

Ice Age 361

Chapter 361: Taking the Blame

At the Yangsheng base, Gaoyuan's disappearance alarmed Xiao Honglian and Zhuge Qingtian.

They immediately dispatched personnel to contact Gaoyuan and sent people to search near the Hongyuan Materials Factory in Lu River District.

After a day of investigation, they reported back to Xiao Honglian and Zhuge Qingtian with their findings.

“We found significant destruction at the Hongyuan Materials Factory, and nearly all the supplies inside have been moved away.”

“Additionally, we have not found any trace of Captain Gaoyuan or the others. They have completely vanished along with their vehicle.”

This intelligence was somewhat terrifying for Xiao Honglian and Zhuge Qingtian.

“Completely disappeared?”

Xiao Honglian's eyes filled with a chilling killing intent.

“No matter how reckless Gaoyuan is, he wouldn’t dare to defy my orders and cut off communication with the base to go elsewhere.”

“Therefore, it’s certain that something has happened to him!”

Xiao Honglian was furious.

Gaoyuan was her cousin; although their relationship was average, Gaoyuan’s predicament was equivalent to a slap in her face!

In this brutal era of the weak being preyed upon by the strong, any display of weakness or hesitation would be exploited by other wolves!

So she had to resolve this issue with an iron fist!

Xiao Honglian turned to Zhuge Qingtian, “Is there any way to locate them? They should have satellite phones in their vehicle with tracking devices.”

Zhuge Qingtian replied, “This is precisely the most puzzling part. We can’t find any signal; it’s as if they vanished into thin air.”

“What?”

A hint of hesitation appeared in Xiao Honglian's gaze.

“So you’re saying that the other side came prepared. They certainly didn’t decide to act on a whim; they’ve been planning to attack our Yangsheng base for some time!” *Ra*

“Is Gaoyuan's disappearance merely a signal for war?”

Xiao Honglian’s mind raced, imagining all possible adversaries.

Of course, she was still unaware of Zhang Yi's existence, so she could never suspect such a powerful force.

“Chaoyu Base, Qingpu Base, or the Followers of the Snow God? Which of them did this! All three have that capability.”

“Or perhaps West Hill Base wasn’t completely wiped out but has instead relocated?”

Due to the lack of intelligence, Xiao Honglian found it difficult to make an accurate judgment.

However, the more one speculated, the more complicated things could become, because there were too many possibilities.

Zhuge Qingtian said to her, "Given the current situation, with Gaoyuan missing, we have no good way to trace his whereabouts, making it impossible to determine who the enemy is!"

Xiao Honglian sat in her chair, crossing her long legs, and fell into deep thought.

"Qingpu Base is to the northwest; even if they want to occupy the territory of West Hill Base, they could only approach from the northwest. It's unlikely they would make a long trek to seek out Gaoyuan in the southeast."

"Chaoyu Base is closest to Gaoyuan; could it be them?"

"The Followers of the Snow God have always acted subserviently, afraid to clash with our bases. But that cult leader is clearly no good; she must harbor ill intentions. There's a high chance it could be her!"

Zhuge Qingtian walked over and said, "I think the incident's location is closest to Chaoyu Base. Why don't we contact them first and see what they have to say?"

Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base had a relatively good relationship.

After all, for Chaoyu Base's ships to go to sea, they needed Yangsheng Base to provide fuel.

Conversely, Chaoyu Base supplied Yangsheng Base with various seafood as food.

However, it was mainly Chaoyu Base that relied more on Yangsheng Base.

Xiao Honglian pondered for a moment and replied lightly, "Don't think that our relationship with Chaoyu Base is very good; we're merely using each other!"

"Those guys are also quite envious of our oil refinery."

Zhuge Qingtian chuckled, "But for now, they still dare not clash with us."

Xiao Honglian nodded, "Then let's contact them!"

Xiao Honglian took out her satellite phone and directly called Wei Dinghai, the leader of Chaoyu Base.

The call connected.

Xiao Honglian's personality was straightforward; after a brief exchange of pleasantries, she got straight to the point.

“Wei Dinghai, my cousin Gaoyuan has disappeared at the Hongyuan Group Factory in Lu River District. Do you know anything about this?”

Upon hearing this, Wei Dinghai immediately realized that Xiao Honglian was suspicious of him.

His tone grew somber, “You guys are quick to react! But I can tell you that this matter has nothing to do with us at Chaoyu Base!”

“And, we have people missing too!”

His subordinate Wang Ruixuan, who was sent to scout West Hill Base, had been killed by Zhang Yi.

This incident left Wei Dinghai feeling uncertain, not knowing who was behind it.

Xiao Honglian was somewhat surprised.

“Your people are also missing? Where?”

“At West Hill Base, the people I sent to scout have vanished! Among them was a superhuman with considerable strength.”

Wei Dinghai said coldly, "Superhumans are so scarce in Tianhai City; even if there are superhumans wandering outside, they can hardly compete with my trained soldiers!"

"So I also want to ask you guys if it was your doing!"

There are also differences among superhumans.

Those from large organizations have access to abundant resources and weaponry.

Conversely, ordinary people who mutate find it challenging to become stronger, and even surviving can be tough.

For example, Li Jian's abilities are limited by his living conditions, leaving him little room to demonstrate his strength.

Xiao Honglian understood Wei Dinghai's implication; he too was suspecting that a force was secretly making a move, which naturally included their Yangsheng Base.

"So, it seems we've both suffered losses!"

Xiao Honglian's gaze cleared up considerably.

“In the entire Tianhai City, there aren’t many forces that could simultaneously strike against both our factions. The blacksmiths of Qingpu Base dislike conflict; they have no reason to go to war with us.”

“So the only possibility is that it was the Followers of the Snow God who did it!”

Wei Dinghai laughed, “Yes, you’re absolutely right! It must be the Followers of the Snow God!”

Using the process of elimination is easy to follow.

At present, the Followers of the Snow God were indeed the prime suspects.

However, why was Wei Dinghai smiling?

Because he and Xiao Honglian were both thinking of the same thing.

They had long viewed the Followers of the Snow God unfavorably; this religious organization has always absorbed survivors from across Tianhai City.

The number of survivors in Tianhai City was around one million, although the exact figure is unclear.

As the Followers of the Snow God absorbed more people, it would affect their ability to obtain labor and even allow their slaves to escape.

The accumulated dissatisfaction had been brewing for a long time, and now that they had a legitimate reason, they would certainly not miss this opportunity!

Since the Followers of the Snow God were the biggest suspects, attacking them would be seen as a justified action.

Even if they weren't the culprits, it would allow them to vent their frustrations—wasn't that a win-win situation?

Chapter 362 : Borrowing a Knife

Xiao Honglian said to Wei Dinghai, "What's the matter? You can't swallow this anger, can you?"

Wei Dinghai smiled coldly, "Wang Ruixuan is my trusted subordinate. If those guys from the Followers of the Snow God dare to kill him, I'll make them pay tenfold!"

