

Ice Age 281

Chapter 281: Liang Yue's Request for Cooperation

Zhang Yi looked at the message from Liang Yue and fell into deep thought.

He still remembered that female martial artist with fierce blade techniques!

Back then, she had been in a state of hunger and exhaustion for a long time but still fought with everything she had against Hua Hua. If she had been at full strength, her combat ability would have been even more formidable!

Having joined West Hill Base not long ago, she was already able to go out on missions with the special forces, which suggested that her status at West Hill Base was quite high.

But why was she looking for Yang Xinxin?

Did she need help?

Zhang Yi didn't know much about the situation at West Hill Base, nor did he understand what kind of person Liang Yue was. It wasn't out of the question that this could be a trap. Maybe Ling Feng, realizing that a direct attack on the shelter wouldn't work, had switched tactics and was trying to trick Yang Xinxin into opening the door for Liang Yue.

Crossing his arms, a posture that usually indicated his wariness, Zhang Yi turned to Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran, asking seriously, "Can you two tell me more about this Liang Yue?"

Lu Keran and Yang Xinxin immediately shared what they knew about Liang Yue.

Liang Yue, 27 years old. A national-level martial arts expert, skilled in more than 300 forms of martial arts and over a dozen kinds of international combat techniques. She excelled in knife fighting and grappling and had once been a bodyguard for a certain powerful figure, even serving as the personal bodyguard of a female leader. Later, she was recruited by the Tianqing Academy board with an annual salary of three million to teach martial arts at the school.

"She's cold on the outside but warm on the inside..."

"Wait a minute!" Zhang Yi interrupted, curious. "Are you talking about her physical traits or her personality?"

Lu Keran scratched his head in confusion, not quite understanding.

Yang Xinxin grinned and said, "It's hard to say for sure without a personal test in that department. But I think Keran was referring to her personality!"

Zhang Yi felt a little disappointed. "Oh, alright. Continue."

Lu Keran and Yang Xinxin went on.

Liang Yue had practiced martial arts from a young age, making her a top-tier martial artist with a pure and straightforward personality. She was known to be stubborn but was clearly a good person. Otherwise, when the apocalypse hit, she could have easily survived on her own instead of dragging her class of "deadweight" students along with her.

Yang Xinxin tilted her head. "If it weren't for Teacher Liang, our classmates would've become Hua Hua's dinner!"

As if on cue, Hua Hua, who had been napping during the day, yawned wide, her mouth full of a fishy stench.

Zhang Yi crossed his arms, slowly contemplating.

Both Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran had known Liang Yue for a long time. As a teacher, she had no reason to fake her personality for so long. The trials of the apocalypse were enough proof of her character. And just talking to her wouldn't cost him anything.

He'd see what she was up to. Who knows? It might even benefit him.

After thinking it through, Zhang Yi asked Yang Xinxin, "If I use your phone to talk to her, is there a risk she could plant a virus and mess with the shelter's network?"

Yang Xinxin was confident. "Don't worry, brother. My phone's defenses are just as strong as the control room's computer!"

Zhang Yi nodded. "Good, then I'll use your phone to chat with her."

Yang Xinxin had no objections.

Zhang Yi took Yang Xinxin's phone and sent a message to Liang Yue.

"I'm Zhang Yi. What do you want to talk about?"

At that moment, Liang Yue was in her room in Xu Dong Village. As a squad leader and a female Superhuman, she had her own private room, specially built by Fatty Xu. After witnessing Zhang Yi's strength, Liang Yue had made up her mind to cooperate with him. Time wasn't on her side, and delaying any further could mean losing students every day.

Seeing Zhang Yi's reply, Liang Yue was overjoyed and quickly responded, "Zhang Yi, I hope we can work together! My students are at West Hill Base, and their lives are in danger. I'm asking for your help!"

Zhang Yi remained cautious. "You want my help? Aren't you all doing fine at West Hill Base? Aren't Tianqing Academy students supposed to be privileged elites?"

His tone was laced with sarcasm. After all, those who got into Tianqing Academy, aside from geniuses like Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran, were either rich or from high society.

Liang Yue replied, "You should know, in times like these, past status and wealth mean nothing. I'm genuinely seeking your cooperation."

“I’m now a squad leader in West Hill Base’s special forces. I think you could use my help.”

“In exchange, I’m asking for your help in getting my students out of there. What do you think?”

Zhang Yi stroked his chin, carefully analyzing the implications behind her words. Something about Liang Yue’s plea felt off, very off.

“Isn’t West Hill Base a large underground refuge? Why would there be life-threatening danger there? And Liang Yue, a powerful Superhuman, can’t even protect a group of students?”

Zhang Yi knew nothing about the internal workings of West Hill Base, which made it even harder to understand why Liang Yue was asking for his help. But one thing was clear: he wasn’t about to launch an attack on West Hill Base. He had enough strength to protect himself, but assaulting a refuge with a formidable armed force and full industrial capabilities was far too risky.

So, Zhang Yi didn’t rush to respond to Liang Yue’s request. Instead, he asked, “I know nothing about West Hill Base. If you want my help, at least tell me something about its internal situation.”

Even if they didn’t make a deal, getting some free intel wouldn’t hurt.

Chapter 282: Choosing Negotiations

Zhang Yi immediately discussed with Liang Yue and agreed to collaborate with her.

However, the condition was that Liang Yue had to assist him in secretly dealing with West Hill Base.

For Liang Yue, this was no problem. She had long hated that evil place and couldn’t wait to see it destroyed.

Thus, the two quickly reached an agreement.

As for how Liang Yue would get the students out, that was her own problem.

The most Zhang Yi could do was provide some assistance; he wasn't going to personally help her rescue them.

Still, Zhang Yi was curious—what was Liang Yue planning to do?

He repeatedly confirmed with Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran:

"How's your Teacher Liang's brain functioning these days?"

The two of them laughed, "Oh, she's still sharp! She won't do anything foolish!"

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, a playful smile on his face, "Really? Then I'm curious to see how she plans to get all those students out."

...

At Xu Family Town, Liang Yue felt a slight relief after receiving Zhang Yi's promise.

At least she had secured a backup plan for the students.

Now, she had to think about how to get them out of West Hill Base.

If it were just one or two people, given her current position as the captain of the Special Forces, it wouldn't be difficult.

After all, the people from the Fourth Life Pod were just laborers and test subjects now.

But taking out more than thirty students in one go? That was a whole different challenge.

"I need to find the right opportunity!"

Liang Yue thought to herself.

The best time would be during a significant upheaval at West Hill Base.

She couldn't act recklessly. If anything leaked, it would be a disaster.

She tucked her phone into her white boots.

She had two phones, a secret she kept hidden.

When she first entered West Hill Base, her phone was confiscated and inspected. Liang Yue suspected they had installed monitoring software.

Fortunately, she had a backup phone.

She turned in one, but secretly kept the other, which she used to contact Zhang Yi.

Meanwhile, Ling Feng, Shi Dayong, and a few other trusted followers were in another snow house, eating while discussing their next offensive plan.

Ling Feng and Shi Dayong were among the strongest Superhumans at West Hill Base.

As top-tier fighters, their physical prowess and combat skills were far superior to ordinary people.

After their awakening, they became even more powerful!

Coupled with the advanced technology and enhancements at West Hill Base, Ling Feng was practically a perfect super soldier.

The only drawback was the enormous consumption of resources.

Despite his short stature, Ling Feng could eat enough for five soldiers on a regular day!

Today, he was eating even more, having overused his powers.

Ling Feng grabbed a roasted fish and bit off half of it in one go.

Munching on it, he spoke indistinctly to the others around him, "From what we can see, regular attacks won't work against that shelter."

"So, put your weapons aside for now and focus on perimeter surveillance. As for Zhang Yi, leave him to us!"

The soldiers, intrigued, asked, "If we don't need to fight Zhang Yi, who else should we prepare for?"

Ling Feng smiled slyly, "Tianhai City isn't the only place with shelters. The commotion we've caused recently might attract other forces."

"Also, I've noticed the villagers in Xu Family Town starting to resent us. Keep an eye on them!"

The soldiers burst into laughter.

"You mean those villagers? Captain, come on. Do they even have the guts?"

Ling Feng replied calmly, "People like them are prone to foolish, impulsive actions. Better to be cautious. If they rebel, just shoot a few, and the rest will fall in line."

The soldiers nodded. They'd done this kind of thing before, and they were good at it.

At that moment, a female soldier approached.

"Captain, the Leader wants to speak with you."

The mention of "Leader" made the atmosphere tense.

They had been out for two days, and although they had gathered a lot of explosives from West Hill Base, the shelter remained intact. Worse, they had lost nearly half of their troops.

