

Ice Age 391

Chapter 391: The Followers of the Snow God's Scheme

Xingtian did not provide an immediate response. As the leader of Qingpu Base, every decision he made affected the lives of thousands of his workers.

He was not a cunning strategist but had the virtue of self-awareness, always thinking carefully before acting.

Shortly after his conversation with Xiao Honglian ended, she sent him the promised intelligence on the shelter.

Xingtian opened the file, and with just one glance, his expression stiffened. Sitting upright, he focused intently on the screen.

The first section contained detailed information about Zhang Yi.

"This can't be a coincidence..." he muttered.

Meanwhile, in Tianfeng District, Wei Dinghai contacted Zheng Yixian, the High Priest of the Followers of the Snow God, to demand their participation in the attack on Zhang Yi.

Unlike his approach to Qingpu Base, Wei Dinghai showed no courtesy to the Followers of the Snow God. Among the western factions of Tianhai City, the cult had the weakest foundation and the least power.

Apart from their large numbers, they lagged in every other respect compared to the other factions.

Their continued existence owed much to their practice of proselytizing, drawing people from other factions, which had made them unpopular and led to conflicts.

If not for the steep price they had paid to placate the larger factions, they would have been eradicated long ago.

Wei Dinghai's tone was commanding, more akin to issuing orders than seeking cooperation.

"We three major bases will be sending troops. You'd better send some of your people to assist as well. We don't want anyone scheming behind our backs while we're fighting on the front lines."

Zheng Yixian frowned, knowing that the current strength of the Followers of the Snow God left them no choice but to comply.

Refusal would likely result in the three factions eliminating them first.

"Understood. We'll dispatch a contingent to support you," Zheng Yixian replied reluctantly.

Wei Dinghai grinned. "Smart choice."

When the call ended, Zheng Yixian's icy gaze brimmed with murderous intent.

His right fist clenched tightly, producing a loud crack as he punched a nearby wall, shattering it with his psychic energy.

"Wei Dinghai, Xiao Honglian, Xingtian... Enjoy your arrogance while you can! When the Followers of the Snow God rise to power, I'll make sure you all perish!" RÀNŌB Es

The Followers of the Snow God were led spiritually by Yuan Kongye, their leader, while High Priest Zheng Yixian handled most of the cult's day-to-day affairs.

Despite the gravity of the situation, Zheng Yixian felt compelled to inform Yuan Kongye of the developments.

When Zheng Yixian explained the proposed alliance, Yuan Kongye's serene expression remained unchanged.

"Another war? How many lives will be lost this time?"

Her hands folded in prayer as she gazed up at the statue of the Snow God in the chapel.

"May the merciful Snow God guide them swiftly to paradise and deliver them from this world's suffering."

Zheng Yixian sighed and said, "The alliance of the three factions leaves us no choice but to participate. My concern is that they'll use us as cannon fodder, sending our people to die first."

"Death holds no terror," Yuan Kongye replied. "All will ultimately return to the Snow God's embrace."

"But what if we gain nothing from this battle?" Zheng Yixian countered. "Strengthening the three factions only makes them more likely to turn on us later!"

For the first time, a glimmer of dark resolve appeared in Yuan Kongye's eyes.

She turned to Zheng Yixian. "Perhaps this can be an opportunity. We'll send troops, but only on the condition that we receive our share of the spoils."

Zheng Yixian frowned. "Territory holds little value for us."

"Then we'll take people," Yuan Kongye declared. "After the shelter falls, we'll forgo land in exchange for the right to proselytize in their territories."

“And they must pledge not to hunt down those who have already defected to our faith. They are now children of the Snow God.”

Zheng Yixian mulled over the proposal. “Negotiating the proselytizing rights will be challenging but not impossible.”

At that moment, a knock sounded on the chapel doors.

Zheng Yixian scowled. Who dared interrupt during a discussion with Yuan Kongye?

“Who is it?”

A familiar, weathered voice replied from outside.

“High Priest, it’s me, Zhao Jianhua. I have urgent news to report to you and the Leader.”

Recognizing the speaker as the high-ranking Great Decree Zhao Jianhua, Zheng Yixian’s irritation subsided.

Within the cult, Zhao Jianhua held a unique position. Though he had no formal office, his importance was second only to Zheng Yixian, thanks to his extraordinary Aura Sight.

Without him, the Followers of the Snow God would not have been able to recruit so many powerful superhumans.

“Come in, Great Decree,” Zheng Yixian said.

The chapel doors opened, and Zhao Jianhua entered, leaning on his cane. He bowed respectfully to Yuan Kongye before turning to Zheng Yixian.

“Well, what did you discover about Zhang Yi?” Zheng Yixian asked.

The cult lacked a robust intelligence network, relying heavily on Zhao Jianhua's unique ability to gauge Zhang Yi and his team's strength.

Zhao Jianhua approached, bowing again.

"I've uncovered something extraordinary—so much so that I had to interrupt your discussion. But I promise, you will not be disappointed."

Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian exchanged glances, their expressions growing serious.

"What have you discovered?" Yuan Kongye asked.

Zhao Jianhua's clouded eyes gleamed with an inner light.

"I sensed an aura of immense magnitude in that shelter," he said, his voice trembling.

"This overwhelming power... it may rival only yours, Leader!"

The statement stunned Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian alike.

"What did you just say?" Yuan Kongye's voice turned sharp.

Zhao Jianhua raised his hands reverently.

"Leader, I am loyal to you and the Snow God! Please believe every word I say. There is a superhuman within that shelter whose power rivals yours!"

"Perhaps... they are the Snow God's right hand, destined to aid you in your divine mission!"

For the first time, a flicker of emotion appeared on Yuan Kongye's perpetually calm face. Zheng Yixian's eyes widened in disbelief.

Zhao Jianhua's Aura Sight had never produced such high praise—not even for figures like Ling Feng, Xiao Honglian, or Wei Dinghai.

Could Zhang Yi, or someone in his team, truly possess abilities comparable to Yuan Kongye's miraculous gift of awakening superhuman powers?

This revelation cast serious doubt on Wei Dinghai's claim that attacking the shelter would be an easy victory.

Perhaps Wei Dinghai and Xiao Honglian had gravely underestimated Zhang Yi's team.

After a moment, Yuan Kongye's composure returned.

"I understand. Thank you, Great Decree. You may rest now."

"I've prepared new attendants for you. You'll like them," she added, clapping her hands.

The doors opened again, and a nun entered, leading two pale, sickly boys.

The boys, newly "purified" through the cult's rituals, exuded a fragile yet eerie beauty.

Zhao Jianhua's eyes lit up with fervent joy.

"Thank you, Leader, for your generosity!"

He left the chapel with the boys, leaving Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian alone again.

Yuan Kongye turned to Zheng Yixian. "Circumstances have changed."

Zheng Yixian nodded grimly.

"It seems everyone has underestimated Zhang Yi's strength. Even if we unite the western factions, attacking that shelter from afar may not be as easy as Wei Dinghai claimed."

After a pause, his eyes sharpened.

"But if we change the terms of engagement and ally with Zhang Yi against the others... the outcome could be very different."

Chapter 392: Old Classmate

Zheng Yixian proposed a daring plan, his eyes blazing with the fury of vengeance accumulated over the years.

Since the apocalypse began, the Followers of the Snow God had struggled to survive, constantly suppressed by the larger, better-armed bases. Despite growing into a congregation of thousands, they remained under the thumb of these factions.

Zheng Yixian had long waited for an opportunity to strike back.

The emergence of Zhang Yi and his formidable team presented such an opportunity.

Yuan Kongye approached Zheng Yixian, her gaze steady but inquisitive.

"You're suggesting an alliance with Zhang Yi to stand against the other three bases?"

“Isn’t that too risky? We don’t truly know how strong Zhang Yi’s team is. If we’ve miscalculated, we’ll be dragged into a premature war with the three factions—a scenario we can’t afford,” she said, her voice tinged with caution.

