to the Board's orders.

So when Ren Xiaosu asked Zhang Jinglin whether it would be of any use if he captured Stronghold 146, Zhang Jinglin replied in the affirmative.

That was where the Zong Consortium was held together. Just as when the Yang Consortium's Stronghold 88 was destroyed, it had caused the entire Yang Consortium to immediately turn into a pile of loose sand and scheme against each other, the Zong Consortium would be no exception either.

If Zong Ying led all the frontline troops for another ten years, perhaps his personal influence would be enough to turn the tide of chaos and pull everyone together. But right now, Zong Ying was not capable of doing so.

If the troops from Fortress 178 were defeated, Ren Xiaosu would no longer have an avenue of support for him to destroy the entire Zong Consortium.

Perhaps the Qing Consortium would think about attacking the Zong Consortium in the future. But after they did that, the Qing Consortium would definitely enter a long postwar period, requiring huge amounts of manpower and resources to rebuild the strongholds.

Not only that, but the Qing Consortium would also have to spend a long time to bring the Yang Consortium's and Li Consortium's strongholds under their control in order to absorb their resources.

After Ren Xiaosu ended the call, Zhang Xiaoman and the others rubbed their hands in glee. "What should we do? Should we attack Stronghold 146? Haha, we even managed to shatter Stronghold 144, so

Stronghold 146 should be easy too!" The other soldiers of the Razor Sharp Company looked at Ren Xiaosu. Some of them had said they wanted to attack Stronghold 146, but Ren Xiaosu had denied them at that time. But this time, Ren Xiaosu did not mock Zhang Xiaoman. Instead, he urged the soldiers from the Razor Sharp Company to hurry up and get aboard the train.

The steam locomotive was traveling at full speed in the wilderness, and no one could figure out which direction they were heading. They just assumed they were going towards Stronghold 146.

Everyone on the train was having a lively discussion. "How do y'all think we should attack Stronghold 146? We'll have to quickly wrap things up, won't we? Otherwise, when that 131st Brigade hears the news and rushes back, we might end up facing two brigades in battle."

On the train, Ren Xiaosu pulled the deputy commander of the 1237th Regiment over and asked, "How's the combat effectiveness of that garrison brigade in Stronghold 146?".

"They're obviously one of the most elite fighting forces of the Zong Consortium. Their equipment's all the latest and the best since they represent the image of the Zong Consortium. Even the family members of the Zong Consortium who get posted there to serve their 'tour of duty' have to be the most outstanding members of the organization. Of course, they don't really have any actual combat experience." The deputy commander said meekly, "You all aren't really thinking of attacking Stronghold 146, are you? I'm not trying to pour cold water on you, but with just this many of you, it's really no different from suicide if you assault Stronghold 146."

The deputy commander was thinking, 'If you fucking want to die, don't drag me in!'

Then the deputy commander saw the direction they were traveling and said, "Eh, this isn't the right—"

"Keep quiet," said Ren Xiaosu as he looked at him. "I'll let you leave with them when we reach a suitable location, or would you rather come with me to Stronghold 146?"

Wait a minute! There was too much information contained in those words!

The deputy commander was shocked. The route this young man had taken was clearly not to get to Stronghold 146. From what he had said, it was likely this young man was planning to go to Stronghold 146 alone!

The steam locomotive suddenly came to a stop in the wilderness. Ren Xiaosu shouted, "Time to get off!"

The sound of guns being cocked came from within the carriages as the Razor Sharp Company assumed it was time to prepare for battle.

But after they got out of the train, Zhang Xiaoman was caught off guard when he did not see Ren Xiaosu getting down with them. Instead, the train sped off into the distance again!

"Hey, wait up, Ren Xiaosu, where are you going? What is this place!" Zhang Xiaoman chased after him for a short distance, but the train sped off so fast that he could not catch up at all. Besides, Ren Xiaosu had no intention of turning back.

Jiao Xiaochen pointed his gun at the deputy commander. "Where are we?!"

"We're in the easternmost territory of the Zong Consortium. If we were to continue traveling for another ten kilometers, we would be leaving the Zong Consortium." The deputy commander said with difficulty, "Put down your gun first. I didn't know he would do this! When we were traveling here, I realized that something was amiss when I saw the direction we were heading. But that young man warned me not to breathe a word to anyone about it!"

Zhang Xiaoman said resentfully, "Goddammit, it's all over now! Ren Xiaosu must be worried that it'd be too dangerous for us to go to Stronghold 146, so he deliberately dropped us off at a safe place and went there by himself!"

There were no other possibilities! It was no wonder Ren Xiaosu had been so quiet along the way. So it turned out that Ren Xiaosu had planned this way in advance, and he even ensured that he dropped them off somewhere first without a fluster.

