

## Ice Age 371

### Chapter 371: Medicine

Yuan Kongye regarded Zheng Yixian with a faint smile. “Oh? Test him? You mean to gauge his true potential?”

Zheng Yixian chuckled. “If he’s strong enough, we might consider recruiting him. Together, we could stand against the major bases.”

Yuan Kongye’s furrowed brow relaxed, her interest clearly piqued.

Zheng Yixian continued, “The major bases control all the critical resources in Tianhai City. Although our numbers are great, the Followers of the Snow God are severely resource-deprived.”

“The Blood Vine helps us obtain food through conversion, but it’s not a sustainable solution.”

“Take today, for example. We barely withstood the combined assault of Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases. If they hadn’t held back, unwilling to risk mutual destruction, we might not have survived.”

Zheng Yixian’s eyes gleamed. “We need allies—someone like us.”

After a moment of contemplation, Yuan Kongye nodded slowly. She saw the wisdom in his words.

The current strength of the Followers of the Snow God wouldn't hold in an all-out war. Any one of the three major bases could annihilate them.

She needed time. Time to grow stronger.

"Very well. Send the Grand Writ to test his strength."

"If he proves capable of resisting the bases, Tianhai City's balance of power may shift drastically."

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Inside the Shelter's Medical Room

Zhou Ke'er, clad in a white lab coat, leaned over a microscope, meticulously examining a slide.

Zhang Yi lounged lazily against the counter behind her, his tone casual. "Well? Recognize this stuff?"

Zhou Ke'er was studying a stimulant Zhang Yi had acquired from Gao Yuan and his team.

The drug, capable of temporarily granting ordinary people Superhuman-like abilities, had left a deep impression on Zhang Yi.

Curious about its potential, he wanted to understand its properties—perhaps to use in emergencies or to counter it if encountered again.

Zhou Ke'er turned around, her expression thoughtful. “This is a military-grade stimulant, typically issued to soldiers in active combat zones. Its effects are powerful, drastically enhancing physical performance and keeping users awake for up to three days.” ↩

She sighed. “I’ve seen similar compounds in my mentor’s lab, but this is the first time I’ve encountered it in use.”

“Compared to the stimulants I’ve used on you, this one is at least ten times stronger.”

“Of course, the side effects are equally severe.”

Zhang Yi’s curiosity deepened. “How severe?”

Zhou Ke'er smirked. “The drug works by accelerating metabolism and maximizing energy use. Essentially, it forces the body into overdrive.”

“After one use, losing ten pounds is common. Users experience intense muscle soreness, and recovery takes weeks for those in good health. As for the less fortunate...” She shrugged. “They might not survive the first dose.”

Zhang Yi chuckled. "Figures. No such thing as a free lunch. A drug that makes you stronger without drawbacks doesn't exist, huh?"

Zhou Ke'er hesitated, then said thoughtfully, "Maybe not entirely."

"Oh?" Zhang Yi's interest sharpened. "There's something like that?"

Zhou Ke'er nodded, then shook her head. "I've heard that the military once worked on a drug to enhance combat performance with minimal side effects."

"While it couldn't eliminate side effects entirely, it supposedly reduced them to negligible levels."

"Naturally, such a drug would be outrageously expensive, which is why it never became standard issue."

Zhang Yi considered this. "So, there's a chance we might encounter it, though it's unlikely. Good to know."

He crossed his arms, muttering, "Technology is a dangerous game. Even ordinary people can't be underestimated."

Zhou Ke'er removed her gloves and prepared to clean her equipment. Zhang Yi struck up a new conversation.

"Ke'er, remember the rat poison I used back at Yuelu?"

"Hmm? Rat poison?" She glanced at him, puzzled. "You mean the one you used in Yuelu Residential Area? You still have that stuff?"

Zhang Yi's smile turned sly. "Never know when it might come in handy. Better safe than sorry."

He scratched his nose. "You said its lethal dose was 0.1 grams. What happens with smaller amounts?"

Though unsure of his intentions, Zhou Ke'er answered. "In tiny doses, the body's detoxification processes can handle it without issue."

"But if the dose is carefully controlled—around 5% of the lethal amount—it can accumulate and cause harm."

"Would it kill someone?" Zhang Yi asked.

Zhou Ke'er shook her head. "Not immediately. That's why it's called a lethal dose, after all."

She added, "However, repeated exposure would cause organ failure over time. Without treatment, it would eventually be fatal."

She chuckled. "In today's harsh conditions, where even minor ailments can be deadly, it's practically a death sentence."

Zhang Yi nodded. "Interesting. Makes sense."

Zhou Ke'er eyed him playfully. "Got a rat problem?"

Zhang Yi's grin grew more enigmatic. "Not in the shelter. But outside? Maybe."

Zhou Ke'er shook her head. "Rats in this frozen wasteland? You must be imagining things."

She paused. "Then again, who knows? Maybe some survived in the sewers."

Rats, resilient in filthy environments, often outlived humans during disasters.

Zhang Yi shrugged. "Could be. If cats can mutate, why not rats? Maybe someday, rats will rule the planet. Who's to say?"

Chapter 372: Malice

After finishing his chat with Zhou Ke'er, Zhang Yi left the infirmary.

From the living room, the lively sounds of a card game carried over clearly. Zhou Haimei came by almost every day to play mahjong with the women in Zhang Yi's household.

It proved, once again, that no matter the time or place, playing cards was always a simple and reliable source of joy.

The Shelter remained as bright and opulent as ever, radiating a sense of security and comfort—a veritable post-apocalyptic haven. It seemed as though this peaceful state could last forever.

No, not just seemed.

Zhang Yi quietly assured himself, I'll make sure this comfortable environment lasts until the apocalypse ends.

Just then, a pleasant and steady voice called out behind him.

“Zhang Yi, there you are! I've been looking for you in the west section.”

Zhang Yi turned to see Liang Yue approaching.

He smiled lightly. “Look at me, almost forgot about your task.”

Without waiting for her to say more, he retrieved food for ten people from his spatial storage and packed it neatly.

Liang Yue's face flushed slightly. “Thank you!” she said, taking the food. Her fingers brushed against his, causing her to tremble ever so slightly.

Zhang Yi chuckled. "Why so polite? Like I said, as long as you're here, we're family. In the apocalypse, the only real family are those who stick together. Your problems are my problems."

Since Liang Yue joined the Shelter, Zhang Yi and the others had been reinforcing this idea: they were family, united against the apocalypse. This belief clearly set them apart from those students who simply awaited rescue.

Living in such an environment, people's mindsets were bound to shift. Liang Yue's changing demeanor showed she was gradually embracing this philosophy.

"I understand. Thank you, Zhang Yi, for indulging my little whims." Liang Yue looked up at him, her eyes carrying a hint of unspoken emotion.

"Once they can fend for themselves like the villagers of Xu Family Town, I won't bother you anymore. That's a promise."

They won't trouble me for long, Zhang Yi thought, glancing at the food in her hands.

"Yeah, self-reliance is good. Take your time; there's no need to rush or pressure yourself."

Liang Yue bit her lip, but realizing such a gesture didn't suit her image, she quickly straightened her expression. "I'll head over now."

"Alright, the sooner you go, the sooner you'll be back!" Zhang Yi waved, watching her leave.

At this moment, Yang Xinxin wheeled herself beside him. She followed his gaze, looking at Liang Yue's retreating figure, then spoke thoughtfully.