Reporting this outcome was bound to infuriate their leader.

Everyone was nervous for Ling Feng.

Ling Feng, however, remained calm, putting down his fishbone and standing up casually.

It wasn't that he wasn't anxious; as the person in charge, he knew he had to take responsibility.

Ling Feng approached the communication device next door.

It was a special computer with far more functions than an ordinary one, allowing communication with West Hill Base, located hundreds of meters underground.

Through the screen, Ling Feng saw the dignified yet stern face of Chen Xinian.

Ling Feng saluted, "Leader!"

Chen Xinian nodded, "Ling Feng, how's the mission going? It's been two days—any progress?"

Chen Xinian didn't ask if the mission was completed.

He knew Ling Feng's style well enough to understand that if the mission had been successful, Ling Feng would've reported it immediately.

So, Chen Xinian was aware that Ling Feng had encountered difficulties.

Ling Feng, with his square, iron-like face, meticulously reported the situation to Chen Xinian, hiding nothing.

He included details of Zhang Yi's abilities and the loss of over twenty elite soldiers.

Hearing this, Chen Xinian's smile gradually faded, and a cold glint flashed in his narrowed eyes.

Those were over twenty Special Forces soldiers!

Not ordinary fighters, but the cream of the crop, including some of their hard-to-create synthetic Superhumans!

And they had all been wiped out?

This was a severe blow to West Hill Base's combat strength.

Ling Feng knew Chen Xinian was deeply disappointed and angry.

He quickly added, "Although we suffered heavy losses, we've managed to figure out Zhang Yi's abilities over the past two days."

"Moving forward, we will definitely be able to take down his shelter! Please rest assured."

Chen Xinian was silent for a moment, trying to calm himself down. Otherwise, he would've unleashed a tirade at Ling Feng.

But as the leader of West Hill Base's top fighting force, he couldn't afford to berate him too harshly—Ling Feng was still needed.

Any scolding could wait until the mission was complete.

Chen Xinian asked, "What's your plan?"

Ling Feng replied, "Conventional weapons are ineffective against him. We could request support from the upper military district to launch a missile strike on his shelter."

Chen Xinian took a deep breath and glared at him, "That plan is too difficult to execute, and I've already made it clear that I want Zhang Yi alive. What good is a corpse to me?"

What Chen Xinian really wanted were the vast supplies within Zhang Yi's alternate dimension.

If Zhang Yi were killed, there was no guarantee he'd ever get those supplies.

Ling Feng expected this response, so he calmly presented his second suggestion.

"My second plan is for a few of us, the squad leader-level Superhumans, to continuously attack Zhang Yi's shelter."

"The downside is that it might take longer."

Chen Xinian asked, "How long?"

Ling Feng thought for a moment before cautiously replying, "Six months!"

Chen Xinian was stunned.

"Six months? Are you saying it will take half a year, with constant attacks from our top Superhumans, to break through his shelter?"

"That would leave West Hill Base vulnerable. What if other forces attack during that time? What if there's internal unrest? Could you respond in time?"

Ling Feng said, "Leader, we are stationed at Xu Family Town, and don't need supplies from the base."

"Moreover, we've confirmed that Zhang Yi is a spatial ability user. He must be the one who stole billions in supplies from the Walmart warehouse!"

"If we capture him, we can keep West Hill Base running for five years!"

Chen Xinian leaned back in his chair, his fingers tapping slowly on the table.

After a long pause, he said, "But have you considered what happens after those five years?"

Ling Feng was taken aback.

"After five years?"

This was Zhang Yi's first encounter with Chen Xinian.

However, Zhang Yi's personal information had already been delivered to Chen Xinian's desk.

So, Chen Xinian knew quite a bit about Zhang Yi—at least all the intel from before the apocalypse.

After reading Zhang Yi's profile, Chen Xinian was confident he could recruit him.

From Chen Xinian's perspective, Zhang Yi was nothing more than an ordinary, somewhat daring young man from the city.

He had no political experience, had never held a senior position in any company, and wasn't even considered a white-collar worker.

Such a person wouldn't have even qualified to meet Chen Xinian in the old world.

Chen Xinian's confidence was evident in the calm, assured smile on his face.

As soon as he saw Zhang Yi, he greeted him with a warm smile.

"Hello, you must be Zhang Yi?"

Zhang Yi, however, didn't have a favorable impression of Chen Xinian.

Even though the middle-aged man appeared kind and approachable, after hearing Liang Yue's revelations about the inner workings of West Hill Base, Zhang Yi knew just how ruthless the man before him could be.

"So, you're the leader of West Hill Base? How should I address you?"

Zhang Yi's tone was calm, his smile just as cold.

"My name is Chen Xinian."

"Mr. Chen Xinian, nice to meet you. What brings you here today?" Zhang Yi asked with a smiling but sharp tone.

Chen Xinian's smile widened.

Suddenly, his previously gentle face showed a flash of sternness. With just one look, Zhang Yi felt a chill.

"Not long ago, two of our West Hill Base soldiers went out on a mission. They later disappeared near your shelter.

According to the information they sent before vanishing, the last person they interacted with was you."

"Zhang Yi, did you kill our men from the base?"

Chen Xinian's opening question was an attempt to assert dominance.

But Zhang Yi wasn't one to be intimidated.

Chen Xinian might be a master of political maneuvering, but Zhang Yi wasn't about to play by his rules.

Without saying a word, Zhang Yi pulled a military knife out of his spatial dimension and slammed it onto the table!

The sudden action made Chen Xinian frown.

Such a crude move wasn't part of the negotiation tactics he was familiar with.

Zhang Yi pointed to the knife, "Do you recognize this? Your men left it in my house!"

"Even in peaceful times, trespassing and leaving a weapon behind would be considered illegal invasion, justifying lethal self-defense!"

"Now, in this apocalyptic world, everyone's on edge. If your people dare threaten me, so what if I killed them?"

Zhang Yi's tactic was simple—refuse to play by the rules!

He was young and had no patience for the word games and backstabbing that older, politically savvy men like Chen Xinian thrived on.

If he tried to play it cool and deep, Chen Xinian would likely outmaneuver him.

So Zhang Yi simply went for broke.

"Yeah, I killed them. What are you going to do about it?"

Everyone already knew what had happened, so why not just lay all the cards on the table?

Chen Xinian looked at Zhang Yi's reckless behavior with disdain.

He thought to himself: *This is no different from dealing with an uneducated thug. How crude!*

Chen Xinian tried to reason with Zhang Yi.

"They didn't harm you. They were simply greeting you, letting you know that other survivors were nearby.

In fact, West Hill Base often helps survivors we encounter. Leaving a mark was our way of ensuring you felt safe.

We intended to help you later. How could you repay kindness with murder? Sigh!"

Zhang Yi couldn't help but smirk inwardly at Chen Xinian's act.

Liang Yue and the students' experiences had already shown how vile West Hill Base truly was.

What a great actor you are, Chen Xinian!

Zhang Yi waved his hand dismissively, "I don't care what you think. I know what I think! I say they were intruders, so they were intruders. What's the problem with me killing them?"

Zhang Yi's blatant disregard for decorum left Chen Xinian momentarily speechless.

Chen Xinian had intended to reason with Zhang Yi, skillfully leading him into a trap using his political savvy.

But Zhang Yi?

He outright admitted to the killings and acted like it was no big deal.

He wasn't interested in moral debates or verbal tricks.

Seeing this, Chen Xinian's face darkened. "So, you refuse to admit you were wrong?"

Zhang Yi scoffed, "Wrong about what?"

"You've had your troops camping at my doorstep, bombing my house day and night. Now you say I'm the one at fault?"

Honestly, how shameless can you be?"

Zhang Yi had no intention of making peace with West Hill Base.

He knew that Chen Xinian held all the cards in any peace talks.

Zhang Yi was on the defensive.

If West Hill Base called off their attacks, then peace would follow.

And from what Liang Yue had told him, Zhang Yi knew Chen Xinian was a smiling tiger, a ruthless man in disguise.

There was no way he'd let himself be swayed by sweet words.

The only reason Zhang Yi had accepted the call was to probe Chen Xinian and see what cards he had left to play.

Chen Xinian's false smile faded as he leaned back in his chair, crossing his hands and staring coldly at Zhang Yi.

It was a look that Zhang Yi found deeply repulsive.

It reminded him of the condescending gaze of the high-ranking executives from his previous job, back when they used to look down on him.

What's with the arrogance? It's the apocalypse, and you're still acting like a big shot?

Without a word, Zhang Yi propped his feet up on the table, his black socks practically in Chen Xinian's face.

"You—"

Chen Xinian was livid!

