

Ice Age 421

Chapter 421: Bai Xue Jiao's Expansion

While life at the Shelter settled into a peaceful routine, the same couldn't be said for other factions.

Bai Xue Jiao was rapidly expanding, using the weakened territories of Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base to spread their doctrine and recruit survivors.

"Join Bai Xue Jiao, and enjoy safety, abundant food, and equality for all!"

"Join Bai Xue Jiao, escape the cycle of reincarnation, and find eternal bliss in the Divine Kingdom!"

"Join Bai Xue Jiao, cleanse your sins, and be reborn anew!"

In the harsh reality of the apocalypse, people sought two things above all: material sustenance and spiritual solace. Bai Xue Jiao's promises offered both, making their message irresistibly appealing.

The movement grew at an alarming rate, swelling its ranks with disillusioned survivors eager for hope.

One day, the desolate Yuelu Residential Area received an unexpected visit.

A group of gray-robed ascetics led by Grand Decree Zhao Jianhua arrived, cutting a solemn figure against the snowy backdrop. Zhao Jianhua leaned on his staff as he surveyed the ruins.

The only building in Yuelu still inhabited was Building 18, where the residents had barely scraped by using the bodies of the dead and Li Jian's Sacrifice Ability to grow food.

But there was a price for Li Jian's newfound powers: complete allegiance to Bai Xue Jiao.

When Zhao Jianhua approached, Li Jian immediately gathered the surviving residents to greet him.

“Greetings, esteemed Grand Decree!” Li Jian exclaimed, his eyes brimming with reverence.

Behind him, his wife and sixteen-year-old son peeked curiously at the ascetics. On their previous visit, these figures had only interacted with Li Jian briefly, granting him the Ice Soul and departing hastily. At the time, the area was under West Hill Base’s control, forcing them to remain discreet.

Now, with the major factions crippled or destroyed, Bai Xue Jiao operated openly, their missionary efforts unhindered.

Zhao Jianhua regarded Li Jian warmly. “Li Jian, I see the Snow God’s gift has served you well.”

“Praise the Snow God! Praise the benevolent Leader!” Li Jian bowed deeply. “Thanks to your blessing, we’ve managed to survive!”

The Grand Decree’s gaze drifted past Li Jian, lingering momentarily on his son, Li Kaile, before returning to him with a smile.

“I bring good news,” Zhao Jianhua said. “By the Leader’s decree, you and your people are invited to join us in Tianfeng District. There, you will live with the Leader and our devoted congregation.”

Li Jian and the others exchanged puzzled looks.

“Tianfeng District?” Li Jian repeated. Though it wasn’t far, they had grown accustomed to Yuelu and were wary of the unknown. In the apocalypse, change was often more frightening than death.

“Don’t be afraid!” Zhao Jianhua reassured them. “Tianfeng is a paradise in this desolate world, a haven where we help one another and rebuild together. It will soon become a utopia, untouched by the apocalypse.”

“You’ve been chosen. It’s a privilege few are granted,” Zhao Jianhua said, his gaze resting firmly on Li Jian.

“The Leader herself has spoken of you, Li Jian. She admires your abilities and believes you are indispensable to Bai Xue Jiao’s future. If you come with us, you and your family will receive special care.”

Li Jian’s mouth fell open in astonishment. He couldn’t believe the Leader herself had mentioned him. It was the highest honor imaginable.

Among the residents of Building 18, Bai Xue Jiao had already achieved an almost divine reputation. After all, they owed their survival to the Leader’s blessing, which had enabled Li Jian to awaken his abilities.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, Li Jian dropped to his knees.

“Praise the great Snow God! Praise the Leader! I, Li Jian, will dedicate my life to Bai Xue Jiao!”

Zhao Jianhua nodded approvingly. “Rise, my child. Gather your family and belongings and join us in building a new home.”

Excitement rippled through the group as they hurriedly packed their clothes and food supplies. More than fifty residents of Building 18 prepared to leave Yuelu, their hearts filled with hope for a better future.

The journey to Bai Xue Jiao’s base in Tianfeng District was grueling, but the thought of a utopia kept them moving through the relentless snow.

Upon arrival, they were greeted by a bustling settlement. Priests and ascetics maintained order while distributing food and clothing to newcomers. Others taught the doctrine of Bai Xue Jiao, their words inspiring awe and devotion.

Li Jian noticed several people holding strange red fruits, their glistening crimson surfaces resembling polished gemstones. He had never seen such a fruit before.

Though curious, he brushed it aside, too focused on the joy of reaching their destination.

After settling the group, Zhao Jianhua turned to Li Jian.

"The Leader wishes to see you personally," Zhao Jianhua said.

Li Jian hesitated, glancing at his wife and son. "What about my family?"

"They will be well taken care of," Zhao Jianhua assured him.

His wife, Zhang Jianfang, encouraged him. "This is an honor! Go meet the Leader. We'll wait for you here."

Reassured, Li Jian followed Zhao Jianhua toward a grand cathedral. The other residents were guided elsewhere by smiling nuns.

Pushing open the massive cathedral doors, Li Jian felt a sense of reverence.

Though the sky outside was overcast, the interior seemed bathed in a divine glow. The room was dim, save for the altar, which was illuminated as if by some unseen light source.

A woman in a white robe stood before the altar, her back to him, her posture radiating devotion.

To Li Jian's surprise, the object of her worship was a crucifix bearing the image of Jesus Christ.

Zhao Jianhua coughed lightly, sensing Li Jian's confusion. "The Snow God manifests in many forms. The divine image reflects the faith of its followers. Do not dwell on such details."

Li Jian quickly nodded. "Of course. I understand."

He knew the truth. This was St. John's Cathedral, once the heart of Tianhai City's Christian community. Bai Xue Jiao had seized it and adapted its religious imagery to suit their needs.

Li Jian was no fool, but he wasn't about to question the doctrine openly.

Bai Xue Jiao's blessings had saved his life, and that was all that mattered. The rest was just theatrics.

Chapter 422: The Symbol of Harvest

Yuan Kongye knelt before the cross, her posture radiating devout reverence.

As the Leader of Bai Xue Jiao, her faith in the existence of a divine being was unshakable.

To her, figures like Jesus Christ, Shakyamuni, Zeus, Yuanshi Tianzun, and Odin were merely humanity's attempts to comprehend the Creator.

How else could she explain the miracles that had unfolded in her life?

She prayed fervently, a dedicated apostle of the divine:

“Snow above and earth below,

Our bodies born from the earth,

Our souls descend from the heavens.

Sun and moonlight illuminate us,

Pure snow cleanses our spirits.

We offer our bodies to the cold winds of the land,

Thanking the heavens for granting the Snow God's children a place to survive.

May our hearts remain pure,

Sharing joy with our brethren,

Sharing their sorrow,

Forever praising the children of Bai Xue Jiao.

We pledge our souls and bodies as proof."

Her serene chant filled the sacred space, carrying a sense of timeless devotion.

In the distance, Grand Decree Zhao Jianhua and Li Jian waited patiently for her ritual to conclude.

After what felt like an eternity, Yuan Kongye finally rose from her prayers. Her cold gaze swept toward Li Jian.

Seeing her for the first time, Li Jian was taken aback.

The architect of the apocalypse's most powerful religious faction was a mere girl, barely twenty years old in appearance.

Quickly lowering his head, Li Jian stammered, "Greetings, Leader. I am Li Jian, saved by your blessing and alive today because of your grace."

Yuan Kongye stepped closer, her measured footsteps echoing in the silent cathedral.

“I know who you are,” she said calmly.

“The Grand Decree tells me you are a beacon of hope, blessed by the Snow God with the power of harvest.”

