

Ice Age 251

Chapter 251: Following Protocol

A day earlier, at midnight, the West Hill Base.

The information department received an urgent distress signal from Liu Ziyang, a member of the ACE Special Forces, sending the department into a state of emergency. This was the first time a special forces member had sent a distress signal during a mission, and the staff on duty were unsure how to handle the situation.

The West Hill Base had only recently established its internal organizational structure, and the communication and responsibilities between departments were still somewhat loose. The staff didn't know what to do with this unprecedented situation. The staff member who received the distress signal immediately reported it to Information Minister Geng Yilin, seeking his instructions.

Geng Yilin frowned deeply when he saw the report. "A distress signal?"

The information department didn't have the authority to command troops, so Geng Yilin could only report the situation to the leader, Chen Xinian, and wait for his decision. However, there was a problem—Chen Xinian was very strict about his schedule and had already gone to bed. Waking him up at this hour could be risky; if Chen Xinian was displeased, Geng Yilin could lose his position.

Seeing Geng Yilin's hesitation, a subordinate said, "But if we don't report it and something goes wrong, won't we be held responsible?"

Geng Yilin's frown deepened. Having spent decades navigating the complexities of bureaucratic life, he knew the importance of avoiding blame. His priority was always to protect himself from potential fallout. But this situation left him in a difficult position.

After a moment of thought, Geng Yilin made a decision. He didn't want to personally take the risk, so he decided to report the situation to Ling Feng, the captain of the ACE Special Forces. Since the two personnel in question were from the special forces, Ling Feng would be more invested in their well-being than anyone else.

Geng Yilin hurried to the special forces area and woke Ling Feng through the duty soldiers. Soon, a group of fierce-looking special forces members gathered before Geng Yilin. The ACE Special Forces were the most elite warriors at West Hill Base, consisting primarily of specially trained soldiers and Superhumans, although most of the Superhumans were artificial creations.

Ling Feng, a short but powerfully built officer with dark muscles bulging under his green short-sleeved shirt, led the group. Despite his lack of height, the other, taller special forces members around him looked up to him respectfully.

The group's fierce demeanor intensified when they saw Geng Yilin, their eyes radiating hostility. "What happened to Liu Ziyang and Xie Huanhuan?" Ling Feng asked, arms crossed.

Geng Yilin quickly explained the situation, "We received their distress signal five minutes ago. We've confirmed their location but can't act without the leader's permission."

Ling Feng saw through Geng Yilin's hesitation immediately. But for the sake of his team members, he decided to go directly to Chen Xinian and request permission to launch a rescue operation. After all, in the post-apocalyptic world, many of their comrades had died in blizzards or during experiments to create artificial Superhumans. Those who survived were few, making each one invaluable.

Ling Feng and a few of his subordinates quickly went to the First Life Pod, where Chen Xinian resided—the most heavily guarded place in West Hill Base. Without Chen Xinian's permission, no one could enter. In terms of defense, this place surpassed even Zhang Yi's shelter.

Upon arrival, Secretary Ge Rou stopped Ling Feng. "Captain Ling, it's late. Please don't disturb the leader's rest. Report whatever it is tomorrow."

Ling Feng replied urgently, "Two of our special forces members, Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang, are in danger and have sent a distress signal to the base. I must report this immediately!"

Ge Rou responded with a faint smile, "I understand your concern, Captain Ling, but you need to realize that no matter how hard your team members work, it can't compare to our leader's daily effort for the base's survival. He's just gone to bed, and waking him now would be irresponsible to the entire base."

The special forces members behind Ling Feng grew furious. "Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang are likely facing life-threatening danger, or they wouldn't have sent a distress signal. If we delay, they could die!"

Ge Rou maintained her calm demeanor, "Trust in your comrades. Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang are excellent special forces members with strong combat skills. They can take care of themselves."

The special forces members' anger was evident, with veins bulging on their foreheads as they glared at Ge Rou, barely restraining themselves from attacking her. Ling Feng remained stern as he spoke to Ge Rou, "Lives are at stake here. Please relay the message to the leader."

Ge Rou's polite smile didn't waver, but her tone turned firm, "Captain Ling, do you think the safety of two special forces members is more important than our leader's rest? The entire West Hill Base could be at risk if the leader doesn't sleep enough. We're talking about the lives of thousands of survivors here!"

The special forces members erupted angrily, "What kind of talk is that? Are the lives of special forces members not important?"

Ge Rou replied gently, "I'm not saying that. I'm just stating that in West Hill Base, the leader's well-being is paramount."

Ling Feng raised his arm, stopping his enraged team members from lashing out. He asked Ge Rou one last time, "Is there no way to make an exception? Every special forces member is a valuable asset to the base."

Ge Rou bowed slightly, "I'm sorry, but I can't do anything."

After a moment of silence, Ling Feng turned away. "Let's go, back to the base!"

His voice was hoarse as he gave the order. The special forces members were distraught, unwilling to abandon their comrades who might be facing a life-or-death situation. But soldiers were bound by their duty to follow orders, no matter how reluctant they were.

Ge Rou watched them leave, her smile fading as she resumed her standard, emotionless posture in front of Chen Xinian's door.

Chapter 252: Managing Thousands of Affairs

Meanwhile, in a room just beyond a wall, Chen Xinian, the leader of West Hill Base, was enjoying his luxurious accommodations. Despite being underground, his living conditions were top-notch, rivaling the comfort of Zhang Yi's home. Chen Xinian was lying on a sofa, dressed in a white cotton pajama set, with two beautiful girls by his side. These girls, Shen Moling and Meng Zixuan were survivors of Tianqing Academy, both from noble families. They had maintained their youthful looks through years of expensive self-care.

Chen Xinian enjoyed the company of these young women, as it made him feel youthful again. After spending time with them, he began discussing his thoughts and ambitions, particularly the current challenges faced by West Hill Base. Adopting a concerned expression, he spoke of the severe issues plaguing the base.

"There are still many serious problems at West Hill Base," Chen Xinian lamented. "Our energy supplies won't last long, and food is becoming scarce. As the leader, I'm under constant pressure, worried that any misstep might cause the people to lose faith in me."

He took a slow sip of a glass of Rémy Martin, worth tens of thousands, and continued to speak. Deeply moved by his words, Shen Moling and Meng Zixuan gazed at him with admiration.

"Leader, it must be so difficult for you! Managing the entire West Hill Base on your own is an enormous burden," they exclaimed.

Chen Xinian, enjoying their adoration, replied modestly, "Someone has to take responsibility. If I don't do it, no one else will. For the survival and development of West Hill Base, I must shoulder this burden, no matter how exhausting it is."

As he looked down at the two young, beautiful women, their eyes filled with admiration, Chen Xinian felt deeply satisfied. However, feeling tired from his activities, he decided to call it a night.

He picked up his phone and used the smart system to open the door, summoning Ge Rou inside. Several hours had passed since Liu Ziyang's distress signal had been sent. When Ge Rou entered, she asked the two girls to get dressed, which they promptly did, knowing they were not needed for the time being.

Ignoring their presence, Ge Rou asked Chen Xinian, "Should these two stay or be sent back?"

Chen Xinian thought momentarily before deciding, "Let them stay for now." This meant he might need their company again in the future. Ge Rou understood and instructed the attendants to take the girls to the Second Life Pod, where they were assigned rooms to stay in temporarily. The girls were overjoyed, knowing they wouldn't have to return to the grueling task of generating power by pedaling.

After they left, Chen Xinian casually asked, "Someone came to see me earlier. Who was it?"

Ge Rou replied, "It was Captain Ling Feng of the special forces."