"Brother, I think Teacher Liang has fallen for you."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow but responded with a faint smile.

Recently, he had spent a lot of time with Liang Yue, particularly during their martial arts training. Such close contact was inevitable, and over time, her gaze toward him had indeed changed.

How did Zhou Botong and Ying Gu get together? Through martial arts training.

"Love? Attraction? It's just hormones messing with people," Zhang Yi remarked casually. "Humans have instincts, and in a high-stress, apocalyptic environment, the urge to reproduce only intensifies."

He touched his face. "Besides, there are only three men in the Shelter. Compared to Uncle You and Fatty Xu, I'm clearly the best catch. It'd be strange if she didn't feel something for me."

Yang Xinxin tilted her head, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Why not make Teacher Liang your girlfriend? With her rigid personality, once she decides you're her man, she'll be loyal for life."

She leaned closer and whispered conspiratorially, "I'll let you in on a secret—Teacher Liang has never had a boyfriend. Women like her, who've been single for years, are actually easy to sway. To put it bluntly, they're easy to fool."

Zhang Yi gave her a sideways glance. "Wow, you really know your stuff. Even willing to trick your own teacher?"

Yang Xinxin smiled faintly, interlacing her slender fingers on her lap.

"I just don't want to see her waste her life. With her personality, if she didn't have you looking out for her, she wouldn't survive long in this apocalypse."

Zhang Yi looked out the window, his gaze falling on Liang Yue's determined silhouette.

"Let's deal with that matter first," he muttered. "Getting involved with such a stubborn woman would only give me more headaches."

Though Zhang Yi enjoyed the company of beautiful women, he despised trouble. If he had to choose, he'd rather keep his freedom.

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Meanwhile, in Xu Family Town.

After some time living independently, the group had gradually learned to fish. It was a difficult process—once accustomed to laziness, even small efforts felt like a monumental task. But hunger eventually forced them into action.

Among the students, a few physically strong boys stood out, with Ye Xiaotian, a modified superhuman, taking the lead. As a result, he held the most authority.

However, Ye Xiaotian's character was aloof, and he had no interest in power struggles. He focused solely on gathering food as Liang Yue instructed, never abusing his influence.

This left room for Wu Chengyu, a schemer, to step in.

In their academy days, Wu Chengyu had a degree of influence among his classmates. Now, he made a point of ingratiating himself with Ye Xiaotian, calling him "brother" at every opportunity.

Ye Xiaotian, though aware of Wu Chengyu's intentions, was still a nineteen-year-old prone to enjoying flattery. Over time, he tolerated Wu Chengyu's antics, allowing him to exploit his authority.

One day, the group gathered around a small fire in their snow house. Fuel was scarce; most of the deadwood and furniture in the area had been burned. They had even resorted to burning the clothes of the deceased, albeit sparingly.

"Damn it! Why do we have to live like this?" Wu Chengyu gritted his teeth, cocooned in a thick blanket. Despite the insulation, the cold gnawed at them, leaving their limbs numb.

However, was the cold truly his greatest torment? Perhaps not.

Back at Tianqing Academy, they had endured icy conditions for extended periods without such resentment. Wu Chengyu's suffering stemmed from knowing that, across the river, Zhang Yi, their teacher, and two classmates lived comfortably in a luxurious, heated mansion.

It was not scarcity but inequality that fueled his malice.

"If only Teacher Liang cared about us!" Class leader Shen Miaokey muttered bitterly. "She could've fought for our entry into the Shelter. But no, she only looks out for herself."

"Forget it," Wu Chengyu sneered. "Teacher Liang wouldn't dare! She already belongs to Zhang Yi. Hehe, maybe she got into the Shelter by trading her body for it!"

"Wow! Seriously?"

"Hmph, it's very likely. Don't be fooled by her serious demeanor during the day. I bet deep down, she's the shy, flirtatious type—wild at heart!"

"Hahaha, let's dive deeper into this topic!"

Chapter 373: Investigating Xu Family Town

The students vented their frustrations about Liang Yue through their words, complaining without restraint.

But soon, they all fell silent, almost in unison.

Based on the usual schedule, it was about time for Liang Yue to deliver their food.

Sure enough, not long after, Liang Yue arrived at their snow house, carrying provisions.

“Teacher Liang!”

“Teacher Liang, you’re here!”

“We missed you so much!”

The students put on pitiful faces, tears welling up in their eyes.

Liang Yue, however, simply placed the food on the ground and said, “Be careful these days. The area hasn’t been peaceful. Unless you’re out searching for food, stay inside the snow house as much as possible.”

“Oh, and there are plenty of underground cellars in Xu Family Town where food is stored. You should hide in the cellars whenever possible. Got it?”

Hearing this, the students grew uneasy.

Wu Chengyu quickly stood up, his face full of fear. “Teacher Liang, if it’s so dangerous, why not take us back with you?”

“Isn’t the Shelter the safest place?”

The other students, realizing the opportunity, rushed to join in, pleading with Liang Yue to bring them back.

As Liang Yue looked at their pale faces, her thoughts turned to Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran.

Most of these students had once subjected those two to cold, silent ostracism.

Over time, Liang Yue’s bond with Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran had grown significantly stronger.

This was partly due to the environment of the apocalypse, which drove people to seek warmth and solidarity, and partly because Liang Yue had found in them what she had lost in students like Wu Chengyu.

Without comparison, there would be no disappointment.

As a teacher, she naturally gravitated toward the more obedient and sensible students.

She couldn't bear the thought of upsetting Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran by suggesting these students be brought into the Shelter.

And she wasn't naïve.

While Zhang Yi was kind and supportive of her, the others in the Shelter had no obligation to these students.

Bringing back such a burden would surely displease people like Zhou Ke'er.

Given that there hadn't been any signs of external threats recently, Liang Yue was unwilling to stir up trouble.

"You can't rely on your teacher for everything. You're all grown up now and need to learn how to solve problems on your own."

"Hide in the cellars. Even if danger comes, you won't be the primary targets. As long as you stay hidden, you'll be safe."

Liang Yue's plan seemed sound.

After Zhang Yi's intense battle with the West Hill Base, any smaller factions in the area wouldn't dare to cause trouble.

And if a major force from beyond Xichuan or Lu River District did show up, their target would be Zhang Yi's Shelter, not a group of resource-poor students. r?

But Wu Chengyu and the others were unwilling to give up.

"Teacher, if danger really strikes, it'll be too late to do anything!"

"It's safer if you take us to the Shelter. Zhang Yi and the others are so strong, and you're a great fighter too. Protecting us would be easy, wouldn't it?"

Liang Yue's eyes filled with even more disappointment.

She no longer offered any explanations, only letting out a soft sigh. "Take care of yourselves. Just listen to me and hide well."

With that, she turned and left the snow house, ignoring the students' cries behind her.

"Teacher Liang! Teacher Liang! Teacher—Dmn it! That heartless woman!"

Wu Chengyu punched the wall in frustration, his eyes burning with hatred.

"Why give us hope only to shove us into despair?"

Ye Xiaotian walked over and casually grabbed a portion of the food.

Wu Chengyu noticed and quickly pretended to distribute the rest to everyone.

The food from Zhang Yi's Shelter was undeniably superior, carefully preserved and full of flavor.

They devoured it ravenously, leaving not a single grain behind.

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Meanwhile, in the Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases, the two factions had begun operations against the so-called mysterious force ever since their return from the Followers of the Snow God.

