

Ice Age 451

Chapter 451: Outsiders and Locals

Three major bases, one religious sect, and one rogue faction—this is the current power structure in Tianhai City.

After receiving the email from the Jiangnan District Investigation Team, each faction dispatched representatives for a meeting.

Zhang Yi brought along his regular combat squad, composed of their main force from the West Base and Hua Hua. The shelter's surroundings were currently devoid of major threats, and even in the case of an emergency, the shelter's defenses were strong enough to hold until reinforcements arrived. Therefore, leaving no combat personnel for defense wasn't a concern.

The other factions, however, didn't have the same luxury. They constantly had to guard against attacks from zombie hordes and giant rats, leaving large numbers of troops stationed at their bases. Each faction leader led a select few troops to the Central Building to meet the investigation team.

The first to arrive were the people from Yangsheng Base.

Xiao Honglian arrived with a group of her subordinates in a combat vehicle, accompanied by a captain from the Western Superhuman Forces and ten elite warriors. Meanwhile, the main camp was left under Zhuge Qingtian's command.

Upon reaching the Central Building, Xiao Honglian immediately noticed the distinctive snow vehicle.

"Just one vehicle? It seems like the District sent only a small group." Xiao Honglian's mood turned somber.

She knew all too well the gravity of the zombie horde threat. Without deploying a significant military force, it would be nearly impossible to eliminate the threat.

However, despite her disappointment, Xiao Honglian decided to meet the investigation team, hoping this was merely an advance team with reinforcements to follow.

She and her team approached the Central Building, stopping to examine a snow channel over a hundred meters long and ten meters deep.

“This...!”

Crouching down, Xiao Honglian ran her hand over the perfectly smooth surface of the channel. It was clearly not machine-made but rather shaped by a superhuman ability, likely a single, precise strike.

As one of Tianhai City’s top superhumans, Xiao Honglian immediately grasped the skill it took to create this. She quickly dismissed her earlier underestimation.

“There’s a master among them,” she muttered, her tone serious.

Xiao Honglian continued toward the building, but as they neared the entrance, a man in a black uniform stepped out. His face bore a smug, mocking expression as he looked at them.

“Which faction are you from?”

The man, Wu Di, had an arrogant demeanor that instantly irritated the Yangsheng Base team, making them want to punch him.

Xiao Honglian frowned. “We’re from Yangsheng Base. I am Xiao Honglian, the base leader.”

Wu Di’s gaze lingered on her before he said, “Xiao Honglian, former captain of Tianhai City’s Criminal Investigation Unit. Welcome.”

Xiao Honglian’s brows furrowed slightly—his words carried an implicit warning: “I know everything about you.”

So, this is a power play? she thought to herself.

Wu Di stepped aside and gestured. “Please enter, but only you. Your men will have to wait outside.”

Xiao Honglian didn’t object and turned to her subordinates. “Wait for me here.”

One of her captains whispered, “Leader, could this be a trap?”

Xiao Honglian smirked. “Even if it is, no one here can stop me if I want to leave.”

Her confidence drew admiration from her subordinates.

Indeed, Xiao Honglian’s power was unparalleled. Countless challengers had fallen in less than 30 seconds against her.

“Yes, ma’am. We’ll wait here for your orders!”

As Xiao Honglian entered the building, Wu Di’s lips curled into a faint sneer.

Soon after, the second group arrived—representatives from Chaoyu Base.

Wei Dinghai, cautious as ever, even brought his strongest subordinate, Chen Jingguan. Recent setbacks, including battles and zombie horde attacks, had left Wei on edge. **RA NqbEş**

Like before, Wu Di stood at the entrance, barring everyone except Wei Dinghai from entering.

Chen Jingguan was immediately annoyed. “What’s with all the secrecy? Afraid we’ll overpower you?”

Wu Di’s smug expression only deepened. “We only discuss matters with faction leaders. Unless you’re the leader of Chaoyu Base?”

Chen Jingguan's face darkened, but Wei Dinghai stepped in with a hearty laugh, diffusing the tension.

"Haha, let's not fall for such petty provocations," Wei said. "We're here sincerely. If they only want to talk to me, that's fine."

With his Ice and Snow Lord abilities, Wei Dinghai was confident in his safety, especially in this icy terrain where his powers excelled.

More importantly, he couldn't let Xiao Honglian outshine him.

Wei patted Chen Jingguan's shoulder. "Stay here and wait for me. Don't engage with anyone," he warned with a stern look.

Chen Jingguan froze for a moment before nodding. "Understood."

Wei Dinghai calmly entered the building but remained vigilant, secretly observing everything around him.

Meanwhile, Wu Di, clearly bored, turned his attention back to Chen Jingguan.

"Too bad your boss is here. Otherwise, I would've liked to spar with you. Care to try now?" he taunted with a sneer.

Chen Jingguan's expression darkened, but recalling Wei Dinghai's warning, he restrained himself and stood aside, pretending not to hear.

This restraint earned ridicule from the nearby Yangsheng Base soldiers.

Not long after, Zhang Yi's group arrived.

From a distance, they saw the vehicles and soldiers, immediately recognizing the presence of Yangsheng and Chaoyu Base representatives.

“Enemies meet again. Let’s hope they behave,” Zhang Yi muttered, unlocking his Desert Eagle.

After the previous Five-Armies Battle, the other bases had suffered heavy losses, likely harboring deep resentment toward Zhang Yi.

Given the delicate dynamics among the five factions, Zhang Yi prepared himself for potential conflict.

Chapter 452: A First Encounter

As soon as Zhang Yi and his team stepped out of their vehicle, the tension on the scene became palpable.

The soldiers from Chaoyu Base and Yangsheng Base glared at them, their eyes burning with resentment but also tinged with fear. After the Five-Armies Battle, it had become widely acknowledged that Zhang Yi’s team was formidable—provoking them was not something to be done lightly.

Zhang Yi kept his hand in his pocket, gripping his Desert Eagle, remaining on high alert. His arrival even caught Wu Di’s attention, who couldn’t help but take a closer look.

Having researched Zhang Yi’s background only recently after being assigned to Tianhai City, Wu Di had learned of his impressive rise: starting as a mere warehouse manager, leading an elite squad to challenge large-scale factions, and eventually becoming a key player among the city’s five major powers. Such a figure was impossible to ignore.

As Zhang Yi approached the Central Building, he noticed the distinctive ice channel that had been cleared by Wu Di. He immediately understood its purpose—a warning to all attendees of the Jiangnan District envoy’s power.

Wu Di’s voice rang out, “You must be Zhang Yi. Come in alone. The rest must stay outside.”

Zhang Yi smiled harmlessly. "As you wish."

Seeing the soldiers from the other two bases already assembled outside, Zhang Yi had anticipated this arrangement. This was, after all, a meeting for faction leaders—not a gathering of their entourages.

He instructed Uncle You and the others to wait outside. If they felt cold, they could stay in the vehicle. Zhang Yi himself casually made his way into the Central Building.

Wu Di's eyes followed him intently, almost never looking away, which made Zhang Yi feel slightly uncomfortable.

No man enjoys being stared at by another man, and Zhang Yi couldn't help but wonder if Wu Di's interests were... unconventional.

"Is there something on me?" Zhang Yi asked with a cheerful smile.