When had he ever been insulted like this?

Zhang Yi casually remarked, "You'd better take your people and get out of here. Otherwise, none of the people from West Hill Base will leave here alive!"

"Also, I'll contact the other forces in Tianhai City and let them know West Hill Base is defenseless."

"What do you think they'll do with that information?"

Zhang Yi was bluffing. He didn't actually know anyone from other forces in Tianhai City.

But he was certain that a city with over two million people still had some surviving factions.

And Chen Xinian knew this too, which made him uneasy.

Still, Chen Xinian maintained a calm facade.

"Sigh, Zhang Yi, you're too young."

Chen Xinian pointed at Zhang Yi and sighed. "You're too quick to resort to violence. I was hoping we could negotiate."

"I know the supplies from the Walmart warehouse are in your hands.

There's more there than you could use in ten lifetimes. Why hoard it all?"

Zhang Yi instantly denied it, "I didn't do it. Don't go making baseless accusations!"

Even if the evidence was irrefutable, Zhang Yi would never admit it.

Enjoying his spoils in secret was much better than flaunting them.

Chen Xinian chuckled, "I already know. There's no point in hiding it."

"I just hope you'll consider the bigger picture. We have thousands of survivors at West Hill Base.

If you were to share those supplies, it could keep them alive for years!"

Zhang Yi inwardly sneered. *So, you think I'm an idiot?*

Liang Yue had already told him that West Hill Base's hierarchy was split into different tiers.

The higher up you were, the better your life.

In the lowest level, The Fourth Life Pod, people were surviving on protein liquid made from cockroaches and corpses.

It wasn't that West Hill Base lacked resources—it was that they were distributed unequally.

If everyone drank that protein liquid, the base could easily support double its current population!

And yet, the leadership lived in luxury, while preaching sacrifice?

How ridiculous!

But Zhang Yi didn't say this out loud.

If he did, Chen Xinian would realize someone from the base was feeding him information.

Zhang Yi simply replied, "What does that have to do with me? I'm not a saint, and I don't care about anyone else's survival."

"In this apocalypse, countless people have already died. This is survival of the fittest."

Chen Xinian frowned, "Sigh, such a selfish and shallow mindset! All those years of education—did it all go to waste?"

Chapter 284: Wooing and Threatening

Although Zhang Yi disliked Chen Xinian as a person, he couldn't help but agree with what Chen Xinian was saying.

Zhang Yi recalled his experiences managing a warehouse, especially what he went through during that time. When he was just a junior employee, he had to be careful to please both his superiors and the senior staff. Even when dealing with a supervisor who was only one level above him, he had to think hard about their preferences and act accordingly.

After a few years, he finally became a supervisor himself, managing seven or eight people. That was the first time he truly felt how wonderful power could be. A simple task assigned with just a word had others working hard to complete it. During meals, everyone always made sure to order dishes to his

liking, with the fish head always facing him. When singing, the women always sat next to him. And this, was just the privilege of being a warehouse supervisor.

The higher one climbed, the more intoxicating the allure of power became, even to the point of reaching the fabled "your word is law." With just a hint or a few words, someone would arrange everything for you.

Listening to Chen Xinian's rosy description of the future, Zhang Yi couldn't deny that part of him did miss those days. However, without hesitation, he flatly refused Chen Xinian's offer.

"What you're talking about doesn't hold any appeal for me anymore," Zhang Yi said coldly. "If it were before the apocalypse, I would've happily taken a position of power, because in a stable society, the rewards of leadership far outweigh the risks. But now? Now, risk and reward go hand in hand. I'm not interested in meddling in the mess you've got at West Hill Base, and I'm even less interested in being anyone's second-in-command."

Zhang Yi wasn't someone with grand ambitions. Perhaps his biggest dream in life was to date a few girls with baby faces and slim waists and then live a carefree life until the end. This laid-back attitude meant he was never cut out to lead a large group of people.

He wasn't like Chen Xinian, who could be heartless, feasting on the finest delicacies while forcing the people below to survive on protein made from cockroaches and corpses.

Moreover, Zhang Yi didn't trust Chen Xinian. Go to West Hill Base? On their turf? By then, he would be at their mercy, not as easy as this negotiation was now.

"I refuse," Zhang Yi said icily. "I enjoy my current life and have no intention of joining any faction or being under anyone's control. If you withdraw your forces now, I'll let bygones be bygones, and we can stay out of each other's way in the future. How about it?"

Even though West Hill Base had attacked him several times, Zhang Yi hadn't suffered any real losses, while the enemy had lost a lot of men. He wasn't bent on revenge, so if things could end like this, he'd be happy to let it go.

But Chen Xinian wasn't happy. Seeing that Zhang Yi wouldn't budge, his expression finally darkened. Since diplomacy wasn't working, it was time for force.

“Hmph! Do you think you can just walk away after killing so many of our people at West Hill Base?” Chen Xinian sneered. “Zhang Yi, I’m offering you a chance because I recognize your talent! But if you don’t appreciate it, I won’t hold back!”

“With the strength of West Hill Base, it’s only a matter of time before we take down your little shelter!”

Zhang Yi chuckled. “It’s just a matter of time, huh? You’ve sent so many men, guns, and explosives, but tell me, have any of them even managed to harm a single hair on my head?”

“They’re the ones who suffered heavy losses!” he added coldly. “You’re not offering me an opportunity; I’m giving you one!”

“Chen, stop now! You’ve got no chance of beating me!”

Calling him “Chen” was a clear sign of Zhang Yi’s contempt, and it made Chen Xinian boil with rage.

He glared at Zhang Yi with a menacing look and hissed, “Do you really think hiding in that turtle shell of yours means I can’t touch you? I could wipe you out with just one missile!”

Zhang Yi’s heart skipped a beat. A missile?

Now that was a serious threat. If his shelter were hit by a missile, no matter how much space he had in his pocket dimension, he wouldn’t be able to absorb such massive destructive force. Even the shelter itself would suffer devastating damage, with the surface completely destroyed and the underground sections severely shaken.

But Zhang Yi’s face remained calm, even breaking into a relaxed smile.

“Oh, really? This is the first time I’ve heard that Tianhai City has missile-launching authority. Impressive, very impressive!” Zhang Yi clapped his hands, his expression full of mockery.

Tianhai City didn't have a large military district. Even if there were missile defenses in place, the authority to use them wouldn't be in the hands of local forces. Especially now, in the apocalyptic world, such high-level weapons would be firmly controlled by the higher-ups. Who did Chen Xinian think he was? A mere regional warlord, thinking he could deploy missiles?

Zhang Yi was convinced that Chen Xinian was bluffing. He didn't buy it for a second.

Chen Xinian, his face dark, replied, "What does a small-time warehouse manager like you know? I'm only giving you a chance because I don't want to see you and your supplies go up in flames!"

"Zhang Yi, don't make a mistake you'll regret! When the missiles hit, there won't be anywhere for you to cry!"

Chapter 285: Deadly Order

The villagers of Xu Family Town heaved a sigh of relief when they heard it was only their communication devices being confiscated. Smiles appeared on their faces. Although losing their phones meant no more entertainment, they didn't think the actions of the Special Forces were unreasonable.

The people here had one key trait: obedience. As long as they weren't being asked to die, they could tolerate most intrusions on their lives. So, the situation remained orderly as everyone handed over their devices without protest.

In the crowd, however, Fatty Xu was anxious, his heart racing in fear. Others weren't worried because they had no contact with Zhang Yi, but Fatty Xu was Zhang Yi's mole in Xu Family Town! Fortunately, he had been prepared for this day ever since he started working undercover. He deleted his chats with Zhang Yi daily and even had a shortcut set up to delete his contacts.

When Xu Dongtang came around to collect phones, Fatty Xu swiftly deleted Zhang Yi as a friend. Now, there was no trace of Zhang Yi left on his phone. Unless they performed a data recovery—which was highly unlikely, given the number of villagers and the lack of advanced equipment—they wouldn't find anything.

Xu Dongtang approached him. "Chunlei, where's your phone?"

Fatty Xu quickly handed over his phone and said, "My computer's at home. I'll bring it later."

Xu Dongtang, aware that Fatty Xu might eventually go to West Hill Base, treated him fairly well. "Alright, wait until Captain Ling finishes speaking before you go get it."

After Xu Dongtang left, Fatty Xu wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. Although he had dodged this crisis, how would he contact Zhang Yi in the future? Could it be that West Hill Base had already discovered there was a traitor among them?

Once all the devices were confiscated, Ling Feng began assigning the next task. He declared that everyone in Xu Family Town was to enter a state of war, assisting the Special Forces in attacking Zhang Yi's shelter.