"Oh? What did he want so late at night?" Chen Xinian asked with mild interest.

Ge Rou smiled slightly. "Two special forces members encountered trouble while on a mission and sent a distress signal to the base. Ling Feng came to request permission to send a rescue team, but I stopped him."

Chen Xinian nodded indifferently. "Two special forces members? No matter their importance, they're not worth disturbing my rest."

He mused aloud, "I named the ACE Special Forces because they are supposed to be my most powerful trump card. If two ace members are out on a mission and need to call for help, could it be that they encountered an opponent they couldn't escape from?"

Sensing his doubt, Ge Rou cautiously suggested, "Should we send someone to investigate, if only to give Ling Feng an answer?"

Chen Xinian laughed at the idea. "Give Ling Feng an answer? I'm the leader of West Hill Base. Even before all this, Ling Feng was just a soldier under my command. Soldiers are supposed to follow orders, not demand explanations from their superiors."

Realizing her mistake, Ge Rou quickly apologized, "I'm sorry, Leader. I misspoke."

Chen Xinian dismissed it with a wave. "Send a few people to check it out, but don't send any high-ranking officers. We can't waste valuable resources on a situation we don't fully understand."

Ge Rou nodded, "Understood, Leader!"

She immediately went to the special forces area to relay Chen Xinian's decision. Meanwhile, in the Second Life Pod, where the core members of the ACE Special Forces were gathered, the atmosphere was tense. Captain Ling Feng had called all the team leaders to discuss the situation with Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang. Although Ling Feng would not act without orders from above, he was prepared to move as soon as he received the command.

In the dimly lit meeting room, the seven people present, including Ling Feng, waited silently, their expressions heavy with worry. Among them was Liang Yue, who had recently joined the group. She sat quietly in a corner, holding a newly acquired Tang sword, ready to act as soon as Chen Xinian's orders arrived.

Everyone in the room was deeply concerned, especially Ling Feng, closest to Liu Ziyang. He appeared calm, but those who knew him well could sense his anxiety. They waited, lost in their thoughts until the sound of high heels clicking on the floor echoed down the hallway—a sound everyone recognized. The group immediately turned their attention to the door, knowing that Ge Rou was approaching.

Chapter 253: The Disappearing Students

As expected, Ge Rou entered the meeting room. Ling Feng stared at her and slowly stood up. "Secretary Ge, do you have good news for us?"

Ge Rou maintained her usual friendly smile. "I made an exception for you and reported the situation to the leader. He has permitted you to send people to investigate, but there's a condition—no captain-level personnel are allowed to participate!"

The captains in the room exchanged dissatisfied glances. One of them voiced his concern, "If someone could pose a threat to Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang, how can we send anyone less experienced?"

Ge Rou's smile remained unfazed. "Liu Ziyang is just a soldier, and while Xie Huanhuan is a captain, her abilities are more suited for reconnaissance, not combat. All of you are West Hill Base's most valuable combat power, and we can't risk you needlessly. Sending regular soldiers to scout the situation is the most appropriate action."

Ling Feng, clearly impatient, responded, "Understood! I'll send someone else."

Ge Rou nodded, adjusted her black-framed glasses, and left with an air of confidence.

The other captains began voicing their frustrations as soon as she was gone. Fang Zun, a wiry man, expressed his dissatisfaction. "Captain, it seems Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang ran into serious trouble. Can we just send regular soldiers?"

Ling Feng glanced at him and then frowned. "Fang Zun, you may have been born with natural abilities, but your current combat power isn't necessarily much greater than our other brothers'. Even if they don't have abilities, they're still well-trained soldiers. Don't underestimate them!"

He added, "Since it's the leader's order, we'll follow it strictly. No more complaints."

Despite the captains' dissatisfaction, Ling Feng contacted other team members to organize a mission. As the captains were no longer needed, Liang Yue, one of the newer members, felt relieved and slightly disappointed. Having been in the underground base for so long, she occasionally longed to go outside. More importantly, she hadn't yet participated in a mission since joining the so-called ACE Special Forces.

Ling Feng left to arrange for regular team members to take on the mission while Liang Yue, carrying her Tang sword, prepared to head back to her quarters for some rest. Suddenly, she felt a tap on her shoulder and turned to find Ye Ronghua, one of the other two women in the squad.

Ye Ronghua, unlike the others, was somewhat frail-looking and didn't seem to have a military background. However, what struck Liang Yue the most was Ye Ronghua's incredibly bright eyes, which always seemed to carry an intense, soul-piercing power.

With a smile, Ye Ronghua greeted Liang Yue, "Feeling a bit disappointed that you didn't get a chance to go on a mission?"

Liang Yue smiled back. "Just a little."

Ye Ronghua shook her head. "There's no need to rush or expect too much. When captains-level members are called into action, it usually means we're dealing with a very serious problem."

Liang Yue shrugged. "But I've been here for so long and haven't done anything. I can't help but wonder what I can contribute to the base."

Ye Ronghua humorously explained, "We're like H-weapons—never to be used, but must always be present. The world is more complicated than you might think. You're still new here and don't understand many things yet. You'll come to realize it in time!"

She added, "For now, it's more important to improve your abilities. Powers are gifts from the heavens; no one knows how much they can be developed."

Ye Ronghua's words seemed to carry a deeper meaning, and Liang Yue felt she understood something, though Ye Ronghua didn't elaborate further. With that, Ye Ronghua left, leaving behind an air of mystery. Her piercing gaze left Liang Yue feeling as though her soul had been momentarily ensnared.

Liang Yue shook her head, choosing not to dwell on these troublesome thoughts. She wasn't particularly concerned about Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang since she had no deep connection with them, having only recently joined the team. She left the meeting room, heading back to the living quarters.

As Liang Yue unlocked her door, she caught sight of a familiar figure out of the corner of her eye. Startled, she turned to see a girl emerging from a room nearby, fresh from the shower.

"Meng Zixuan!" Liang Yue instinctively called out.

The girl turned, and upon seeing Liang Yue, she smiled brightly. "Teacher Liang! What a surprise to see you here!"

She ran over, her eyes shining with excitement. Liang Yue was just as surprised. Wasn't Meng Zixuan supposed to be living and working in the Fourth Life Pod?

"What are you doing here?" Liang Yue asked, confused.

The Second Life Pod was a high-level area of West Hill Base, reserved only for Chen Xinian's trusted aides and special talents like Liang Yue.

Meng Zixuan brushed back her hair and smiled mysteriously. "I have my special abilities."

"You've awakened powers too?" Liang Yue asked, her curiosity piqued.

Meng Zixuan's smile turned even more enigmatic. She placed her hand on her chest, emphasizing her well-endowed figure. "In a way, you could say it's a natural talent!"

Just then, Shen Moling, another former student of Liang Yue's, heard the commotion and exited her room. Upon seeing Liang Yue, Shen Moling's expression grew cold. "Teacher Liang."

Liang Yue was even more surprised. "Both of you are in the Second Life Pod? What about the other students?"

At this question, Shen Moling and Meng Zixuan's expressions shifted subtly. They both averted their gaze, clearly unwilling to discuss the matter.

"Teacher Liang, we're now part of the Second Life Pod. There's no need to concern ourselves with those in the Fourth Life Pod," Meng Zixuan said with a trace of disdain in her voice. "People aren't equal. Once we're no longer on the same level, it's impossible to interact as we did before."

Liang Yue stared at the two girls in shock, anger welling inside her. "How can you say that? They're your classmates, your friends for so many years! How can you just forget them like that?"

Shen Moling looked up and sneered. "And you have the right to say that, Teacher Liang? Weren't you the first to abandon us students?".