Taking a deep breath, she added, “We still need time. A lot of time.”

Zheng Yixian, however, was undeterred.

“This can be a trial run,” he argued. “If we miss this chance, we may never again encounter a force like Zhang Yi’s: powerful yet isolated, targeted by other bases.”

“If Xishan is divided among them, our situation will only grow more precarious.”

Zheng Yixian thought back to recent attacks by Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases against the Followers. His brows furrowed deeply.

Time was what they needed—time to build their strength and expand their congregation.

“A trial, you say?” Yuan Kongye’s piercing gaze locked onto him.

“And if it fails?”

Zheng Yixian leaned closer and whispered something into her ear.

A glimmer of understanding and intrigue appeared in Yuan Kongye’s eyes.

“If we proceed this way, we minimize the risks. It’s worth attempting,” she said with a nod.

The next day, Yuan Kongye summoned Zhao Jianhua, the Great Decree, to the chapel.

She retrieved a small wooden box from her robes and handed it to him.

“Great Decree, this mission concerns the future of the Followers of the Snow God. I entrust it to you. Do not fail the Snow God’s will,” Yuan Kongye said calmly.

Zhao Jianhua accepted the box. Without opening it, he already knew its contents.

However, the weight in his hands was heavier than expected.

His eyes widened in surprise—it wasn’t just one.

The production of such items placed a tremendous burden on Yuan Kongye, even as the human vessel of the Snow God.

Yet she had provided two.

What kind of task required this level of preparation?

Zhao Jianhua bowed deeply. “I will not fail you or the Snow God. What must I do?”

Yuan Kongye gazed down at the gray-cloaked elder.

“Take these to Cloud Manor and deliver them to Zhang Yi. Let him see our sincerity.”

The tension at Cloud Manor was palpable.

Zhang Yi and his team knew that attacks from Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases were inevitable, but the timing and method of the assault remained unclear.

In preparation, they had assigned everyone specific combat roles. If war broke out suddenly, they would not be caught off guard.

Still, the waiting was unsettling, fostering a sense of restlessness among the group.

To keep himself focused, Zhang Yi spent his days training in the underground sports facility on the third level.

Having learned martial arts from Liang Yue for a while, Zhang Yi had picked up some valuable combat techniques.

Combined with his superhuman acceleration, he had become a formidable close-quarters fighter. Only melee specialists among superhumans posed a real threat to him now.

After all, speed was the ultimate advantage in battle.

Meanwhile, Liang Yue was slowly recovering from the devastating loss of her students.

Her mental state remained poor, and she still seemed deeply melancholic. However, the impulsive desire to storm Yangsheng Base for revenge had subsided.

Instead, she spent her days meticulously polishing her Tang Sword, preparing herself for the inevitable battle.

Everyone could see that she needed to unleash her rage through a violent clash to finally find peace.

Zhang Yi regarded her readiness as an asset. To him, Liang Yue was a finely honed blade, now tempered and awaiting its first strike.

One night, an unexpected message shattered the tense calm.

Zhang Yi's phone, which he had modified into a secure satellite device, displayed a notification from QQ Messenger.

This surprised him greatly.

Though QQ had been a staple app on his phone, he hadn't used it in ages. Since the apocalypse began, no one had bothered with such platforms anymore.

The app's servers, protected as part of a national initiative to preserve critical communication tools, had remained operational.

Out of curiosity, Zhang Yi opened the app. Rather than checking the message directly, he first navigated to the sender's profile.

To his astonishment, the message came from a long-lost acquaintance: Xing Weinan.

Seeing the name, Zhang Yi frowned, memories surfacing.

Xing Weinan had been his classmate in elementary and middle school. The two had lived in the same old neighborhood and occasionally hung out.

However, Xing Weinan's poor academic performance had led him to a low-tier high school, while Zhang Yi moved to a better neighborhood with his family. They had lost touch after that.

Zhang Yi had heard rumors that Xing Weinan followed in his father's footsteps, working at a steel factory.

"So, he's still alive," Zhang Yi muttered. "I suppose he's got some skills."

The message read: "Old classmate, long time no see!"

Zhang Yi paced in the living room, phone in hand.

Given the tense times, the sudden reappearance of a former classmate felt far from coincidental.

After some thought, Zhang Yi replied: “I’m managing. How about you?”

Xing Weinan responded quickly, his excitement palpable:

“Haha! It really is you! You’re still alive!”

“I can’t believe it—you’ve become so amazing!”

“But I’m doing well too. I’m now the director of Tianhai City’s largest steel plant! How’s that, old buddy? Not bad, huh?”

The boastful tone gave Zhang Yi pause.

“The largest steel plant in Tianhai City?” Zhang Yi murmured. “That would be Qingpu Steelworks...”

Realization struck.

“You’re the leader of Qingpu Base?”

After a moment, Xing Weinan replied: “Typing’s a hassle. Let’s talk over voice instead.”

The call request came through almost immediately.

Zhang Yi hesitated briefly before answering.

“Xing Weinan, it’s been a long time.”

A hearty laugh echoed through the line.

“Hahaha! Zhang Yi, it really has been ages! I never thought you’d end up this incredible—taking down Xishan Base and all!”

“I’m not doing too bad myself. Qingpu Steelworks is mine now! Who would’ve thought our old neighborhood produced two rising stars, huh?”

Xing Weinan’s words, though excited, carried an undercurrent of pride.

Zhang Yi couldn’t help but recall the Xing Weinan of the past—a plain-looking boy with acne and average height, perpetually seated at the back of the classroom due to poor grades.

Their relationship had been decent, bonding over basketball games during breaks.

But if someone had told Zhang Yi back then that the humble Xing Weinan would rise to become a regional power, he wouldn’t have believed it.

Smirking, Zhang Yi asked, “Isn’t Qingpu Base led by someone named Xingtian? Did you change your name?”

Xing Weinan laughed again.

“Exactly! Xing Weinan didn’t sound imposing enough. Xingtian, though—now that’s a name with power!”

Zhang Yi’s smile grew. Changing one’s name to boost confidence often revealed underlying insecurity.

“Alright,” Zhang Yi said calmly. “Tell me—why reach out now? What’s on your mind?”

Chapter 393: Times Have Changed

Zhang Yi's calm response caused a brief pause on the other end of the line.

Oh, correction—it was Xingtian now. After all, he was no longer Xing Weinan, the unremarkable classmate, but a bigshot leader of Qingpu Base. Bigshots didn't like being reminded of their humble beginnings, not even their names.

Xingtian chuckled. "I thought we'd reminisce a bit first, catch up on old times."

"Back in school, I wasn't much, was I? Not like you—you were the handsome guy, popular with girls, and good at your studies."

With a long sigh, his tone turned wistful.

"Who would've thought someone like me would make it big someday? Life sure is full of surprises, huh, old classmate?"

Zhang Yi smiled but didn't take Xingtian's boasting to heart.

It wasn't uncommon for someone who'd suddenly risen from nothing to seek validation in their past connections.

Without knowing Xingtian's real intentions, Zhang Yi chose not to expose his insecurities.

"Catching up is fine," Zhang Yi said evenly. "But I don't think you reached out just for nostalgia, did you?"

"I'm a curious person, you see. Why don't you skip to the part where you tell me what you really want?"

Xingtian raised his eyebrows on the other end of the line.

This wasn't the reaction he'd been hoping for.

What he wanted was for Zhang Yi to express shock, to say things like:

"Whoa, you're running Qingpu Steelworks now?!"

Or

"I never expected someone like you to rise so high!"

But Zhang Yi neither fulfilled his expectations nor said anything that might offend him.

Still, the chance to show off to an old classmate left Xingtian in good spirits.

"Alright then, let's get down to business!"

He cleared his throat, his tone turning serious.