Xiao Honglian slightly raised the corner of her mouth, "Then let's take this opportunity to teach them a lesson!"

After discussing, the two sides decided to launch an attack on the headquarters of the Followers of the Snow God located in the Tianfeng District!

As for whether the person who killed their subordinate was actually from the Followers of the Snow God, that was not the most critical issue at the moment.

They would deal with it after they struck first.

This was indeed a good approach.

Thus, for various reasons, the two major bases decided to gather forces to attack the Followers of the Snow God.

If the Followers of the Snow God found out about this, they would definitely be very frustrated.

Clearly, they had done nothing, yet they were suffering an undeserved disaster.

Meanwhile, the real culprit, Zhang Yi, was at home constructing defenses and the Shelter.

Everyone worked together, and no one was slacking off.

Soon, the outer defenses were basically completed.

The main structure was made from huge ice blocks intercepted from the Lu River and rebar confiscated from the Western Mountain Base warehouse.

The construction conditions were quite rudimentary, entirely relying on their manual labor.

However, in the freezing cold, these materials were nearly as strong as concrete.

The key was that the materials were inexpensive and could be found everywhere.

Zhang Yi didn't expect the first line of defense to be invincible; it merely needed to serve as a buffer.

If a powerful enemy were to breach the first line, there was no need to feel distressed or worried, as it would buy everyone time to retreat to the Shelter.

After establishing the initial outline of the defenses, Zhang Yi began adding various tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery.

Modern weapons could be controlled via computer.

Once installed, they were connected to Zhang Yi's phone through a wireless network.

This way, when enemies attacked, Zhang Yi only needed to press the firing button on his phone to create a spectacular scene of thousands of cannon fire!

"Thousands of cannons" might be a bit of an exaggeration.

However, with 70% of the firepower from the Western Mountain Base deployed, the impact was indeed terrifying.

In addition to the weapons, many cameras were installed high on the walls to monitor the outside situation at all times.

However, these devices could only be used for reconnaissance before a battle; once a fight broke out, they could be destroyed in an instant.

After laying out the defenses, it was time to repair the Shelter.

The materials were prepared by Lu Keran, and the renovation work was handed over to Uncle You, who had maxed out his living skills.

He climbed the scaffolding, picked up tools, and worked quickly on the masonry.

Although he wasn't as skilled as professional builders and the walls weren't particularly aesthetic, Zhang Yi only required them to be sturdy and durable.

After three busy days, the entire Shelter and defenses were finally completed.

Zhang Yi had originally been on guard against an attack from the two major bases, but with everything successfully finished, he felt considerably more relaxed.

However, this outcome wasn't necessarily a good thing.

In a sense, if they discovered their superhumans had been killed, they would urgently bring people to search and attack the Shelter, indicating that the leader of that force was a reckless person.

Foolish individuals were easy to deal with.

What he feared was encountering a calm, rational opponent who would think things through and prepare countermeasures.

"So far, they haven't taken any action, and I haven't even detected any scouts."

"It seems the leaders of Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases are quite formidable!"

Zhang Yi muttered to himself, his expression serious.

What he didn't know was that the two bases had already integrated their forces and were now far away in the Tianfeng District, seeking a fight with the Followers of the Snow God.

They weren't overly cautious; they simply had no idea that a force like Zhang Yi existed.

While Zhang Yi was contemplating, others were celebrating the completion of the project.

Everyone felt a great sense of accomplishment working together to finish something.

In fact, many people didn't have close relationships with each other; they had only gathered because of Zhang Yi.

However, through this activity, they became much more familiar with one another.

At that moment, Liang Yue approached Zhang Yi and said, "Zhang Yi, I'm going to deliver some food to the students."

Zhang Yi came back to his senses, "Oh, okay."

He took out food for ten people from his dimensional space, which he had found in the Western Mountain Base warehouse—food that he himself wouldn't eat but had set aside to give to others.

Liang Yue took a bag of food, smiled, and said "Thank you," then set off towards Xu Family Town by herself.

Zhang Yi watched her back, his eyes filled with a playful glint.

To be honest, he had been somewhat worried that if Liang Yue discovered his plan to deal with those students, she might turn against him.

So, Zhang Yi had long been prepared, letting Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran take on the role of the villains.

Recently, he had been acting like a good guy in front of Liang Yue.

Behind the scenes, he had also let Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran brainwash Liang Yue.

This way, if that day ever came, Liang Yue would have no reason to blame Zhang Yi, who had helped her.

"I really am a genius!"

Zhang Yi took a deep breath.

Using someone else's knife to kill without getting his hands dirty was the perfect way to commit a crime.

After a while, Liang Yue returned.

From her expression, it was clear that she wasn't in a good mood.

It was evident that those students had said something to her again.

But since Liang Yue didn't bring it up, Zhang Yi wouldn't ask either—after all, someone would naturally take care of that for him.

Sure enough, Yang Xinxin, being considerate, stepped forward and asked, "Teacher Liang, why does your face look so bad? Did they speak harshly to you again?"

Liang Yue, already feeling uneasy, found her emotions surging when Yang Xinxin pointed it out.

Many people were like this; they could quickly forget about unpleasant matters.

However, if someone brought it up, their emotions would become increasingly agitated.

Liang Yue recounted what had happened.

It turned out that in recent days, since Liang Yue had only delivered food and provided no further assistance, the students had begun to complain, yet they had to fish for food to survive.

As time passed, they were forced to be self-reliant.

The students managed to survive, but they didn't thank Liang Yue; instead, they continuously begged her to let everyone stay in the Shelter.

At first, they pleaded, using moral coercion, but as they became desperate, some even resorted to cursing.

Even though Liang Yue had helped them so much, after the apocalypse, these once pampered students all began to show signs of psychological issues, forgetting even the kindness they had received in the past.

How could Liang Yue not feel sad upon seeing this?

"They're going too far. I even think that Teacher Liang shouldn't care about them anymore! Just let them die."

Yang Xinxin held Liang Yue's hand, speaking softly in a low voice, "Teacher Liang did nothing wrong; it's all their fault. Even if you abandon them, you have no responsibility."

Liang Yue's mood lightened a bit, "Is... is that so?"

"No! Regardless, I'm still their teacher!"

She sighed softly.

After experiencing so much since the apocalypse, combined with the persistent brainwashing from Lu Keran and Yang Xinxin, her thoughts had quietly changed.

In her heart, she had already lost much hope for those students.

Only the last remnant of her obsession kept her from watching them die before her eyes.

Chapter 363: Life in the Jianghu, Bound by Circumstance

The Shelter's defenses were now fully prepared.

From the outermost ice wall to the repairs within the Shelter, everything had reached a level that satisfied Zhang Yi. He issued a directive: no one was to step beyond the defensive perimeter.

No one objected.

After all, with the stockpile of supplies they had amassed, they could live comfortably in Cloud Manor for a lifetime without any shortages.

