

Ice Age 471

Chapter 471: Baseless Accusations

Morning light illuminated the Snow God Sect's headquarters, casting a stark contrast against the destruction from the previous night's brutal battle.

Though the sect had many superhumans and had gained experience fighting the undead, lives were still lost. However, the casualty numbers had begun to decline.

After his meeting with Bian Junwu, Zheng Yixian returned to the Snow God Sect's base and began overseeing the relocation of non-combat personnel.

Their new shelter was the underground parking structures, with all entrances securely sealed, leaving only combat-capable members above ground to defend them.

In the past, the sect had tried moving people to higher floors of buildings and cutting off access to the lower levels. Yet the zombies, unbound by physical limitations, climbed dozens of meters to reach their prey. That mistake had cost them dearly, but they'd learned their lesson.

The area around St. John's Cathedral was a desolate wasteland. The dawn brought no sense of renewal, only stark visibility to the carnage—a grisly mix of human corpses, zombies, and giant rats littered the surroundings.

Exhausted sect members worked tirelessly to clear the battlefield.

The corpses had to be moved to a nearby abandoned building, where they would be consumed by the bloodvine. Leaving them exposed risked the recently dead transforming into new zombies.

Others collected the bodies of the giant rats, a rare source of fresh meat in these desperate times. Though many worried about potential diseases or unknown infections, hunger overruled such concerns. Survival hinged on eating what was available.

Amid this chaos, Father Li Jian, a priest of some standing within the sect, searched frantically alongside his wife, Zhang Jianfang.

The previous night's battle had separated them from their son, Li Kaile. Now, they scoured the battlefield, their desperation mounting.

"Where could Kaile have gone?!" Zhang Jianfang's voice was tinged with panic.

Their son had gone missing after recklessly rushing off to find his girlfriend, Xu Beibei, despite the danger and his parents' protests.

Now, amid the sea of corpses, Zhang Jianfang feared the worst.

"Kaile!" she called, her voice trembling.

Li Jian, his expression grim, asked every sect member he passed if they had seen his son, but no one had time for their plight.

Then, as Li Jian rounded a corner near the ruins of a building, he froze, his blood running cold.

In the shadow of the rubble lay Li Kaile, drenched in blood. His lower body was soaked in dark red, and he lay motionless on the ground.

Standing over him was Sect Leader Yuan Kongye, her hand gripping a bloodstained dagger. Her face was calm, but her gaze betrayed a twisted struggle.

For a moment, Li Jian's mind went blank.

Then his instincts as a father took over.

"Kaile!" he roared, charging toward them.

Without turning her head, Yuan Kongye raised her left hand.

Boom!

A powerful force sent Li Jian flying backward, landing heavily five meters away.

Zhang Jianfang, arriving moments later, saw her husband crumpled on the ground and her son bleeding beneath the sect leader. Her face turned ghostly pale.

“This filth...” Yuan Kongye muttered, staring at Li Kaile with a look of cold disdain. “You must be purified.”

Her words plunged Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang into despair.

Why? Why would the revered sect leader harm their son?

As if answering their silent pleas, High Priest Zheng Yixian appeared.

Surveying the scene, he frowned slightly before striding toward Yuan Kongye.

Towering over her, Zheng Yixian opened his cloak and enveloped her in a protective embrace.

Yuan Kongye’s tense body remained rigid, but the madness in her eyes began to subside.

“Original sin is unforgivable,” she murmured. “I am helping him.”

“I know. You’ve done nothing wrong,” Zheng Yixian reassured her gently, allowing her to keep the dagger as he led her away.

Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang could only watch helplessly as the two figures disappeared into the distance.

Swallowing their fury and confusion, they scrambled to their son's side.

Li Kaile was unconscious, his face pale as paper. His lower body was drenched in blood, though his upper body bore no fatal wounds.

Li Jian's expression darkened as he pieced the situation together.

The purification ritual.

He'd heard whispers about the Snow God Sect's initiation practices, particularly the "cleansing" of young boys.

As a superhuman serving the sect, he had hoped his son would be spared this fate. But now, it seemed inevitable.

Though devastated, they found solace in the fact that Li Kaile was alive. Yuan Kongye had stopped the bleeding after the ritual, but the emotional scars would remain.

How would their son face the world when he awoke?

Tears streamed down their faces as a storm of emotions—grief, anger, and helplessness—overwhelmed them.

From a distance, Zhang Jianfang spotted a figure huddled in a shadowy corner.

It was Xu Beibei, trembling and curled into herself, clutching her knees.

Zhang Jianfang clenched her fists and shouted, "Xu Beibei! What happened here? Why did the sect leader harm my son? Was it because of you?"

Xu Beibei, already in tears, shook her head frantically.

"I... I didn't do anything!" she stammered, her voice choked with sobs.

"After we escaped, he kissed me. That's when the sect leader saw us, and... and then she..."

Her voice broke as the memory flooded back, her sobs intensifying.

Zhang Jianfang's anger flared, but seeing the girl's misery, she was left with more questions than answers.

What had driven Yuan Kongye to such extremes?

Chapter 472: A Man's Pain

Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang stared at their son's condition, their hearts filled with despair and incomprehension. Beyond their anger, a sense of helplessness consumed them.

The reality was bitter: Yuan Kongye, the leader of the Snow God Sect, had done this. Yet they were reliant on the sect for survival. There was no way to seek vengeance or even demand justice.

But why? Why would the sect leader act so irrationally over a budding romance between children?

From the moment they joined the sect and learned about the "purification ritual," Li Jian had felt something was off with Yuan Kongye.

Why were young boys mutilated, while adult men were left untouched? What drove such a decision?

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Meanwhile, in her chambers at the back of the cathedral, Yuan Kongye sat on her bed, slowly regaining her composure.

For a fleeting moment, her icy demeanor softened, replaced by a rare fragility and confusion.

She looked up at Zheng Yixian, standing before her.

“I didn’t do anything wrong, did I?” she asked.

“Those actions—those desires—are inherently sinful. All I did was guide him toward the right path.”

Zheng Yixian nodded in agreement.

Kneeling before her, he raised his head, his gaze unwavering.

“You’ve done nothing wrong. It was the boy’s fault.

“In this apocalyptic world, there is no room for love or lust. Impure relationships between men and women must be forbidden.”

Yuan Kongye sighed, her face lighting up with a radiant smile as she gently placed her pale hand on Zheng Yixian’s cheek.

“If only all men were like you,” she murmured. “Then the world wouldn’t be so tainted.”

Her cold touch made Zheng Yixian’s submissive expression deepen.

“This world will be as you desire, my Lady,” he said reverently.

Yuan Kongye withdrew her hand, her expression returning to the calm, authoritative gaze befitting the leader of the Snow God Sect.

“That boy is Li Jian’s son. Will he hold any grievances against us?”

“I will speak with him and help him understand your intentions,” Zheng Yixian assured her. “I believe he will come to see your wisdom.”

Yuan Kongye nodded, saying nothing further.

Li Jian’s abilities were valuable to the sect, and he posed no threat to them. Such individuals were ideal for cultivation and loyalty.

This incident had only occurred because Yuan Kongye had been triggered by the sight of Li Kaile and Xu Beibei.