"Zhang Yi, you've killed people from Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases. Now they're coming after you."

"But they're not coming alone. To be safe, they've roped in Qingpu Base and the Followers of the Snow God."

"Let's just say, if all the western factions gang up on you, your situation is going to be pretty grim."

Zhang Yi's eyes narrowed, a sharp glint flashing within them.

“Western factions?”

He had no prior grudges with Qingpu Base or the Followers of the Snow God.

It wasn't surprising that Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases had allied against him, but involving all of Tianhai City's major factions?

That raised the stakes significantly.

If the western alliance attacked as a unified front, the pressure on his shelter would double.

Zhang Yi had considered such a worst-case scenario but hoped it wouldn't come to pass. If it did, the probability of his shelter's surface structures being breached would rise to 20%.

In that event, they would have no choice but to abandon the villas and the ground-level buildings, retreating into the underground layers.

Drastic? Yes.

But not impossible. Even the western alliance's combined forces wouldn't necessarily bring more firepower than Xishan Base had.

And Xishan Base, for all its might, had failed to destroy the ground-level buildings of Zhang Yi's shelter.

Still, Xingtian's words indicated this was no ordinary threat.

Zhang Yi asked flatly, “So, are you calling to declare war?”

Xingtian chuckled.

“Old classmate, this isn’t some medieval drama. Who declares war anymore? If I were coming after you, I wouldn’t bother calling. I’d hit you with a surprise attack.”

“No, this call is partly to catch up, partly to talk things over.”

On the other end, Xingtian’s expression softened as he reminisced.

He recalled his school days, when he was a poor student with no charisma, often overlooked in class.

Zhang Yi, on the other hand, had never belittled him. He’d even taken the time to help him with math problems.

Now that he was successful, Xingtian wanted to return the favor, to showcase his success and lend a helping hand to his old friend.

“How do you propose we talk?” Zhang Yi asked, breaking his train of thought.

Xingtian said, “Qingpu Base has no quarrel with you. I can stay out of this war, but you’ll have to make it worth my while.”

Unlike the more aggressive factions, Qingpu Base’s workers valued stability. Their current lives were relatively comfortable, and they disliked the idea of senseless bloodshed.

While they were unafraid of fighting, they didn’t want to die for no reason.

Thus, Xingtian had reached out to Zhang Yi. If he could secure benefits without shedding blood, all the better.

Perhaps there was a hint of genuine care for his old classmate, but it was minimal at best.

Zhang Yi fell silent, unsure whether to believe Xingtian.

He couldn't even be certain that the man on the other end of the line was truly Xingtian.

But recalling that Xing Weinan had worked at Qingpu Steelworks before the apocalypse, and considering his survival, it was plausible.

Xingtian, sensing Zhang Yi's hesitation, laughed.

"You'd better decide quickly—time isn't on your side. The alliance will attack your shelter soon!"

Zhang Yi's eyes sharpened.

"When?"

"Ah, now that's something I can't tell you. Unless, of course, you're willing to make a deal."

Zhang Yi considered this and asked, "What's your price?"

Xingtian replied, "10,000 kilograms of food."

Zhang Yi frowned.

"10 tons of food?"

"That's right," Xingtian confirmed. "If you want Qingpu Base to sit this one out, that's the price."

Zhang Yi paused to think.

He recalled that Xing Weinan's math skills had been poor—scoring above 60 on a 150-point test was a rarity for him.

Did Xingtian believe that 10 tons was an astronomical amount?

It wasn't. Not for Zhang Yi.

His warehouses contained food reserves far exceeding that amount, and 10 tons was merely a drop in the bucket.

Zhang Yi responded, "I'll need time to consider. Ten tons is a lot of food, and I can't decide immediately."

Xingtian laughed. "Fair enough. I'll give you one day. By tomorrow noon, I'll need your answer."

He added, "I hope you say yes, old classmate. I really don't want to face you on the battlefield."

After the call ended, Zhang Yi leaned back on his sofa, the warm light of the crystal chandelier casting a gentle glow over him.

"Ten tons of food isn't much. I can use the canned goods from Xishan Base's stores. Those are heavy and will add up quickly."

"Or maybe the leftovers from Wang Siming's warehouse. The canned foods there are full of water and weigh a lot."

"Getting to ten tons will be easy."

His concern, however, wasn't the food—it was whether Xingtian could be trusted.

Resources weren't an issue.

If it weren't for the dangers outside, Zhang Yi could easily raid buried supermarkets with Xu Pangzi to replenish his supplies.

But he didn't want to hand over food only to be betrayed.

"Here's what I'll do," Zhang Yi decided.

"I'll agree to his terms but only pay a portion upfront. If Qingpu Base's behavior during the battle satisfies me, I'll pay the rest after it's over."

With a plan forming in his mind, Zhang Yi smiled faintly.

Chapter 394: The Elder

The unexpected call from Xingtian gave Zhang Yi crucial insights into the looming threat.

1. The shelter could soon face a joint assault by Tianhai City's four major factions.
2. The attack would likely occur in the near future.

While confident in the shelter's defenses, Zhang Yi remained cautious.

The western alliance lacked a figure like Chen Xinian or the firepower of large-scale bunker-buster missiles. They could not destroy the shelter's core—its underground third-level space.

Moreover, their grievances with Zhang Yi weren't deep enough to warrant a mutually destructive campaign. If the cost outweighed the benefits, the alliance would likely abandon the assault.

“Prepare for the worst, and fight the fiercest battle we’ve ever fought. Only by shocking all of Tianhai City can we ensure peace,” Zhang Yi reasoned.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Yi decided to cooperate with Qingpu Base, offering 10 tons of food in exchange for their neutrality. He would, however, only pay a deposit initially.

Reducing the number of enemy factions would significantly increase the odds of holding the shelter.

That night, Zhang Yi convened a meeting, explaining the situation to everyone.

When the group learned of the possible combined attack by the western factions, their expressions turned grim.

The pressure was far greater than what they had faced against Xishan Base.

Yang Xinxin, however, spoke up with surprising calm.

“I don’t think the situation is as dire as it seems. The western factions may appear united, but they don’t fully trust each other.”

“Only Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases have real conflicts with us. The Followers of the Snow God and Qingpu Base were roped in—they’re less invested.”

“They’re likely to act halfheartedly, avoiding a true fight to the death. If we can persuade Qingpu Base to withdraw, our burden will lessen even further.”

Her analysis prompted thoughtful nods from the group.

Uncle You crossed his arms and commented, “Our greatest weakness is manpower. If the enemy overwhelms us with numbers, splitting up to fight will be a big disadvantage.”

Zhang Yi gestured to the terrain outside the window.

“We can rely on the defensive line for the first wave.”

“The area around the shelter isn’t open. Two small hills form natural barriers behind us. With the snow making the slopes slippery, an assault from that direction is highly unlikely.”

“That means the main attack will come from the front, within a 120° arc.”

Zhang Yi traced a curve on the table with a water-dampened finger.

“Our firepower is concentrated in this sector.”

“Our goal isn’t to defeat them outright—it’s to repel them. We need to demonstrate enough strength to earn their respect and establish this area as a no-go zone.”

Xu Pangzi furrowed his brows.

“Even if only three factions attack, the pressure will still be immense. I feel like our first line of defense might fall quickly, forcing us to retreat inside the shelter.”

“Our strongest defenses are the shelter itself and your Dimensional Gate, boss. But if they use large-scale equipment or special superhumans to breach the shelter, what then?”

He spread his hands in exasperation.

“Yangsheng Base has plenty of fuel and the ability to transport heavy machinery. Plus, who knows what abilities their superhumans might bring?”

Zhang Yi merely smiled, exuding calm confidence.

“Don’t worry about those scenarios. If it comes to that, I’ll handle it.”

Though Zhang Yi disliked war, his strength was undeniable. After the Xishan Base battle, he had absorbed the abilities of Ling Feng and other notable superhumans, becoming even more formidable.