After extensive investigation, they had narrowed down the enemy's location to somewhere near Cloud Manor and Xu Family Town.

Yangsheng Base acted faster, thanks to Zhang Yi's deliberate placement of Gao Yuan's satellite phone among Liang Yue's students, allowing them to track the signal using radar.

The Yangsheng Base dispatched Dong Hu, nicknamed "Blazing Fist," for the mission.

In his early forties, Dong Hu had been a professional bodyguard before the apocalypse, skilled in martial arts and marksmanship. After awakening his superhuman abilities, he became one of Xiao Honglian's trusted generals.

This mission was a reconnaissance operation, not an assault. Xiao Honglian was unsure of Zhang Yi's strength and chose Dong Hu for his level-headed approach.

Dong Hu led his team to the outskirts of Lu River District, where he ordered their snow vehicles hidden before proceeding on foot.

Their modified snow vehicles were loud and fuel-intensive, unsuitable for stealth operations.

Well-equipped and well-provisioned, the group cautiously trekked through the snow, guided by their instruments toward Xu Family Town.

From a distance, they spotted the cluster of snow houses and, across the river, the imposing ice fortress.

Dong Hu exhaled in amazement. "Did they really build this by hand?"

The thick ice wall resembled a miniature snow fortress, towering 20 meters high and 10 meters thick.

Though made primarily of ice, its steel-reinforced core gave it remarkable durability.

"Unless you hit this thing with heavy artillery, standard infantry weapons won't even scratch it."

"No wonder they held off West Hill Base for so long."

Dong Hu's expression grew serious as he issued orders. "Stay sharp! This isn't an opponent to take lightly. One misstep, and we're dead."

His men, seasoned and cautious, nodded solemnly.

Dong Hu used his equipment to confirm that Gao Yuan's satellite phone signal was coming from one of the snow houses.

He called over a sharp-eyed subordinate.

"Scout the area and report back."

The scout, cloaked in white, moved stealthily toward Xu Family Town, blending into the snowy landscape.

As night fell, he reached the village outskirts, finding no signs of guards.

Relaxing slightly, he continued, using the snow houses as cover.

But the village was eerily lifeless.

The dome-shaped snow houses stood like tombs, silent and foreboding.

Most were empty, with only a few sealed by curtains or wooden boards.

The cold left the streets deserted, as if the residents had all perished.

No guards, no signs of life. This can't be a functioning faction, the scout concluded.

A proper force would maintain vigilance, posting guards to ward off intruders. Their absence suggested a lack of resources and strength.

Relieved, the scout carefully approached the snow house marked as the signal's source but chose not to enter, instead retreating to avoid unnecessary risks.

After all, this could be the lair of the individuals who had wiped out both Gao Yuan and Wang Ruixuan's teams.

Returning to Dong Hu, the scout reported, "It's an abandoned village. No guards, no activity. I located the signal source without alerting anyone."

Dong Hu was puzzled. "What? That doesn't add up."

Even the most formidable foe wouldn't leave their defenses so lax.

Glancing at the ice fortress across the river, Dong Hu's eyes narrowed.

"Could it be that their true power lies beyond that stronghold?"

"But why would the signal source be here? Is it a trap?"

Conflicted but determined, Dong Hu resolved to gather more intel before leaving.

Leading his team cautiously into Xu Family Town, he soon stumbled upon a group of young people sleeping soundly in one of the snow houses.

Their defenseless state was almost laughable.

Confirming the signal source was in this very house, Dong Hu stood in silent confusion, unsure of what to make of the scene.

#### Chapter 374: Captives

Although Dong Hu suspected something fishy was going on here, since he had come this far, the first priority was to locate Gao Yuan's satellite phone and capture everyone here for interrogation.

"Move!"

With his order, the investigation team sprang into action, quickly moving to subdue the sleeping students.

Ye Xiaotian, who had the sharpest senses, was the first to notice the intruders. He abruptly opened his eyes and found himself facing a group of strangers in the snow house. Instantly on alert, he shouted, "Who are you? Get out of here!"

One of the investigators didn't bother with words. His massive hand clamped down on Ye Xiaotian's neck like a steel vise and slammed him against the wall.

"If you dare say another word, I'll snap your neck!" he growled coldly.

Ye Xiaotian was stunned.

Although he was a cyborg and far stronger than ordinary people, it was clear that these intruders were seasoned fighters.

Clenching his teeth, Ye Xiaotian let out an angry roar and suddenly mustered all his strength, prying the man's hand off and kicking him three meters away.

"Hm? A Superhuman!" Dong Hu's eyes glinted coldly.

Realizing he couldn't take on so many people at once, Ye Xiaotian decided to make a break for it. However, Dong Hu's towering figure blocked his path.

"Move!" Ye Xiaotian gathered all his strength and swung a punch at Dong Hu's face.

The next moment, a scorching red light flashed before his eyes, his vision blurred, and an unbearable pain exploded in his abdomen.

Dong Hu's fist, engulfed in flames, struck Ye Xiaotian's stomach. His clothes caught fire instantly, burning fiercely.

"Cough..." Ye Xiaotian spat out a mouthful of blood and collapsed unconscious in the snow.

The flames burned through his cotton jacket, revealing the combat uniform of West Hill Base underneath.

Dong Hu's expression grew serious. "Could these people be the remnants of West Hill Base?"

"Move quickly! Don't delay! If they wake up, it'll be trouble!"

Wu Chengyu and the others were still sound asleep when Dong Hu's men restrained them.

“Don’t move! Try anything, and I’ll kill you!”

“Make a sound, and you’re dead!”

The investigation team acted cautiously. Having detected Gao Yuan’s satellite phone signal here, they assumed these young people were no ordinary group. As a result, they didn’t hold back, pinning them to the ground and pressing their heads deep into their bedding.

The students, abruptly woken by the pain of their arms being twisted behind them, let out muffled cries and struggled desperately. However, after the investigators’ brutal threats, they froze in fear, trembling like leaves.

Dong Hu and his team quickly realized that most of the group were mere mortals. Only Ye Xiaotian exhibited some unusual strength, though it wasn’t particularly impressive.

The students were terrified, tied up tightly, and forced to kneel on the freezing snow. Their trembling bodies resembled sieves, their faces pale with fear of these strangers. ↵

The investigators dug out the satellite phone from beneath a bed board and handed it to Dong Hu.

Dong Hu inspected it and confirmed it was indeed Gao Yuan’s satellite phone. Holding it aloft, his icy gaze swept over the captured students.

“Where did you get this?”

The students, having never seen such a device before, could only stare dumbfounded, unable to give a coherent answer.

Dong Hu’s face darkened. “This was found in your house, and you’re saying you don’t know about it?”

He approached one of the students, grabbed his neck, and hoisted him into the air.

The student's face turned red as he stammered, "Don't kill me! Please, I swear I don't know anything!"

"You're really not afraid to die, huh?"

Glancing at the others, Dong Hu tightened his grip.

A sickening "crack" echoed as the student's neck was snapped.

The other students turned even paler, and several girls fainted from sheer terror.

"If you don't talk, you'll end up like him!"

Dong Hu's cold gaze scanned the group, searching for clues. His sharp eyes landed on Wu Chengyu, who seemed shrewder than the rest.

Unlike the others, who were frozen in despair, Wu Chengyu's eyes darted nervously, clearly scheming to find a way to survive.

A veteran like Dong Hu wouldn't miss such behavior.