"I hope you'll all cooperate with us. This is for your own safety," he said. "As long as we eliminate the murderer Zhang Yi, your future will be much brighter!"

The villagers were stunned, fear creeping into their hearts.

"Are they really going to make us attack Zhang Yi's shelter?"

"I don't want to go! So many people died the last time."

"We're just farmers and fishermen. What can we do against him?"

"Exactly! You're trained soldiers. Why make us fight?"

The villagers, clearly upset, voiced their concerns. Ling Feng reassured them, "You won't have to charge into battle. We just need you to help with some engineering work. Rest assured, we'll be the ones directly confronting Zhang Yi."

He pounded his chest confidently. "Trust us. It's a soldier's duty to protect the people!"

Leaders like Xu Dongtang also spoke up to support Ling Feng's plan. Though some villagers grumbled, no one wanted to be the first to oppose the order, and so the matter was settled. But in reality, their opinions didn't matter. Ling Feng was merely informing them; they had no choice but to obey.

Fatty Xu's anxiety grew. He was not only worried about his cover being blown but also realized that Zhang Yi's warnings were coming true. At first, West Hill Base's forces only demanded food from the villagers. Then, they stationed troops and requested information on Zhang Yi, putting the town at risk. Now, they were asking the villagers to help in the assault on Zhang Yi's shelter.

Knowing Zhang Yi's personality, if he survived this ordeal, he would undoubtedly seek revenge on everyone in Xu Family Town. As for West Hill Base, Fatty Xu wasn't sure if they'd spare the town either.

Behind Ling Feng, Liang Yue stood next to Zheng Xuerong and Shi Dayong, feeling relieved that she had prepared two phones. If she were asked to hand one over, she could easily avoid detection. However, Ling Feng hadn't suspected her yet.

First, Liang Yue's strength had earned the Special Forces' respect. Second, Ling Feng couldn't fathom why Liang Yue would betray West Hill Base, where she enjoyed the privileges of the Fourth Life Pod. In his mind, it was unthinkable that someone would give up such a comfortable life to save people unrelated to her.

Still, Liang Yue felt a sense of wariness towards Ling Feng. His sudden actions were not only unexpected but also excluded her from the planning process. Was this because he suspected her, or was there something even more secretive going on?

After thinking it over, Liang Yue decided to ask. As a member of the Special Forces, it wasn't unreasonable for her to inquire about the mission.

"Captain Ling, with such a large-scale operation, do we have a big action planned?"

Ling Feng glanced at her and smiled faintly. "We've received a death order from above. Zhang Yi's shelter must be taken down, no matter what."

“So now, we have to mobilize every possible resource!” he added. Not wanting Liang Yue to feel left out, Ling Feng explained, “I only came up with this plan last night. Since it was urgent, I didn’t have time to inform you.”

Liang Yue remained calm. “No problem. You’re the captain, so you make the decisions.”

Ling Feng nodded and began assigning tasks to his soldiers. Then he called Liang Yue, Zheng Xuerong, and a few others into a room to discuss his plan. The intelligence officers in the Special Forces were already in the loop.

“We’ve made several attempts to attack the shelter, and though we’ve suffered losses, we’ve figured out Zhang Yi’s abilities,” Ling Feng explained, pointing to a 3D model of the shelter.

“Ballistic weapons like guns and rocket launchers are useless; he can absorb and reflect them. However, his offensive capabilities are limited. He only dares to attack with a sniper rifle and never ventures out of the shelter.”

“So, my plan is for us to attack continuously from his shelter’s blind spots using our superpowers!” He pointed to the model again, highlighting the areas with no windows.

Liang Yue raised an eyebrow. “Is that all? This could take forever. Even if we rotate, it might take over a year to break through.”

She continued, “I don’t think the base will give us that much time, and why involve the villagers if it’s just us fighting?”

Ling Feng chuckled. “As expected of a teacher, Liang! You’re sharp.”

“I’m a P.E. teacher,” she replied coldly.

“Well, teacher or not, you’re right. The real attack isn’t from the surface—it’s underground,” Ling Feng said, his eyes hardening as he pointed to the soil beneath the shelter on the model.

“We’re going to blow it up from below. TNT is still the most effective way to deal with a fortified structure.”

Liang Yue’s heart froze as she grasped the plan. “You’re sending the villagers to their deaths?”

Ling Feng’s expression turned icy. “I’m doing this for their own good. Zhang Yi has already slaughtered hundreds of them. If we leave now, they’ll have no chance against him.”

“Sacrifices are necessary for victory,” he said coldly. “As soldiers, our first duty is to follow orders. And we’ve been ordered to take Zhang Yi’s shelter at any cost.”

Liang Yue’s fists clenched in fury. ‘At any cost—but it’s the villagers who will pay the price!’

Though she had known West Hill Base was ruthless, she hadn’t expected the soldiers to be this heartless.

“I’m not a soldier! I can’t do this!” she spat.

Ling Feng’s gaze turned sharp. “Since joining the Special Forces, you’ve been one of us. Unless you have a better plan, you’ll follow the order.”

Liang Yue fell silent. What could she do? She had secretly allied with Zhang Yi and wanted him to survive. But how could she watch the villagers march to their deaths?

Zheng Xuerong intervened, placing a hand on Liang Yue’s arm. “We have no choice, Liang. Zhang Yi controls supplies for thousands. He’s vital to West Hill Base.”

“In the apocalypse, only a few can survive. Protect yourself and those close to you—like your students.”

Hearing this, Liang Yue calmed down. Confronting Ling Feng now wouldn’t end well for her or her students.

Chapter 286: Just You Wait!

Ling Feng had prepared against everyone in Xu Family Town, including Fatty Xu, but he never anticipated that there was a traitor within the Special Forces Team.

After all, when Liang Yue entered West Hill Base, her personal background had been thoroughly investigated. She had no contact with Zhang Yi, and there were no records of her on Tianluo.

But it was precisely this oversight that led to the operational plan he had agonized over being leaked in less than a day.

After returning to her room, Liang Yue immediately passed the information to Zhang Yi.

“The Special Forces plan to dig a tunnel and blow it up from underneath your shelter.”

“They’ve gathered the entire town of Xu Family Town, and the construction site is far from the shelter, so it’ll be hard for you to notice.”

“But if you pay close attention, you should be able to spot some clues.”

After receiving Liang Yue’s message, Zhang Yi was slightly startled.

“Blowing it up from underground?”

To be honest, he had thought of this method before. However, the construction would take a very long time, and with the reinforced underground structures, an enormous amount of explosives would be needed.

So, while he needed to be cautious, it wasn’t something to worry about immediately.

After all, this kind of plan was easy to counter—just blow up the tunnel to resolve it.

If they were using traditional construction methods, a simple detector would be enough to monitor the underground movements, provided they were on alert ahead of time.

Zhang Yi responded to Liang Yue, “Got it, thanks for the heads-up. I’ll keep an eye on it!”

Ling Feng’s plan relied heavily on the element of surprise. But once the intel was leaked, the plan’s damage potential would drop significantly—and it would become more of an insult to themselves.

Liang Yue suddenly asked, “So, what’s your next move?”

Zhang Yi shrugged and grinned. “If they’re so keen on wasting their time, then let them go for it!”

It was freezing outside—it was already mid-winter, the coldest time of the year. If they started digging now, many of them would die.

Forget about the villagers from Xu Family Town—even the well-trained soldiers from West Hill Base wouldn’t last long in this weather.

“If they want to work, let them work. I’d be thrilled if they dropped dead from exhaustion!” Zhang Yi thought, an idea full of dark humor forming in his mind.

He planned to let them dig most of the way, wait until they were within 300 meters of the shelter, and then blow up the tunnel!

At that moment, the expressions on the faces of the Special Forces and Xu Family Town’s villagers would surely be priceless!

Zhang Yi was thoroughly enjoying his devious plan.

But Liang Yue, hearing this, grew anxious. “No, you can’t! It’s the villagers from Xu Family Town digging the tunnel, not the soldiers.”

“If you let it continue, the ones who die will be those innocent villagers.”

“Zhang Yi, you should act quickly to prevent unnecessary deaths.”

Zhang Yi scoffed at her words. He acknowledged that Liang Yue was kind-hearted, but she didn’t understand his deep grudge with Xu Family Town.

Their previous attack on the shelter aside, the fact that they later chose to aid the soldiers from West Hill Base meant they were already his enemies.

Zhang Yi would love nothing more than to see those people get what they deserved.

Watching them be forced to labor and then die tragically in the tunnel was exactly the outcome he was hoping for.

Zhang Yi lazily said to Liang Yue, “Ms. Liang, you’re right. But if I destroy the tunnel too soon, won’t that expose you?”