Only Liang Yue had to leave every day, maintaining her routine of delivering food to her students.

Zhang Yi didn't stop her. In fact, over the past few days, he had even been showing concern for her and her students.

"If you think it's too dangerous, we could discuss moving them closer to the Shelter."

"Of course, since we're not very familiar with them, this would need to be decided in a group meeting," Zhang Yi added sincerely.

Those who knew him, however, were well aware that these so-called meetings were mere formalities. Once Zhang Yi made a decision, no one would oppose it.

Uncle You, indebted to Zhang Yi, consistently supported him. Fatty Xu was even more loyal, sticking to Zhang Yi like glue.

In essence, if Liang Yue truly wanted to bring her students over, the only person in the entire Shelter who would support her proposal would be Zhang Yi himself. The rest, under Zhang Yi's implicit guidance, would firmly oppose it.

Liang Yue prided herself on her righteousness and kindness. When her proposal inevitably failed, she would feel disappointed but wouldn't blame Zhang Yi.

Sure enough, Liang Yue was moved by his suggestion. But after some hesitation, she slowly shook her head.

"Not for now," she said.

"I've been talking a lot with Xinxin and Keran these past few days. The trauma from our time at Tianqing Academy still affects them deeply. Back then, they were ostracized by their classmates, and as their teacher, I bear some responsibility."

"For now, it's better to let the others toughen up in Xu Family Town."

Her eyes lit up with hope.

"Besides, life is peaceful now. There's no sign of danger. There's no need to be overly cautious."

She smiled brightly, radiating positivity.

"Actually, when you think about it, if those still alive can live peacefully, there's no reason for them to invade others."

Liang Yue had no idea that Zhang Yi had already encountered and killed people from the Yangsheng Base at a factory 25 kilometers away from the Shelter. ㄟ

Otherwise, her tone wouldn't have been so carefree.

Zhang Yi nodded approvingly. "It's good to have that mindset. Even in the apocalypse, maintaining a positive outlook is crucial."

Stretching lazily, he added, “I should learn from you—stop being so on edge all the time. The world is still beautiful, and tomorrow is full of hope, right?”

Liang Yue chuckled at his relaxed demeanor, her laughter refreshing.

“It’s rare to hear that coming from you!” she teased, tossing her ponytail and winking at him.

“Well then, shall we start today’s martial arts lesson?”

Zhang Yi grinned as he followed her. “What are we practicing today?”

“You’re learning martial arts to handle close-quarters combat, so grappling techniques like Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu are essential. Let’s start with that!”

Together, they descended to the third underground level to begin their rigorous training.

Jiu-Jitsu was intricate. As they practiced, their bodies naturally became entangled.

Liang Yue, skilled as she was, often used techniques like the scissor hold, wrapping her legs tightly around Zhang Yi’s neck, or locking his head under her arm to force him to submit.

Zhang Yi didn’t seem to mind; in fact, he seemed to enjoy it.

He noticed how her mindset had been shifting since joining the Shelter.

Previously, she had been despairing about the apocalypse. Unable to see a future or find meaning in life, she had poured all her hopes into protecting her students.

But now, the comfortable life in the Shelter was far better than her days as a teacher at Tianqing Academy.

Adversity strengthens resolve, while comfort dulls it.

The Shelter's peaceful environment melted the icy barriers in her heart, allowing her to appreciate the beauty of life.

Though she still delivered food to her students daily, her interactions with others in the Shelter increased, and her smile became more frequent.

Zhang Yi considered this a positive development.

A person with desires and a will to live could be manipulated, turned into a pawn in his grander schemes.

Later that night, Zhang Yi lay on his bed, deep in thought.

“Should I go through with it?”

Opening the Dimensional Gate, he scanned the satellite phones he had confiscated and pondered.

Liang Yue was getting closer to them, and their relationship was in its honeymoon phase.

It was time to deal with those troublesome students in Xu Family Town.

The plan was simple; he had thought of it after eliminating the Yangsheng Base soldiers.

Placing these satellite phones in their homes would lead the Yangsheng Base directly to them.

In the apocalypse, life was cheap. The enraged Yangsheng Base wouldn't spare them.

This strategy of borrowing another's blade for revenge could close the loop perfectly.

However, the risk was drawing the attention of both Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases prematurely.

Yet Cloud Manor 101 was such an obvious target. Even without his intervention, it was only a matter of time before it was discovered.

"What's the right choice?"

"Could there be a chance that neither base realizes their men were killed by me?"

"In that case, we could live peacefully, and they could continue playing emperors in Tianhai City."

It was an ideal scenario.

But Zhang Yi quickly dismissed the thought with a chuckle.

"Wishful thinking! How could it be that simple?"

Conflict with the other factions was inevitable.

He had killed their Superhumans—core members of the Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases. They wouldn't let it go.

Even if he wasn't discovered now, once West Hill Base fell, the others would inevitably move in to carve up West Hill and Yuelu.

Could they tolerate a powerful force like his right under their noses?

And Zhang Yi wouldn't tolerate strong enemies so close to home.

"At the end of the day, life in the Jianghu leaves no room for retreat," Zhang Yi muttered, narrowing his eyes.

"If tolerance and compromise don't bring peace, then I'll carve out a clear sky with my blade."

"They'll back off once they've had enough."

Chapter 364: The Gift

Zhang Yi was a born pessimist, always preparing for the worst-case scenario.

Despite possessing formidable strength, he remained vigilant.

In terms of pure firepower, Zhang Yi's current force could rival Tianhai City's former strongest faction—West Hill Base.

While he lacked ordinary soldiers, his advantage lay in the superior application of weapons.

West Hill Base, devoid of spatial Superhumans, could only leave their heavy weapons gathering dust underground.

Zhang Yi, however, could transport them to the surface for actual combat.

Combined with his powerful team of Superhumans, he could now face off against West Hill Base's army head-on.

“If we focus solely on defense, without taking the offensive, my odds of victory should be around 95%,” Zhang Yi murmured, furrowing his brow. “But 95% rounded down is basically a coin toss. If I step out and fight, it’s as good as suicide.”

His gaze hardened, and he clenched his fist. “It’s settled. Over my dead body will I step beyond the defensive line!”

With that, he retrieved Gao Yuan’s satellite phone from his Spatial Storage and called Hua Hua over. He whispered a few instructions to it softly.

That night, silence enveloped the Shelter.

Suddenly, the door to Zhang Yi’s room creaked open.

Hua Hua slipped out, a satellite phone clamped in its mouth, and silently descended the stairs.

The Shelter’s main gate opened, and Hua Hua darted out, racing swiftly across the river toward Xu Family Town.

In Tianhai City’s Tianfeng District, thick snow blanketed towering buildings. Once the city’s most bustling area, it was now a frozen graveyard.

Gray concrete structures stood lifeless, mirroring the bleakness of this post-apocalyptic world.

Yet, in one grand cathedral within Tianfeng District, the scene was different. Candlelight filled the space, illuminating a gathering of thousands of devout followers.