Zhang Xiaoman passed this information to Zhang Jinglin and the others through the satellite phone. All of the commanders also fell silent. Zhou Yinglong suddenly said to Zhang Jinglin, "In any case, I'm convinced."

He was referring to the move that Zhang Jinglin had made when he arranged for Ren Xiaosu to join the Razor Sharp Company. Zhou Yinglong was the first senior officer to express his support for Ren Xiaosu, although his position was the lowest among the other commanders.

The other commanders still did not say anything yet. After all, there were still many requirements to pass if one were to become the fortress commander. They would like to observe Ren Xiaosu further if he could make it back alive from Stronghold 146.

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was making his way over to attack Stronghold 146. But rather than saying that he was going to raid them, it might be better to call it a sneak attack.

After some thought, Ren Xiaosu still felt that it would be safer for him to go to Stronghold 146 by himself. He could not bring the Razor Sharp Company with him when he knew they would die there.

Therefore, he might as well drop off Zhang Xiaoman and the others somewhere far away so it would be impossible for them to come over to help him. In fact, it would take at least ten days for them to reach Stronghold 146 if they wanted to head there on foot.

Of course, Ren Xiaosu had still given it very careful consideration. If it were him alone, he could use many methods to calmly get into Stronghold 146 to observe the situation first. Whether it be climbing over the stronghold walls or sneaking in on the undercarriages of the Zong Consortium's transport trucks, there were more chances of pulling it off with fewer people in the group. If he had brought along the Razor Sharp Company, they would truly have to fight their way in.

Ren Xiaosu dematerialized the steam locomotive when he was about to reach Stronghold 146. Then he started walking alone in the wilderness so he would not be discovered by his enemies in advance.

He remained hidden outside of Stronghold 146 for a full day and night to see if there were any good ways for him to sneak into the stronghold.

However, Ren Xiaosu discovered that the vehicles entering Stronghold 146 had to go through extremely strict security checks. From afar, he could see through his sniper rifle scope that the security guards were thoroughly checking all supplies that were being brought in and had never failed to investigate the undersides of the vehicles either.

As such, he could only scale the stronghold walls like he did when he climbed the steep cliffs on the back of Mt. Dingyuan. Fortunately for him, there was a gap between the patrol times of the troops on the stronghold's wall, and that one-minute gap would be more than enough for him to fully take advantage of.

Chapter 447 The fortune teller

As Fortress 178 got forced into a corner at Mt. Wuchuan, the damn band of soldiers fought so fiercely they forced the Zong Consortium to retreat.

As the saying goes, an oppressed army fighting with desperate courage is sure to win, and that was exactly what happened here.

It was as though Zhang Jinglin, who was at the front line himself, had suddenly turned the matter of their retreat route being cut off into something positive. All the soldiers of Fortress 178 shared a bitter hatred for the enemy, so all of them fought like they were unafraid of death.

Of course, this was something that could only be accomplished with many years of faith. However, this would not change the crisis that Fortress 178 was facing at the moment.

For the past two days, Zhang Jinglin had not spoken much at all. A commander went to inquire with him on how to handle and resolve the Zong Consortium's sudden attack on Fortress 178, but he just said that he had not thought of a plan yet.

The commanders found it a little strange that Commander Zhang seemed to be at a loss for what to do. Usually, he could make a resolute decision no matter how difficult things got. But why did it seem like the Zong Consortium was leading him by the nose now?

What was the point of winning the battle here at Mt. Wuchuan when they were on the verge of losing their homes?

The commanders were so anxious that they got a little mad, and one of them even had a lot of his hair turn gray overnight. Everyone's friends and family were still back at Fortress 178.

Someone privately asked Lin Yuze, the chow hall manager, "How's the Commander's appetite been the past few days?"

Someone was trying to figure out from Zhang Jinglin's behavior if he had any contingencies for their situation. If he had any, his appetite would probably remain the same. But if he didn't, he would most likely not eat as much as he usually did.

The commanders of Fortress 178 all knew about Zhang Jinglin's habits. This one was an eccentricity of Zhang Jinglin's they had figured out long ago.

Lin Yuze said with a bitter expression, "Commander Zhang has not eaten for two days already."

The commanders of Fortress 178 all had a bitter look on their faces. Commander Zhang was so worried this time that he did not even eat?!

Although Zong Ying had suffered successive defeats here at Mt. Wuchuan, this frontline commander knew the situation was going to change in a few more days. But the problem was that there had to be an explanation for this matter.