Her voice carried an almost hypnotic quality, filling Li Jian with an overwhelming urge to kneel before her in worship.

“Raise your head, Li Jian,” Yuan Kongye commanded.

As if under a spell, Li Jian obeyed. His surroundings blurred, and the only thing that remained in focus was Yuan Kongye’s piercing gaze.

Her words etched themselves into his mind, unshakable and absolute.

“From this day forward, you are a Father of Bai Xue Jiao. Your arrival heralds a bountiful harvest. The Snow God guided you here, and you have a mission to fulfill.”

Li Jian’s blood surged with emotion.

He wasn’t just another survivor—he had been chosen by the divine!

“I am willing to give my all to Bai Xue Jiao!” Li Jian declared passionately.

Yuan Kongye smiled faintly. “Good. Come with me.”

Turning, she led him out of the cathedral toward a nearby derelict building.

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When Li Jian regained some semblance of clarity, he found himself standing in a blood-red environment.

Inside the building was an enormous tree, its trunk five or six meters thick and cloaked in dark bark that pulsed with veins of crimson light.

The tree seemed to breathe, its surface expanding and contracting like the chest of a living creature.

Its branches sprawled across the space, their curled leaves resembling cocoons. Inside those cocoons, faint outlines hinted at something—or someone—trapped within.

Li Jian stared, slack-jawed, at the grotesque yet awe-inspiring sight.

“This is the Sacred Tree of Bai Xue Jiao,” Yuan Kongye said, gesturing toward the giant plant.

“It burrows hundreds of meters into the earth, drawing nutrients to produce its miraculous fruit. This fruit sustains us and is the key to our survival.”

Raising her hand, Yuan Kongye called down a vine from the tree. At its end hung a single crimson fruit, which detached and landed gently in her palm.

The tree’s intelligence and responsiveness were undeniable.

Li Jian finally understood the origin of the red fruit he had seen earlier.

Walking up to him, Yuan Kongye extended the fruit. Her soft smile contrasted sharply with the eerie surroundings.

“This is our hope for survival,” she said. “Would you like to taste it?”

Without hesitation, Li Jian accepted the fruit.

The moment he bit into it, a sweet yet unfamiliar fragrance overwhelmed his senses. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced.

The fruit's flesh oozed a thick, blood-like liquid, yet it filled him with warmth and strength, banishing all hunger and cold.

"You are now Father Li," Yuan Kongye said, her tone firm.

"Your mission is to nurture the Sacred Tree with your ability. Help it grow stronger, so it can provide for even more of our followers."

Li Jian nodded fervently. "I will dedicate my life to this task!"

Approaching the tree, Li Jian drew a small knife and made a shallow cut on his hand.

Blood streamed freely from the wound, more than seemed natural, yet the tree absorbed every drop with ravenous greed. Its red glow intensified, pulsing like a beating heart.

Yuan Kongye stepped forward, placing a hand on his wound to stop the bleeding.

"From now on, you will feed the Sacred Tree daily. It is an honor and a responsibility," she said gently.

Li Jian's eyes shone with reverence, as if this duty had become his life's purpose.

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Two weeks passed in the blink of an eye.

At Zhang Yi's Shelter, the team had rebuilt their snow-and-ice defenses, and no new enemies had appeared. Life settled into a comfortable rhythm.

With ample food, warmth, and entertainment, the group enjoyed a rare sense of peace.

But Zhang Yi, ever cautious, refused to grow complacent.

He spent several hours each day training with Liang Yue, honing his combat skills. Liang Yue, now more mature and reserved, treated the sessions seriously, often chastising Zhang Yi when he faltered.

Though professional during training, Liang Yue's cheeks still flushed whenever their sparring led to accidental contact.

Meanwhile, the outside world was far from tranquil.

Chaoyu and Yangsheng Bases, weakened by their recent defeats, struggled to maintain control over their territories.

Not only were they powerless to stop Bai Xue Jiao's missionary activities, but small armed factions within their lands began rising up, taking advantage of the chaos.

Though Tianhai City's five major factions ostensibly controlled the region, the truth was far messier. Many underground organizations thrived in the shadows, waiting for their chance to claim resources.

In response, Chaoyu and Yangsheng redirected their attention inward, attempting to quell local unrest.

A fragile truce emerged among the five factions, each acknowledging the others' territorial claims to avoid further conflict.

For now, none of them were willing to spark another large-scale war.

Chapter 423: The Corpses

Zhang Yi's cautious approach to survival influenced everyone in the Shelter, ensuring none of them grew complacent.

Uncle You trained daily in close combat and shooting.

Yang Siyah tirelessly produced energy-boosting food, which Zhang Yi stored in his spatial dimension.

Even Fatty Xu, usually the laziest of the group, was dragged out by Zhang Yi to hone his abilities.

Each Superhuman's powers were unique. While their initial abilities might seem simple, they all had significant potential for growth. Zhang Yi, for example, had expanded his spatial powers into numerous versatile skills, and he continued pushing the boundaries of what he could achieve.

Fatty Xu, however, felt a growing sense of inadequacy.

During the Five-Army Battle, he had witnessed Wei Dinghai's powerful Ice and Snow Lord ability—a stark reminder of how far behind he was. Determined not to become a burden, he threw himself into training.

One particular realization shook him further: Liang Yue also possessed the rare Devourer ability, allowing her to absorb the abilities of other Superhumans. Previously, only Zhang Yi and Hua Hua had this power, and Fatty Xu hadn't thought much of it.

Now, it was clear that there were tiers of talent even among Superhumans—and he and Uncle You were at the lower end.

"Damn it! I can't keep relying on last-minute miracles!" Fatty Xu muttered, frustrated by his lack of progress.

Despite his efforts, his abilities—ice spikes, ice walls, and snow bursts—remained useful primarily for controlling the battlefield. Against other Superhumans, they lacked the raw power needed for decisive combat.

Zhang Yi noticed his struggles and approached him with advice.

“Your abilities grow stronger the more you use them, but strategy is just as important,” Zhang Yi explained, tapping his temple. “Think of your ability as a weapon. Strengthening the weapon is important, but mastering its use matters even more.”

He smirked. “A skilled fighter’s pebble can be deadlier than an amateur’s blade.”

Fatty Xu mulled over Zhang Yi’s words and had an epiphany.

“I’ve been too hung up on raw power,” he realized. “When you killed Ling Feng, it wasn’t because your ability was stronger—it was your intelligence and preparation!”

His perspective shifted. Though he lacked the ability to absorb others’ powers, maximizing his own potential could still make him formidable.

March arrived, bringing a slight increase in temperature as Blue Planet edged closer to its perihelion. Despite this, the world remained bitterly cold.

Within the Shelter, life carried on peacefully. Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu had beaten countless AAA-tier games on the console, and the communal mahjong table had needed repairs several times—thanks to Lu Keran, their resident mechanical expert.

It was a tranquil existence, almost idyllic.

But life had a way of delivering surprises when least expected.

At the ruins of West Hill Base.

The long-abandoned site lay eerily still. Its resources had been looted by Zhang Yi, and the aftermath of the Five-Army Battle had deterred other factions from approaching.

Yet, something stirred.

The thick, green iron door of The Fourth Life Pod trembled violently, as if struck by an immense force.

Boom! Boom!

With each thunderous impact, the heavy door's bolts weakened until they finally snapped.

From the darkness within, an eerie green light began to pulse, accompanied by the nauseating stench of decay.

One by one, a horde of decrepit, blank-eyed corpses shuffled out.

It was as if someone had opened a long-forgotten can of rotten fish.

The zombies poured into the passageway, their numbers quickly filling the confined space.

Guided by some unseen force, they cleared debris from the base's entrance and emerged into the open air.

