

Ice Age 411

Chapter 411: Unexpected Firepower

Zhang Yi wasn't particularly concerned about Xing Tian and his group's appearance at the rear mountain. He had anticipated this scenario while fortifying the defensive lines. That area was a natural chokepoint, and he had planted numerous triggered landmines on the slopes. Anyone attempting to descend there would have no means of clearing the mines and would inevitably be blown to pieces.

"Enemies sighted! Prepare for battle!" Zhang Yi's voice rang out sharply over the comms.

Everyone in the Shelter immediately entered a state of heightened focus. This battle would decide their survival.

With a rumble, the armored convoys from Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases advanced toward the Shelter's outer perimeter. Soldiers clad in combat gear and armed to the teeth marched in formation, supported by powerful Superhumans ready to strike from the shadows.

To these forces, victory seemed assured.

Meanwhile, the followers of Bai Xue Jiao approached from another direction, armed with an eclectic mix of modern firearms and primitive weapons like spears and broadswords. As they drew closer, Zhang Yi waited until the leading vehicles were within 300 meters of the defensive line before shouting, "Fire!"

In the control room, Yang Xinxin decisively pressed a button.

Suddenly, cracks appeared along the icy walls facing the advancing forces of Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases. Massive cannon barrels and gun turrets emerged from within.

The front line erupted with deafening explosions as heavy artillery, tank cannons, and machine guns roared to life. Even heavily armored vehicles were obliterated, sent flying into those behind them.

"Boom!"

“Boom!”

“Boom!”

The earth-shaking detonations stunned all factions.

“Artillery? Tanks? Machine guns? Where the hell did they get all this firepower?” Zheng Yixian was dumbfounded.

Fortunately, his followers had been slow to advance; otherwise, they’d have been mowed down.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai were equally shocked. They couldn’t believe their eyes.

These heavy weapons were supposedly exclusive to West Hill Base, the most powerful faction in Tianhai City.

“Did they loot West Hill Base’s arsenal?” Xiao Honglian muttered. “How is this even possible?”

West Hill Base’s firepower was unparalleled, but transporting heavy weapons was always a logistical nightmare, limiting their use in battle. Yet today, Zhang Yi had somehow deployed them against his enemies, making them his test subjects.

“Scatter and retaliate immediately!” Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai barked orders to their troops, who hurriedly spread out to avoid being annihilated.

Caught off guard, however, they had already suffered heavy casualties. Many soldiers were obliterated, and armored vehicles were destroyed in the opening salvo.

“It’s just an ice wall. Break through it, and victory is ours,” Xiao Honglian said coldly.

Although taken by surprise, she remained calm. Wu Huaiwen had assured her that the Shelter had no automated weapon systems, only a sturdy outer shell. If they could breach the perimeter defenses, the battle would turn in their favor.

Fearing complete annihilation, soldiers disembarked from their vehicles with their weapons. But stepping away from their armored cover only made them easy targets for Zhang Yi.

Standing in a tower with his rifle protected by the Dimensional Gate, Zhang Yi began sniping.

The process was monotonous: aim, pull the trigger, reload.

But with each pull of the trigger, another life was snuffed out.

Since the apocalypse began, Zhang Yi had honed his sniping skills to instinctual perfection. On average, he killed one soldier every three seconds.

The unanticipated presence of heavy artillery caught Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases off guard, resulting in catastrophic losses. Their modified vehicles, despite their reinforcements, couldn't withstand the onslaught, and even their siege cannons were destroyed before they could be deployed.

Meanwhile, Xing Tian, who had planned to spectate from the rear mountain, couldn't help but swallow nervously.

"So that's why Zhang Yi dares to face so many factions at once. He had this up his sleeve," Xing Tian murmured, silently thanking his foresight in choosing to slack off at the back.

Turning to his men, he ordered, "Fire your guns and make some noise. Just don't aim at anyone!"

A bald subordinate scratched his head in confusion. "Boss, there's no one here to shoot at."

Xing Tian smacked the man on the head. "I said fire! Don't ask questions. And make sure you don't hit anyone!"

“I’m an honest man. If I take someone’s stuff, I see it through to the end. Unless Zhang Yi loses, we’re not stabbing him in the back!”

Gunfire erupted from the rear mountain, creating the illusion of an intense battle.

Meanwhile, on the front lines, the fight was anything but fake. The combined forces of two major bases were being decimated, their casualties mounting rapidly.

Fearing suspicion if he remained idle, Zheng Yixian ordered a wave of cultists to charge the defensive line.

Over a hundred followers, armed with crude weapons and makeshift guns, screamed as they rushed toward the Shelter. But the flat terrain offered no cover, and they were shredded by machine-gun fire before coming within 100 meters.

Frowning, Zheng Yixian realized Zhang Yi wasn’t holding back at all. Reluctantly, he kept up the charade, sending more cultists to their deaths.

“This isn’t working. We underestimated the Shelter’s firepower,” Xiao Honglian muttered through gritted teeth. Looking at the carnage around her, she began to regret her decisions.

Who would have thought that a team cobbled together by a warehouse clerk during the apocalypse could wield firepower rivaling a military base?

Wei Dinghai’s voice came over the comms. “We need to breach their outer defenses together! Most of their firepower is concentrated here. If we break through, they’ll be at a severe disadvantage.”

Xiao Honglian responded, “Understood!”

Wei Dinghai’s Ice Fortress ability would be crucial now.

“Suppress their fire and support Chaoyu Base’s advance!” Xiao Honglian ordered.

Meanwhile, Zheng Yixian reluctantly continued to send cultists to their deaths, while Xing Tian laughed and directed his men to fire harmlessly into the sky.

Back on the battlefield, Wei Dinghai stepped forward, encased in crystalline ice armor. His entire body shimmered as he melted seamlessly into the icy terrain.

Suddenly, amidst the chaos, a section of the ice wall exploded violently.

“What?” Zhang Yi and the others turned toward the unexpected breach.

Amidst the flying snow and debris, they spotted Wei Dinghai, his figure wrapped in thick ice armor, a mocking smirk on his face.

“In a world of ice and snow, I am king,” Wei Dinghai declared.

Machine guns and artillery were useless against a powerful Ice Element Superhuman like him.

From the far distance, Zhang Yi couldn’t unleash his Divine Power in time. With the breach opened, the allied forces surged forward, roaring as they crossed the gap.

Within moments, hundreds of soldiers poured into the area before the Shelter.

Wei Dinghai pressed his hand against the wall, activating his ability. The remaining sections of the ice barrier shattered like paper, leaving the steel framework beneath crumbling in its wake.

Even Zhang Yi couldn’t help but tense up, his pupils narrowing. Wei Dinghai’s power far surpassed anything they had faced so far, eclipsing even Fatty Xu’s abilities.

Chapter 412: Battle!

“Let’s begin!” Zhang Yi said calmly.

He wasn’t surprised that the defensive line was breached. After all, it was merely an ice wall, incapable of withstanding every attack. What did catch him off guard was the sheer strength of the Ice Element Superhuman, who had ripped through the wall like tearing paper.

But Zhang Yi had contingencies. Behind the breached line was the second layer of defense: Uncle You, Liang Yue, and the others.

Wei Dinghai laughed as he effortlessly shattered the ice wall, tearing a massive gap into it. Yet, in that moment, a chilling killing intent locked onto him.

Wei Dinghai’s pupils narrowed as a sharp, icy gleam flashed past his neck.

“Crack!”

The thick ice armor protecting his neck shattered, scattering blue ice crystals. Wei Dinghai awkwardly rolled on the ground to dodge the fatal blow. When he looked up, he saw a woman wielding a long, narrow blade, her eyes brimming with murderous intent.