He strode over, grabbed Wu Chengyu, and lifted him effortlessly.

"Your turn! Speak, or don't?"

Faced with Dong Hu's lethal threat, Wu Chengyu's mind raced before finally landing on a survival strategy.

"I know who brought it! It was Zhang Yi! It must have been Zhang Yi!" he blurted.

Hearing the name “Zhang Yi,” Dong Hu’s expression turned grave.

Before setting out, Xiao Honglian and Zhuge Qingtian had warned him to avoid a man named Zhang Yi at all costs. It was highly likely that West Hill Base had fallen because of him.

“What’s your connection to Zhang Yi?” Dong Hu asked in a low voice.

Knowing his only chance at survival was to prove his worth, Wu Chengyu replied, “There’s a woman with Zhang Yi named Liang Yue. We’re her students. She takes special care of us. Please, don’t kill me. I’m useful to you!”

“If you’re enemies of Zhang Yi, you can use us as leverage. Liang Yue loves us and wouldn’t just watch us die!”

Dong Hu frowned. Wu Chengyu’s words were dubious.

“If your teacher cares about you so much, why would she leave you here instead of taking you to Zhang Yi’s residence?”

Wu Chengyu stammered nervously, “We didn’t want to burden Teacher Liang!”

“We’re adults and need to survive on our own. But Teacher Liang still brings us food every day. Look at the lunchboxes over there if you don’t believe me!”

He pointed to some lunchboxes on a table.

Dong Hu glanced at them and found himself slightly convinced by Wu Chengyu’s explanation.

After a moment of hesitation, he made a decision.

The mission was to retrieve Gao Yuan's satellite phone and gather intel on Zhang Yi. Capturing people connected to Zhang Yi meant they could interrogate them later.

Dong Hu ordered his men to bind all the students and take them back to their leader, Xiao Honglian, for further questioning.

As for the towering ice wall behind them, Dong Hu dared not investigate. Perhaps his cautious instincts had already sensed the lurking danger.

### Chapter 375: Then Let's Fight!

Inside the shelter, in Zhang Yi's room, a notification sounded on his phone.

The satellite phone that Hua Hua had left in Xu Family Town was designed to send an alert whenever it moved out of range. Zhang Yi opened his phone, watching the signal slowly drift farther away, and his eyes narrowed slightly.

“As expected, what's meant to happen will happen.”

He had intentionally instructed Hua Hua to leave the satellite phone in the students' quarters. It was a strategy that killed two birds with one stone.

First, it allowed external forces to deal with those troublesome students for him.

Second, with Yang Xinxin's help, he had tampered with the satellite phone to monitor its location in real time.

This way, as soon as someone took the phone, Zhang Yi could pinpoint the location of their base of operations.

Standing by the window, Zhang Yi gazed toward Xu Family Town through the wind and snow, a sharp glint flashing in his eyes.

“How will things unfold from here?”

“I must admit, I’m starting to look forward to it.”

He had already killed Superhumans from both the Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases—there was no way they would let it slide.

A confrontation with the two bases was inevitable.

It would either end in negotiation or war!

Everything hinged on strength.

Zhang Yi was fully confident in the shelter’s defensive capabilities and didn’t fear a combined assault from the two bases. Still, achieving peace through strength would be preferable to him.

With that in mind, Zhang Yi left his room and headed for the control center to find Yang Xinxin.

Yang Xinxin spent most of her time in the control center, safeguarding the shelter’s network against external intrusions that could steal vital data.

In this post-apocalyptic world, everyone was a hunter armed with weapons, preying on one another in the darkness. The relationship between predator and prey was fluid, but intelligence was the ultimate factor that determined the power gap between two sides—far more so than armed forces.

More than once, Zhang Yi had turned the tables with information, as demonstrated by his victory over West Hill Base.

When he arrived at the control center, he found Yang Xinxin dressed in black Lolita attire, seated in her wheelchair. She was munching on potato chips while watching a classic film displayed on the screen.

At the sound of the door opening, Yang Xinxin quickly shut the video. She knew it must be Zhang Yi since the control center could only be accessed by the two of them—and Zhang Yi's clearance level was higher than hers.

"Brother Zhang Yi, you're here!" Yang Xinxin greeted him sweetly.

Zhang Yi smiled, walked over, and gently ruffled her soft hair.

"Watching movies all alone—doesn't it get boring?"

"Not really! I'm just passing the time, not slacking off," Yang Xinxin replied, her expression the picture of innocence.

If Zhang Yi didn't know her better, he might have thought she was just a naïve and sweet young girl.

Sitting down next to her, Zhang Yi asked with a grin, "How's the analysis coming along on the satellite phone data I gave you a few days ago? Any important intel?" ↴

Data analysis was a time-consuming process, as AI wasn't yet capable of discerning what information was relevant to Zhang Yi.

For instance, a simple photo of a meal could reveal insights about Yangsheng Base's living standards and overall conditions—something only humans could infer.

As a result, Yang Xinxin manually sifted through the data, even though the vast troves of information from West Hill Base were still far from fully processed.

"These people are very cautious," Yang Xinxin explained. "And since the satellite phone wasn't used for long, there isn't much data."

"However, based on the chat records, we've identified the identity of the person you killed."

"His name was Gao Yuan. He was the cousin of Xiao Honglian, the leader of Yangsheng Base, and a squad captain under her command."

Hearing this, Zhang Yi facepalmed. "What are the odds? I managed to accidentally kill the cousin of Yangsheng Base's leader. Looks like there's no way to resolve this peacefully now."

Yang Xinxin chuckled lightly. "Just a cousin, not a brother. Who knows how close they were?"

For her part, she had little affection for her own cousins, so she wasn't convinced this would escalate tensions significantly.

Zhang Yi shrugged. "We can't really speculate on their family dynamics. Let's just be prepared for the worst."

Yang Xinxin continued, "Also, from his chat logs, it's clear that Yangsheng Base and Chaoyu Base are closely connected. The specifics are unclear, but the chats hint at a cooperative relationship."

Looking concerned, she warned, "Brother, if that's the case, we might have to face a joint attack from both bases."

Zhang Yi took a deep breath and reclined in his chair. His expression was calm as he said, "I've considered that. It's simply the worst-case scenario."

"But after the drawn-out battle with West Hill Base, I've lost my fear of these large organizations."

"They all rose to power as rebel groups. Without access to high-yield weapons like massive missiles, they can't pose a significant threat to us."

He narrowed his eyes as he spoke, a sharp glint in his gaze.

"Honestly, from the bottom of my heart, I'd welcome a fight with them!"

“That’s the only way to make them understand that the territory of West Hill Base is now mine. They have no right to cross the line or disrupt my life!”

“A battle would demonstrate our strength. After that, we’d all be able to live peacefully.”

Zhang Yi today was not the same person as before.

His team was strong, composed of top-tier talent. With West Hill Base’s arsenal in his hands, he had also constructed an integrated offensive and defensive perimeter.

Unless he actively launched an offensive against one of the factions, no one in Tianhai City could threaten him in a defensive battle.

Yang Xinxin looked at Zhang Yi, who exuded both confidence and caution, her admiration evident in her smile.

“Oh, right,” she said suddenly, “there’s something else in the chat records. It mentions Bai Xue Jiao. It doesn’t have much to do with us, but I thought I’d tell you anyway.”

“Bai Xue Jiao?” Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, his distaste for the organization evident.

Strictly speaking, Zhang Yi respected Daoist traditions of aiding people in chaotic times. To him, most other religions were simply escapist tools for avoiding reality.