Wu Di crossed his arms and smirked. "I heard you're quite strong."

Zhang Yi resisted the urge to ask, In which way? If this was about the kind of "strength" between men, Zhang Yi wanted no part of it.

"Just average," Zhang Yi replied modestly.

"Let's spar sometime," Wu Di said, his gaze heating up slightly.

A shiver ran down Zhang Yi's spine. Crap, this guy can't really be... can he?

"No, no, I'm not into that," Zhang Yi quickly declined. "By the way, which room is it?"

Wu Di looked a bit disappointed. "Fifth floor, third room on the left."

“Thanks!” Zhang Yi replied, smiling as he walked away, looking every bit the friendly, harmless neighbor.

Following Wu Di’s directions, Zhang Yi headed upstairs. Along the way, he noticed other members of the investigation team stationed in strategic positions, keeping a close eye on the surroundings.

Their sharp gazes and subtle movements radiated an air of professionalism that set them apart from ordinary people. Years of specialized training were evident in their demeanor, confirming to Zhang Yi that these were elite operatives sent by the Jiangnan District.

Still, Zhang Yi wondered how much help such a small team could offer.

Lost in thought, he reached the designated meeting room. The door was open, and he walked in.

The room was spacious, with a large red table dominating the center. As Zhang Yi entered, all eyes turned toward him.

Two familiar faces—Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai—were already there. Both frowned upon seeing him, their gazes a mixture of wariness and irritation.

However, Zhang Yi’s attention was drawn to the man sitting at the head of the table—a middle-aged figure wrapped in a black coat and wearing oversized sunglasses.

Is he blind? Zhang Yi thought, amused. The sunglasses gave the man an air of pretentiousness, but Zhang Yi couldn’t rule out the possibility of some eccentric preference.

Smiling, Zhang Yi introduced himself. “I’m Zhang Yi. And you are?”

As the saying goes, one doesn’t hit a smiling face. Zhang Yi’s polite and unassuming demeanor left Bian Junwu no choice but to respond in kind.

Lowering his arms, Bian Junwu replied in a cold tone, “I’m Bian Junwu, head of the Jiangnan District investigation team for the zombie outbreak.”

“Ah, so it’s Mr. Bian. A pleasure to meet you!” Zhang Yi said courteously, finding a seat and refraining from further interaction. It was his first meeting with Bian, and he preferred to remain cautious, avoiding even a handshake.

The spacious room maintained a significant distance between each attendee. Clearly, Zhang Yi, Xiao Honglian, and Wei Dinghai were all on guard.

Bian Junwu, however, appeared completely at ease. While waiting for the remaining representatives, he nonchalantly pulled a pack of Heilian cigarettes from his pocket and lit one.

No one spoke. Each had their own agenda, waiting for the others to arrive.

Finally, Xing Tian from Qingfu Base entered the room.

With a cheerful demeanor, he greeted Bian Junwu before sitting near Zhang Yi.

Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai shot him murderous glares. In the Five-Armies Battle, Qingfu Base’s betrayal had directly led to their defeat. Adding insult to injury, Xing Tian had looted a significant amount of their supplies after the battle.

Despite their hatred, Xing Tian remained indifferent to their hostility and started chatting with Zhang Yi.

“Old Zhang, how’s it going on your side? Those damn zombies and rats have been giving us hell.”

Zhang Yi frowned, his voice turning somber. “Don’t even bring it up. We’re constantly clearing them out—I’m so fed up I could scream!”

Leaning back in his chair, Zhang Yi sighed heavily. “At this rate, my shelter might not hold out much longer.”

Hearing Zhang Yi's complaints, the three other faction leaders felt a twinge of satisfaction. Misery loves company, after all.

Was it a trick of the light, or did Bian Junwu's gaze briefly flicker toward Zhang Yi after that statement?

With those sunglasses obscuring his eyes, it was impossible to tell. Perhaps it was just an illusion.

Chapter 453: Seizing Command Authority

Among the five major factions, the Followers of the Snow God were the last to arrive. However, it wasn't their leader, Yuan Kongye, who came but rather the High Priest, Zheng Yixian.

No one found this unusual. After all, Yuan Kongye typically didn't manage the sect's affairs, especially as a young woman in her twenties, whose administrative skills were not as seasoned as Zheng Yixian's. Thus, it was natural for Zheng Yixian to represent the sect at this meeting.

Zheng Yixian politely greeted Bian Junwu before finding a seat.

Once all five factions had gathered, Bian Junwu silently rolled up his sleeves and glanced at his watch.

"Good. No one's late," he said, his voice as cold as ice, sending a chill through the room.

He placed both arms heavily on the table, his gaze sweeping over everyone present.

"The zombie outbreak in Tianhai City is a crisis for which all of you bear undeniable responsibility!"

His words instantly made the room tense, faces growing serious.

Zhang Yi frowned, a faint smirk playing at the corners of his mouth, while Xiao Honglian folded her arms and said mockingly, "Oh? So the envoy from Jiangnan District has come just to push blame onto us?"

Bian Junwu responded with a cold chuckle.

“Push blame? Do you even understand the purpose of these shelters?”

“I won’t dwell on the Followers of the Snow God since they’re a private organization,” he continued.

“But as for the Xi family, you either took over official shelters or inherited a large portion of their resources!”

“The purpose of these shelters is to maintain stability during citywide crises!”

His mocking tone intensified.

“You’ve seized these prime resources but refuse to shoulder the responsibility of protecting the city. If that’s not incompetence, then what is?”

Xiao Honglian’s face turned red with embarrassment and anger, leaving her momentarily speechless.

She understood the true purpose of the shelters: to preserve as many lives as possible. However, over time, they had long forgotten this mission, focusing instead on securing more benefits for themselves.

The veteran Wei Dinghai interjected smoothly, “Mr. Bian, that’s easy for you to say. Do you think we don’t want to maintain stability in Tianhai City?”

“But this zombie wave is enormous, sudden, and already beyond our control! Zombies are wreaking havoc everywhere.”

“With the limited forces we have, it’s impossible to handle this crisis. Unlike Jiangnan District, we don’t have advanced weaponry or the nation’s elite military corps at our disposal.”

Bian Junwu's smirk grew wider at these words. He even crossed his arms and let out a loud, unrestrained laugh.

“Hahaha!”

“Then,” he said, his tone growing icier, “if you lack the ability to handle this crisis, from now on, you’ll have to obey my orders!”

“I will take command of this zombie crisis, and all factions must follow my instructions unconditionally!”

The leaders’ expressions shifted repeatedly, with a sharp glint flashing through Zhang Yi’s eyes.

Unconditionally follow someone else’s commands?

Impossible!

Even if it was Jiangnan District, he couldn’t accept that. Allowing others to control their actions opened the door to potential sacrifices.

“That’s something we can’t agree to,” Zhang Yi said.

“Even if Jiangnan District is the superior authority, expecting your small squad to command all of us is an insult. Unless you deploy a full force, it won’t happen.”

The faction leaders echoed his sentiment. They couldn’t stomach handing over power to a small, unfamiliar team. If it were a full deployment, they might have begrudgingly complied.

Bian Junwu sneered.

“Oh? So you’re saying I’m not qualified, is that it?”

Xiao Honglian scoffed, and though the others remained silent, their expressions spoke volumes.