The wind howled as thousands of zombies streamed out, their movements sluggish but unyielding, heading southeast.

Back at the Shelter, Zhang Yi lounged on the sofa, sipping coffee as Yang Xinxin briefed him on the latest updates from other factions.

Over the past month, Yang Xinxin had managed to infiltrate the networks of the remaining factions, observing their activities in secret.

Unlike West Hill Base, their network security was rudimentary—no more sophisticated than that of pre-apocalypse small businesses.

“Qingfu Base continues to play it safe, enjoying their current territory without attempting expansion,” Yang Xinxin reported. “Chaoyu Base is in full retreat, focusing on recovering from the Five-Army Battle. Their leader, Wei Dinghai, is still injured, and unrest has flared in their territory.”

“Yangsheng Base remains stable, though they’ve had to suppress several internal uprisings. And as for Bai Xue Jiao...”

Yang Xinxin paused, her expression serious.

“They’ve been the biggest beneficiaries of the war. Their membership has grown exponentially—possibly exceeding ten thousand followers.”

Zhang Yi leaned back, casually absorbing the information.

Most of it aligned with his expectations, but Bai Xue Jiao’s explosive growth intrigued him.

“How are they feeding so many people?” he mused aloud. “Most of their recruits are likely non-combatants, not all of them useful. A large population can become a burden.”

Yang Xinxin offered a theory. “Perhaps they’re using faith as leverage. Desperate times drive people to cling to whatever promises security.”

She added, “Do you remember the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom? Their movement was built on the chaos of the time, using a pseudo-religious banner to establish a regime that lasted over a decade.”

Zhang Yi nodded. “So you’re saying Bai Xue Jiao could do the same in Tianhai City?”

“Exactly,” Yang Xinxin said. “Their leader, Yuan Kongye, might not just want survival—she might want divinity.”

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. “Turning herself into a god? That sounds ridiculous.”

Yang Xinxin’s tone grew more serious. “It might seem absurd, but in desperate times, people will believe anything that gives them hope. Even the educated will bow when faced with starvation and death.”

Zhang Yi acknowledged her point but remained skeptical.

“Even with ten thousand followers, numbers alone can’t defeat modern weapons. The other factions are still far stronger.”

Yang Xinxin countered, “But what if Yuan Kongye uses her Blessing ability to awaken an army of Superhumans?”

Zhang Yi’s expression hardened.

Now, that was a problem worth considering.

As Zhang Yi pondered, his gaze drifted toward the snow-covered horizon.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed.

In the distance, silhouetted against the white landscape, a mass of figures emerged, moving steadily toward the Shelter.

“Visitors,” Zhang Yi murmured, setting down his coffee.

Chapter 424: Corrosion

Zhang Yi froze for a moment, staring out at the surreal sight. For an instant, he thought his eyes were deceiving him.

How could so many people be moving about in this unforgiving cold?

The sheer number of figures on the horizon surpassed even those seen during the Five-Army Battle.

But as he squinted for a clearer view, Zhang Yi realized this was no illusion. It was real—a vast horde, slowly advancing toward the Shelter.

Springing to his feet, Zhang Yi barked orders:

“Xiao Ai, alert everyone in the Shelter. Get them geared up and assembled in the living room!”

As he spoke, he stripped off his cozy loungewear and began suiting up in combat gear with practiced efficiency.

Within moments, the Shelter’s alarm blared. Everyone, though accustomed to their comfortable routine, responded with urgency.

Dressing quickly, they hurried to the living room.

Yang Xinxin, wheeling herself closer to Zhang Yi, asked nervously, “What’s going on, Gege?”

Zhang Yi, now fully equipped and gripping his Golden Desert Eagle, pointed toward the window.

“See for yourself. Something’s coming.”

Wheeling over to the window, Yang Xinxin squinted at the distant horizon. Her face turned pale as she made out the countless silhouettes advancing in the distance.

“Why... why are there so many of them? Could this be an alliance of factions coming to attack us?”

As the others arrived, Uncle You approached Zhang Yi.

“What’s the situation? Are we under attack?”

Raising his binoculars, Zhang Yi took a closer look.

What he saw made his skin crawl.

The figures weren’t people.

They were corpses—a massive horde of zombies, slowly but inexorably shambling toward the Shelter.

Their bodies were grotesque, clad in tattered, frostbitten clothing. Blue-black patches of decay marred their skin, while some bore horrific open wounds that revealed frozen flesh underneath. The extreme cold had preserved them from complete decomposition, leaving them trapped in a grotesque limbo.

“Zombies...” Zhang Yi muttered, his voice heavy with disbelief.

The others crowded around, peering through binoculars or the window.

Sure enough, the horde was unmistakably made up of the walking dead.

Liang Yue’s sharp eyes caught a chilling detail.

“Wait a second,” she said, pointing. “Some of them are wearing West Hill Base uniforms.”

Zhang Yi followed her direction and confirmed it: many of the zombies wore the familiar green fatigues of West Hill soldiers.

“They must’ve come from the Fourth Life Pod,” Liang Yue deduced, her tone grim.

Zhang Yi set down the binoculars, a mix of shock and grim acceptance settling in.

“It’s bizarre. In this kind of weather, they should be frozen solid, not moving.”

Dr. Zhou Ke’er, who had remained calm despite the chaos, ventured an explanation.

“It could be some kind of virus that’s keeping their bodies animated,” she suggested.

Zhang Yi nodded. “That makes sense. In the end, they’re just infected corpses—creepy, sure, but manageable.”

He grabbed his rifle from his spatial inventory.

“Let’s go. It’s time to take care of these restless dead. Remember, aim for the head!”

The group snapped out of their initial fear, reminded that these were just zombies.

Their confidence surged as they recalled their well-maintained arsenal and combat prowess. Zombies? They’d be nothing more than target practice.

Even Lu Keran, usually behind the scenes repairing equipment, was excited to join in.

“Boss, give me a gun! I wanna shoot some zombies too!” she pleaded.

Zhang Yi handed her a rifle with a sigh. “Stick close to me. And watch your aim—no friendly fire.”

“Woohoo! This is gonna be awesome!” Lu Keran cheered, gearing up enthusiastically.

The group stepped outside, leaving Zhou Ke’er and the other non-combatants inside.

Inside the Shelter, chairs and snacks were brought out as the remaining residents prepared to watch the battle unfold from the safety of their fortress.

Out in the snow, the mood among Zhang Yi’s team was lighthearted.

Uncle You transformed into his towering giant form, hefting a massive entrenching tool like a war hammer.

Zhang Yi called out, “Stick to guns for now, Uncle You!”

But Uncle You laughed. “No need to waste ammo on these guys!”

Liang Yue’s blade gleamed as she drew it, her eyes burning with battle lust.

The more cautious members—Zhang Yi, Fatty Xu, and Lu Keran—took up positions to begin shooting.

Zhang Yi fired the first shot.

With practiced precision, his bullet struck a zombie squarely in the head, dropping it instantly.

Inspired, Lu Keran turned to Fatty Xu. “Let’s see who can kill more!”

Fatty Xu smirked. “You’re on. But don’t cry when I win—I’ve had way more practice!”

Suddenly, something unexpected happened.

The zombie Zhang Yi had shot stood back up.

A gaping hole in its skull revealed the damage from the shot, yet no blood flowed, and it continued moving toward the Shelter.

“What the hell?” Zhang Yi muttered. “I hit it dead center. Why isn’t it down?”

Before he could process what was happening, the entire horde’s demeanor shifted.

The previously slow and aimless zombies began to howl—a guttural, inhuman sound that echoed across the frozen plains.

“Awoo ! ! !”

The sound was chilling, like a pack of wild dogs feasting in a graveyard.

Then, as one, the horde broke into a sprint.