“You already mentioned that everyone in Xu Family Town has had their communication devices confiscated. Only you and the Special Forces Team have the ability to make contact with the outside.”

“So, once the plan fails, they’ll definitely suspect you first.”

“I can’t risk your life just to save a few villagers.”

Zhang Yi crossed his arms, a mocking smile on his face.

“How about this—I’ve got a suggestion! Go find Captain Ling Feng and have a nice chat. Try to convince him to drop the plan. Or, challenge him to a fight and force him to agree with you.”

“At least if you fail, he won’t kill you. It’s better than being caught as a traitor, right? What do you think?”

Zhang Yi’s words left Liang Yue speechless. She had only thought about saving the innocent villagers, but she hadn’t considered that once the truth came out, her own life would be in danger.

If it were just her, she could easily leave and survive in the apocalypse with her abilities.

But if she fled, the students she left behind at West Hill Base would be doomed.

It was obvious how West Hill Base would treat a traitor.

“So... do I really have no choice but to watch them die?”

Liang Yue’s voice was filled with guilt.

Zhang Yi calmly replied, “It’s West Hill Base sending them to their deaths, not you. You don’t need to feel responsible.”

His words eased her guilt somewhat. After all, there was no way she would sacrifice herself and her students for the villagers of Xu Family Town.

“Sigh, let’s just hope the casualties won’t be too severe,” Liang Yue sighed helplessly.

Zhang Yi had been about to ask her about Fatty Xu’s situation but decided against it for now.

With Liang Yue as a mole inside the base, he could still keep an eye on the movements of the soldiers at West Hill Base.

“Oh, by the way, let me ask you something. Which house are you staying in at Xu Family Town?”

Liang Yue was puzzled by the question and instinctively glanced into the distance.

From this direction, she couldn't see the villa at Cloud Manor 101, which was several kilometers away.

“Why do you ask? Are you planning to come find me?”

“Who knows! But if the opportunity arises, I might need your help with something.”

Zhang Yi smiled mysteriously. “It's a matter of whether you and your students can escape.”

Using Fatty Xu's extravagant anime-inspired castle as a reference, Liang Yue told him her room's location.

“Got it.”

Liang Yue couldn't help but ask, “What exactly do you plan to do?”

Zhang Yi's voice was full of mystery. “You'll find out when the time comes. Don't worry, I won't risk my life sneaking over there just to take advantage of your beauty.”

Liang Yue rolled her eyes.

“Even at a time like this, you still have the energy to make such lewd jokes?”

“If you're bold enough to come over, I might as well entertain you,” she said provocatively.

“Fine, just wait for me then!” Zhang Yi answered without hesitation.

He was never one to turn down such invitations.

Chapter 287: Digging a Tunnel

Under Ling Feng’s command, the entire ACE Special Forces team and the people from Xu Family Town were mobilized.

Ling Feng, Liang Yue, and Shi Dayong were responsible for launching the attack on the shelter. They noticed that the alternate space didn’t actively affect the human body, so they aimed to forcibly create an opening. Of course, their furious assault was mostly a ruse to confuse Zhang Yi. To make the act more convincing, they even called in a large number of special forces members, who attacked from a distance with various types of firepower. The only thing they didn’t use was high-yield explosives. Otherwise, the assault was fairly intense. If Zhang Yi hadn’t received an inside tip, he might have believed they’d gone mad.

Meanwhile, about 1,500 meters away at the river embankment, special forces members stood by with guns, overseeing the people of Xu Family Town as they started digging. Each of the villagers carried tools, but none of them knew exactly what they were doing. This was part of Ling Feng’s plan—to ensure they didn’t realize they were digging a 1,500-meter tunnel from the start. Otherwise, there would have been unrest. Ling Feng didn’t want to kill people just to make an example. He valued each worker, knowing that most of them would eventually be sent to West Hill Base to work in the Fourth Life Pod.

Since the villagers had no idea what they were doing and saw that the entire town was divided into teams for work, they didn’t feel too miserable about the situation. Professional engineers from the special forces stood by to guide them, teaching them how to dig properly.

In the underground shelter’s third level, Zhang Yi sat on a leather sofa, wearing loose-fitting sportswear. Beside him were women dressed even more casually, in nothing but pajamas. Zhang Yi had already informed them of the enemy’s plans, so upon learning there would be no large-scale attack for now, the women relaxed.

Using the cameras embedded in the wall, Zhang Yi could clearly see Ling Feng and the others furiously attacking the back wall. It was a shooting blind spot, making it impossible for Zhang Yi to counterattack with a sniper rifle. Even so, when Ling Feng punched the wall, all he managed to leave was a shallow mark on the thick, reinforced surface. Shi Dayong's blows left even fainter marks; although his transformed state was terrifying, his strength was far below Ling Feng's. As for Liang Yue, she swung her newly acquired Tang sword, leaving a slightly deeper but still very thin scratch. After one slash, she quickly retreated, feigning exhaustion.

Among the team's captains, Zheng Xuerong wasn't a strength-type Superhuman, so she simply kept watch and didn't join the attack. At their current pace, even if they worked nonstop for 24 hours a day, it would take them years to break through.

Zhang Yi, sitting cross-legged on the sofa, watched the screen intently as if enjoying a show. Beside him were Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siyah, both dressed in alluring sleepwear, one on each side of him. They peeled nuts and fed them to him.

"Water," Zhang Yi said lazily, spitting out a word. Yang Siyah quickly handed him a cup of warm water, while Zhou Ke'er, a step slower, shot her a disgruntled look.

The two women's competition for his favor made Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran, sitting nearby, feel a bit awkward. Lu Keran scratched her head and broke the silence.

"These Superhumans are really strong! Their power has already surpassed many modern weapons. Are all Superhumans this tough?"

Crunching on some nuts, Zhang Yi replied, "These people are the elite of the elite from West Hill Base. It's not surprising they're this powerful." Then, turning to the women around him, he added, "So you see, the world outside is full of danger, with monsters like them lurking around. We'd better stay here where we have food and drink. Isn't that a better life?"

The women nodded in agreement. After hearing gunfire and explosions from outside for days, they had been on edge.

Yang Siyah asked curiously, "Zhang Yi, even though we know their plan, we can't go out. How will we know how far they've dug?"

Zhang Yi smiled and glanced at Yang Xinxin, who was sitting elegantly. “Xinxin, care to explain?”

Yang Xinxin shot her cousin a proud look, lifting her chin slightly. “Sound travels faster through solids than air. Since they’re digging underground, we can detect the vibrations more clearly.”

“As long as we have a receiver, I can analyze their progress with my computer,” she said, taking a sip of coffee. “It’s a simple trick.”

Yang Siyah nodded in understanding. “So basically, we don’t need to do anything? We just wait?”

Zhang Yi nodded. “Yes, essentially, there’s nothing for us to do. What they’re doing is a complete waste of time.”

“We’ll just conserve our strength and watch them waste time—and lives.”

It wasn’t that Zhang Yi didn’t want to act; it was just that being on defense meant waiting for the enemy to make the first mistake before responding. This was the wisest strategy. All he needed to do was stay vigilant and not miss any suspicious movement. After all, he couldn’t completely rule out the possibility that Liang Yue was a double agent.

The first day passed peacefully. To keep up appearances, Zhang Yi showed his face, fired a few sniper shots, and quickly retreated back to the basement, where he passed the time playing cards with the women.

After a few days of practice, the women’s card skills had improved enough to make a decent game, especially Yang Xinxin, whose sharp mind and near-photographic memory made her the best card player in the shelter. They made their games more interesting by adding forfeits instead of betting money—losers had to perform tricks or share embarrassing stories.

While Zhang Yi’s group enjoyed their quiet life, the people outside had it much harder. Even the soldiers from West Hill Base couldn’t endure the conditions forever. Despite their specialized suits with excellent cold resistance, the extreme cold couldn’t be ignored. Regular soldiers had to rotate out after two-hour shifts to warm up indoors, while Superhumans like Ling Feng found a corner and built an igloo.

The igloo was built by Zheng Xuerong, whose ability differed from Fatty Xu's. She could condense water molecules from the air to create ice structures, even without snow or ice in the environment. Though their powers were similar, they had key differences. Fatty Xu's ability was more terrain-dependent, only usable in icy areas, but his range was much larger. Since he used local materials, his energy consumption was lower. In contrast, Zheng Xuerong could create ice anywhere but at a higher energy cost. Her igloo, however, was sturdier and could even withstand small artillery fire if needed.