This explanation was necessary to appease the Board. Being victorious was not the only thing that mattered in war. Amid all the battles, there would still be a lot of people seeking to reproach whoever was responsible for certain results in order to get rid of their opponents.

Furthermore, a lot of people were also eyeing Zong Ying's position, seeing that once the contingency plan succeeded, this would truly be an unprecedented victory. To be honest, a lot of people were looking to steal the fruits of Zong Ying's labor.

The Board had already sent someone to inquire about the matter. Meanwhile, Zong Ying squarely pinned the blame on Zong Wu, saying that if Zong Wu had not withdrawn an anchoring force like the 131st Brigade from the front, the defeat at Mt. Wuchuan could definitely have been avoided.

After all, the defensive position the 131st Brigade was guarding was an extremely important one. However, Zong Wu had abandoned the interests of the organization just because his diverted assets had been seized by someone. This was as good as desertion!

Meanwhile, this action of withdrawing from the battle at the last minute had in turn affected the overall situation of the war by disrupting the plans at the front lines.

On the other hand, the Board had also contacted Zong Wu regarding the same matter, only to hear him yelling at the top of his lungs and claiming that if Zong Ying could not even guarantee the safety of the rear, how were they supposed to win the war?

Both parties were pushing the blame on the other with their excuses. However, Zong Wu, who was leading the 131st Brigade, had already lost track of the Razor Sharp Company's whereabouts. He knew his sudden withdrawal from the battlefield would no longer be his main charge. Instead, diverting his assets during the war and planning his getaway would make the Board even more suspicious of him. What would he face after the war was over? It would surely have to be a torrent of investigations!

Hence, the thing that would surprise everyone still happened. Zong Wu had actually taken the 131st Brigade and fled! Although the mechanized infantry were very reliant on logistics from the rear, the fact that Zong Wu fled showed that he must have found an organization that would take him in the Central Plains.

Who wouldn't welcome a surrender from someone if a mechanized army came included with them!

With the desertion, everyone from the Zong Consortium was disgusted. Meanwhile, Zong Ying heaved a sigh of relief as the matter overshadowed the defeats he had suffered, and no one cared about that anymore.

What Zong Ying should really be doing right now was to stay at the top of Mt. Wuchuan to continue defending against Stronghold 178's attacks. If the Zong Consortium were to get beaten before their contingency plan could be pulled off, that would be the real joke.

...

The night was silent in Stronghold 146, and Ren Xiaosu guessed that a curfew might have been implemented. It couldn't be that no pedestrians would be out walking the streets otherwise. Occasionally, he could even see troops patrolling the place.

It wouldn't be difficult for Ren Xiaosu to avoid the patrols. What was difficult was finding out where the higher-ups of the Zong Consortium were.

Ren Xiaosu had defined the operation this time as a decapitation strike. His purpose was not to destroy the entirety of Stronghold 146, nor was he going to fight against the brigade that was garrisoned here. Instead, he was seeking to cripple all of the higher-ups of the Zong Consortium so they would fall to the same fate as the Yang Consortium.

But Ren Xiaosu thought of a very serious problem. If Zong Cheng was the commander of the garrison brigade for Stronghold 146, wouldn't he also be around in the military base here?

Other targets aside, Zong Cheng was the one he wanted to kill the most.

Figuring out a way to sneak into the base, as well as finding out where the higher-ups of the Zong Consortium were located, were the first things that Ren Xiaosu had to face.

But how was he supposed to find them?

Ren Xiaosu hid under a small bridge all night. The next day, he started strolling on the streets like it was nothing. He realized the residents of Stronghold 146 all looked lifeless. There was no one talking on the streets, and the atmosphere was extremely oppressive.

He did not know what the Zong Consortium did during their rule over these citizens to make them completely lose their spirits. It was only after entering the stronghold that Ren Xiaosu realized that the Zong Consortium had not only lost the hearts of the refugees but also the hearts of the stronghold's residents.

But he did not try to strike up a conversation with any of them. Surely he could not pull a random person aside to ask them where the higher-ups of the Zong Consortium lived, could he?

While Ren Xiaosu was walking the streets, a person holding a white banner upright suddenly walked over to him. He saw two words written on the white banner: Divine Foresight.[1]

Ren Xiaosu was stunned as this was his first time encountering a fortune teller on the streets. But such things were just interesting to look at. He had heard that a 100 percent of fortune tellers were frauds who used their skills to cheat others.

But as the two of them walked past each other, the fortune teller suddenly grabbed Ren Xiaosu by the arm. Ren Xiaosu turned around and grabbed his wrist, locking the fortune teller's arm as he carried him into a small alley.

Ren Xiaosu looked around and realized no one had noticed them. Then he said, "Who are you?"

