

Ice Age 491

Chapter 491: Holding the Line

The battle on the outskirts of the Followers of the Snow God camp had reached its climax.

There was no need for elaborate tactics—the zombie horde had only one strategy: overwhelming with sheer numbers!

Over 200,000 zombies had completely encircled the camp, launching relentless assaults from all directions.

The human forces used every means at their disposal to fight back—artillery, traps, superhuman abilities, and melee combat!

Every possible method was being deployed.

They knew they couldn't retreat. Their formation was hollow in the center, completely surrounded, with no way out.

Their only option was to fight to the death and hold the line until Bian Junwu and his team completed the decapitation mission!

Blood and flesh flew across the battlefield.

Zombies were blasted to pieces, but even with only half a body left, they continued crawling forward, roaring.

Human soldiers, armed with advanced weaponry, could take down hundreds of zombies each.

But a single misstep meant being overwhelmed by the endless horde.

Even if a zombie couldn't bite through their protective gear, sheer numbers could crush them under the weight.

Not to mention the giant mutated rats, which could break through their defenses.

From his vantage point atop a high-rise, Zhang Yi systematically sniped nearly all the Bronze Armored Zombies.

His terrifying precision as a sniper became even more apparent on the battlefield.

It could be said that Zhang Yi alone had relieved at least 20% of the pressure on the allied forces!

If those heavily armored Bronze Armored Zombies had reached the frontlines, the human defenses would have collapsed in no time!

Time flew by—twenty minutes had already passed.

The allied forces fought while retreating.

Each withdrawal left behind an array of traps, filled with incendiary materials and explosives, wiping out waves of zombies.

The defensive perimeter kept shrinking, and casualties had already reached 30%!

Xiao Honglian gritted her teeth and contacted Bian Junwu.

“We can’t hold out much longer! How’s it going on your end?”

Bian Junwu’s response was cold. “We’re close to finding the Zombie King. Hold on a little longer, and we’ll have results soon!”

Hearing this, the allied forces clung to the last shred of hope and continued their desperate defense.

But after ending the call, Bian Junwu remained outside—he hadn’t ventured underground yet.

He was still waiting for more zombies to emerge from below.

With an attack of this scale, Bian Junwu was certain that the Zombie King wouldn't want to lose.

If Zhang Yi and the others held out long enough, the Zombie King would be forced to send reinforcements.

This was a battle of endurance.

And the Zombie King couldn't be sure whether this was a trap.

As long as the opportunity presented itself, Bian Junwu's seven-man assassination team would strike.

...

The battlefield ahead was turning into a bloodbath!

Liang Yue, Uncle You, and Fatty Xu formed a special task force, reinforcing the western flank.

Liang Yue's Loong Roar Sword was made from Adamantium—otherwise, it would have dulled from hacking zombies!

She moved like a human tornado, slashing through the horde with relentless fury, her blade tearing dozens of zombies apart with each swing!

Uncle You had incredible defense, but when faced with the massive zombie horde, he relied primarily on his two enormous Gatling guns to mow them down.

The only good news was that Zhang Yi and his team had an ample supply of ammunition.

At this moment, Fatty Xu's abilities proved invaluable.

His Snowstorm ability was incredibly versatile, especially in battlefield control.

While not as deadly as Wei Dinghai's Ice and Snow Lord, which excelled in stealth attacks, Fatty Xu's ability to control the battlefield was even stronger.

Different strengths for different situations.

With his power alone, Fatty Xu covered an area of several kilometers in ice and snow, drastically slowing the zombies down.

This gave the others an opportunity to cut them down more efficiently.

Though Zhang Yi's team was small, they were among the most active on the battlefield, contributing more than many larger factions!

Time crawled by, another thirty minutes passing in an agonizing struggle.

Every second felt like an eternity, filling everyone with despair.

But they had no choice—they were cornered, forced to fight like madmen against the undead tide!

The relentless fighting gradually slowed the zombie advance.

Although the horde kept pushing forward, the allied forces' shrinking formation made it harder for them to break through.

However, casualties among the ordinary followers of the Snow God began to mount.

No matter how tight the defensive line was, some zombies would inevitably slip through.

And at this point, no one had the capacity to care about the fate of the common followers.

Although the Followers of the Snow God had evacuated them to high-rise buildings and deep underground tunnels in advance,

Zombies and giant rats had an uncanny ability to sense living prey.

Some zombies managed to breach the defenses and infiltrate the hiding places of the followers.

And there were no elite fighters stationed there.

Just a few zombies could slaughter an entire floor of defenseless believers!

Screams filled the air as they rushed to the windows, crying out for the armed forces to save them.

Xiao Honglian and the others ignored their pleas.

They had no manpower to spare—barely managing to protect themselves.

Even Zheng Yixian and his people could only sigh and mutter, "Return to the Divine Kingdom."

Then, they turned away, indifferent.

At this moment, just holding back the zombie horde was pushing them to their limits.

If they split their forces to deal with scattered zombies in the rear, their entire defensive line would collapse.

Zhang Yi spotted a dozen zombies slipping through.

He hesitated for a moment before adjusting his aim and picking them off one by one.