As for Bai Xue Jiao, an odd religious group that originated abroad and had morphed into a new sect exploiting human despair and ignorance, he held no goodwill toward them.

“Tell me, what about them?”

Chapter 376: Interrogation

Yang Xinxin said to Zhang Yi, “Based on Gao Yuan’s conversations with others, it’s clear that their attitude toward Bai Xue Jiao is very negative. I believe the conflict between them is quite sharp.”

Zhang Yi pondered for a moment before asking, “And so? Are you suggesting that if Yangsheng Base attacks us, we should consider recruiting Bai Xue Jiao as an ally?”

Yang Xinxin blinked playfully and smiled. “Who knows? But wouldn’t having one more ally be better than having one more enemy?”

Zhang Yi shook his head.

“Sometimes, an unclear ally is even more dangerous than an enemy.”

Then, his tone shifted, “That said, if they’re useful, I wouldn’t mind squeezing some value out of them.”

In the apocalypse, friends were rare. Relationships were often transactional—those with value could be allies, but when interests clashed, alliances could turn to enmity in an instant.

What Zhang Yi didn’t know yet was that a team from Bai Xue Jiao’s headquarters was already en route to Cloud Manor.

Dong Hu, with Wu Chengyu and the other captives, departed Xu Family Town, traveling through the night to return to Yangsheng Base.

With these captives in hand, Dong Hu was ready to report back to Xiao Honglian.

Meanwhile, Wu Chengyu and the others were on edge. Facing these strangers of unknown origin, they were deeply afraid for their lives.

“If only we’d listened to Teacher Liang’s advice and stayed hidden, this wouldn’t have happened.”

“Zhang Yi may be selfish and cold, but at least he wouldn’t kill us. He even gave us food for Teacher Liang’s sake.”

“No, no! This is all Teacher Liang’s fault. If she hadn’t left us in Xu Family Town, we wouldn’t have ended up like this!”

“If she’d stayed to protect us, we might have had time to escape!”

Despair, resentment, and regret swirled in the students’ minds.

The Yangsheng Base soldiers guarding them, however, were utterly indifferent to their thoughts. The captives were now in their hands, and they had countless ways to extract the information they needed.

When Dong Hu’s convoy returned to Yangsheng Base, it was late at night. Still, Dong Hu went straight to see Xiao Honglian.

He knew her sleeping schedule was short—barely five hours a day.

Sure enough, when he reached her office, Xiao Honglian was still reviewing reports submitted by her subordinates.

After Dong Hu knocked and entered, she didn’t even look up. “What’s the result of the investigation?”

Dong Hu immediately recounted everything he had observed.

“We found Gao Yuan’s missing phone in Xu Family Town and captured a group of students. They claim to be from Tianqing Academy, and their teacher is said to be close to Zhang Yi.” R

“As for Zhang Yi himself, I didn’t see him. However, across the river in Cloud Manor, I spotted a heavily fortified ice wall. If I’m not mistaken, Zhang Yi and his people live behind that wall, which is likely how they withstood West Hill Base’s attack.”

Dong Hu shared his deductions.

Xiao Honglian frowned slightly, setting down the report in her hands. Her deep, thoughtful eyes fixed on Dong Hu.

“Where are the students?”

“They’re outside. Do you want to interrogate them yourself?”

Xiao Honglian stood up from her chair. “Let’s go. I want to see them.”

This was a critical matter. The outcome of the interrogation would determine whether Xiao Honglian decided to launch an attack on Zhang Yi. She needed to hear the students’ testimonies firsthand.

Wu Chengyu and the other students had been thrown into a workshop at the refinery.

The machines around them roared noisily, and the temperature was noticeably higher than outside, alleviating some of their physical discomfort. However, the warmth did nothing to soothe their fear.

Armed soldiers surrounded them, their expressions cold and unyielding.

The oppressive atmosphere was no better than their days pedaling bikes at West Hill Base. No one dared to speak, kneeling on the cold floor until their legs felt numb.

After a long time, the sound of measured footsteps echoed from outside the workshop.

The door opened, and Wu Chengyu and the others were greeted by the sight of a cold, domineering woman.

She wore a red, specially designed combat uniform that stood out distinctly from the others. On her shoulders were three flaming emblems, marking her as someone of extraordinary rank.

On either side of her stood Zhuge Qingtian and Dong Hu.

When Wu Chengyu saw Dong Hu standing deferentially behind this woman, he immediately understood her identity.

Xiao Honglian entered the workshop and glanced at the captives. The girls were pale with fright, their souls seemingly scared out of their bodies. The boys, with their fair skin and timid demeanor, looked equally incapable of putting up any fight.

It was clear at a glance that they were pampered students from an ivory tower, the type who should have been among the first to die in the apocalypse without protection.

Dong Hu said to Xiao Honglian, "One of them is unconscious. He seems to have ties to West Hill Base, as I found signs of their human modification technology on him."

This piqued Xiao Honglian's interest.

West Hill Base's human modification technology was something even she envied. While the fatality rate was high, it could create semi-Superhuman squads that significantly enhanced combat strength. This was far superior to their reliance on drugs for temporary power boosts.

"Keep that one alive for further study," Xiao Honglian said nonchalantly.

A soldier brought over a chair and respectfully placed it behind her.

Xiao Honglian sat down confidently, crossed her legs, and looked down at the kneeling students. Her amber eyes glinted with a cold red hue, exuding a commanding aura.

Her fiery red lips parted to deliver an icy statement.

"Tell me everything you know. Otherwise, you won't want to experience the interrogation methods of Yangsheng Base."

Wu Chengyu, ever quick-witted, immediately knelt and bowed his head to the ground.

“Rest assured, I’ll tell you everything I know! Just spare my life!”

The other students quickly followed suit, realizing that they needed to demonstrate their value to survive.

“I’ll tell you everything! Please don’t kill me!”

“Who do you want to know about? Zhang Yi? Teacher Liang Yue? I can give you all the information!”

Overwhelmed by fear, the students didn’t even wait for Xiao Honglian to ask questions. They began spilling everything they knew, speaking over one another in their desperation.

Chapter 377: Would Someone Really Be a Saint?

Xiao Honglian looked at the captives’ pitiful expressions, her heart filling with disdain.

She understood that such useless, cowardly individuals could never have access to Zhang Yi’s core intelligence. However, given how little she already knew about Zhang Yi, any scraps of information they could provide were still worth extracting.

“First, tell me: where did you get this satellite phone?”

She held up Gao Yuan’s satellite phone as a signal for them to explain.

But the students had no idea where it had come from. If Dong Hu hadn’t dug it out from under their beds, they wouldn’t have even known it existed.

“We don’t know anything about it!”

“We’ve never seen it before!”

A trace of irritation flashed in Xiao Honglian’s eyes.

Sensing danger, Wu Chengyu’s mind raced before he quickly came up with an idea.

“This... this was left behind by Zhang Yi!”

When in doubt, blame Zhang Yi and Liang Yue—that was his plan. As powerless students, they figured it was only natural for stronger people to bear the responsibility. Zhang Yi and Liang Yue had brought them to Xu Family Town; they should be responsible for their safety.

“Zhang Yi? So it really is him,” Xiao Honglian muttered, her gaze turning cold and murderous.

Killing Gao Yuan was tantamount to declaring war on her and Yangsheng Base.