Even if Jiangnan District's squad was formidable, commanding the five major factions was beyond their reach.

Bian Junwu replied, "Fine, but with your strength alone, can you resolve this crisis?"

Silence.

The constant zombie waves and rat swarm attacks had left them overwhelmed. None dared to guarantee success, as the full scale of the crisis remained unknown.

Bian Junwu mocked, "You can't protect Tianhai City, and now zombies are spreading to nearby cities, threatening other civilians."

"Yet, you cling to your paltry power, unwilling to let go."

"Let me remind you!"

Bian Junwu slammed the table, making everyone jump.

"Tianhai City isn't your private property! With the nation still standing, Jiangnan District remains the highest authority here!"

Standing up, Bian Junwu towered over them. Though lean, he radiated an intimidating military aura, the likes of which Zhang Yi had only felt from Ling Feng before.

"I represent Jiangnan District. My words are the will of Jiangnan District!" he declared.

“If you refuse to follow my orders, you’ll face consequences you can’t bear!”

Zhang Yi frowned but stayed silent.

With only a handful of people under his command, ceding control posed minimal loss to him. However, surrendering authority entirely would endanger him and his group.

Xiao Honglian laughed coldly.

“And if we refuse, will you send troops to eliminate us?”

Though scared, she knew this negotiation was about leverage. She had to push back to secure their interests.

Power, once surrendered, would be nearly impossible to reclaim.

Her concern wasn’t unfounded—ceding power risked becoming a vassal of Jiangnan District, losing all autonomy.

Bian Junwu turned his sunglasses toward Xiao Honglian, staring silently for a long moment.

Xiao Honglian glared back.

“Trying to scare me?”

Bian Junwu finally broke his silence.

“Do you think the situation isn’t severe enough?”

“Do you believe this crisis only concerns Tianhai City?”

“Let me make this clear: our orders from the higher-ups are twofold.”

“First, cooperate with local forces to resolve the zombie crisis and prevent its spread to other cities.”

“Second, if containment proves impossible and the zombie threat can’t be resolved...”

He paused deliberately, sitting back down.

“...then Tianhai City can be abandoned.”

Chapter 454: Tianhai City is Full of Trash—Except Me

Bian Junwu’s voice was calm yet icy, sending chills through the hearts of the five faction leaders.

“So, it’s come to this, has it?”

Zhang Yi couldn’t help but swallow hard, his expression grave. This outcome wasn’t entirely unexpected.

If Tianhai City’s zombie crisis became too severe, threatening nearby cities, Jiangnan District’s best course of action would undoubtedly be to cut their losses.

It was like treating a festering wound—when medicine fails, surgery becomes the only option.

In this scenario, Bian Junwu’s investigation team was the “medicine.” But if the medicine failed, the “surgery” would be...

Zhang Yi’s thoughts trembled at the implications.

It meant Tianhai City would be abandoned entirely!

That was an outcome he absolutely couldn't accept.

As the gravity of Bian Junwu's words sank in, the others realized the same thing. Silence fell over the room.

Even Xiao Honglian, known for her fiery temper, couldn't find a rebuttal.

After all, Jiangnan District had the power to wipe them out with the press of a button.

Bian Junwu, satisfied with their reactions, said coldly, "From this moment on, all armed forces within Tianhai City must unconditionally follow our command!"

Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, and Xing Tian exchanged complex looks, fully aware they lacked the leverage to challenge Jiangnan District.

But then Zhang Yi spoke up, his voice calm yet firm.

"I'm willing to support your operation," he said, drawing everyone's attention.

"However, as you've stated, the investigation team came here because local forces couldn't handle the zombie and rat swarm crises. That's why you had to intervene and take command."

"But what if we can handle the problems in our respective territories ourselves?"

A sly smile played on Zhang Yi's lips.

His words stunned the entire room, all eyes now fixed on him.

“Zhang Yi, what’s that supposed to mean? Don’t tell me you think your little shelter can handle such a massive zombie and rat swarm threat!” Xiao Honglian sneered, disbelief written all over her face.

Wei Dinghai leaned back in his chair and added mockingly, “Ah, the arrogance of youth! Zhang Yi, don’t let your ambition drag us all down.”

Even Xing Tian chimed in, “Didn’t you say your situation was dire? Stop bluffing and just listen to them.”

Zhang Yi’s grin widened as he replied lazily, “You think I’m joking?”

“No, I’m afraid not. In fact, the zombie and mutated rat crises in the area surrounding our shelter have already been resolved.”

His confident statement left everyone dumbfounded.

This wasn’t child’s play. Zhang Yi’s tone and demeanor made it clear he wasn’t bluffing.

If he was telling the truth, it meant that while the rest of them were desperately battling zombies and rats, Zhang Yi had been calmly watching from the sidelines. RÅN OBĚŠ

The faction leaders’ expressions turned as sour as if they’d just swallowed something vile.

“I don’t believe you! How could your tiny group manage that?” Xiao Honglian slammed her fist on the table, glaring at Zhang Yi.

She desperately wanted him to admit he was joking or that his shelter had also suffered heavy losses. After all, her own base had been devastated.

Why should he get off easy?

Even Bian Junwu looked at Zhang Yi with curiosity.

Zhang Yi maintained his composed smile and said, “I’m being truthful. If you don’t believe me, you’re welcome to investigate for yourselves.”

Bian Junwu asked, “How did you accomplish it? I’m genuinely curious.”

Everyone was watching Zhang Yi now. Despite their frustration, they were eager to learn how he had dealt with the zombies and rats.

Zhang Yi’s smile faded as he intertwined his fingers and leaned forward.

“Here’s how it happened,” he began seriously.

“Zombies are drawn to humans as food, so they naturally gather where people are concentrated. In Tianhai City, where do you think the most people are? Obviously, in the areas you all control.”

“My shelter, on the other hand, is sparsely populated, with fewer than ten people in total. It’s located on the outskirts, far from the city, which naturally attracts fewer zombies.”

He frowned slightly before continuing, “That said, our battles with the zombies were still brutal.”

“After extensive observation, I discovered that the zombie horde was being directed by a Zombie King. The Zombie King is intelligent and capable of creating new zombies.”

“Only by killing the Zombie King can you destroy an entire zombie nest.”

“As for the mutated rats, they share a symbiotic relationship with the zombies. Once the zombies are eliminated, the rats lose their purpose and stop attacking humans.”

“So, we took a gamble and entered the subway tunnels, using every weapon we’d obtained from West Hill Base.”

“After several days of fierce fighting, we finally killed the Zombie King, resolving the zombie crisis in our area.”

Zhang Yi’s explanation was a mix of truth and omission. While most of what he said was accurate, he deliberately left out how he had used his spatial abilities to flood the subway tunnels with seawater from the East Sea, freezing the zombies in place.

Revealing this secret would only invite pressure from the other factions and Jiangnan District to use his abilities to help them.

But Zhang Yi didn’t believe that flooding the subway would completely eradicate the zombie threat. Powerful creatures like the Bronze Armored Zombies were unlikely to drown, let alone the more cunning Zombie Kings.

Rather than risk his shelter’s safety and resources, Zhang Yi chose to let the other factions exhaust themselves fighting the zombies.

After hearing his account, the others were filled with both envy and frustration.