The fortune teller started sweating from the pain. "Let go of me! I'm just a fortune teller! I noticed from your aura that you might encounter a bloody calamity in the coming days, so I wanted to read your fortune for you."

"Oh?" Ren Xiaosu was amused to hear that. Telling others they would encounter a bloody calamity was a trick fortune tellers used. To resolve this "calamity," one would have to pay them money to avoid it. "I'm not that stupid. Go and scam others. I'm not that gullible to fall for something like that."

"Why don't you know what's good for you?" The fortune teller said in a speechless manner, "I'm really sincere about telling your fortune. My divinations are quite accurate."

"Accurate?" Ren Xiaosu sneered. "Then what can you divine for me?"

"I can divine anything!" said the fortune teller.

Chapter 448 A bloody calamity

The fortune teller did not know whether to laugh or cry. "I'm a fortune-teller. If you ask me to interpret dreams, calculate your chances of marriage or future prospects, I can do that for you. But why would you ask me to solve a math problem? That's science, while I'm a practitioner of magic. The two don't mix."

Ren Xiaosu remained silent for a moment before saying, "You said you can interpret dreams, right?"

"That's right." The fortune teller nodded enthusiastically. "I can interpret all kinds of dreams."

Ren Xiaosu said, "Then listen carefully. I had a dream about a question related to quadratic function f(x)..."

The fortune teller was dumbfounded. 'What fucking dream is that? Can't a guy help others read their fortunes even if he does not know how to solve quadratic functions! What the hell!'

Ren Xiaosu sneered. "You can't interpret that, right? So you're really a fraud."

But the fortune teller suddenly said, "Based on your facial structure, I can tell that you have a friend who's like family but is not related to you by blood. I also know you've experienced a turning point in your life at the age of 17, while water is the source of your mishaps!"

This time, it was Ren Xiaosu's turn to be stunned. However, he still did not believe the fortune teller. He lifted him off his feet and asked coldly, "Just who the hell are you? How did you know these things?"

His "younger brother" was Yan Liuyuan, and didn't Ren Xiaosu experience the greatest calamity of his life in that flood? Even though the fortune teller mentioned all these, Ren Xiaosu's natural instincts told him not to believe this was something that could be figured out through divination. Instead, it was likely that some people with ulterior motives who knew about those matters were using it to get close to him.

But when the fortune teller noticed that Ren Xiaosu did not believe him, he smiled wryly. "I can also tell that you got into grave danger when you were in your teens, but you probably don't even know how you managed to escape it. The Northwest is where you will prosper. If you still don't believe me, there's nothing I can

do."

Ren Xiaosu loosened his grip on the fortune teller. Very few people knew about his past, and not even those back at Stronghold 113's town knew about it. But it was true that he really did not know how he had escaped from the wolves.

This fortune teller dared to bring up something like that with such certainty, so could he really know how to read fortunes?

Ren Xiaosu pondered for a moment before saying, "You're saying that I will face a bloody calamity in the next two days?"

"That's right. It's extremely ominous!" The fortune teller said, "But I didn't get to look at it carefully just now, so you'll have to let me have a look again."

Ren Xiaosu said noncommittally, "Then divine for me how to resolve it."

Then Ren Xiaosu released his grip from the fortune teller. However, he kept his guard up in case the fortune teller sneak attacked or attempted to escape.

However, the fortune teller did not try to escape. Instead, he turned around and carefully observed Ren Xiaosu, who put on an expressionless face. If the fortune teller told him he would have to pay up to avert the calamity, he would kill him on the spot.

But the more the fortune teller looked at him, the more startled his expression became. "You won't fucking be the one facing the bloody calamity, you'll be the one bringing a bloody calamity upon others..."

Ren Xiaosu was speechless.

"What nonsense!" Ren Xiaosu's heart skipped a beat but refused to admit it. "I'm just a resident of the stronghold. Why would I bring a bloody calamity upon others?" "Are you really a resident of this stronghold?" The fortune teller laughed and said, "You can't fool me. Your 'aura' makes you look really out of place in this stronghold. If you even lived here for longer than three days, you wouldn't look like that."

Ren Xiaosu wondered why the conversation seemed to be getting more and more mystical. He asked, "Then why don't you tell me if I'll be able to achieve what I wish to do?"

"Oh, I can't divine that." The fortune teller said, "I cannot predict something so specific. Usually, I can only provide a word of warning to those whose fortunes I've read."

"Then what would you like to say to me?" Ren Xiaosu asked with a frown.