Inside the igloo, the group gathered around a fire, warming up before resuming their harassment of Zhang Yi. After a full day, they had only left shallow marks on the outer wall, with no real progress. Yet, Ling Feng remained patient. While roasting preserved pork from Xu Family Town over the fire, he started telling stories from his days as a soldier in Xichuan.

When not fighting, Ling Feng seemed like a modest, approachable man. He wasn't tall and didn't appear to be a ruthless special forces captain, but beneath his unassuming appearance was the heart of a pure soldier.

"When I first joined the army, the company commander taught us an important lesson. He said, 'A good soldier doesn't need his own thoughts.'"

"Of course, he didn't mean combat strategies, but strategic-level thinking. In war, the worst thing is letting personal will override collective purpose. Even if you know something is wrong, everyone has to move in the same direction to win. If everyone follows their own ideas, it's over."

As Ling Feng said this, he glanced at Liang Yue with a smile. "Internal division is always the most lethal for any organization."

Liang Yue tossed a piece of wood into the fire. "But if we keep doing the wrong thing, isn't that worse? You know the saying about pulling in the wrong direction, right?" she said, alluding to Ling Feng's disregard for the villagers' lives as he forced them to dig the tunnel.

Ling Feng traced a circle with his hand and joked, "Don't forget, the world is round. Even if we head in the wrong direction, we'll eventually come back around."

After his sly remark, he grew serious. “But if the group loses its unity, even if we find the right direction, we won’t succeed.”

“We’ve tried too many things already. We can’t afford another failure.”

Ling Feng didn’t need to explain himself to Liang Yue, just as he didn’t owe any explanation to Zheng Xuerong or Shi Dayong. Yet, he showed Liang Yue extra patience because she wasn’t a career soldier, and her abilities were exceptional. He wanted her to respect and trust him, making future management easier.

Liang Yue remained silent for a long time before looking at Ling Feng with a playful smile. “So, do you think we’ll succeed this time? If we fail, and many people die from exhaustion and frostbite, who will take responsibility?”

The atmosphere inside the igloo turned heavy. Ling Feng lowered his head in thought for a moment before saying quietly, “I will.”

Then he lifted his head and smiled brightly. “I’ll remember those who died and live well enough for all of them.”

Chapter 288: Management Measures

Ling Feng's explanation left Liang Yue completely speechless about this man.

She didn’t even know how to describe him, as Ling Feng had his own unique logic for everything he did. It was a form of pure emotion, so much so that no matter what he did, he never felt he was wrong. He even had a way to justify sacrificing others for his own goals. The key point was, Ling Feng wasn’t trying to argue—he truly believed from the bottom of his heart that he wasn’t wrong.

Such pure goodness or evil could make people feel fear.

Liang Yue kept silent and stopped engaging with him any further.

As night fell, the temperature dropped sharply. Ling Feng said to Liang Yue and the others, "Let's go back and rest for the night. It's hard to see anything now, so we don't need to worry about Zhang Yi noticing anything."

He led the special forces team back, passing by the tunnel excavation site on their way to inspect the work. The remaining population in Xu Family Town was over a thousand, and they could mobilize nearly a thousand people to work. But, of course, not that many people could dig the tunnel at the same time—it had to be done in batches of twenty people per shift, with a shift change every half hour.

The initial digging was the hardest. The ground beneath the surface had frozen into permafrost, making it extremely difficult to excavate using manual labor alone.

Ling Feng approached, accompanied by the team leaders, and asked Wu, the engineer in charge of the project, "How is it going? Is the first day's work progressing smoothly?"

Engineer Wu replied, "Everything is going according to plan. If all goes well, with nonstop digging, we'll break through this 1,500-meter tunnel in about a month."

"And then—boom!" Engineer Wu made an exploding gesture and smiled. "We'll send Zhang Yi's shelter flying with 2,000 kilograms of explosives!"

Ling Feng nodded in satisfaction as he looked at the busy scene. Several armed soldiers were standing guard nearby, while a group of workers waited, shovels and bamboo baskets in hand, ready for their shift.

Suddenly, Ling Feng's brow furrowed. He quickly approached one of the villagers and stopped him. "Hey, you! Lift your head and let me take a look."

The villager had a scarf wrapped around his face and was quite small in build. Hearing Ling Feng's command, he pulled down the scarf, revealing a youthful face.

Ling Feng's eyes widened. "How old are you?"

"I'm thirteen," the boy replied honestly.

Ling Feng's sudden burst of anger startled everyone as he shouted at Xu Dongtang and Engineer Wu, "Didn't I say no children under sixteen are allowed to work? Don't you know that children are the future of the nation?"

Xu Dongtang hurriedly explained, "Captain Ling, we're all farmers. Don't let his age fool you—he's just as strong as any adult from the city."

Ling Feng, still furious, responded, "I said no, and I mean it! Even if the project is urgent, we must have some boundaries!"

He pointed at the boy, "Take him back immediately! This is a battlefield, and we cannot let children get involved!"

Xu Dongtang quickly pulled the boy aside. "Yes, yes, I'll take him back right away."

The boy looked at Ling Feng with eyes full of gratitude and admiration.

Not far away, Liang Yue observed the scene and was at a loss for words. She just didn't know what to think of Ling Feng anymore. Was he a fool?

Xu Dongtang had the boy taken away, while Ling Feng continued, "To speed up the project, the tunnel must operate 24 hours non-stop. Mayor Xu, I hope you'll lead by example and help everyone push through this."

Xu Dongtang was dumbfounded. Ling Feng had never mentioned this to him before. No, Ling Feng had never considered the opinions of the Xu Family Town residents at all. Including this excavation, none of these people knew what they were really working for.

Upon hearing that the work would continue around the clock, Xu Dongtang was terrified. “Captain Ling, isn’t that too much? Even if they only work for half an hour at a time, it’s still too much for ordinary people in this weather.”

“What’s more... we don’t even know how long this project will take.”

Xu Dongtang mustered the courage to ask, “Captain Ling, what exactly are you trying to do?”

Ling Feng didn’t bother explaining to him. Instead, he lightly patted Xu Dongtang’s shoulder. “Old Xu, you just need to cooperate with our work. Understand?”

“Everything we’re doing is for the good of Xu Family Town. If we don’t eliminate Zhang Yi, that demon, all of you will die!”

“Be smart. Don’t think I’m harming your people!”

After saying this, Ling Feng turned and left, not giving Xu Dongtang any chance to negotiate. Or rather, in Ling Feng’s eyes, Xu Dongtang wasn’t qualified to negotiate.

“Let’s head back and rest. We’ll return tomorrow,” Ling Feng smiled as he spoke to Liang Yue and the others. As the main force for the diversionary attack, their superhuman abilities were drained from the constant use.

Liang Yue had seen through Ling Feng by now, so she said nothing and followed him back to Xu Family Town.

Once back, the town’s women were immediately instructed to prepare food for them. Before long, a table full of food was brought out, mainly consisting of steamed buns and grilled fish—two of the most abundant food supplies left.

Ling Feng tore into the food, biting down on the buns like he hadn’t eaten in days.

In the following days, life became monotonous. Ling Feng continued leading a few superhumans in their diversionary attacks on Zhang Yi's shelter, while the villagers of Xu Family Town toiled as laborers, digging the tunnel.

Fatty Xu, as a superhuman destined to be taken to West Hill Base, wasn't required to work. But after losing contact with Zhang Yi, he was completely cut off from him.

On the third day, the tunnel had reached over 100 meters deep, and the challenges became more apparent. The deeper they went, the more oxygen-deprived it became. Without oxygen supply equipment, they had to resort to the most basic method—pumping air in through rubber hoses, much like an old-fashioned diving setup, using manpower to push air into the tunnel.

But this method was far less effective than modern equipment. Coupled with the cold and the intense labor, the first worker finally collapsed. Amidst shouts and panic, the others carried the man out of the tunnel.

A military doctor from the special forces team checked him over and shook his head. "Acute myocardial infarction. He's gone."

The man was Xu Youzhi, 52 years old, a construction worker. Older people were more prone to heart attacks and strokes in such extreme cold conditions. While these conditions could be treated with a timely bypass operation at West Hill Base, it wasn't worth the trouble for an ordinary villager.

Xu Youzhi was thus declared dead on the spot.

Seeing Xu Youzhi's still-warm body, the villagers of Xu Family Town felt a deep sense of grief and anger.

A young man shouted at the special operations soldiers nearby, "This is inhumane! You're treating us like slaves! I'm done with this!"

He angrily threw down his shovel. Seeing this, the other villagers followed suit, throwing down their tools and demanding answers.

Supervisor Shen Hong frowned and said coldly, "Orders from the organization must not be disobeyed! Everything we're doing is for your revenge."