“She broke through my ice armor?” Wei Dinghai muttered, now on high alert. His armor, forged of solid ice crystals, had a defensive strength comparable to high-grade synthetic metals. Yet this woman had nearly severed his neck in a single strike!

“Not bad!”

Wei Dinghai had no intention of continuing the duel. He immediately melded into the snow beneath him, where his power was at its peak.

Liang Yue frowned and shouted, “Fatty Xu!”

Fatty Xu arrived just in time to see another Ice Element Superhuman, clearly stronger than him. He sighed in relief—this was a fight he didn't need to take on himself.

Without hesitation, Fatty Xu ripped up a large patch of the snowy ground. The thin snow layer surrounding the Shelter, a result of both terrain and prior battles, made it easy to expose the earth beneath.

Realizing the danger, Wei Dinghai had no choice but to surface from the snow. Liang Yue, prepared for this moment, struck with a blade full of killing intent.

“Crack!”

Her blade, over a meter long, released an arc of energy three meters wide, slicing through the pale blue ice armor on Wei Dinghai's chest.

He gasped in pain as a thin red line of blood appeared, seeping through the broken armor.

Gritting his teeth, Wei Dinghai used his powers to quickly regenerate the ice layer over his wound, staunching the bleeding. He hadn't expected the Shelter to harbor someone so skilled in close combat.

Despite being injured, Wei Dinghai had achieved his objective: breaching the defensive line. He retreated through the gap, avoiding further confrontation with Liang Yue.

As Liang Yue prepared to pursue him, a wave of enemy soldiers, armed and charging, surged through the gap. Bullets rained down like a storm.

Taking a deep breath, Liang Yue drew her blade and charged straight into the mass of enemies.

Fatty Xu shouted in alarm, “Teacher Liang, don't be reckless!”

But Zhang Yi's calm voice cut through. “Just hold the gap. Let her go.”

Liang Yue needed to vent her rage. Allowing her to slaughter the enemy would help release her inner turmoil. It was her choice, and Zhang Yi wouldn't stop her.

"Stay alert! The big players are about to join the fight!" he warned.

At this stage of the battle, ordinary soldiers were becoming less relevant. Superhumans would now determine the outcome.

As expected, with the breach in the defensive line, the firepower net faltered, relieving much of the pressure on the allied forces.

Xiao Honglian leaped onto the hood of an armored vehicle, took a swig from her flask of high-proof alcohol, and spat out a long stream of fire that coiled into a blazing dragon.

The remaining ice walls melted instantly, and the weapons concealed within were rendered ineffective.

The allied forces cheered and surged forward, exhilarated by the open path ahead. The expanse before them was clear, with the Shelter standing alone in the distance.

"Victory is ours! Charge!"

Mad Dog Liu Xian howled in excitement, dropping to all fours and racing toward the breach at breakneck speed.

But just as the soldiers approached, a sudden blizzard swept through. Fatty Xu summoned the snow, creating obstacles at the breach.

Standing guard was the now-enlarged Hua Hua, who roared so thunderously that it caused hundreds of soldiers to clutch their ears in pain, some bleeding, and others collapsing in disorientation.

"Boom!" "Boom!" "Boom!"

Heavy footsteps approached as Uncle You transformed into a two-meter-tall giant. Bare-chested and draped in ammunition belts, he carried two Gatling guns, positioning himself at the breach.

“RAAARGH!”

Uncle You roared, pulling the triggers. Blazing streams of bullets tore through the snowstorm, striking and dismembering soldiers caught in their path.

“Thud!” “Thud!” “Thud!”

Blood mist filled the air as high-powered bullets shattered bodies. Soldiers, despite their bulletproof gear, fell like wheat under a scythe.

Meanwhile, Liang Yue was in a frenzy on another battlefield. Her Strength Enhancement ability amplified her speed, power, reflexes, and even her senses. Coupled with her expertise as a Martial Arts Master, she was unstoppable.

Each swing of her blade claimed another life.

Her eyes locked on Xiao Honglian, standing aflame atop an armored vehicle.

Rage surged as Liang Yue charged, blade aimed at her foe. But a sharp glint of steel suddenly streaked toward her neck.

“Clang!”

Liang Yue’s blade deflected the strike, revealing Mad Dog Liu Xian glaring at her with predatory intent.

“You can’t just cut my men down like they’re nothing,” he growled.

Xiao Honglian spared Liang Yue a fleeting glance before dismissing her. As a commander, she had bigger concerns than an enemy soldier.

But Liang Yue's eyes glowed a sinister red, her aura exuding an eerie malevolence unfamiliar even to her allies.

Liu Xian smirked, sensing her growing ferocity. "Interesting," he hissed, his tongue flicking out as he crouched. His body began to enlarge, claws and fangs extending like blades.

Liang Yue calmly sheathed her blade and lowered her stance. Her mastery of martial arts included techniques from around the world, and her Iaido strike was among her deadliest.

Liu Xian, beast-like and bloodthirsty, lunged at her with inhuman speed, leaving afterimages in his wake. His gray wolf mutation granted him unparalleled agility and power, able to block even sniper bullets.

But as he closed in, Liang Yue closed her eyes.

The battlefield stilled.

In a flash, Liu Xian's claws slashed toward her neck. But her blade struck first, severing both his arms and slashing through his throat in a fluid motion.

Liu Xian's body continued to rush forward, his head and limbs finally tumbling to the ground some distance away.

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Back at the breach, Uncle You, Hua Hua, and Fatty Xu held the line, slaughtering countless soldiers.

But the arrival of allied Superhumans turned the tide. Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases had plenty of skilled fighters, and with the defensive line breached, their abilities came to the forefront.

Although injured, Wei Dinghai retreated. But five more Superhumans joined the fray.

Uncle You was still firing his Gatling guns when a white blur zipped past his side.

A moment later, Chen Jingguan, Wei Dinghai's lieutenant, wrapped himself around Uncle You like a boneless serpent, constricting him tightly.

"My body can't even be pierced by sniper bullets. You think you can break free?" Chen Jingguan sneered, his Rubber Man abilities making him the perfect counter to Uncle You's brute strength.

Just then, Hua Hua roared, stunning Chen Jingguan long enough for Uncle You to pry him off and toss him aside.

But more Superhumans were closing in.

Realizing the futility of holding the line, Zhang Yi issued a command.

"Everyone, fall back to the Shelter!"

"Liang Yue, that includes you. Vengeance won't help now. Be rational!"

Hearing the order, the team began a tactical retreat.

Liang Yue glanced at the wolf's head in her hand, a strange light flickering in her eyes. With blood splattered across her face, she wiped it clean and silently obeyed, retreating to the Shelter.

Her abilities were nearly drained, and without Yang Siyah's prepared provisions, she wouldn't have lasted this long.

Despite the bitter fight, Liang Yue's gains were significant. But continuing the battle was pointless; she

Chapter 413: The Backstab

Liang Yue returned behind the defensive line, and Zhang Yi finally exhaled in relief. Thankfully, she hadn't foolishly thrown her life away.

The team retreated toward the Shelter's entrance under the cover of Zhang Yi's sniper fire and the protection of the Dimensional Gate. As they regrouped, Zhang Yi glanced toward the Bai Xue Jiao cultists, who were still idly spectating.

"Still watching? Heh."

Deciding it was time to teach them a lesson, Zhang Yi resolved to make them understand that standing by idly wouldn't come without consequences.

"Xinxin, aim all remaining firepower at Bai Xue Jiao and fire a volley!"

The defenses on Bai Xue Jiao's side were largely intact. Zhang Yi hadn't pressed them hard earlier, and their half-hearted attacks hadn't caused much damage.

Now that they continued to sit on the sidelines, Zhang Yi had no intention of being polite. He wasn't about to let anyone swoop in and steal the fruits of his labor.