They knelt in solemn prayer, their eyes fixed on the enormous cross ahead. Beneath it stood a young woman dressed in white robes and a matching headscarf.

Her hands clasped, eyes closed, her expression radiated compassion.

As she began to chant, her voice carried a deep, resonant prayer throughout the cathedral:

“Snow in the heavens, life on the earth,

Our bodies are born from the ground,

Our souls descend from the skies.

The sun and moon illuminate our forms,

Pure snow cleanses our spirits.

We surrender ourselves to the cold winds sweeping the land,

Grateful for the miracle bestowed upon Snow God’s people.

May our hearts remain ever tranquil,

May we share joy with our brethren,

And bear their sorrows as our own.

Praise be to the followers of Snow God,

May we testify with our soul and body.”

As Yuan Kongye, the leader of the Followers of the Snow God, recited the prayer, an extraordinary power swept through the cathedral.

Her voice seemed to carry an enchanting quality, soothing hearts, dispelling hunger, cold, and pain.

To the followers, it was a divine miracle, deepening their devotion.

They bowed, offering their loyalty to Jesus, Buddha, the great Snow God, and Yuan Kongye—the Snow God’s earthly vessel.

Upon concluding the prayer, Yuan Kongye turned to face the congregation.

Her youthful face, radiant with vitality, betrayed her age—she couldn’t have been more than twenty. Yet, her authority was unquestioned.

Even the powerful priests in her service bowed respectfully before her.

Everything they possessed, they owed to her.

Yuan Kongye was one of the most extraordinary beings in this land, gifted with a unique ability known as **【Blessing】**, enabling others to awaken their Superhuman powers.

Through this ability, she had built a vast religious following, even in a world teetering on the brink of despair.

The prayer session ended, transitioning into the “Gift” ceremony.

The crowd stirred momentarily but quickly fell silent, their eyes reverent as they gazed at Yuan Kongye.

A frail woman carrying a child made her way forward, staggering through the crowd before collapsing at Yuan Kongye's feet.

Trembling, she raised her child high.

Yuan Kongye glanced down, her eyes filled with compassion. The child's pale, almost lifeless complexion suggested he was on the brink of death.

With a serene expression, she placed her hand on the child's forehead.

A gentle warmth, a soft breeze, and a faint white glow swept through the cathedral.

Moments later, the infant's eyes fluttered open, followed by a strong, healthy cry.

“Waaah!”

The congregation's eyes sparkled with awe and excitement.

“A miracle! A miracle!”

“Praise the great Snow God, and praise Her Holiness, the Snow God's earthly vessel!”

This was Yuan Kongye's other power, 【Gift】 , which could heal physical ailments.

This ability played a crucial role in drawing so many followers.

The ceremony continued, with Yuan Kongye bestowing her blessings multiple times.

Eventually, fatigue crept onto her face.

A long-haired man in white, standing nearby, stepped forward.

“Your Holiness, please rest. The ceremony can resume tomorrow.”

His words caused a ripple of anxiety among those still awaiting their blessings.

In such dire conditions, even a minor ailment left untreated for a day could mean death in their sleep.

Yuan Kongye gently shook her head. “Continue.”

Her deputy, Grand Priest Zheng Yixian, reluctantly stepped back.

Within the Followers of the Snow God, Yuan Kongye’s will was absolute, her thoughts unchallengeable.

The ceremony pressed on until a sudden explosion echoed from outside, followed by a cacophony of gunfire.

Panic spread through the cathedral. Women clutched their children, shutting their eyes in fear.

Yuan Kongye gazed calmly toward the commotion and sighed softly.

Beside her, Zheng Yixian’s eyes gleamed coldly.

“Tong Zhan, Dai Mei—protect Her Holiness!”

“Han Chang, Li Qian, Wu Huan—follow me to confront the enemy!”

Priests flanking the altar, second only to Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian in the hierarchy, immediately obeyed.

As the Snow God's avatar, Yuan Kongye seldom managed day-to-day affairs. That role fell to Zheng Yixian, who also led the defense against external threats.

Under his command, two priests took protective positions near Yuan Kongye, while Zheng Yixian led the others out.

Yuan Kongye clasped her hands in silent prayer.

"May the Snow God shield His followers, keeping us from war and suffering."

Moved by her solemnity, the cathedral's adult men stepped forward, their eyes burning with fervent devotion.

They followed the priests out, leaving the cathedral's doors firmly closed behind them.

Yuan Kongye's voice remained calm: "The Gift ceremony shall continue."

Chapter 365: The Great Battle

Tianfeng District.

Outside the headquarters of the Followers of the Snow God, a fierce battle raged.

The combined forces of the Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases had launched their attack.

Furious over the disappearance of their Superhumans, they pointed their blame squarely at the Followers of the Snow God.

In the post-apocalypse, where might made right, investigations and evidence were unnecessary. They believed the cult was responsible, and that alone justified their assault.

This was also a convenient opportunity to eliminate a rising power they had long despised.

Leading the charge were Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

Dozens of modified snow vehicles, packed with hundreds of heavily armed soldiers, stormed toward the cult's defensive line.

The disparity in weaponry and training was glaring.

Both Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases were equipped with advanced weaponry and ample ammunition, as they had been military outposts prepared for wartime.

The Followers of the Snow God, on the other hand, were a mixed bag. Even their firearms were often second-hand black-market goods, wielded by individuals with little to no marksmanship skills.

Their defenders fell swiftly, staining the snowy streets red with blood.

“Hold the line! We must protect our home!”

“For the Snow God!”

The war machines pushed relentlessly toward the towering cathedral at the street's end.

Cult defenders, wielding makeshift weapons, retaliated from alleys, windows, and rooftops.

Some hurled stones; others charged recklessly, Molotov cocktails and explosives strapped to their bodies.

Their crude tactics and suicidal fervor managed to momentarily stall the coalition forces.

Xiao Honglian watched grimly, her expression dark.

"This cursed cult has brainwashed its followers into fearless fanatics. They must be eradicated!"

The sheer number of cultists was overwhelming.

Wave after wave emerged from buildings, sewers, and alleyways, throwing themselves at the invaders with reckless abandon.

Despite being prepared for such zealotry—the coalition had clashed with the cult before—their soldiers still felt an unsettling chill.

"Push forward!" Xiao Honglian barked, pointing to the cathedral.

"Bring me Yuan Kongye, that lying bh! I'll flay her alive!"

"To whoever captures her, fifty pounds of beef as a reward!"

The promise of such a prize reinvigorated the soldiers. Adrenaline surged as they unleashed a hail of gunfire.

If the cultists didn't fear death, neither did they. In this desolate world, they had grown numb to life and death.

The fight raged on. The cult's tactics of attrition could only slow the coalition's advance but couldn't halt it.

The gap in firepower and discipline was too vast.

At that moment, figures emerged at the street's far end.

The cult soldiers' eyes lit up.

"The priests are here!"