"We're this far along now—anyone who tries to back out will be treated as a deserter!"

Shen Hong emphasized the word "deserter," gripping his assault rifle and subtly pointing it toward the crowd of villagers.

That simple gesture was like a bucket of cold water, instantly cooling the villagers' tempers.

Xu Dongtang sighed. "Take the body away. We need to replace him."

With sorrow in their eyes, the villagers carried Xu Youzhi's body back to town for burial.

However, as the deaths mounted, things spiraled out of control. The deeper the tunnel, the harsher the conditions. The second person, the third, and eventually the fourth villager collapsed...

One by one, the villagers died, either collapsing during the day or passing away quietly at home, never to wake up again.

Human bodies are fragile. Already, they were struggling just to survive the extreme cold, but now, forced to work in such harsh conditions, it was the final straw that broke them.

By this point, a few bodies were being carried out of the tunnel every day.

The growing death toll stirred anger among the villagers. Though they didn't dare confront the armed special forces team directly, verbal disputes and secret acts of resistance increased.

When Ling Feng heard about this, he remained calm. It was all within their expectations.

"Pick a few ringleaders and execute them. Some people won't understand fear until they see blood."

“We only care about the progress of the project. Let their mayor and village chief manage them. Their own people manage each other better than we ever could.”

Chapter 289: Negotiation Requires Strength

The conflict came quickly but disappeared just as fast.

A group of hot-headed villagers attempted to attack the special forces team, hoping to seize their weapons and resist. But what could they use to fight against well-trained soldiers?

They were quickly captured, and three of the ringleaders were publicly executed on the spot. Seeing the heads of those three burst open, with blood and brain matter spilling onto the snow, steaming from the heat, brought the villagers of Xu Family Town back to their senses.

They realized they were no match for West Hill Base. The idealized image they had of the organization was shattered. Many regretted the warm welcome they had given these people, with some even cursing Xu Dongtang and the other leaders. But they also knew that refusing to welcome the special forces would not have led to a different outcome.

No, it wouldn't have.

Ling Feng didn't mind firing a few extra shots. Teaching them the rules with bloodshed would only make things clearer.

Life returned to its routine, but every villager in Xu Family Town lived under a cloud of fear. They continued digging tunnels, knowing they might suffocate deep underground at any moment. If they refused to work, the overseers from the special forces would beat them to death on the spot.

After executing the prisoners, Ling Feng had made their relationship clear. There was no longer any pretense; they openly used force to dominate the town.

Ten days passed in a flash. Thirty-two people from Xu Family Town had died, and the number continued to rise. The tunnel had reached a depth of about 500 meters. The shifts grew shorter—just digging for a few minutes required coming up for air.

“At this rate, will we be able to dig 1,500 meters?” Liang Yue asked Ling Feng.

“With the villagers' remaining strength, crawling 1,500 meters will leave them exhausted, let alone continuing to dig,” Ling Feng replied coldly. “But we have no choice. Without modern tools, this is the only way.”

“Since we’ve chosen to sacrifice, we have to see it through.”

“When the time comes, I’ll deal with Zhang Yi for them. That should count as revenge.”

Liang Yue felt speechless at Ling Feng’s twisted logic. Right now, the villagers likely hated Ling Feng far more than they hated Zhang Yi. People really have no self-awareness, Liang Yue thought.

Each meter of progress would now be paid for in lives.

In the shelter, Zhang Yi was keeping up with the outside situation through his conversations with Liang Yue. Liang Yue’s mental state had also become more composed, having witnessed death daily and listened to Ling Feng’s twisted rationalizations. Nothing could shake her anymore.

“At the current pace, it’ll take at least half a month to reach the designated spot,” she said. “But by then, hundreds more villagers will have died.”

“Zhang Yi, aren’t you going to act? Be careful you don’t let things get out of control. It’ll be hard to clean up the mess later.”

Zhang Yi smiled faintly. “I have a plan, don’t worry.”

“No matter what I do, I’ll keep my promise to you. As for the rest, you don’t need to concern yourself.”

In other words, you’re meddling too much, Zhang Yi thought. We’re just partners, not anything more. You have no right to tell me what to do.

Liang Yue frowned slightly. “I was just trying to help.”

“Yes, and I appreciate that,” Zhang Yi replied indifferently. “By the way, I’ve noticed fewer attacks on the shelter lately. Apart from a few Superhumans like you, where did the others go? Are they on some other mission?”

“No, most of them are on standby in Xu Family Town,” Liang Yue answered. “They can’t really do much to help. The only thing they’re doing is ‘maintaining order’ in the town.” She couldn’t help but laugh at her own words. “Maintaining order? More like keeping the villagers in check, ready to suppress any riots.”

Zhang Yi nodded slowly. “Oh~~ I see.”

After ending the conversation, Zhang Yi had a plan forming in his mind. It was time to act after all this waiting. Surely by now, Ling Feng and the others had let their guard down a bit, thinking Zhang Yi would stay holed up in the shelter without doing anything.

“It’s time to give them a little surprise,” Zhang Yi said with a sly smile.

In Xu Family Town, Ling Feng was inside a house, eating heartily while discussing their next steps with Shi Dayong and a few others. The large table in front of them was piled high with food, enough to form a small mountain. And this was just for the five of them.

Ling Feng, Shi Dayong, Zheng Xuerong, Shen Hong, and Yu Lang were all Superhumans, and their appetites far exceeded those of ordinary people. Since much of their power came from the energy in food, they consumed more than ten times what a regular villager would eat.

This left the villagers in Xu Family Town bitter. Watching their hard-earned food being wasted like this was like a knife to their hearts. At this rate, their stores of food would be gone in a few months.

Xu Dongtang arrived at Ling Feng's residence, hoping to talk about the issue. After the guards announced him, Xu Dongtang walked into the room, his eyes immediately drawn to the piles of food on the table. The amount these five Superhumans ate could easily feed seventy or eighty people.

Ling Feng glanced at Xu Dongtang and greeted him warmly. "Old Xu! Come on over, have a bite with us."

Xu Dongtang quickly waved his hand. "No, no, I've already eaten."

"Ah, don't be shy. Come, sit with us!" Ling Feng insisted, forgetting that he was a guest in this town and Xu Dongtang was the host.

Reluctantly, Xu Dongtang sat down next to Ling Feng.

"Old Xu, you've been working hard lately," Ling Feng said sincerely. "I know you're under a lot of pressure. But hey, that's what being the town leader is about. With great power comes great responsibility. So keep up the good work, alright?"

Xu Dongtang smiled awkwardly and nodded.

After exchanging pleasantries, Xu Dongtang got to the point. "Captain Ling, how much longer until you can take down Zhang Yi's shelter?"

At his question, everyone turned to look at him.

Shi Dayong grumbled, "What, you don't want us here anymore?"

Ling Feng immediately shot him a glare. “Shi, what are you talking about? Old Xu isn’t like that.”

“We’re here to help, after all. Isn’t that right, Old Xu?” Ling Feng said with a smile.

“Yes, of course, I didn’t mean that,” Xu Dongtang quickly responded. “It’s just that, recently, we’ve lost a lot of people, and the food situation...”

He was about to say that they were eating their food, living in their houses, and sending their people to die, hoping Ling Feng and his group would leave soon. But before he could finish, Ling Feng interrupted him.

“Oh, speaking of food, let me tell you something!” Ling Feng picked up a grilled fish. “We’ve been eating fish for almost a week now. It’s well-cooked, but eating the same thing every day gets boring.”

“We’re soldiers. We need proper food! You should bring us more red meat.”

Xu Dongtang was dumbfounded. He had come to ask them to cut back on food, but now Ling Feng was demanding better quality?

“Captain Ling, I... I wanted to ask if you could simplify your meals,” Xu Dongtang said. “The villagers rely on the fish from Lu River to survive. With your arrival, most of the fish have gone to feed your soldiers.”

Ling Feng raised an eyebrow. “Oh? So you’re saying you’re running low on food now?”

Xu Dongtang nodded reluctantly. “It’s getting difficult for us.”

Ling Feng put down his fish, paused for a moment, then said, “I understand your situation. Times are tough for everyone.”

Xu Dongtang let out a sigh of relief. “It’s great that you understand, Captain Ling.”

Ling Feng slapped his thigh and said, "Well then, since you're having such a hard time, we won't trouble you any longer."

"I'll take my team and leave tomorrow. We'll head back to West Hill Base."

Xu Dongtang's eyes widened in surprise. "What, you're leaving?"

His heart raced with excitement. Sending these people away meant Xu Family Town could finally breathe. Living under the barrel of a gun was a torment.

Ling Feng continued, "But once we leave, you'll need to be more vigilant."