He didn't particularly care about the fate of the Followers of the Snow God.

But he absolutely couldn't allow chaos to break out behind them.

If the common believers panicked and ran everywhere, they could disrupt the frontline forces.

However, more and more zombies were breaching the defenses.

The battle had devolved into brutal hand-to-hand combat.

“It’s already been forty minutes! What the hell is going on over there?”

Xiao Honglian and Xing Tian were getting anxious.

They were supposed to hold the line for thirty minutes—why were the zombies still attacking with full force?

“There are still a lot of zombies underground. Hold on for ten more minutes, and we’ll finish them off!”

Bian Junwu’s cold reply irritated Xiao Honglian and the others.

But at this point, they had no choice but to believe him.

As the defensive perimeter shrank further, the hiding places of the ordinary followers had to be abandoned.

But this also had an unexpected advantage.

Zombies were drawn to living humans, highly sensitive to their presence.

The large concentration of believers became an irresistible lure, drawing a significant portion of the horde away.

This significantly reduced the pressure on the combat forces.

In fact, from the very beginning, these believers had been part of Bian Junwu's plan—as bait.

To annihilate the zombie horde, anything was expendable.

Desperate screams echoed throughout the camp.

Without the protection of the armed forces, the ordinary believers stood no chance against the zombie and rat swarms.

They quickly became nothing more than food for the undead.

Just as Zhang Yi breathed a sigh of relief, thinking they could hold on a little longer,

Beside him, Hua Hua suddenly pricked up its ears, growling as it bared its sharp fangs!

Chapter 492: Collapse

Zhang Yi held his sniper rifle, maintaining a commanding view of the battlefield, picking off enemies from every direction.

To him, no enemy could approach without being noticed.

But he had overlooked one direction.

“Meow—!!”

Beside him, Hua Hua suddenly let out a loud roar before rapidly enlarging its body and shielding Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi was startled, unsure why Hua Hua had reacted this way.

But in less than half a second, he realized—someone was approaching!

Whoosh—

A gust of wind swept over him as Hua Hua leaped into the air toward the unseen threat.

Zhang Yi looked up, and his pupils shrank at what he saw!

Above the dark night sky, a dozen humanoid creatures with massive bat-like wings were descending.

They were slender yet unnervingly agile.

Flying Bronze Armored Zombies?!

“A new variant? These things were hiding deep!”

Zhang Yi’s sharp gaze locked onto the airborne creatures.

Hua Hua had already lunged at one of them, forcing it down onto the rooftop.

The other flying zombies rushed straight toward Zhang Yi!

Unfazed, Zhang Yi swiftly activated the Dimensional Gate, opening a massive portal before him and immediately pulling the trigger.

Two of the airborne zombies charged straight into the portal without warning.

One was instantly shot down.

The remaining flying zombies quickly changed tactics, hovering high above as they searched for an opportunity to take him down.

Since Zhang Yi had already eliminated most of the ground-based Bronze Armored Zombies, these creatures had set their sights on him, determined to kill him.

Fortunately, Zhang Yi had Hua Hua as a bodyguard, preventing any surprise attacks.

On the rooftop, the growls and roars of the flying zombies were soon drowned out by Hua Hua's frenzied cries.

“Meow! Meow!!”

Hua Hua's razor-sharp claws tore through its opponent, shredding the zombie's steel-like body into bloody chunks.

The creature was utterly destroyed.

The remaining dozen flying zombies hesitated, a flicker of caution appearing in their eerie eyes.

Their speed made them difficult to snipe, and at this range, Zhang Yi's Divine Might could still take them down. The Dimensional Gate also offered excellent defensive coverage.

If worst came to worst, he could always retreat.

So he wasn't afraid.

But the flying zombies, wary of his abilities, suddenly veered away—heading straight for the allied forces!

“Damn it!”

Zhang Yi immediately shouted over the comms, “Flying Bronze Armored Zombies! Above you! Stay alert!”

The flying zombies were incredibly fast, and now that they had adapted to Zhang Yi's sniping, they were harder to take down quickly.

Their aerial assaults became a massive threat to the allied forces.

Despite Zhang Yi's warning, they still managed to slaughter a large number of soldiers.

Even worse, Zhang Yi spotted something terrifying in the distance—

Another massive wave of zombies, numbering at least hundreds of thousands, was surging toward them!

"This is getting out of control! Bian Junwu, it's all on you now!"

Zhang Yi sucked in a sharp breath.

The first zombie horde had nearly broken their defenses.

Now, with the addition of the flying zombies and a second wave, the allied forces stood no chance of holding the line.

Unless Bian Junwu and his team successfully completed their decapitation mission,

Zhang Yi would be left with no choice but to retreat with his squad.

He immediately activated the squad's private comms.

"Stop fighting at the front. Fall back and be ready to withdraw with me at any moment!"

With the Dimensional Gate, his squad still had a chance to escape.

But if Bian Junwu failed, no one here would survive.

After issuing the order, Zhang Yi's first thought was Zhou Ke'er in the church.

He immediately turned his gaze toward the church—only to see two flying zombies diving straight for it!

"F**k!!"