Chapter 254: Secrets

Shen Moling's words left Liang Yue stunned.

"I... I never abandoned any of you!" Liang Yue protested, feeling a pang of hurt. She had done everything she could to protect her students; how many of them would have survived without her efforts?

"Never abandoned us? Then why did you choose to leave us behind in that horrible place?" Shen Moling shot back, her gaze piercing.

"If we hadn't used our bodies to secure a chance to escape, we might have ended up 'disappeared' like the others!" she added, her tone full of bitterness.

"Disappeared? What are you talking about?" Liang Yue asked, feeling a chill run down her spine. She had left the students behind when she moved to the Second Life Pod, but she believed there was nothing wrong with that decision. Society's roles should be divided according to one's abilities. Her students weren't Superhumans nor had any particularly outstanding skills, so staying in the Fourth Life Pod, where they could generate power, was the best choice for them. What had she done wrong?

Shen Moling let out a cold laugh as if she wanted to say more, but Meng Zixuan quickly covered her mouth.

"Enough! Stop talking, or you'll get us into trouble," Meng Zixuan warned, pulling Shen Moling's hand away from her mouth.

Shen Moling shot Liang Yue a resentful glare before turning on her heel and retreating to her room. Meng Zixuan, left behind, looked apologetically at her former teacher.

"Bing'er, don't be mad at her. She's just been through some bad experiences," Meng Zixuan said, bowing to Liang Yue in apology.

Liang Yue took a deep breath, trying to steady her nerves. Could things be happening in the Fourth Life Pod that she was unaware of?

"Zixuan, what happened in the Fourth Life Pod?" Liang Yue asked, her voice filled with concern.

Meng Zixuan hesitated, biting her lip. Finally, she spoke, "After you left, many of our classmates disappeared."

"Disappeared? How could that happen?"

"We don't know why. They were taken away, and we never saw them again," Meng Zixuan explained, her tone filled with sorrow. "I'm sorry, Teacher Liang, but that's all I know. If you want to discover what happened, you should investigate yourself."

"Or maybe just pretend none of it ever happened—don't ask any more questions," she added before quickly turning and fleeing down the hallway as if afraid of being implicated in something dangerous.

Liang Yue stood there, her mind racing. The students she had worked so hard to protect had disappeared in West Hill Base inexplicably?

"Could it be a misunderstanding? Maybe they were reassigned to other tasks, and no one else knows?" Liang Yue thought, but she knew this was a flimsy excuse.

The Third Life Pod was guarded by regular soldiers stationed at West Hill Base. The Second Life Pod, where she now lived, housed only top-tier talent, including Superhumans like herself. Those missing students couldn't have gone to the Third Life Pod, and she would have seen them if they had been brought to the Second Life Pod.

Something major was behind their disappearance.

Liang Yue felt a growing unease. She couldn't rest until she found out the truth. After all, she was a teacher—a protector of her students. She led them out of Tianqing Academy and felt responsible for their safety.

Taking a deep breath, Liang Yue decided to investigate the Fourth Life Pod herself, despite the late hour.

West Hill Base had strict security, with access between the different Life Pods tightly controlled. It was easy for someone from a higher-ranked pod to visit a lower one, but the reverse was strictly forbidden. However, Liang Yue's status as a captain in the ACE Special Forces granted her the authority to move freely.

She went to the Fourth Life Pod, where the power generators ran 24/7 to supply the entire base with electricity. She went directly to the student dormitories and woke several students.

Seeing Liang Yue, the students immediately burst into tears and hugged her, desperate for help.

"Teacher Liang, you're finally here! Are you here to take us away?"

"It's so hard here—I'm so tired!"

"Teacher Liang, several of our classmates were taken away and never came back. Are they dead? What kind of place is this?"

Their cries woke the other students, who crowded around Liang Yue, seeing her as a beacon of hope. Everyone begged her to take them away.

Liang Yue comforted them as best she could before asking about the missing students.

The remaining students exchanged uneasy glances. Some were terrified, others indifferent, and a few even seemed envious.

Some speculated that the missing students had been taken away as food, while others thought their families had rescued them to live in comfort. Theories ranged from optimistic to pessimistic, leaving Liang Yue's head spinning. These students knew little about the actual situation.

However, one thing was certain: every so often, someone would come to select one or two students, and those taken never returned.

"Teacher Liang, I'm so scared! What if I'm next?" one girl cried, clutching Liang Yue's sleeve with tearful eyes.

Beside her, a boy shrugged it off. "What are you so scared of? We have nothing; why would they harm us? Those people probably just went to work somewhere else. Don't overthink it."

Liang Yue was equally confused. She seemed to need to inquire with someone from a higher Life Pod to learn the truth.

"I'll see Ge Rou tomorrow and demand to know where my students are!" Liang Yue resolved, determined not to let anything happen to her students.

After calming the students, she left the dormitory. The hallway was pitch black, as the lights were turned off at night to conserve energy. A low, familiar voice spoke from the shadows as she reached a corner.

"Teacher Liang, do you want to know where those students went?"

Liang Yue turned sharply towards the voice.

"Wu Chengyu?"

The voice belonged to Wu Chengyu, the class monitor. As a student leader, he interacted more with the teachers, so Liang Yue immediately recognized his voice.

Wu Chengyu stepped out of the shadows, cautiously glancing around before whispering, "Teacher Liang, come with me."

Chapter 255: Test Subjects

Wu Chengyu, tightly bundled in his clothes despite the underground shelter being less cold, had his jacket zipper pulled up. The dim lighting made it hard for Liang Yue to see clearly, but she could still make out his face's bruises and nail marks.

"Wu Chengyu!" Liang Yue exclaimed, realizing why she hadn't seen him around before.

Wu Chengyu led her to a secluded room with faint lighting, making the darkness feel somewhat comforting. His voice, trembling with emotion, carried a plea for help. "Teacher Liang, this base is so strange! You have to find a way to get us out of here!"

His words were mixed with sobs, and he seemed on the verge of breaking down completely. Shocked and concerned, Liang Yue tried to console him while probing for more information.

"Wu Chengyu, tell me, what exactly have you discovered?" she asked gently.

Wiping his tears, Wu Chengyu began, "Because of some special duties, I occasionally get taken to the Second Life Pod. One day, I saw a few people in white protective suits carrying two long bags. They looked like sleeping bags, but inside, they appeared to be... people."

Driven by curiosity, he had quietly followed them. "You won't believe what I saw," Wu Chengyu's voice quivered as if the memory itself was too horrifying to recount.

"What did you see?" Liang Yue prompted, her heart pounding.

"I saw them pull two bodies out of the bags and throw them into a huge machine," Wu Chengyu said, covering his head with his hands, his expression twisted with fear. "On one of the bodies, I saw Hu Xiaoyu's tattoo!"

Liang Yue staggered back three steps, her mind reeling from the shock. Though she had feared the worst, hearing the confirmation was unbearable.

"Are you sure it was Hu Xiaoyu?" she asked, hoping against hope that he was mistaken.

"There's no doubt! I went swimming with Hu Xiaoyu many times, and a famous foreign artist did his tattoo. I would recognize it anywhere!" Wu Chengyu insisted.

With that, the last sliver of hope Liang Yue clung to vanished. West Hill Base had killed her students. But why? What reason could they possibly have for murdering a group of harmless students? Liang Yue couldn't wrap her mind around it. She was furious, confused, and desperate for answers.

Still trembling with fear, Wu Chengyu begged her, "Teacher Liang, we're counting on you now! Please find a way to protect us. Our classmates are disappearing one by one—if this keeps up, we'll all be dead soon!"

