

Ice Age 291

Chapter 291: Stealth Attack on the Base

The atmosphere in Xu Family Town was distinctly polarized.

The villagers were on edge, their faces blank with fear. Although they didn't need to work outside, they still had tasks assigned by the Special Forces Team, such as preparing food or fulfilling personal requests for some team members. In the past, these soldiers had been well-trained and strictly disciplined, but after the apocalypse, human nature gradually eroded with each twisted event. When one gains control over another's life and death, moral boundaries blur.

The bitter cold kept most people indoors, leaving only a few soldiers on guard. Yet, after a long period of peace, they didn't believe any enemy would attack.

After all, they were the elite Special Forces Team from West Hill Base! Even in all of Tianhai City, their strength was unmatched. Their mission this time was to deal with a coward hiding in a shelter, too afraid to come out. No one would ever expect that a Superhuman from that shelter would dare launch an attack, especially against their main base.

A soldier patrolling the edge of the village held his gun, pacing slowly. Suddenly, he noticed a white figure in the distance. Upon closer inspection, he saw a captain's insignia on the person's shoulder.

(The combat suit Zhang Yi wore was modeled after Liu Ziyang and Xie Huanhuan's, complete with a captain's insignia.)

The soldier thought it was his captain returning from the front lines and immediately saluted.

“Captain!”

The person in the combat suit approached, nodding slowly. Just as the guard let his guard down, a flash of a blade sliced across his throat.

“Urgh...”

Clutching his neck in disbelief, the guard collapsed onto the snow, eyes filled with terror. Zhang Yi stepped forward and finished him off with a precise strike through the skull, ensuring his death.

"That's the fourth. Now, all the guards around Xu Family Town are dead," Zhang Yi remarked calmly.

Although he and Hua Hua could easily kill all the Special Forces members in the village, a chaotic battle would complicate things and introduce unnecessary risks, possibly alerting the captains across the river. Zhang Yi was here to kill, not play the hero.

After storing the body in his spatial dimension, Zhang Yi cleaned the blood from his clothes with the snow and casually walked further into the village.

At the southwest corner of Xu Family Town, a Special Forces soldier suddenly burst into a snow hut. The man of the house had been drafted to dig tunnels, leaving only his young wife at home. The soldier entered, quickly covering the woman's mouth to stifle any screams.

"Sister, I've been having a rough time lately. Help me out!" The soldier's gaze swept over her body with a hint of lust. Though she was bundled up in thick clothes, her pale, frozen face wasn't exactly beautiful, but to a soldier deprived for days, she was more than enough to satisfy.

The woman trembled in fear, her body shaking. "You... you can't do this."

The soldier impatiently shoved her onto the bed, roughly tearing at her clothes.

"You better cooperate, or the consequences will be beyond what you can handle!" He didn't want to make a scene. Even if the upper officers in the Special Forces Team found out, at most he'd get a slap on the wrist, but being called out for such behavior would bring him shame in front of his peers.

The woman sobbed quietly, knowing she was powerless to resist. She tightly closed her eyes, resigned to whatever was about to happen. As the soldier struggled to remove her many layers, his breath grew heavier.

"So cold... it's freezing. Couldn't we at least cover ourselves with a blanket first?" The woman, nearly numb from the cold, could barely feel anything.

"Damn! Even in this hellhole, I have to grit my teeth to do this. Way worse than back at the base!" the soldier grumbled. Still, it was an urgent situation—he needed a quick release, not a full experience.

Soon, muffled sobs and suppressed whispers filled the room, catching the attention of a passerby. The snow huts were partially buried underground and had no doors, with ice bricks used to block them at night. But since it was daytime, the soldier hadn't bothered to close off the entrance.

The passerby peered in and smirked, then quietly stepped inside.

The soldier, in the middle of his assault, paused at the sound, turning his head to see another Special Forces Team member standing there, fully geared up. The only odd thing was that the newcomer was wearing a helmet, even though there was no active mission.

"Hey, man, don't interrupt my fun! If you want a woman, go find one yourself—I'm not into threesomes," the soldier joked, turning back to his task, completely unfazed.

But in the next moment, a bright blade pierced through his left chest, skewering both him and the woman beneath him, pinning them to the bed.

The long sword had impaled them both, and steaming blood dripped down its blade. Zhang Yi casually pulled the sword out, flicking the blood onto the floor. The soldier, with his heart pierced, died instantly. The woman, her lungs punctured, coughed up blood and quickly died from blood loss and the cold.

Zhang Yi had to kill her—otherwise, in her panic, she would have screamed, blowing his cover. She was part of Xu Family Town, so there was no such thing as innocence. The enemy's allies were enemies themselves.

To avoid alerting others, Zhang Yi stored the two bodies in his spatial dimension. He then walked out of the snow hut as if nothing had happened, heading towards the area where the West Hill Base soldiers were stationed.

Xu Family Town had been peaceful for too long. The soldiers left here had no sense of danger. In their free time, they gathered to play cards or mess around with handheld gaming consoles. Zhang Yi had already gotten all the information he needed from Liang Yue, so there was no need to search blindly.

Zhang Yi strolled through the village. Despite his helmet, no one found it suspicious because of the cold and his white combat suit. The only odd thing was the large, muscular tabby cat walking beside him—cats were rarely seen these days, as they weren't as useful as dogs and often ended up as food. Such a robust tabby cat was even rarer.

Walking up to a snow hut where soldiers were stationed, Zhang Yi could hear lively chatter inside.

“Are you playing or not? If not, I’m taking the win!”

“Win? I’ll bomb you! Let’s see how smug you are!”

“What the hell? You actually have a bomb!”

It was clear they were engrossed in their card game. Zhang Yi casually walked in.

Inside, five or six soldiers were gathered around a table playing cards, while two others watched and occasionally chimed in. Someone glanced at Zhang Yi as he entered, casually remarking, “Isn’t it stuffy wearing a helmet?”

But since it was cold outside, wearing a helmet didn’t seem too strange.

Zhang Yi said nothing, walking quietly over to them. Everyone was too absorbed in their game to pay him any attention. The stakes were high—cigarettes, a rare luxury even at West Hill Base, had them all playing with fiery intensity.

In a flash, Zhang Yi activated his ability and drew out the Loong Roar Sword from his spatial dimension. The sword gleamed as it sliced through the air, instantly beheading two soldiers.

Their heads tumbled onto the table, disrupting the game. The six remaining soldiers, despite their shock, instinctively reached for their guns. But even the most well-trained soldiers couldn't match Zhang Yi's speed. Like a ghost, he darted forward, killing two more with swift strikes.

The last two survivors hadn't even pulled the trigger when a black shadow streaked past, tearing their throats open!

Hua Hua leapt gracefully onto the table, its eyes glowing with bloodlust. In a matter of moments, Zhang Yi and Hua Hua had slaughtered all six soldiers without giving them a chance to make a sound.

Zhang Yi stored the bodies and quickly cleaned up the blood. His waterproof combat suit made wiping off the blood easy. After finishing, he strolled out and headed to the next building.

The freezing cold kept most soldiers inside, making Xu Family Town eerily quiet—perfect for Zhang Yi's mission.

His next target was the communications unit's residence. These soldiers weren't combat experts but skilled in computer systems, responsible for maintaining contact with West Hill Base and managing various network issues for the Special Forces. Inside the room were two female soldiers and one man with gold-rimmed glasses.

As Zhang Yi entered, they saluted him without hesitation. He returned their gesture with a swift, painless death.

The process was simple: pretend to be an ally, activate his ability, kill, and clean up. Then move on to the next building.

One by one, Zhang Yi silently killed the West Hill Base Special Forces members. But after he had slain more than ten soldiers, the thick smell of blood began to stir the military dogs housed nearby. Their frenzied barking echoed through the village, alerting the remaining soldiers to the danger.

Chapter 292: The Gap in Power

The barking of the military dogs alerted the Special Forces Team soldiers. These highly trained dogs had an exceptional sense of awareness and would never bark without reason. If they were alarmed, there was surely danger.

Due to the severe cold, most animals had perished, and only cold-resistant sled dogs remained. They had become invaluable, serving multiple purposes. However, the sled dogs raised in Xu Family Town had been taken to help with tunnel digging, and the soldiers' military dogs were kept indoors to protect them.

Though all were dogs, there was a clear difference between those with official duties and those without.

“There’s something wrong. Go check it out!”

The remaining soldiers quickly geared up, grabbing their guns and leading the dogs out of the snow huts.

“Woof! Woof! Woof!”

The barking echoed throughout the small town. Hearing the commotion, the villagers cowered in fear inside their homes, too terrified to step outside.

The soldiers soon discovered that several of the snow huts were missing their comrades, and there were bloodstains hastily covered on the ground.

“Enemy attack! We’re under attack!”

“Alert positions now!”

A squad leader reported the situation via radio. The well-trained soldiers immediately took defensive positions, guns at the ready, prepared for any threat.

But none of them noticed that the enemy they were preparing for was dressed just like them and standing right behind them.

Zhang Yi didn't waste time on words. With a swift stroke of his sword, he killed two Special Forces soldiers in an instant. The Loong Roar Sword, forged from Adamantium, effortlessly sliced through their necks.

The others reacted quickly, spinning around and firing their guns. But Zhang Yi had already disappeared behind an ice hut.

He realized that the only distinguishing feature of the uniforms was the golden star on the shoulder, so he casually removed it. Then, with his ghostly movements, Zhang Yi vanished from their sight.

Before long, he infiltrated another squad from a different direction. With everyone tense and focused on the mysterious intruder, they all put on their tactical helmets. This made Zhang Yi even harder to spot—he blended in seamlessly, like a drop of water in the ocean.

"He's wearing our uniform!"

A squad leader shouted through the radio, "Everyone, be wary of anyone near you!"

Thus, a bizarre scene unfolded on the snowy roads of Xu Family Town: soldiers pointing guns at each other, unsure if the person beside them was a comrade or an enemy.

"Follow my command and use the covert hand signal!" The squad leader was sharp, knowing that while the uniforms were the same, outsiders wouldn't know the Special Forces' signals. Sure enough, as everyone followed the signal in unison, Zhang Yi, who did nothing, was instantly exposed.

All the soldiers aimed their guns at him. Without any orders, they instinctively pulled the triggers!

Gunfire erupted like a torrential downpour. But to their horror, the bullets seemed to disappear into thin air as they neared Zhang Yi, vanishing without a trace!

“He’s Zhang Yi! That’s Zhang Yi!” The name sent chills down the soldiers’ spines. This was the man who had caused them repeated losses and cost them over twenty comrades in a single battle!

Wasn’t he supposed to be hiding in the shelter? How did he get out, and why was he here?