Zhang Yi swore, his blood turning ice-cold.

The church had defenders, but no one had prepared for an aerial assault.

If those two flying zombies got inside, they would massacre everyone within seconds.

And Zhou Ke'er would be in grave danger.

Without hesitation, Zhang Yi activated the Dimensional Gate and teleported toward the church.

The distance required him to use the gate three times to get there.

But before he could arrive—

A blinding white light erupted from inside the church!

The two flying zombies that had dived in were suddenly blasted out through the ceiling, encased in thick layers of ice, looking like frozen statues.

“What the hell? There’s a powerhouse inside?”

Zhang Yi exhaled in relief.

But on second thought, it made sense.

The Followers of the Snow God wouldn't leave Yuan Kongye, their leader, unguarded in the church.

The two frozen zombies crashed to the ground.

Their icy shells shattered, and they slowly got back up, growling in fear toward the church.

At the entrance, the superhumans of the Followers of the Snow God immediately took defensive positions, engaging the frozen zombies in combat.

But Zhang Yi had no time to worry about that.

He stepped through the Dimensional Gate and entered the church.

Inside, chaos reigned.

Terrified believers huddled together on the floor, their faces pale with fear.

At the center of the church, Yuan Kongye stood tall, bathed in the light streaming through the shattered ceiling.

There was an aura of divine serenity surrounding her.

Zhang Yi glanced at her, his mind racing.

Was the mysterious powerhouse of the Followers of the Snow God actually her?

It was surprising, but also perfectly logical.

As their leader, it wasn't strange for her to possess formidable strength.

However, Zhang Yi had no time to dwell on that thought.

His eyes quickly landed on Zhou Ke'er—

She was clutching a medical kit, trembling in fear behind a white pillar.

Without a second thought, Zhang Yi strode forward and pulled her into his arms.

“It’s okay. I’m here.”

That single sentence made Zhou Ke’er’s tense body relax instantly.

With Zhang Yi by her side, she felt an overwhelming sense of security.

Yuan Kongye looked at Zhang Yi with slight surprise.

She didn’t understand how he had suddenly appeared out of thin air.

But after a brief moment of thought, realization dawned upon her—Zhang Yi must have used some sort of spatial teleportation ability.

Such a rare power piqued her curiosity, and she couldn’t help but glance at him a few more times.

Outside, the sounds of battle and agonized screams grew louder.

The church's massive doors thumped violently—a group of terrified believers had fled here, desperately seeking Yuan Kongye's protection.

“Zhang Yi... are we losing?”

Zhou Ke'er asked nervously.

Zhang Yi's expression remained cold and unwavering. He simply said, “Don't be afraid. Come with me.”

At this point, Zhang Yi had no interest in hiding his abilities. He immediately activated the Dimensional Gate and took Zhou Ke'er with him, vanishing from the church.

As for the fate of the others...

He didn't have the luxury to care.

Or rather, to put it more bluntly—he didn't have the ability to save everyone.

Holding Zhou Ke'er's hand, Zhang Yi emerged into the chaotic battlefield outside.

The situation was completely out of control.

More and more zombies and giant rats were breaking through the defensive lines.

At the front, Xiao Honglian and the others were still holding on desperately, refusing to let the undead completely overrun them.

Zhang Yi's face remained cold as he teleported both himself and Zhou Ke'er to the rooftop of a nearby high-rise.

Hua Hua was still there, standing over the shattered remains of a Bronze Armored Flying Zombie.

Strangely, Hua Hua hadn't eaten its brain.

That likely meant this creature was fundamentally different from superhumans or other mutated beings.

It wasn't a naturally evolved organism—it was something else entirely.

Zhang Yi scanned the battlefield from above, his sharp eyes analyzing the worsening situation.

The superhuman army was still holding their ground, preventing total annihilation.

But regular soldiers were dying en masse.

And when the superhumans' energy eventually ran out, they too would be overwhelmed.

Zhang Yi and his team had the advantage of Superhuman Energy Dishes to replenish their strength, allowing them to fight longer.

But this wasn't a sustainable strategy.

“Bian Junwu...”

Zhang Yi muttered the name, knowing full well that their assassination mission wasn't going smoothly.

And it was no surprise.

After all, their enemy wasn't just a single target—it was the entire zombie horde of Tianhai City.

“Zhang Yi... what do we do?”

Zhou Ke'er's voice trembled as she looked at the battlefield below.

The undead surged from all directions, like an unstoppable tidal wave.

There was nowhere left to run.

Believers hiding in skyscrapers were being dragged out and slaughtered.

Those in underground parking lots and malls were trapped, unable to escape.

The Followers of the Snow God's sanctuary had become a living nightmare.

At this rate, in ten minutes, the entire defense would collapse.

Aside from Zhang Yi's small team, no one would survive.

Zhang Yi could see the sheer desperation in the eyes of the fighters below.

They were battling like madmen.

Xiao Honglian's white flames engulfed the battlefield, incinerating wave after wave of zombies.

Wei Dinghai's Ice and Snow Lord ability slowed down the undead advance, but as soon as one wave was frozen, another surged forward.