If Zhang Yi’s offensive power rated a 100, his defensive capability easily surpassed 1,000.

His confidence reassured the group, their faces relaxing. Everyone knew Zhang Yi’s cautious and methodical nature. If he was this confident, the situation was manageable.

As they discussed plans, Hua Hua, the mutated cat, suddenly perked up on the sofa beside Zhang Yi.

Its heterochromatic eyes narrowed, fixed on something outside.

“Meow—”

The warning cry was tinged with alertness.

Everyone followed Hua Hua’s gaze, their tension rising.

Hua Hua’s heightened senses often detected threats humans couldn’t perceive.

The dark, snowy expanse outside the window revealed little—a landscape of white under faint light. The wind howled, and something seemed to move slowly through the storm.

“Let’s check it out.”

Zhang Yi's Golden Desert Eagle appeared in his hand, the safety off. He carried Hua Hua as he approached the window.

The others followed cautiously, ready for anything.

Through his binoculars, Zhang Yi finally discerned a figure trudging through the snow.

An elderly man, wrapped in a gray robe, leaned heavily on a cane as he approached, step by labored step.

No one mistook him for an ordinary elder.

In this bitter cold, even a healthy man wouldn't venture out without reason.

"Definitely a superhuman," Zhang Yi assessed. "But from which faction, and why is he here?"

There were no signs of additional people nearby, suggesting the old man came alone.

If so, he either had immense confidence in his strength or believed Zhang Yi wouldn't harm him.

Uncle You suddenly exclaimed, breaking the silence.

"I recognize him! That's the Great Decree from the Followers of the Snow God!"

"The Followers of the Snow God!"

The name sent ripples through the group.

One of Tianhai City's major factions, the cult was both mysterious and notorious.

“What could they want now?” Zhou Ke’er asked warily.

Zhang Yi’s mind raced, connecting dots.

Qingpu Base and the Followers of the Snow God had no direct enmity with him. Both had been coerced into the alliance by Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases.

But no one acted without self-interest.

If Qingpu Base sought a deal, perhaps the Followers of the Snow God were here for a similar reason.

Yang Xinxin’s voice broke his thoughts.

“The Followers of the Snow God have always had strained relations with the other factions. If we want to undermine the alliance, they’re the best place to start.”

Zhang Yi lowered the binoculars, his gaze sharp.

“True. But I have no goodwill toward their cult.”

The Followers’ predecessor, a Japanese sect known for ruinous exploitation, had destroyed countless families. Now, in the apocalypse, they claimed to be saviors?

Zhang Yi wasn’t buying it.

Even the western bases despised them.

Yang Xinxin smiled.

“If they’re useful, it doesn’t matter whether we like them. We can still talk.”

Zhang Yi nodded. Cooperation depended on mutual benefit, not personal feelings.

He turned to Xu Pangzi.

“Pangzi, you’ll talk to him. Use the mic so I can guide you.”

Xu Pangzi’s face turned pale.

“Boss, I’m the weakest here! Isn’t someone else better suited?”

Zhang Yi’s expression hardened.

“Your abilities are ideal for this snowy environment. Don’t worry—we’ve got your back. He won’t get the chance to hurt you.”

Zhang Yi raised his Golden Desert Eagle.

“If he makes any suspicious moves, I’ll kill him instantly.”

Faced with Zhang Yi’s unyielding gaze, Xu Pangzi reluctantly donned his combat suit and stepped outside.

As Xu Pangzi approached, the elder continued his slow trek, his gray eyes glinting with faint gold.

Through his Aura Sight, he noted Xu Pangzi’s formidable energy, a clear testament to the strength of Zhang Yi’s group.

Chapter 395: Forging an Alliance

“Stop right there! Don’t come any closer!”

Following Zhang Yi’s instructions, Xu Pangzi shouted at the approaching elder.

The gray-robed Great Decree stopped in his tracks, offering a courteous bow and a calm smile.

“Greetings, good sir! I see a radiant aura around you, a clear sign of your strength as a mighty superhuman!”

The unexpected compliment caught Xu Pangzi off guard. In the shelter, he was always considered the weakest, so this rare praise left him momentarily pleased.

But the grin on his face quickly vanished when Zhang Yi’s voice came through his earpiece, reminding him to stick to the script.

Xu Pangzi cleared his throat and asked sternly, “Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

The Great Decree remained composed, his demeanor humble and calm, resembling a frail old man.

“I am Zhao Jianhua, the Great Decree of the Followers of the Snow God. I have come under my Lord’s orders to seek an audience with Mr. Zhang Yi.”

He smiled faintly and added, “But you are not Zhang Yi, are you?”

His eyes seemed to pierce through the snowy winds, as though he could see directly into the shelter. To him, Zhang Yi’s energy shone like a radiant sun, an unmistakable beacon of immense power.

Inside the shelter, Zhang Yi’s brows furrowed at the mention of his name.

Uncle You leaned closer and whispered, “I know that old man! He’s the one who came to Yue Lu Residential Area years ago. He tried recruiting me, but I turned him down. He did, however, help Li Jian awaken his powers.”

Zhang Yi nodded thoughtfully.

“That ability of his is quite useful,” he murmured. “Especially when paired with Yuan Kongye’s Blessing ability. Together, they’re a perfect combination.”

He turned to Xu Pangzi and instructed, "Ask him what he wants with me."

Xu Pangzi relayed the question without missing a beat.

"Our boss doesn't meet with just anyone," Xu said bluntly. "If you've got something to say, say it here. He's listening."

The Great Decree seemed momentarily surprised but quickly recovered.

What caution! Even a simple meeting is so carefully considered.

Though he himself wasn't a combatant, Zhao Jianhua admired Zhang Yi's prudence. In the chaos of the apocalypse, vigilance was the first rule of survival.

"I have come bearing a vital message from my Lord," the Great Decree began. "Three days from now, Yangsheng Base, Chaoyu Base, and Qingpu Base will jointly launch an assault on your shelter!"

Zhang Yi listened calmly, unsurprised by the revelation.

What the Great Decree offered was not new information but confirmation of the assault's timing. It also explained why both Xingtian and the Followers of the Snow God had contacted him today.

With the attack just three days away, they had little time to negotiate. Should discussions fail, they'd need to finalize their alliances and prepare to march alongside the other factions.

The Great Decree straightened his back, his tone growing passionate.

"These ruthless, despicable warlords dare to target such a beautiful haven! They even tried to persuade my Lord to join their vile scheme."

"But our faith is rooted in love and peace. We utterly reject their wicked plans!"

"Therefore," Zhao Jianhua said, his eyes gleaming as he looked toward the shelter, "we hope to collaborate with Mr. Zhang Yi."

Zhang Yi smirked. Exactly as expected.

The so-called alliance among the western factions was fractured from the start. Whether it was Qingpu Base or the Followers of the Snow God, each was hedging its bets and angling for leverage.

The more divided they were, the more confident Zhang Yi felt about his chances in the coming battle.

At Zhang Yi's direction, Xu Pangzi asked, "So you're saying you're willing to pull out of the attack and stay neutral?"

To Xu Pangzi's surprise, the Great Decree shook his head.

"Simply withdrawing wouldn't constitute a partnership."

"We, the Followers of the Snow God, stand for love and peace. Evil must be opposed, and injustice must be punished!"

"Our leader wishes to propose a deeper alliance—to work together with Mr. Zhang Yi against the other factions."

Zhang Yi's expression turned serious. This cult has some nerve.

Their goal wasn't just neutrality; they wanted an alliance to directly confront the other three bases.

Zhang Yi wasn't naive enough to trust such a bold claim.

"Ask him why they want to ally with us, supposedly the weaker side," Zhang Yi instructed.

Xu Pangzi repeated the question.