And Xu Beibei had lied.

What she described as “just a kiss” wasn’t the full truth.

Faced with life-and-death situations, humans often succumbed to primal instincts, driven by an unconscious desire to ensure their genetic survival. In the lawless world of the apocalypse, these young lovers had pushed boundaries they barely understood. 像Nóßeš

But they had chosen the worst possible time and place—and encountered the worst possible person.

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Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang’s hearts were heavy with grief, though they consoled themselves with the knowledge that their son was still alive.

In the harsh world of the apocalypse, the loss of that ability might not matter much. Survival took precedence over all else.

But for Li Kaile, the loss was unbearable.

When he regained consciousness and realized what had been done to him, his mind spiraled into chaos.

“Why bother living anymore?!” he screamed, thrashing and clawing at himself.

Zhang Jianfang wept, trying desperately to calm him. “We’re still a family of three. Let’s live together, survive together—please, my son.”

From the shadows, Xu Beibei watched quietly, tears streaming down her face. She didn’t dare approach.

It wasn’t that she didn’t care. She knew that her presence would only deepen Li Kaile’s wounds.

...

That afternoon, Li Jian was visited by High Priest Zheng Yixian.

Though Li Jian’s heart burned with anger, he forced himself to remain composed, greeting his guest respectfully.

“Zheng—” he began.

“Not Zheng,” the high priest interrupted with a wave of his hand. “Address me by my title.”

Li Jian quickly corrected himself. “Yes, High Priest.”

"It's understandable," Zheng Yixian said, his tone almost indulgent. "You're new to the sect. Adapting takes time."

His sharp eyes studied Li Jian's face, noting the restrained displeasure there.

Li Jian, to his credit, didn't lash out or demand answers. He didn't storm off to confront Yuan Kongye or Zheng Yixian in a fit of rage. His restraint showed he understood the reality of his situation.

But Zheng Yixian also knew he needed to provide a reasonable explanation to ensure Li Jian's continued loyalty.

"How is your son?" Zheng Yixian asked, breaking the silence.

Li Jian's face darkened. "His physical wounds will heal, but the damage to his spirit may never mend."

"A man who loses the essence of his manhood... how can he ever hold his head high?"

Zheng Yixian's face twitched slightly, an uncharacteristic crack in his composure.

He responded in a softer, almost apologetic tone. "Your son's purification was a great mercy. However, he should not have behaved inappropriately before the sect leader."

Zheng Yixian's voice briefly wavered, unsettling Li Jian, but it quickly returned to its usual calm, authoritative tone.

"The Snow God Sect is a vast organization. At its peak, it had over ten thousand members! Without strict governance, chaos would be inevitable.

"Romantic entanglements are the seed of disorder. While adults may exercise self-control, reckless young people act on impulse.

“In this post-apocalyptic world, where all rules have crumbled, what would happen if such impulses led to conflicts, fights, or unplanned pregnancies? It would jeopardize the entire group.”

He fixed his gaze on Li Jian.

“This is about preserving order and ensuring survival. You are an intelligent man—you must understand this.”

He added, “Your son was not singled out. The same applies to everyone.”

Li Jian remained silent for a long time before finally nodding. “The High Priest speaks with wisdom.”

Zheng Yixian studied him for a moment before continuing.

“From now on, your son will receive an additional share of rations,” he said. “And I trust this matter won’t affect your dedication to the sect.”

Li Jian nodded again. “I understand.”

Chapter 473: The Bait Plan

Zheng Yixian comforted Li Jian briefly. Seeing that his emotions were stable, he left.

He knew Li Jian couldn’t let go of his son’s situation so quickly. However, as long as Li Jian and his family lived under the Bai Xue Jiao, they had no choice but to move past it.

As the Grand Priest, Zheng Yixian personally lowering himself to console them was already a great honor.

To Li Jian, though, Zheng Yixian's nonsensical explanations were unbearable.

"What kind of absurd logic is this? For the stability of the cult, they castrate people? What's the point of the cult if humanity can't reproduce? Won't we all be wiped out anyway?"

Li Jian muttered under his breath, cursing Zheng Yixian's ridiculousness.

But circumstances were beyond his control. He had to care for his family and the companions he brought from Yuelu District.

Even though anger boiled within, he had to learn to endure it.

By now, he realized the Bai Xue Jiao was far from the utopia he imagined.

As a former senior manager of a publicly listed corporation, his intellect was sharp enough to notice something fishy about the cult.

This became even clearer as he uncovered more of the cult's secrets.

His mood grew heavier. For the first time, he questioned whether bringing his neighbors from Yuelu Residential Area to the Bai Xue Jiao had been the right decision.

But there's no medicine for regret.

Had they stayed in Yuelu, another zombie wave would have turned them into zombie food.

As he approached his home with heavy steps, the sounds of his wife crying and Li Kaile's pained screams reached his ears.

Li Jian's eyes filled with sorrow.

The inability to continue his bloodline now seemed minor.

But as a father, he couldn't bear to see his son endure such pain in the future.

Swallowing countless unspoken words, he let out a long sigh of helplessness.

What happened in Li Jian's home was just a trivial matter for the Bai Xue Jiao.

It was a microcosm of the cult: a facade of harmony masking deep dissatisfaction.

Yet the followers, desperate for protection, chose to bury their heads in the sand, even when faced with unbearable hardships.

Meanwhile, the investigation team, after killing a Zombie King, finalized their strategy.

The plan was to lure the zombie horde to one spot and eliminate the Zombie King!

Even if they couldn't completely eradicate the horde, they could replicate their previous success by taking out many of the intelligent white-furred monkeys. RANÓBÉS

Bian Junwu believed the horde's behavior resembled that of a Zerg swarm.

Zombie Kings could create new zombies, with infection speeds far exceeding ordinary zombies.

Moreover, the Zombie King had intelligence and could evolve through battles.

However, as the brain, it lacked significant combat strength.

Thus, a solution emerged.

First, use a large crowd to draw the zombie main force forward.

Then send an elite team underground to decapitate the Zombie King.

This was Bian Junwu's plan.

With the strategy clear, the next step was execution.

The first task was selecting an ideal bait location.

Holding a communicator showing the positions of Tianhai City's five factions and the zombie horde's movements, Bian Junwu tapped the Bai Xue Jiao territory.

"This spot it is!"

There were two reasons for choosing the cult's territory.

First, the Bai Xue Jiao had the most followers, making it the best bait for attracting zombies.

Second, the cult's location was in Tianfeng District, previously Tianhai City's busiest area.

This meant the highest death toll and the densest zombie population were here.

The city's underground zombie waves naturally converged in this area.

Bian Junwu immediately sent messages to the five factions.

The instructions were simple:

Evacuate non-combatants and bring all combat forces to the Bai Xue Jiao's St. John's Cathedral!

Reactions varied.

Xiao Honglian, now the biggest beneficiary, responded quickly.

The investigation team had cleared numerous zombies around Yangsheng Base, especially the Zombie King. This made the surrounding rogue zombies easy to handle.

Xiao Honglian had deduced that the team likely killed the Zombie King controlling the horde.

Acknowledging their strength, she replied without hesitation, "Understood. We'll head there immediately."