Liang Yue, the only person the remaining students could rely on, took a deep breath to calm herself. She couldn't afford to panic; she had to do something. She was their teacher and their only hope.

"Wu Chengyu, have you told anyone else about this?" she asked.

Wu Chengyu shook his head. "No, I didn't dare. Even if they knew, there's nothing they could do."

"Good. For now, don't tell anyone, not even your classmates," Liang Yue instructed. "Now, tell me where you saw them handling the bodies, and I'll investigate it myself."

After Wu Chengyu shared the location, Liang Yue committed it to memory and sent him back. Before leaving, Wu Chengyu pleaded with her, "Please hurry, Teacher Liang. If you don't, I might be next."

Liang Yue nodded resolutely. "I will."

She decided to investigate that very night. Although underground, people in the First and Second Life Pods maintained regular sleep schedules. Most of the base's residents wouldn't be active at night, except for some guards.

More importantly, the ACE Special Forces, West Hill Base's main armed force, were distracted by the mission to rescue Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang. This provided the perfect opportunity for Liang Yue to

act. After leaving the power plant, she headed to the location Wu Chengyu had mentioned, a secluded corner where the Second and Third Life Pods intersected—a place rarely frequented by anyone.

When Liang Yue arrived at the Second Life Pod, she was in a familiar area. She activated her supernatural ability, entering a meditative state that made her movements silent and her presence nearly undetectable. This allowed her to approach the site without drawing attention.

However, as she reached the location, she saw two armed guards at the door. Frowning, Liang Yue realized that dealing with these guards would be easy for her, but she wasn't ready to provoke West Hill Base. Doing so would be tantamount to suicide. But if she missed this opportunity, more students might disappear, and she would lose the perfect chance to uncover the truth.

As she pondered her options, Liang Yue suddenly heard footsteps approaching. She quickly hid in a corner and watched as two people in white protective suits walked by, carrying body bags. When they reached a restroom, the rear two stopped. After gesturing to the others, they dropped the body bags on the ground and entered the restroom.

Seeing her chance, Liang Yue swiftly entered the women's restroom, where she knocked out a female worker from behind. Working quickly, she changed into the woman's protective suit and walked out as if nothing had happened. Outside, the male worker who had been waiting nodded at her, and the two of them picked up the body bags and carried them to the secure room.

The guards at the door glanced at them but didn't intervene, allowing them to enter. The male worker knocked on the door, and the heavy, silver-gray metal door swung open. Inside, another worker in a white protective suit looked at the body bags and remarked with a grin, "Failed again! This is the eighth one recently!"

The male worker shrugged. "Nothing we can do—their bodies just can't adapt."

Liang Yue, listening silently, was filled with questions. "Adapt to what?" she wondered, but she held her tongue and followed the male worker into the room.

Inside, other workers quickly took over, pulling out a body from one of the bags. The sight shocked Liang Yue to her core. The body was a grotesque blend of human and something else as if infected by a deadly

virus. One side was still human, but the other was a terrifying crimson mass of swollen muscle with visible blood vessels and bones.

"What on earth is this base researching?" Liang Yue's eyes widened in shock, her heart pounding with curiosity and fear.

Chapter 256: High-Quality Protein

Liang Yue observed the laboratory calmly, taking in everything inside. The first thing she noticed was a massive machine that took up nearly a third of the lab, consisting of a long pipeline and numerous other parts. Because it was nighttime, there weren't many people on duty. The staff who had brought in the bodies were lounging around, some even playing games on handheld consoles. The atmosphere was unusually relaxed, with no sense of seriousness. Everyone was busy with their own tasks, and no one seemed to notice Liang Yue's presence.

Two workers brought out a strange corpse, opened a machine resembling a crematorium, and threw the body inside. A loud "rumble" followed, and soon a thick, milky white, viscous liquid flowed from a large pipe into a big metal barrel below. When Liang Yue saw it, her stomach churned violently. The milky white substance was identical to the white paste she had eaten on her first day here.

Did that mean what she ate was actually...

Liang Yue covered her mouth, struggling not to vomit. It took all her strength to suppress the urge. Her worldview felt utterly shattered. She had thought West Hill Base was a sanctuary in a ruined world, but it was a horrifying hell instead. Were they actually turning dead bodies into food? And not just for anyone—only for those in the Fourth Life Pod. The First to Third Life Pods were eating regular food.

The staff went about their business as usual, dividing the milky substance into several portions and adding other ingredients.

"Is there any banana-flavored seasoning left?"

"Some, but not much. We'll have to ask the lab for more later."

"This stuff is high in protein and rich in nutrients. If you don't know what it's made of, it's actually quite good for energy."

"Heh, you say that now. Who knows, maybe one day you'll end up in someone else's stomach too."

"Well, at least it saves on burial costs. It's still a contribution to the base, right?"

The workers laughed casually, treating the corpses as if they were nothing more than livestock. Liang Yue's expression twisted in horror. She now realized her missing students had likely been dealt with in the same silent way. Her hatred for the West Hill organization surged.

"But why would they kill my students? Has West Hill Base's food shortage reached such an extreme? Wouldn't young labor be more valuable to them?"

Liang Yue still couldn't understand it all. At that moment, a door in the adjacent room suddenly opened. A tall man struggled to carry a wooden crate out and brought it to the machine, opening the lid. The crate was filled with countless black, wriggling creatures—cockroaches!

Liang Yue nearly screamed. The man casually poured the cockroaches into the machine. Just like with the human body, the machine accepted everything without hesitation. A few cockroaches escaped, crawling towards Liang Yue's feet, causing her to jump back in fright. Soon, another batch of white protein was produced.

Liang Yue's stomach churned to its limit. Though she knew cockroaches were a high-protein food source, seeing them turned into food was still nauseating. Fighting her revulsion, she snuck over to the next room to take a look inside. What she saw next would haunt her forever—a giant, warm room filled with countless wooden boxes, each crawling with enormous cockroaches!

"Gulp—"

Liang Yue's throat kept making sounds as her stomach contents threatened to rise. She quickly left the lab and rushed to the bathroom. The other staff members laughed as they watched her flee.

"She still hasn't gotten used to it after all this time!"

"Can't blame her. Women have a natural fear of cockroaches."

"From now on, we should keep women out of that room. They can just manage the machines."

Liang Yue ran into the bathroom, stripped off her protective suit, and vomited violently into the sink. It wasn't until she had emptied her stomach that she felt somewhat better.

"If I had known it would be like this, I would've stayed at Tianqing Academy! At least the monster there just ate people—it was still manageable."

"But this place... this is a nightmare."

Liang Yue was utterly desolate. Even if she wanted to escape with her students, it was impossible.

"I can't stay here any longer! I need to find a way out."

"But if I leave, where can I take the children?"

Liang Yue felt lost. She had no choice but to pretend she hadn't seen anything and continue to bide her time, waiting for an opportunity.

After a while, she emerged from the bathroom, and the female staff member she had knocked out earlier had already been placed back into her protective suit. Liang Yue had acted so quickly that the woman hadn't even noticed. When she woke up, she would probably think she'd fainted from exhaustion, as it was common for those living and working underground in such an environment to experience health issues. Even if she had suspicions, she wouldn't be able to trace anything back to Liang Yue.

...

Back at West Hill Base, after some arrangements by Ling Feng, a thirty-person special operations team set out. Although the two leaders were not born Superhumans, they were highly trained and formidable warriors. One was named Shen Hong, and the other was Yu Lang; both soldiers were trained by Ling Feng.