Questions filled the soldiers’ minds, but there was no time to dwell on them. Their bullets had no effect on Zhang Yi. When they realized something was wrong and ceased fire, Zhang Yi sent the bullets flying back at them with a flick of his hand.

Though bullets didn’t work on Zhang Yi, they were still lethal to the soldiers. Even with bulletproof combat suits, the unrelenting hail of gunfire riddled the soldiers with holes, killing them in an instant!

The gunfire stirred Fatty Xu, who had been hiding at home, avoiding the harsh reality. He opened the window and looked out at the snow-covered streets, only to witness a scene all too familiar to him.

“Boss!”

Fatty Xu’s eyes widened in disbelief. He rubbed his eyes, thinking he was seeing things.

“There’s no mistake, that power—Boss is here!”

Fatty Xu felt a surge of emotion. “Is he here to take me away?”

Sometimes, a bit of confidence could make life much more pleasant.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi continued his battle with the Special Forces soldiers. With their own bullets, he had already eliminated seven or eight soldiers.

The remaining soldiers hid behind the bodies of their fallen comrades, quickly taking cover in the snow huts. Among the crowd, Zhang Yi noticed two shadowy figures moving like ghosts. The sensation was all too familiar to him—it was the same ability as Liu Ziyang and the others. Cyborgs.

A squad leader named Liu Tao shouted to his team, "Stop shooting! His ability nullifies bullets! Use melee weapons!"

Hearing this, Zhang Yi's lips curled into a mocking smile.

Nullifies human bodies? Are you sure about that?

It's true that his spatial dimension couldn't actively absorb living beings, but that didn't mean close combat could hurt him.

In a split second, several Special Forces soldiers wielding military daggers charged at Zhang Yi from all directions! The two from the left front and right rear were clearly enhanced cyborgs, moving at lightning speed!

A glint of determination flashed in Zhang Yi's eyes. His spatial gate could only open in one direction, making it tricky to face attacks from multiple angles. But he wasn't alone.

Ignoring the rear attack, Zhang Yi opened a dimensional gate in front of him. Meanwhile, behind him, the two soldiers with daggers suddenly found themselves under a massive shadow!

With two massive paws, Hua Hua slammed them to the ground! When it came to speed, cats were second to none!

As for the two soldiers in front of Zhang Yi, they were quickly sucked into the spatial dimension. Zhang Yi shut the gate, and after a bit more time inside, they would be dead.

Behind him, Hua Hua, now in its giant form, picked up the two soldiers and casually crunched them in its jaws. Even enhanced cyborgs were too weak to face a true mutated beast.

The remaining soldiers were already terrified. Faced with such overwhelming power, they lost the will to fight and scattered in all directions.

Pursuit wasn't Zhang Yi's specialty. "Hua Hua," he called.

Without needing further instructions, Hua Hua eagerly chased after the fleeing soldiers. Cats loved to toy with their prey.

Before long, anguished screams echoed from all directions of Xu Family Town. Blood and bodies littered the streets.

Zhang Yi had wiped out every single Special Forces soldier stationed in the town!

Wasting no time, Zhang Yi quickly found Liang Yue's house, placing a chip and a phone card beneath her bed. After completing this task, he knew he couldn't stay there much longer. He quickly left the room.

"Hua Hua, we're leaving!"

The gunfire had likely alerted those across the river. In five minutes at most, Ling Feng and the others would be back. Zhang Yi had no intention of facing off against several powerful Superhuman captains.

Zhang Yi always played it safe, striking only when he had the upper hand!

Hua Hua returned to its smaller form, and the two quickly left Xu Family Town. They had taken a long detour to avoid detection when arriving, and they planned to do the same when leaving.

Just as they were about to retrieve their snow vehicle and depart, a familiar voice called from behind.

"Boss, wait up!"

Hearing this voice, Zhang Yi paused, frowning as he turned to see Fatty Xu panting as he ran over.

"What's wrong with you? Chasing me down now could expose our connection!" Zhang Yi scolded.

Fatty Xu, gasping for breath, finally reached Zhang Yi and blurted, "Boss, you came here to get me, right?"

Zhang Yi shot him a look, letting him figure it out on his own.

Fatty Xu felt a twinge of disappointment but quickly smiled. "Haha, I knew you wanted to see me! Right?"

"Get back home. I don't have time to chat. If they come back, we'll both be in trouble," Zhang Yi said indifferently.

Fatty Xu hurriedly added, "But Boss, you killed so many soldiers. When they return, they'll be furious! I think it's dangerous to stay here."

Zhang Yi stared at him. "So, you've decided to leave with me?"

Fatty Xu's ability was useful, and Zhang Yi considered keeping him as a subordinate.

Fatty Xu hesitated briefly. "I still want to take a few people with me."

Zhang Yi's expression grew impatient. "I don't have time to waste here. Either come with me now, or figure out your own way to find me later."

He tossed Fatty Xu a new phone. Through Liang Yue, Zhang Yi had learned why Fatty Xu hadn't been able to contact him lately.

With that, Zhang Yi pulled out the snow vehicle, and with Hua Hua, he sped away from Xu Family Town.

Fatty Xu stood there, torn, watching the snow vehicle disappear into the distance. His cowardly nature told him that the death of so many soldiers would bring a massive storm. He knew he couldn't stay here any longer. He had to leave!

Resolutely, Fatty Xu headed toward Xu Lili's house. He needed to convince her to leave with him so they could find a safe place and live out their lives in happiness.

"Lili will definitely want to leave with me!" Fatty Xu thought confidently.

Soon, he arrived outside Xu Lili's snow hut. But just as he was about to knock, he heard voices from inside.

Chapter 293: The Furious Ling Feng

Fatty Xu stopped outside Xu Lili's house.

He was eager to tell Xu Lili how dangerous Xu Family Town had become, with no one knowing what the enraged special forces might do. He wanted to take Xu Lili away from here. However, he realized that he hadn't gotten Zhang Yi's permission to bring anyone along. Even if he could take someone, how many could he take? If he only took Xu Lili, what would happen to her family?

As Fatty Xu was mulling over these thoughts, the voices of Xu Lili and her family floated out from inside the snow house.

"Mom, so many people have died outside. Will we be okay?"

"Silly girl, why would anything happen to us? Didn't you see? They're killing each other."

"This has nothing to do with us. They have to be reasonable. We've treated them well with good food and drink; we'll be fine."

"That's right. Maybe I should go find that fatty. If I say a few nice words, he'll definitely protect us."

“True, that fatty may be a bit dumb, but he’s capable and can keep our family safe.”

“Lili, why don’t you marry him?”

“What???”

Xu Lili’s voice suddenly turned sharp.

“Mom, what nonsense are you talking about? He’s fat and ugly! If you all hadn’t pressured me to cozy up to him, I wouldn’t have bothered speaking to him.”

Outside the snow house, Fatty Xu’s heart felt like it was being stabbed with a knife. Is this how Xu Lili really saw him? He wasn’t the hero she thought he was after all!

The conversation inside continued.

“You don’t get it. Marriage is about living life. Sure, he’s not great, but he can keep all of us alive.”

“Forget it. If I had to sleep in the same bed as him, I’d have nightmares every night.”

“I’d puke just looking at that greasy, fat face!”

“But if you don’t sweet-talk him, how will he protect us?”

“Don’t worry, Mom. That idiot is dumb as a rock. If I show him just a little kindness, he’ll be over the moon.”

“Fat shut-ins are the easiest to deal with. Their heads are full of fantasies. As long as a woman shows them the slightest affection, they’ll practically hand you their hearts.”

Outside, Fatty Xu's heart turned cold. All the wonderful fantasies he once had shattered in that moment.

At that point, they noticed him standing outside.

Xu Lili's mother looked a bit awkward. "Oh... Chunlei, you're here! Come in and sit for a while."

Xu Lili's face changed slightly when she saw Fatty Xu, but since their conversation had been exposed, she didn't bother pretending anymore. Instead, her expression turned haughty.

Fatty Xu forced a smile. "No, Auntie. I just need to have a word with Lili. Could you ask her to come out?"

Xu Lili's mother nudged her, and only then did Xu Lili step out of the snow house. She fixed her hair and, trying to ensure that Fatty Xu would continue to protect her family, put on her sweetest smile.

"Chunlei, when did you get here?"

"Oh, I just arrived."

Fatty Xu stared at the sweet-smiling girl before him, feeling dazed. He couldn't believe that the vile words he had just heard had come from her cherry-red lips.

"Chunlei, is there something you wanted to talk about?"

Fatty Xu's lips felt bitter, but he didn't angrily storm off. After all, once you've fallen in love, it's hard to give up on the dream.

"Lili, you should come with me. It's not safe in the village anymore. So many people have died. There could be even more danger."

Fatty Xu urged.

Xu Lili smiled lightly, “Chunlei, where could we go even if we left the village?”

Fatty Xu didn’t mention that he was planning to find Zhang Yi.

“If you trust me, I’ll take you out of here. Don’t worry, as long as I’m around, I’ll make sure you’re safe!”

Given his abilities, they could probably find shelter in a snow-covered supermarket. Even if they didn’t meet up with Zhang Yi, he could still survive. The snow-covered world was his domain.

Xu Lili was silent for a few seconds before smiling apologetically. “Sorry, Chunlei! Isn’t this a bit too reckless? This isn’t some romance drama. Why act like we’re eloping?”

Her warm smile and the pity in her eyes deeply wounded Fatty Xu. It was like a grown woman comforting a naive boy.

It was a gaze from someone looking down from a high place.

Even at that moment, Fatty Xu couldn’t let go of his fantasy. He tried to explain, “But so many soldiers have died. What do you think will happen when those people come back?”

Xu Lili thought for a moment and nonchalantly said, “That has nothing to do with us, does it? It shouldn’t affect us.”

Then she stepped closer, smiling as she took Fatty Xu’s hand. Gazing up at him pitifully, she said, “Even if we do face danger, Chunlei, you’ll protect us, won’t you?”

Fatty Xu’s body stiffened. He didn’t know what he said or did afterward. He probably just nodded numbly and watched Xu Lili return to the house.

But when he snapped out of it, he immediately turned and ran out of the village. He had to get out of there, to find Zhang Yi, or maybe just hide like an ostrich.

He feared death, so he had a keen sense for danger.

After all, he was Zhang Yi's undercover agent. It was only a matter of time before he was discovered.

Run!

Running away may be cowardly, but it works.

As for Xu Lili... to hell with her!

Fatty Xu ran as he called Zhang Yi.

“Boss, I’ve made up my mind. I’m going back with you!”

Across the river, Ling Feng was leading a group of team leader-level Superhumans and some special forces soldiers to carry out routine harassment of the shelter, while also overseeing the Xu Family Town villagers as they worked.