It was true that Zhang Yi’s shelter had a geographical advantage, being in a remote, rural area with few subway lines passing through.

Still, they couldn’t replicate his success.

Bian Junwu studied Zhang Yi with an intrigued expression.

He thought to himself, This Zhang Yi may have the smallest faction, but he’s the first to resolve the zombie crisis in his area. Truly a hidden talent.

Chapter 455: Testing Strength

Zhang Yi smiled as he said to Bian Junwu, “Currently, West Hill District and Lu River District are under my control and stable.”

“So, according to your proposal, if local forces can maintain their own stability, does that mean they’ll be granted a certain degree of autonomy?”

He added with a diplomatic tone, “Of course, we’re more than happy to cooperate with the Investigation Team. If there’s anything we can help with, feel free to ask. As long as it’s within our capacity, we won’t hold back.”

“However, at this stage, we still hope to focus our energy on our own territories. After all, you all know that our numbers are limited, and we simply can’t spare forces for operations elsewhere.”

His words were measured and respectful. He maintained Bian Junwu’s dignity while making his stance clear:

If the Jiangnan District Investigation Team needs assistance, we’re willing to help—but only because we choose to. This is about giving Jiangnan District face, not because we can’t handle our own problems.

Bian Junwu stared at Zhang Yi for a long moment before replying in a deep voice, “You’ve done well. This proves that your team has remarkable wisdom and strength.”

“In the upcoming operations, we’ll need to rely on your power.”

Zhang Yi smiled faintly, took two seconds to think, and replied, “If needed, feel free to give the orders.”

He was willing to offer Jiangnan District respect. Besides, Zhang Yi didn’t want Tianhai City to be completely destroyed. As long as his own interests weren’t compromised, he could assist Bian Junwu in dealing with the zombie horde and the mutant rat swarm.

Bian Junwu nodded. “Then I’ll thank you in advance.”

From that moment, everyone understood that Zhang Yi had become a unique presence in Tianhai City.

Other forces sought the Jiangnan District's help because they couldn't resolve their problems. But Zhang Yi, acting as an ally, offered assistance. The difference in status was significant.

"Now," Bian Junwu said, placing both hands on the table, "from this moment on, I need your unconditional cooperation with our operations!"

"Start by sharing all the information you have!"

"And for now, regardless of any past grudges, put them aside!"

"Even if you want to fight, wait until after we've resolved the current crisis!"

Zhang Yi maintained a relaxed smile. With his own strength intact and the problems in his territory already resolved, he feared no one.

The other factions, however, weren't so fortunate. Struggling with their own crises, they had no time or energy to challenge others.

As a result, everyone tacitly agreed to this arrangement. For now, they would cooperate until the zombie threat was eliminated.

"Next, let's discuss how to handle the crisis of the zombies and mutant giant rats," Zheng Yixian said, frowning deeply.

The Followers of the Snow God had suffered the most significant losses in this crisis.

To date, at least five thousand of their members had died—either devoured or infected, forcing them to be sent back to the Snow God's kingdom.

If this continued, the foundation of their faith would be obliterated.

At that moment, commotion erupted outside.

Everyone instinctively turned to look.

Wei Dinghai frowned deeply as he heard Chen Jingguan's voice.

He walked to the window, flicked a finger, and the frost on the glass instantly melted, revealing the scene outside.

Something was clearly wrong—Chen Jingguan was in a standoff with members of the Investigation Team, and the atmosphere was tense.

“What’s that guy up to now?” Wei Dinghai muttered, his expression darkening as he glanced at Bian Junwu.

Noticing Wei Dinghai’s gaze, Bian Junwu asked indifferently, “What’s the problem?”

“Nothing, just some minor disagreement among my men,” Wei Dinghai replied.

Xing Tian chuckled. “Oh, a minor disagreement?”

Bian Junwu dismissed the issue with a wave. “Let them deal with it themselves. We have more important matters to discuss.”

Clearly, he had great confidence in his subordinates.

Everyone returned to the table to resume their discussion.

Meanwhile, outside the Central Building, Chen Jingguan stood with a grim expression, glaring at Wu Di and Kong Sheng.

“So what if they’re from Jiangnan District? What’s so special about them? Back in the day, I served in the Navy myself,” Chen Jingguan sneered.

“If you’ve got the guts, come fight me one-on-one! But don’t go crying to your superiors if you lose!”

Chen Jingguan had been simmering with frustration. Once a prominent figure in Tianhai City’s upper class, he’d risen rapidly in the military and, after awakening his superpowers, became the second-in-command of Chaoyu Base. 然而如今

Yet the Jiangnan District Investigation Team treated him like an insignificant nobody, and he couldn’t stand their disdain.

Standing on the steps, Wu Di and Kong Sheng looked down at him, smirking as though he weren’t worth their time.

Wu Di, hands in his pockets, remarked to Kong Sheng, “Look at that—he’s actually throwing a tantrum!”

Kong Sheng sneered, “Useless people only know how to rage.”

Wu Di laughed. “But he’s issued a challenge. If we don’t accept, won’t it seem like we’re scared?”

Kong Sheng nodded. “I won’t let these small-town nobodies think Jiangnan District is on their level.”

Their mocking banter belittled the local powers of Tianhai City, with Chen Jingguan treated as the lowest of the low.

“You’re too arrogant! We’re all superhumans—you’re not necessarily stronger than us!” Chen Jingguan retorted, pointing at them.

Kong Sheng squinted and stepped down the stairs. “Fine. Let me show you the difference between a Jiangnan District superhuman and someone like you!”

As the fight loomed, onlookers from various factions gathered, eager to see just how strong these outsiders were.

Chen Jingguan smirked inwardly. He had chosen Kong Sheng deliberately, knowing the latter was an Enhancement-Type superhuman.

Enhancement-Type abilities, though common, were purely physical in nature. Kong Sheng might excel at close combat, but Chen Jingguan’s ability was a Special-Type power: Rubber.

Unless Kong Sheng’s attacks exceeded his defensive threshold, they would have no effect. And reaching that threshold would require firepower akin to artillery.

Chapter 456: A Battle of One Move

The duel between Kong Sheng and Chen Jingguan was inevitable. Both intended to deliver a sharp warning to the other.

The onlookers had no intention of intervening, either.

Although Kong Sheng’s tone was full of disdain, his eyes were focused and serious, showing no sign of underestimating his opponent. This battle wasn’t just personal—it was about defending the prestige of the Jiangnan District. Victory was non-negotiable.

Both men, however, knew the unwritten rule: they couldn’t go so far as to take each other’s life. Doing so would only strain relations between their factions and undermine future cooperation.

Kong Sheng raised his hands in a professional combat stance. At the same time, his body began to glow with a silvery-gray sheen, and his skin appeared to transform into steel.

Kong Sheng, an Enhancement-Type superhuman, wielded the ability Steel Tempering, allowing him to harden his body like steel. Both his defensive and offensive capabilities were exceptional.

When Chen Jingguan saw Kong Sheng's ability confirmed his suspicion, a smirk spread across his face.

From a distance, Uncle You observed and muttered, "That kid from Jiangnan District is in trouble. Chen's ability is strange—it completely counters close combat."

He spoke from experience, having once suffered a defeat at Chen Jingguan's hands. Without outside help, he might've been strangled to death by Chen.