Yang Xinxin responded crisply, "Understood!"

Her fingers danced across the keyboard, activating the firepower net aimed at Bai Xue Jiao.

Zheng Yixian, who had been biding his time, planning to support the winning side, was caught off guard by the sudden barrage. The poorly equipped cultists suffered heavy casualties almost instantly.

"Zhang Yi, you..." Zheng Yixian retreated to the rear of his forces, seething. He understood that Zhang Yi was enraged at their reluctance to commit to the fight.

Meanwhile, soldiers from Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases were roaring as they pushed forward, converging in the open space before the Shelter. Bai Xue Jiao's hesitation could no longer continue.

Taking a deep breath, Zheng Yixian murmured, "It's time to move."

He realized that Zhang Yi falling here would benefit no one. The other factions were the true enemies of Bai Xue Jiao.

He ordered a group of cultists to advance toward the Shelter.

The Shelter was now completely surrounded. Smoke bombs were thrown all around its perimeter, significantly disrupting Zhang Yi's sniping capabilities.

To avoid injuring his eyes, Zhang Yi refrained from using infrared vision, wary of potential flashbangs or grenades.

Inside the Shelter, Liang Yue and the others watched the waves of soldiers surrounding them, their nerves tense.

"Zhang Yi, what's the plan? Do we abandon the upper two floors and retreat underground?" Uncle You asked.

"No need to panic. The Shelter's defenses won't fall so easily," Zhang Yi reassured him.

As he spoke, a loud rumble echoed outside. Through the dissipating smoke, Zhang Yi caught sight of a massive engineering vehicle slowly advancing, forcing the crowd to part around it.

Frowning, he sensed trouble.

Opening his Spatial Storage, Zhang Yi retrieved crates of grenades and explosives. Protected by the Dimensional Gate, he began tossing them out of the windows.

Explosions erupted in rapid succession, sending bodies and debris flying as screams of terror filled the air.

Crate after crate, Zhang Yi continued to hurl explosives relentlessly. Having emptied West Hill Base's arsenal, he was never short of munitions.

"You think breaching the first line of defense means victory? How naive!" Zhang Yi sneered, tossing out another bundle of explosives. "The Shelter is my true stronghold!"

Within moments, over a hundred soldiers lay dead, and the rest scattered in panic, unable to retaliate against Zhang Yi's deadly tactics.

Some tried firing back, but their bullets passed through the Dimensional Gate and fell upon their own comrades.

The repeated blasts eventually cleared the smoke, revealing the engineering vehicle again. Zhang Yi recognized the man driving it: Wu Huaiyu from the War Dragon Security Company.

An old acquaintance.

"So, they brought him in. No wonder they're so confident about attacking my Shelter!" Zhang Yi muttered with a hint of malice.

He immediately lobbed grenades at the vehicle. But the engineering vehicle was heavily protected, and Chen Jingguan, Chaoyu Base's Rubber Man, intercepted the grenades mid-air, deflecting them harmlessly.

Wu Huaiyu seized the opportunity to maneuver the vehicle to the Shelter's side. A long mechanical arm extended from the vehicle, releasing a thin blue flame that began cutting into the wall.

Xiao Honglian, observing the operation, issued calm orders: "Spread out and attack from the flanks. Obscure his line of sight!"

Thick mist enveloped the Shelter's surroundings, further hindering Zhang Yi's sniping efficiency.

At that moment, Xiao Ai's alarm sounded in Zhang Yi's earpiece:

"Warning! Warning! High-temperature cutting detected on the Shelter wall. Damage at 0.001%."

"Continuous cutting?" Zhang Yi asked, immediately grasping the situation.

"Based on the current rate, full penetration will take 1 hour and 29 minutes," Xiao Ai reported.

Zhang Yi relaxed slightly. If simply breaking through the wall required so much time, creating an entry point large enough for soldiers would take an entire day.

Plenty of time to inflict massive casualties.

"So they want to go all in, huh? Then let's see who breaks first!" Zhang Yi growled, redoubling his efforts with grenades and sniper fire.

While the smoke and mist reduced his accuracy, each hit still meant a confirmed kill.

On the first floor, Uncle You and the others, unable to see the action outside, listened anxiously to the faint hissing sound of cutting.

"Boss, should we fall back?" Fatty Xu asked nervously.

"Not yet. Hold your ground," Zhang Yi replied with calm authority.

In less than 20 minutes, they were surrounded. While it appeared they were on the defensive, Zhang Yi's team had managed to kill hundreds without losing a single member—a testament to their resilience.

Still, Wu Huiren's involvement changed the stakes.

Zhang Yi bided his time. He knew Bai Xue Jiao had been lurking, waiting to exploit an opportunity. With the other factions suffering heavy losses, would Bai Xue Jiao let such a chance slip by?

Of course not.

Meanwhile, Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai, stationed at the rear, regarded the near-captured Shelter with relief. The battle had been far more grueling than expected.

But with so many soldiers lost, Xiao Honglian thought grimly, "At least we'll gain access to Zhang Yi's supplies."

Just then, Bai Xue Jiao cultists began mingling among the allied forces.

At first, no one found this unusual; Bai Xue Jiao was ostensibly an ally.

However, as over a hundred cultists spread out, smiles lit their faces.

One cultist casually draped an arm around a soldier from Yangsheng Base, chatting amicably. Without warning, he reached for a trigger on his body.

The bombs strapped to him detonated, engulfing soldiers from both factions in a massive explosion.

Chapter 414: A Decisive Battle

Both Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base believed victory was within their grasp.

But no one expected the sudden, devastating explosions among their ranks.

The soldiers were densely packed around the Shelter, and the Bai Xue Jiao cultists, strapped with crude explosives, sacrificed themselves to deadly effect.

Though the explosives were basic, the sheer quantity was enough to inflict catastrophic damage. Fire erupted across the battlefield, and massive explosions engulfed the area surrounding the Shelter.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai's eyes widened in shock.

"What's happening? Where did those explosions come from?"

They had taken precautions against landmines while advancing. How could there still be bombs?

A panicked soldier reported, "It's the Bai Xue Jiao cultists! They're carrying bombs and blowing themselves up to take us with them!"

"What?!"

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai were horrified.

"Those damned lunatics dare to attack us now?"

Before they could react, the cultists—led by Zheng Yixian—launched a full-scale assault on the two bases.

By now, the allied forces had suffered over 70% casualties, with fewer than 200 soldiers remaining between the two bases. In contrast, Bai Xue Jiao still had significant numbers.

Despite their rudimentary weapons and lack of armor, the cultists charged forward, screaming fanatically with bloodshot eyes, ready to die for their cause.

There is nothing more terrifying than an enemy unafraid of death.

Zheng Yixian's cold gaze gleamed with madness as he raised both hands, telekinetically lifting two massive armored vehicles and hurling them toward Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai's positions.

"You slimy rat! You set us up!"

Wei Dinghai and Xiao Honglian's furious glares locked onto Zheng Yixian, their murderous intent palpable.

If looks could kill, Zheng Yixian would have died a thousand deaths.

Wei Dinghai conjured a barrier of ice to block the incoming vehicles, while Xiao Honglian smashed through the roof of her transport and leapt out, punching one of the vehicles aside with a single blow.

From his vantage point, Zheng Yixian laughed maniacally.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

"Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, your time is up!"

Bai Xue Jiao had endured humiliation for far too long. Every conflict forced them to pay a heavy price and bow to the major bases for mere survival. This moment of triumph was a cathartic release for Zheng Yixian, who relished the chance to vent his years of frustration.

"You're all going to die! From now on, Tianhai City won't be your playground anymore!"

Zheng Yixian and his followers launched a frenzied assault.

Caught between Bai Xue Jiao at their rear and the Shelter's defenders at the front, the allied forces found themselves trapped with no escape route.