The fortune teller looked at Ren Xiaosu again for a long time before suddenly saying in surprise, "Eh, why're there so many intersections in your life? I've never met anyone like you before.... I can't divine, no, I won't read your fortune any further!" Ren Xiaosu was speechless. Had he just wasted his fucking time here for nothing?

He pulled the fortune teller back. Ren Xiaosu was starting to believe him a little. "Let's disregard everything for the moment. Can you help me divine where the people I want to kill are? If you can't tell me that, you won't be leaving today."

"Oh." The fortune teller thought for a while before saying, "They're right here in this stronghold."

Ren Xiaosu frowned and said, "Be more specific."

The fortune teller broke free from Ren Xiaosu's grasp and said with a smile, "They'll be gathering in the northeast in the coming days, but you'll only have one chance to strike." Then the fortune teller turned around to leave. Ren Xiaosu did not stop him this time.

Ren Xiaosu believed 60% of the fortune teller's words. But fate was still something he didn't know well, so he still had doubts.

Ren Xiaosu suddenly asked in a loud voice, "Wait a minute, have you ever read fortunes for people living in the South?".

"I've read quite a lot of people's fortunes. Who are you referring to? I can remember the names of all those I've told the fortunes of."

"Li Qingzheng!"

"Oh, I told him he would meet his benefactor in the future."

Ren Xiaosu kept quiet and did not say anything else. Now he believed 80% of the fortune teller's words! However, could there really be such a mystical person in the world? Could this fortune teller also be a supernatural being?

Normally, anything that Ren Xiaosu could not understand would immediately be deemed as superstition. But now that he actually encountered it, he did not know whether he should trust the fortune teller.

Li Qingzheng had told him he had met a fortune teller who said he would meet a benefactor who would bring him into the stronghold. However, Ren Xiaosu thought that fortune teller might not be that reliable. Even though Li Qingzheng had really entered the stronghold, it was not to enjoy life on the inside but to experience a disaster.

More importantly, the fortune teller also did not say there were beings like the Experimentals in the stronghold he would be entering. If he had said so earlier, Li Qingzheng would definitely not have wanted to go in.

Right now, Ren Xiaosu only kept in mind the one thing the fortune teller had said. The people he wanted to kill would be gathering in the coming days, and he only had one chance to strike. He was targeting 13 people, including Zong Cheng. As each of them wielded a lot of power, if he tried to kill them one by one, he would probably get hunted down by the entire stronghold after eliminating the first target. Simultaneously, the other targets would go into hiding.

So if his enemies gathered together, that would be the best opportunity for Ren Xiaosu to get them. But how was he supposed to find out where they would be gathering?

After turning a corner, the fortune teller quickly ran off. "What a close shave! I nearly died, and I didn't con any money out of him!"

In the east, the Razor Sharp Company was marching through the wilderness. Then Zhang Xiaoman looked disconcerted when they heard the sound of armored vehicles moving. He quickly beckoned the others to hide inside a gully nearby to avoid being discovered by the enemy. "Why is this fucking armored brigade chasing us around relentlessly? I thought you said they could only locate other supernatural beings? So how did they follow us all the way here?" Zhang Xiaoman looked at the deputy commander. "Did you lie to us? Do you think I won't stab you to death?"

The deputy commander was already in tears. "I've already said everything that I know."

However, it was no time to argue. The armored brigade was right in front of them. However, Zhang Xiaoman and the Razor Sharp Company discovered this armored brigade was not coming for them but heading towards the Central Plains.

Chapter 449 A spy in Fortress 178

After the armored brigade continued to rumble their way towards the Central Plains, Zhang Xiaoman muttered, "That's strange, why are they headed in that direction? Doesn't that road lead to the Central Plains?"

"Could they have some other plans?"

"Is it possible that they're fleeing?"

"That can't be, right? Hasn't the Zong Consortium gained the upper hand in the war? So why would they suddenly need to flee?"

The Razor Sharp Company's soldiers could not figure out what was going on. But after the armored brigade advanced dozens of kilometers further, it was suddenly stopped by a smiling young man who was none other than Li Shentan.

Zong Wu, the commander of the 131st Brigade, shouted into the radio, "Run him over! Whoever that is, just go over him!"

But when the armored brigade was about to collide into Li Shentan, he suddenly raised his right hand and a turbulent "wave" rippled through the ground as an earthen wall suddenly got pulled up. The armored brigade could only stomp on the brakes and come to a quick stop. If they hadn't, some of the armored vehicles and tanks could've been destroyed if they had collided into the thick earthen wall.

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Li Shentan said with a smile, "To think that I was worried that I wouldn't be of much help to Ren Xiaosu. Who could've guessed that an armored brigade would suddenly show up at our doorstep?"