Even Xing Tian's elite warriors, known for their boundless battle spirit, were beginning to tire.

Their white combat aura was fading from exhaustion.

"Prepare to retreat. If the frontlines fall, I'll get you all out immediately."

Zhang Yi spoke into the comms, addressing Fatty Xu, Uncle You, and Liang Yue.

Fatty Xu's breathless voice came through, panicked and desperate.

"Boss! I can't hold out any longer! Come save me!!"

Zhang Yi's eyes scanned the battlefield, quickly locating Fatty Xu.

As a Control-type superhuman, he was naturally surrounded by a small squad of bodyguards.

But the undead were about to overrun them.

Fatty Xu, cowardly as ever, was already pale with terror.

Without hesitation, Zhang Yi commanded Hua Hua:

“Get him out of there!”

WHOOSH!

Hua Hua leaped from the rooftop, descending dozens of floors in a blur, kicking up a storm of ice and snow upon landing.

Charging through the zombie horde like an unstoppable force, Hua Hua snatched Fatty Xu by his collar and dragged him out of the swarm.

Within moments, they were back on the rooftop.

Fatty Xu collapsed onto the ground, panting heavily, his face still etched with the horror of near-death.

But Zhang Yi wasn't standing idly by.

From his storage, he pulled out dozens of grenades and explosives, hurling them into the densest clusters of zombies.

At this point, all he could do was lessen the burden on the others as much as possible.

His Divine Might ability, though powerful, had a limited range.

Even if he killed hundreds of zombies in a single shot, it wouldn't change the tide of battle.

Chapter 493: The Battle Ends

Just as Zhang Yi was about to give up and prepare to retreat with his team, the battlefield underwent a sudden and eerie change.

All the zombies stopped moving in an instant.

It was as if someone had removed their batteries—they completely ignored the humans standing before them, not even making a move to attack.

And then, a second later, they all turned around in unison and sprinted back the way they came.

Bronze Armored Flying Zombies, Bronze Armored Zombies, and even the ordinary undead—

Every single one of them abandoned the battle, despite the fact that just a few more waves of attacks could have completely overrun Tianhai City's largest human stronghold.

Yet, they didn't hesitate at all—they turned and fled at full speed.

When they arrived, they surged in like a tidal wave.

Now, they retreated like a collapsing mountain, fleeing in absolute chaos—every zombie racing desperately, their guttural cries filled with urgency, as if something more important than life and death itself was pulling them away.

Xiao Honglian's face lit up with joy at the sight.

Because she had seen this exact same scenario just days ago.

"Bian Junwu's team must have found the Zombie King! They're rushing back to save it!"

The Zombie King, as the commander of the horde, had absolute control over all zombies.

Whenever it was in mortal danger, it would instinctively recall every single zombie to protect it.

The fact that this was happening now could only mean Bian Junwu's team had successfully located the Zombie King and posed an immediate threat to it.

It was so desperate that it had no choice but to recall its entire army.

The battlefield was eerily silent for a moment.

Everyone was utterly exhausted—except for Zhang Yi, who was still relatively composed.

They had just brushed shoulders with death—one step away from becoming food for the undead.

As the zombie tide receded, the mutant rat swarms were slightly slower to react.

But as creatures that thrived in symbiosis with the zombies, they too were cunning—quickly turning around and following the undead in retreat.

No one dared to pursue them.

At this point, everyone was stretched to their limit—one wrong move, and the horde might turn back to attack.

Only when the zombies disappeared beyond the horizon, their dark forms shrinking into a narrow, endless black line in the distance, did the soldiers finally dare to breathe again.

“Haha... Hahahaha! Waaaaahh!!”

“Am... Am I still alive? I’m alive?! Or am I dead?”

Throughout the camp of the Followers of the Snow God, a mix of laughter, sobs, and heavy breathing echoed through the night.

The surge of relief was so overwhelming that even the most battle-hardened warriors broke down emotionally.

Many had faced death countless times before, but never like this—never against something so utterly hopeless.

They could accept dying in battle—but the thought of being eaten alive by zombies and giant rats was a nightmare beyond comprehension.

Xiao Honglian, despite her exhaustion, forced herself to stay alert.

“We can’t relax yet!” she called out.

“You can sit down and rest, but stay ready to fight! There might still be stragglers among the zombies and rats.”

Hearing her warning, the other faction leaders followed suit.

No one wanted to let their guard down too soon.

Even while resting, they kept their weapons close, ready to fight at a moment’s notice.

Zhang Yi swept his gaze over the battlefield, noticing that many soldiers looked completely dazed.

This battle had scarred them deeply.

For many, this night would haunt their dreams forever—PTSD was inevitable.

He could only hope they wouldn’t wake up screaming from nightmares of the horde.

Zhou Ke’er clung tightly to Zhang Yi, her body trembling as she finally allowed herself to breathe freely.

Her rapidly rising and falling chest made her distress painfully evident.

Zhang Yi felt it all too clearly.

Before long, Liang Yue, Uncle You, Fatty Xu, and Hua Hua gathered around Zhang Yi.

The three had strictly followed Zhang Yi's orders—fighting when necessary but reserving enough energy to escape at a moment's notice.