As the leader of Yangsheng Base, she could not let Zhang Yi go unpunished. Failing to take action would undermine her authority in the base.

“Tell me, how many people does Zhang Yi have, and what are their abilities? How much weaponry and resources do they possess?”

Her piercing gaze locked onto Wu Chengyu as she demanded answers to the critical questions.

This line of questioning left Wu Chengyu and the others frozen.

Although they had lived in Xu Family Town for a while, they had never set foot across the river where Zhang Yi’s shelter was located. The two groups lived entirely separate lives.

They knew nothing about Zhang Yi’s strength, abilities, or the capabilities of his followers.

Even though they had interacted with Liang Yue, they had focused solely on gaining her sympathy to secure more food—or, better yet, gain entry to the shelter. They had never bothered to ask about Zhang Yi or his team.

And even if they had, it wasn't certain Liang Yue would have told them anything.

Now, stumbling over their words, the students relayed what little they knew, piecing together fragments of information.

“I think I’ve heard that Zhang Yi’s ability is spatial...”

“His followers are really strong. One of them, Yang Xinxin, is a top-tier hacker!”

“There’s also someone named Lu Keran, who’s great with machinery.”

“Oh! And there’s Yang Siyah, the celebrity. She’s with him too!”

“Our teacher, Liang Yue, is also by his side. She’s incredible—she’s a national-level martial artist who once served as a high-level bodyguard!”

Their fragmented statements painted a scattered picture.

Xiao Honglian instructed Zhuge Qingtian to record all the information.

Despite the volume of details, most of it was useless. For instance, while they mentioned Zhang Yi was a spatial Superhuman, they couldn’t elaborate on what that entailed.

As for Liang Yue, her ability was of the common enhancement type—using Superhuman energy to strengthen her already impressive physique and martial arts skills. This information was somewhat useful for planning future combat strategies against her.

However, regarding the shelter's defenses and the abilities of Zhang Yi's other followers, the students were completely clueless.

"With just this information, it's difficult to gauge the true strength of Zhang Yi's team," Zhuge Qingtian remarked, shaking his head.

Xiao Honglian drummed her long, pale fingers on the edge of her chair.

She understood this as well. The limited intelligence she had wasn't enough to justify launching a war.

Yet this was a battle she could not avoid.

"Do you have any other information? Think carefully. If this is all you can provide, it won't be enough to save your lives," she said calmly.

The students felt a dizzying wave of despair. Were they really going to die here?

"No! We have other uses! Don't kill us!"

"Keep us alive! Teacher Liang has a soft heart. You can use us to negotiate with her! No matter what demands you make, she'll agree!"

"Yeah, Teacher Liang cares about us deeply. She won't just watch us die!"

"If you're planning to attack Zhang Yi, we can guide you to his location!"

Hearing this, Xiao Honglian's lips curled into a mocking smile.

She stood up, clearly uninterested, and waved her hand.

"Lock them up. Give them some time to think about what value they have. If they can't come up with anything, we'll use them as sacrificial pawns when we go to war."

Her refinery needed capable workers, not these frail, pitiful students who would only waste resources.

Zhuge Qingtian approached her and said, "Perhaps we could try something."

"Try what?" Xiao Honglian asked indifferently.

"These students are Liang Yue's pupils, and Liang Yue is currently working for Zhang Yi. Their bond might still be strong!" Zhuge Qingtian explained.

"We don't know Zhang Yi's true strength. Using these students as leverage, we could feign a negotiation with him. That way, we might uncover some of his hidden cards."

Xiao Honglian raised an eyebrow at him in surprise.

"You think threatening Zhang Yi or Liang Yue with these useless students would work?" she asked with a derisive smile.

"Don't be foolish. This is the apocalypse. Everyone is fighting tooth and nail for their own survival. Only those with value deserve to be ransomed. These kids are worthless—why would anyone pay for them?"

"Even their teacher, Liang Yue, wouldn't be so foolish."

Zhuge Qingtian chuckled softly.

"My great leader, not every woman in this world is as rational as you."

“Perhaps their teacher Liang Yue is a soft-hearted woman. And judging by the fact that they’ve been allowed to live near Zhang Yi’s shelter, it seems she still cares for them.”

After hearing Zhuge Qingtian’s reasoning, Xiao Honglian found herself somewhat persuaded.

She couldn’t measure others by her own standards; after all, strong, rational women like her were rare.

“You’re suggesting their teacher Liang Yue might be some kind of saint?”

Zhuge Qingtian smiled. “Let’s hope she is. If she is, then we’ll have an opportunity.”

#### Chapter 378: I, Zhang Yi, Will Never Abandon Them!

Xiao Honglian, after hearing Zhuge Qingtian’s suggestion, decided to reach out to Zhang Yi to test the waters.

Still, she doubted that Zhang Yi or Liang Yue would act like saints. People like that wouldn’t have survived this long in the apocalypse.

However, the prospect of probing Zhang Yi’s strength intrigued her.

“If they truly care about these people, all the better. That will put the advantage squarely in our hands during negotiations,” she remarked.

She instructed Zhuge Qingtian to find a way to contact Zhang Yi.

By this time, Zhang Yi and his people no longer used their old phone numbers. Each of their phones had been converted into encrypted communication devices, making internal communication easy and secure from eavesdropping.

As a bonus, they no longer had to pay phone bills—a darkly humorous benefit in these dire times.

With no direct means to contact the shelter, Zhuge Qingtian suggested sending someone to deliver a message to Zhang Yi and leave a communication frequency for him to respond. Xiao Honglian agreed, showing no urgency for revenge.

She already knew Zhang Yi's location and had captured Liang Yue's students. It was vital to gather sufficient intelligence on her enemy's strength before acting; otherwise, it could backfire.

Zhuge Qingtian dispatched members of Dong Hu's investigation team to deliver the message, while Wu Chengyu and the other students were locked in the underground prison.

Each of them wore a modified explosive collar. Whether they tried to escape or were rescued, Yangsheng Base could detonate the collars remotely, blowing their heads off.

After warning the prisoners, the grim-faced guards left the cell.

The group of students huddled together, staring at the deathtrap collars around their necks, their faces full of despair.

Even crying was impossible—their tears frozen in the relentless cold.

“Teacher Liang, you have to come save us!”

The next day, under a sky shrouded in heavy clouds, the sunlight was little more than a cold, circular shadow. Even on rare clear days, its light was unable to bring warmth to the planet.

Zhang Yi and his group gathered at the long table and finished breakfast.

Standing up, Liang Yue said, “Zhang Yi, I’m heading across the river.”

Zhang Yi glanced up at her. “Oh, sure. Be quick. It’s cold out; don’t let yourself freeze.”

His gentle concern made Liang Yue bite her lip, her face tinged with a faint blush.

She avoided looking at Yang Siyah and Zhou Ke'er, knowing full well their gazes were likely tinged with jealousy.

Recently, her relationship with Zhang Yi had grown noticeably closer. Though Zhang Yi had never said anything affectionate, his occasional acts of care spoke volumes. Their training sessions involved increasing physical contact, and over time, she found herself unsure of her feelings for him—or how Zhang Yi viewed her. ♦

Accepting the food Zhang Yi handed her, Liang Yue put on her winter gear and left the shelter.

Zhang Yi didn't watch her leave, calmly spearing a takoyaki ball with his fork and chewing it slowly.

“What will Liang Yue do when she finds her students missing?” he wondered.

On one hand, he hoped she would simply abandon them and focus on being his obedient ally.