Suddenly, a barrage of gunfire erupted from Xu Family Town, attracting attention across the river. Both the special forces soldiers and the working villagers instinctively turned to look.

“Gunshots... from the village?”

“Could someone be setting off firecrackers?”

“Impossible! Who’d be dumb enough to set off firecrackers in times like these?”

Ling Feng's expression immediately grew serious when he heard the gunshots. Gunfire meant trouble in Xu Family Town. But Zhang Yi had been trapped in the shelter and couldn't possibly have caused it. So where did it come from? Could there be other forces nearby that West Hill Base hadn't discovered?

Ling Feng immediately ordered someone to contact the people in Xu Family Town to find out what had happened. A team member used the communicator to make contact, but all the soldiers in the village had already been killed, so no one answered.

The team member reported back to Ling Feng, and his expression darkened.

The special forces operated under strict discipline, and failing to respond to a communication was unheard of unless they were overwhelmed by force.

"Let's go back and see what happened!"

Ling Feng left Shi Dayong and others behind to continue harassing the shelter, to prevent Zhang Yi from noticing anything unusual. Then he took five soldiers and sped back to Xu Family Town on sleds.

As they crossed the river, they encountered a bloody corpse at the village entrance. The body was mangled, as if crushed by something massive. Blood had dyed the ground red, freezing into chunks of crimson ice. The corpse's right hand was stretched toward the riverbank, as if there was some terrifying monster in the village.

Ling Feng's eyes sharpened immediately.

"Stay alert!"

He ordered his men to raise their guns, all of them warily watching the surroundings. But Ling Feng himself strode boldly into the village.

By now, Zhang Yi had already fled far away.

Corpses of soldiers were scattered along the village roads, blood splattered everywhere in a gruesome display. The sight was too horrific to bear.

Villagers stood at the side of the road, chattering among themselves as they pointed at the bodies. When they saw Ling Feng and his men return, they quickly stepped aside.

As Ling Feng walked through the village, his expression grew darker and darker, bloodshot veins forming in his eyes.

Dead. More dead!

These longtime comrades, these brothers, had once again died in front of him!

Ling Feng had brought a total of fifty men with him, along with the dozen or so from the rescue team, making over sixty people. The failed explosion outside the shelter had already killed twenty-two of them. Now, all the soldiers left behind in Xu Family Town were dead. Aside from the captains, there were only thirteen soldiers left by his side!

Such heavy losses! And these weren't just any soldiers; they were the elite of West Hill Base. How would he ever explain this to Chen Xinian?

Ling Feng walked to the bloodiest part of the battlefield, his eyes filled with killing intent as he looked down at the familiar faces of his fallen comrades.

“Ahhhh!!!”

Unable to contain his rage, Ling Feng let out a roar that surged outward in a wave, stirring up the falling snow. Nearby villagers were knocked to the ground by the force of his voice.

“Who did this? Who killed my brothers?!”

Ling Feng's bloodshot eyes swept across the village as

he shot forward, grabbing an old man by the neck.

“Tell me! Who did this?!”

The old man was terrified, stammering incoherently, unable to form a complete sentence.

“Crack!”

With a squeeze, Ling Feng snapped the man’s neck like he was crushing a rubber doll, tearing his head clean off.

The villagers stared in disbelief before breaking into terrified screams and fleeing for their lives.

“Don’t run! If anyone runs, I’ll kill them!”

Ling Feng’s fury had almost obliterated his reason after watching his soldiers die twice in a row. The sight of the panicked villagers only filled him with disgust.

In a few quick flashes, Ling Feng turned seven or eight villagers into piles of gore, crushing them like clay figures.

Desperate to vent his emotions, Ling Feng held nothing back. These ordinary people were as fragile as mud in his hands.

The villagers of Xu Family Town died without ever understanding why. They had done nothing wrong, yet they were slaughtered by the very soldiers they had treated so kindly.

Chapter 294: Suspicion

Ling Feng slaughtered the villagers of Xu Family Town without restraint.

By now, he had completely lost his sanity, and only through killing and bloodshed could he vent his inner frenzy.

When he finally felt a slight relief in his emotions, the ground was already littered with broken corpses.

In his hand, he held two halves of a body, drenched in blood, resembling a demon that had just emerged from hell.

Meanwhile, the villagers were being forced by other special forces soldiers, not allowed to flee.

Ling Feng glanced at the trembling villagers and suddenly felt like he might have gone too far.

He quickly explained, "Look at you all. I just wanted to ask if you saw the culprit. Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"You know I've lost so many brothers, and I'm in a terrible mood!"

"It's all right now, no need to be afraid."

Although Ling Feng felt a bit guilty for killing so many villagers, he justified it by reminding himself that his actions were driven by the deaths of his comrades.

With a stern face, he asked the villagers again, "Now, tell me honestly! You must have seen the battle in the village. Who's the culprit?"

The villagers, staring at the suddenly furious Ling Feng, saw only a monster before them, too scared to respond.

Ling Feng, furious, shouted, "If you don't speak, it means you're guilty! If so, then the entire town will die with you!"

At that, one villager finally blurted out, "I saw them killing each other!"

Ling Feng's eyebrows shot up, "You're lying!"

He strode over, grabbed the man by the neck, and lifted him off the ground.

"Our men would never turn on each other! Are you hiding something? Do you want me to kill you?!"

The elderly man's legs flailed as his face turned red from the lack of air. He was on the brink of death.

His daughter couldn't take it anymore and cried out, "My father is telling the truth! The killer was wearing clothes just like yours."

"But he killed everyone else by himself. Oh, and he had a strange cat that could grow as big as a house!"

Ling Feng's eyes widened, "A Superhuman?"

He tossed the old man aside and pulled the woman over, pointing at her, "Listen, I'm a fair man. As long as you tell the truth, I won't kill you."

The irony of his words was palpable.

As if the murders he just committed were somehow justified.

The woman, trembling, recounted what she had seen. However, the villagers had been too scared to watch closely, and she hadn't seen much of the fight.

Fortunately, other villagers chipped in to fill the gaps in her story.

After hearing their account, Ling Feng stood in shock, taking two steps back in disbelief.

"A spatial ability... it must be Zhang Yi! But isn't he supposed to be in the shelter? How did he get out?"

Shen Hong, standing nearby, approached and said, "Captain, could there be another exit?"

Ling Feng's eyes lit up, "Yes, that must be it! A proper shelter can't have just one way in."

"Our shelter, for example, has at least two escape routes, not to mention the private ones for Chen Xinian."

"If we find that path, we can storm the shelter!"

"D*mn Zhang Yi! You killed so many of my brothers and all those villagers from Xu Family Town. I will kill you!"

After his outburst, Ling Feng addressed the villagers again, "Remember this, it wasn't me, Ling Feng, who killed your loved ones today. It was Zhang Yi! He's to blame for all of this."

"I will avenge you!"

The villagers, heads bowed, dared not speak, but in their hearts, they saw Ling Feng as an even more terrifying monster than Zhang Yi.

At least Zhang Yi had only retaliated after being provoked.

But Ling Feng and his special forces team from West Hill Base?

They had done everything they could to accommodate these people, only to be treated like animals by Ling Feng's group.

Now they were filled with regret, but it was far too late.

They had no strength to fight back against the special forces.

Ling Feng immediately ordered his soldiers to search for traces of Zhang Yi's escape.

The heavy snow outside would surely leave marks wherever someone had passed through.

By following them, they could find Zhang Yi's route, and therefore, the secret passage.

At that moment, Zhang Yi had already left Xu Family Town, taking Fatty Xu with him.

Before heading back, Zhang Yi wanted to confirm if Fatty Xu had truly let go of all ties to the town and its people.

"Fatty, think carefully. Once you enter the shelter, you must obey my orders unconditionally."

"Are you really willing to abandon Xu Lili?"

Hearing Xu Lili's name, Fatty Xu clenched his fists tightly, tears suddenly spilling from his eyes. He shouted, "Of course, I can! Women in the real world can't be trusted. I will never believe in love again!"

"That's the spirit."

Zhang Yi started up the snowmobile and took a detour back to the entrance of the mountain passage.

Opening the door, he led Fatty Xu and Hua Hua inside.

Fatty Xu, looking cautiously over his shoulder, asked, "Boss, the tire tracks are pretty obvious. Won't this passage be discovered?"

Zhang Yi gave him a sideways glance, "If they're not complete idiots, they'll definitely find it."

Fatty Xu grew nervous, "That's not good! If they attack through here, we're done for!"

A sly smile crept onto Zhang Yi's face.

"I'm counting on them to come."

Fatty Xu blinked, then quickly understood, "Ah, Boss, you've set a trap for them here!"

"I never fight a battle I'm not prepared for."

Zhang Yi led Fatty Xu to the alloy door. After a complex unlocking procedure, they entered the shelter.

...

Meanwhile, Ling Feng's group quickly found the snowmobile tracks.

Shen Hong, eager for revenge, gritted his teeth and said, "Captain, let's go! Let's kill that b*stard Zhang Yi!"

But Ling Feng remained calm, "We've fought him enough times—have you ever seen him make a mistake?"

"He's an extremely dangerous opponent. He wouldn't leave such obvious tracks unless he had something else planned."

Shen Hong nodded in agreement.

"But we can't miss this chance. In half a day, the snow will cover the tracks, and we'll never find that passage again!"

Ling Feng paused for a moment, his voice cold and heavy with sorrow.

"We can't afford more losses."

Out of their 60-strong elite team, more than 50 had already been killed.

The remaining ten or so were either Superhumans, cyborgs, or engineers responsible for overseeing the project.

The loss of any one of them was more significant than losing thirty regular soldiers.

Ling Feng stood up and said, "Call everyone back."

Shen Hong was taken aback, "But our tunnel project is still underway. Are we just going to stop?"

Ling Feng shot him a deep look, "Think about it. Why did Zhang Yi dare to leave his shelter and attack our base?"

Shen Hong frowned and started thinking.

Moments later, his eyes widened in shock.

"Captain, you mean there's a traitor among us?"

"Someone leaked our information to Zhang Yi, allowing him to attack us while our defenses were down!"

Ling Feng's eyes were dark and sharp. "Exactly. Otherwise, given his cautious nature, he'd never have left the shelter."

"And if our plans have been leaked, do you think digging that tunnel is still worth it?"

Shen Hong's breathing grew rapid.

Did that mean all their work over the past two weeks had been in vain?

The only silver lining was that they hadn't wasted their own time—Xu Family Town's villagers had done all the digging.

Wait, hold on!

Shen Hong suddenly realized something and blurted out, "But who could the traitor be?"

They had searched all the villagers in Xu Family Town, confiscating any communication devices they found.

Even if someone had tried to hide something, the special forces had scanned them with detection devices.

And the villagers had no reason or means to communicate with Zhang Yi, given their deep grudge against him.