As a result, none of them had sustained injuries.

Even Uncle You, who had clashed with several Bronze Armored Zombies, remained completely unscathed.

His thick skin, raw strength, and terrifying regeneration ability had made him nearly invincible on the battlefield.

Time felt distorted—no one knew how long had passed.

Had it been hours? Or just a few short minutes?

Each second had felt endless.

Zhang Yi's gaze swept over the entire battlefield.

The first wave of defenders, those who had held the front line from the start, had suffered an 80% casualty rate.

Tianhai City was in ruins.

This battle had completely shattered its remaining military strength.

Especially in terms of high-level combat power, the losses were beyond catastrophic.

It wasn't just "devastating"—it was a complete disaster.

But for Zhang Yi, this wasn't necessarily bad news.

At the very least—

His team had survived.

No one from his group had perished.

That alone made this battle worth it.

And honestly—

If anyone truly deserved to be called "tragic", it wasn't Zhang Yi, nor the other base factions.

The real tragedy was yet to come.

The true victims of this battle—were the Followers of the Snow God.

Because the war had ravaged their territory.

Now, even the cries of grief had grown faint and scattered.

Of the 5,000 believers in the cult, barely 1,000 remained—

No, maybe not even 500.

That stark reality weighed heavily on the faces of Zheng Yixian and the other high-ranking members of the cult.

Everyone still stood at their defensive positions, their bodies unmoving.

But no one spoke.

Not a single word.

Because after a battle of such unimaginable loss, after witnessing so many lives perish, even the most basic human emotions seemed momentarily paralyzed.

Zhang Yi surveyed the surroundings, his expression neutral, unreadable.

Then, a soft voice broke the silence.

“Zhang Yi, are you hurt? Do you need me to check?”

It was Zhou Ke'er.

Her concern was evident in her gentle voice.

Zhang Yi turned to look at the kind-hearted doctor, but he couldn't bring himself to smile.

He simply shook his head. “I’m fine.”

Zhou Ke'er then checked on the others, but everyone in their squad was unharmed.

Tightening the strap on her medical kit, she looked at Zhang Yi and asked, “Can I go help the others?”

She was referring to the injured survivors on the battlefield.

Although they had made it out alive, many bore grievous wounds.

Zhang Yi didn't refuse.

At the very least, for now, they were all on the same side.

And after this battle, the major factions of Tianhai City had suffered such heavy losses that they were no longer capable of forming large-scale forces—let alone posing a threat to Zhang Yi's group.

In fact, they might even form an alliance to face the greater dangers ahead.

Zhou Ke'er hurried onto the battlefield, seeking out the wounded soldiers, carefully bandaging their injuries and administering medicine.

Her serious expression, her gentle hands, and her skilled medical care caused many of the hardened warriors to suddenly break down in tears.

For the first time since the battle ended, they felt warmth—

A warmth that reminded them they were still human, that they had survived, and that they hadn't fallen into the depths of hell.

One by one, the various factions retrieved their supplies.

Food, medicine, bandages, blankets, military coats—

Though no one dared to sleep just yet, they were fairly certain the zombie horde wouldn't return.

The priority now was helping the wounded recover.

From the church, Yuan Kongye emerged, leading the remaining survivors outside.

Throughout the battle, they had been well-protected.

Though there had been a few scares, not a single one of them had died.

Yuan Kongye's eyes were filled with grief and compassion as she gazed at the devastated battlefield.

Then, she turned to her followers and said solemnly:

“Go and help care for them. They are the ones who fought for us.”

The surviving believers understood—

They were alive only because the front-line warriors had fought to the death to protect them.

So those who could still move rushed to help the wounded, tending to them with what little strength they had left.

Among them were Li Jian, his wife, and Xu Beibei.

As for Li Kaile, his health had been poor since his last incident, and he had yet to fully recover.

So he was ordered to stay inside the church.

Li Jian gazed at the hellish scene before him, his heart heavy with pain.

The neighbors he had once brought to the Followers of the Snow God for safety—

Most of them were now dead, slaughtered in wave after wave of zombie attacks.

A deep sense of guilt settled on his face.

Zhang Jianfang, seeing his sorrow, gently consoled him.

“Don’t blame yourself too much. You did everything you could. In times like these, all we can do is survive one day at a time. This wasn’t your fault.”

Li Jian let out a long, weary sigh, then walked forward to help carry the wounded onto stretchers.

Meanwhile, the young girl Xu Beibei moved through the battlefield, carefully wrapping bandages around the injured and offering them warm water to help them recover.

Chapter 494: A Painful Victory

After what felt like an eternity, Bian Junwu and his team finally returned.

The seven of them looked battered and exhausted, a stark contrast to their usual composed demeanor.

Baili Changqing was supporting Wu Di, who had always been an arrogant loudmouth—but now, his face was ashen like gold leaf, his steps unsteady as if his body had lost all strength.

Kong Sheng, the Enhancement-type superhuman, had his shoulder wrapped in bandages, but his other arm was twisted unnaturally, clearly broken during battle.

All seven of them were covered in blood, their injuries varying in severity.

And yet—

They were smiling.