Zhang Yi's lips curled into a sly smile.

“Time to shut the doors and deal with the rats.”

With Bai Xue Jiao pressing from behind, and Zhang Yi’s team attacking from the Shelter, the allied forces were cornered.

As the Shelter doors opened, Liang Yue and the others emerged, revitalized by Yang Siyah’s specially prepared energy meals. They charged into the fray, slaughtering soldiers and Superhumans alike from behind.

The tide of the battle turned rapidly, shocking everyone.

Even Xing Tian, who had been posturing in the rear mountain, was dumbfounded.

“Why did Bai Xue Jiao suddenly betray them?”

After a moment of thought, a chill ran down his spine.

He realized that Bai Xue Jiao and Zhang Yi must have had a prior arrangement.

Had Qingfu Base been part of the assault, they too would now be in the same dire situation as Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases.

“Lucky, lucky me!” Xing Tian muttered, patting his chest in relief.

His decision to sit out had not only spared his forces but also left them as one of the strongest remaining factions in Tianhai City.

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The battlefield devolved into utter chaos.

Bai Xue Jiao's surprise attack was too much for the already battered allied forces. With Zhang Yi's team suffering no casualties, they unleashed a savage counterattack.

Uncle You roared as he wielded twin Gatling guns, spraying bullets into the enemy ranks.

Liang Yue moved through the crowd like a tiger among sheep, each swing of her blade claiming another life.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi sniped Superhumans with terrifying precision, averaging one kill every two seconds.

At a range of 300 meters, his Divine Power-enabled sniper rifle was unstoppable. With its auto-targeting capabilities, it locked onto heads with lethal accuracy.

In the chaotic melee, many Superhumans became his unsuspecting victims.

One, deliberating whether to fight or retreat, suddenly felt an immense force tugging at his neck. Before he could react, his head was torn clean from his shoulders. He died without ever knowing what hit him.

Panic overtook Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

Desperately, they attempted to contact Xing Tian, hoping he would bring his forces to their aid.

But no matter how many times they tried, there was no response.

"That bastard has betrayed us too!" Wei Dinghai cursed, his spine tingling with fear.

Earlier, he had assumed the commotion from the rear was Qingfu Base launching an attack. But now, surrounded and with no Qingfu troops in sight, the truth was painfully clear.

“Retreat! They’ve all colluded against us! If we don’t leave now, it’ll be too late!”

Wei Dinghai didn’t hesitate to rally his remaining forces for a retreat.

Xiao Honglian, overcome with fury and disbelief, hesitated for a moment. Why had Bai Xue Jiao and Qingfu Base turned on them?

But anger was futile now. Continuing the fight would only lead to annihilation. As a leader, she couldn’t afford such a gamble.

“Full retreat!” she shouted.

Gulping down another mouthful of pure alcohol, she unleashed a blazing dragon of fire at the Bai Xue Jiao cultists behind her, incinerating dozens of them.

Her body radiated smoke and heat, her magma-like markings glowing as she tore a fiery path through the enemy. Even Zheng Yixian didn’t dare confront her directly.

While Bai Xue Jiao swarmed the allied forces, their fanatical cultists were no match for Chaoyu and Yangsheng Base’s Superhumans.

With combined efforts, the allied forces carved a bloody escape route.

Wu Huaiyu abandoned his attempts to cut through the Shelter wall and tried to flee in his engineering vehicle.

But Zhang Yi had been watching him. A single bullet pierced Wu Huaiyu’s skull, eliminating the threat for good.

By the end, fewer than 100 soldiers escaped, leaving behind a sea of corpses, wrecked vehicles, and abandoned weapons.

Neither Zhang Yi nor Bai Xue Jiao pursued.

For Bai Xue Jiao, they lacked the means to chase after vehicles.

For Zhang Yi, he didn't want to provoke desperate retaliation that might endanger his team.

Zheng Yixian raised his fist high, shouting, "Victory!"

The cultists erupted into cheers, hugging one another in joy.

This was Bai Xue Jiao's first triumph against the powerful base factions—a monumental turning point.

Although they had lost over 500 members, most of the fallen were ordinary cultists, easily replaced.

Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases, on the other hand, had lost their elite troops—losses that would take years to recover from.

With their strength diminished, neither base would be able to challenge West Hill or Lu River anytime soon, nor could they harass Bai Xue Jiao's territory again.

Chapter 415: Empty Shells

Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base fled in a disastrous retreat, leaving Zhang Yi and Bai Xue Jiao victorious.

As Zhang Yi lowered his sniper rifle, he watched the battered remnants of the two bases retreat and glanced at the jubilant Bai Xue Jiao cultists celebrating their victory. For a fleeting moment, he felt tempted to turn his gun on them.

The battle had dealt a devastating blow to all three factions, while Zhang Yi's team emerged nearly unscathed. This success was largely due to Zhang Yi's meticulous preparation, but it had come at a cost.

The buildings surrounding the Shelter, including the villa where Uncle You and Fatty Xu resided, were almost entirely destroyed. The ice wall, which had taken days to construct, was 70% ruined.

This grueling battle gave Zhang Yi a profound understanding of the horrors of large-scale warfare. Bai Xue Jiao's fanatical, fearless tactics left a lasting impression.

Despite this, Zhang Yi dismissed the idea of attacking them. Bai Xue Jiao's members were too many, and their deaths too easily replaced. Sacrificing his team to take them down wasn't worth it.

He descended the Shelter and cast a glance toward the rear mountain. As expected, Xing Tian had kept his promise, merely observing the fight from afar.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but regard Xing Tian with a newfound respect. The man, it seemed, was as trustworthy as his word. Of course, this reliability was likely due to the strength Zhang Yi had displayed—trust was often built on power.

Zhang Yi pulled out his phone and messaged Xing Tian:

“You can come to collect the remaining food now.”

Xing Tian replied quickly:

“Give me a moment; there's something else I need to handle first.”

Raising an eyebrow, Zhang Yi could guess what that “something else” might be. But it wasn't his concern, so he shrugged it off and turned his attention back to his team.

Outside the Shelter, Liang Yue, Uncle You, Fatty Xu, and Hua Hua were all bloodied and exhausted. The energy-boosting food prepared by Yang Siyah had kept them going through the intense combat, but they were visibly drained.

“Alright, everyone. We won!” Zhang Yi declared, patting each of them on the shoulder.

When he reached Liang Yue, he noticed how rigid her shoulders felt, like steel.

“It’s over. The fight’s done. You’ve avenged your students,” he said gently.

Liang Yue’s icy, murderous gaze melted, and she leaned weakly against him. Only then did Zhang Yi notice the deep gash across her neck. Though the bleeding had stopped, the sight of the wound was chilling.

His eyes narrowed as he quickly carried her back into the Shelter, heading for the medical room.

The reckless charge she had made into the enemy ranks had drawn an immense amount of fire. That she survived at all was nothing short of miraculous.

Once inside, he handed her over to Zhou Ke’er, whose gasp of horror at the sight of Liang Yue’s wound spurred her into immediate action. Grabbing her medical tools, Zhou Ke’er set to work cleaning and stitching the wound.

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As the aftermath unfolded, Zhang Yi prepared to finalize matters with Bai Xue Jiao and Qingfu Base.

Bai Xue Jiao had suffered heavy losses, including some of their Superhumans. Yet for them, the outcome was worth the cost. They had secured a rare opportunity to develop without interference, something they were eager to seize.

Still wary of their fanatical nature, Zhang Yi approached Zheng Yixian. From a distance, he called out:

“This fight is over. You can leave now. From this day forward, the West Hill Base territory is mine. None of your people are allowed to approach without my permission!”

Zheng Yixian, fully aware of Zhang Yi's overwhelming strength, bowed respectfully.