Could the traitor be one of the special forces?

But most of the special forces were already dead. Could it be someone among the ten survivors?

A name instantly came to Shen Hong's mind.

The most suspicious person, without a doubt, was Liang Yue, who had joined the special forces not too long ago.

After all, she had publicly opposed Ling Feng's plan and wasn't particularly close to anyone in the squad.

The more he thought about it, the more suspicious she seemed.

Shen Hong whispered to Ling Feng, "Could it be Liang Yue?"

Ling Feng narrowed his eyes, "We'll know once we call them back!"

As long as they got hold of Liang Yue's phone and had the tech team inspect it, the truth would come out.

Even if she had deleted the communication records, they could recover everything.

It would be impossible for her to hide.

Ling Feng issued an order for everyone across the river to return to Xu Family Town immediately.

The group across the river had already heard the gunfire and knew something was up, so they rushed back.

Liang Yue was puzzled, but she had no knowledge of Zhang Yi's plan. She only sensed that something wasn't right.

On the way back, she quietly hid the phone she had used to contact Zhang Yi in the hollow of a dead tree.

Chapter 295: The Constant-Temperature Grill

The people on the other side of the river returned to Xu Family Town.

Seeing the bloody and cruel scene before them, everyone was stunned.

The villagers of Xu Family Town cried to the heavens in despair; many of their relatives had died at Ling Feng's hands.

On the side of the Special Forces Team, the atmosphere was equally tense.

Shi Dayong's veins bulged with rage, and he almost lost control of his fury, nearly transforming into an ice-giant ape to wreak havoc.

Most of their comrades had been wiped out, yet they hadn't even managed to touch Zhang Yi. It was an utter humiliation!

Meanwhile, Ling Feng and his group walked up to Liang Yue, their eyes filled with a bone-chilling coldness.

"Teacher Liang, could you hand over your phone for me to check?" Ling Feng asked.

As soon as he said this, the atmosphere grew tense.

Everyone understood why Ling Feng asked this—it was clear he suspected Liang Yue had tipped off Zhang Yi.

Liang Yue frowned. "Captain Ling, are you accusing me?"

Her heart was already a bit anxious, but her excellent warrior training allowed her to maintain outward calm.

Fortunately, when she had contacted Zhang Yi, she hadn't used her usual phone.

Ling Feng said, "We've lost so many people, and yet Zhang Yi had the nerve to come out and attack our rear. There must be a mole informing him!"

Liang Yue sneered and took her phone out of her pocket, handing it over without hesitation.

"If you want to check, go ahead!"

After handing over her phone, she stood aside with a Tang Sword in her arms, her face still cold and silent.

Her brazen attitude made Ling Feng and the others suspicious.

Could they have been wrong?

At that moment, Shi Dayong looked around in surprise. "Hey, where's that Fatty Xu?"

Fatty Xu had superpowers and had been a quasi-member of their Special Forces Team. He was supposed to be taken back to West Hill Base once this mission was over.

Shi Dayong asked because they hadn't seen Fatty Xu since they returned.

Hearing this, Ling Feng immediately sensed something was wrong.

"Where's Xu Chunlei? Where is he?"

They quickly called for Xu Dongtang.

"Old Xu, where's your grandson?"

Ling Feng stared into his eyes as he asked.

At this moment, Xu Dongtang felt a deep sorrow.

Upon returning, they had found many villagers dead in gruesome ways, their bodies mangled beyond recognition.

At first, they thought it was an external invasion, but upon asking around, they learned it had been Ling Feng who caused this!

Xu Dongtang didn't answer Ling Feng's question. Instead, he summoned the courage to meet his gaze.

"Captain Ling, our Xu Family Town has treated you well, so why did you kill our kin?"

Ling Feng was taken aback. "I didn't kill them! It was Zhang Yi who caused their deaths. Old Xu, you're usually pretty smart, so why are you being so muddle-headed now?"

He continued, "It's simple logic! If Zhang Yi hadn't come and killed my brothers, and if you Xu Family people hadn't known and kept quiet, I wouldn't have been so angry!"

"So, you should blame Zhang Yi."

"If you cooperate with me, I'll deal with Zhang Yi and avenge your people!"

Ling Feng spoke with such righteous conviction, even appearing to exude a sense of justice.

It wasn't just a defense; he truly believed he was in the right.

Xu Dongtang's lips trembled with anger. How could anyone reason with such a person?

He suddenly recalled Fatty Xu's earlier warning.

Trusting the people from West Hill Base too much could bring disaster to Xu Family Town.

And now, he began to doubt—was this organization really just?

Xu Dongtang was already regretting his earlier choices, but it was too late to turn back.

The wolves had entered the sheepfold, and they wouldn't leave until every last sheep was devoured.

"Hey, stop standing there like a fool! Where's Xu Chunlei?" Ling Feng pressed him.

Xu Dongtang, now frightened, stammered, "I—I don't know! Wasn't Chunlei one of yours? He's been with you all the time. How would I know where he went?"

Ling Feng took a deep breath. "Everyone, find him for me!"

If someone had disappeared right after Zhang Yi's attack, then that person was likely the mole.

And if that person happened to be a superhuman, the possibility was even greater.

Soon, they found a lead.

It was Xu Lili who reported Fatty Xu.

She admitted that she knew Fatty Xu was planning to leave Xu Family Town, but she didn't know where he had gone.

At this point, the truth was clear.

The mole who had tipped off Zhang Yi was Fatty Xu!

Ling Feng, enraged, smashed a snow hut with his fist.

"That traitor! I'm going to kill him!"

Liang Yue secretly breathed a sigh of relief.

Fatty Xu had certainly left with Zhang Yi, which made him her scapegoat.

Her own suspicions were now washed away.

Yet, she still stood coldly, arms folded, not saying a word.

Ling Feng grabbed Xu Dongtang, his face filled with confusion as he asked, "Didn't you say your village has a blood feud with Zhang Yi? Why would there be a traitor collaborating with him?"

Xu Dongtang knew some of the inside story.

The peace agreement with Zhang Yi had actually been Fatty Xu's doing.

But in order to take the credit, he had told everyone that he had negotiated the deal.

Thus, no one else knew about Fatty Xu's connection with Zhang Yi.

Now, there was no way he could reveal the truth.

Otherwise, Ling Feng would surely kill him!

He could only say, "That Xu Chunlei is a coward, always fearful for his life. There's nothing strange about him doing something like this. Captain Ling, this has nothing to do with the rest of us!"

"We hate Zhang Yi to the core. We'd never help him."

Ling Feng was almost certain now that Fatty Xu was the mole.

But capturing him would be difficult with their current manpower.

Besides, they had other pressing matters.

Ling Feng told Xu Dongtang, "If you really aren't working with Zhang Yi, then prove it to me with action!"

Xu Dongtang didn't understand what Ling Feng wanted.

Ling Feng ordered everyone in Xu Family Town to gather in the square.

About a thousand people were herded there by a dozen Special Forces members like sheep. None dared resist.

Ling Feng randomly selected one hundred of them.

"You people come with me for something important. If it goes well, I'll credit you with a great achievement!"

"The rest of you stay here and carry on as usual."

Because of their limited manpower and fear that more people might be picked off by Zhang Yi, Ling Feng decided to take all the Special Forces Team members with him.

As for the hundred villagers, he had special plans for them.

As for the rest, he wasn't worried about them escaping.

In this frozen world, without adequate preparation, running away was as good as suicide.

Right now, Xu Family Town was a natural prison for its villagers.

After a moment of thought, Ling Feng walked over to Liang Yue, who still wore an unhappy expression.

He explained, "I know you're upset, but we've lost too many brothers. I have to investigate everyone with even a hint of suspicion. It's not just you—everyone will be checked."

The Special Forces Team had lost too many people. The few who remained were precious, especially top fighters like Liang Yue. Ling Feng needed to win her over.

Liang Yue, her face cold, replied, "I understand."

Ling Feng nodded. "Good. Let's head out together. If we're lucky, we'll find a weak spot in that shelter!"

The group left Xu Family Town, following the tracks left by a snow vehicle.

Zhang Yi had taken a long detour, about five kilometers west.

He had a snow vehicle, but Ling Feng's team didn't have enough for everyone.

The Special Forces Team members used sleds, while the villagers had to walk.

After two and a half hours, they reached the back mountain and stopped before a large tombstone.

"So, this is it!"

Ling Feng calculated the position of the tombstone relative to the shelter and confirmed it was the right place.

Immediately, he ordered the villagers to open the tombstone.

The villagers were haggard, exhausted, and starving, but they didn't dare complain and went to work

Soon, they uncovered the hidden door disguised as a tombstone, revealing a deep, narrow passage below.

Ling Feng said to the villagers, "You go ahead and scout it out for me."

He'd been tricked by Zhang Yi too many times and was wary of another trap.

The villagers silently cursed him in their hearts but didn't dare resist. They obediently entered the passage.

A Special Forces member handed them a communication device to take inside so they could monitor everything from outside.

One by one, a hundred villagers entered the underground passage.

Inside, the place was impressively constructed. Lights automatically came on as they walked, and the walls were made of special silver-gray metal, looking incredibly sturdy.

The only downside was that it was too narrow, giving the feeling of a tomb.

The villagers cautiously moved forward like sheep being driven into a pen.

Outside, Ling Feng and his team monitored everything with their instruments.

At first, everything was calm. The villagers slowly advanced, and nothing happened.

But when they reached the middle of the passage, a loud rumble sounded.

Two metal walls slammed down from above, cutting off their front and back.

The villagers panicked and screamed.

Moments later, Ling Feng and his team watched in horror as a fiery inferno erupted from the walls, surging forward like a dragon.

"Ahhh!!!"

Screams filled the air, and then the video feed cut off.

"Zhang Yi, you vicious bastard! He really did leave a trap behind!"

Ling Feng clenched his teeth.

If he hadn't been smart enough to send the Xu Family villagers to scout, he would've lost even more of his men.

Chapter 296 : Does Love Disappear?

The agonizing screams echoed through the passage. Though the video feed had cut off, the sound traveled clearly to the entrance.

Liang Yue felt a twinge of pity for the villagers who died so miserably. But after everything she had seen since leaving Tianqing Academy, her heart had grown numb and cold.

Human minds have a remarkable ability to adapt.

What was once unbearable becomes routine over time.

Shi Dayong asked Ling Feng, "Boss, what do we do now? This path is obviously a dead end."

Ling Feng replied coldly, "If we can't use it, then blow it up! If we can't get in, he won't be able to get out either!"

They had come prepared, bringing the remaining explosives.

At this moment, Liang Yue suddenly spoke, "Are you sure explosives will work? What if, instead of sealing it off, you end up delivering the explosives to him and he uses them against us?"