Zheng Yixian, leading three other priests, stood resolutely, cold eyes fixed on the advancing enemy.

"Kill them!"

The coalition soldiers immediately shifted their aim, unleashing a storm of bullets.

Zheng Yixian remained unfazed, calmly raising his right hand in front of him.

This simple gesture seemed to conjure an invisible wall.

Bullets halted midair, as if embedded in a soft rubber barrier, before clattering harmlessly to the ground.

His icy gaze swept across the enemy.

"Are you declaring the peace treaty void?" he asked coldly.

Xiao Honglian's eyes narrowed as she spat out his name:

"Zheng—Yixian!"

“You broke the treaty first,” she retorted, wasting no time as she uncorked a massive flask and took a swig.

With a fierce exhale, she unleashed a torrent of flame.

A colossal fire dragon roared down the street, illuminating the night as its searing heat melted the snow.

The inferno incinerated a dozen cultists instantly and surged toward Zheng Yixian and the priests.

Even with their powers, the priests showed visible tension.

Zheng Yixian spread his arms wide, using telekinesis to yank two derelict trucks from the snow, positioning them as barriers.

Whoosh!

The flames collided with the makeshift shields, their heat still intense enough to scorch their faces.

Forced to retreat a few steps, Zheng Yixian called out, “Is there some misunderstanding? The Followers of the Snow God have always remained neutral!”

But Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai weren’t listening.

They had come to crush the cult. Truth could wait until after the carnage.

“Kill them all!”

At Xiao Honglian’s signal, coalition soldiers poured from their vehicles, guns blazing.

The priests may have been formidable, but ordinary cultists were no match for the coalition's elite troops.

Wei Dinghai waved his forces forward, Chaoyu's soldiers joining the fray.

Zheng Yixian's expression darkened as the reality set in.

The coalition intended to annihilate them.

"To arms!" he bellowed. "Defend the cathedral at all costs!"

The coalition soldiers were relentless, their advanced gear making them near-invincible against the poorly equipped cultists.

Decked in superior thermal armor, they fought with confidence, assured of their dominance in this frozen battlefield.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai personally led their Superhumans against the priests.

Swigging from her flask, Xiao Honglian unleashed another fire dragon, the flames consuming everything in their path.

Her fiery powers, remarkably potent even in this ice age, were bolstered by abundant energy reserves.

Beside her, Wei Dinghai wasted no time. In battle, hesitation was fatal.

Exhaling a frosty breath, the air around him chilled further.

"Ice Lord!"

A thick layer of ice enveloped Wei Dinghai, forming an imposing armor.

Placing his hand on the ground, the surrounding snow erupted violently, launching toward the cultists in a destructive wave.

Amid the chaos, his figure became an indistinct blur within the blizzard.

Chapter 366: The Zealots

Both Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai had seized control of their respective shelters through sheer power, making them the strongest combatants in their factions.

Their combined strength posed an enormous threat to the Followers of the Snow God.

Yet, despite this formidable opposition, the cult had one overwhelming advantage: sheer numbers.

Whether among ordinary followers or Superhumans, they outnumbered any base by a wide margin.

Realizing that a decisive battle was unavoidable, a ruthless glint flashed in Zheng Yixian's eyes as he shouted, "In the name of the Snow God, deliver them divine punishment!"

The priests ceased their hesitation, unleashing their abilities in a ferocious clash with the Superhumans of the coalition forces.

Chaos Unleashed

From every corner, the cultists swarmed like ants.

Ragged and emaciated, their eyes burned with a fanatical light, utterly devoid of fear.

“Eliminate all enemies of the Snow God! Kill them all!”

Armed with nothing but kitchen knives and iron rods, dozens of cultists charged headlong into the coalition’s ranks.

The soldiers sneered as they raised their rifles.

“Ratatatatata!”

The cultists were shredded by gunfire.

“Are these people insane? They think their bodies can stop bullets?” a soldier mocked.

But just as the laughter spread, a sudden rush of wind came from above.

“Huh?”

Looking up, the soldiers barely had time to react as a shadow plummeted down—a crazed cultist, his body strapped with explosives, had leapt from a high building.

“Boom!”

The explosion tore through the ranks, taking the cultist and six soldiers with it.

The grisly scene left the remaining troops visibly shaken.

A squad leader barked, “These cultists are lunatics! They’ll stop at nothing to kill us. Stay alert!”

The coalition had deployed only a few hundred soldiers, leaving some to guard their bases.

But from the surrounding ruins, thousands of cultists poured forth, their sheer numbers causing even the most battle-hardened soldiers to draw a sharp breath.

Xiao Honglian scowled. “Damn cult! How many idiots have they brainwashed into dying for them?”

Her disdain for the cultists was palpable. She saw them as fools, sacrificing their lives for a worthless cause.

Her gaze shifted to the cult’s Superhumans, finally settling on Zheng Yixian.

“Take out the leader, and the rest will crumble.”

She exchanged a glance with Wei Dinghai, who nodded with a smirk.

“Good plan.”

Xiao Honglian took a deep swig from her flask, activating her ability, Infernal Furnace.

Fiery red patterns spread across her face and hands, resembling molten lava flowing under her skin. The heat around her intensified, causing steam to rise from the snow.

With her power fully unleashed, she bolted toward Zheng Yixian like a blazing comet.

An Ambush Unfolds

Zheng Yixian's eyes narrowed, sensing imminent danger.

Suddenly, icy hands shot up from beneath the snow, locking onto his legs.

Wei Dinghai's face emerged, a sinister smile on his lips as freezing energy began creeping up Zheng Yixian's body.

From the front, Xiao Honglian launched a fiery punch, her flame-covered fist aimed directly at Zheng Yixian's head.

“Boom!”

The explosion sent a shockwave through the battlefield, scattering snow and bodies alike.

When the dust settled, Zheng Yixian stood behind Wu Huan and Han Chang, panting heavily. His right arm was charred, blood clotted, and poison from the flames coursed through his veins.

Without immediate treatment, his condition would worsen in the harsh post-apocalyptic environment.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai looked on with frustration.

Despite their combined attack, they had failed to take Zheng Yixian down. His subordinates had intervened at the critical moment, pulling him to safety.

A Battle of Attrition

The ordinary soldiers and cultists fought with equal ferocity.

The cultists, with no fear of death, charged armed with mere cooking utensils. Their fiery determination sent chills down their enemies' spines.

It wasn't just a disregard for death; they seemed to seek it out.

Even the most seasoned soldiers began to tremble.

Wave after wave of cultists fell, only to be replaced by more, chanting their doctrine as they marched to their deaths.

The coalition soldiers grew weary, their nerves fraying under the relentless assault.

They were killing cultists by the hundreds, but the cultists' suicidal tactics had already cost them over thirty soldiers in just thirty minutes.

Worse still, more cultists kept emerging from the ruins.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai exchanged uneasy glances.

The sheer fanaticism of the cult was beyond anything they had expected.