The thousands of zombies surged forward with terrifying speed, their eyes glowing a sinister crimson.

“What the—?!” Zhang Yi cursed, his grip tightening on his rifle.

Liang Yue and Uncle You, who had charged ahead to engage, were suddenly faced with a wave of frenzied undead barreling toward them like hunting hounds.

“Fall back!” Zhang Yi shouted, his voice cutting through the chaos.

But it was too late—the horde was upon them.

Chapter 425: Eerie Encounter

No one could have anticipated that the seemingly sluggish and apathetic zombies would suddenly become so unpredictable.

In an instant, they unleashed astonishing speed, completely surrounding Uncle You and Liang Yue!

Before Zhang Yi could even react, the zombies had already engulfed the two, layers upon layers, their guttural roars chilling to the bone.

“W**t the h*ll!”

Uncle You’s furious shout rang out as he swung his entrenching tool, sending a dozen zombies flying and cleaving three of them cleanly in half.

These zombies were rigid and remarkably tough, nothing like the decayed corpses often seen on TV that could be easily destroyed.

Fortunately, both Uncle You and Liang Yue were Enhancement-Type Superhumans, with formidable close-combat skills. Even surrounded by thousands of zombies, they still managed to hold their ground and fight back effectively.

Liang Yue wielded a Tang Sword, the blade’s gleam slicing through the air like cold moonlight.

The iron-like bodies of the zombies were severed cleanly!

However, the efficiency of their attacks was too low, and the horde of zombies was overwhelming.

If this continued, they would surely exhaust themselves and be devoured alive!

This outcome was beyond anyone's expectations.

Mere moments ago, Zhang Yi and the others still thought of zombies as the slow-moving, fragile creatures often portrayed in TV dramas—so weak that even a child could kill one with a stick.

But the zombies they faced now were vastly different—stronger, fiercer, faster, and harder to kill!

Even a headshot wouldn't stop them. How were they supposed to kill such creatures?

Looking at the dismembered zombie corpses on the ground, still struggling toward Uncle You and Liang Yue, Zhang Yi felt a shiver run down his spine.

“What on earth are these things? Why won't they die?”

Fatty Xu and Lu Keran were pale with fear. They quickly opened fire, trying to kill as many zombies as possible to rescue Uncle You and Liang Yue.

But instead of eliminating the zombies, the gunfire attracted their attention.

A portion of the massive horde broke off, roaring as they charged toward Zhang Yi and his group!

Zhang Yi remained calm. Since even a headshot couldn't kill these zombies, firearms were useless.

Holstering his pistol, he made a gesture in the air, tracing a dimensional shape.

A massive Dimensional Gate appeared, blocking the zombies' path toward the three of them.

The horde moved with terrifying speed, comparable to sprint champions. But before reaching Zhang Yi, they disappeared one by one into the Dimensional Gate.

Fatty Xu and Lu Keran finally breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank goodness for the boss’s Dimensional Gate! We can use this to handle the entire horde of brainless zombies!”

However, just as Fatty Xu finished speaking, the zombies suddenly stopped in front of the Dimensional Gate.

“Huh?”

Zhang Yi frowned, sensing something was amiss.

Zombies were supposed to be mindless and incapable of intelligence.

Yet these creatures had stopped, as if aware of the danger. This was entirely illogical!

Two possibilities came to mind:

They weren’t truly dead and were instead some kind of intelligent creatures.

Someone was secretly controlling them!

The second possibility seemed more likely.

“Could it be a Superhuman capable of controlling zombies? Like the time when soldiers’ corpses mysteriously disappeared?”

“If that’s the case, then everything makes sense!”

If they could locate and eliminate the controller among the horde, the crisis would be resolved.

However, Zhang Yi felt a headache coming on at the thought of finding the controller among thousands of zombies—it was like searching for a needle in a haystack!

He decided on a more straightforward approach.

With a wave of his hand, a heavy tank appeared on the snow, its weight compressing the snowy surface.

“Uncle You, Liang Yue, follow my command. When I count to three, jump as high as you can!”

As Zhang Yi spoke, he climbed into the tank and began loading the cannon.

Although he wasn’t great at driving a tank, Uncle You had taught him how to fire its cannon.

Understanding his plan, Uncle You and Liang Yue nodded.

“Got it!”

Zhang Yi finished loading the shell and started the countdown.

“Three, two, one!”

As soon as he said “one,” Uncle You and Liang Yue fought back the zombies surrounding them with all their might and leaped into the air.

Both being Enhancement-Type Superhumans, their physical strength was extraordinary—they jumped over ten meters high!

The tank’s cannon roared with a deafening boom.

“Boom!!!”

A shell detonated in the center of the horde, scattering hundreds of zombies in a spectacular explosion of limbs and debris.

The horde was momentarily dispersed, giving Uncle You and Liang Yue a chance to retreat toward the Shelter.

But the relentless zombies pursued them, their terrifying speed allowing them to quickly close the distance.

Driven by their instinct to hunt the living, the zombies gathered together, conveniently lining up directly in front of the tank's cannon.

Zhang Yi loaded another shell and fired!

Another explosion scattered hundreds of zombies, but many remained, charging from the sides.

Lu Keran was so frightened that his legs gave out.

Thankfully, Uncle You and Liang Yue intercepted the stragglers, eliminating the remaining zombies.

Realizing that decapitating them wasn't enough, they figured out that destroying the bodies or severing the legs was more effective.

Zhang Yi stepped out of the tank and retrieved a peculiar-looking piece of equipment from his Spatial Storage—a device with two large metal canisters connected to a long nozzle by pipes.

It resembled a pesticide sprayer but was actually a flamethrower, which Zhang Yi had taken from West Hill Base but never used. Its short range and cumbersome design made it inconvenient.

However, it was perfect for dealing with these unkillable zombies.

Lying prone, Zhang Yi aimed the flamethrower. A fiery dragon over ten meters long erupted from the nozzle!

Even in the freezing temperatures, the flamethrower's intense heat set the zombies ablaze.

Their clothes caught fire, and their bodies burned fiercely.

The zombies' proximity to each other amplified the flames' effectiveness.

At first, Zhang Yi worried the burning zombies might charge toward them. But instead, they became erratic, their limbs twisting wildly as they let out eerie screeches.

As the team prepared to fight with all their might, the zombies suddenly turned tail and fled!

Chapter 426: Uncertainty

The sight of thousands of zombies turning and running in the opposite direction of the Shelter left Zhang Yi and his group utterly stunned.

It was unheard of—zombies showing fear and executing a strategic retreat!

Zhang Yi stood up cautiously, watching the retreating horde with wariness in his eyes.

“This confirms one thing: these zombies are definitely being controlled by someone!”

“When the controller realized it was difficult to kill us, they decided to retreat to preserve their forces.”

Liang Yue frowned deeply, pondering for a moment before shaking her head.

“I can’t imagine how a person could control thousands of zombies simultaneously!”

“Not to mention, these corpses were frozen solid, and decapitation couldn’t even kill them. If someone had such immense power, they could easily dominate Tianhai City, given the sheer number of corpses outside.”

Zhang Yi glanced at the pile of shattered and charred corpses on the ground, some of which were still twitching.

Despite being reduced to fragments, these zombies exhibited an eerie vitality, like worms cut into multiple pieces that continued to squirm.

The thought of facing more of these creatures in the future made Zhang Yi’s head ache.

“We need to figure out what these things are and how someone is controlling them.”

“If not, Tianhai City will never know peace!”

Walking over, Zhang Yi attempted to store parts of the zombie fragments into his Spatial Storage.

The process went smoothly, confirming they were indeed lifeless corpses rather than living organisms.