The Great Decree smiled faintly. "Because it is the will of my Lord! In you, I see the light of love and peace—"

"Spare me the theatrics," Xu Pangzi interrupted. "Let's be honest here."

Caught off guard, Zhao Jianhua chuckled softly. "Very well."

"The truth is, we, like you, lack powerful backers. Tianhai City's major bases had the best weapons, shelters, and talent from the very beginning. They've always seen this city as their personal domain."

"The rise of factions like ours—grassroots forces without ties to the old system—threatens their control, sparking both jealousy and fear."

"Your shelter suffered under Xishan Base's oppression, didn't it? We, too, have been targeted and forced to survive in the cracks."

"From this perspective, we are the same. We are natural allies against the tyranny of the major bases!"

The Great Decree's voice rose with passion, but Zhang Yi remained unmoved.

In short, they've been suppressed for too long and want revenge.

"What's the point of talking about a 'shared struggle'? I'm nothing like you cult scammers," Zhang Yi thought dismissively.

The Great Decree's speech failed to stir him.

From the very beginning, Zhang Yi never cared about power, territory, or other worldly pursuits.

He only wanted to live comfortably in the apocalypse.

"However," Zhang Yi said aloud, his tone calm, "since everyone seems intent on destroying Yangsheng Base and Chaoyu Base, there is a premise for cooperation."

Chapter 396: The Ice Soul

First came Xingtian with an offer to collaborate, then the Great Decree of the Followers of the Snow God arrived, proposing an alliance to counter the other factions.

The situation seemed favorable for Zhang Yi, but his vigilance never wavered.

These people were nothing more than a pack of bloodthirsty beasts—feed them, and they'd stay satisfied; show weakness, and they'd bite.

Talk of cooperation and honor was nothing but a fleeting illusion.

Zhang Yi instructed Xu Pangzi:

“Ask him this: if they want to cooperate, what proof of sincerity are they offering?”

Following the question, the Great Decree smiled faintly.

“Our esteemed leader understands that Mr. Zhang Yi is a prudent individual. Without sufficient proof of sincerity, it would be impossible to gain your trust.”

He paused, then produced a small wooden box from his robes and handed it to Xu Pangzi.

“This is one of our sacred artifacts—the Ice Soul,” the Great Decree announced.

“Ice Soul?”

The name sounded impressive, but no one knew what it actually did.

Xu Pangzi hesitated, unsure if it was dangerous, and didn’t dare to take it.

Zhang Yi’s voice came through the earpiece again:

“Ask him what it does.”

Xu Pangzi relayed the question. The Great Decree chuckled softly and began to explain:

“The Ice Soul has a straightforward function: it can help a person unlock their latent potential and become a superhuman.”

“For those who are already superhumans, it can further tap into their abilities, making them even stronger!”

“Surely, Mr. Zhang Yi, after spending so long in Tianhai City, you must have heard of its miraculous effects?”

Hearing this, Zhang Yi’s eyes flashed with a hint of interest.

So, this is the so-called miraculous artifact linked to Yuan Kongye’s abilities.

He remembered what Li Jian had said—that the so-called Ice Soul resembled a small, soft, snowball-like object. When implanted into a person’s forehead, it triggered their potential and granted superhuman abilities.

Zhang Yi also recalled that the Great Decree had once tried to recruit Uncle You, offering this same Ice Soul, though Uncle You had declined.

Dangerous thoughts began to swirl in Zhang Yi’s mind as his lips curled into a cold smile.

Hmph, trying to deceive me with this thing!

Zhang Yi had always believed there was no such thing as a free lunch. A method that gave someone powers simply by implanting a foreign object was bound to come with strings attached.

“This so-called Ice Soul must have some hidden drawbacks. Pangzi, tell him that word for word,” Zhang Yi ordered.

Xu Pangzi repeated Zhang Yi’s message.

However, the Great Decree remained calm, his smile unshaken as if he had anticipated such doubts.

“I assure you, the Ice Soul is a sacred artifact without any side effects,” he said.

“And, Mr. Zhang Yi, you are not the first to receive it.”

“Before you, the major bases in Tianhai City also requested it from us. Even they have verified its safety. Surely, this should dispel any doubts?”

This statement left Zhang Yi momentarily stunned.

“What? The major bases have used it too?”

The bases had access to extensive intelligence networks and advanced research equipment. If the Ice Soul had any harmful effects, they would have uncovered it.

Still skeptical, Zhang Yi turned to Yang Xinxin for confirmation.

Yang Xinxin quickly opened her laptop, her fingers flying across the keyboard. After a brief search, she nodded.

“It’s true. There are records indicating that some of the earliest superhumans at Xishan Base awakened their abilities through the Ice Soul.”

She hesitated before adding, “In fact, it was their use of this implantable method that inspired Xishan Base’s later experiments with modified humans.”

Yang Xinxin suddenly froze, her tone laced with shock as she continued:

“According to Xishan Base’s reports, the so-called Ice Soul appears to be derived from human cells!”

Zhang Yi’s expression darkened as realization dawned.

So, the Ice Soul is actually Yuan Kongye’s cells.

No wonder Xishan Base had tried replicating this method by implanting Ling Feng’s cells into others to create modified humans.

“Does it have any side effects?” Zhang Yi asked, still cautious.

Yang Xinxin replied, “Based on the records, the major bases conducted thorough research and found no harmful substances or mechanisms for controlling recipients through the cells.”

“Much of the Followers of the Snow God’s current influence comes from trading Ice Souls for survival agreements with the major bases,” she explained.

“If the reports are accurate, the Ice Soul is undoubtedly an incredible asset,” Yang Xinxin concluded.

Zhang Yi remained silent for a long time, gazing out the window.

An incredible asset? Something that allows ordinary people to become superhumans without risking death, or enhances existing superhumans’ abilities?

He didn’t believe it.

Even if the Ice Soul truly had no side effects, Zhang Yi couldn't bring himself to trust it. His principle had always been to assume the worst about anyone he didn't fully understand.

Narrowing his eyes, he coldly instructed, "Ask him if it works on ordinary people."

The Great Decree explained, "Its effectiveness varies based on an individual's latent potential. When used on ordinary people, the results are minimal, granting only faint traces of extraordinary ability."

"But for superhumans, it can unlock far greater potential."

Zhang Yi didn't waste time debating.

"Fine. Since you've gone to the trouble of bringing it here, I'll take it," he declared. "Xu Pangzi, accept it."

For now, he decided to keep the Ice Soul and assess it later.

The Great Decree showed no hesitation, promptly handing over the wooden box to Xu Pangzi.

This straightforward gesture made Xu Pangzi suspicious.

"Aren't you worried we might refuse to cooperate with the Followers of the Snow God?" he asked. "You're giving this up awfully easily."

The Great Decree responded with a wily smile.

"Regardless of whether we cooperate or not, the alliance's plan to attack your shelter remains unchanged."

"But if this strengthens your side and helps you eliminate more of the other factions' forces, it's a win for us."

Hearing this, Xu Pangzi couldn't help but mutter to himself, This old fox sure knows how to play the game.

Zhang Yi's voice came through the earpiece again:

"I understand you want us to weaken the other bases, but what exactly is your proposal for this alliance?"

His tone carried a cold sneer as he added, "It's obvious your ambitions don't end with just sitting on the sidelines."

The Great Decree bowed slightly, his cloudy eyes gleaming with a sharp, calculating light.

"When the time comes, we'll appear to join the assault on your shelter," he explained.

"Of course, we'll merely feign participation, launching a token attack nearby."

"But once they reveal an opening..."

The Great Decree's lips curled into a sinister grin.

"...we'll strike from the shadows and stab them in the back!"

Chapter 397: An Experiment

After hearing the Great Decree's proposal, Zhang Yi couldn't help but sneer internally. What a bunch of conniving old schemers.

The Baixue Sect had calculated everything perfectly.