"Are you going to hypnotize them?" Si Liren asked.

"Of course," Li Shentan said with a smile.

"Do we need to make them come out of the armored vehicles? How are you going to hypnotize them if they remain inside?" Si Liren wondered.

"Sound can be used for hypnotizing people as well. Everything in this world can act as a medium for hypnotism." Then Li Shentan picked up a small stone and flicked it with his fingers. The stone bounced off a tank and produced a ringing sound.

It was a strange sound that felt like an intimidating force that could shake the hearts of people. Then the faces of the armored brigade's troops turned blank.

But even a powerful supernatural being like Li Shentan found this a little strenuous on himself. It seemed that this was his limit.

Li Shentan calmed himself down and spoke to the armored brigade, "Where is your brigade commander? Step forward." Zong Wu walked out of an armored vehicle and stood in front of Li Shentan in a trance.

A ways away, Hu Shuo happened to emerge from the forest. "Little Liren, look what I brought for you. Haha, I found a watermelon

patch."

As it was summer, the harvesting season for melons had arrived. However, Hu Shuo was stunned when he saw the armored brigade in front of Li Shentan.

Little Liren's eyes lit up. "Grandpa Hu Shuo is amazing."

Li Shentan glanced at both of them before turning back to face the armored brigade. He said calmly, "After you hear a finger snap, you'll head to Stronghold 146 and launch an attack there. Remember, you're to only kill the Zong Consortium's people after breaking into the stronghold, and you will neither resort to deploying your mechanized equipment nor killing the innocent indiscriminately."

With a snap of his fingers, the armored brigade turned around and headed straight in the direction of Stronghold 146.

Hu Shuo said curiously next to him, "Looks like you're avoiding killing the innocent this time."

Li Shentan looked silently at the huge case Si Liren was carrying on her back. "In the past, I used to think that I was always right. I felt that whoever was in my shoes would also act with no qualms like I did."

"Then what about now?" Hu Shuo said with a smile.

Li Shentan sighed and said, "Some people are like a blazing torch. Even after they've stopped burning, they've still affected us a little."

"But I'm a little curious. Why do you choose to stay here and not head to the Zong Consortium personally?" Hu Shuo asked, "If you go there, can't you help them even more?"

Li Shentan took a watermelon from Hu Shuo and said with a smile, "Let's not talk about that anymore and just enjoy the watermelons."

Earlier, when the Razor Sharp Company watched the armored brigade rumble off into the distance, they climbed out of the gully and continued heading towards the interior of the Zong Consortium's territory. But before they could get far, they heard the rumbling of the armored vehicles again. Zhang Xiaoman's mood soured as he led everyone to crawl back into a gully again. The Razor Sharp Company was speechless by now. What was this armored brigade doing by going back and forth? Were they playing games? Were they done yet?

But this time, the armored brigade was moving much faster than before, like they were in a hurry to get somewhere. The Razor Sharp Company was utterly confused by this and felt that something was amiss.

The battle at Mt. Wuchuan had already been going on for an extended period as the battle between Fortress 178 and the Zong Consortium went back and forth in this vast mountain range. The ferocity of the battle was vividly reflected here.

In order to capture Position 129, half of Zhou Yinglong's Forward Strike Battalion had been sacrificed, with this position alone changing hands more than 20 times!

Zong Ying had just evaded getting punished by the Board and was no longer holding out hope for getting so lucky again. So he transferred all of that pressure onto the generals under his command, ordering them to defend the position until the troops in the Gobi arrived at Fortress 178. Even if they had to fight to the death, they would have to defend their position!

As for Fortress 178, there was actually no other way out for them anymore. Not only that, but everyone also knew that Fortress 178 was facing imminent danger. Therefore, almost all of their troops were so enraged that it seemed like they had gone mad!

Zhou Yinglong had not gotten any sleep for the past two days and two nights. Position 129 proved much more difficult to take than he had imagined. Almost every time they won the position, it was due to his superpower that they pulled it off.

A huge, gray boar appeared again at Zhou Yinglong's side and charged at Position 129. The wild boar was so tough it did not even fear the heavy machine guns firing at it.

But Zhou Yinglong was not Ren Xiaosu. Each time he used his superpower, there was a time limit for it. The past two days had exhausted him mentally many times, leaving his eyes deeply sunken like he was at death's door.

The commander of Second Company advised him, "Battalion Commander, do rest a bit more. If you carry on like this, I'm afraid you won't hold out for much longer."

But Zhou Yinglong retorted, "If we don't hold Position 129, how will our armored brigade pass through Pass 177 safely? It's not that I don't want to rest, but even if you and I have to die here, we must make sure that the enemy cannot target the armored brigade!" Similar battles such as the one happening at Position 129 were taking place throughout Mt. Wuchuan. As multiple infantry brigades advanced in oblique order, they won more and more territory as soldiers got sacrificed one after another.