While she didn't understand the significance of gathering at St. John's Cathedral, trust in the investigation team's strength and their superior background prompted her to comply.

The Qingfu and Chaoyu Bases reacted similarly.

They secured non-combatants in underground shelters built over 100 meters deep, reinforced with steel and concrete, resistant even to missile strikes.

As long as the doors remained shut, neither zombies nor giant rats could breach the shelters.

Xing Tian and Wei Dinghai mobilized most of their forces per Bian Junwu's orders and headed toward the Bai Xue Jiao's base.

However, not everyone welcomed this plan.

The Bai Xue Jiao, in particular, had reservations.

When Zheng Yixian received the message, his expression turned grim.

He rushed to Yuan Kongye to report.

“The investigation team wants everyone to gather here. It looks like they plan to fight a major battle against the horde. This is bad news for us.”

If their base became the battlefield, countless cult followers would die.

Bian Junwu prioritized the big picture, focusing solely on mission completion, indifferent to casualties.

While logical, this approach spelled disaster for the Bai Xue Jiao, who would bear the sacrifice.

After hearing this, Yuan Kongye frowned.

“Many more people will die,” she murmured.

“And their gathering here is a threat to us.”

Relations between the five factions were tense, especially with Yangsheng and Chaoyu Bases, who bore grudges against the Bai Xue Jiao for past betrayals.

They might even sabotage the cult in secret.

Zheng Yixian suggested, “Let’s evacuate quickly! If they discover anything, it’ll be disastrous.”

Yuan Kongye hesitated before nodding slowly.

“Let’s do as you say.

“Still, there’s no need to worry too much.

“The gods above will protect the faithful of the Bai Xue Jiao.”

She clasped her hands in prayer.

It seemed prayer was all they could rely on, as Bian Junwu never consulted them about his decisions.

They could only comply.

Chapter 474: The Gathering

Zhang Yi received the message and immediately began pondering its deeper implications.

“Gather at the Bai Xue Jiao? Why not choose another place? Why that rundown spot?”

“Wait... they want us to bring all our combat forces. Is this a plan for a major battle with the zombies?”

“If they’re confident enough to initiate a fight, did they uncover some critical intelligence?”

As Zhang Yi paced back and forth by the living room window, deep in thought, Yang Xinxin rolled by in her wheelchair.

Noticing his contemplative expression, she tilted her head and asked, “Brother, what’s troubling you this time?”

Zhang Yi smiled and waved her over.

“You came at the perfect time. Come take a look!”

After Yang Xinxin approached, Zhang Yi handed her the investigation team’s message.

She lowered her gaze, pondering briefly before breaking into a smile.

“Brother, this is great news!”

Zhang Yi chuckled. “Explain in detail—what’s so great about it?”

Yang Xinxin locked eyes with him, her smile unwavering. “What’s the defining trait of the Bai Xue Jiao?”

“Hmm... well, they’re dirt poor. Aside from their large population, they don’t have much else. Are you saying it’s because of their numbers?”

Yang Xinxin nodded.

“Exactly. Their sheer population is their most significant feature.”

She teased, “It’s also their only noteworthy advantage.”

Zhang Yi recalled the Bai Xue Jiao’s combat methods.

Their weaponry was outdated, and their combatants were weak.

In battles with other factions, they often resorted to suicide tactics, trading lives to gain an edge.

Such brutal and savage strategies had earned them a foothold in Tianhai City.

Yang Xinxin continued, “If zombies truly prey on humans selectively, then the massive Bai Xue Jiao population would undoubtedly attract the most zombies.” **RADEBEŠ**

“The investigation team wants us to gather at the Bai Xue Jiao and bring all our combat forces. Their intent is clear.”

“They plan to wage a massive battle against the zombies there. With the Bai Xue Jiao’s people and the combined forces of other factions, it will undoubtedly become the most conspicuous target in all of Tianhai City!”

Hearing her analysis, a realization dawned on Zhang Yi.

His eyes lit up as he looked at Yang Xinxin in surprise.

“If that’s the case, doesn’t it mean they’ve figured out how to deal with the zombie horde?”

Their five-person squad had witnessed the terrifying might of the zombie horde.

Under the command of the intelligent Zombie King, the zombie army, bolstered by Bronze Armored Zombies with combat power rivaling superhumans, had been unstoppable.

Yang Xinxin tilted her head with a smile.

“Since this investigation team was sent by Jiangnan District, their strength is undoubtedly exceptional.

“But the key lies in intelligence! Intelligence!”

She wagged her delicate finger, emphasizing her point to Zhang Yi.

“They have more sources of information than we do. Plus, with the combined data from all factions, they understand the zombie horde far better than we ever could.”

“So naturally, they’d find a way to deal with it quickly.”

Zhang Yi found her reasoning sound.

“Now that I think about it, the main reason we failed the last mission was our lack of understanding of the underground environment.”

“We never even encountered the Zombie King. We had to piece together fragmented information, which led to a fear of the unknown.”

On the other hand, Zhang Yi had to admit that the seven-person squad’s combat prowess far exceeded that of his team.

Bian Junwu’s strength aside, even his subordinates were top-tier by Tianhai City standards—comparable to the leaders of various bases.

Just imagining a team comprising individuals of Zhang Yi’s, Xiao Honglian’s, or Wei Dinghai’s caliber sent shivers down his spine.

Leaning back on the sofa, Zhang Yi said casually, “In that case, let’s head over and see what they’ve got planned.”

“Such large-scale mobilization doesn’t affect us much anyway.”

Their small numbers afforded them flexibility.

Whether advancing or retreating, they could act swiftly.

Without ordinary people holding them back, Zhang Yi's group could maintain composure on any battlefield.

"Alright, we'll make the trip. Let's see what tricks they have up their sleeves!"

With that, Zhang Yi summoned everyone to the living room for a meeting.

Once the group assembled, he shared the message.

Uncle You, with his keen sense for war, immediately remarked,

"This is it, isn't it? The human alliance against the zombie army!"

Zhang Yi reclined on the sofa, his expression relaxed.

As part of an alliance, there'd be plenty of cannon fodder to bear the brunt of the pressure, leaving them less to worry about.

And with the elite seven-person squad leading the charge, things seemed promising.

He said, "This fight was inevitable! As long as the zombie problem persists, survival here will remain precarious."

"I'm just surprised at how quickly they moved. They've only been here a day and already have a plan."

"All I can say is, a professional team is indeed professional!"

After his musings, Zhang Yi turned a serious gaze to the group.

“But as always, the most important thing is to prioritize your safety. Life comes first—everything else is secondary. Got it?”

The group nodded in agreement. They’d heard this so often it had become a mantra.

Zhou Ke’er, however, frowned worriedly, her gaze downcast.

“So, you’re all going to the Bai Xue Jiao and leaving us behind at home?”

Zhang Yi nodded without hesitation.

“Non-combatants shouldn’t come. If a battle breaks out, the zombie army’s numbers will be unimaginable. We won’t have the capacity to protect you.”

Thinking about the millions who’d died in Tianhai City, Zhang Yi couldn’t help but feel uneasy.

He had no idea how many of those corpses had turned into zombies.

The unification of the five factions meant facing all the zombies in Tianhai City.