"Thank you for helping us win this war. As agreed, no one from Bai Xue Jiao will come near your land, except for our missionaries."

Zheng Yixian understood that without Zhang Yi's team tying down the bulk of the allied forces, Bai Xue Jiao could never have stood up to the two major bases.

He also recognized that Zhang Yi had likely coordinated with Qingfu Base beforehand. Had Bai Xue Jiao chosen not to side with Zhang Yi, their gains would have been minimal at best.

"I hope that we can coexist peacefully and respectfully moving forward," Zheng Yixian said with a warm smile.

Zhang Yi narrowed his eyes. "Of course. I'm a pacifist, after all."

With mutual wariness lingering in the air, no further conflict erupted between the two sides. Zheng Yixian led his followers away, their holy chants echoing across the snowy plain:

"Snow above and earth below,

From the ground our bodies are born,

From the heavens our souls descend.

Sunlight and moonlight illuminate us,

Pure white snow cleanses our souls.

We surrender ourselves to the cold winds of the earth,

Thanking the heavens for the miracle of this land.

May our hearts remain pure,

Sharing joy and sorrow with all,

Praising the children of Bai Xue Jiao,

With our souls and bodies as testament."

Watching them disappear into the distance, Zhang Yi's narrowed gaze betrayed his lingering unease.

While Zhang Yi's team had solidified their position, Bai Xue Jiao had emerged as the biggest beneficiaries of the battle.

Freed from the constraints of the major bases, their ability to rapidly recruit followers would allow them to grow stronger quickly. With their leader Yuan Kongye's Blessing ability, they could also increase the number of their Superhumans at an alarming rate.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but muse, "Perhaps I've unleashed a monster. But right now, I have no choice."

For now, he would cooperate with factions aligned with his interests. The future was uncertain, and any potential problems would have to be dealt with as they arose.

...

Returning to the battlefield, Zhang Yi collected useful supplies from the wreckage. The allied forces had brought elite troops, and their weapons and equipment were valuable—perfect for offsetting his team's losses.

Surveying the aftermath, he discovered that seven Superhumans had died during the battle. But to his surprise, three of them had become empty shells, their powers seemingly drained.

“What’s this about? Did someone absorb their abilities?” Zhang Yi wondered, puzzled.

In the chaos of combat, it seemed impossible for anyone to perform such a feat, leaving him without a clear explanation.

After cleaning up the battlefield, Zhang Yi turned to his companions and smiled.

“Let’s head back. It’s time for a good rest!”

“Meow!” Hua Hua leapt onto Zhang Yi’s shoulders, nuzzling his neck and leaving a bloody smear. During the battle, it had transformed into a war machine, crushing countless enemies.

Zhang Yi stroked its head gently, then slung an arm around Uncle You and Fatty Xu. Laughing, the three trudged back toward the Shelter together.

Chapter 416: Playing Both Sides

On the distant snowy plain, Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai led their battered remnants in a slow and desperate retreat.

What had started as a grand and imposing campaign now ended in utter humiliation. The combined forces of both bases had dwindled to fewer than 100 soldiers, with five of their most powerful Superhuman captains among the dead.

This battle had nearly halved the armed strength of both bases.

Wei Dinghai himself bore a deep slash from Liang Yue, his injury compounded by rage and frustration. His worsening condition added to the growing sense of despair.

“Bai Xue Jiao and Xing Tian! Those traitorous scum!” Wei Dinghai slammed his fist against the vehicle, the loud clang expressing the depth of his fury.

But anger did nothing to change reality.

A loss was a loss.

Their defeat stemmed from their arrogance. They had underestimated Zhang Yi, dismissing him as a minor threat with a small team and an insignificant Shelter.

But the fight had shown them how wrong they were.

Zhang Yi’s team, with its heavy firepower and formidable Superhumans, rivaled even the former West Hill Base. Combined with their defensive advantage, they had held their ground with remarkable effectiveness, even against two opposing forces.

Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases had paid dearly for their underestimation, their defeat a costly lesson in hubris.

If they had known the truth beforehand, they might have brought their entire armies or sought a negotiated settlement with Zhang Yi to share West Hill’s spoils more amicably.

But regret was futile. The price of their arrogance was already paid.

Sitting together in the same vehicle, Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai simmered in frustration. Their losses extended even to their vehicles; only four were left operational.

As Wei Dinghai ranted, Xiao Honglian clenched her teeth in rage.

She wasn’t surprised that Bai Xue Jiao had turned on them. What baffled her was why Qingfu Base had sided with Zhang Yi.

Had Xing Tian's army joined the fray, the battle's outcome could have been entirely different. Qingfu Base's expertise in large-scale warfare was unmatched.

"Xing Tian! How much did Zhang Yi offer you to betray us?" Xiao Honglian growled, her fury intensifying. She pulled out a satellite phone, intending to confront Xing Tian directly.

But Wei Dinghai grabbed her arm. "Don't do anything rash!"

"What?" Xiao Honglian snapped, glaring at him.

Wei Dinghai sighed. "Xing Tian didn't attack us. He stayed neutral and just watched. My guess? Zhang Yi offered him something valuable to stay out of the fight and help no one."

Grinding his teeth, he added, "Those guys always play it safe. If they can profit without fighting, they'll jump at the chance."

Having dealt with Qingfu Base for years, Wei Dinghai understood Xing Tian's cautious, opportunistic nature all too well.

Xiao Honglian seethed. "And what about our agreement? He broke his promise and left us to bear the losses! How do we settle this?"

Wei Dinghai shook his head with resignation. "Both our forces are crippled. Do you really think we can afford to confront Xing Tian about this?"

"All we can hope for is that he doesn't strike us now while we're weak."

But just as the words left his mouth, a thunderous rumble echoed across the plain.

It sounded like an avalanche—or an approaching army.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai's faces turned pale. They had heard this sound before.

"Xing Tian's army!"

Through the swirling snow, they saw five vehicles crawling along, carrying exhausted survivors. Meanwhile, Xing Tian and his 500-strong force surged across the plain, intercepting their path.

Sitting atop a massive mutant hound, Xing Tian bellowed with laughter.

"Xiao Honglian! Wei Dinghai! Why are you in such a hurry to leave?"

With no choice, Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai stepped out to face Xing Tian's fully intact and enthusiastic army.

Xing Tian's troops, having stayed out of the earlier battle, were raring for a fight, their morale sky-high.

To the retreating leaders, they looked like a pack of hungry wolves ready to pounce.

A heavy sense of dread filled Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

If another conflict broke out now, they wouldn't stand a chance.

"Xing Tian!" Xiao Honglian snapped, her sharp eyes narrowing. "You didn't honor our agreement to attack Zhang Yi's Shelter. What are you doing here now?"

Xing Tian smirked, his expression full of mockery.

"Isn't it obvious? You're both wealthy lords with plenty of resources. I'm here to collect a toll!"

His blatant extortion sent waves of rage through the battered remnants of the two bases, but their anger was powerless. Their weakened state made them entirely vulnerable.

Wei Dinghai, trying to maintain composure, asked, "Xing Tian, why? If you had joined us in taking Zhang Yi's Shelter, we could've shared West Hill and Lu River. Instead, you stayed out of the fight. Did you already know Zhang Yi's true strength?"

This question gnawed at Wei Dinghai, and he needed answers—even in defeat. Xiao Honglian's eyes also bore into Xing Tian, waiting for his response.

Xing Tian shrugged casually.

"It's simple. Qingfu Base doesn't have the vehicles or energy resources you do. We can't extend our control like you can. Even if we'd won, I wouldn't be able to compete with your bases when dividing the spoils."

"Zhang Yi offered me 10 tons of food to stay out of the fight, so I happily agreed."