Yet the fact that they were still moving defied explanation.

“Could it be some technique like the corpse-driving rituals from Xiangxi? Have I been too narrow-minded, refusing to believe in the supernatural?”

Zhang Yi's thoughts grew increasingly conflicted.

He tossed the flamethrower to Fatty Xu. "Burn these things completely! At least we now know they can be destroyed by fire."

The group couldn't make sense of the day's events.

Ever since that day when thousands of corpses vanished from the battlefield, a shroud of mystery had enveloped them.

Today's zombie crisis only deepened the enigma, making it impossible to ignore.

Though they had successfully repelled the horde, the confusion on everyone's faces was unmistakable.

Back at the Shelter, Zhou Ke'er, Yang Siyah, and the others were still shaken. Their pale faces betrayed how terrified they had been.

After all, who had ever seen zombies fiercer than wild dogs, let alone an entire horde of them?

If it hadn't been for Zhang Yi's group, even heavily armed soldiers would have been torn apart today.

"Do you think ghosts really exist?" Yang Siyah asked nervously, clutching her chest as fear lingered in her eyes.

The older Zhou Haimei frowned slightly. "Hard to say. Such things are better believed in than dismissed. It's best to stay respectful!"

As a veteran actress who had weathered the entertainment industry for years, Zhou Haimei was deeply superstitious about metaphysics.

It was said that her career only took off after a famous fortune-teller advised her to change her name.

Some phenomena defied scientific explanation yet undeniably existed.

Zhang Yi remained silent, sitting on the sofa as he reflected on the series of strange events.

The horde of thousands had come from West Hill Base.

When he, Fatty Xu, and Uncle You had previously scavenged there, they had sensed something unusual in the surroundings.

At the time, Zhang Yi dismissed it as paranoia and didn't give it much thought.

Before leaving, he had sealed the entrance to West Hill Base for peace of mind.

Adding to that were the recent incidents—disappearing soldier corpses and their appearance at the Ci Qu subway station.

These clues hinted at a hidden truth of monumental significance.

“Someone must be controlling those corpses.”

While the women speculated about supernatural events, Zhang Yi concluded decisively.

“These zombies avoided my Dimensional Gate and retreated intelligently. That’s behavior characteristic of sentient beings.”

“So, there must be a Superhuman capable of controlling corpses, targeting us from the shadows.”

His reasoning was sound, and the group nodded in agreement.

However, Zhou Ke'er raised a question.

“But why attack us?”

“We haven’t provoked anyone. The only recent conflicts were with Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base.”

“But if they had such power, why didn’t they use it during the battle? Why wait until now?”

Zhang Yi shook his head.

“The situation is too sudden to unravel immediately. For now, let’s stay within the Shelter. It’s very secure, and those zombies can’t breach it.”

“Let’s wait and see how things develop.”

As he spoke, Zhang Yi turned to Yang Xinxin.

“Xinxin, keep an eye on other factions in the coming days. See if this phenomenon is unique to us or widespread in Tianhai City.”

Yang Xinxin nodded. “Got it. Leave it to me!”

Zhang Yi then addressed Uncle You and Liang Yue.

“Uncle You, Liang Yue, check your bodies thoroughly to ensure no scratches or bites. If a zombie virus exists, we must be cautious.”

The group instinctively distanced themselves from Uncle You and Liang Yue, though silently.

After all, in zombie movies, those injured by zombies often became infected.

Uncle You and Liang Yue were speechless but understood Zhang Yi's caution.

"Alright, we'll cooperate with the checks."

Zhang Yi chuckled and reassured them. "Relax, it's just a precaution, not suspicion."

Considering their bulletproof combat gear, it was unlikely the zombies had bitten them. Zhang Yi was simply being thorough.

After examining them with Zhou Ke'er, Zhang Yi confirmed they had no injuries.

"All clear. You're both good to go!"

Smiling, Zhang Yi dismissed them.

With the two gone, only Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er remained in the medical room.

Zhang Yi's tone turned serious as he addressed her.

"Ke'er, there's something I need you to do."

Zhou Ke'er immediately understood.

"You want me to study the zombies?"

Zhang Yi nodded. "I need to determine if they carry a virus or are being controlled by Superhuman powers."

“If it’s the former, this could escalate into a citywide catastrophe—or worse, a global pandemic.”

“But if it’s the latter...”

His expression grew graver as he continued.

“Then it means Tianhai City harbors an unknown and terrifying entity.”

Zhou Ke’er’s face clouded with concern as she gently hugged Zhang Yi from behind.

“Either outcome is frightening.”

Zhang Yi held her hand and smiled faintly. “Don’t overthink it. Let’s focus on protecting ourselves. As long as the Shelter remains secure, we can live peacefully.”

Zhou Ke’er nodded, finding comfort in his words.

Overthinking would only lead to despair.

Zhang Yi retrieved a piece of zombie flesh from his Spatial Storage and placed it on the workstation.

The fragment twitched like a severed worm, even as frost clung to its surface, radiating a strange vitality.

Even Zhou Ke’er, a seasoned doctor, was astounded.

“This is incredible!”

“Be careful,” Zhang Yi warned. “We don’t know if it’s viral or how contagious it might be.”

Zhou Ke'er smiled confidently. “Don’t worry. I know what I’m doing.”

She expertly placed the fragment into a tray and sealed it under a glass cover.

“I’ll need some time to study this.”

“No rush. If this remains the extent of the crisis, we can handle it with ease.”

Zhou Ke'er nodded. “Yes, given our resources, we’re the most well-equipped faction in Tianhai City!”

“But if a zombie crisis erupts among other factions, especially groups like the Followers of the Snow God, it would be terrifying.”

Chapter 427: Catastrophe in Tianhai City

Just as Zhang Yi suspected, the zombie crisis was not an isolated incident targeting them alone. It had erupted across all of Tianhai City on a massive scale!

Yangsheng Base, Chaoyu Base, and Qingfu Base all came under attack by swarms of zombies that seemed to materialize out of nowhere.

The soldiers, untrained for such a phenomenon, initially assumed they could neutralize the zombies by destroying their heads.

But to their horror, even headshots failed. The zombies continued their onslaught, tearing off heads with their razor-sharp claws.

These zombies were far from the sluggish creatures seen in TV shows. Their speed and strength far exceeded those of ordinary humans.

The horde surged relentlessly, overwhelming the first line of human defense with sheer numbers. The soldiers struggled to mount any resistance, and the line was soon breached!

Their numbers were overwhelming, and their resilience was terrifying.

The three bases suffered heavy losses, with numerous lives claimed by these horrifying creatures.

However, the bases were equipped with powerful weaponry. After the initial chaos, the leaders and Superhuman Captains of each base organized a fierce counterattack.

At Yangsheng Base, Xiao Honglian quickly identified the zombies' weakness—fire.

She climbed a tall distillation tower, wielding a high-purity alcohol sprayer to unleash streams of flame upon the horde.

Like an inferno engulfing insects, the fire swiftly turned the zombies to ash.

Yet, the scale of the horde was daunting.

Compared to the few thousand zombies that Zhang Yi's Shelter faced, the bases located in core areas faced far greater hordes.

With her sword-like brows furrowed, Xiao Honglian pushed her [Purgatory Furnace] ability to its limits.

A man carrying a heavy metal box approached her.

The box contained high-purity alcohol. Xiao Honglian consumed it, unleashing fiery blasts like a dragon, scorching trenches into the ground and decimating the zombies.

After an arduous battle, and with countless zombies slain, the wave of attackers was finally repelled.

“What the hell are these things? They’re far beyond ordinary zombies. Investigate their origins immediately! Is someone controlling them?”

Xiao Honglian was furious as she surveyed the carnage. Her painstakingly built refinery lay in ruins, strewn with corpses.