To fight with no distractions, he needed assurance that his loved ones were safe.

Zhou Ke’er, however, argued, “But you’ll need a doctor! If someone gets hurt, I can help treat them.”

Every time they went into battle, Zhang Yi left her at the shelter.

She understood it was to protect her.

But every time, she was left anxiously awaiting his safe return.

Zhang Yi looked up, meeting Zhou Ke'er's determined gaze.

She genuinely wanted to help.

After all, in the extremely cold environment outside, any injury left untreated on the battlefield could quickly become fatal.

Chapter 475: Zhou Ke'er Requests to Join

Zhang Yi chuckled dismissively.

"You don't have the ability to protect yourself. If you're on the battlefield, I'll just end up worrying about you. Don't be silly, kiddo."

While battlefield medics are important, they shouldn't become a liability.

Zhou Ke'er replied, "That might've been true before, but this time it's a large-scale battle. Adequate logistical support will be essential."

"I imagine other factions will bring their own support personnel as well."

Uncle You chimed in, "Miss Zhou has a point. With nearly all the combat power of Tianhai City's top five factions gathered, this fight won't end quickly."

"If it turns into a prolonged battle, logistics will be critical—especially medical personnel!"

His sincere gaze fixed on Zhang Yi.

"In the past, your caution has kept us from any casualties. But such a streak might not last forever."

“You must understand, deaths on the battlefield are common, and having a doctor is crucial.”

Their words gave Zhang Yi pause.

Although his strength was formidable, in a chaotic battle of this magnitude, even he couldn’t guarantee he’d avoid injury.

In the sub-zero temperatures of minus 60 degrees, even a minor wound could lead to tissue necrosis.

Best case: permanent disability. Worst case: death.

If he kept up his stubbornness and ended up injured, regret would be pointless.

Moreover, he knew that his companions needed to adapt to harsh environments—including battlefields—for the future.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Yi nodded.

“Alright, you can come with us this time. I’ll arrange for you to stay at the rear. Just hide and focus on treating us if we’re hurt.”

Zhou Ke’er, overjoyed, threw her arms around Zhang Yi’s neck, her bright eyes shimmering with happiness.

“I understand! I’ll fulfill my duties as a doctor!”

Seeing Zhou Ke’er take the initiative, Lu Keran couldn’t help but step forward as well.

Patting her modest chest, she declared, “Big Brother, take me along too! My marksmanship has improved a lot lately.”

Zhang Yi glanced at the short-haired girl and said plainly, “Did you forget that guns don’t work well on zombies?”

Lu Keran froze. “Uh...”

Zhang Yi cut her off before she could say more.

“Except for Ke’er, no one else is coming. Everyone stays in the shelter.”

Frustrated, Lu Keran sank back into her seat, while Yang Xinxin remained calm and indifferent.

At the same time, Zhou Haimei and Yang Siyah exchanged subtle glances of relief.

Unlike Zhou Ke’er, they lacked the courage to join Zhang Yi on the battlefield.

With no combat abilities, they’d only end up dead if they went. Staying safely in the shelter was undoubtedly the better option.

Lu Keran, despite being left behind, busied herself inspecting the snow vehicle for Zhang Yi, ensuring it was free of any issues and fully fueled.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi and the others prepared their weapons and equipment. Once everything was ready, they prepared to set off.

Before departure, Zhang Yi handed Zhou Ke’er a small silver handgun.

“Guns are pretty ineffective against zombies, and you can’t handle high-caliber ones. Keep this for self-defense—it works well enough against humans.”

The immediate threat might be the zombie horde, but Zhang Yi never fully trusted the other factions.

They were allies of convenience, united by shared interests, but betrayal could come at any moment.

Although Zhou Ke'er's marksmanship wasn't great, it was adequate for self-defense.

She took the gun and tucked it into the inner layer of her combat uniform.

The group locked down the shelter and boarded two snow vehicles, heading toward the Bai Xue Jiao's headquarters in Tianfeng District.

At the Bai Xue Jiao, preparations were underway as they learned of the investigation team and other factions heading their way.

Bian Junwu and his team arrived promptly, met by Zheng Yixian and a group of priests and clergymen.

The so-called "welcoming" was perfunctory at best, with no time for elaborate preparations.

Bian Junwu and the others didn't care for ceremonies, arriving unannounced and unbothered by the lack of formality.

As they entered the area, they noticed bloodstains splattered everywhere, with severed limbs yet to be cleaned.

In a corner, someone gnawed on a blood-soaked piece of giant rat meat.

Taking in the scene, the seasoned veterans showed no shock—they had seen worse.

Zheng Yixian approached Bian Junwu and his team, nodding slightly as he spoke.

“Welcome to the Bai Xue Jiao. May I ask the purpose of summoning all the factions here so suddenly?”

“If we’d been informed in advance, we could have prepared better.”

Wu Di smirked, folding his arms.

“Look at the state of this place. What’s there to prepare? We’re here to clean up your mess. Just follow our lead.”

The priests behind Zheng Yixian bristled with anger at Wu Di’s words.

Noticing their displeasure, Wu Di raised an eyebrow.

“What? You look like you’re not convinced. Want to spar? I can take you all on!”

Unable to hold back, Han Chang bared his teeth.

“Don’t get cocky! Even if you’re strong, we’re not pushovers!”

“Han Chang, be quiet!”

Zheng Yixian cut him off sharply, then turned to Wu Di.

“I apologize on his behalf. The recent heavy casualties have left our people emotionally strained.”

Wu Di opened his mouth to retort but fell silent at a slight glance from Bian Junwu.

Bian Junwu addressed Zheng Yixian directly.

“We'll discuss the plan once everyone is here.”

He saw no need to explain matters to Zheng Yixian alone.

Zheng Yixian smiled politely.

“Very well. Would you like to rest in the church area while you wait?”

He gestured for the investigation team to proceed.

Bian Junwu led the group forward, the others close behind.

As they walked, Bian Junwu asked, “How many of your people have died in recent days?”

Zheng Yixian hesitated briefly before replying in a somber tone.

“Thousands of followers have fallen to the zombies during these battles. Some infected couldn't be saved, so we had to humanely dispose of them to prevent further mutations.”

Bian Junwu raised an eyebrow. “Can you give me an exact number?”

He cared deeply about the figures, as they revealed the extent of the zombie horde's impact on the Bai Xue Jiao.

Zheng Yixian froze, hesitating before answering.

“I'm sorry, but we haven't kept precise statistics. The estimated death toll... three or four thousand, perhaps?”

“Three or four thousand?”

Bian Junwu’s tone carried a hint of surprise upon hearing the number.

He glanced at the surrounding environment.

The defensive infrastructure was rudimentary at best, far inferior to that of the major bases.

In the freezing cold, despite having many followers, the Bai Xue Jiao lacked the resources to build strong fortifications. They relied on the existing terrain to fight against the zombies.

A group that once boasted over ten thousand members had lost only three or four thousand after prolonged battles with zombie hordes. It was unexpected, to say the least.

“So, how are you addressing the food supply issue?”

“In an apocalypse, feeding thousands of people requires a massive amount of food. I’m curious how you manage it.”

Bian Junwu’s question immediately heightened the tension among the Bai Xue Jiao members.