Her words made Ling Feng and Shi Dayong furrow their brows.

Yes, they couldn't dismiss that possibility.

At that moment, Zheng Xuerong walked over, casually suggesting, "That's easy to solve! Just block the passage so he can't come out."

She stepped to the passage entrance, a slight smile on her face, and crouched down, placing her right hand on the ground.

"Ice Freeze!"

A deep blue light enveloped her hand. The swirling snowflakes in the air froze for a moment, then surged toward the passage as if guided by an unseen force.

A thick layer of frost quickly spread across the silver-gray metal walls.

As the ice crept deeper into the tunnel, the intense heat inside melted it into water.

Before long, those standing outside, including Ling Feng, heard the sound of water rushing.

"Brilliant, simply brilliant! Now Zhang Yi has no way to leave the base through here!" Engineer Wu couldn't help but applaud.

"This passage descends downward. As the water floods it and cools down, it will freeze solid, sealing it shut. Zhang Yi won't be able to open this door again."

"And even if he tries to melt the ice with heat, it won't help."

"Marvelous!"

Engineer Wu was full of praise.

Zheng Xuerong smiled proudly, "It's just a little trick."

But Ling Feng showed no sign of joy.

While they had sealed Zhang Yi's secret escape route, they still had no way to breach the shelter.

Without capturing Zhang Yi, they couldn't complete the mission for West Hill Base, nor could they avenge the deaths of over fifty Special Forces Team members.

As captain, Ling Feng remained furious and anxious.

"We don't just want to block him in. We need to break through his shell and destroy him completely!"

Liang Yue remained silent, observing coldly to see if they could come up with another plan.

Meanwhile, Fatty Xu had already left Xu Family Town with Zhang Yi. She knew she had to be even more cautious in her actions, ensuring she wasn't exposed.

The others were silent as well, deep in thought. Every method they had considered had failed, and the Special Forces Team had suffered heavy losses. With only a handful of men left, how could they hope to fight Zhang Yi?

Unable to come up with a solution, the group decided to return to Xu Family Town to rest and reconsider their strategy.

When they arrived back at the town, the villagers noticed that the hundred men who had left with them hadn't returned and asked Ling Feng where they had gone.

Ling Feng coldly replied, "Zhang Yi killed them all."

Once again, Xu Family Town was filled with the wails of grieving families. In a single day, countless households had lost loved ones.

Ling Feng then ordered, "We're hungry. Prepare food and bring it to us. Don't waste any time!"

At this point, he had no interest in pretending anymore.

These villagers had no power to resist, so there was no need to put on a façade.

As expected, though the villagers cried and hated them, they still obediently served them.

That night, the villagers tore white cloth from their homes, hastily burned the bodies of their relatives, and held a simple mourning ceremony.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the river, within the shelter, a lively welcome banquet was taking place.

Perhaps because it had been so long since they had seen outsiders, everyone warmly welcomed Fatty Xu's arrival—at least outwardly.

Yang Siyah and Zhou Ke'er had prepared a lavish dinner, and Zhang Yi had brought out several bottles of fine wine he had been saving.

Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran, having already met him before, weren't strangers to him either.

When Fatty Xu arrived at the shelter, he was in complete shock, just like everyone else.

In the harsh, apocalyptic world outside, they lived in palatial homes and enjoyed delicious food, an almost obscene display of luxury.

Especially Zhang Yi, who was surrounded by beautiful women—truly a winner in life!

Fatty Xu's admiration for Zhang Yi grew even deeper.

If someone wasn't extraordinary, how could they live such a carefree life in the apocalypse?

However, in the presence of these beauties, Fatty Xu was extremely nervous, barely able to speak properly.

It wasn't surprising. Even in front of a relatively plain woman like Xu Lili, he would get so excited he could hardly control himself.

Let alone now, when Zhang Yi's women were all stunning, exceptionally talented beauties.

But despite their beauty, Fatty Xu felt a certain fear when he saw them.

Having just suffered the blow of heartbreak, he had lost all faith in real-life relationships.

"The more beautiful a woman is, the more she likes to deceive people!"

Fatty Xu firmly believed this.

Instead of wasting energy trying to connect with real women, he figured it was better to spend more time watching anime.

At least the girls in anime would never lie to him.

Zhang Yi handed him a wine glass, clinking it with his.

“Fatty, since you’re here now, we’re partners from now on. Whatever enemies we face, you need to fight them with all you’ve got.”

Zhang Yi smiled as he spoke to Fatty Xu.

This guy had great abilities, but he was timid and had no idea how to harness them.

But now that Fatty Xu had become Zhang Yi’s follower, Zhang Yi would help him develop his powers, turning him into a valuable asset.

Fatty Xu chuckled awkwardly, “I know, I know! There’s no such thing as a free lunch in this world!”

He may be a nerd, but he wasn’t stupid.

However, as they ate, Fatty Xu voiced a question that had been on his mind.

“Boss, besides me, do you have any other spies in Xu Family Town?”

“Oh? Why do you ask?”

Zhang Yi smiled as he looked at him.

Fatty Xu laughed nervously.

“Boss, I know your personality too well. You wouldn’t leave the shelter and take such a risk unless you were absolutely certain.”

“Unless you had a clear picture of what was happening in Xu Family Town.”

Zhang Yi didn’t hide it from him.

“Do you remember Teacher Liang from Tianqing Academy?”

The moment Zhang Yi mentioned this, Fatty Xu slapped his thigh in excitement.

“I knew it! I guessed it was her, and I was right!”

Not just Zhang Yi, but the other women at the table also looked at him curiously.

“How did you guess?”

Fatty Xu grinned, “It was simple. When we went to Tianqing Academy to rescue people, we met her.”

“Later, she followed the people from West Hill Base to Xu Family Town. When I saw her, I was scared to death because she knew about my relationship with the boss.”

“But she acted like she didn’t know me at all and didn’t tell anyone about me.”

“So I figured she wasn’t truly loyal to West Hill Base. If anyone was your mole, it had to be her!”

Zhang Yi gave Fatty Xu a look of appreciation. “You’re smarter than you look! Cheers to that!”

“Haha, thanks, boss!”

Overjoyed by the praise, Fatty Xu downed his glass of wine.

Everyone was in high spirits, though not because they were particularly happy about Fatty Xu’s arrival.

It was more that his arrival gave them an excuse to drink.

Fatty Xu drank with gusto. The wine wasn't very strong, and at first, he felt fine.

But after a while, the alcohol kicked in.

He became tipsy, swaying in his seat, his face flushed, laughing one moment, then suddenly bursting into tears.

"I thought she liked me, but she made a fool of me. I was wrong, love really does disappear, doesn't it?"

"How lame!"

Yang Xinxin sipped her wine and offered a disdainful comment.

Zhang Yi merely smiled and instructed Yang Siyah to prepare a room for Fatty Xu on the first underground floor.

As for himself and the other women, they lived on the second underground floor.

Letting Fatty Xu stay in the shelter was only temporary.

Zhang Yi didn't like having other men in his home, so this arrangement was only a stopgap.

Once they dealt with the situation at West Hill Base, Zhang Yi planned to move Fatty Xu to one of the nearby villas that hadn't been destroyed.

"What's your next move against me?"

Zhang Yi swirled the wine in his glass as he thought to himself.

He was ready for whatever came next. He had struck a major blow against the Special Forces Team from West Hill Base.

Their grand plan to dig a tunnel would have to be put on hold.

Zhang Yi was curious about their next steps, feeling both a bit anxious and eager.

People are always both fascinated and
fearful of the unknown.

“If only Liang Yue could get that chip back sooner.”

Zhang Yi glanced at Yang Xinxin with a smile.

She was sitting on the couch, wearing a black Lolita dress.

Apart from being unable to walk, she looked no different from a normal girl.

Her elegance, especially when sipping red wine, was timeless.

Yang Xinxin expressed her confidence in Liang Yue.

“This task won’t be difficult for Teacher Liang. Brother, don’t forget what she used to do.”

“If she was only skilled, she wouldn’t have been hired to guard that place.”

Chapter 297: Madness

Ling Feng and his men returned empty-handed, the atmosphere unusually heavy. No one wanted to speak.

Since they joined the army, they had never suffered such a humiliating defeat.

It wasn't because they lacked ability—circumstances had been too limiting.

Facing a fortress-like shelter, their outdated, half-century-old combat weapons were simply no match.

Even in military theory classes, tackling such a fortified stronghold required precision bombing, not solo infantry assaults.

But the conditions they faced left them with no choice. The mission had to be completed, so they pressed on, despite the odds.

Now, Ling Feng and his Special Forces Team had the skills but no way to use them.

That cold night, a giant full moon hung in the sky.

Since the apocalypse, it had been a long time since they'd seen such a bright moon.

Yet, the cold moonlight felt like salt rubbed into the wounds of Ling Feng and his men.

After returning to Xu Family Town, they quickly ate dinner. Ling Feng told everyone to rest but reminded them to stay alert and not sleep too soundly.

Everyone nodded, knowing they were not just guarding against Zhang Yi, but also the villagers of Xu Family Town, who could turn on them at any moment.

Liang Yue returned to her snow hut.

As soon as she reached the door, she frowned.

Someone had been in her room!

Since contacting Zhang Yi, she had always been on high alert, afraid her secret would be discovered.

So, she had set a few subtle traps in her room—anyone entering would leave traces.

Without showing any emotion, Liang Yue walked calmly inside.

After carefully checking her belongings, she realized someone had tampered with her bed.

She reached under the mattress and retrieved a dark gold chip and a silver SIM card.

“This is...”

Liang Yue suddenly recalled Zhang Yi asking her for the location of her room.

It dawned on her that this must have been left for her by Zhang Yi!

The chip was a storage device that would need to be plugged into a computer to access. The SIM card, likely for encrypted calls, would prevent West Hill Base from monitoring their conversations.

With Yang Xinxin’s computer skills, this level of encryption wouldn’t be difficult to achieve.

Her phone, however, was hidden in a crack of a dead tree on the other side of the river, so for now, she couldn’t contact Zhang Yi to ask about the chip.

She pocketed both the chip and the SIM card, planning to reach out to Zhang Yi as soon as she could retrieve her phone.

After that, she sat on her bed and fell asleep without undressing.

...

The next morning, Liang Yue got up and joined Ling Feng and the others for breakfast, as usual, to discuss their next steps.

However, the Special Forces Team's camp seemed eerily quiet today. She saw almost no one around.

It suddenly hit her—most of them had been killed by Zhang Yi, and only a dozen or so remained.

When Liang Yue reached the dining area, Ling Feng was talking to Xu Dongtang.

"Gather all your people. I need a favor from you," Ling Feng said.

Xu Dongtang's face turned pale, his lips dry, clearly reluctant.