But knowing her, Zhang Yi doubted she would stay indifferent to their disappearance. She might even act impulsively.

“I just hope she doesn't cause too much trouble. Otherwise, I'll have no choice but to ask her to leave the shelter,” he thought.

This was a test—a test for Liang Yue.

Liang Yue, carrying food, arrived at Xu Family Town as usual.

She entered the students' snow house, but the moment she lifted the curtain, she found it completely empty.

Her heart skipped a beat, a sense of foreboding gripping her instantly.

She knew her students well. Lazy as they were, they barely ventured outside except to fish. They even handled restroom needs behind the curtain, paying no mind to propriety in such bitter cold.

But now, not a single person was there. Something was definitely wrong.

“Where did they all go?”

Swallowing nervously, Liang Yue felt an intense wave of anxiety. She hadn’t seen them crossing the river on her way over, so they couldn’t be out fishing.

Setting the food on the table, she immediately began searching for them.

Xu Family Town was eerily silent, its few remaining villagers rarely leaving their homes except to scavenge for food.

Undeterred, Liang Yue went door to door, asking if anyone had seen her students.

But her efforts yielded nothing.

As her dread deepened, an ominous feeling enveloped her. Her students had vanished—disappeared into thin air!

In the current environment, leaving Xu Family Town was a death sentence.

“Were they kidnapped?”

Recalling Zhang Yi’s mentions of nearby factions, Liang Yue’s mind raced to the worst-case scenario.

“Could a major faction have taken them?”

“But why? Xu Family Town is too impoverished to attract attention.”

“Could it be the people themselves? Yet no other villagers were taken...”

Her head throbbed with confusion, worry growing more suffocating by the second.

Despite her disappointment in the students, they had been her companions throughout the apocalypse. Even if they didn’t appreciate her, she couldn’t ignore her bond with them.

People often hold onto certain obsessions—and for Liang Yue, it was the duty to protect the students she had taught for years. She couldn’t stand by and watch them perish.

Staring at the frozen, lifeless expanse around her, with icy winds howling through the air, Liang Yue felt utterly lost. She had no clues, no way to track her students.

“There’s no choice. I have to ask Zhang Yi for help.”

A conflicted look crossed her face.

She didn’t want to trouble Zhang Yi. After all, his decision to shelter her was already an act of immense generosity, and he had always treated her kindly.

Perhaps, deep down, she harbored feelings for him.

But now, she had no other way to find her missing students.

“Their disappearance isn’t random. If someone targeted them, the true goal is likely me.”

Exhaling deeply, her breath condensed into a sharp, arrow-like plume that lingered in the air.

“I won’t let them die because of me!”

### Chapter 379: A Burst of Acting

Liang Yue rushed back to the shelter, her anxious demeanor catching everyone’s attention.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Yi asked, looking at her with curiosity.

Breathing heavily, Liang Yue exclaimed, “Zhang Yi, something terrible has happened! My students... they’ve all disappeared!”

Her words startled everyone present.

“What? They disappeared?”

“All of them? How could that happen?”

“Maybe they went out to gather firewood or food?”

Though their faces showed concern, their eyes betrayed indifference. In the entire shelter, only Liang Yue truly cared about the students. The rest of the group had no fondness for them.

Liang Yue shook her head. “I’ve searched everywhere I could. There’s not a trace of them! Zhang Yi, I suspect one of the surrounding factions might have extended their reach here.”

Zhang Yi crossed his hands and frowned deeply.

“That’s certainly possible. But I don’t understand—why would they kidnap your students?”

“Do you have any enemies from your past?”

Liang Yue looked confused and helpless.

“I... I don’t know. I taught at Tianqing Academy for three years and never had any conflicts with anyone.”

Zhang Yi reassured her, “Don’t panic. Getting worked up won’t help. We need to think this through calmly.”

He gave a subtle signal to Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran. The two girls walked over to Liang Yue, gently guiding her to the sofa and offering her words of comfort.

Looking into her eyes seriously, Zhang Yi said, “Liang Yue, I need to make something clear. I had nothing to do with their disappearance! If you don’t believe me, I can show you the shelter’s surveillance footage.”

“I was here in the shelter all day yesterday—I never left.”

Liang Yue’s eyes widened in alarm as she quickly responded, “No, no! Zhang Yi, I would never suspect you of doing such a thing!”

To her, Zhang Yi had become a kind and gentle man. The idea of him harming her students never crossed her mind.

Zhang Yi shook his head. “It’s better to be clear about these things, so there are no doubts among us. Since your students disappeared, everyone in the shelter is a suspect.”

Yang Xinxin chimed in, “Exactly. None of us would ever do such a thing, but it’s good to put everyone’s mind at ease.”

Liang Yue felt embarrassed. “This... this feels unnecessary. I know Zhang Yi isn’t that kind of person.”

Though her words expressed confidence, a tiny seed of doubt lingered in her heart. After all, not everyone possessed the ability to make people vanish without a trace. ↴

“No harm in checking,” Zhang Yi said calmly. “We’ll also review the surrounding footage to ensure no strangers appeared nearby.”

Summoning the shelter’s AI, Xiao Ai, Zhang Yi instructed it to pull up surveillance footage from the past day.

Soon, the 100-inch wall screen in the living room displayed recordings from over a hundred cameras, fast-forwarded at high speed.

It didn’t take long for the group to review all the footage.

The shelter’s surroundings had remained as quiet as usual, with no signs of anyone entering or leaving.

This eliminated everyone in the shelter as suspects—the students’ disappearance wasn’t an inside job.

Liang Yue exhaled in relief. The outcome she had feared most had not come to pass.

Zhang Yi leaned forward, resting his hands under his chin. His expression grew serious.

“This complicates things. We don’t know who took them or why.”

“This puts us in a completely passive position. While the known factions in Tianhai City are possibilities, we can’t rule out other unknown groups.”

“The only option we have is to wait. If the captors took Liang Yue’s students, they’re bound to make a move eventually.”

Liang Yue clenched her fists tightly.

“But why me? What would anyone want from me? I can’t think of anyone I’ve wronged!”

Zhang Yi chuckled softly. “It’s a complex question, but since they took your students, it’s likely about you.”

“Of course, this is just a theory.”

Liang Yue furrowed her brows deeply. She desperately wanted to take action but found herself paralyzed by uncertainty. She didn’t know who the enemy was or what they wanted, leaving her powerless.

At that moment, Zhang Yi’s warm hand grasped her cold one.

Startled, Liang Yue looked up to meet his gentle gaze.

“Liang Yue, don’t worry. Your problems are my problems,” Zhang Yi said sincerely.

“I promised to help you take care of those students, and I won’t go back on my word.”

“If there’s any news, I’ll act immediately!”

A warmth spread through Liang Yue’s heart. Feeling lost and overwhelmed, she could only rely on Zhang Yi’s guidance.

Zhang Yi, meanwhile, smiled to himself. Internally, he was ecstatic—finally rid of those troublesome students.

It wouldn’t be long before they were dead. Whether the people from Yangsheng Base killed them or the poison Zhang Yi had been slipping into their food did the job, their fate was sealed.

Most importantly, Liang Yue would remain unaware of his involvement, ensuring their relationship stayed intact.

The group comforted Liang Yue, lifting her spirits slightly, though she still struggled to fully relax. Zhang Yi instructed Lu Keran and Yang Xinxin to escort her back to her room to rest.