Their plan was essentially to sit on the sidelines while Zhang Yi fought the combined forces of the major bases, and then swoop in to finish off the weakened survivors.

Even their supposed cooperation hinged entirely on Zhang Yi's ability to hold his ground. If he failed and was swiftly defeated, the Baixue Sect would pretend none of this had ever happened.

It was a classic open conspiracy, and Zhang Yi had no choice but to play along.

Between a definite enemy and a potential ally, he had to choose the latter.

"I understand. If what you've offered proves effective, I'll consider your proposal."

The Great Decree smiled. "I'm sure you won't be disappointed!"

"By the way," he added, "since we've demonstrated our sincerity, wouldn't it be appropriate for Mr. Zhang Yi to reciprocate?"

Zhang Yi's lips curled into a cold smirk. "We're the ones fighting the toughest battle. What more do you want?"

The Great Decree quickly waved his hands. "You misunderstand. We're not asking for material goods. All we request is your permission to spread our teachings in your territory if we succeed in this war."

"For the Baixue Sect, bringing more people under the Snow God's light is our ultimate goal."

"Spreading your faith, huh? Sounds like classic cult behavior—just recruiting people for your flock." Zhang Yi muttered under his breath.

He had no particular objections to their request. As long as it didn't harm his interests, he didn't care what others did.

One key to living a stress-free life, after all, was minding your own business.

Besides, managing the sprawling territories of Xishan and Lujiao districts wasn't something he was interested in doing personally.

"Fine. If we succeed in repelling the attack, your condition is acceptable."

The Great Decree was delighted and, after exchanging some pleasantries, departed with a satisfied expression.

As Zhang Yi watched him leave, his mind grew clearer.

Initially, he had worried that defeating Xishan Base would make him a target for the other forces.

But now it seemed that his victory had instead made him the center of a power struggle, with factions vying to use him for their own ends.

This unexpected shift also gave him valuable insight into the nature of the major factions.

Qingfu Base: Cautious and conservative, uninterested in aggressive expansion—an attitude likely shaped by their leader, a pragmatic steelworker.

Baixue Sect: Seemingly weak but ambitious and with significant growth potential.

Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases: Aggressive and expansionist.

"Qingfu Base is staying neutral for now and might even abstain from the fight entirely. Baixue Sect, on the other hand, wants to cooperate with me to backstab the other factions."

A smile slowly spread across Zhang Yi's face.

“Interesting. The tide is turning in our favor.”

Though Zhang Yi didn’t fully trust either party, he knew that with the right incentives, both Qingfu and Baixue could be swayed to betray their supposed allies.

If all went according to plan, it wouldn’t be the West Alliance sieging Zhang Yi, but Zhang Yi ambushing them with insider help.

For now, however, his focus was on the two Ice Souls.

Xu Pangzi held up the small wooden box, looking uneasy. “Boss, what do we do with these?”

“Bring them over here,” Zhang Yi instructed.

Xu Pangzi carefully carried the box to the door. Zhang Yi immediately stored it in his dimensional space for safety, ensuring any potential danger would be contained.

Once inside the space, Zhang Yi opened the box and inspected its contents.

Inside lay two small, white, spherical crystals emitting a faint chill. Occasionally, they pulsed ever so slightly, as though alive.

“So, these are the Ice Souls?” Zhang Yi murmured, his thoughts churning.

The fact that even the major bases had used them suggested they were reliable and stable.

After all, the major factions weren’t foolish—if there were serious risks, they wouldn’t have continued using them.

He had also seen Li Jian, who had used an Ice Soul, living without apparent side effects.

“Could it be that Yuan Kongye’s Ice Souls really are just keys to unlocking latent abilities?” Zhang Yi mused, then burst out laughing.

“Yeah, right. As if I’d believe in a free lunch like this.”

The problem wasn’t just that the major bases had used them; the Baixue Sect had also distributed them to outsiders like Li Jian.

“Who in this world would be so selfless as to give others power for free?”

In the apocalypse, everyone was struggling to survive, striving to grow stronger. Altruism was a luxury few could afford.

“Even if the Baixue Sect claims to act in the name of righteousness, I’m not buying it.”

Zhang Yi’s principle was simple: trust no one but yourself. Risking unknown dangers for the sake of power was not his style.

Yet, the allure of creating two new superhumans was hard to ignore.

As Zhang Yi deliberated, he felt the weight of several gazes fixed on him.

Looking up, he saw Zhou Ke’er, Yang Siyah, and Lu Keran staring at him with undisguised anticipation.

The conversation about the Ice Souls hadn’t gone unnoticed, and the three women, who lacked any powers, were visibly excited.

Among them, Yang Siyah’s longing was the most intense. Unlike the others, her role in the shelter was minimal—reduced to chores and providing emotional support for Zhang Yi.

She yearned to gain power, to finally be useful.

By contrast, Yang Xinxin remained calm, her intelligent gaze betraying no sign of expectation. Clearly, she had already deduced that the Ice Souls might carry hidden risks.

Unable to hold back, Yang Siyah spoke first. “Zhang Yi... are you planning to use the Ice Souls?”

Her tone was cautious, almost pleading, as though fearing she wasn’t worthy of consideration.

Lu Keran hesitated to speak but couldn’t conceal her eagerness, her gaze burning with hope.

Zhang Yi observed them silently, his mind already made up.

The Ice Souls were too valuable to waste, but he wasn’t willing to risk using them on his closest allies without first understanding their full effects.

If he was going to use them, he needed someone to serve as a test subject—a guinea pig for his experiment.

Chapter 398: The Candidate

Zhang Yi turned and settled himself back onto the sofa. The others followed suit, waiting expectantly to hear his decision.

There were two pressing matters at hand: how to handle the Ice Soul and the upcoming battle plans. After all, according to the Great Decree, the allied forces would attack in three days.

Seeing the eager expressions on the faces of the ordinary members, Zhang Yi decided to address the Ice Soul situation first.

He spoke evenly:

“This Ice Soul, as you’ve heard, can help someone awaken as an Ability User. The West Bases have used it in the past, and so far, no side effects have been reported.”

“But I’m not convinced. I’ve never believed in things that are too good to be true.”

As he spoke, Zhang Yi’s gaze swept over everyone present.

The existing Ability Users in the group appeared indifferent. They already possessed powers, and living safely in the shelter meant they didn’t feel a pressing need to grow stronger. As such, they had little interest in a potentially dangerous Ice Soul.

However, aside from Yang Xinxin, all the ordinary members displayed strong desires.

For them, the possibility of gaining superhuman powers was irresistible. In the apocalypse, strength directly correlated to survival.

Zhang Yi looked at the hopeful faces and said:

“Understand this: I only intend to use one of the Ice Souls for now. Whoever uses it first will essentially act as a test subject.”

“If you’re willing to take that risk, raise your hand.”

The atmosphere grew tense as hesitation clouded the expressions of those present.

While they longed for powers, the thought of being the first to try an unknown and possibly dangerous artifact gave them pause.

Then, Yang Siyah raised her hand decisively.

“I’ll do it.”

Her eyes shone with determination. As a strong-willed woman, she refused to resign herself to being a useless ornament in the shelter.

Seeing Yang Siyah step forward, Zhou Ke'er quickly followed, raising her hand as well.

Even Zhou Haimei, despite her reservations, tentatively lifted her hand, her movements subdued.

Zhang Yi nodded with a faint smile and addressed Yang Siyah:

"Your resolve is the strongest. I've decided to let you use one of the Ice Souls."

Yang Siyah's face lit up with joy. Overcome with emotion, she threw her arms around Zhang Yi's neck in an ecstatic hug.

"Thank you, Zhang Yi! Thank you so much!"

Zhou Haimei smiled faintly. Though disappointed, she quickly accepted the outcome. She didn't have a particularly close relationship with Zhang Yi, so she hadn't expected to be chosen.