Normally, a few gunshots would scatter any opposing force, leaving survivors to surrender or flee. But these cultists were different.

They fought like madmen, unyielding and undeterred.

The coalition still had the upper hand, but the mounting casualties were becoming unsustainable.

With other factions lurking in Tianhai City and the powerful Qingfu Base dominating the northwest, they couldn't afford such losses.

Xiao Honglian finally made a decision.

Taking a deep breath, she glared at Zheng Yixian.

"My cousin and his team are dead. The Followers of the Snow God are the prime suspects. Now, I want an explanation!"

Chapter 367: The Veil of Truth

If eliminating the Followers of the Snow God outright were feasible, Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai would have done so without hesitation. However, the risks were mounting. Negotiation offered a safer route to extract benefits while preserving their advantage.

Though the coalition had the upper hand, pressing the attack further could lead to significant losses.

Wei Dinghai nodded approvingly at Xiao Honglian's decision. "My trusted lieutenant, Wang Ruixuan, also died in West Hill Base's territory. The most likely suspects with the capability and motive are you, the Followers of the Snow God!"

"Zheng Yixian," he said coldly, "today you will give us an explanation. If not, we will level your entire cult!"

At the leaders' command, both sides pulled back their forces.

As the cultists retreated, their sheer numbers became evident, numbering in the thousands. While most were unarmed civilians, the sheer scale was enough to unnerve both Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

Their disdain for the cult wasn't baseless. If left unchecked, such a group could grow strong enough to challenge their dominance.

The priests of the Followers of the Snow God glared daggers at the coalition leaders.

They were no fools. They knew the coalition's shift to negotiation came only after realizing a drawn-out battle would cost too much.

Han Chang, visibly seething, tossed the severed head of a Chaoyu Base soldier onto the ground. His beast-like claws gleamed menacingly.

"Your dead men have nothing to do with us! Where's your proof that we killed them?"

Xiao Honglian sneered. "Proof? What a joke. Why don't you go call the police?"

Her mocking tone made Han Chang's face turn red with fury.

In the post-apocalypse, law and order were relics of the past. Power determined everything, not evidence.

Zheng Yixian raised a hand to calm Han Chang.

"I see why you're here now," Zheng Yixian said. "But the Followers of the Snow God have always honored our agreements. We've never killed any of your people." R◆

Wei Dinghai chuckled, his cold breath swirling. "Yet, besides you, who else in Tianhai City has the strength and ambition to strike at both our factions simultaneously?"

"Whoever did it made no mistakes—eliminating two Superhuman-led squads without leaving a trace."

The Qingfu Base members, known for their fiery tempers, were dismissed as suspects. They lacked the ambition for territorial expansion and were too distant to act in both locations simultaneously.

The Followers of the Snow God remained the most plausible culprits.

Zheng Yixian took a deep breath. "Have you considered that another hidden force might be at play here?"

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai frowned, dismissing the suggestion.

"Impossible!"

Tianhai City's five regions had long been divided among the major factions. Only the cult had managed to grow in the chaotic early days of the apocalypse, seizing their foothold before the others could react.

Any emerging force would have been swiftly crushed or absorbed.

Zheng Yixian, however, insisted. "You're overlooking something. What about the disturbances in Lu River District over the past month?"

Both leaders paused, recalling reports of skirmishes in the former West Hill Base's territory.

West Hill Base, once the most formidable, controlled the city's military, its soldiers, and its weaponry.

Yet, over the past month, scouts had reported gunfire and massive explosions in Lu River District—far beyond what a minor skirmish would produce.

No one believed West Hill Base had been bested by another faction until a missile strike from Jiangnan District destroyed the base.

The earlier conflicts had been largely ignored in the rush to seize West Hill's territories.

Zheng Yixian's words now brought those events back into focus.

"Could there really be a powerful force capable of standing up to West Hill Base?"

Xiao Honglian's expression grew heavy. If true, it would complicate their plans to expand into West Hill's former territory.

Wei Dinghai shared her concern.

Neither wanted another rival to emerge in Tianhai City.

"Zheng Yixian, you're trying to shift our focus," Xiao Honglian said sharply. "You think we'll believe you just because you said so?"

Her gaze hardened. "Prove your cult's innocence, or we'll take matters into our own hands!"

Han Chang clenched his fists, fuming, but Zheng Yixian restrained him.

"Stay calm. We can't win this fight outright."

The cult's power was still too weak. Even facing a single base was a challenge, let alone two.

Their survival hinged on the fanatical devotion of their followers, who believed in the Snow God's promise of a bountiful afterlife.

Turning to Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai, Zheng Yixian offered, "We were at West Hill Base that day. We encountered your man, Wang Ruixuan."

"Alongside him were individuals from another faction—perhaps the ones you seek."

Wei Dinghai's eyes narrowed. "Who? Who dares challenge Chaoyu Base?"

Wang Ruixuan wasn't just a valued subordinate; he was a long-time comrade and a Superhuman, invaluable to their faction.

Han Chang's eyes gleamed with defiance. Glaring at the coalition leaders, he growled, "That day, I saw people wearing West Hill Base combat gear."

Chapter 368: The Rising Undercurrent

Han Chang recounted everything he had witnessed that day to Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

He had already shared these details with Zheng Yixian before, but at the time, both had dismissed the activity as the remnants of West Hill Base's scattered forces.

Han Chang had no interest in getting involved in the conflicts of other bases and left shortly after, unaware of subsequent developments.

It wasn't until the coalition attacked and revealed the deaths of Wang Ruixuan and Gao Yuan in separate incidents that Zheng Yixian realized something was amiss.

Wei Dinghai's expression darkened as he processed the story. "Are you suggesting that West Hill Base wasn't entirely wiped out? That they've been regrouping in secret?"

“Impossible,” Xiao Honglian interjected.

“Their shelter was obliterated by missiles. Any survivors wouldn’t have enough resources to rebuild, let alone target both of our factions at the same time.”

She crossed her arms with a cold smirk. “Even in their prime, Chen Xinian wouldn’t have dared.”

Zheng Yixian’s tone deepened. “Perhaps it’s not West Hill Base’s remnants, but another faction that seized their territory after the battle.”

“They might not even be aware of the major shelters outside Lu River and West Hill Districts. If they knew, I doubt they’d have made such a bold move against you.”

Zheng Yixian’s theory gave Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai pause.

Though the idea seemed far-fetched, it was the most plausible explanation given the circumstances.

When all other possibilities are eliminated, no matter how improbable the remaining scenario, it must be closest to the truth.

For years, the major factions had maintained a delicate balance, avoiding direct conflict.

Who else but an outsider would dare to provoke two major bases by killing their Superhumans?

“Lu River District...” Xiao Honglian murmured, her voice barely audible.

Her mind raced back to the reports from their scouts about heavy fighting near the border of Lu River and West Hill Districts.

If they investigated that area, they might uncover the clues they sought.