It was clear that the assassination mission had been just as brutal as the battlefield fight.

But they had succeeded.

As the investigation team entered the camp of the Followers of the Snow God, Bian Junwu scanned the survivors.

His expression remained impassive.

They had won—but only barely.

Everyone had pushed themselves to their absolute limits.

And there was no need for pointless words of comfort.

Zhang Yi stepped forward and asked directly, "Did you eliminate all the Zombie Kings?"

Bian Junwu's reply was as cold as ever. "There were five in total. We killed them all. The bodies are in the vehicle."

"Good."

With confirmation that the Zombie Kings were truly dead, everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Without the Zombie Kings' command, the remaining zombies in Tianhai City were just mindless wanderers.

There was no longer a risk of them organizing into massive hordes.

From here on out, they could deal with the stragglers at their own pace.

After a moment of thought, Zhang Yi reached into his Spatial Storage and retrieved several Superhuman Energy Dishes, handing them to Bian Junwu.

Bian Junwu glanced at the food with curiosity. "What's this?"

"Food made for superhumans. Helps restore energy, stamina, and mental focus. It's extremely useful."

Zhang Yi replied with a smile.

Bian Junwu's eyes flickered with brief amusement before he let out a barely noticeable smirk—though even that small smile looked forced on his stoic face.

"Seems like you have a pretty impressive Support-type superhuman in your team."

Without hesitation, he took the food and returned to his snow vehicle with his team.

Meanwhile, the rest of the survivors—now assured of their victory—could finally rest.

Everyone was too exhausted to talk much.

The fighters withdrew to their own resting areas, while those who hadn't fought tended to the wounded and distributed food.

That night, no one spoke much.

...

After an entire day of rest, everyone's mental and physical state had improved significantly.

However, the number of injured survivors was far too great.

Given the circumstances, it was impossible to leave just yet.

So, the group decided to remain at the Followers of the Snow God's camp and recover before heading back.

But there was still one lingering issue—

Tianhai City was still crawling with zombies.

Even without the Zombie Kings, they still had their predatory instincts.

For now, staying together in one place was the safest choice.

Zhang Yi and his team could have left immediately.

But at Bian Junwu's request, they chose to stay.

Right now, Zhang Yi's team was by far the strongest combat force among the survivors.

Bian Junwu hoped they would remain and protect the others until everyone had fully recovered.

Zhang Yi, despite longing to return to his shelter, to collapse into his soft bed with Zhou Ke'er in his arms,

He ultimately agreed—

Out of respect for Jiangnan District's authority.

Thus, Zhang Yi's team stayed behind, primarily tasked with clearing out the scattered zombies in the surrounding areas.

For them, this was an easy job.

The remaining zombie hordes were small, only numbering a few thousand at most.

Without the Zombie Kings, they were mindless, weak, and disorganized—

A few superhumans working together could wipe them out effortlessly.

Over the course of several days, the survivors noticed a significant drop in zombie activity.

The threat wasn't entirely gone, but it was no longer an immediate crisis.

Bian Junwu and his team continued monitoring the situation.

Only after confirming that there were no more large-scale zombie movements would they return to Jiangnan District to report their success.

Meanwhile, after fighting side by side for so long, the relationships between the five major factions had undergone a dramatic shift.

Ironically—

The so-called "Five Major Factions" could hardly be called "major" anymore.

After this war, over 80% of their core combat forces had been wiped out.

They were shadows of their former selves.

Fortunately, the zombie horde had attacked indiscriminately—

Not only did it devastate them, but it had also annihilated the smaller factions of Tianhai City.

Had those smaller groups survived, the "Five Factions" might not have been able to hold onto their own territories.

But now?

Tianhai City was practically a dead city—so what was the point of having a large territory when there were hardly any living people left to occupy it?

Thus, the past tensions between the factions faded away.

They no longer saw each other as rivals, but rather as fellow survivors of the apocalypse.

And Zhang Yi felt it the most.

Because over the past few days, the other factions had constantly been trying to befriend his team.

Of all the groups, Zhang Yi's suffered the least losses.

In fact—

Aside from using up a significant amount of ammunition, Zhang Yi's team had taken no real damage.

And ammunition was cheap.

Zhang Yi had his own private armory, and with Lu Keran, his mechanical genius, constantly manufacturing more weapons,

His team would remain the strongest force in Tianhai City for the foreseeable future.

The first to extend an olive branch was Xiao Honglian.

She walked up to Zhang Yi with confidence, offering a friendly smile.

“Zhang Yi, we may have had some... disagreements in the past. But look at Tianhai City now—it’s in ruins. There might not even be 10,000 living people left.”

“From now on, let’s be friends. None of us can afford more conflict. If you ever need my help, just say the word.”

Xiao Honglian extended her hand with a bold, straightforward demeanor.

Zhang Yi had been deeply impressed by her leadership on the battlefield, her ability to rally troops and fight fiercely.

Unlike the women around him, she was a true warrior—strong, commanding, and fearless.

Zhang Yi had no love for unnecessary conflict.

Since she was offering peace, he saw no reason to refuse.

Past battles had been about resources—not personal grudges.