Meanwhile, at Qingfu Base, Xing Tian unleashed his abilities and led 500 elite warriors in a direct charge against the zombie horde.

With Xing Tian’s empowerment, his warriors became formidable, combining offense and defense seamlessly.

Abandoning firearms, they relied on massive battle axes, war hammers, and iron rods to engage in brutal close combat with the zombies.

This method proved far more effective than firearms, as even the frozen corpses were shattered by the brute force of their attacks.

At Chaoyu Base, the situation escalated to the point where the main naval guns of ships stationed in the Deep Sea District were deployed against the horde.

While the zombie attacks were ferocious, they alone couldn’t inflict catastrophic damage on the major factions.

The bases’ superior firepower and abundance of powerful Superhumans helped contain the threat.

“Where did these things come from? Could they be a product of another faction in Tianhai City? Or is there an underground force we’ve overlooked?” Wei Dinghai speculated with a furrowed brow.

Zhang Yi and the three bases managed to resolve the crisis relatively effectively, suffering losses that, while significant, were within tolerable limits.

The Followers of the Snow God, however, were not so fortunate.

Having rapidly expanded their ranks over the past month, their population swelled to over 10,000 in the core area of Tianfeng District.

More than 70% of them lacked combat capabilities, and many were even unarmed.

This massive, vulnerable crowd attracted an underground horde of zombies.

That night, the followers finished their prayers and retired to their tents.

To keep warm, they huddled in a few enclosed buildings, lit fires, and shared canned food and red sacred fruits plucked from the Holy Tree.

Among them were residents from Yuelu Residential Area, who had joined the cult alongside Li Jian.

Li Jian's son, Li Kaile, was particularly happy at the camp.

He quickly befriended Xu Beibei, a girl of the same age from a nearby tent.

Even in the apocalypse, human emotions remained powerful.

The two teenagers, drawn to each other at first sight, quickly grew close.

Living nearby and having little to do beyond prayers, they spent their days together.

Li Kaile shared his treasured books, while Xu Beibei showed him an oil painting she had found.

In the innocence of youth, their feelings were pure and untainted.

Li Kaile secretly vowed to marry Xu Beibei once the apocalypse was over and to stay by her side for life.

But in the darkness, pairs of eerie green eyes had already fixed on their camp.

The night watch spotted shadows moving on the outskirts.

With visibility too poor to discern details, the watch mistook the zombies for survivors seeking refuge.

“Where are you coming from? Do you need help?” one watchman called out.

As they approached, the truth became horrifyingly clear.

The creatures had purplish-blue skin, vacant eyes, and ghastly wounds that marked them unmistakably as undead.

“A-a-a... monsters!” the watchman screamed in terror.

That was the moment the zombies attacked.

Drawn to the firelight, they swarmed like moths to flames.

But this time, they weren’t self-destructing—they were bringing death to the unsuspecting survivors.

Gunfire erupted as the watchmen tried to fight back.

However, the zombies were undeterred, pressing on even as bullets riddled their bodies.

Screams of despair echoed through the camp as the undead began their slaughter.

The Followers of the Snow God's camp turned into a nightmare, with hundreds of members falling victim to the horde.

The guards, realizing the nature of their attackers, aimed for the zombies' heads.

Yet their efforts were futile, and the noise only attracted more of the undead, who tore them apart.

Desperate cries for help spread through the camp.

The guards were swiftly overwhelmed, leaving the unarmed followers defenseless.

The ravenous zombies charged in like starving bandits descending on a buffet.

In that moment, it was as if the dinner bell had rung.

Chapter 428: A New Storm

The rapid expansion of the Followers of the Snow God had swelled their numbers to over 10,000. Most resided in the buildings around St. John's Cathedral.

To conserve warmth, dozens of people often shared a single room, creating an extremely high population density.

When the zombie attack began, the crowded conditions left little room to escape.

On the floor where Li Kaile and Xu Beibei lived, zombies surged upward.

Even in the dark, the creatures could sense the presence of living humans, moving through the dim hallways with eerie precision.

“Bang! Bang!”

Doors were smashed open, and zombies poured into the rooms, slaughtering indiscriminately.

Terrified screams echoed as some fainted, meeting their gruesome fate regardless.

Others leapt from the building in a desperate bid to escape, only to find more zombies waiting below with jaws agape.

It was as if “meat pies” were dropping from the sky.

Li Kaile turned pale with fear, but seeing Xu Beibei trembling and unable to stand, he mustered his courage. Grabbing her hand, he led her upstairs.

Zombies acted purely on instinct, attacking anything alive. Heading to the upper floors was their best chance.

“Let’s find my parents first!”

Li Kaile pulled Xu Beibei out of their room, just as his frantic parents appeared searching for him.

Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing their son unharmed.

They noticed Li Kaile clutching Xu Beibei’s hand but said nothing. Even in the apocalypse, they respected his pursuit of love—a symbol of humanity’s resilience and hope for the future.

“Upstairs, quickly!”

The parents shielded the young couple as they ascended.

Behind them, the horde's eerie growls grew louder, drawing closer.

Suddenly, two figures stepped into the hallway, blocking the zombies' path.

These were Superhumans, tasked by Zheng Yixian to protect Li Jian's family.

One of them faced the approaching zombies and, without a word, smashed his fist into the wall. He then ripped the entire section free, creating a barrier of debris that temporarily stopped the zombies.

With their path blocked, the zombies turned their attention to other victims, unleashing carnage throughout the building.

The air was filled with screams, blood sprayed in every direction, and the sound of zombies tearing into flesh and crunching bones was everywhere.

The Followers' camp had become a living nightmare, a vision of hell on earth.

At St. John's Cathedral, the situation grew dire as the zombie horde surrounded the sacred grounds.

Inside, the core members of the cult and countless followers huddled together.

The zombies, drawn by the scent of living humans like sharks to blood, attacked with red eyes and relentless hunger.

Then, the cathedral doors suddenly swung open.

An invisible force blasted out, sending dozens of zombies flying.

The High Priest Zheng Yixian emerged, flanked by over a dozen Superhumans.

The grisly scene outside made even these seasoned warriors' pupils contract in shock.

Zombies, once confined to fiction, were now a terrifying reality at their doorstep.

Though briefly shaken, Zheng Yixian quickly regained his composure and began issuing orders.

“Tong Zhan, Geng Lei, stay inside the cathedral and protect the Chief Priest and the followers. Do not step out under any circumstances!”

“The rest of you, follow me. Let’s kill these zombies!”

Under Zheng Yixian’s leadership, the Followers began to organize and counterattack.

The addition of powerful Superhumans turned the tide, allowing the group to mount an effective defense.

Even the once-panicked followers found their resolve, grabbing whatever weapons they could to fight back.

“Swish, swish, swish!”

In an instant, a dozen flashes of cold steel lit the air, and the heads of over a dozen zombies hit the ground.

Han Chang, having activated his Beast Transformation, took on the form of a honey badger—a small yet ferocious creature with sharp claws and fangs.

Using what he knew from television, he decapitated more than a dozen zombies, assuming this would end them.

But to his shock, the headless zombies merely staggered briefly before resuming their attack.

“What? They’re not dead?”

Though startled, Han Chang, true to his honey badger nature, was unafraid.

“Fine, I’ll take you apart completely!”

Moments later, another flurry of blows left the zombies in seven or eight dismembered pieces. The fragments wriggled grotesquely on the ground.

“Disgusting! What the hell are these things?”

Han Chang’s face twisted in revulsion.

While their strength surpassed that of ordinary humans, they were no match for a Superhuman like him in one-on-one combat.

But their sheer numbers, combined with their resilience, posed a dire threat—even to Superhumans, should they become surrounded.