Food supply was the core issue for any faction.

Had Bian Junwu not been from Jiangnan District, asking this question would have been seen as provocation.

Zheng Yixian hesitated briefly before answering, “We search nearby areas for buried supermarkets and malls to obtain food and survival supplies.”

“Oh? Is that all?”

Bian Junwu stared at Zheng Yixian, his eyes obscured by reflective sunglasses, yet his disbelief was palpable.

Under such harsh conditions, even searching for food consumed significant energy.

How could the Bai Xue Jiao sustain thousands—at one point, tens of thousands—by digging food from beneath meters of snow?

Zheng Yixian and the priests behind him wore uneasy expressions.

It was evident they were hiding a major secret about their food source.

The atmosphere grew increasingly tense.

The investigation team, including Baili Changqing, looked on with amused expressions. A theory was beginning to take shape in their minds, one not uncommon in the apocalypse. *RANÓBĚŠ*

Wu Di broke the silence.

“Nearly half of your people died. That’s probably how you managed to feed the rest, isn’t it?”

The Bai Xue Jiao erupted in outrage.

Han Chang shouted, “How dare you say that! We’d never do such a thing!”

Dai Mei scowled, “Don’t compare us to animals!”

Wu Di shrugged mockingly. “What then? Are you surviving on air?”

“You—”

“Enough! Both of you, stop talking.”

Before the argument escalated, Zheng Yixian and Bian Junwu simultaneously intervened to restore order.

Taking a deep breath, Zheng Yixian bowed slightly to Bian Junwu.

“There is indeed a secret, but it concerns the survival of the Bai Xue Jiao and cannot be disclosed to outsiders.”

“Oh, is that so?”

Bian Junwu’s cold tone implied he wasn’t satisfied with this response.

Even we can’t know?

In such times, any hidden secret could potentially be connected to the zombie hordes.

Bian Junwu had even considered the possibility that the zombie outbreaks in Tianhai City were deliberately caused by local factions.

After a long pause, Zheng Yixian met Bian Junwu’s gaze and said, “If you insist on knowing, I can share the details.”

Bian Junwu nodded. “Alright.”

Zheng Yixian straightened up. “Please follow me.”

The priests and clergy behind him panicked.

“Grand Priest, can we really reveal this to outsiders?”

Zheng Yixian gestured for calm. “It’s fine. The investigation team from Jiangnan District wouldn’t be interested in what little we have.”

Despite his reassurance, the Bai Xue Jiao members were visibly uneasy.

They understood that if this secret were exposed, it would become a major vulnerability for their faction.

Even these outsiders from Jiangnan District might covet the treasure they guarded—a treasure that formed the foundation of the Bai Xue Jiao’s survival.

Zheng Yixian, however, had made his decision. As the Grand Priest, his authority was second only to Yuan Kongye’s, and no one could overrule him.

He led Bian Junwu and his team toward an abandoned building adjacent to St. John’s Cathedral.

As they approached, Bian Junwu suddenly stopped.

His brows furrowed deeply.

The building ahead exuded an unsettling aura.

The gray concrete structure jutted out of the snow like a funeral tomb, evoking an ominous feeling.

Bian Junwu’s sharp instincts warned him to stay away.

Baili Changqing whispered, “Captain, the stench of blood is overwhelming here.”

Ahead, Zheng Yixian turned back to them, a faintly eerie smile on his lips.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is the Bai Xue Jiao’s secret. Do you still wish to proceed?”

Wu Di crossed his arms and scoffed. “Enough theatrics.”

Adjusting his glasses, Bian Junwu followed without a word.

He hadn’t told his team one crucial detail:

After losing his sight, his perception had grown sharper.

Just moments earlier, his senses had revealed something bizarre.

What appeared to be an abandoned building was, to him, a massive, grotesque creature.

The structure seemed alive—over a hundred meters tall, with countless limbs flailing madly and roots burrowing deep underground.

Inside, the stench of blood grew stronger.

But it wasn’t the decayed odor of corpses; it was the fresh, sweet scent of blood still warm from the living.

As they ventured deeper, the true nature of the “creature” was revealed.

The building’s interior was overrun by a massive, mutated plant.

Its vines and branches stretched throughout the structure, glowing faintly with an eerie red light.

Red fruit hung from the branches, each one glistening unnaturally.

Seeing this, Bian Junwu and his team began to understand.

“This... is the source of your food?”

Zheng Yixian plucked a red fruit from the vine and offered it to Bian Junwu.

“Correct. This is a mutated plant we discovered, which we call the Blood Vine.

“It has extraordinary vitality, absorbing all surrounding nutrients to sustain itself and produce these fruits.

“These red fruits are our primary food source.”

Bian Junwu took the fruit, examining it carefully rather than eating it.

Zheng Yixian smiled faintly.

“Don’t worry—it’s not poisonous. We’ve consumed it for months without any adverse effects.”

Bian Junwu replied flatly, “That explains a lot. But does it yield enough fruit to feed thousands of people?”

Zheng Yixian continued forward.

“Ordinarily, no. But there are ways to accelerate its fruit production. For instance, this.”

He pointed toward the ceiling.

Bian Junwu and the others looked up to see an oval-shaped object entwined in the vines.

The red leaves encasing it emitted a faint glow, and its silhouette resembled a human figure.

“Is that... a human?”

Meng Siyu’s eyes widened in shock.

“You’re using humans as nutrients for this plant?”

Zheng Yixian remained expressionless.

“To be precise, human remains.”

Chapter 477: A Sinister Presence

Moments later, the investigation team followed Zheng Yixian to the depths of the Blood Vine’s lair, where they were greeted by a shocking sight.

The massive central space of the building had been hollowed out, creating an expansive void that extended from the ground floor to the ceiling of the top level.

The Blood Vine’s thick, pulsating trunk occupied the center, its movements eerily reminiscent of a living creature breathing.

Around them, the walls and floors were adorned with countless hanging oval-shaped objects—thousands of them at a glance.

Zheng Yixian placed his right hand over his chest, closed his eyes, and muttered a prayer:

“May the departed become the hope of the survivors. Their flesh and blood, our sustenance.”

At that moment, the truth behind the Bai Xue Jiao’s food source became crystal clear.

The cult was using the bodies of the dead as nutrients for the Blood Vine.

The plant absorbed the corpses’ nutrients, producing fruit that was then consumed by the survivors.

Wu Di frowned, crossing his arms. “How is this any different from cannibalism?”

Meng Siyu countered, “There’s a difference. At least this method avoids prion diseases and is psychologically easier to accept.”

Despite the macabre scene, none of the investigation team felt physically repulsed. They had witnessed far more grotesque and bizarre things in the apocalypse.

Using a mutated plant to process corpses was a relatively humane solution.

Zheng Yixian turned to the group with a sincere expression.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is the greatest secret of the Bai Xue Jiao. It determines the life or death of thousands of our followers. Please, I implore you to keep this secret.”

Zheng Yixian wasn’t concerned about Jiangnan District coveting the Blood Vine.

After all, who would willingly eat food grown from corpses unless they were desperate?

Moreover, the plant's enormous size made it nearly impossible to transport.

Bian Junwu nodded. "Don't worry. Your secret is safe with us."