So he shook her hand, smiling. “I’ve always admired a woman who can lead a faction.”

Curious, he asked, “You’re skilled. Were you in the military or police before all this?”

Xiao Honglian chuckled softly. “I was a police superintendent in Tianhai City’s Criminal Investigation Unit.”

Zhang Yi smirked. “I knew it! A true badass.”

Then, a thought crossed his mind. His eyes gleamed mischievously.

“So... does that mean you have records on all of us?”

Xiao Honglian grinned. “Of course. I know all your basic information. Well... at least everything from before the apocalypse.”

Chapter 495: The Cloud of Doubt in His Heart

After Xiao Honglian left, Wei Dinghai quickly arrived.

He was a man in his forties, shrewd and worldly.

As soon as he saw Zhang Yi, he warmly flattered him.

Things like "so young and promising" and "born to be a great leader."

"Zhang Yi, do you have any interest in going out to sea? If you have time, I can take you overseas to take a look. There's a vast world out there!"

Wei Dinghai extended his invitation enthusiastically.

Thinking about the vast ocean, Zhang Yi couldn't help but feel a bit intrigued.

But then he recalled that beneath the boundless sea, there could be creatures even more dangerous than those on land. He quickly shook his head.

"Rather than that, you'd be better off sending me some ribbonfish."

Wei Dinghai laughed heartily. "No problem, no problem! Next time we return from the sea, I'll bring you the freshest frozen ribbonfish!"

Fresh fish were out of the question—only deep-sea fish could still survive in the ocean depths. Once they were caught and brought up, they would die instantly.

Zhang Yi asked, "So many people died this time. Is it still safe to go out to sea?"

Wei Dinghai's smile faded slightly.

He sighed softly and lowered his head. "Most of our combat personnel are dead, but I still have some staff on the ship. As long as they're there, I can still sail!"

He then expressed the same sentiment as Xiao Honglian.

Tianhai City was already scarred beyond recognition from this battle. No one even knew how many survivors were left.

This city, once home to over twenty million people, was now eerily silent.

Everyone was exhausted. No one wanted to fight anymore.

Besides, with so few people left, there were more than enough resources. There was no need for competition.

Shortly after, Zheng Yixian and Xing Tian arrived as well.

Zheng Yixian's face was clouded with deep sorrow.

Of all the factions, the Followers of the Snow God had suffered the heaviest losses.

Not only did they lose their warriors, but also a vast number of their followers.

Out of over five thousand people, more than four thousand had died. The remaining survivors, including both high-ranking members and ordinary believers, were less than eight hundred.

The other factions couldn't help but feel sympathy for them.

Xing Tian, on the other hand, casually slung an arm around Zhang Yi's shoulder, acting all buddy-buddy.

"Old Zhang, from now on, your team is the strongest in Tianhai City! You gotta watch my back."

He grinned as he spoke.

In truth, his faction had suffered the second-highest casualties, right after Zhang Yi's team.

His ability was unique—it allowed him to empower many people, turning ordinary soldiers into superhuman warriors.

Because of this, only about half of his Xing Tian Army had fallen.

The survivors were still strong and full of vigor.

Zhang Yi shot him an annoyed look. "Don't be so optimistic just yet. The zombie crisis in Tianhai City isn't over."

"Haha, the Zombie Kings are already wiped out. The remaining zombies won't amount to much."

Xing Tian chuckled, unfazed.

Zhang Yi sneered. "I wouldn't be so sure. We don't even know if all the Zombie Kings were drawn out in this battle."

Xing Tian was momentarily stunned.

Then he retorted, "If there were still Zombie Kings alive, why wouldn't they attack us now? This would be the perfect time, while we're at our weakest. Old Zhang, I think you're overthinking it." *r4NōbES*

Zhang Yi frowned slightly.

Even he wasn't entirely sure if his concerns were valid.

But he always preferred to consider the worst-case scenario.

Pessimists might struggle to be happy, but at least they rarely made fatal mistakes.

"Who knows? Better safe than sorry. Just stay alert."

"Got it." Xing Tian nodded.

Though whether he took it to heart or not was another matter.

After this battle, the atmosphere between the factions in Tianhai City became much more harmonious.

It was almost as if the zombie attack had been a blessing in disguise.

It reminded Zhang Yi of what a certain president had once said—when humanity faces an attack from non-human entities, all their internal conflicts might suddenly seem insignificant.

Yet, Zhang Yi couldn't shake an ominous feeling in his heart.

He glanced at the surviving members of the Followers of the Snow God.

Their corpses were strewn across the battlefield in a gruesome display, evoking deep sympathy from everyone.

Silently, Zhang Yi called Zhou Ke'er over and asked her to get in the car with him. There was something important he needed to do.

Seeing the serious expression on Zhang Yi's face, Zhou Ke'er blushed slightly.

They had been too preoccupied with defending against the zombie horde lately, and some things had been left unattended.

Now that things had settled down, handling those matters seemed only natural.

"Mm."

She nodded gently, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear before getting into the car first.

Zhang Yi then instructed Fatty Xu and a few others to stand guard for him.

"If anyone comes looking for me, don't let them get close. Got it?"