The team, led by the two, took sleds to the location where Liu Ziyang had sent his distress signal. After several hours of travel, they finally arrived at the scene, but it was already past 10 a.m., more than ten hours since Liu Ziyang's call for help. By then, Zhang Yi had cleaned up everything. There wasn't a single drop of blood left, let alone the bodies of Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang. Before leaving, Zhang Yi had even let Huahua roll around to erase most of the traces.

Combined with delays caused by internal issues at the base and the snowfall, it was extremely difficult to find any signs of battle at the scene. The team couldn't use professional equipment, but the sled dogs, with their keen noses, caught the scent of blood and barked frantically at one spot.

Chapter 257: Attack on the Shelter

After searching the scene, Shen Hong and Yu Lang both felt a deep sense of unease. The absence of any bloodstains was unnervingly clean. There were only two possibilities: either Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang had been captured alive, or both had been killed, and the enemy had leisurely cleaned up the battlefield before leaving. Neither outcome was good news.

At that moment, a soldier discovered snowmobile tracks and reported to the two men, "Boss, I found snowmobile tracks!"

Shen Hong and Yu Lang exchanged a glance. "Let's go check it out!"

They followed the tracks and indeed found snowmobile treads that hadn't been fully covered by the snow. They were instantly relieved.

"As long as we follow these, we can find where the person responsible is hiding!"

"We have no time to waste. Let's go before the snow completely covers the tracks!"

They immediately gathered all the soldiers and followed the tracks on sleds. In the vast snowfield, human traces were rare, so the trail was as clear as a signpost.

Before long, they arrived outside Cloud Manor.

"Stop!" Shen Hong ordered everyone to halt outside the manor and secure the sled dogs.

"The person must be inside the manor. Everyone, form teams of three and move forward, following the footprints on the ground."

The team, familiar with each other from years of working together, quickly formed a combat formation, advancing cautiously with their weapons drawn.

The path they had taken led to the west gate of the manor, not the southern one, so the traps on this side were mostly intact.

As Zhang Yi returned, his footsteps had left varying depths of prints on the ground, leading directly to Villa 101.

The soldiers from West Hill Base cautiously followed the footprints. Suddenly, a soldier's foot stepped on something. He quickly lifted his foot and saw what was underneath. He couldn't help but chuckle.

"Heh!"

The others looked over and saw him pull out a spiked board from the sole of his thick military boot.

"In this day and age, there are still such traps?"

Holding the spiked board, the soldier smiled playfully. His comrades couldn't help but smirk, too.

"Looks like the enemy we're facing doesn't have much combat skill," the soldier laughed.

Shen Hong's expression softened slightly when he saw the crude trap, but still warned, "Stay alert; they did manage to defeat two of our warriors."

However, Shen Hong knew well that Xie Huanhuan wasn't a combat-type Superhuman. If the manor was hiding a large number of people, they could have overpowered them with sheer numbers and weaponry.

But this time, they had brought thirty fully armed soldiers and two modified Superhuman leaders. Failure was not an option!

The soldiers continued to advance, and another soldier stepped on a spike, but the spikes had been buried for so long that the snow had hardened, greatly reducing their lethality. Moreover, they were wearing special military boots with excellent puncture resistance, so the spikes did no harm.

The soldiers joked about it, treating the traps like a joke, which made them let their guard down. Just then, a soldier felt a slight resistance on his leg as he advanced. He looked down and saw a tripwire buried in the snow, triggering the pull ring of a grenade.

"Boom!!"

A grenade exploded right under the soldier's feet, sending him flying. The rescue team was shocked! Shen Hong and Yu Lang rushed over to find the soldier's face red like a pig's liver, blood already trickling from his mouth.

"Xu Wei!!" Shen Hong shouted in pain.

Although Xu Wei was fully armored, the grenade exploded right in front of him, inflicting severe internal injuries. Some rushed to help, but internal wounds were the hardest to treat. Without a medic, even bringing him back wouldn't help.

Someone took out adrenaline to try to keep him alive, but it was futile. Within moments, Xu Wei coughed up blood and died on the spot. Everyone's eyes turned red.

In the apocalypse, the bonds between old comrades were stronger than ever; they were brothers who had faced death together. Seeing a brother die before their eyes filled them with hatred.

"D*** bastards!" someone cursed, gritting his teeth, glaring at Villa 101 ahead. The footprints stopped there, and the killer was undoubtedly inside. A soldier immediately raised his gun and began firing at the shelter.

But the bullets, hitting walls and windows, were like toy bullets, leaving no marks whatsoever. Not even a scratch on the glass.

However, the series of noises had already alerted those inside the house. Zhang Yi had just come up from the basement when he heard the grenade explosion and gunfire. He immediately realized the people from the West Hill Base had arrived!

In the living room, Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya nervously looked out the window, seeing a group of white-uniformed soldiers firing at them from a distance.

Zhang Yi called to the shelter's AI, "Activate the optical protection system!"

"Confirmed. Activating now."

As soon as the command finished, the shelter's windows turned into one-way glass, allowing them to see outside while appearing pitch black from the outside. Zhang Yi had never used this function before because it slightly affected room lighting. But now, faced with a real armed team, there was no room for carelessness.

Zhang Yi walked to the window, looked at the group of dozens outside, and muttered to himself, "Finally, a worthy opponent has shown up."

"This is perfect. If it weren't for professional soldiers like these, wouldn't having such a high-level shelter be a waste?"

He glanced back at the nervous Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya, smiling as he said, "If you're scared, you can stay in the basement."

Hearing this, Zhou Ke'er's frown immediately softened. She walked up to Zhang Yi with a smile and said, "We've faced storms together; what's there to be scared of now?" With Zhang Yi around, she feared nothing, knowing he never fought unprepared.

Yang Siya also mustered her courage, stepping up beside Zhang Yi and gazing at the intense gunfire outside. "We're in this together, no matter the danger!"

Zhang Yi smiled faintly. "Danger? Aren't you exaggerating a bit?"

He squinted, looking out the window confidently, crossing his arms. "These people alone? They're not qualified."

He had already noticed they were not carrying any heavy firepower, only rifles and grenades. He didn't even need to intervene personally. The shelter's defenses alone could withstand their attacks for years without breaking!

"Bring me a chair," Zhang Yi calmly instructed Yang Siya while bullets whizzed outside. She quickly fetched a chair, and he sat in front of the window, legs crossed, watching the assault leisurely. His calmness left Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er in awe.

Even though they knew the windows were specially made and could withstand large explosions, the intense fire outside still made them nervous.

Meanwhile, the rescue team outside realized something was wrong.

"What kind of building is this? It feels like a fortress!"

"We've been shooting for so long, and we haven't even scratched the windows!"

The soldiers were on high alert, knowing they were dealing with a tough opponent. Shen Hong and Yu Lang exchanged glances.

Shen Hong said, "This opponent is no ordinary person! I'm convinced now that whoever's inside has the skills to capture or even kill Xie Huanhuan and Liu Ziyang."

Yu Lang smirked coldly, glaring at the one-way glass. "Perfect. Isn't it our mission to rescue them? And besides, whoever killed our comrades must pay with their lives!"

If Zhang Yi had heard this, he would surely have protested his innocence.

Your people died triggering landmines; what does that have to do with me?!

Shen Hong ordered everyone to stop the futile shooting. "Be cautious of more traps around us! Clear the traps first!" He didn't want to see more of his men hurt the same way.

The soldiers immediately put on tactical goggles and began demining. Had they not been careless initially, no one would've been killed by the grenade.

Modern armies have advanced bomb disposal methods, and soon, they found every hidden grenade in the snow. Not just grenades, they even discovered the deeply buried anti-tank mine Zhang Yi had set.