With that, he casually tossed the red fruit in his hand to Wu Di before heading toward the exit.

Wu Di looked at the fruit in disgust and passed it to Kong Sheng, who then handed it to Qi Guangming.

The group treated it like a game of catch, none of them willing to eat it.

Zheng Yixian watched with a faint, enigmatic smile before following them out.

As he glanced back at the Blood Vine and the thousands of suspended corpses around it, he noticed they were swaying slightly, as if moved by an invisible breeze.

Once outside the abandoned building, Bian Junwu noticed the other factions had yet to arrive.

He suggested meeting the leader of the Bai Xue Jiao, Yuan Kongye.

Zheng Yixian replied, "The leader doesn't typically handle day-to-day affairs. All external matters are my responsibility."

Bian Junwu was undeterred.

"Since we're here, we should at least meet her. I've heard rumors about your leader—even some of the higher-ups in Jiangnan District are intrigued by her abilities."

Zheng Yixian's pupils briefly contracted.

The higher-ups in Jiangnan District were interested in Yuan Kongye's abilities?

This was a significant development.

Yuan Kongye's abilities were indeed extraordinary. She could help others awaken their superhuman powers.

Essentially, whoever controlled her had the potential to create an endless army of superhumans.

For the Bai Xue Jiao, this was both a blessing and an opportunity.

If they could gain the support of a faction as powerful as Jiangnan District, their cult's growth would become unstoppable.

Zheng Yixian finally nodded. "Please wait here for a moment. I'll inform the leader."

Bian Junwu gestured for him to proceed.

As Zheng Yixian walked away toward St. John's Cathedral, the team exchanged glances.

Perhaps it was the lingering shock from the Blood Vine, but Wu Di frowned and muttered, "This Bai Xue Jiao gives off an unsettling vibe."

Kong Sheng responded gravely, "That's to be expected. Organizations with a religious structure tend to be a bit odd."

Meng Siyu added, "Still, the Bai Xue Jiao has managed to survive and keep so many people alive. That's impressive in its own way."

Baili Changqing sidled up to Bian Junwu.

“Captain, are the higher-ups really interested in Yuan Kongye?”

Bian Junwu raised an eyebrow and replied coolly, “When we were sent, someone did mention looking into her abilities.

“If the rumors are true and she can awaken superhuman powers without any cost, the leaders will undoubtedly want her.”

Baili Changqing whistled, running a hand through his short hair.

“That kind of power is seriously tempting!”

Bian Junwu smirked knowingly.

“Do you really think it’s that simple?”

“Oh? What do you mean?”

Baili Changqing blinked curiously.

Bian Junwu explained, “Power always comes with a price.

“When we awakened our superhuman abilities, it was after facing life-and-death situations. We earned our powers by gambling with our lives.

“Yuan Kongye’s ability supposedly lets people awaken without paying any price. Does that sound plausible to you?”

Baili Changqing’s expression grew serious.

“I have my doubts about that too.”

Bian Junwu adjusted his glasses.

“The leadership has considered this as well. The military has been studying superhumans for years, and they find her abilities too incredible to be true.

“That’s why we’ve been tasked with investigating her.

“We need to determine if her powers are as miraculous as claimed.”

Baili Changqing asked, “And if the rumors are true, what then?”

Bian Junwu shoved his hands into his pockets, his tone laced with implication.

“If the rumors are true, then her ability would be strategically comparable to LV5 Epsilon.”

The mention of “Epsilon” left the entire team visibly stunned.

For superhumans, the name “Epsilon” carried an almost mythical weight—heavier than Mount Tai.

Throughout all of Huaguo, there was only one known Epsilon-level superhuman: the enigmatic figure from the Shengjing District.

Their abilities defied logic, making them virtually unstoppable.

It was said that anyone targeted by Epsilon couldn’t escape, no matter how far they fled.

Not even Jiangnan District had an Epsilon-level superhuman.

Bian Junwu himself had once been a candidate for Epsilon-level training, but inherent flaws had barred him from achieving that rank.

In Jiangnan District, “Epsilon” was the epitome of power—a dream unattainable for most.

Now, the thought that Tianhai City might harbor someone with Epsilon-level potential left the team shaken.

Noticing their reactions, Bian Junwu chuckled lightly.

“I’m just saying it’s a possibility. But until we meet Yuan Kongye and assess her abilities, it’s too soon to draw any conclusions.”

Baili Changqing nodded in understanding.

“So, that’s why you’re so eager to meet her—to evaluate her for yourself?”

“Exactly,” Bian Junwu affirmed.

His words piqued the entire team’s curiosity about Yuan Kongye.

Chapter 478: Multi-Party Talks

Shortly after, Zheng Yixian emerged from the cathedral and invited Bian Junwu to meet Yuan Kongye.

Bian Junwu entered alone.

Inside, he saw a young woman dressed in a white holy robe, appearing no older than twenty.

The two spoke privately in the cathedral for over ten minutes.

When Bian Junwu finally exited, his usual icy demeanor gave away nothing about the conversation.

Unable to hold back, Baili Changqing and the others bombarded him with questions:

“Captain, how was it? Is Yuan Kongye really an Epsilon?”

Bian Junwu replied indifferently, “Judging a superhuman’s rank isn’t something I can do with just my eyes.”

“But—” he continued, his tone sharpening, “there’s definitely something unusual about that girl.”

Everyone was taken aback.

Meng Siyu, ever curious, asked, “What’s unusual about her?”

Bian Junwu tapped his temple.

“Here.”

“Her brain isn’t normal?”

The team stared at him, stunned.

The leader of a major faction like the Bai Xue Jiao had mental issues?

“Well, it makes sense,” Baili Changqing chuckled.

“People in religious organizations are either con artists or devout fanatics!”

Bian Junwu nodded slightly in agreement.

During his conversation with Yuan Kongye, he had sensed her overwhelming zeal for religion.

She genuinely believed in the existence of gods, which deeply intrigued him.

It was no wonder she delegated the cult’s operations to Zheng Yixian. A leader overly committed to divine ideals would either act too idealistically or too recklessly—hardly conducive to managing a large faction.

“Let’s assess her abilities gradually,” Bian Junwu concluded.

“After we deal with the zombie problem, we’ll have plenty of time to investigate further.”

For now, Yuan Kongye wasn’t going anywhere, and confirming whether she was an Epsilon would require time and evidence.

Soon after, the other factions began to arrive.

Following Bian Junwu’s orders, they brought their strongest combat units, including heavily armed soldiers, armored vehicles, artillery, and even terrifying warhounds.

The combined might of the three major bases, numbering in the thousands, filled the Bai Xue Jiao’s territory, creating an intimidating presence that unnerved the cult’s followers.

Zhang Yi’s group also arrived at the scene.

After stepping out of the vehicle, Zhang Yi helped Zhou Ke'er down.

"Stay by my side and don't wander off. I'll find you a safe spot to wait later," he said gently.

Zhou Ke'er nodded happily, comforted by his care.

As they walked toward the towering landmark of St. John's Cathedral, Zhang Yi spotted an old acquaintance—Xing Tian.

Xing Tian waved and greeted him.

"What took you so long?"

Zhang Yi replied, "From the map, Qingfu Base is closer than us. How are we here before you?"