On the other hand, Zhou Ke'er looked visibly annoyed. She clenched her fists and muttered something under her breath, clearly blaming herself for not acting quickly enough.

What they didn't realize was that Zhang Yi's decision had been made long before he'd asked for volunteers.

Allowing them to raise their hands was merely a formality.

Yang Siyah had always been his first choice.

First, as the test subject, the candidate needed to be someone whose role in the group was minimal. If something went wrong, the shelter wouldn't suffer a significant loss. This criterion ruled out anyone with crucial responsibilities.

Second, the person needed to be easily controlled. Zhang Yi didn't know what effects the Ice Soul might have, and if the user became hostile or unstable, they needed to be manageable.

Combining these criteria, Yang Siyah was the most suitable choice.

She contributed the least among the group, and her loyalty to Zhang Yi made her a safer option than others.

Yang Siyah was still clinging to Zhang Yi, her emotions overwhelming her as tears of joy streamed down her face.

"Thank you, Zhang Yi! This means everything to me!"

Zhang Yi gently patted her on the back, his tone calm:

"You're important to me, Siyah. Of course, I'll take care of you."

After she calmed down, Zhang Yi turned back to the group to discuss the upcoming battle.

"Here's my take: let's put the potential alliances with Qingfu Base and the Baixue Sect aside for now."

"Don't trust anyone. For all we know, they're testing us, and there's a high chance they'll betray us at the last minute."

"Our priority remains the same—prepare to face the Western Alliance."

Zhang Yi's gaze darkened as he leaned forward, his voice growing colder:

"But if something changes on the battlefield... if their betrayal or cooperation tips the scales..."

His lips curved into a devilish smile.

“Then let this shelter become their tomb.”

The strategic plan largely stayed the same, though they now accounted for the uncertainty of Qingfu and Baixue’s involvement.

Once the discussion ended, it was time for the moment everyone had been waiting for—using the Ice Soul on Yang Siyah.

Human curiosity was a powerful thing, and even those who had expressed no interest in using the artifact were eager to witness its effects.

The process, according to the Great Decree, was straightforward: place the Ice Soul against the user’s forehead, and it would merge automatically.

For safety, Zhang Yi chose a secure, reinforced room to carry out the experiment.

Yang Siyah lay on a sturdy bed, her arms and legs restrained by straps to prevent any unforeseen incidents.

Her face was a mix of excitement and anxiety, her body trembling slightly as she awaited her transformation.

She didn’t know that, in Zhang Yi’s mind, there was a contingency for every possible outcome.

If she gained powers without incident, all would be well.

But if the Ice Soul caused unexpected changes—such as her being controlled or turning violent—Zhang Yi was prepared to do whatever was necessary.

He refused to dwell on the thought, knowing the decision would be brutal if it came to that.

As everyone gathered to observe, Zhang Yi opened the small wooden box, releasing a faint mist of white frost into the air.

The onlookers leaned forward, wide-eyed as two luminous white orbs came into view. They were irregularly shaped, faintly pulsing as though alive.

With steady hands, Zhang Yi donned gloves and used a pair of tongs to pick up one of the Ice Souls. Slowly, he lowered it onto Yang Siyah's forehead.

The room fell into an expectant silence.

As soon as the Ice Soul touched her skin, thin, filament-like strands extended outward, latching onto her head like tendrils.

To everyone's amazement, the crystalline orb began to melt and sink into her flesh.

The process was swift. Within seconds, the Ice Soul had completely fused with Yang Siyah, leaving behind a faint white mark on her forehead that shimmered briefly before fading.

Yang Siyah's eyes lost focus, and her expression slackened. Moments later, her head fell to one side, and she drifted into a deep sleep.

"It's done," Zhang Yi announced. "We'll monitor her condition closely over the next few hours."

The group dispersed, leaving the reinforced room secured. Surveillance cameras were in place, and the walls were made of reinforced alloy, ensuring any emergency could be swiftly contained.

Chapter 399: A Long-Awaited Farewell

The effectiveness of this so-called Ice Soul would soon reveal itself to Zhang Yi.

After dismissing everyone, Zhang Yi instructed them to remain vigilant in the coming days. The three-day warning of an attack as mentioned by the Great Decree could very well be a ruse. In this current era, no one could be trusted. For all he knew, the attack could happen tonight.

Everyone understood the gravity of this war and dispersed to prepare. However, "preparation" in this case was little more than mentally rehearsing their assigned roles.

Once the others left, Zhang Yi called Zhou Ke'er to his side.

"Ke'er, you're in charge of keeping an eye on Yang Siyah. To prevent any incidents, administer a moderate dose of muscle relaxants and sedatives to her in advance."

Zhou Ke'er nodded. "Understood. I'll get the medication right away."

Her lips were pursed, as if she could hang a soy sauce bottle from them, revealing a mix of jealousy and discontent.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but chuckle. He knew exactly why Zhou Ke'er was upset—because he chose to give the Ice Soul to Yang Siyah instead of her.

Grasping her hand gently, he reached out to rub her soft, fair cheek.

"Silly girl, do you really think I didn't let you use the Ice Soul because I care more about her than you?"

"On the contrary, it's precisely because you mean more to me! My feelings for you are as enduring as the Great Wall itself."

"I'm worried about the potential side effects of the Ice Soul, which is why I didn't let you use it. Can't you see my concern?"

Zhou Ke'er looked at Zhang Yi, surprised. "So... that's what you were thinking?"

"But Xinxin said the Ice Soul has been tested by multiple bases and has no adverse effects, didn't she?"

Zhang Yi responded coolly, "Theoretically, drinking urine can sustain life too, but if there's clean water available, would anyone choose urine?"

Zhou Ke'er's mouth twitched. "What kind of analogy is that?"

Zhang Yi laughed and said, "Never trust things from strangers. In the apocalypse, even a small oversight can cost your life!"

"Ke'er, you're a vital member of our team, and your medical expertise makes you more important than even the superhumans. But Yang Siyah is different. She needs to prove her worth."

"That's why I chose to give the Ice Soul to her. Do you understand now?"

Hearing Zhang Yi's explanation, Zhou Ke'er finally understood his intentions. Warmth filled her heart as she realized Zhang Yi's decision stemmed from his respect for her abilities and his desire to protect her.

Pressing her lips together, Zhou Ke'er accepted his reasoning and obediently went to the infirmary to prepare the medicine.

After she left, Zhang Yi's smile faded. He returned to his room in silence.

The current situation was increasingly complicated.

In Tianhai City, the Western Alliance forces were mired in infighting and disunity. Two factions had grudges against Zhang Yi and coveted his territory, intent on destroying the Shelter. The other two factions were opportunists, waiting to see which side would gain the upper hand.

No one was trustworthy. Everyone was a potential betrayer—or ally.

Zhang Yi even considered leaking the Baixue Sect's plans to Yangsheng Base and Chaoyu Base, triggering a skirmish between them.

But would that benefit him?

The Qingfu Base and the Baixue Sect bore no personal grudge against him. His primary adversaries remained Yangsheng Base and Chaoyu Base.

Thus, his main objective was still to counter these two factions.

Lying on his bed, Zhang Yi pondered for a long time before reaching a decision. Since war was inevitable, he would face it in a way most advantageous to him.

He picked up his phone and called Xing Tian.

"Hello, Zhang Yi, have you made up your mind?"

Zhang Yi nodded. "I have. We can cooperate, but I want to change the terms of our collaboration."

Curiosity flickered in Xing Tian's eyes. "Oh? What terms do you propose?"

Zhang Yi said, "I'll double the food supply you asked for, but you'll have to participate in this battle!"

Xing Tian chuckled coldly. "You want me to help you? That's impossible! Qingfu Base avoids unnecessary conflicts. We won't fight you, but we also won't provoke the other three factions."

Zhang Yi shook his head. "No, I don't need you to fight anyone. I just need you to show up and pretend to attack."