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But it was only by relying on these soldiers to engage in tug-of-war battles that the armored brigade would have a chance to continue venturing further into the battlefield.

Not only the Forward Strike Battalion, but the Reconnaissance Battalion too had crossed swords many times with the Zong Consortium's guerrillas in the mountains. As both sides ran through the battlefield, it was as though they were dancing with death on a tightrope every time there was an exchange of fire.

Almost nowhere in the vast Wuchuan Mountain remained in a perfect condition. The soldiers were already exhausted from fighting, but if an officer came up to them and asked for volunteers to storm a certain summit, these exhausted soldiers would immediately step forward to fight to the death.

This was what war was.

Even without the Zong Consortium's contingency plans, Fortress 178 would still have attacked with the same fortitude to take Mt. Wuchuan. However, Fortress 178 was able to win even more battles than they would have as the soldiers were currently filled with intense rage.

But at this moment, troops from the Intelligence Department of Fortress 178 were quietly surrounding the 103rd Infantry Brigade's command post. When they arrived at the tent of the command post, the soldiers who were temporarily reorganizing their forces looked at them in surprise. One of them who spotted a familiar comrade asked, "What's the matter? Why have y'all shown up here all of a sudden?"

As he said that, the infantry brigade's soldiers gathered and tried to stop the Intelligence Department's troops from advancing any further.

Although both groups were fighting on the same side, the intelligence agencies of every organization always had a cruel streak to them. So when these intelligence troops descended down to their "territory," all of the infantry soldiers had an ominous feeling.

The director of the 2nd Military Intelligence Division of the Intelligence Department said coldly, "Get out of the way. We're here on official duty."

The soldiers of the 103rd Infantry Brigade thought of stopping them, but they were surprised to see Zhang Jinglin walking towards them alongside Wang Fengyuan, the Intelligence Director, from a distance.

With the appearance of Commander Zhang, the soldiers of the 103rd Infantry Brigade finally gave up any hopes of stopping them and opened up a path. The 2nd Military Intelligence Division's troops walked into the command post tent and led Brigade Commander Li Xiang out.

Zhang Jinglin looked at Li Xiang and asked, "Why?"

Chapter 450 A citywide search!

Li Xiang knew that the Intelligence Department must have found some evidence against him and somehow intercepted his relaying of information to their enemy. Otherwise, they would not arrest him right during the war. As such, he did not bother to explain himself.

Zhang Jinglin also did not say anything else. "Take him away. As of today, Zhou Yinglong will concurrently serve as the commander of the 103rd Infantry Brigade."

Zhou Yinglong's promotion had been fast-tracked because of the war. On one hand, it was due to the Razor Sharp Company's contributions that the Forward Strike Battalion accomplished many great things. On the other hand, this war had so far been tragic. Fortress 178 had fought to the point where there was barely anyone left to deploy to the battlefield. Zhang Jinglin frowned as he watched Li Xiang get taken away. He was only worried about whether the intelligence leaked by Li Xiang would inconvenience Ren Xiaosu greatly.

Next to him, Wang Fengyuan lowered his head and said, "Commander, I wasn't observant enough and allowed him to relay the intel. If I had discovered it earlier, Ren Xiaosu would not have to—".

"It's not your fault." Zhang Jinglin shook his head. "There are too many tasks waiting to be done in intelligence gathering, so it's great that you sniffed him out. When we were cleaning up and purging the Zong Consortium's elements, Li Xiang was clearly on our side. It was inevitable that he confounded your judgment as even I find it hard to believe."

"But for Ren Xiaosu to infiltrate into Stronghold 146 alone..."

Zhang Jinglin replied, "Don't worry, he isn't a reckless person and will only act if he is confident. All we need to do is wait for a miracle."

Meanwhile, Ren Xiaosu was still trying to figure out Stronghold 146's layout as quickly as possible so he could capture all the Zong Consortium higher-ups in one fell swoop.

But when he went out onto the streets again that day, he realized the garrison troops of Stronghold 146 were putting up wanted posters everywhere. All of the electrical poles in the stronghold had several posters pasted on them, and all of them were for the arrest of the same person: Ren Xiaosu!

Before anyone could gather around to have a look, Ren Xiaosu found an electrical pole with no one around it and went up to have a look. He was surprised to see a portrait of himself on it.

As the portrait was a sketch, there were some differences. But it was still really well-drawn. Although there were some differences, anyone who saw the wanted poster would definitely find him extremely familiar.