Spreading his hands, Xing Tian added, "10 tons of food for doing nothing versus risking my men for an uncertain payoff? Which do you think I should choose?"

Xing Tian's frank admission left Wei Dinghai and Xiao Honglian speechless.

They had indeed planned to monopolize the best territories and resources if they won. Bai Xue Jiao and Qingfu Base wouldn't have stood a chance against their mobility and firepower.

But they hadn't anticipated Xing Tian cutting a deal with Zhang Yi.

Satisfied with their silence, Xing Tian crossed his arms. "Now, let's talk tolls. How much are you willing to pay to pass through here?"

Faced with no alternatives, Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai begrudgingly handed over a significant portion of their remaining supplies in exchange for safe passage.

Xing Tian's grin widened as he watched his men collect the loot.

From start to finish, Qingfu Base had avoided direct involvement, yet they reaped immense rewards. With Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases now crippled, Qingfu Base was poised to rise as one of Tianhai City's top factions.

"Everyone thought I was a fool. Now, let's see who the real fools are!" Xing Tian said, laughing gleefully.

Chapter 417: The Devourer

After the battle, Zhang Yi instructed Zhou Ke'er to focus on treating Liang Yue while the rest of the group rested in the living room to recover.

The warm, cozy atmosphere of the Shelter was a stark contrast to the horrors they had just endured. Following such a grueling conflict, the soft sofas and freshly brewed coffee in the luxurious villa felt like paradise to the exhausted team.

Before long, a commotion stirred outside. Xing Tian had returned to claim the food Zhang Yi had promised.

Despite Zhang Yi's team being drained of energy and abilities, Xing Tian's Qingfu Base lacked the firepower to breach the Shelter. Confidently, Zhang Yi led his group outside and handed over the agreed supplies.

Xing Tian's expression was one of barely contained glee, and Zhang Yi could tell he had made a significant profit from the day's events.

"Tianhai City is yours now, Xing Tian. Congratulations on becoming the most powerful force around!" Zhang Yi said with a smile.

Xing Tian laughed heartily. “Not at all! You’ve made your mark today. No one will dare mess with you now!”

“I never thought you had such strength, Zhang Yi. Truly impressive.”

Xing Tian’s praise wasn’t just empty politeness. Repelling two major bases and depleting half their forces with just a small team was an incredible feat, one that left even Xing Tian in awe.

“The West Hill Base territory is yours now,” Xing Tian continued. “With Yangsheng Base and Chaoyu Base severely weakened, they’ll never regain their former glory.”

He grinned and added, “Of course, we’re old classmates. I don’t want any conflicts between us!”

Zhang Yi chuckled. “Peaceful coexistence would indeed be the best outcome.”

As Xing Tian prepared to leave, he suddenly paused and turned back to Zhang Yi.

“One more thing,” Xing Tian said, his tone more serious.

“Oh?” Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, curious.

Xing Tian’s expression grew cautious. “You’ve been clever, working with Bai Xue Jiao. But I must warn you—keep an eye on those people. In times like these, cults with their persuasive rhetoric can grow alarmingly fast.”

“Now that they’re unrestrained, who knows how far they’ll expand?”

Zhang Yi nodded, his thoughts drifting to the fervent, fearless Bai Xue Jiao cultists who had charged into battle. The sheer number of people unafraid of death was unsettling, even with the Shelter’s defenses.

“Thanks for the advice,” Zhang Yi replied.

With that, Xing Tian mounted his mutant hound and led his Qingfu Base troops away, leaving the blood-soaked battlefield behind.

Zhang Yi gazed at the carnage outside the Shelter, deep in thought. Corpses were strewn everywhere, and the once-pristine snow was stained red with blood. The ice wall they had painstakingly built and armed with heavy weapons was now mostly destroyed.

The brutal reality of war was undeniable.

"We'll clean it up later," Zhang Yi sighed, shaking his head at the overwhelming sight. For now, there were more pressing matters to address.

Returning to the Shelter, Zhang Yi made an announcement to the team. "The war is over!"

Hearing him say it aloud brought a collective sigh of relief.

Lu Keran exchanged a jubilant glance with Yang Xinxin, while Yang Siyah, exhausted from crafting energy food for the team, leaned back with a tired smile. Zhang Yi didn't let her cook further. Instead, he pulled fresh food and high-quality wines from his Spatial Storage, filling an entire table with a feast.

The combination of victory and survival ignited everyone's appetite. Even those who rarely drank were now gulping down wine with abandon.

Zhang Yi grabbed two beef burgers and a hot coffee and headed to the medical room.

Zhou Ke'er had just finished Liang Yue's surgery. The deep gash on Liang Yue's neck had been shocking, even for Zhou Ke'er. She couldn't believe Liang Yue had fought so fiercely and for so long in such a condition.

Zhang Yi, however, understood. Liang Yue had fought on sheer willpower, driven by her need for vengeance. Once the battle ended, her strength had given out entirely.

Handing food to Zhou Ke'er, Zhang Yi asked, "How is she?"

Taking a sip of coffee, Zhou Ke'er replied, "The wound was deep, but I've stitched it up. She's a Strength Enhancement Superhuman, so her recovery will be much faster than normal. She'll be fine."

She glanced at Zhang Yi, a hint of playful jealousy in her tone. "Superhumans really have it easy, don't they?"

Zhang Yi chuckled, recognizing her unspoken wish for the Ice Soul artifact in his possession. But his lingering wariness of Bai Xue Jiao kept him cautious.

"Your medical skills are far more valuable," he said, pulling her into a hug. "We could do without a Superhuman, but not without a doctor. Don't underestimate your importance!"

Her smile brightened at his praise. "Do you think we'll finally have peace after this?" she asked.

"For a while, yes," Zhang Yi replied thoughtfully. "But how long that lasts, who can say?"

Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base would need time to recover. For now, their focus would shift to rebuilding rather than seeking revenge.

But Tianhai City's other powers were more concerning. Qingfu Base had emerged unscathed, profiting handsomely from playing both sides. Bai Xue Jiao had suffered heavy casualties, but their ability to recruit and convert followers could allow them to rebuild rapidly.

For now, Zhang Yi's smaller team wouldn't be seen as a major threat. Their minimal resource needs made them less of a target.

As Zhou Ke'er rested her head on Zhang Yi's shoulder, she suddenly stood and began massaging him. "You fought a battle while I just performed a small surgery. Let me take care of you," she said.

Zhang Yi leaned back and let her work, drifting into a drowsy haze until Liang Yue stirred in the nearby bed. Strength Enhancement Superhumans truly recovered at remarkable speeds.

Seeing Zhou Ke'er massaging Zhang Yi, Liang Yue sighed. "You two could at least pick a better time. I'm still injured here, you know."

Embarrassed, Zhou Ke'er stopped and tapped Zhang Yi's back. "She's awake!"

Zhang Yi sat up and approached Liang Yue.

"I need to tell you something," Liang Yue said, her expression serious.

Zhou Ke'er excused herself, leaving the two alone.

"I killed a Superhuman during the fight," Liang Yue began. "And I absorbed his power."

"I thought you should know, since we're teammates. This might be important."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow.

"So, you have the ability to absorb powers," he mused.

Not every Superhuman had this ability, as Zhang Yi had confirmed through his own team. While he, Hua Hua, and Ling Feng possessed the ability, Uncle You and Fatty Xu did not.

It seemed linked to potential. Zhang Yi's team members who had this power—himself, Hua Hua, Ling Feng—were notably stronger. Liang Yue having it, too, was a promising sign of her future growth.

"Congratulations," Zhang Yi said with a smile. "This is good news. We've fought together; we're like family now. The stronger you are, the better it is for all of us."

Clapping his thigh, Zhang Yi added, "You avenged your students. Has it helped you find peace?"