"We've spent a lot of time here in Xu Family Town, and Zhang Yi knows that. We've been attacking his shelter for days, bombing everything around it."

"With his personality, he won't just let this slide. While we're here, we keep him in check. But once we're gone, who do you think he'll come after?"

Ling Feng turned to look at Xu Dongtang with a mocking smile. "Old Xu, what do you think?"

A chill ran down Xu Dongtang's spine. He understood perfectly—if Zhang Yi learned they had helped West Hill Base, Xu Family Town would be the next target for revenge. They had already seen what Zhang Yi was capable of.

Chapter 290: Give Them a Little Shock

Xu Dongtang's body was rigid and tense, not knowing how to respond to Ling Feng's words.

Ling Feng smiled and said, "So you see, we can't leave. We have to stay here and protect you."

"Starting tomorrow, double the food rations! We need to maintain our strength to fight the enemy, after all!"

Xu Dongtang was stunned. "What? Double the rations? If we do that, our villagers won't have enough to eat, they'll starve to death!"

Ling Feng stared into his eyes, his black-gray pupils cold and indifferent like stainless steel.

"If the villagers die, you Xu Family members can still survive here. But if we soldiers die, there won't be a single blade of grass left in Xu Family Town!"

"So, my request is not unreasonable, right?"

Xu Dongtang opened his mouth but didn't say a word. Although he was the mayor of Xu Family Town, he was, in reality, nothing more than a puppet propped up by the West Hill Base. He had no power to negotiate with them.

That night, Xu Dongtang reluctantly conveyed the message to the villages as tactfully as possible.

Curses echoed through the night; everyone wished they could chop the special forces team into pieces!

But after all the cursing, no one took any action. The next day, they obediently handed over the food as Ling Feng demanded.

Even though the food was seized, it didn't matter, as they could still eat a little and wouldn't starve to death. Even if forced to work in the freezing cold, facing the threat of death, it wasn't a certainty they'd die. As long as they weren't completely cornered, they would curse in their hearts but rarely dared to resist.

Those who did dare to resist had already been executed in public, leaving the survivors broken, keeping their heads down like ostriches, enduring all the injustice.

Time passed slowly, and the situation around the shelter remained the same every day.

Ling Feng, to avoid arousing Zhang Yi's suspicion, continued to attack the shelter at the same time each day. As for Zhang Yi, he occasionally came out, pretending to be enraged, cursing loudly, and firing shots randomly, but he never actually left the shelter.

Most of the time, Zhang Yi, Yang Siyah, Zhou Ke'er, and the others lived leisurely in the shelter. Food was plentiful, and they had no shortage of entertainment. With enough people around, boredom wasn't an issue. They played cards, moved on to other games, and sometimes even played badminton in the gym on the third underground floor.

The underground space was large enough to accommodate bigger group activities if they wanted.

Just like that, half a month passed.

Monitoring showed that the tunnel digging had progressed to within 700 meters of the shelter. Over a hundred people from Xu Family Town had already perished for this effort. The villagers had become numb, even forgetting why they had started digging the tunnel in the first place. Every day, they were herded by the special forces, working non-stop in 24-hour shifts.

As for Zhang Yi, Ling Feng and the others were almost certain he was too afraid to leave the shelter. The overly comfortable environment had made him complacent, and the only outcome awaiting him was destruction.

Another morning came.

Zhang Yi woke up early, pulled back the covers, and Hua Hua lazily stretched out, glancing at him before yawning.

"Wake up! How about I take you for a walk?" Zhang Yi patted Hua Hua's head.

Hua Hua was reluctant but eventually got up, stretching its body like a long noodle.

Sitting by the bed, Zhang Yi calmly started changing clothes. Instead of his usual casual wear, he retrieved a full set of pure white attire from a dimensional space.

It was a two-piece set. The inner layer was the same kind of close-fitting garment worn by Xie Huanhuan, entirely white, with gold zippers and decorative buttons, and a golden sword emblem on the chest—simple yet elegant.

After putting on the inner layer, he then wore the matching combat suit. The suit was identical in color and style, but its primary function was defense, whereas the inner layer focused on insulation.

The suit was equipped with a heating system and batteries, with heating modules distributed across the body, ensuring Zhang Yi's warmth. This suit was modeled after the combat suits used by the special forces from West Hill Base, but its craftsmanship and materials far exceeded the original.

Despite the sophisticated design, the suit was easy to wear, as it was designed for combat situations where ease of movement and quick dressing were crucial.

After putting on his white combat boots and equipping a matching helmet—bulletproof and equipped with a communicator and tactical goggles—Zhang Yi meticulously checked his weapons and ammunition.

This process took more than half an hour.

Afterward, Zhang Yi placed some premium cat food by the bed, and Hua Hua, with a swipe of its sharp claws, opened the can and began eating.

Zhang Yi checked his equipment one last time, grabbed a beef and cheese burger from the dimensional space, and heated up a cup of soy milk in the kitchen. After a leisurely breakfast, he hoisted Hua Hua onto his shoulder and headed down to the third underground floor.

Most emergency shelters had secret exits designed for situations like enemy invasions. This shelter was no exception, and Zhang Yi was the only one who knew of its location, hidden beneath the floor in the front left corner of the gym on the third floor.

The tunnel stretched 2.5 kilometers, emerging behind the northern hills of Cloud Manor. The exit was concealed within a dense forest.

After studying the special forces team's patrol patterns, Zhang Yi decided to take the initiative for once, planning to give them a little shock.

The special forces team, including the superhumans, would come every day for mock assaults, as it was part of their ruse to prevent Zhang Yi from suspecting anything. However, only ordinary soldiers remained at Xu Family Town, with a few modified humans at most.

These people posed no threat to the current Zhang Yi.

Not to mention, he had Hua Hua with him. In close combat, Hua Hua was at least ten times more efficient at clearing out grunts than Zhang Yi himself.

Zhang Yi reached the gym corner, lifted the third tile from the left in the fourth row, and unlocked the old-fashioned mechanical lock. He pulled out a yellow key, inserted it into the lock, and opened the door. Behind the first door was a second, and then a third, each offering progressively higher levels of security.

Finally, the three doors opened, revealing a white staircase. Sensors automatically lit up the stairwell.

Zhang Yi descended the stairs, reaching another heavy silver-gray metal door at the bottom. Its material was the same as the main entrance—designed to withstand even heavy artillery fire.

Next to the door was a black motorcycle. Given the length of the tunnel, having a vehicle was essential for a quick escape. The shelter designers had planned it all carefully.

Zhang Yi approached, scanned his iris and palm, and the door slowly opened with a rumble. Lights flickered on along the length of the tunnel.

He mounted the bike and realized it was electric. Electric bikes were quieter, and with advancements in new energy technology, their range and speed were comparable to fuel-powered vehicles.

The bike didn't require a key; it started with an iris scan. Zhang Yi accelerated down the tunnel, which inclined upwards, leading to the surface.

Not long after, he reached the end of the tunnel. In front of him was a thick alloy door, identical to the ones before, and using the same method, he opened it.

With a loud rumble, the door opened inward, and a rush of snow poured in.

Zhang Yi was prepared, dodging aside quickly. Even with the combat suit, he could still feel a slight chill.

Hua Hua, perched on his shoulder, gave a disgruntled meow.

Zhang Yi patted its head, stepped out into the snow, and shut the door behind him.

The exit was located on a snow-covered hillside, where the snow was over five meters deep. The trees were bare, with only a few branches sticking out above the snow.

Zhang Yi trudged through the snow, climbing up and reaching back to close the tunnel door. Upon seeing it clearly, he couldn't help but pause.

It was disguised as a tall gravestone!

"Well, that's certainly hidden," Zhang Yi muttered, shaking his head. It wouldn't be surprising if he were standing in the middle of a cemetery.

He scanned the surroundings—it was deathly silent, with no signs of life.

Zhang Yi crouched down, whispered a few words to Hua Hua, who responded with a meow. Reluctantly, Hua Hua transformed, growing larger and using its big paws to shovel snow over the gravestone, concealing the door once again.

Once finished, Hua Hua shrank back to its normal size.

Zhang Yi nodded to the cat, and they set off, one man and one cat, trekking slowly through the snow.

An hour later, around 8:30 in the morning.

Ling Feng and his team finished breakfast and, as usual, headed to the shelter for their daily harassment.

On the riverbank, a production line was in motion. People inside the shelter continuously passed out baskets of dirt, while those outside cleared it away and manually cranked machines to pump air into the tunnel.

The only people left in Xu Family Town were the elderly and children who were too weak to work, along with a few women who were responsible for cooking. Aside from them, the rest were the special forces members from West Hill Base.