Wei Dinghai, meanwhile, frowned as he tried to recall a piece of intelligence that seemed relevant but remained frustratingly elusive—something that once seemed trivial but now appeared significant.

Recognizing the stalemate, neither side was eager to incur further losses.

Both leaders agreed to retreat and investigate Zheng Yixian's claims about Lu River District.

Xiao Honglian pointed sternly at Zheng Yixian. "This isn't over. We'll investigate, but if I find out your people were involved, I'll return and burn your base to the ground."

Han Chang couldn't hold back. "Bring it on! Next time, you'll leave here in body bags!"

Xiao Honglian shot him a contemptuous smile before turning away, leading her forces out without another word.

Wei Dinghai followed suit, his cold smirk lingering as he directed his troops to withdraw.

Though both factions had temporarily disengaged, they would undoubtedly return if provoked.

For now, their mission had been a partial success—significantly depleting the cult's forces while keeping their own losses manageable.

On the Road Back

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai discussed their next moves.

“The cult’s growth is too rapid. That so-called prophet is brainwashing survivors left and right,” Wei Dinghai remarked.

Xiao Honglian snorted. “That zealot should’ve been dealt with long ago. Not only is she recruiting survivors, but even my slaves are trying to escape to her sanctuary.”

“Fools,” she added disdainfully. “They think there’s a ‘heaven’ in the apocalypse? Without strength, they’re just cannon fodder wherever they go.”

Wei Dinghai chuckled. “And often, those who preach ‘for your own good’ are the ones to exploit you most mercilessly.”

The convoy soon reached a fork in the road where the two factions would part ways.

Before leaving, Wei Dinghai asked, “What’s your plan from here?”

Xiao Honglian gave a cryptic smile. “Isn’t it obvious? None of us can ignore this.”

Wei Dinghai shrugged. “I was suggesting we work together. If there’s truly a strong force in Lu River District, going solo could be risky.”

Though Chaoyu Base dominated the seas, their land-based strength was limited, often relying on Yangsheng Base for support.

Xiao Honglian neither agreed nor declined. “We’ll investigate further and decide then.”

She trusted her own judgment over the cult's claims.

"Let me know if you change your mind," Wei Dinghai said. "With Chen Xinian gone, together we could take control of Tianhai City in no time."

Xiao Honglian dismissed the notion with a wave, ordering her troops to return to Yangsheng Base.

As her convoy disappeared into the distance, Wei Dinghai exhaled a frosty breath. "What a fierce woman. If I could bring her to heel, Tianhai City would be mine."

A pale, soft-featured man stepped forward—Chen Jingguan, Wei Dinghai's deputy.

"Leader, she's hiding something from us."

Wei Dinghai's eyes gleamed briefly, then he laughed. "Of course she is. Trust is a luxury none of us can afford."

His smile grew sly. "Besides, I think I've remembered something."

"Whoever clashed with West Hill Base near Lu River... it's likely that once insignificant player we overlooked."

Chapter 369: Sacrifice

Upon returning to Chaoyu Base, Wei Dinghai wasted no time initiating a thorough investigation into the mysterious force in Lu River District.

His search led back to a series of events that began months ago with a peculiar mass text from Lu Fengda, circulating through Tianhai City.

The name Zhang Yi resurfaced.

Connections were drawn: Yuelu Residential Area, Zhang Yi, the theft at Walmart South China Warehouse...

Piece by piece, the puzzle began to form, drawing closer to the truth.

Meanwhile, Yangsheng Base's intelligence network, equally diligent, had made its own discoveries. But Xiao Honglian's focus wasn't solely on these clues—it was the unexpected signal from Gao Yuan's satellite phone that piqued her interest.

Yangsheng Base, Intelligence Division

After returning, Xiao Honglian skipped rest and went straight to the Intelligence Division.

Her team had tracked Gao Yuan's satellite phone signal to the border between West Hill and Lu River Districts, near the Lu River.

Though pinpointing the exact location was impossible due to signal interference, they managed to narrow it down to a five-kilometer radius.

"Xu Family Town, Cloud Manor," Zhuge Qingtian noted, adjusting his gold-rimmed glasses. "These are the only inhabited areas nearby. If there's a force capable of challenging West Hill Base, it's likely located there."

Xiao Honglian's eyes flickered with a calculating light as she weighed her options.

Who were these people? Why had they killed her men?

And why had the signal disappeared, only to reappear now? It all felt orchestrated, as if someone was manipulating events behind the scenes.

“We’ll have to send scouts,” Xiao Honglian murmured.

Zhuge Qingtian suggested, “Should we involve Wei Dinghai? Sending a joint team would increase our chances of success.”

Xiao Honglian waved the idea away.

“Unnecessary,” she said with a confident smirk.

“This mysterious faction, though powerful enough to contend with West Hill Base, must be weakened by now. Their peak strength likely only matched West Hill’s.”

“West Hill Base is gone, and if they’re as battered as I suspect, this could be our chance to swoop in and claim their assets.”

Zhuge Qingtian nodded but remained cautious. “It’s still risky. They’ve already taken down two Superhuman squads from our bases.”

Xiao Honglian thought of her late cousin and shook her head.

“He was weak. This time, I’m sending Dong Hu. He’s reliable.”

“As for Chaoyu Base, let them fend for themselves. Wei Dinghai plays nice now because he needs us. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be so polite.”

With Xiao Honglian's decision made, Zhuge Qingtian refrained from further argument and sent for Dong Hu.

Tianfeng District

The aftermath of the battle had left the Followers of the Snow God's headquarters in ruins. The ground was soaked in blackened blood, littered with the shattered remains of fallen fighters.

Inside the cathedral, women and children huddled together under the protection of the cult's guards.

Only the adult male cultists had fought—and died—outside.

Zheng Yixian inspected his severely burned arm, where Xiao Honglian's fiery punch had left his flesh charred, exposing raw muscle and cracked bone beneath.

The bitter cold numbed his pain, but exhaustion weighed heavily on him.

"Grand Priest!"

Han Chang and others surrounded him, their faces etched with worry. They couldn't forget how close Zheng Yixian had come to death in his duel with Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

The combined might of the two base leaders was terrifying, a testament to the brutal path they had walked to the top.

"I'm fine. I'll seek the Holy Maiden for healing," Zheng Yixian said, pulling a white fox fur cloak over his wound as he turned toward the cathedral.

"Clean this place up."

His eyes briefly closed, his usual composed clarity giving way to a flicker of weariness.

As Zheng Yixian retreated, the cultists who had fought so valiantly began to falter. The adrenaline and divine fervor that had driven them started to fade.

Seeing the carnage around them, the pain from their wounds finally struck.

“Aaaagh!”

Cries of agony rose as the reality of their injuries set in.

From the crowd, women in white religious robes stepped forward, raising their hands.

“Brave warriors! You have received the Snow God’s blessing. Your souls shall ascend to the divine kingdom, where peace and joy await!”

While these words offered spiritual solace, physical relief was scarce.