The battle to defend the camp was grueling.

With so many zombies and over 10,000 Followers, the dozen or so Superhumans couldn’t possibly protect everyone.

For most of the fight, they focused on thinning out the densest clusters of zombies, while ordinary followers had to fend for themselves and their families.

After more than half an hour of brutal combat, the ground was littered with blood and corpses.

No one could tell how many were zombies or Followers.

When the horde finally receded into the darkness, a collective sigh of relief swept through the survivors.

But the lingering fear gripped their hearts, refusing to fade.

“What were those things?”

Han Chang, his hands in his pockets, surveyed the carnage with a gloomy expression.

The cries of mourning followers filled the air—a haunting lament for the countless lives lost.

When they had joined the cult, they believed it to be a sanctuary, a utopia amidst the apocalypse.

Han Chang's chest tightened with a dull ache as he approached Zheng Yixian, his frustration plain on his face.

By now, the exhausted Superhumans had gathered, awaiting further orders.

Zheng Yixian, ever composed, methodically directed the survivors to clean up the aftermath.

“Move all the bodies to that abandoned building.”

“Check for injuries. These zombies are highly unusual and could be carriers of a biochemical virus. Isolate anyone wounded and monitor them closely.”

“Increase patrols tonight. Organize the strongest men to guard the camp perimeter. The horde may return.”

Though fatigued, the survivors understood the urgency and quickly got to work.

Han Chang approached Zheng Yixian, frowning deeply.

“These things are absurd! They can’t be killed, and they even know when to retreat. This isn’t the mindless behavior of TV zombies.”

Zheng Yixian gave him a long, measured look, his brow furrowing slightly.

“This matter must be thoroughly investigated. With our high population density, we’re at constant risk of another attack.”

“And we still don’t know if this involves the other factions.”

Han Chang clenched his teeth in frustration. “If those scumbags are behind this, I’ll make them pay!”

The cult’s strength had grown exponentially, with a surge in both followers and Superhumans.

Han Chang itched for a chance to crush the factions that had oppressed them.

But Zheng Yixian placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Calm yourself. It’s just a theory for now. Our priority is protecting those who remain.”

After a moment of contemplation, Han Chang nodded. “You’re right.”

He turned to help manage the post-battle cleanup.

Standing amidst the chaos, Zheng Yixian gazed into the distance.

Somewhere in the shadows, a powerful enemy might still be lurking.

“A new storm is brewing,” he muttered.

In one of the residential buildings, Li Jian cautiously peered downstairs.

After confirming the zombies had left, he exhaled deeply. “It’s finally over.”

Zhang Jianfang approached, and the couple embraced tightly.

Nearby, Li Kaile held Xu Beibei’s hand firmly, their eyes meeting with shared affection.

Watching this, Zhang Jianfang smiled softly. “Our son is growing up—he’s pursuing happiness.”

The couple approved of Xu Beibei. In these desperate times, survival skills mattered far more than family background.

Having lost her entire family, Xu Beibei’s ability to endure spoke volumes.

But deep within Li Jian’s eyes was a flicker of concern.

“I just hope this doesn’t bring trouble,” he murmured, careful not to be overheard.

Curious, Zhang Jianfang asked, “Why do you say that?”

Li Jian hesitated before answering.

“You know how the cult treats underage boys—they’re taken for... that.”

Zhang Jianfang shuddered, remembering how terrified she’d been that Li Kaile might suffer the same fate.

Thankfully, Li Jian’s Superhuman abilities and his favor with cult leaders like Yuan Kongye had spared their son from that grim ritual.

Still, the couple couldn’t shake the shadow of worry over what the future might hold.

Zhang Jianfang hugged her husband tightly, resting her head on his chest.

“We’ll be okay. As long as we’re together, we’ll survive.”

Chapter 429: They're Back

In just a single day, all of Tianhai City’s major factions had faced zombie attacks.

Of these, Zhang Yi’s group experienced the least impact—no casualties at all.

Their smaller numbers meant they didn’t have to protect large groups of ordinary members, and with their superior firepower, eliminating the zombies posed no problem.

Other factions weren’t as fortunate. Each suffered varying degrees of loss.

The Followers of the Snow God bore the brunt, losing over 1,000 members in this wave alone.

Additionally, more than 800 individuals were bitten or scratched. These people were immediately quarantined, locked away in a secure area under the guard of two powerful Superhumans, to prevent potential mutations.

The following day, the uneasy factions began to contact one another.

Zhang Yi called his old classmate, Xing Tian, to inquire about the situation.

“What? You got hit by zombies too? Damn it, we had over a hundred people killed here yesterday!” Xing Tian vented his frustration over the phone.

“Where the hell did these monsters come from? Is this some kind of biochemical crisis?”

Learning that Qingfu Base had also been attacked reassured Zhang Yi slightly—it wasn’t a targeted assault against his group.

“This is troubling,” Zhang Yi muttered. “These zombies are bizarre. Beheading doesn’t work, and it feels like someone’s controlling them.”

He added with a frown, “What’s worrying is that despite the 100-kilometer distance between our bases, we both experienced attacks. If there really is someone orchestrating this, it’s not just one person.”

Xing Tian pinched the bridge of his nose, his own concerns deepening.

“You’re saying there’s a force in Tianhai City powerful enough to control these hordes of zombies?”

“But if that’s true, they’d be unbeatable! There are over 10 million corpses in Tianhai City—just sending wave after wave would wear us down to nothing!”

“Even your Shelter, sturdy as it is, wouldn’t hold out forever if they kept attacking!”

Xing Tian’s fears echoed Zhang Yi’s own.

The unknown enemy was the most terrifying kind.

And Zhang Yi still had no answers about the zombies or the entity possibly controlling them.

“All we can do is take it one step at a time. Let’s contact the other factions and see if they’ve faced similar situations.”

They weren’t alone in their initiative.

The other factions shared the same concerns and suspicions, suspecting that one among them might be behind the zombie tide.

After exchanging intelligence, they discovered that all had encountered identical attacks.

This revelation led to a consensus:

The zombie tide wasn’t the doing of any of the five major factions. It had to be the work of an underground sixth force, something far more sinister than a mere biochemical crisis.

The acknowledgment that no faction was behind the attacks provided some clarity, but cooperation remained out of reach.

Distrust and old grudges between the factions prevented meaningful alliances.

Each faction now focused solely on defending itself. Secretly, many hoped the other groups would be wiped out by the zombie hordes.

Zhang Yi’s group faced the least pressure.

Their sturdy Shelter and efficient combat strategy gave them confidence.

But unease lingered among the Shelter's inhabitants.

This time, the attack involved several thousand zombies.

What if next time, it was tens of thousands?

With Tianhai City's death toll nearing 20 million, a full-scale outbreak would be catastrophic, even for the well-prepared Shelter.

"All we can do is take it one step at a time," Zhang Yi thought grimly.

On the second day, the zombie tide reappeared outside the Shelter.

Sighing, Zhang Yi muttered, "Let's go."

He donned his combat gear and led Uncle You, Fatty Xu, and others out to confront the horde.

Even Hua Hua, the loyal beast, was brought along this time. Zhang Yi sternly warned it not to bite the zombies, to avoid potential poisoning or infection.

Hua Hua, understanding its master, nodded obediently.

Together, the group set out to clear the wave.

This time, Uncle You and Liang Yue avoided recklessly diving into the horde. Liang Yue and Hua Hua focused on eliminating nearby zombies, while Fatty Xu used his ice abilities to restrict their movements.

Zhang Yi and Uncle You wielded flamethrowers, taking on the main force.

“Blizzard!”

Fatty Xu raised his hands, unleashing a massive ice and snowstorm that enveloped thousands of zombies.