Liang Yue stared at the ceiling, her eyes closing slowly. She didn't answer.

Zhang Yi smiled knowingly.

Silence was the best response. Though she might never fully move past her grief, time would eventually dull its edge.

Life, after all, was about moving forward.

Chapter 418: Vanishing Corpses

At Bai Xue Jiao's headquarters, Yuan Kongye stood amidst the swirling snow, waiting for the triumphant return of her followers.

Draped in a pristine white ceremonial robe, her youthful and delicate face exuded an air of fragility. Yet her eyes burned with unwavering determination.

This battle had been a gamble for Bai Xue Jiao's future. Only by joining forces with Zhang Yi to strike a decisive blow against the other major factions could they secure the breathing room they desperately needed to grow.

If Zhang Yi had failed to repel the allied forces, Bai Xue Jiao would have merely taken whatever scraps they could. But instead, they had emerged victorious, a triumph that promised either modest gains or a monumental shift in power.

From afar, dark silhouettes began to emerge through the storm.

Zheng Yixian led the survivors back, though their numbers had been halved. The sight of their reduced ranks caused unease among the gathered followers. This did not look like the procession of a victorious army.

But as Zheng Yixian approached, his face and the faces of his warriors bore expressions of pride.

Bowing before Yuan Kongye, Zheng Yixian announced, "Leader, we have succeeded. By the grace of the Snow God, we have achieved a great victory!"

"Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base have been dealt crippling blows, and they will no longer pose a threat to Bai Xue Jiao!"

His words sent waves of exhilaration through the assembled followers. Tears of joy filled many eyes as they embraced one another in celebration.

For far too long, Bai Xue Jiao had been oppressed by the larger factions. This victory marked a historic turning point.

A spark of light appeared in Yuan Kongye's eyes as she stepped forward to lift Zheng Yixian from his bow.

"You've done well, Grand Priest. The gods will not forget your deeds," she said, her tone warm yet resolute.

Zheng Yixian's voice was solemn. "But many of our faithful have perished, including Fathers Lin Fei and Meng Ziyuan."

The mention of the fallen Superhuman priests cast a somber shadow.

Yet Yuan Kongye's smile remained gentle. She clasped her hands over her chest as if embracing unseen children.

"They have not left us. They have returned here. I can feel their presence," she murmured.

“May every departed soul rest with the Snow God,” Zheng Yixian intoned reverently.

A flicker of something dark and powerful crossed Yuan Kongye’s eyes. “Now, nothing can hinder our expansion. The light of the Snow God will shine over every corner of Tianhai City!”

“And then across the nation, and eventually the world!”

“Snow God will reign as the one true deity, and Bai Xue Jiao will endure forever!”

The followers placed their right hands over their hearts and gazed skyward.

“Bai Xue Jiao will endure forever!”

Their fervent devotion shone like sunlight, seemingly capable of dispelling the coldest winter. With this conviction, they sought to spread their faith across the earth.

...

The Five-Army Battle had reshaped the power dynamics of Tianhai City.

Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base had been devastated, betrayed by Bai Xue Jiao and Qingfu Base. Their strength was shattered.

Though their central bases retained half their forces and resources, the loss of their elite warriors—especially Superhumans—was a wound that would take years to heal.

Their ability to expand was crippled, forcing them to consolidate and protect what little territory they still controlled.

Meanwhile, Bai Xue Jiao seized the moment. Their religious propaganda appealed to those struggling to survive in the apocalypse, offering hope and purpose. Many defected from other factions to join their ranks.

Zheng Yixian was careful not to overreach. He avoided Qingfu Base and Zhang Yi's territory, targeting only the weakened areas of Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases.

For now, Tianhai City's balance of power was precarious. Zhang Yi's resounding victory had earned him a reprieve, and no one dared challenge the Shelter.

The team inside the Shelter recovered quickly. Though the front-line fighters had sustained injuries, they were now healed enough to resume normal activities. Even Liang Yue, still wrapped in bandages, could move about freely.

There was a noticeable change in Liang Yue after the battle. Her hesitation and vulnerability had vanished, replaced by a calm indifference. She spoke little but carried an air of quiet acceptance.

Zhang Yi recognized the transformation immediately. He had felt the same way after his own rebirth. Great joys and sorrows often brought rapid growth.

The destruction of the surrounding villas left Zhang Yi with no choice but to invite Uncle You, Fatty Xu, and their families to live in the Shelter permanently.

Having shared numerous battles and forged deep trust, their fates were now intertwined. The Shelter offered them safety in an unpredictable world.

No one was happier about this arrangement than Zhou Haimei. As a woman in her forties, she adored the lively company and now spent her days cooking with Yang Siyah or playing cards with the younger women.

The Shelter was filled with warmth and laughter.

The men passed the time playing cards or video games, surrounded by bright lights and plentiful energy. In the apocalypse, the Shelter felt more like a luxury resort than a survival refuge.

...

A few days later, as Zhang Yi sipped his morning coffee and gazed out the window, something felt off.

The snow-covered landscape stretched as far as the eye could see, pristine and untouched. Snowflakes continued to fall, varying in size and intensity.

“Something’s missing...” Zhang Yi muttered.

It was too clean.

His eyes widened as the realization hit him.

“The corpses. Where are all the corpses?”

The aftermath of the Five-Army Battle had left over a thousand bodies scattered across the battlefield. Now, not a single one remained.

Chapter 419: They Walked Away

Zhang Yi felt a chill crawl up his spine.

Over a thousand corpses, vanished without a trace.

Just yesterday afternoon, they had still been there.

“Could someone have cleaned them up?” Zhang Yi murmured to himself, trying to stay calm as he picked up binoculars and carefully scanned the area.

After thoroughly searching, he confirmed the truth: the bodies weren’t buried under snow or hidden—they were gone.

A sense of dread gripped his heart.

The post-apocalypse world was filled with mysteries. With living creatures capable of mutating, was it possible for corpses to undergo changes as well?

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Yi steadied his nerves.

He put on his combat suit, armed himself, and stepped outside.

In the kitchen, Yang Siyah and Zhou Haimei were chatting happily as they prepared breakfast. The laughter and normalcy inside the Shelter stood in stark contrast to the eerie mystery outside.

From the food being prepared, Zhang Yi guessed they were making soy milk, steamed buns, and some delicate side dishes—a classic Chinese breakfast.

“Morning,” he greeted them.

Yang Siyah looked surprised. “You’re up early today.”

Zhou Haimei added, noticing his formal attire, “Are you heading out? What’s going on?”

“Nothing major. There’s something outside I need to check on,” Zhang Yi replied before walking out the door.

The two women exchanged puzzled glances but didn’t press further.

...

Zhang Yi strode cautiously toward the battlefield, gripping his weapon tightly.

The area that had once been littered with corpses was now eerily empty.

Although the overnight snowfall had covered many things, it couldn't completely erase all traces. A mass disappearance like this would surely leave clues.

As Zhang Yi reached the site, he spotted something unusual—footprints.

Countless footprints, of varying sizes, crisscrossed the area. There was only one direction: away from the battlefield. No signs of entry, only departure.

Zhang Yi shivered, feeling an unshakable sensation of being watched. It was as if something cold and sinister was lurking behind him, its gaze crawling up his back.

He whipped around suddenly, but there was nothing there.

His heart raced as he clutched his chest, trying to calm himself.

Zhang Yi, a man who had faced countless life-and-death battles, found himself unsettled by the sheer strangeness of the situation.

Taking another deep breath, he muttered, "What's there to fear? If I can kill the living, why should the dead scare me?"

Resolving to uncover the truth, Zhang Yi began following the trail of footprints leading eastward. They stretched into the distance, disappearing over the horizon.

Feeling uneasy about going alone, he turned back toward the Shelter.