Xing Tian grinned. "There was a ton to handle at the factory. Not all of us can live as carefree as you."

"Having fewer people does come with its perks," Zhang Yi quipped, raising an eyebrow.

Their exchange was brief, as neither knew why Bian Junwu had summoned them, leaving little room for deeper conversation.

Upon arriving, Bai Xue Jiao members guided Zhang Yi and Xing Tian toward the cathedral. Zhang Yi left Zhou Ke'er and the others outside, entering the building with Xing Tian.

St. John's Cathedral, once a famous Tianhai City landmark, was a familiar sight to Zhang Yi. He had visited before to admire its medieval European architecture, though he wasn't religious.

Inside, he noticed that everyone else had already gathered.

Bian Junwu, Zheng Yixian, Xiao Honglian, and Wei Dinghai had all found seats.

There was also someone Zhang Yi didn't recognize—a woman in a pristine white holy robe, her face youthful yet solemn, an intense juxtaposition of purity and maturity.

He quickly deduced her identity.

At a gathering like this, the only unfamiliar person could be Yuan Kongye, the cult leader rumored to possess the ability to awaken superhuman powers.

Xing Tian, seeing her for the first time, leaned toward Zhang Yi.

“She’s so young! She looks like she’s barely out of her teens.”

Zhang Yi glanced at him.

“Easy there, my neon-loving friend. Watch your words and curb your urges.”

Xing Tian’s face twitched. “What nonsense are you spouting? You know I’ve only ever liked older women!”

Zhang Yi smirked. “Oh, I’ve heard. Like that eight-year relationship you had with the massage parlor owner twelve years your senior.”

Xing Tian’s dark complexion flushed red, like hot iron in a furnace.

“You... you don’t understand! I was young, and she was... mature and charming. It was mutual!”

“Relax,” Zhang Yi replied. “Nothing wrong with missing motherly love.”

“You son of a—”

Xing Tian was about to retort when he caught himself, mindful of the situation.

“Zhang Yi, you’re heartless! No wonder you’re cold and unfeeling!”

Zhang Yi’s eyes briefly darkened with a flash of memory, followed by a cynical laugh.

“Love? Hah. Love is the cruelest thing in this world.”

By then, they had reached the group, and the others’ watchful gazes silenced their banter.

The two found seats, putting an end to their playful argument.

Bian Junwu wasted no time.

“Last night, we killed a Zombie King,” he began.

“It’s now confirmed that eliminating a Zombie King causes the entire zombie horde to lose cohesion. Even the accompanying rat swarms become disorganized.”

“Therefore, the key to resolving Tianhai City’s zombie crisis lies in killing every Zombie King.”

The announcement left everyone stunned.

Zhang Yi thought to himself, So they’ve figured it out.

Though he had anticipated this, the investigation team’s efficiency still caught him off guard.

They had ventured underground before, attempting to kill a Zombie King, only to fail. The team's swift success highlighted the disparity in capability.

Xiao Honglian, however, remained composed.

She knew that the Zombie King killed last night had been operating near Yangsheng Base.

Xing Tian asked curiously, "What exactly is a Zombie King? Can you explain in detail?"

"Of course," Bian Junwu replied.

Needing their help to deal with the zombies, he saw no reason to withhold information.

Chapter 479: The Plan to Annihilate the Zombie Horde

After finishing his explanation, Bian Junwu lifted a black body bag from the ground and placed it in the center of the cathedral.

Unzipping it, he revealed the corpse of a humanoid creature covered in white fur.

"This is it," Bian Junwu announced, pointing at the corpse.

Everyone stood up and crowded around the so-called Zombie King.

Upon seeing its appearance, most of them were underwhelmed.

They had expected the Zombie King to be a more terrifying or mysterious entity. Instead, it looked like nothing more than an ordinary corpse with fur—reminiscent of an old tale about corpses in tombs transforming into furry monsters.

Zhang Yi asked, “Is this thing really that dangerous?”

Bian Junwu replied, “The Zombie King can control hordes of zombies. Its intelligence is comparable to a human’s, but its combat strength is relatively weak.”

Hearing this, Zhang Yi nodded in relief. As long as it wasn’t overwhelmingly powerful, it would be manageable.

He had previously assumed that the Zombie King’s combat strength far surpassed that of the Bronze Armored Zombies. If that had been the case, eliminating it would have been a monumental challenge.

“It sounds a bit like a hive mind,” Zhang Yi remarked. “An intelligent queen that births more zombies but lacks significant combat ability.”

Xing Tian shot him a glance. “What, you wish it were stronger? If it were any tougher, we’d all be dead already!”

It was a fair point. The Zombie King’s glaring weakness was a saving grace.

Had it been a formidable fighter on top of commanding hordes of zombies, rats, and Bronze Armored Zombies, the factions in Tianhai City wouldn’t have stood a chance.

Knowing the Zombie King’s vulnerabilities eased some of the fear.

However, Zhang Yi remained cautious. If this was just one Zombie King, there were likely others in Tianhai City.

Moreover, the origin of the Zombie Kings was a mystery. Without clarity on this, the crisis couldn’t truly be resolved.

Bian Junwu explained their method for killing the Zombie King:

“The zombie hordes attack daily, but the Zombie King itself is fragile and remains hidden deep in the subway tunnels.

"To eliminate it, we need to use bait to lure the zombie army to the surface while an elite team infiltrates the tunnels to kill the Zombie King."

“Without the Zombie King’s control, the hordes lose cohesion and become far easier to deal with, no matter their numbers.”

Hearing this, Zheng Yixian suddenly realized the plan.

His eyes flashed with anger, and even Yuan Kongye's gaze flickered with subtle emotion.

Wei Dinghai chuckled.

“Don’t get so worked up. Out of all the factions in Tianhai City, your Bai Xue Jiao has the largest population. It’s only logical to choose your territory as the battlefield.”

Bian Junwu remained expressionless as he answered Zheng Yixian's accusation.

“While it may sound cold, we did factor that into our decision. Additionally, your faction lacks the advanced defenses that others have.”

“But don’t worry too much. All the factions have brought their armed forces here, maximizing your congregation’s safety.”

Zheng Yixian gritted his teeth. "But you're gathering all the zombies in Tianhai City here. What will happen to our people then?"

Bian Junwu adjusted his sunglasses and replied coolly, “If that happens, it’ll be ideal. We all hope to end Tianhai City’s zombie problem in one decisive battle.”

Zheng Yixian’s voice rose with indignation. “And what about the lives of the Bai Xue Jiao followers? Are they just fodder to you?”

Xiao Honglian interjected with a smirk.

“Zheng Yixian, be realistic. If Jiangnan District’s team doesn’t take this approach, your Bai Xue Jiao will vanish from the map eventually anyway.”

Spreading her hands, she added, “Unlike you, we have the option of retreating into our shelters.

“With our military-grade equipment, no number of zombies could breach our defenses. But your people? How long can you last with those flimsy fortifications?”

Her tone was laced with mockery, but her words were undeniable.

Everyone understood the brutal truth: if any faction were to fall first, it would be the Bai Xue Jiao.

Zheng Yixian’s face turned ashen.

“This still doesn’t justify using our people as bait!”