Though it didn’t inflict much damage, its range was immense.

After his discussions with Zhang Yi, Fatty Xu had realized the proper use of his abilities. Lacking offensive power, his role as a support was crucial.

Sure enough, under the storm’s icy cover, the zombies’ movements slowed, and they seemed to lose their sense of direction.

Zhang Yi’s eyes narrowed.

“Just as I thought. These zombies are being controlled. Obscure the controller’s vision, and they lose coordination.”

Meanwhile, Uncle You wielded the flamethrower, turning zombies into charred remains with its searing blasts.

Zhang Yi joined him, attacking from the side to create a crisscrossing fire pattern.

The combined firepower was devastating, engulfing the horde in a raging inferno.

The zombies’ ghastly wails echoed as they succumbed to the flames, losing their ability to move.

Inside the Shelter, Zhou Ke’er observed through a window, diligently recording notes on her laptop.

“It’s just as I suspected,” she murmured. “The zombies carry a cold-adapted virus that fears heat. High temperatures deactivate it, rendering them inert.”

By the end of the battle, half of the zombie tide had been destroyed, prompting the remainder to retreat.

Zhang Yi and his team pursued the fleeing zombies briefly but found the horde scattering in all directions.

Despite killing several hundred more, many escaped due to their speed.

Once again, the outcome mirrored the previous day: part of the horde was wiped out, while another portion escaped.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Zhang Yi muttered, frowning deeply.

Although they had managed to repel the tide without much difficulty, the repeated escapes troubled him.

There was something elusive about the situation—an element he couldn’t quite piece together yet.

Chapter 430: Intelligence

After returning to the Shelter, Zhang Yi and his team rested in the living room.

The women brought out hot drinks and food to help them regain their strength. Zhou Ke’er stood behind Zhang Yi, gently massaging his shoulders to ease his tension.

Despite successfully repelling another zombie tide, Zhang Yi's face showed no signs of relief. A heavy cloud of unease loomed over him.

This unusual expression caught the attention of Fatty Xu, who had been bragging with Uncle You moments before.

“Boss, why do you look so grim?”

Others also noticed Zhang Yi's serious demeanor and turned their concerned gazes toward him.

“Yeah, what's on your mind? You look so tense.”

“If there's a problem, let's discuss it together!”

Zhang Yi exhaled deeply and addressed the group:

“We managed to take out most of yesterday's horde. But today's tide was even larger in number.”

“This suggests the zombie virus is spreading quickly. It's possible that those who recently died are being turned into zombies.”

“If that's true, it's only a matter of time before all of Tianhai City is overrun by the undead. I can't imagine how we'll survive when that happens.”

Zhang Yi's words drained the smiles from everyone's faces.

The group fell silent, each person lost in thought as worry etched itself onto their expressions.

Seated in her wheelchair, Yang Xinxin took a sip of her cappuccino and spoke calmly:

“However, this trend doesn’t seem obvious yet. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be sending only a few thousand zombies at us each time.”

She paused, her usual light-hearted demeanor giving way to a rare solemnity.

“But if we don’t uncover the truth behind these zombies, they’ll undoubtedly become an enormous problem for us in the future.”

Lu Keran sighed deeply.

“If only it were summer—then these zombies would just rot away into skeletons.”

Zhang Yi shook his head. “What’s most concerning isn’t their numbers but the fact that they appear to have a controller. They aren’t just mindless monsters.”

“On top of that, they’re incredibly hard to kill. Burning or dismembering them is the only solution, which makes dealing with them all the more difficult.”

Yang Xinxin added, “So the real issue lies in dealing with whoever—or whatever—is controlling them?”

Zhang Yi chuckled bitterly. “Easier said than done. How do we find them? Every time we engage, the zombies retreat before we can finish them off.”

“I can’t even confirm if there’s a controller among the horde. After all, Superhuman abilities are so unpredictable.”

He shrugged. “There’s no logical way to deduce it.”

Investigating the subway depths, where these zombies seemed to originate, was an option. But Zhang Yi was reluctant to leave the Shelter’s protective range unless absolutely necessary.

As the group debated, Zhou Ke'er, standing quietly behind Zhang Yi, spoke up.

“I think I might have a theory.”

Curious, Zhang Yi craned his neck to look back, only for his view to be blocked by two rather prominent obstacles.

“Oh?” he prompted, motioning for her to continue.

Typically, Zhou Ke'er, as the group’s doctor, didn’t involve herself in combat strategies. But her expertise in virology made her insights especially valuable in this scenario.

Encouraged, Zhou Ke'er explained:

“I’ve been studying the zombies’ bodies these past two days and found something peculiar—a virus-like entity.”

“It can survive extreme cold, even temperatures as low as minus 100 degrees Celsius, and it invades the nervous system to control the host’s body.”

“However...” She frowned.

“It doesn’t match the modern biological definition of a virus. Its structure seems to fall somewhere between a virus and a cell. It’s more akin to a cell but can behave like a virus, hijacking the host’s body for control and reproduction.”

Zhang Yi, having abandoned his academic knowledge long ago, was thoroughly baffled.

“Ke’er, can you simplify that?”

The trio of men present clearly didn’t grasp her explanation, judging by their bewildered expressions.

Zhou Ke'er chuckled awkwardly.

“Alright. Let’s just call it the zombie virus for now. The apocalypse has rewritten many biological concepts, likely due to gamma-ray exposure.”

“Simply put, this virus exhibits behaviors similar to colony organisms or even eusocial animals.”

“When the zombies are in a horde, their actions display coordination and even rudimentary intelligence. But in isolated lab samples, the virus shows diminished reproductive instincts and lower responsiveness.”

“This leads me to suspect the virus operates like a biological collective, with a mother organism possibly controlling the horde remotely.”

“Remotely?” Zhang Yi straightened up, intrigued.

Zhou Ke'er quickly clarified, “Not over vast distances. Animals communicate through pheromones, for instance. This mutated virus might have its own method of transmitting signals.”

“So,” Zhang Yi mused, “if we kill the mother organism, the infected zombies might die as well?”

Zhou Ke'er shook her head.

“That’s uncertain. At the very least, they’d lose their current level of coordination and intelligence.”

Intelligence.

The word hit Zhang Yi like a thunderclap.

His eyes lit up as he finally identified the nagging sense of unease that had been plaguing him.

“I think I get it now!”

He crossed his arms and addressed the group:

“Have you noticed that while the zombie tides appear aggressive, their tactics show a faint hint of intelligence?”

“Yet their strategy feels juvenile—almost as if they’re learning, step by step.”

“It’s like watching a toddler trying to form sentences, learning one word at a time.”

The group pondered his observation, nodding as it began to make sense.

The zombies behaved clumsily, charging directly into flamethrower attacks without adjusting their approach. Yet they avoided Zhang Yi’s Dimensional Gate and retreated when the situation turned unfavorable.

They had some intelligence—but not much.

“Wait a moment, Zhang Yi,” Liang Yue interjected, her arms crossed and eyes sharp with caution.

“Are you suggesting our enemy might be an intelligent zombie?”

“Perhaps a mutated virus has taken over a human body and evolved into a mother organism?”

“Essentially, it’s recently gained intelligence and is learning how to fight like humans do.”

Zhang Yi found her theory plausible.

The zombies' tactics didn't resemble those of rational humans, but they also weren't entirely mindless.

"If such a being exists, it could very well be a Zombie King," Zhang Yi speculated.

"After all, we've confirmed two ways to gain Superhuman abilities—facing near-death experiences or through external stimuli like the Ice Soul."

"So it's not impossible for someone to gain powers after death."

A fleeting image crossed Zhang Yi's mind, but he kept this thought to himself.