However, finding them didn't guarantee defusing them.

As soon as they found the mine, Zhang Yi pressed the remote detonator in his hand. The mine's power was far greater than that of a grenade. The nearest two soldiers were blown to pieces, their advanced combat suits unable to protect them from the blast.

Three others nearby were also thrown by the shockwave, suffering severe internal injuries likely shattering their organs.

Shen Hong's eyes filled with fury. "Who the hell is he? How does he have access to equipment that only our military has?!"

His anger boiled over. These soldiers were the elite of the elite. With proper intel, none of them would have died so senselessly. But in this ice age, many high-tech weapons couldn't be used, forcing them to revert to combat tactics from a century ago.

The frustration of it all made Shen Hong want to spit blood!

Chapter 258: Terrifying

Five more comrades had fallen. Yet, until now, they hadn't even caught a glimpse of the person inside the villa. This immense sense of failure cast a heavy shadow over the remaining twenty or so members of the rescue team.

The vice-captain of the rescue team, Yu Lang, stepped forward to suggest, "We don't know anything about this enemy, and we lack advanced weapons and bomb disposal equipment. Why not report back to the base and request support?"

Yu Lang was pragmatic and had already sensed that they might not be able to complete the mission on their own. But Shen Hong immediately rejected his suggestion without a second thought.

"Absolutely not! We're supposed to be the rescue team. If we have to request backup from the base, that would be utterly humiliating!"

"But..."

"No buts! Keep attacking. I refuse to believe this villa has no weaknesses at all!"

Yu Lang hurriedly tried to reason with him, "Shen Hong, don't act recklessly!"

Shen Hong, with a grim expression, gritted his teeth and said, "I'm not being reckless! We have no intelligence on this place. If we don't fight now, others will have to fight next! Let's act as the vanguard this time and gather information on this villa."

Hearing Shen Hong's reasoning, Yu Lang fell silent. He realized Shen Hong had already perceived this as a war, acknowledging the enemy's strength. Even though they had already lost six soldiers, they had managed to clear all explosive traps around the villa.

Shen Hong immediately ordered everyone to spread out and search the large villa from all angles, aiming to gather comprehensive intelligence on the structure. Finding a weak point would be even better.

"It's just a fing turtle shell. Once we break through, we'll slaughter every b**d inside!" Shen Hong growled, determined to avenge his fallen comrades.

The remaining team members dispersed, investigating the shelter from all directions. Seeing this, Yang Siya grew worried and asked, "Will they really find a weakness if they keep searching like this?"

Zhang Yi, with his cheek resting on his hand and a bag of chips in the other, casually replied, "I thoroughly checked this shelter when I first got here, and I do routine inspections every three days. There are no external vulnerabilities."

Yang Siya watched the soldiers outside with a sigh. "But seeing them search so recklessly still makes me anxious. You never know, right?"

Zhang Yi noticed her concern and smiled, asking, "You're thinking that it would be better if we could take the offensive, right?"

Yang Siya smiled shyly, "That's kind of what I meant."

Zhang Yi chuckled lightly. "Attacking them is simple, but I prefer a defensive counterattack strategy. No rush—let's see what they're capable of."

Zhang Yi wasn't in a hurry to strike back because he knew this was just an advanced team, and their firepower wasn't that formidable. He was also unfamiliar with modern military weapons and combat tactics, so this was a good opportunity to gather some intel.

He turned on the large screen in the living room and had the AI system display the surveillance footage from outside. The cameras, hidden behind bulletproof glass, couldn't be destroyed from the outside and offered a full view of the shelter's exterior. Zhang Yi observed every move the soldiers made.

The rescue team cautiously examined the shelter but found no points of entry. After some discussion, they concluded that the villa was like a heavily fortified fortress made of materials comparable to those used in modern war bunkers.

"The only advantage is that it doesn't seem to have any offensive capabilities. That's a relief!"

"Yeah, it seems to be purely built for defense, designed as an apocalypse survival shelter."

After conducting their investigation, Yu Lang made this assessment.

"In this kind of affluent area, it's not unusual to see such buildings. Rich people either have too much money or too many enemies, so they build houses like this."

Shen Hong listened, frowning in thought. "That's why they set up so many traps on the way. Now that the traps are cleared, they can only sit there and take the hits!"

"Alright, let's blow a hole in the wall and storm in!" Shen Hong suggested with a sneer.

Yu Lang added, "But how much explosive will we need?"

Shen Hong snorted. "Even fortresses on the battlefield can be blown apart with enough explosives. How can a privately built shelter be tougher than a military bunker? Focus the firepower on one spot, and we'll break through!"

They gathered all the explosives from the thirty soldiers. It was a considerable amount, as West Hill Base was well-equipped with weapons despite other shortages. When Zhang Yi had raided the military camp earlier, he found most of the equipment had been taken by these soldiers, and now they were using it against his shelter.

The bombs and grenades were piled at the corner of the wall by a soldier. Seeing this, Zhang Yi immediately activated the sound isolation system; the blast could damage their eardrums. He then got up from his chair.

"You two stay here and enjoy the show. I'm going to teach them a little lesson."

Zhang Yi, tired of their constant assaults, felt the urge to strike back. He went up to the second floor, grabbing a large sniper rifle.

The soldiers quickly retreated after setting up the timed explosives. With the combined power of explosives from thirty soldiers, they expected at least a sizable breach in the wall, even if it didn't punch all the way through. Knowing the wall's strength would allow them to plan for a stronger blast next time.

"Three, two, one, boom!" Shen Hong counted down from behind a wall, and everyone covered their ears, bracing for the blast.

A deafening explosion erupted, not just once but in a series of blasts. The shockwaves even sent the snow, piled several meters thick, flying into the air, creating a snowstorm that scattered far and wide. Shen Hong and Yu Lang couldn't wait to see the results; at minimum, they hoped to blow off a layer of the wall.

But when the soldiers looked, they were all dumbfounded. The explosion had carved a massive crater at the wall's base, scattering snow and soil everywhere, yet the dark wall remained smooth and intact. The mysterious black material, resembling both marble and metal, was still flawlessly smooth and unscathed.

"How is this possible?! Not even a scratch?" One soldier exclaimed, unable to believe his eyes.

"This shelter is unbelievably strong!" Yu Lang gasped, noticing that the same tough, black material continued several meters below the surface.

"In other words, frontal assault won't work. We can't even tunnel our way in?"

Shen Hong and Yu Lang exchanged glances. What could they use to attack such a fortress-like shelter?

Zhang Yi didn't even bother watching the explosions. He knew the exact strength of the shelter's defenses. A shelter advertised as H-proof wasn't just talk.

Gritting his teeth, Shen Hong said, "Our weapons alone won't cut it. We need to request backup and have the main squad bring in the demolition team!"

With enough firepower, even the toughest bunkers could be destroyed. The rescue team was ill-prepared to breach this shelter, but Shen Hong believed that West Hill Base had the resources to do so.

"If the explosives don't work, let me try!" Yu Lang suggested gravely. They were nearly abandoning the idea of a direct assault but still needed to gather enough intelligence to pave the way for future teams.

He signaled to a soldier, who brought over a black metal case. Yu Lang opened it, revealing a heavy black sniper rifle.

"You're going to use that?" Shen Hong asked in disbelief.

Yu Lang nodded. "Yes! This heavy sniper can take out an armored vehicle with a single shot!"

He skillfully assembled the sniper rifle, wielding the hefty weapon with ease. He mounted the sniper, loaded a specially made armor-piercing bullet, and aimed at the shelter's window.

"Even if it's bulletproof glass, let's see if it can withstand this shot!"