Liang Yue glanced at Kong Sheng's stance and remarked, "The other guy's no amateur, either. You can tell by his breathing and movements."

The outcome was uncertain. Battles between superhumans depended not only on their raw strength but also on their adaptability during the fight.

Chen Jingguan gestured for Kong Sheng to attack first, a taunt laced with confidence.

Kong Sheng scoffed. Though he knew the risk of exposing vulnerabilities by attacking first, he wasn't the least bit intimidated.

In the next instant, he charged at Chen Jingguan like a whirlwind.

Whoosh!

In a blur, Kong Sheng vanished from his original position and reappeared behind Chen Jingguan. His speed was so astounding that many onlookers didn't even see how he moved.

With a thunderous kick, he aimed directly at Chen Jingguan's back.

Despite the speed and force, Kong Sheng showed restraint, avoiding Chen's head—if the blow had landed there, it could've been fatal.

But when Kong Sheng's leg struck Chen's back, he felt no resistance. Instead, Chen's body bent unnaturally, as if boneless.

“What?”

Kong Sheng frowned, surprised.

In the next moment, Chen Jingguan's body twisted like a snake, wrapping around Kong Sheng's leg.

Before Kong Sheng could pull away, Chen's rubbery form coiled up his thigh and around his body, binding him tightly.

In mere seconds, Kong Sheng was wrapped like a fly in a spider's web.

Chen Jingguan's distorted body looped around him five or six times. It was almost impossible to believe that a human could twist like that.

Kong Sheng struggled to break free, pouring his strength into escaping, but every move was quickly neutralized by Chen.

The more Kong Sheng resisted, the tighter Chen Jingguan's grip became.

Crack! Crack!

The sound of steel-like bones creaking under immense pressure made everyone wince.

“Stop struggling. If you keep this up, I might accidentally crush your bones,” Chen Jingguan teased with a grin, his head twisting unnaturally to look Kong Sheng in the eye. ¶

“No matter how strong you are, once I’ve got you wrapped up, there’s no escape. Admit defeat!”

Kong Sheng responded with a cold smile.

His right hand suddenly straightened, transforming into a blade-like edge, and he slashed at Chen Jingguan’s torso.

Yet even his steel-strengthened hand was ineffective. The attack merely tore Chen’s clothes, exposing his slick, rubber-like skin underneath.

“I told you! Enhancement-Types can only surrender to me!” Chen Jingguan laughed triumphantly.

“No matter how arrogant you are, don’t underestimate us!” Kong Sheng sneered.

Completely bound and immobilized, Kong Sheng seemed helpless, and many of the onlookers believed the fight was over.

Even Uncle You swallowed nervously, shaking his head. “It’s decided.”

But just then, Kong Sheng turned his head toward Chen Jingguan, opened his mouth, and spat out a blade-like object straight at Chen’s left eye.

Thunk!

Blood splattered everywhere.

“Aaaaagh!”

Chen Jingguan screamed in pain. The sharp stab to his eye broke his concentration, and his grip on Kong Sheng loosened.

Seizing the moment, Kong Sheng exerted all his strength and flung Chen Jingguan away.

Chen staggered to his feet, clutching his bleeding eye, glaring at Kong Sheng with venomous hatred.

Kong Sheng laughed heartily. "I thought your eyes could turn to rubber too! Guess not."

As he spoke, he licked the blood on his lips and swallowed it.

The blade that struck Chen's eye had been Kong Sheng's own tongue, hardened and sharpened like a knife.

Uncle You gasped. "He can even enhance his tongue into a weapon! That's how he pierced Chen's eye!"

The shocking turn of events left everyone stunned.

They had believed Chen Jingguan had the fight in the bag, only for Kong Sheng to snatch victory in the most unexpected way.

Chen, still clutching his wounded eye, gritted his teeth. "How did you know my weak point?"

Kong Sheng smirked. "Your body can turn to rubber, but if your eyes followed suit, you'd be blind, wouldn't you?"

Eyes rely on capturing and processing light. If they were to deform like rubber, light would distort, rendering the person effectively blind.

Kong Sheng had taken a gamble—and it paid off.

“Go patch yourself up before you bleed out,” Kong Sheng said with a laugh. “In this cold, injuries are no joke.”

Though unwilling to admit defeat, Chen Jingguan knew the truth: he had lost.

Next time, he thought bitterly, he would take more care not to expose his weakness.

For now, he limped back to his vehicle to treat his injuries.

The battle had ended quickly, with the Investigation Team securing a clean and decisive victory.

Chapter 457: At the Negotiating Table

Kong Sheng defeated Chen Jingguan in less than a minute. His overwhelming strength left everyone present with grim expressions.

Chen Jingguan was the second-in-command of Chaoyu Base, and his combat abilities were well-known. For many, like Uncle You—a fellow Enhancement-Type superhuman—the question of whether they could defeat Chen left them uneasy. Liang Yue believed he might stand a chance, but not without difficulty.

This gap wasn’t just about personal strength; it was about strategy. Fighters from the Jiangnan District were battle-hardened veterans who had crawled out of mountains of corpses. Their combat experience was leagues beyond the locals.

After defeating Chen Jingguan, Kong Sheng, still itching for a fight, turned to the onlookers and said, “If anyone else thinks they’re strong enough, feel free to come challenge me!”

It was clear to everyone: Kong Sheng and his team were here to establish dominance.

But after witnessing Chen's swift defeat, no one wanted to be the next sacrificial lamb. One misstep could cost their lives.

When no one stepped forward, Kong Sheng shrugged with boredom and lazily turned back toward his team.

In the second-floor conference room, Wei Dinghai frowned at the sound of Chen Jingguan's scream outside. Still, he refrained from leaving to check, as Bian Junwu and the leaders of the major factions were deep in discussion about their next steps.

Each faction shared their intelligence on the zombie and rat hordes, exchanging crucial information.

Only Zhang Yi kept the methods he used to eradicate the hordes in his territory to himself. Nevertheless, the rest of the factions shared freely, knowing that their common goal was to eliminate the zombies.

If they couldn't deal with the hordes, Tianhai City would face annihilation. A single button press from Jinling would release the Lover's Death

weapon, erasing Tianhai City from the map.

No one could afford that price.

After the exchange, Bian Junwu placed both hands on the table and began issuing directives.

"Good. I've reviewed the intelligence you've provided, combined it with what we already know, and I have a plan."

The room grew silent with anticipation.

The Jiangnan District's intelligence network was leagues ahead of theirs. Everyone was curious to know just how much information the district's headquarters in Jinling had on Tianhai City.

Adjusting his thick glasses, Bian Junwu addressed the room in a measured tone:

“Our investigation confirms that zombies are drawn to densely populated areas. The larger the crowd, the more zombies converge.”

“The rat hordes, being symbiotic with the zombies, follow their movements. So, if we eliminate the zombies, the rats will naturally scatter.”

“Furthermore, the zombies display a consistent pattern of behavior. This strongly suggests they’re being directed by a Zombie King.”

“Of course, ‘Zombie King’ is just a designation—it could be a powerful zombie or a superhuman.”

“The zombie horde’s numbers are staggering, allowing them to sustain simultaneous attacks across multiple locations in Tianhai City.”

Raising his voice, Bian Junwu continued, “Based on this, we can conclude that simply eliminating the surface hordes will achieve nothing.”