"Captain Ling, what... what do you need us to do?"

Whenever Ling Feng sought him out, it was never good news.

Ling Feng coldly replied, "Just follow my instructions, and I'll tell you when the time comes. Now go!"

He waved Xu Dongtang away, signaling him not to disturb their breakfast.

Ling Feng wasn't worried about the villagers running off.

They could flee, but they couldn't escape their fate. Xu Family Town was the only place they could survive.

Leaving here would be suicide.

The town was already firmly in West Hill Base's grasp, with no room for escape.

Xu Dongtang, pale and trembling, left the room.

Liang Yue, her eyes flickering with helplessness, pushed aside her sympathy for the villagers and sat down to eat.

Breakfast was the same as usual—white steamed buns, pickles, and stewed fish, with hot rice porridge simmering in another pot.

They couldn't eat regular rice—it cooled too quickly.

Sitting beside the others, Liang Yue ate in silence, saying nothing.

Yesterday, Ling Feng and the others had already begun to suspect her, but Fatty Xu's betrayal had shifted their focus away.

However, with so many of the Special Forces members dead, Ling Feng was more paranoid than ever. He trusted no one but a few close confidants.

Naturally, that meant he didn't trust Liang Yue either.

After breakfast, Xu Dongtang gathered all the villagers in the town square, as instructed by Ling Feng.

When Ling Feng arrived, he quickly noticed some people were missing.

Most of the absent ones were women and children.

Clearly, the villagers, unsure of Ling Feng's intentions, had hidden them away.

Ling Feng didn't care. He simply addressed the crowd, "Yesterday, Xu Family Town suffered heavy losses due to an attack by the villain Zhang Yi!"

"As soldiers, we cannot let this go unchecked. But we are short on manpower and need your help."

"I'm asking for 100 volunteers to come with us across the river!"

As soon as he finished speaking, the villagers panicked.

Every time the Special Forces Team sought them out, it ended badly.

Their once peaceful and happy lives had been shattered over the past month. They were now constantly on the verge of starvation, living under the threat of death.

If it weren't for their fear of the Special Forces' weapons, they would have revolted long ago.

But after the first wave of rebels was killed, the rest had their spirits crushed. Unless the blade was at their throats, they didn't have the courage to fight back.

The crowd murmured, voicing their complaints quietly.

But Ling Feng ignored them. He simply instructed Xu Dongtang, "I'll leave it to you to gather 100 people. And make sure a few specific individuals come along."

He whispered a few names into Xu Dongtang's ear, and after some thought, Xu Dongtang reluctantly nodded.

From the back, Liang Yue silently observed, puzzled as to what Ling Feng was plotting now.

But she knew that whatever it was, he was keeping her in the dark.

Still, she didn't ask. She figured she'd find out soon enough.

After all, what could these 100 ordinary people possibly do?

...

At the shelter, Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu spent the morning playing video games after breakfast.

The women in the house played a bit too, but their skills were so bad that Zhang Yi quickly grew tired of carrying them.

But now that Fatty Xu, a fellow gaming nerd, had joined, at least he had a decent teammate.

Fatty Xu was deeply moved. "Boss, it's great working for you! I even get time to play video games!"

He had expected Zhang Yi, surrounded by enemies, to be constantly on edge, always ready to fight.

He hadn't imagined Zhang Yi's life would be so relaxed!

Zhang Yi smiled. "Work when it's time to work, play when it's time to play. As long as no serious threat shows up, I spend most of my time chilling and enjoying life."

But despite his casual tone, Zhang Yi wasn't complacent.

The surveillance footage outside was being monitored at all times, and Zhou Ke'er and the others weren't just here to have fun.

Fatty Xu admired him deeply.

He even regretted, for a moment, not seizing the chance to join Zhang Yi earlier, instead of wasting time chasing after Xu Lili.

Women were one thing, but how could they compare to the latest PS15 and thousands of AAA games?

Fatty Xu stared at the stack of game cartridges beneath the TV, eyes gleaming with greed. He wished he could play them all in one go!

"Boss, can I... hehe..."

Fatty Xu scratched his head, pointing at the games.

Zhang Yi understood his intent. "Go ahead, pick whatever you like!"

Fatty Xu eagerly rushed over to sift through the cartridges.

But at that moment, Zhou Ke'er, who had been watching the monitors, suddenly spoke up, "Zhang Yi, someone's coming! And they look... strange."

Her eyes showed a mix of fear and confusion as she stared at the surveillance footage.

Zhang Yi's eyes narrowed. "What's wrong?"

He stood up and walked over to take a look.

"It's like a group of walking corpses heading this way."

Zhou Ke'er pointed at the screen, her voice shaky.

Zhang Yi peered closer and saw a slow-moving crowd about several hundred meters south of the shelter.

Their sluggish pace and stiff movements made them look like zombies from a movie.

If they were actual zombies, Zhang Yi wouldn't be worried—he could easily deal with them with hot weapons.

"Zoom in," Zhang Yi ordered.

Xiao Ai zoomed in on the camera, revealing that these weren't zombies at all, but rather a group of pale, stiff-looking humans.

Zhang Yi waved at Fatty Xu, who was still sorting through games. "Hey, Fatty Xu, come here and check this out. Are those people from Xu Family Town?"

Fatty Xu paused for a moment, then quickly rushed over.

After seeing their faces, he immediately confirmed, "Yeah, that's them! But... why are they here?"

His face turned pale, cold sweat breaking out on his back.

Though he didn't know what was going on, his instincts told him it wasn't good.

Zhang Yi studied the footage carefully. He didn't see Ling Feng or the others, which meant they were likely hiding.

And since Liang Yue hadn't warned him, he had no idea what this was all about.

"Why are they here? They're not here to trigger traps—the landmines around here were cleared long ago."

Zhang Yi felt something was off. Judging by the villagers' pale faces and trembling bodies, there was definitely more going on.

"Let's go check it out!"

He patted Fatty Xu on the shoulder, motioning for him to come along.

Chapter 298 : Human Bomb

No matter what schemes they might be plotting, they're just regular people. Taking them out should be easy.

Zhang Yi felt no fear as he calmly swapped into a set of gear—an enhanced imitation of the Special Forces Team combat suit.

Watching him, Fatty Xu asked enviously, "Boss, what about me? I don't want to die either—don't you have some protective gear for me?"

When it came to fear of death, Fatty Xu and Zhang Yi were definitely on par.

Zhang Yi tossed him a bulletproof vest he wasn't using and handed him a helmet.

"Hurry up and put it on; let's get down there and see what's going on."

"I don't know what their plan is, but we definitely can't let them near the Shelter."

The two headed to the first floor, where they could see Xu Family Town villagers approaching slowly through a one-way glass window.

Fatty Xu leaned against the window, scanning them one by one, recognizing many familiar neighbors.

Suddenly, Fatty Xu's eyes widened. "Lili!"

Among the crowd, he spotted Xu Lili's figure. Her face was drawn and pale, her body trembling as if she might collapse at any moment. But she kept moving forward, as though something behind her was forcing her on.

Noticing Fatty Xu's expression, Zhang Yi glanced at him indifferently.

"We have to kill all of them."

Fatty Xu shivered.

"Huh? Kill... kill them? All of them?"

Fatty Xu looked like he was about to cry. Even though he had chosen to leave Xu Family Town to escape, the thought of shooting his fellow villagers was too much for him to bear. After all, most of Xu Family Town shared his surname; they were all relatives of one sort or another.

Watching the cowardly Fatty Xu, Zhang Yi sighed deeply.

"If the Shelter falls, do you think we'd survive?"

“It’s the apocalypse.”

Zhang Yi’s tone was emphatic, and he said nothing more. He didn’t want blood on his hands either, if he could avoid it. But survival sometimes demanded sacrifices.

Zhang Yi didn’t force Fatty Xu to kill his own kin. Instead, he activated the Dimensional Gate in front of the window as a defense, then opened the window and raised a pistol, calmly firing selective shots.

One by one, five or six villagers fell as if they’d been reaped.

The crowd slowed, some crying out in terror, others spotting Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu through the window.

“Xu Chunlei! It’s Xu Chunlei!”

“Xu Chunlei, we’re your own kin—how can you open fire on us?”

“Chunlei, it’s me, your aunt! Don’t shoot! Save us!”

Pleading and curses filled Fatty Xu’s ears, making him break into a cold sweat as he instinctively stepped back. Seeing Xu Lili staring at him with tearful eyes, she pleaded, “Chunlei, save me, please! I’ll marry you, just save me!”

The sweat on Xu Chunlei’s forehead kept dripping.

But Zhang Yi’s shooting continued unimpeded, systematically taking out the villagers of Xu Family Town. He couldn’t shake the feeling that something wasn’t right; it was as if these people had come here to die. Could Ling Feng and the West Hill Base be behind this, forcing them?

“Bang!” An elderly man’s head exploded, blood spraying everywhere, intensifying the screaming.

“Xu Chunlei, what are you doing? I know you’re in there. Are you really going to watch us all die?”

“Chunlei, it’s me, Gangzi! Don’t kill me!”

“Xu Chunlei, you traitor to the Xu family! Look at what you’ve done! Xu Family Town turned into this because of you! If it weren’t for your dealings with Zhang Yi, none of this would have happened!”

An old woman cursed Fatty Xu from outside.

Zhang Yi frowned, glancing at him.

He could sense it—these people were deliberately being sent to die. Could it be that Ling Feng planned to use their blood to open the Shelter’s doors?

A futile hope.

Zhang Yi resumed firing. This time, as a body fell, something slipped from under its clothing, and he froze, understanding instantly why these people were here.

They were strapped with explosives!

Ling Feng intended to use the villagers of Xu Family Town as human shields to blow open the Shelter.

Zhang Yi stopped shooting, his mind clearer now.

“Fatty, do you see what’s on them?” he asked.

Fatty Xu looked closely and saw the explosives strapped to the villagers, his eyes widening in disbelief. “Those scum!!”

Fatty Xu had no love for the West Hill Base, but he'd thought they'd have some moral bottom line—not to harm innocent people. Now, they'd turned his fellow villagers into human bombs!

"This is inhumane, worse than animals!"

"As I said, they're faithless desperados. To deal with them, we have to be even more ruthless," Zhang Yi said coolly.

Fatty Xu's heart nearly broke. These people were doomed either way, and he had to watch, helpless.

Zhang Yi held the pistol toward him. "The situation's obvious now. You know what has to be done."

Fatty Xu hesitated a long moment before clenching his teeth and taking the pistol.

"If they're going to die, it's not my fault for sending them off."

"Blame it on those scumbags at West Hill Base!"

Steeling himself, he raised the gun and fired at the crowd. With his guilt dispelled, Fatty Xu grew bolder with each shot.