As described on the wanted poster, Ren Xiaosu was currently likely to be in the vicinity of the stronghold or might even have infiltrated into the stronghold alone. If any residents discovered the whereabouts of this person and reported it to the garrison brigade of Stronghold 146, they would receive 200,000 yuan as a reward for the tip. Ren Xiaosu pouted. Was he only worth 200,000 yuan?

While he felt unhappy about that, his thoughts turned to, 'There must be a spy in Fortress 178 that told the Zong Consortium about my location.'

He did not know if the troops of Fortress 178 were aware of this spy, but if the spy were allowed to continue relaying intel to the enemy, it could be disastrous for Fortress 178.

Suddenly, a platoon walked in the direction of Ren Xiaosu. He immediately lowered his head so they would not notice him. But when the platoon walked past him, the platoon commander at the front of the group sensed something was wrong. He turned to look at Ren Xiaosu and said, "Hey, you, raise your head!"

In that instant, Ren Xiaosu took off in the opposite direction. With a leap, he jumped over a wall and landed inside a small yard.

Before the platoon could even raise their guns to shoot at him, Ren Xiaosu had already disappeared from their sights.

This platoon immediately blew their whistles and shouted into their radio, "Suspicious personnel spotted! Suspicious personnel spotted! Requesting reinforcements!"

The search party in Stronghold 146 was a wide net. Once they received the intelligence report from the spy at Fortress 178, they got ready to cast it.

It was not that Ren Xiaosu was incapable of winning against a standard platoon, but if he did not manage to kill them all at once, they could get a chance to warn the other members of the search party. If Ren Xiaosu got held back in such a situation, it would probably be over for him.

At this moment, the benefits of acting alone could vividly be seen. If he was leading the Razor Sharp Company, he would probably have to look out for their safety. But since he was alone, he was extremely mobile and could shake off any pursuing troops whenever or just start an all-out fight with them.

When Ren Xiaosu landed inside the yard, he was startled by the sight of a woman collecting dried laundry. He did not stop and jumped over a wall into another yard.

As screams rang out one after another, the cries of the stronghold residents were a signal to help the search party track him down.

When he finally jumped out into an alleyway, he encountered two Zong Consortium soldiers who were trying to intercept him.

When the two soldiers saw Ren Xiaosu, they were about to raise their guns to shoot him down. But the moment Ren Xiaosu landed in front of them, he grabbed hold of their gun barrels, and a hint of his shadow could be seen darting out from behind him. Once the shadow disappeared from sight, blood started seeping from the slit in the necks of the two soldiers.

They were surprised, as they could not even make out what that shadow darting from behind Ren Xiaosu was.

A large-scale pursuit was launched in Stronghold 146, and that wide net gradually closed down on Ren Xiaosu.

When the pedestrians in the streets saw the Zong Consortium soldiers pursuing their target with so much urgency, they immediately hid in the buildings on the street, afraid they would get themselves entangled.

All of the Zong Consortium soldiers were listening in on the radio and could hear random shouting. "Target has crossed Fuxing Road. I repeat, target has crossed Fuxing Road. He is now moving eastwards on Zhangheng Road at a fast pace!"

"The target has downed several of our soldiers again. He has jumped into the residents' houses on Zhangheng Road and is still moving east!"

More than a 1,000 Zong Consortium soldiers were scattered all over the streets as residents living in the vicinity eavesdropped on the soldiers' shouts from their windows. They were surprised when they realized that all of these elite members of the Zong Consortium's garrison were actually pursuing just one person. Many of them had thought the big commotion was caused by a group of soldiers from Fortress 178 infiltrating into the stronghold.

The Zong Consortium soldiers realized the target they were pursuing was not human at all. Disregarding how fast it could move, any scattered troops who got separated from the main force would instantly be killed. Some of those who were slain did not even manage to finish their reports about the target's whereabouts.

At this moment, Ren Xiaosu was using his rifle because he realized the enemy's encirclement was gradually closing in on him. Even if he did not use the rifle, he could not hide his whereabouts. He could only resort to every means available to break through the encirclement so he could open up a path of escape for himself.

Ren Xiaosu's firearms proficiency had been raised to master, so how could these normal soldiers compare with him? Even if he suddenly encountered the Zong Consortium platoons in the streets, Ren Xiaosu could still immediately suppress them with his rifle.

Some soldiers attempted to form a defensive line in front by hiding behind some walls. But before they could even react, a grenade suddenly appeared at their feet and the newly established defensive line was blown up into pieces.

Ren Xiaosu had already started his killing spree, and there was no way back from it!

Fighting to the death was something Ren Xiaosu long understood!