“To resolve the crisis at its root, we must destroy the so-called Zombie King.”

“So, starting now, I need each of your factions to relocate the majority of your populations underground to avoid being overrun.”

“Then, concentrate your elite forces and focus on taking down the Zombie King.”

Bian Junwu’s plan called for drastic sacrifices. He expected Qingfu Base to abandon its steel refinery, Yangsheng Base to relinquish its oil refinery, and Chaoyu Base to give up its port.

The leaders of the three factions exchanged hesitant glances but eventually nodded in agreement.

Previously, they had been reluctant to abandon surface resources, fearing it would compromise their future survival. Additionally, even if they retreated, the zombie horde’s threat would remain unresolved.

Now, with the Jiangnan District stepping in to unify command, they felt more confident.

After all, everyone was struggling to protect themselves; no one could exploit the situation to attack others.

As long as the horde was destroyed, the resources and territories would remain theirs. After all, zombies had no interest in resources—only human flesh.

With a unified front, many obstacles became easier to resolve.

At this point, the High Priest of the Followers of the Snow God broke the silence.

“What about us?”

Zheng Yixian frowned, clearly displeased. “The other factions have underground shelters and high-level bunkers, but the Followers of the Snow God have nothing!”

“Mr. Bian, you can’t play favorites here!”

Bian Junwu turned to Zheng Yixian, his expression cold.

“You have thousands of followers in your sect. Protecting them is your responsibility, not ours.”

“Do you expect us to protect your disciples for you?”

Zheng Yixian’s face darkened, but before he could retort, Bian Junwu continued, “We can only formulate strategies based on your current resources. If you lack the awareness to prepare, then you’ll simply be swallowed by the zombie horde.”

It was clear Bian Junwu didn't care about the sect's survival—his priority was stopping the zombie crisis and preventing the virus from spreading to surrounding regions.

Zheng Yixian gritted his teeth, gripping the armrest of his chair. "So, you're just going to watch as our people are sacrificed?"

"If the other factions retreat underground, the Followers of the Snow God will undoubtedly become the zombies' primary target!"

"How will our followers survive?"

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, a playful smirk tugging at his lips.

Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, and Xing Tian were visibly indifferent.

The sect's survival wasn't their concern.

Xiao Honglian even sneered, "You've taken in so many followers, most of whom can't fight. If you couldn't handle it, you shouldn't have recruited them in the first place!"

"Now that there's a problem, you expect others to clean up after you?"

She had long been irritated by the sect and seized the opportunity to mock them.

Zheng Yixian glared at Xiao Honglian, murderous intent flickering in his eyes.

Just then, Bian Junwu broke the tension.

"The Followers of the Snow God still have their uses. If you can't hide effectively, you can serve another purpose."

Chapter 458: Visiting Your Home

Bian Junwu's words gave Zheng Yixian a sliver of hope.

“Oh? What’s your plan?”

Bian Junwu cast a cold glance at him.

“I can’t tell you right now; it’s classified. But in no more than three days, I’ll give you an answer!”

“For now, return to your respective posts and ensure your people are ready according to my orders. I’ll notify you of any actions going forward.”

Bian Junwu's mysterious attitude left everyone wanting to ask more, but he waved them off, signaling the end of the conversation. Helpless, the others had no choice but to comply.

After all, he was a special envoy from the Jiangnan District, and they couldn’t afford to offend the region’s overwhelming power.

The group rose and exited the conference room.

Zhang Yi, with his hands in his pockets, was about to leave when Bian Junwu called out to him.

“Zhang Yi, stay back.”

The others exchanged curious glances, unsure what Bian Junwu wanted to discuss privately. However, considering Zhang Yi was the only one who had resolved the zombie crisis in his domain, it was understandable why Bian Junwu wanted a word with him.

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow and smiled. “Mr. Bian, what can I do for you?”

Bian Junwu approached him, his pale and gaunt face showing a rare smile.

“May I visit your place?”

The unexpected request caught Zhang Yi off guard.

Frowning instinctively, Zhang Yi’s first thought was to refuse.

Even knowing Bian Junwu came from the Jiangnan District, Zhang Yi’s habitual caution made him wary of letting strangers into his shelter.

He smiled and replied, “There’s nothing special about my place. The other major bases are much better. My shelter’s conditions are pretty average.”

Bian Junwu gave him a meaningful look and slowly said, “What? Are you saying I’m not welcome?”

Zhang Yi quickly raised his hands, a cheerful smile spreading across his face. “Of course not! Not at all!”

Bian Junwu said, “You don’t need to be so tense. I mean no harm to you. There’s no grudge between us, so why the suspicion?”

Zhang Yi merely chuckled without answering.

Better safe than sorry.

He had long learned to assume the worst in others and remained cautious around anyone unfamiliar.

Bian Junwu chuckled as well.

“I just want to have a proper conversation with you about how you eliminated those zombie hordes.”

He leaned in and whispered, “Besides, I have intelligence you’re unaware of.”

This piqued Zhang Yi’s interest.

The Jiangnan District’s intelligence was undoubtedly far more comprehensive than his own.

Since the apocalypse began, Zhang Yi understood the critical importance of information for survival and warfare, and he’d gone to great lengths to gather whatever intelligence he could.

After glancing at Bian Junwu, Zhang Yi thought for a moment before smiling and nodding.

“Alright, since you’re so eager to visit, I can’t very well refuse a guest!”

Given Bian Junwu’s high-ranking position, Zhang Yi figured it best not to strain relations unnecessarily.

Bian Junwu followed Zhang Yi as they walked side by side, his attitude toward Zhang Yi noticeably different from how he treated others.

This disparity didn’t provoke any dissatisfaction from the likes of Xiao Honglian and the rest.

Despite their animosity toward Zhang Yi, they couldn’t deny their grudging respect for him.

Rising from obscurity with just a small shelter and a handful of teammates, Zhang Yi had carved out a piece of Tianhai City in the post-apocalyptic chaos, standing toe-to-toe with them as a powerful contender.

The recent zombie crisis had devastated everyone else, leaving Zhang Yi’s domain untouched. If that wasn’t proof of strength, what was?

Outside, the tension remained palpable.

Chen Jingguan, one eye bandaged, looked almost comically disheveled. The scene drew some amusement from the group as they exited.

Wei Dinghai's face darkened slightly. Though he had expected this outcome, seeing his deputy injured stirred a flicker of anger.

"Chen Jingguan, what happened to your eye?" Wei Dinghai asked in a low voice.

Chen Jingguan glanced at Wu Di and Kong Sheng, who were grinning smugly.

Lowering his head, Chen Jingguan muttered, "Leader, it's nothing. I just sparred with the investigation team and took a minor hit."

Losing was bad enough; complaining to his leader in front of so many powerful figures would only add to the humiliation.

Besides, Chen Jingguan knew now wasn't the time to provoke the Jiangnan District's team.

Wei Dinghai glanced at Wu Di and Kong Sheng but said nothing. Instead, he patted Chen Jingguan on the shoulder, preparing to take him back and focus on matters at Chaoyu Base.

Bian Junwu shot Wu Di and Kong Sheng a sharp look.

"Didn't I tell you not to clash with them?" His tone was cold as always but lacked anger.

Wu Di grinned and replied, "They were clearly not convinced of our strength. We had to show them what we're capable of. That way, they won't drag us down during future operations."