The first death saddened him a bit, but afterward, he felt a thrill he'd never experienced before.

Bang!

His second aunt fell, a woman who often belittled him. Fatty Xu felt an unexpected satisfaction—after all, he hadn't had much love for some of these relatives.

"Heh... haha!" Fatty Xu's laughter grew as his body trembled with exhilaration. His firing rate increased.

In Xu Family Town, he had no friends and no respect, despite the help he'd given his village after awakening his powers during the apocalypse. But even then, he'd been met with disdain and envy. How many nights had he told himself that he was imagining it?

But he knew—it wasn't in his head.

They had truly looked down on him.

And now, he had their lives in his hands, free of guilt.

"Ahaha!"

Fatty Xu's face twisted with a sinister smile as he emptied his magazine. Zhang Yi handed him another clip, gesturing for him to continue.

Fatty Xu's aim was lousy, but at a hundred meters with a dense crowd, he couldn't miss. Zhang Yi had encouraged him, understanding the pent-up frustration within him. As a powerful Superhuman who had endured years of scorn, Fatty Xu needed this release.

With their previous tormentor fallen, the villagers ran in terror, some cursing, others pleading. But behind them, Ling Feng's forces drove them closer to the Shelter, determined to make them die on their explosive mission.

Ling Feng's plan to exploit Fatty Xu's connection to his fellow villagers was failing as his forces fell to Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu's bullets.

"Those animals killed their own!" Ling Feng cursed, shooting an escaping villager.

Watching from the side, Liang Yue shook his head. Really, Ling Feng? You force them forward and then call them animals?

Ling Feng had his own logic: killing the villagers himself was justified, but Xu's actions were pure betrayal. Yet he hadn't expected Fatty Xu to be so eager, his shots hinting at personal vendettas.

Zhang Yi handed him an assault rifle, saying, "Try this—it's more satisfying."

Fatty Xu took it, and Zhang Yi instructed, "Hold it steady; the recoil's powerful."

With the gun steadied on the windowsill, Fatty Xu unleashed a hail of bullets upon the villagers he'd once known.

Chapter 299: Give Everything You Have

One hundred villagers, each strapped with explosives, were all mowed down by Fatty Xu.

Among them was Xu Lili, whom he had once been infatuated with.

But as he gazed at Xu Lili's lifeless body on the ground, his heart felt oddly calm. He even started to question himself.

"Why was I ever so obsessed with this woman?"

Looking at Xu Lili now, she wasn't even that pretty.

Some of the villagers weren't quite dead yet. Fatty Xu's aim was terrible, and they were still struggling in agony.

"Well, no turning back now!"

Gritting his teeth, Fatty Xu went around delivering the finishing blow to each of them. He awkwardly apologized to Zhang Yi, "Sorry, Boss. My aim's pretty bad—I wasted your bullets."

Zhang Yi generously waved it off. "No problem, consider it target practice."

Bullets weren't a scarce resource for him. With plenty of materials stored in his alternate dimension, Lu Keran could forge them continuously.

Many people had an irrational reverence for firearms and bullets, thinking they must be extremely valuable. In reality, they were cheap to produce—otherwise, many households abroad wouldn't own them.

With all the villagers dead, and none of them reaching the Shelter, Ling Feng clenched his teeth in frustration.

"Damn it! Damn it all!"

This had been his last card. If it didn't work, he'd have no choice but to admit the mission was a failure.

Half of the Special Forces Team from West Hill Base had been killed, leaving only a few survivors.

There was no way Chen Xinian would send him the remaining forces.

As for regular soldiers, sending them would be like throwing cannon fodder at Zhang Yi—they didn't even have the skill to engage in a proper shootout with him.

Ling Feng fumed, venting his frustration, while the others stood silently around him, equally furious but powerless to do anything.

They wanted nothing more than to drag Zhang Yi out of the Shelter and tear him apart—but they lacked the strength to do so.

"Captain Ling, let's go back."

Engineer Wu suddenly spoke.

Unlike the others, Engineer Wu wasn't one of Ling Feng's subordinates. He had been assigned to assist Ling Feng on this mission by the higher-ups, so it was appropriate for him to speak up.

"We're out of weapons and ammunition, and our soldiers are almost all gone. Staying here serves no purpose."

Shi Dayong, Zheng Xuerong, Shen Hong, and Yu Lang were taken aback, quickly glancing at Ling Feng.

They were terrified that their proud captain might lose it.

But Ling Feng didn't act out.

Instead, he gazed at the fortress-like Shelter, standing unscathed amidst the scorched earth. He stayed silent for a long time.

With Ling Feng not speaking, no one else dared say a word, waiting for their captain to make the final decision.

After a few tense minutes, Ling Feng finally spoke, his voice tinged with fatigue.

"Do you think we can go back?"

For the first time, exhaustion crept into his tone.

He was tired—truly tired.

In all his years as a soldier, he had never encountered such a helpless situation.

It was a total defeat.

The mission had failed, and so many of his soldiers had died. He felt ashamed to even think about facing Chen Xinian.

“Maybe I should just die here.”

As he spoke, Ling Feng suddenly drew his pistol and pointed it at his own temple.

No one expected this. Liang Yue’s eyes flickered, secretly hoping he would pull the trigger.

She knew how dangerous Ling Feng was. If he lived, he would be a significant threat to her future escape plans.

Besides, this butcher had too much innocent blood on his hands. He deserved to die!

But Shi Dayong and the others weren’t about to let their captain end his life.

They quickly wrestled the gun out of his hand.

“Captain, don’t do something foolish!”

“This wasn’t your fault! In the face of the apocalypse, we don’t have the modern equipment needed to breach that fortress, and Zhang Yi’s superpowers are too strange! Failure was inevitable.”

“You’re one of West Hill Base’s most important protectors. If something happens to you, the base would suffer a tremendous loss!”

Everyone was trying to talk Ling Feng out of it.

But to Liang Yue, it was laughable how easily Ling Feng had let them take the gun away. She couldn't help but look down on him.

Ling Feng hadn't intended to kill himself. It was all an act, just like when Cao Cao had cut off his hair to take responsibility for trampling a farmer's field.

"See? It's not that I'm afraid to die—I just couldn't turn down your earnest pleas, so I guess I'll live."

Ling Feng struggled a little. "Let go! Just let me go! I've failed the mission assigned by our leader. How can I face him?"

Engineer Wu coughed and said, "In fact, we didn't come back completely empty-handed."

"If we take the people of Xu Family Town back, that should be enough to appease the leader."

In the post-apocalypse, villages like Xu Family Town, with a large number of living people that could be easily controlled, were extremely rare.

West Hill Base was always in need of people—whether for experiments on superhumans or as labor for the Fourth Life Pod.

Engineer Wu continued, "Besides, we've already lost so many Special Forces members. If you can't pull through, the base will suffer even more."

The Special Forces chimed in, agreeing with Engineer Wu's reasoning.

Ling Feng hesitated for a while before letting out a resigned sigh.

"In that case, I'll have to live with this shame and return to the leader."

Though Ling Feng was deeply resentful, he knew the mission had failed. Continuing to fight would be pointless.

“Let’s go back to Xu Family Town.”

His cold demeanor returned as he led the way back.

Before leaving, Ling Feng detonated all the explosives strapped to the villagers from Xu Family Town.

A blinding flash of light shot up into the sky. If not for the Shelter’s glass shielding, it would have blinded them.

Zhang Yi closed his eyes, ignoring the explosion.

Though the house shook, the distance was far enough that the Shelter remained undamaged.

Fatty Xu, caught off guard, had his eyes stung by the blast, turning them red and teary.

“It’s over.”

Zhang Yi knew that this time, Ling Feng and his people wouldn’t be returning anytime soon. If they did, they would need better weapons and more resources to challenge him again.

Back in Xu Family Town, the villagers were on edge after hearing the explosion from across the river.

They desperately wanted to escape.

But in the icy wilderness, without shelter or sufficient food, they wouldn’t survive three days.

Faced with such harsh conditions, people instinctively huddled together for warmth, even if it meant facing death together.

As the town's nominal leader, Xu Dongtang was deeply troubled.

Never in his worst nightmares had he imagined that the people from West Hill Base would do this to them.

If he had known, he would have listened to Xu Chunlei.

But... did he ever have a choice?

Xu Dongtang furrowed his brows. After much reflection, he realized a terrible truth.

No matter what decisions he made early on, today's outcome was inevitable.

Xu Family Town had plenty of people and food but lacked the military power needed to protect themselves in the post-apocalypse.

Whether they faced a powerful superhuman like Zhang Yi or an organized force like West Hill Base, they were always going to be the victims.

This wasn't a civilized world anymore. Strength ruled everything.

When Ling Feng and his men returned to Xu Family Town, the villagers saw that the hundred people who had been taken were not coming back.

They already knew what had happened.

But this time, no one spoke. They just stared at Ling Feng's group with lifeless eyes, like corpses watching grave robbers.

Ling Feng stood before them and said, "We're leaving now."

At those words, a flicker of hope appeared in the villagers' eyes.

Were these devils finally going to leave? Were their days of suffering finally over?

Only they knew the hell they had lived through for the past month.

Though the Special Forces Team was just over sixty men, they consumed enough food for five or six hundred.

They had also killed, worked to death, or otherwise caused the deaths of over five hundred villagers!

Despite the freezing weather, Xu Family Town hadn't lost many people to the cold. Instead, they had lost nearly a third of their population to these outsiders.

The villagers' eyes filled with excitement, thinking they had finally seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

Even Xu Dongtang's eyes welled with tears of joy.

"Thank goodness! This time must have been hard on all of you. Should we help you pack up?"

"Of course."

Ling Feng added, "Have everyone pack what they need for daily use. Prepare to come with us back to West Hill Base."

"Oh, and by everyone, I mean all those between the ages of 16 and 35."

Xu Dongtang's smile froze.

"Captain Ling, what do you mean by that?"

Without even looking at him, Ling Feng said in a commanding tone, "Not just anyone can go to West Hill Base. This is a tremendous opportunity—a gift to you all. You should take advantage of it."

Xu Dongtang was stunned, realizing Ling Feng wasn't joking.

In a panic, he shouted, "Captain Ling! These young people are the backbone of Xu Family Town! If they leave, only the old, weak, women, and children will remain. How will we survive?"

Ling Feng finally looked at him, but his gaze was one of disdain, as if he were scolding a child who didn't understand.

"In the apocalypse, expecting everyone to survive is unrealistic. You need to be willing to make sacrifices. Let the strongest live to carry on your family's legacy!"

Chapter 300: Round Up the Able-Bodied

Ling Feng was very deliberate in his selection.

Whether for human experimentation or labor in the Fourth Life Pod, only healthy people were of use. Those too old or too young were of no value—they would only waste resources.