The others watched with anticipation. Their improvised explosives weren't specifically designed to destroy fortifications, but the heavy sniper with armor-piercing rounds could pose a real threat, even to tanks.

Yu Lang pulled the trigger, and a thunderous shot rang out.

Zhang Yi, preparing to counterattack from the second floor, heard a piercing noise. Looking closely at the bulletproof glass, he saw a white scratch on its otherwise perfect surface.

"A heavy sniper?" Zhang Yi immediately guessed the type of weapon used. Only an anti-armor sniper could leave such a mark on his shelter's glass.

"Terrifying!" Zhang Yi took a deep breath.

"The bulletproof glass is only 80 centimeters thick, and it managed to leave a scratch. What if they fired hundreds of thousands of rounds and shattered the glass?"

Chapter 259: Surround and Rescue

After firing his shot, Yu Lang stared at the unscathed bulletproof glass in silence. After a few seconds, he angrily punched the wall beside him.

"Damn it! I used this gun to blow chunks out of bunkers made of reinforced concrete, and now this damn shelter has no weak points at all!"

He knew the shot wouldn't break the bulletproof glass, but the harsh reality was too much to bear, and Yu Lang couldn't help but curse.

Shen Hong took a deep breath and said, "This shelter's defenses are probably even scarier than West Hill Base! Our weapons are useless; we need to report this to our superiors."

The rescue team's soldiers were utterly disheartened. They swore that this was the most frustrating fortification they had ever encountered, rendering their years of tactical training and marksmanship utterly useless.

"Retreat!" Shen Hong ordered, and the team began an orderly withdrawal from their cover. Yu Lang handed his heavy sniper rifle back to the soldier carrying it and prepared to retreat. They didn't know that Zhang Yi was waiting for them to reveal themselves.

"Dimensional Gate, activate!"

"Xiao Ai, open the window."

Following Zhang Yi's command, the intelligent system slowly opened the window in front of him, creating an opening. The Dimensional Gate appeared just outside, forming a seemingly vulnerable yet impregnable barrier. The Dimensional Gate was one-way, meaning any incoming attacks would be absorbed, but outgoing shots were unaffected.

The retreating rescue team noticed the window opening.

"Captain, the second-floor window just opened!" Two soldiers immediately raised their rifles and fired without hesitation. As elite soldiers, their marksmanship was precise, and they fired three-round bursts aimed directly at Zhang Yi's face.

But the bullets vanished before reaching Zhang Yi, as if swallowed by the air.

Zhang Yi, meanwhile, pulled his own trigger. He aimed at the soldier carrying the heavy sniper rifle. Zhang Yi liked that rifle; even within the military, such a weapon wasn't easily accessible. It was far more powerful than his current sniper rifle, and in his hands, it would be even deadlier. So, Zhang Yi decided to keep it.

"Bang!"

A bloody hole appeared in the soldier's head; even his helmet couldn't stop the sniper shot. Shen Hong saw Zhang Yi at the window, catching a glimpse of his handsome face, and couldn't help but smile grimly.

"Perfect timing! You're digging your own grave!" he shouted. "Fire at will!"

Ignoring the fallen soldier, Shen Hong aimed his rifle at Zhang Yi. Over twenty soldiers simultaneously raised their guns, unleashing a barrage of bullets at Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi, un hurried, fired back.

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

His pace was steady, taking one shot after another. But each shot was a perfect headshot! The soldiers were well-equipped with bulletproof helmets, but Zhang Yi's sniper rifle, combined with his precision ability, could pierce through even their finest gear.

Within moments, six soldiers lay dead under Zhang Yi's sniper fire.

"No way, why can't we kill him?" one of the soldiers finally realized something was wrong. Zhang Yi was fully exposed to their fire, without any defensive cover or even decent gear. Yet no matter how they fired, he remained unscathed, not even a scratch on his clothes!

Shen Hong's pupils contracted as he finally understood.

"He's a Superhuman!"

Yu Lang stared in disbelief. "Are you saying he can completely negate our attacks?"

Superhumans were already beyond the understanding of ordinary people, and each had unique mutations that defied comparison. Zhang Yi's unknown ability instilled immense fear in the rescue team.

"Retreat, retreat immediately! This guy is not someone we can handle!" Shen Hong shouted, ordering the soldiers to retreat quickly. This enemy was too formidable; only a squad leader from the Special Forces might stand a chance against him. But even then, with his fortress-like shelter, a single squad leader might not be enough. How could they fight when they could only be on the receiving end?

Shen Hong and the others were furious to the point of cursing.

"This is just bullying!"

For such an elite unit to fight, such a humiliating battle was infuriating. Some soldiers tried to carry the bodies of their fallen comrades, but lingering for even a second longer spelled death.

"Forget the dead for now! Hide, quickly!" Shen Hong yelled anxiously.

Zhang Yi noticed Shen Hong and Yu Lang, who seemed to be the leaders. He aimed his rifle at them.

"Bang!"

A shot aimed straight for Shen Hong's head. But just as Zhang Yi fired, something eerily familiar happened. Shen Hong's body blurred, leaving afterimages in the air, narrowly dodging the bullet.

"Huh? Another artificially made Superhuman? And their abilities are so similar!" Zhang Yi then aimed at Yu Lang and found his reaction to be identical to that of Shen Hong.

"They have the same abilities. Can Superhumans be created with drugs, or are their powers copied from someone else?"

Zhang Yi marveled at the wonders of biology, but his mission remained. Not all of the soldiers had such powers, and they were still targets.

However, this time, Zhang Yi changed his mind. He noticed the soldiers abandoning the bodies of their fallen comrades and hiding behind the walls of the surrounding luxury villas. From Zhang Yi's vantage point, his attack range couldn't cover the entire battlefield, but he didn't want them to escape easily.

He wanted to kill more intruders.

Zhang Yi's lips curled into a cold smile. He aimed at a soldier who hadn't managed to hide in time, targeting his right leg instead of his head.

"Bang!"

The soldier's right leg exploded into a mist of blood as the sniper bullet tore it apart, leaving it mangled and broken.

"Ahhhh!!!"

The soldier screamed in agony, collapsing onto the snow. Zhang Yi repeated the process with another soldier who hadn't managed to hide, leaving two men writhing in pain on the ground. Even hardened warriors couldn't withstand the agony of shattered limbs.

"Liu Hongtao! Cao Jiayu!!"

Seeing their comrades' miserable state, the other soldiers' eyes reddened with fury. They wanted to rush out and save them immediately! They could abandon fallen comrades, but they couldn't leave those they fought alongside to die without trying to help.

"No one moves! This is a trap to lure you out. No one steps forward!" Shen Hong shouted angrily, stopping any soldier who tried to rush out.

His heart bled as well, but he knew staying calm was the only way. Falling into the enemy's trap would lead to more deaths.

"Smoke grenades and incendiary bombs, deploy them!"

At Shen Hong's command, the soldiers quickly realized the plan. Since Zhang Yi was using sniping tactics to bait them into rescuing, they would disrupt his vision. Smoke and flames quickly engulfed the area around the wounded soldiers, obscuring visibility even through tactical goggles.

Taking the opportunity, Shen Hong dispatched several soldiers to rescue the injured.

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. "They're professional soldiers, after all. Impressive combat skills."

Now, he couldn't strike with precision. Zhang Yi's lips curled into a cold smile as he adjusted the direction of the Dimensional Gate. In an instant, all the ammunition it had absorbed was unleashed like a torrential storm upon the area!

In a blink, the two wounded soldiers and the group sent to rescue them were bombarded by a hail of bullets. Even wearing the best combat suits, they couldn't withstand such an overwhelming assault. Seconds later, they were all riddled with holes.