Removing his helmet once inside, Zhang Yi took a few deep breaths to steady himself.

Yang Siyah and Zhou Haimei noticed his pale complexion and immediately asked what he had seen.

Instead of answering directly, Zhang Yi instructed them to gather everyone in the living room.

Soon, the entire group was seated on the sofas, dressed in casual clothing, their faces puzzled by Zhang Yi's combat-ready appearance.

"Take a deep breath and stay calm," Zhang Yi began. "What I'm about to tell you might sound unbelievable, but I need you to remain composed."

The group, already growing uneasy, followed his instructions and took a few deep breaths.

Zhang Yi continued, speaking in an even tone, "Last night, over a thousand corpses outside the Shelter disappeared."

"And from the footprints I found, it looks like they walked away on their own."

The temperature in the room seemed to drop as everyone stared at him in stunned silence.

The women instinctively huddled together, their wide eyes reflecting their growing fear.

"Zhang Yi, don't joke about things like this," Zhou Ke'er said, clutching his arm. Despite her scientific background, her face was pale.

"I wish I was joking," Zhang Yi said, shaking his head. "But you can see for yourselves."

The group rushed to the windows. Sure enough, the battlefield was pristine—no bodies, no blood, nothing.

“This... this is impossible,” Zhou Ke’er stammered, her mind struggling to process what she was seeing.

Fatty Xu swallowed hard and asked, “Boss, are you sure you didn’t clear the bodies yourself and are just messing with us?”

The others glanced hopefully at Zhang Yi, wishing this was just an elaborate prank.

Rolling his eyes, Zhang Yi replied, “Do I look like I have time for games?”

His denial only deepened their unease.

“How could this happen? Even if it were some group taking the bodies, it’s not like they could’ve done it so quietly,” Liang Yue said.

The destruction of the perimeter cameras during the battle meant they couldn’t review footage for answers.

The sheer scale of the disappearance—over a thousand bodies—ruled out a simple explanation.

As panic began to set in, Zhang Yi’s calm demeanor stood out.

Clearing his mind, he reasoned that in a world of mutations and chaos, even the bizarre had its logic.

“It’s probably the work of Superhumans or some mutated creature,” Zhang Yi said confidently.

“We’ll investigate. If there’s a threat, we’ll deal with it.”

His resolve reassured the group, though tension still lingered.

"Finish your breakfast. Those capable of fighting, gear up and follow me. We'll trace the footprints and figure this out."

Though nervous, everyone was eager for answers and quickly agreed.

After eating, Zhang Yi led the group to arm themselves. Together, they set out to follow the footprints into the unknown.

Chapter 420: Underground

The sudden and strange events had everyone on edge.

Though they were unafraid of human factions, the unknown commanded a natural sense of caution and reverence.

Since the apocalypse began, the world had become increasingly incomprehensible. Zhang Yi couldn't help but recall an old saying in history books:

"In times of catastrophe, demons and monsters emerge."

The group moved cautiously, following the dense trail of footprints through the snow. They avoided using vehicles at first, wary of making themselves too conspicuous in case they stumbled upon something unexpected.

The howling wind only added to their unease. Each step forward came with the silent worry that they might encounter the missing corpses walking upright in the distance.

Despite their trepidation, the footprints continued steadily, with no sign of stopping or veering off. It only reinforced the horrifying idea that the bodies had risen and walked away on their own.

Zhang Yi finally broke the tense silence. “Let’s take the car from here. Looks like they’ve covered a lot of ground overnight.”

The biting cold was beginning to wear on everyone, even through their combat suits. Once inside the vehicle, they followed the footprints for another half an hour before arriving at their destination.

What lay before them was a large, dark, gaping hole in the snow.

It was a massive pit, black and seemingly bottomless, exuding a menacing air that made the group hesitate to approach.

“Where... where does it lead?” Fatty Xu muttered nervously.

Zhang Yi stepped cautiously toward the edge, his rifle at the ready. Peering into the darkness, he felt a primal fear creeping up his spine.

“What is this place? And why would the bodies all come here?” he murmured. “Could there be a Superhuman capable of controlling corpses?”

“That would be terrifying,” Liang Yue said, her expression grim. “Controlling over a thousand bodies over such a long distance... the power required would be unimaginable.”

The group fell into a heavy silence.

After the apocalyptic freeze, Tianhai City had lost over ten million lives. If someone could manipulate even a fraction of that number, they could easily annihilate any faction.

Fatty Xu’s voice trembled. “Could... could this be the start of a zombie outbreak?”

Zhang Yi shook his head with a dry chuckle. “I almost wish it were something that simple.”

“Zombies, really? You think a slow, brainless mob would pose any threat to us?”

Fatty Xu nodded, trying to comfort himself with the logic. “Yeah, I guess... if there’s a group of hopping zombies in this weather, it’d be more hilarious than scary!”

As they stood debating, Uncle You’s gaze drifted to the surroundings. Suddenly, his expression shifted.

“This area feels familiar,” he said. “I think... this is near a station.”

“A station?” everyone asked, turning to him.

Uncle You scanned the nearby structures, sparse as they were, and pointed to some faint markers in the distance. “I’m sure of it. This is the Ciqu Residential Area, and the pit aligns with the Ciqu Metro Station.”

Realization dawned on Zhang Yi.

“So, the bodies... entered the metro tunnels,” he said.

The subway, buried deep underground and now blanketed in snow, gave the appearance of a natural cavern.

“That means something—or someone—in the metro system is controlling them,” Liang Yue added, her brows furrowed.

Zhang Yi rubbed his chin in thought. After the apocalypse, survival had driven people to desperate measures. The metro system, a vast network stretching beneath Tianhai City, could very well house survivors—or something far worse.

“It’s possible,” Zhang Yi said. “Plenty of people could’ve taken shelter in the tunnels during the initial snowfall and never made it out. If anyone is still alive down there, they could’ve found a way to survive... and thrive.”

The others exchanged uneasy looks.

Fatty Xu asked, "So, what do we do? If someone can control all those bodies, they'd be a nightmare to deal with."

"Do we destroy the entrance? Keep them from getting out?"

Uncle You scoffed. "You think blowing up one tunnel will stop them? The metro system covers the entire city. There are dozens of exits nearby. You'd be chasing shadows."

Fatty Xu fidgeted nervously. "Still, just knowing there's something like that down there... it's enough to make my skin crawl."

Zhang Yi raised a hand to silence the group. "We're not going to do anything rash. For now, there's been no conflict. Let's keep it that way."

"We stay away from this place. Nobody comes near it."

Backing away from the pit, Zhang Yi motioned for the group to retreat.

The metro's depths likely hid immense danger, but without a clear threat, there was no need to provoke it.

"What if it becomes a problem later?" Liang Yue asked.

Zhang Yi smirked, his expression carrying a hint of mischief.

"Then let it simmer. If something goes wrong, it'll be someone else's headache before it's ours."

Cloud Manor, being on the city's outskirts, was only lightly connected to the metro network. If trouble arose, Zhang Yi could deal with it locally. But for factions located deeper within the city, with a denser metro network beneath their feet, the fallout would hit them first.

"Let's head back," Zhang Yi said, leading the group to their vehicles.

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Back at the Shelter, Zhang Yi gathered everyone and explained what they'd discovered. Though the news unnerved them, he reassured them with calm confidence.

"There's no need to worry. We're staying in the Shelter, well-defended and safe. Even if zombies or whatever else comes out, we'll handle it with ease. We've faced far worse."

With the team's incredible firepower and Superhuman abilities, even a zombie apocalypse wouldn't be much of a threat.

Still, Zhang Yi took precautions.

The team began rebuilding the perimeter defenses, using what remained of their weaponry from the last battle. Though the Shelter was safe for now, having a buffer zone in case of future conflicts was a necessary step.