Even using them as protein substitutes wasn't cost-effective.

In his heart, Ling Feng firmly believed that he was a good person.

“Alright, everyone between the ages of 16 and 35, without disabilities, start packing your things! We’re taking you to West Hill Base!”

“It’s a place with ample food and comfortable living conditions. Once you’re there, you won’t have to worry about hunger or freezing!”

He shouted through a loudspeaker.

Upon hearing his words, the villagers reacted like startled birds, nervously chattering amongst themselves.

Some thought it was a great opportunity. They had heard about West Hill Base from the soldiers—a haven with excellent living conditions. If they went there, they might survive in comfort.

But others expressed their concerns.

After all, Ling Feng and his men had used brutal tactics against them over the past few months, killing many of their loved ones. Could they really trust the Special Forces Team?

However, their opinions didn’t matter.

Ling Feng wasn’t asking for their approval—he was giving them orders.

Glancing at his watch, he said, “You have half an hour to gather your things. After that, everyone must be here!”

His gaze swept over the confused crowd as he added, “Anyone caught disobeying or attempting to escape will be dealt with by military law!”

The atmosphere grew tense.

A young man, braving his fear, shouted from the crowd, “What about our families? Are we supposed to leave them behind?”

His words struck a chord with many.

Most people had elderly family members or children at home.

If all able-bodied individuals aged 16 to 35 were taken, it meant leaving behind the elderly, women, and children. Without strong men to fish or protect the town, those left behind would likely die from the cold or be killed by others.

So, even though they feared the Special Forces, the villagers of Xu Family Town raised their voices in protest.

“We can’t leave our families behind! If you’re taking us, take everyone!”

“Would you abandon your own family? If so, I’d rather stay here and die with mine!”

“Yeah, we won’t agree to this!”

Their cries grew louder, drowning out the howling wind and snow.

But Ling Feng’s brow furrowed.

Suddenly, a gunshot rang out, silencing the crowd.

Shi Dayong stood holding a gun, a wisp of smoke rising from its barrel. In the crowd, the young man who had first spoken lay dead, blood pooling on the ground.

“This is an order, not a request for your opinion!”

“At a time like this, if you resist West Hill Base’s orders, there’s only one outcome!”

Ling Feng’s voice was cold and unyielding.

Despair was the only expression left on the villagers’ faces.

In the face of overwhelming power, their resistance was meaningless. Ling Feng had already given up on maintaining even a façade of decency.

The failure of the mission had made him ruthless. Anyone who challenged his authority now would be eliminated without hesitation.

Ling Feng gave Shi Dayong a glance.

Shi Dayong stepped forward, shouting, “All of you between the ages of 16 and 35—yes, that includes you if you’re 16 or 35—who are healthy and able-bodied, go pack your things! The rest of you stay put!”

“Don’t try to be clever or use this chance to escape! If I catch anyone trying to run, they’ll be executed on the spot as deserters!”

The crowd fell silent. Even those who had planned to resist lost their courage, hanging their heads and obediently returning to pack.

Going to West Hill Base offered a slim chance of survival.

But becoming a scapegoat now was a sure way to die.

So, the scene unfolded in Xu Family Town’s square: a dozen Special Forces members, armed with guns, ordering over a thousand villagers to obey.

It was like a small group of sheepdogs herding a massive flock of sheep.

Some people, unwilling to leave their families but unable to defy the Special Forces, resorted to self-harm, smashing their own legs with stones.

But they weren't met with mercy—just a cold bullet.

Half an hour later, the villagers were divided into two groups.

Over 300 able-bodied men and women stood, each one the backbone of their family. In the freezing apocalypse, only the strong had survived this long—the weak had already perished.

As the time to separate from their loved ones neared, the square was filled with the sound of weeping. Many bid their families a final farewell, though none dared cross the line to embrace their wives and children.

After the headcount was completed, Shi Dayong reported to Ling Feng, "Captain, everyone's here. Should we take the food with us too?"

Xu Family Town had a decent stockpile of food left, despite how much the Special Forces had already consumed.

If they could bring back a large amount of food, it would help reduce the blame for their mission's failure.

Ling Feng considered it but ultimately shook his head.

"Leave it here. The main priority is getting the people back. It's a long journey, and it would be inconvenient to carry too much."

"If we need it later, we can come back and take some."

Shi Dayong sighed. "You're too merciful, Captain."

And so, the Special Forces Team, escorting the 300-odd able-bodied villagers, left Xu Family Town for West Hill Base.

The elderly and weak watched them go, their cries rising only after the group had vanished into the distance.

...

Several hours later, Ling Feng and his group arrived at West Hill Base.

The soldiers guarding the base were shocked and delighted to see the captain return with so many survivors.

"Captain, you found so many survivors! This is a huge accomplishment!"

The soldiers gazed at the crowd of over 300 people, overjoyed.

With these new arrivals, they would have more recruits and enough labor for the Fourth Life Pod.

At West Hill Base, the consumption rate in the Fourth Life Pod was high.

Not only were people needed for experiments on superhumans, but many died from the immense psychological strain, choosing suicide.

This created a ripple effect, disturbing others. Without these lower-level workers, the upper class wouldn't be able to enjoy their services.

Ling Feng's face remained cold as he ignored the soldier's flattery, merely nodding slightly.

The soldier found it odd but said nothing more.

Due to Zhang Yi's earlier massacre, all their communications soldiers had been killed, so West Hill Base had no idea that almost the entire Special Forces Team had been wiped out.

Ling Feng led the group into the base, Liang Yue silently following behind.

Although Ling Feng suspected her, she was a powerful Superhuman. Without solid evidence, they couldn't detain her outright.

It wasn't that West Hill Base was particularly just, but that strong Superhumans like her were valuable assets. They wouldn't turn on her unless absolutely necessary.

Liang Yue wasn't worried. The phone she had handed over contained nothing suspicious.

As soon as they entered the base, the quarantine team arrived to test the Xu Family Town villagers, just as they had when Liang Yue and the others had first arrived.

In the underground facility, Chief Secretary Ge Rou was already waiting for them.

She smiled professionally as her gaze fell on Ling Feng.

"Captain Ling, the leader has requested your presence in his office."

Ling Feng nodded, his expression stern.

The inevitable was coming—there was no avoiding it.

Besides, if he wanted revenge, he would need Chen Xinian's support.

Shi Dayong and Zheng Xuerong exchanged worried glances.

Shi Dayong whispered, "You think the captain will be okay?"

They all knew that with such heavy losses, Ling Feng would be held responsible.

Chen Xinian was strict with both rewards and punishments. In the military, he would have severely punished Ling Feng for such a failure.

Zheng Xuerong shook her head.

"He'll definitely get chewed out, but the leader still needs him."

Shi Dayong agreed with her reasoning and stopped worrying.

As expected, Ling Feng went to Chen Xinian's office and reported everything that had happened.

When Chen Xinian heard that over 50 of his best Special Forces members had been killed, he slammed his fist on the table, shattering his water cup.

"Ling Feng, I entrusted half of my finest troops to you, and this is what you bring me?!"

"Do you even understand how difficult it was to train those 50 men? They're worth a thousand ordinary soldiers!"

"You've become a disgrace to West Hill Base!"

The thought of Ling Feng's confident assurances before the mission only made Chen Xinian angrier.

Ling Feng stood stiffly at attention, allowing Chen Xinian to vent his fury.

When Chen Xinian finished, Ling Feng slowly knelt on the ground, lowering his head, and spoke each word clearly: "Leader, I am guilty! If you think I deserve to die, you can execute me right now."

"But I ask that you give me a chance to redeem myself. I will not rest in peace unless I kill Zhang Yi with my own hands!"

Chen Xinian's chest heaved with anger as he stared coldly at his once-trusted subordinate. He truly wanted to have Ling Feng executed on the spot!

However, considering the current situation, he couldn't afford to lose such a valuable asset.

Taking a deep breath, Chen Xinian finally calmed down and spoke in a more measured tone, "Fine, I won't blame you entirely for this. Your failures will be noted, and your future performance will determine whether you're forgiven. If you fail again, you'll be punished for both offenses!"

Ling Feng lowered his head, acknowledging the reprimand. "Thank you for your grace, Leader. I will not fail again."

Chen Xinian nodded slightly, his face still tense with suppressed frustration. "This mission has been a disaster, but at least you brought back over 300 survivors from Xu Family Town. They can replenish our resources, and they will serve as labor for the Fourth Life Pod. You've managed to salvage something from this mess."

Ling Feng remained silent, knowing better than to speak when he was already skating on thin ice.

Chen Xinian continued, "I'm placing you under supervision for now. You'll be closely monitored until I'm convinced you can be trusted with another mission."

Ling Feng accepted this punishment without protest. He knew he was lucky to even be alive, considering the circumstances. "Understood, Leader."

Chen Xinian sat back in his chair, the sharp edge of his anger beginning to soften. “You’re dismissed. Get some rest and make sure the new arrivals are processed properly. We’ll need them ready for labor as soon as possible.”

Ling Feng saluted and left the room, his body tense with the weight of failure still hanging over him.

As he exited the office, he found Shi Dayong, Zheng Xuerong, and the others waiting anxiously.

“How did it go?” Shi Dayong asked cautiously.

Ling Feng’s expression was unreadable as he replied, “I’ve been reprimanded and placed under supervision. But the leader isn’t done with me yet. We’ll be monitored closely for now.”

Shi Dayong sighed in relief. “At least it’s not as bad as we feared. You’re still in charge.”

Ling Feng nodded, though his mind was already racing with thoughts of how to redeem himself. He had sworn to kill Zhang Yi with his own hands, and he would not rest until that oath was fulfilled.

But for now, all he could do was wait—and plan.

Back at the base, the newly arrived survivors from Xu Family Town were processed through the standard procedures. They were scanned, inspected, and given basic health checks before being assigned to labor tasks in the Fourth Life Pod.

Liang Yue, watching the process unfold from a distance, remained as calm as ever. Though suspicion had been cast on her, there was still no concrete evidence against her. She knew that as long as she played her cards right, she would remain under the radar.

However, she also knew that her position was fragile. Any misstep could lead to her downfall, and West Hill Base was not known for showing mercy to those who crossed it.

As the new arrivals were led into the underground facility, Chief Secretary Ge Rou coordinated the entire operation with military precision, ensuring that the base would make full use of the fresh labor.

In the background, the faint hum of machinery echoed through the halls, a constant reminder of the cold efficiency that governed West Hill Base.

Ling Feng's failure had left scars, but the base continued to function, relentless in its pursuit of survival, no matter the cost.

For now, the base was calm—but everyone knew that storm clouds were brewing on the horizon. Zhang Yi was still out there, and the tension between West Hill Base and him had only just begun.