Shen Hong and the others were filled with grief, shouting the names of their fallen comrades. They were furious but also deeply fearful of the man hiding in the shadows. Zhang Yi's tactics were beyond their understanding.

"He's not human! We can't beat him!" cried a young soldier, clutching his rifle with terror on his face. These soldiers had excellent combat skills, but China had been at peace for so long. Facing such a terrifying opponent for the first time and watching their comrades die before them caused some to break.

"Captain, should we request backup? Should we ask the base to send reinforcements?" a soldier asked Shen Hong.

Shen Hong's face twitched with anger, flushed red as he kicked the soldier. "Shut up! We came here to provide backup, and now you want to turn around and ask the base for help? How can we face anyone with that kind of shame?"

"But... that man is too terrifying! No, he's not even human—he's a devil! How can he be invincible?"

The soldiers were utterly demoralized. No matter how strong they were, they couldn't kill someone immune to their bullets. Retreating only made them sniper targets, while attacking was impossible with that impregnable fortress.

"Stay calm!" Yu Lang barked.

"He hasn't come out; he must still fear us to some extent. Don't be too scared!"

The soldiers were terrified by Zhang Yi's strange powers, but Shen Hong and Yu Lang, being modified Superhumans themselves, knew it wasn't supernatural but an unknown ability. Understanding a little about the enemy eased their fears somewhat.

Shen Hong asked seriously, "What do we do? His marksmanship rivals ours. If we show ourselves, we risk getting sniped!"

The villa area was wide open, with only a few houses providing cover. Trying to escape would inevitably expose them.

Yu Lang drew some lines in the snow and pointed to a route. "Blast through these houses and follow this path. As long as we stay out of sight, his marksmanship won't matter."

Chapter 260: Repelling the Attack

Yu Lang's suggestion was unanimously agreed upon. There was no point in continuing the fight—they were outmatched. The gap in strength between them and the enemy was insurmountable. Any further combat would be a senseless sacrifice. The only option was to retreat and wait for reinforcements.

Shen Hong immediately decided to blast open the walls of nearby houses and escape through the gaps. Zhang Yi, lying by the window, could roughly guess their escape plan but had no intention of leaving the shelter to chase them down. This batch of enemies included only two artificial Superhumans similar to

Liu Ziyang, whose abilities were mediocre and far inferior to real Superhumans. As long as Zhang Yi stayed inside, they posed no threat to him. However, if he ventured out, these highly skilled soldiers might have a chance to kill him. His Dimensional Gate could only cover one side, which was a notable weakness.

"Go and call in stronger people! I'll keep fighting until you're all too scared to act—maybe then you'll finally back off!" Zhang Yi muttered calmly. To end the conflict, he knew he had to fight fire with fire; he had no illusions about the enemy.

Explosions rang out continuously, and before long, Shen Hong and Yu Lang led their remaining troops in a difficult escape from Cloud Manor. Only after confirming that they had left did Zhang Yi step out of the shelter. Now, it was time to clean up the battlefield.

Since this group of soldiers was a hastily assembled rescue team, they were only equipped with portable light weapons and no heavy firepower. Still, Zhang Yi was not picky; he stripped them of their weapons and gear. One weapon, in particular, caught his interest—the heavy sniper rifle he had his eyes on. This anti-materiel rifle, relying solely on the gun's power, could tear through the armor of light tanks. Paired with Zhang Yi's abilities, it could even pierce through heavy armor!

After cleaning up the battlefield, Zhang Yi did not bother to bury the bodies. In the past, he might have done so out of respect, but now, these corpses could serve as bait. Zhang Yi knew that the people from West Hill Base would not give up so easily. After two failed operations that resulted in the death of a natural Superhuman and numerous ordinary soldiers, they were sure to seek revenge. Leaving the bodies on the road served two purposes: as a psychological deterrent to affect the enemy soldiers' morale and as potential targets if they tried to recover the corpses.

After tidying up, Zhang Yi returned to the shelter. Inside, the women were anxiously waiting for him, their eyes fixed on him like he was their guardian angel. They all knew that without Zhang Yi's protection, survival in this post-apocalyptic world would be nearly impossible, especially after experiencing such a crisis.

"Zhang Yi, it's so good to have you here!" Yang Siya exclaimed, rushing forward to hug him tightly, her voluptuous figure pressing against his chest. She had been terrified during the gunfight; after all, they were facing professional soldiers, not the farmers from Xidong Village. Hiding in the basement, she had been genuinely scared that the shelter would be breached.

Zhang Yi gently patted her on the rear. "Look at you, scared silly! I told you, everything would be fine."

Zhou Ke'er, feeling a bit jealous, pulled her away. "Alright, alright, look at you being so timid!"

The wheelchair-bound genius Yang Xinxin chimed in, "But judging by the strength of the troops that came, they didn't seem prepared to launch a full-scale assault here. Their weapons were all light—mostly sniper rifles, grenades, and small explosives."

"If their firepower is limited to this, we might be okay. But I'm worried that this group was just a scouting party," she said with a frown, clearly concerned. "No matter how strong this shelter is, if we face a fully equipped professional military force, it might still be difficult to defend against."

Yang Xinxin's sharp mind quickly pinpointed the key issue.

Zhang Yi nodded. "You're right. This team's firepower wasn't much to look at. I suspect they were just here to scout. After all, I killed two of their people. And they likely didn't expect such a formidable shelter in an ordinary residential area."

"When they come back, their firepower level will surely increase by several notches," he added.

Zhou Ke'er voiced her worries. "If that's the case, can we hold them off? The military has professional demolition equipment, and we can only passively defend without many offensive options."

Having been with Zhang Yi for a while, they had all learned to be vigilant even in peace. Zhang Yi was pleased with this mindset.

"If the enemy continues to throw large numbers of troops and firepower at us, breaking through this shelter is only a matter of time," Zhang Yi admitted. "But this process will be long and costly for them."

Zhang Yi's face remained calm, as if he wasn't concerned at all. The shelter was indeed incredibly robust; even if the city were subjected to an H attack, it wouldn't be completely destroyed unless it was at ground zero. A critical advantage was its multi-layered structure. Zhang Yi glanced at the shelter—it had two above-ground floors and three underground levels. In reality, the underground layers were the shelter's true form.

The two above-ground floors prioritized comfort over defense. But if the upper levels were breached, Zhang Yi could immediately move underground, where the defense level was at least twice as high. Beyond the special alloy, it was reinforced with a significant amount of concrete and steel. Even high-yield explosives would struggle against it, and according to the manual, even direct hits from air-launched missiles wouldn't penetrate!

"No fortress is indestructible. But for them to break through the two above-ground levels, they'll have to pay a heavy price in time and lives," Zhang Yi explained. "Once the surface is breached, we'll abandon it completely and move underground."

Zhang Yi shrugged and smiled. "Sure, we won't see the sunlight anymore, but the underground facilities are fully equipped. There's no need to worry about the quality of life."

Zhang Yi's explanation helped to ease everyone's anxieties.

"So that's how it is! I knew it—building a shelter that costs a billion dollars, supposedly the most expensive in the world, couldn't be so simple," Lu Keran laughed heartily, showing off her sixteen pearly white teeth.

Zhang Yi walked over and gently knocked on her head. "You, don't celebrate too soon."

He squinted and said, "Abandoning the two above-ground floors is just a contingency plan, one I won't use unless absolutely necessary."

"They want to attack my house? I'll make them pay dearly!" Zhang Yi declared. "Get those explosives ready. I'm going to make sure they regret it."