A group of nun-like followers rushed among the wounded with medical kits, offering basic first aid. Supplies were too scarce for more than rudimentary care—bandages for bleeding, no proper disinfectants.

A severely injured man with a severed arm reached out to one of the nuns.

“Help me... I can still be saved,” he pleaded weakly.

The nun knelt, tears of compassion welling in her eyes.

“May the Snow God’s mercy embrace all suffering souls,” she whispered. “Your devotion will lead you to paradise.”

With gentle reverence, she drew a sharp blade and, before he could react, plunged it into his carotid artery.

His eyes widened in disbelief as his life faded.

The nun closed his eyes, murmuring, “How fortunate you are to meet the Snow God so soon.”

Such scenes were commonplace on the battlefield.

The cult lacked resources to care for the gravely injured, so they were “released” to join the Snow God in the afterlife.

In time, this grim practice had instilled a belief among the cultists: dying for the Snow God guaranteed entry to a divine paradise.

Meanwhile, deep within a forbidden building behind the cathedral, gruesome rituals unfolded.

Blood-red vines slithered from the shadows, dragging corpses into the building’s depths.

Inside, a massive, pulsating crimson plant anchored itself, its vines spreading throughout the structure.

Cocoon-like pods hung from the ceiling, containing vaguely human forms. The plant absorbed the corpses, exhaling a red mist that filled the space with an eerie glow.

From the vines sprouted crimson, apple-like fruits, growing plump with grotesque vitality.

Watching from a distance, Han Chang folded his arms, his face grim.

“May the fallen sustain the living. Their sacrifice feeds our hope.”

Chapter 370: The Purification Ritual

Zheng Yixian entered the cathedral.

Despite the chaos outside, Yuan Kongye remained focused, conducting the final stages of the Gift Ceremony with serene composure.

This particular group consisted of newly recruited followers, most of whom had joined after witnessing Yuan Kongye’s so-called miracles. Their faith had deepened quickly, and they now viewed the Snow God as their ultimate salvation.

As the ceremony neared its end, only a few young boys remained. Guided by their parents, they approached the altar.

These boys had been with the cult for only a week but were already among its most devout, ready to sacrifice their lives for the Snow God.

Yuan Kongye gazed at them with a gentle expression, though a fleeting struggle of inner turmoil crossed her face.

She quickly masked it, burying the conflict deep within her dark pupils.

“Come, my children,” Yuan Kongye called softly, beckoning them forward.

The boys, confused, looked back at their parents, seeking reassurance.

“Trust the Holy Maiden,” one father said gently. “Everything she does is for your own good.”

“You need this purification to become true followers of the Snow God,” another added.

Trusting their parents, the boys hesitantly stepped toward the altar.

Yuan Kongye instructed one of them to lie down on the stone slab. She placed her right hand gently on his forehead.

The boy instantly felt his strength drain away; his limbs became unresponsive, as though they no longer belonged to him.

“Don’t be afraid, child. An evil spirit resides within you. I will cleanse it,” Yuan Kongye said with a serene smile.

Her hand moved deftly, producing a sharp dagger.

The boy’s eyes widened in terror, his pupils contracting as his body froze in fear. He couldn’t even scream.

The other boys stood frozen in horror, unable to comprehend the true nature of this exorcism.

“It will be over soon,” Yuan Kongye reassured him. “I shall purify your impurity myself.”

Without hesitation, she brought the blade down swiftly.

Blood splattered. The boy lost consciousness immediately, his eyes dull and unfocused.

Yuan Kongye placed her glowing hand over his wound, and a soft, holy light emanated from her palm, sealing the injury.

“From now on, you will never become a corrupted demon.”

“The purification is complete.”

The boy’s parents approached, bowing deeply to Yuan Kongye.

“Thank you, Holy Maiden, for cleansing him. He will no longer be tempted by evil.”

“Now he will be a more obedient and good child, won’t he?” the boy’s mother asked hopefully, recalling years of frustration over her son’s unruly behavior.

Yuan Kongye nodded reassuringly. “From now on, he will be a kind and well-behaved child.”

Tears of relief filled the parents’ eyes. They expressed their heartfelt gratitude and carried their unconscious son away.

Meanwhile, the remaining boys were paralyzed with fear, some collapsing to the floor.

“Purification... means cutting that off? No! I don’t want it!”

“I don’t want to be a eunuch!” another wailed.

They tried to flee, but towering figures blocked their path. Their parents stood firm, expressions stern yet strangely comforting.

“You must understand, child. We’re doing this for your own good.”

“You’ve been so disobedient because a demon resides in your heart. Once the Holy Maiden purifies you, you’ll be a good boy.”

“Stop resisting and accept this gift!”

Despite their parents’ encouragement, the boys saw only terrifying faces, like demons themselves.

Behind them, Yuan Kongye’s soft, chilling voice called out:

“Who’s next?”

One by one, the boys underwent the ritual. Their parents, grateful and reverent, thanked Yuan Kongye before taking them home.

Zheng Yixian observed everything from a distance, his expression unreadable.

When the ceremony concluded, the congregation sang praises before gradually dispersing, leaving the cathedral nearly empty.

Only Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian remained.

Yuan Kongye approached Zheng Yixian, her gaze falling on his concealed arm. She gently pulled back his cloak, revealing the charred and wounded limb.

“How did it get this bad?” she asked softly, placing her hand over the injury. A warm glow radiated from her palm as she began to heal him.

Zheng Yixian allowed her to stabilize his condition but stopped her midway.

“You’ve already used your powers too many times today. Treat me tomorrow,” he said.

Yuan Kongye smiled faintly, her expression as cold and serene as snow.

“Who attacked?”

“Yangsheng Base’s Xiao Honglian and Chaoyu Base’s Wei Dinghai,” Zheng Yixian replied. “They teamed up against us.”

A flicker of surprise crossed Yuan Kongye’s eyes. “Both bases attacked together?”

Zheng Yixian explained the events leading to the battle, including the mysterious faction they suspected.

After listening, Yuan Kongye’s expression turned thoughtful.

“So, aside from the Followers of the Snow God and West Hill Base, there’s another powerful force in Tianhai City?”

“Could their rise have played a role in West Hill Base’s downfall?”

Zheng Yixian nodded. "This mysterious faction is connected to a man named Zhang Yi. We once received intelligence mentioning him."

"Considering his ability to contend with West Hill Base for so long, it's clear he's no ordinary Superhuman."

"If not for him, what else could have led to West Hill Base's destruction?"

Yuan Kongye murmured thoughtfully, "Yet, all evidence points to the missile from Jiangnan District."

"True," Zheng Yixian agreed, "but Zhang Yi remains a key figure. His strength and resources shouldn't be underestimated."

He added, "The rumors of his vast stockpile of supplies might actually be true."

A spark of intrigue lit Yuan Kongye's dark eyes.

"If that's the case, we should keep a closer watch on him."

Zheng Yixian stepped forward. "Should we send an envoy to probe him?"