Once they were gone, Zhou Ke'er approached Zhang Yi, leaning against him with a worried expression.

“Zhang Yi, could it be one of the nearby factions planning to attack us?” she asked.

“Mm, that’s likely,” Zhang Yi replied without hesitation.

He hadn’t told anyone about killing Gao Yuan and his group, but he knew a conflict with the major factions was inevitable.

They would need to fight to prove their strength and deter anyone coveting the West Hill Base’s territory. It was unavoidable.

Yang Siyah sighed. “We’ve barely had a few days of peace, and now it’s back to fighting again?”

Zhang Yi chuckled lightly.

“You’ve got it wrong,” he said.

“War isn’t disrupting our peace. It’s what gives us temporary tranquility.”

“In the apocalypse, war and violence are the norm—peace is the exception.”

Leaning back on the sofa, Zhang Yi began strategizing how to handle the impending conflict.

"If it's just two factions attacking simultaneously, we should be able to hold them off," he mused.

"But if they team up with others, things might get a bit tricky."

His brow furrowed slightly. "If that happens, it could be a real problem."

### Chapter 380: The Messenger

Zhang Yi was already preparing for war.

This battle would be his chance to establish his name in Tianhai City, deterring any faction from daring to provoke him again. Only through this show of strength could he achieve lasting peace.

Liang Yue, though consumed by anxiety, was, after all, an emotional woman. Zhang Yi believed that with enough comforting words, she'd calm down soon enough—especially since her students wouldn't last much longer.

Once they were gone, Liang Yue's obsession would vanish, and the matter would be resolved once and for all.

Throughout the day, Liang Yue couldn't bring herself to eat anything.

Zhou Ke'er expressed concern: "If she keeps this up, won't she ruin her health?"

"She'll be fine," Zhang Yi replied indifferently. "She's strong enough to go three days without food. If she wants to use self-inflicted suffering as a way to seek solace, let her be."

Zhou Ke'er couldn't help but smirk. "Don't you feel sorry for her?"

“Sorry? What’s there to feel sorry about?” Zhang Yi countered with a smile.

“Do you have any feelings for Liang Yue? Or have you ever been tempted by her?” Zhou Ke’er teased, blinking playfully.

Zhang Yi chuckled. “I admire her. If she can prove herself to be a reliable ally, that would be ideal. But first, she has to get through this ordeal.”

For Zhang Yi, emotions were merely a seasoning in life. While they could add flavor, they weren’t essential—he could live just fine on the basics alone.

Since his rebirth and his extended time in the apocalypse, Zhang Yi had grown increasingly indifferent to love and relationships.

In this world, thinking of oneself first was the key to happiness.

While Zhang Yi was willing to support Liang Yue in practical ways, he refused to let emotions dictate his actions. Once entangled by emotions, a person became soft and hesitant—something he couldn’t afford.

Liang Yue could be a friend, but never a lover.

That afternoon, Zhang Yi summoned Uncle You and Fatty Xu to prepare them for potential combat.

“Yangsheng Base’s forces have already encroached near the shelter’s perimeter,” Zhang Yi explained. “They’ve located Xu Family Town, and they’re bound to find the shelter soon.”

“The only reason they haven’t attacked yet is because they’re not ready.”

Uncle You remained composed. “Ever since we killed those Superhumans from Chaoyu Base, I knew this fight was inevitable.”

Fatty Xu, on the other hand, sighed heavily. “What a pain! Can’t these people just live peacefully in the apocalypse? Why fight over territory?”

Zhang Yi replied calmly, “Ambition exists in every era. Once survival is no longer an issue, some people’s desires inevitably grow. Not everyone is as content as we are.”

“From their perspective, eliminating nearby threats ensures absolute safety. I’d do the same if I found a nearby armed faction—wipe them out.”

He smiled, attempting to reassure Fatty Xu. “But don’t worry. Everything is under control. Once they see our strength and realize we’re not easy prey, they’ll back off.”

Zhang Yi harbored no deep grudges against the factions in Tianhai City. While he had killed a Superhuman and some soldiers, such incidents could be resolved if his power was respected.

Although launching an offensive on their base would be difficult, Zhang Yi was confident in his ability to defend the shelter.

Uncle You laughed heartily. “Then let’s fight! Every good day we’ve had here was won with our fists. If they want to mess with us, we’ll teach them a lesson!”

Fatty Xu sighed again, resting his chubby face in his hand. “Well, if it’s come to this, we might as well fight.”

Though they grumbled, neither was new to combat. With the shelter’s robust defenses, they weren’t overly concerned.

Suddenly, the faint sound of an engine reached their ears.

The three men immediately sharpened their focus.

“Someone’s coming!”

“It’s a vehicle!”

Zhang Yi sprang up from the sofa and dashed to the second-floor window.

Peering through the one-way glass, he spotted a modified snow vehicle a few hundred meters from Cloud Manor. Its design looked strikingly similar to those used by Yangsheng Base.

“Yangsheng Base? Why only one vehicle? Could it be a scout—or a messenger?” Zhang Yi wondered aloud.

Grabbing a sniper rifle from his spatial storage, he aimed it at the approaching vehicle.

The snow vehicle sped toward the manor without hesitation. As it passed the front, someone leaned out of a window and fired a black arrow into the ice wall. Then, the vehicle accelerated away.

“You’re not leaving so easily,” Zhang Yi muttered, a cold smile curling his lips.

He opened the window, set up his sniper rifle, and aimed at the vehicle’s tracks.

Bang!

With a single shot, the snow vehicle’s tracks shattered, sending it skidding uncontrollably before toppling over and sliding toward the frozen river.

Zhang Yi leapt from the window, the snow compacted beneath him barely shifting as his spatial energy cushioned the landing. His mastery of his powers had grown significantly over time.

Behind him, Uncle You and Hua Hua followed closely.

Riding on Hua Hua's back, Zhang Yi and Uncle You reached the immobilized vehicle in a few swift bounds.

They found two soldiers in flame-emblazoned combat uniforms crawling out of the wreckage.

One soldier's leg was crushed, and the other, trying to help him, hesitated when he saw Zhang Yi approaching. Dropping his comrade, the uninjured soldier turned to flee.

Zhang Yi calmly raised his rifle and shot him in the leg.

Thud!

The soldier screamed and collapsed into the snow.

The other soldier tried to draw his weapon, but Uncle You quickly restrained him, pinning him by the neck.

"Doesn't look like they're Superhumans," Zhang Yi observed, noting that both were regular soldiers.

He tied them up, intending to interrogate them. Capturing a few tongues was always a chance to glean valuable intel.

However, the soldiers gritted their teeth and, before Zhang Yi could act, their faces turned purple. Black blood seeped from their lips as they slumped lifelessly to the ground.

"Suicide?" Zhang Yi frowned.

Uncle You knelt to inspect their jaws. "Poison capsules hidden in their teeth. It's standard for scouts to carry these to prevent capture and interrogation."

“Smart,” Zhang Yi muttered, exhaling in frustration. “Even if I’d promised to spare them, they wouldn’t have believed me.”

While Zhang Yi had hoped to gather intel before executing them, these soldiers clearly hadn’t entertained any illusions about survival.

“Still, now I have no idea what they were here for,” he said, disappointed.

Just then, Fatty Xu came running over, panting heavily.

“Boss! They left something!” he called, holding up a black arrow with a piece of white cloth tied to it.

Zhang Yi’s eyes narrowed as he barked, “Stop! Don’t move!”