Pushing up his sunglasses, Bian Junwu said flatly, “Don’t do it again.”

Wu Di and Kong Sheng laughed, “Understood!”

They knew their captain well. Though he reprimanded them verbally, such power plays were essential for establishing dominance.

Without strength, why would anyone respect them?

Zhang Yi remained silent throughout, unbothered by the situation. None of it significantly affected him, and he had no need to prove himself.

As for Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, and Xing Tian, they quietly reevaluated their strategies.

Chen Jingguan’s defeat was a stark reminder of the investigation team’s formidable prowess. Moving forward, they resolved to tread carefully in their interactions.

Just as the various factions were about to disperse, a voice suddenly called out from a second-floor window.

“There’s a zombie horde approaching!”

Zhang Yi looked up to see a tall, muscular man in his thirties, clad in black combat gear, holding an unusual black sniper rifle.

It was Qi Guangming, the sharpshooter of the investigation team.

As soon as Qi Guangming spoke, everyone noticed the change in the atmosphere.

From the distance, an overwhelming swarm of zombies began emerging in droves.

At a glance, there were at least several thousand.

Xing Tian's expression darkened as he growled, "Our gathering must've attracted these damn creatures!"

The zombies crawled over the ruins, their eyes glowing with bloodlust as they spotted the crowd of survivors.

"Roar!!"

Their guttural howls filled the air as they broke into a frenzied charge toward the group.

Chapter 459: Oblivion

As the zombie horde approached, the crowd's expressions revealed disgust but not fear.

After all, this group comprised Tianhai City's top fighters. Such a small number of zombies posed no real threat to them.

However, everyone was preoccupied with their own base matters and didn't want to waste time here.

"What rotten luck! Zombies are everywhere! Has Tianhai City become their lair?" Xiao Honglian cursed, her brows furrowed in anger.

The group prepared for battle, ready to spend some time wiping out the zombies completely.

Wei Dinghai reminded Bian Junwu and his team, "We must kill every single one of them. Otherwise, they'll carry intelligence about us back, and the next wave will be even harder to handle!"

“Oh? Is that so?” Bian Junwu said nonchalantly.

He suddenly descended the steps, reaching up to remove his sunglasses as he walked.

When he finally removed them, the crowd noticed that his eyes weren’t the usual black or sky-blue hues of foreigners but an eerie grayish-white.

Yet, within that grayish-white hue glimmered a peculiar, sickly light. It wasn’t the dullness of cataracts, but its unsettling glow struck a deep chord, leaving those who looked into them profoundly shaken.

Bian Junwu stepped to the forefront.

Everyone immediately understood—this captain of the Jiangnan District investigation team was about to make his move.

Zhang Yi’s eyes gleamed with curiosity. He was eager to see just how strong this captain was.

The zombie horde roared as it closed in, now less than 500 meters away.

Their blood-red eyes and frostbitten, rotting flesh became clearly visible.

Bian Junwu stared ahead and murmured softly, “Oblivion.”

The next moment, an intense white light engulfed the space before them.

The light was so dazzling that it erased all other scenery, leaving only Bian Junwu’s tall, imposing silhouette.

Instinctively, Zhang Yi raised his hand to shield his eyes, glancing around at his surroundings.

The only things visible were a few people standing close to him and their faint shadows. Everything else had vanished.

Meanwhile, the massive zombie horde before them—thousands strong—disintegrated into dust in an instant, scattered cleanly into nothingness.

After what felt like an eternity, the light gradually faded, and the surrounding scenery reappeared.

Zhang Yi, Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, and the others looked around, dazed and at a loss for words.

Moments ago, everyone had been blinded.

Suddenly, Wei Dinghai raised his right hand and pointed forward, his voice trembling in disbelief.

“Look... Look over there!”

The crowd followed his gaze.

Not a trace of the zombie horde remained—only shattered dust particles, swept away by the wind.

Zhang Yi’s pupils contracted sharply as he struggled to comprehend what he was seeing.

“Those thousands of zombies... were they all wiped out?”

Eliminating thousands of zombies in a single blow—such a feat was nothing short of extraordinary.

Zhang Yi had encountered many powerful superhumans before, such as Ling Feng and Xiao Honglian.

While they were undeniably strong, their abilities still operated within the realm of understanding.

But Bian Junwu?

His power defied logic entirely.

One glance was enough to obliterate thousands of zombies into dust.

What kind of terrifying ability was this?

There was a time when Zhang Yi believed that after absorbing the powers of multiple superhumans, he might not be the strongest, but he was among the elite.

Yet today, Bian Junwu had taught him a humbling lesson.

If he were to face Bian Junwu in battle, could even his Dimensional Gate withstand such devastating power?

The silence at the scene was deafening. No one dared to speak or even breathe too heavily.

After a long pause, Wu Di remarked to Kong Sheng, "The captain told us to hold back, yet he just went all out!"

Kong Sheng nodded, adding, "Maybe he realized you were right. Only by showcasing overwhelming strength can he ensure everyone will obey his commands willingly."

They weren't wrong.

Before, Wei Dinghai, Xiao Honglian, and Xing Tian obeyed Bian Junwu mainly out of fear of the Jiangnan District's power.

Now, having witnessed his might firsthand, any trace of defiance had been completely extinguished.

Bian Junwu slowly put his sunglasses back on.

But before long, he suddenly clutched his mouth and broke into a violent coughing fit.

Vice-Captain Baili Changqing approached him, concerned.

“Captain, you should’ve let us handle these pests. There was no need for you to act personally!”

Bian Junwu straightened up, his voice icy.

“Everyone’s busy. There’s no time to waste here.”

Zhang Yi noticed how Bian Junwu clenched his right fist and tucked it into the pocket of his black coat.

“It seems like he’s not in good health,” Zhang Yi thought, quickly deducing that Bian Junwu’s condition wasn’t normal.

With the Jiangnan District’s resources, any ordinary illness should’ve been curable.

Could it be an incurable disease? Or perhaps an injury linked to his superhuman ability?

Zhang Yi’s mind raced with speculation.

Bian Junwu turned to the stunned crowd and said, “Alright, everyone. You can go back now. Stay in touch and be ready to act immediately when I contact you.”

Wei Dinghai and the others hastily nodded, their tones now reverent and deferential.

As the crowd departed the central building, Zhang Yi could sense they were still grappling with the shock of Bian Junwu's power.

His ability was leagues above anything seen in Tianhai City.

With a cheerful smile, Zhang Yi approached Bian Junwu.

“Mr. Bian, are you feeling unwell? I have doctors at my shelter who could take a look.”

Bian Junwu chuckled faintly. “It’s nothing, just an old ailment. Rest will suffice.”

Zhang Yi’s heart skipped a beat.

“No need for a doctor?”

It seemed his suspicions were correct—this was likely an incurable condition or a permanent internal injury caused by Bian Junwu’s ability.

Deciding not to press the matter, Zhang Yi changed the subject.

“It’s quite cold here. Why don’t we all head to my place for a bit?”

Bian Junwu smiled and nodded. “That sounds good. I have plenty I want to discuss with you.”

Bian Junwu’s rare smile, reserved for Zhang Yi, startled not only Fatty Xu, Liang Yue, and Uncle You but also the members of the investigation team.