Xing Tian's face was filled with doubt. "You want me to bring my forces and act? Zhang Yi, what's your game here?"

Zhang Yi smiled. "You don't need to understand my motives. We have no conflicting interests or grudges. If you're willing to play along, I'll give you double the food. Are you in or out?"

Xing Tian's eyes gleamed. The proposal seemed too good to refuse, though Zhang Yi's intent puzzled him.

After some thought, Xing Tian laughed heartily. "Fine! Why would I turn down such an offer? But you'll need to deliver the food in advance as a gesture of good faith!"

Zhang Yi said, "I'll send you a third as a deposit. The rest will be delivered once the job is done."

Xing Tian pondered briefly and agreed. "Alright, 2:30 PM tomorrow at the old site of the West Hill Base. We'll make the exchange!"

"Deal."

Ending the call, Zhang Yi felt his plan taking shape.

He could have opted to keep Qingfu Base out of the fray, but he chose to pay a higher price to ensure they played their role convincingly.

This decision served two purposes:

First, Qingfu Base's involvement would lull Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases into a false sense of security, minimizing their defenses against the Baixue Sect's impending betrayal.

Second, Zhang Yi was confident the Shelter could withstand a coordinated attack from multiple factions. If their assault failed, the Baixue Sect's backstab combined with his counteroffensive would devastate both Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases.

At that point, Qingfu Base wouldn't resist the temptation to join the fray and capitalize on the situation.

Though Xing Tian lacked ambition, he wasn't foolish. Who would pass up the chance to claim the spoils of war?

Chapter 400: The Unknown

Everything was an unknown.

Zhang Yi was clever but never blindly confident. In the apocalypse, only pure interests mattered—faith and loyalty were nonexistent.

Relationships between individuals and alliances between forces were built on mutual exploitation. One moment might see close cooperation, and the next, a knife in the back.

Because Zhang Yi trusted no one, he had to meticulously account for everyone's intentions.

The ideal outcome of this war would be as he envisioned. Yet even in the worst-case scenario, where both Qingfu Base and the Baixue Sect betrayed him and joined forces with Yangsheng Base and Chaoyu Base to attack the Shelter, Zhang Yi wouldn't be surprised.

"At worst, I'll abandon the top two floors and retreat to the heavily fortified underground defenses. That's the absolute worst outcome," Zhang Yi muttered coldly.

"But that would come at a heavy cost for them!"

His gaze turned icy.

On reflection, Zhang Yi realized he was undoubtedly one of the top superhumans in Tianhai City. Perhaps not the strongest, but those who could rival him were few, if any.

When he chose to defend and counterattack cautiously, the devastation he could unleash was unimaginable.

In the dead of night, frantic knocking suddenly echoed through Zhang Yi's door.

"Zhang Yi! Zhang Yi! Something's happening with Yang Siyah!"

Outside was Zhou Ke'er's anxious voice.

Zhang Yi leapt out of bed, startling Hua Hua, who had been sleeping soundly. The feline's eyes snapped open, glowing like copper bells.

Zhang Yi hurried to open the door, simultaneously checking the surveillance footage of Yang Siyah's room on his phone.

As expected, Yang Siyah was strapped to the bed with restraints, her face flushed red and her body drenched in sweat.

At the center of her forehead, a white glow flickered, as if something within her was about to erupt.

"Let's go check!" Zhang Yi said with a grave tone.

If he found any sign that Yang Siyah was being controlled, he wouldn't hesitate to incapacitate her—or worse, if necessary.

After all, superhumans were inherently unpredictable.

Sensing Zhang Yi's tense aura, Zhou Ke'er trailed behind him without a word.

With Hua Hua by his side, Zhang Yi quickly reached Yang Siyah's room.

By the time they arrived, however, the abnormal sweating and redness had subsided. Yang Siyah lay gasping for breath on the bed, her movements inhibited by the drugs.

"Yang Siyah? Yang Siyah?" Zhang Yi called softly, maintaining his distance.

Yang Siyah's eyes fluttered open. Upon seeing Zhang Yi, she forced a small, joyful smile.

"Zhang Yi, I did it!"

At that moment, Hua Hua jumped onto the bed, swishing its tail as it prowled over Yang Siyah. Finally, it turned its calm gaze toward Zhang Yi.

This was all the assurance Zhang Yi needed.

The demon cat's senses were hundreds of times more acute than a human's. Any anomaly, no matter how faint, would not escape its notice. Hua Hua's reaction told Zhang Yi that Yang Siyah was unchanged—the same woman he knew inside and out.

"Could I have been overthinking this? Could the Ice Soul, verified by even the Western Bases, truly be harmless?" Zhang Yi wondered.

But he quickly discarded the thought. Better to doubt and verify than to trust blindly. A little extra caution never hurt.

Without untying her restraints, Zhang Yi asked, “How do you feel now? What kind of ability did you awaken?”

When superhumans awakened their powers, they instinctively understood their nature, as if an extra limb had grown, clear and intuitive.

Closing her eyes to sense her ability, Yang Siyah suddenly chuckled. “Turns out I’m only destined to be a homemaker!”

Despite her self-deprecating words, her face showed no disappointment; instead, she seemed quite pleased with her newfound power.

Yang Siyah explained, “My ability is Feast. The food I make can restore a person’s depleted superhuman energy.”

She smiled again. “It’s a support-type ability, just as I thought! Honestly, that’s fine. I was never good at fighting anyway.”

Relaxing at her explanation, Zhang Yi leaned against the doorframe and smiled.

“That’s actually a very useful ability. It means we won’t have to worry about energy depletion during battles.”

He turned to Zhou Ke’er. “Ke’er, help her out of the restraints.”

Though her eyes shone with envy, Zhou Ke’er moved to untie Yang Siyah. However, the lingering effects of the drugs still left Yang Siyah immobilized.

“When you’ve recovered by tomorrow, show everyone what you can do,” Zhang Yi said warmly.

“Alright!” Yang Siyah agreed, her face still glistening with sweat but her eyes sparkling with determination. Finally, she could contribute to the team and prove her worth.

Leaving Zhou Ke'er to tend to Yang Siyah, Zhang Yi returned to his quarters.

Infusing food with restorative properties was not an overwhelmingly powerful ability, but it was undeniably practical—especially with a major battle on the horizon.

"The Great Decree was right—the effects of the Ice Soul depend entirely on the individual's potential. Yang Siyah's abilities may only reach a support level, even with her awakening."

"She reminds me a bit of Li Jian," Zhang Yi mused, recalling the second Ice Soul he possessed.

After pondering for a while, he decided to hold off on using it for now. Creating another superhuman wasn't urgent. He would continue observing Yang Siyah to ensure there were no unforeseen issues. Only then would he consider letting Zhou Ke'er or Lu Keran use the Ice Soul.

The next day arrived.

By mid-morning, Zhang Yi called Xing Tian.

"Come over now. The meeting place has changed—it's Xu Family Town in the Lu River District."

"Your territory?" Xing Tian asked, frowning.

Zhang Yi chuckled. "I'm the one being surrounded and attacked, not you. It's only prudent for me to be cautious. Surely you don't suspect me of plotting against you?"

Their agreed-upon time was 2:30 PM, but Zhang Yi had no intention of adhering to it.

Setting a fixed time and location would only create opportunities for ambushes. Zhang Yi preferred to eliminate all variables.

Xing Tian snorted. “Fine, have it your way—Xu Family Town it is!”

Although Xing Tian had gathered some information on Zhang Yi’s group, he was unsure about their individual capabilities. He only knew that Zhang Yi had a small team and, without the Shelter’s defenses, couldn’t contend directly with base-level forces.

Qingfu Steelworks was about 100 kilometers from Cloud Manor. Since they rarely left their territory, Xing Tian’s group wasn’t certain about travel times, so the plan was to contact Zhang Yi upon reaching Xu Family Town.