Bian Junwu finally spoke again, his voice cold and resolute.

“Why shouldn’t the Bai Xue Jiao serve as bait?”

The question stunned Zheng Yixian and Yuan Kongye.

They couldn't believe such a statement was made so directly.

Bian Junwu stared at them with icy determination.

“We came all the way from Jinling to help you face this crisis.

“Right now, all seven of us are here. The full armed forces of other factions are also here!”

“If you claim your people are bait, what does that make us? Are we not also bait in this battle?”

“Have I ever suggested that you face this crisis alone?”

His powerful declaration left Zheng Yixian speechless.

Bian Junwu was right. The Jiangnan District team bore no grudge against the Bai Xue Jiao.

Their journey here wasn't to stir trouble but to help Tianhai City's factions resolve the zombie crisis.

Despite understanding this logic, Zheng Yixian's face still reflected frustration.

Zhang Yi then spoke calmly.

“You need to understand that we combatants will be on the front lines.

“If anyone dies first, it'll be us.”

Pointing to the faction leaders, he added, “All these factions have brought their armed forces here to protect your congregation. What more could you ask for?”

Of course, Zhang Yi was merely being diplomatic. In reality, if things went south, his smaller group could retreat without hesitation, while larger forces might hesitate to abandon their positions.

Zheng Yixian's expression wavered with struggle. He seemed to realize they had no grounds to refuse.

The fact that Bian Junwu was even explaining the plan to him was a courtesy.

Finally, he let out a reluctant sigh.

"Fine. I understand. But Mr. Bian, you must provide us with a detailed and convincing battle plan!"

Chapter 480: A Call to Fight to the Death

Seeing Zheng Yixian relent, Bian Junwu adjusted his sunglasses with a composed expression.

"Don't worry. I've already devised a plan."

Since their enemy this time was a group of low-intelligence creatures, formulating the strategy had been relatively straightforward.

With a thorough understanding of the zombie horde's structure and behavior, Bian Junwu had crafted a clear plan.

He began explaining his approach to the group.

First, once everyone was gathered at the Bai Xue Jiao's location, the goal would be to attract all the zombies in Tianhai City to converge there.

Due to spatial differences, the zombie hordes would arrive at varying speeds.

The five factions would take defensive positions around the Bai Xue Jiao, luring the hordes into attacking. Meanwhile, Bian Junwu's seven-person decapitation team would infiltrate the subway tunnels to eliminate the Zombie King.

This plan had already succeeded once, proving its feasibility.

"The basic idea is simple," Bian Junwu said.

"Our strategy is similar to encircling reinforcements to destroy the horde, but in this case, it's more like baiting them into a trap."

He allowed himself a rare smile, though it was a cold one.

Xing Tian rolled his eyes.

"So, in short, we're the bait to lure the zombies, huh?"

“Exactly. It’s a massive trap, and we’re waiting for the zombie hordes to walk right in,” Bian Junwu replied calmly, exuding confidence.

“Since they’re low-intelligence creatures, as long as we use the right approach, dealing with them won’t be as difficult as it seems.”

While his tone was reassuring, everyone present felt the immense pressure of the situation.

Zhang Yi voiced his concerns.

“Sure, it sounds simple. But if we attract all the zombies in Tianhai City, how many are we talking about here?”

“Tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands?”

He gestured around.

“With just us and these makeshift defenses, the pressure will be enormous.”

Though Zhang Yi wasn’t afraid of zombies, the sheer numbers could be overwhelming. Fighting in the Bai Xue Jiao’s urban setting, devoid of the sturdy defenses of a shelter, was far from ideal. 而且

Bian Junwu met his concerns with unwavering resolve.

“That’s why I call on all of you to fight to the death. This is for your home. Fight with everything you have!”

Zhang Yi shrugged.

“Fair enough. It’s our territory. Solving the zombie crisis benefits the five factions the most.”

Zheng Yixian cast a skeptical glance around the room.

“What if someone intentionally holds back during the fight, letting the Bai Xue Jiao bear the brunt of the losses?”

Xiao Honglian scoffed.

“Zheng Yixian, stop with your paranoia!

“When the zombie hordes come, who would dare hold back? That’d be suicide!”

After considering her words, Zheng Yixian had to admit the logic was sound. No one would risk sabotaging their own survival.

Bian Junwu addressed the group.

“Does anyone else have objections?”

Zhang Yi and the others shook their heads. After all, the battle wasn’t taking place on their turf.

Finally, Yuan Kongye, who had remained silent until now, spoke up.

“While luring the zombies, I want the non-combatants—especially the children—to be protected.”

Her voice was calm but resolute.

The Bai Xue Jiao’s followers were unafraid of death. Many were willing to sacrifice themselves for their faith. However, the cult also included many women and children who couldn’t fight. It was unthinkable to let them be torn apart by the zombies.

Bian Junwu’s expression briefly softened before returning to its usual coldness.

“Fine. Where’s the safest place in your area? Clear it out for the children—anyone ten and under, not including those aged ten, can stay there.”

“As for everyone else, they must assist in defending against the zombie horde.”

This meant only the youngest children would be sheltered. Everyone else would serve as bait.

Zhang Yi considered Zhou Ke’er and decided to have her stay close to him. He didn’t mention it now, but as a faction leader, he had the authority to make such arrangements.

Yuan Kongye responded, “We’ll use the cathedral as the safe zone.”

She clasped her hands in prayer, gazing devoutly at the cross hanging above the altar.

“The gods will protect their faithful.”

St. John’s Cathedral, situated at the heart of the Bai Xue Jiao’s territory, was its safest location.

If the enemy breached this area, it would mean the situation was dire.

The cathedral also had a basement that could serve as a last resort hiding place.

Since the Bai Xue Jiao knew the area best, everyone accepted Yuan Kongye's proposal without objection.

The consensus was reached: the five factions would draw the zombie hordes while the investigation team focused on eliminating the Zombie King.

The most dangerous task—facing the Zombie King and its Bronze Armored Zombie guards—was left to the investigation team. No one objected, as no other faction had the capability to handle it.

Even Zhang Yi, confident as he was, wouldn't claim to be up to the task.

With the agreement finalized, Bian Junwu began assigning defensive positions.

Each faction was tasked with guarding one direction—east, south, west, or north.

Zhang Yi's small, elite team was designated as a special operations unit, free to move and provide support wherever needed.

The factions hashed out minor disputes over defensive responsibilities before settling on a cohesive plan.

Bian Junwu distributed advanced communication devices to each group. These high-tech gadgets connected to the Xingyun Satellite System, ensuring reliable communication even in adverse conditions.

“Communication is critical on the battlefield. This equipment will keep the factions coordinated and responsive,” Bian Junwu explained.

He also issued a final reminder:

“This battle could last a long time—certainly more than a day or two. Prepare for a prolonged conflict.”

Everyone nodded. The gravity of the situation was clear. They were baiting the entire city’s zombie population into one area, and the outcome depended on timing and numbers they couldn’t predict.

For the foreseeable future, this was where they would live and fight.

Zhang Yi, however, remained unfazed. Though the conditions here were far worse than those of the shelter, he had plenty of supplies and a snow vehicle with heat, ensuring he wouldn’t suffer too much.