Even so, everyone boarded their vehicles, with Zhang Yi’s group leading the way toward the shelter.

In the investigation team's vehicle, Wu Di couldn't hold back his curiosity.

"Captain, why are you so nice to Zhang Yi? Is he your long-lost illegitimate son?"

The vehicle erupted in laughter.

Bian Junwu's lips twitched slightly, though his amusement was subtle.

He was used to Wu Di's playful antics and didn't take it to heart.

"He's no ordinary man," Bian Junwu said, his tone thoughtful. "I can sense that his strength is exceptional, far beyond the other faction leaders."

"This might just be a promising talent."

Chapter 460: Laying Cards on the Table

Hearing Bian Junwu's high praise for Zhang Yi, the other members of the investigation team couldn't hide their surprise.

When Bian Junwu referred to someone as a "promising candidate," it implied potential eligibility to join their elite ranks of superhumans.

Figures like Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, Xing Tian, and Zheng Yixian were merely under observation. The Jiangnan District's recruitment standards were notoriously stringent, prioritizing not just raw power but also loyalty and intellect. Strength alone wouldn't suffice.

Of course, this didn't mean that every member of the investigation team was stronger than Xiao Honglian and the others. Instead, as long-standing members of the Jiangnan District, their loyalty and reliability were assured. Recruiting from outside required far stricter criteria.

“Is he really that strong?”

“How can you tell if we’ve never even seen him fight?” asked Ye Jikang, the team’s demolition expert, leaning forward with curiosity.

“First, my instinct,” replied Bian Junwu.

“Second, experience and judgment. Despite their small team, they’ve risen to become one of the top five factions in Tianhai City. That alone suggests their superhumans are exceptional.”

“As the leader of his group, Zhang Yi must have the strongest overall capabilities. And, they were the only faction to completely resolve the zombie threat near their base—a clear indicator of their strength.”

A sly smile played across Bian Junwu’s lips.

Discovering Zhang Yi had unexpectedly added a layer of intrigue to this mission. For someone like Bian Junwu, whose own growth had plateaued at a high level, uncovering new talent had become one of his few remaining joys.

Baili Changqing laughed heartily.

“Ah, I see! As expected, you’re always thinking ahead, Captain.”

The cabin fell silent for a moment as everyone seemed lost in their thoughts, some of which were less than pleasant.

A few seconds later, Wu Di broke the tension with a grin.

“Interesting, interesting! Now I really want to spar with him!”

Bian Junwu raised an eyebrow.

“Wu Di, don’t underestimate him. As I understand, his ability counters yours.”

“Oh?” Wu Di replied, his expression showing mild defiance.

“Counters me? That makes it even more interesting! Captain, what’s his ability?”

“Something extremely rare, even among specialized abilities—spatial manipulation,” said Bian Junwu.

Gasps filled the vehicle.

“Spatial manipulation!” Baili Changqing’s eyes widened as he murmured,

“Even in the Jiangnan District, spatial abilities are incredibly rare. Their strategic value is off the charts!”

Spatial powers might not offer the most direct combat potential, but their utility in areas like storage and logistics made them invaluable to any team.

“No wonder you’re considering recruiting him!” Baili Changqing laughed.

Bian Junwu responded, “It’s just an idea. We’ll see how capable he truly is. Whether he’s willing to leave Tianhai City for the Jiangnan District is ultimately up to him.”

Zhang Yi was an unexpected find, but Bian Junwu’s primary objective remained the resolution of the zombie crisis.

Meanwhile, in the lead vehicle, Zhang Yi had enabled autopilot, allowing it to head toward the shelter while he discussed the Jiangnan District visitors with Liang Yue and the others.

“These people are leagues above any other faction we’ve encountered,” Liang Yue said.

“We should be cautious and respectful in our dealings with them. The military district's people demand a certain level of reverence.”

Bian Junwu's obliteration technique had left Zhang Yi utterly awestruck, offering him a clear sense of how formidable the Jiangnan District truly was.

Superhumans of Bian Junwu's caliber weren't likely in short supply within their ranks.

For now, Zhang Yi saw no harm in maintaining good relations with such a powerful force.

Sometimes, the smartest approach in life is knowing when to bow and when to stand tall.

Besides, Zhang Yi had noticed that Bian Junwu seemed to regard him with a trace of goodwill. While the source of this sentiment was unclear, it was undoubtedly a positive development.

Hours later, Zhang Yi arrived at his shelter with Bian Junwu and his team in tow.

The sight of the massive, luxurious villa left the Jiangnan District visitors momentarily stunned.

“I thought his shelter would be some underground bunker. Who knew it'd be a mansion?” said Kong Sheng, shaking his head in disbelief.

“This place is ridiculously extravagant! Even in the Jiangnan District, we don't have shelters like this,” he added.

Meng Siyu reminded them, “Don't forget, this used to be the residence of the richest man in China. It's no surprise it's of this caliber.”

They disembarked from their vehicles, taking a moment to admire the grandeur of the shelter's exterior before Zhang Yi welcomed them inside with a warm smile.

Inside, Zhou Ke'er and the others were already waiting to greet the visitors. Having been informed earlier, their curiosity had them quietly appraising the Jiangnan District representatives.

“Zhang Yi, are these the people sent by the Jiangnan District? They really look like regular army troops!” Zhou Ke'er whispered.

Zhang Yi rarely allowed anyone into his shelter, and even then, only those with substantial authority or credentials.

“They’re envoys from the Jiangnan District, here to help resolve the zombie crisis in Tianhai City,” Zhang Yi replied.

“Prepare some food and drinks for our guests.”

Turning to his guests, Zhang Yi asked, “What would you all like to drink? We don’t have much, just some alcohol, coffee, and soda. I hope that’s alright.”

Even Bian Junwu’s eye twitched at this point, while the others struggled not to burst out laughing. The extravagance of the villa and Zhang Yi’s feigned modesty were almost unbearable.

Still, as seasoned professionals, they maintained their composure.

“Just plain water is fine,” Bian Junwu replied calmly.

The group settled into the plush couches in the living room, trying not to gawk at the luxurious surroundings.

Zhang Yi and Liang Yue sat with them, but Bian Junwu soon turned to Zhang Yi and said, “Could we have a private conversation?”

Zhang Yi nodded with a smile. “Of course. Please, follow me.”

He directed his team to entertain the other visitors while he led Bian Junwu to a small reception room.

Situated in the southeast corner of the shelter, the room featured bulletproof glass walls, offering a panoramic view of the snowy landscape outside. Its serene atmosphere made it perfect for a quiet chat.

Zhang Yi set down two glasses of plain water, one in front of Bian Junwu and one for himself.

Bian Junwu glanced at the scenery outside before sitting down across from Zhang Yi.

“Now that it’s just us, let’s hear it—how exactly did you deal with those zombies?”

Zhang Yi opened his mouth, intending to embellish his previous explanation, but Bian Junwu’s sharp gaze stopped him.

“What you told the others was a half-truth at best. That might fool them, but don’t try to play games with me. The Jiangnan District’s intelligence is far more extensive than you realize.”

Zhang Yi paused, then chuckled in resignation.

Of course, people from the top would be hard to deceive. Any more vague answers could leave a bad impression on Bian Junwu, and that was something Zhang Yi couldn’t afford.