A flicker of emotion passed across Liang Yue's usually cold face. She turned her head away with a huff.

Fatty Xu, on the other hand, grinned and eagerly assured, "Yes, yes, yes! I'll make sure no one disturbs you, Boss! Whoever comes, they'll have to wait!"

Zhang Yi nodded and got into the car, quickly shutting the door and drawing the curtains.

The car had built-in soundproofing, so no one outside could hear what was happening inside.

Nearby, Liang Yue, Uncle You, and Fatty Xu rested.

Liang Yue seemed a little uncomfortable.

She never thought she'd be standing guard for someone in this kind of situation.

Uncle You, however, took it in stride.

He chuckled. "Zhang Yi is still young, after all. His energy is boundless."

He sighed almost imperceptibly.

If only Zhou Haimei were still here...

...

Inside the car, Zhang Yi saw Zhou Ke'er had already taken off her coat and was sitting on the bed with her legs elegantly crossed.

She gazed at him with an enchanting expression.

But Zhang Yi simply plopped down beside her.

"Ke'er, I need to ask you something important."

Zhou Ke'er was startled for a moment. Seeing how serious Zhang Yi looked, she realized she had misunderstood.

A trace of embarrassment crossed her face. "What is it?"

Zhang Yi said solemnly, "Remember when I asked you to observe Yuan Kongye closely?"

He narrowed his eyes, recalling the events of the zombie horde attack.

That night, everyone had been too tense, their nerves stretched to the limit. No one had time to think about anything else.

But now, looking back, there were many things that didn't add up.

For example, Yuan Kongye's display of ice abilities.

From what Zhang Yi knew, Yuan Kongye, as the leader of the Followers of the Snow God, relied on two abilities.

【Blessing】 —which allowed her to condense Ice Soul from her body, helping others awaken or strengthen their superhuman energy.

【Gift】 —which healed physical injuries.

People with two abilities weren't unheard of, and both of hers were enhancement or support-based. That much made sense.

But what about that night?

How did she suddenly exhibit offensive ice-based powers?

Those abilities were completely different from 【Blessing】 and 【Gift】 .

Chapter 496: A Terrifying Theory

Zhang Yi had seen Yuan Kongye in action—she had sent two powerful Bronze Armored Flying Corpses flying with a single strike. Her strength was undoubtedly formidable.

From just that one move, Zhang Yi had already determined that her combat power was at least on par with Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

But that was exactly what puzzled him the most.

"Think carefully. When you were with Yuan Kongye, did you notice anything unusual about her?"

"Especially on the night of the attack—how did she fight?"

Zhou Ke'er wasn't sure why Zhang Yi was suddenly asking about Yuan Kongye.

To her, the Followers of the Snow God were the biggest victims of this battle.

Everyone was sympathizing with them—why would anyone suspect them?

But since Zhang Yi asked, she did her best to recall.

"Um... these past few days, she spent most of her time praying and comforting other believers."

"But if I had to point out something unusual, there was one moment... She said she could help me awaken my superhuman energy."

A sharp gleam flashed in Zhang Yi's eyes.

"She said she could help you awaken your ability? Did you agree?"

Zhou Ke'er quickly shook her head with a smile.

"No! Of course, I want to become a Superhuman, but I always remember what you told me—to stay wary of others. So I refused her!"

Zhang Yi nodded in relief.

"When someone offers kindness for no reason, there's always a hidden agenda. Yuan Kongye wouldn't just hand over something as valuable as Ice Soul without a reason."

"Unless... she had a special purpose."

Zhang Yi intertwined his fingers, resting his chin on his hands. The fog clouding his mind started to clear.

He had a feeling he was grasping a critical truth.

A bold theory was slowly forming in his mind.

"Ke'er, keep going. Tell me everything about her in detail—don't leave anything out!"

Zhou Ke'er nodded and continued.

"After I refused her, she just said that if I ever changed my mind, I could go find her anytime."

"She didn't force me, which made me feel more comfortable around her."

"Later, that was when the two creatures broke through the ceiling and stormed into the church."

Zhou Ke'er recalled the moment vividly.

"I was sitting in the front row, very close to Yuan Kongye. So when she made her move, I saw everything clearly."

"The two monsters dove down, targeting her first."

"She was fast—she just raised her hand slightly, and both creatures froze in midair."

"Then, like she was swatting flies, she effortlessly waved her hand, sending them flying out of the church. The doors were even smashed apart!"

Zhou Ke'er described the scene animatedly.

But as Zhang Yi listened, his scalp tingled, and a bone-chilling cold crept up his spine.

"An ice-based ability strong enough to instantly freeze two powerful Bronze Armored Flying Corpses..."

"Incredible reaction speed and monstrous physical strength... that's the mark of an Enhancement-type Superhuman."

"That means she possesses at least three different abilities!"

Zhang Yi finally understood.

Everything made sense now!

He finally knew why the Followers of the Snow God had so generously handed out Ice Soul.

Not only to him but to all the major factions in Tianhai City.

And why they kept using the Great Decree to spread their faith, seeking out talented individuals and gifting them Ice Soul.

It didn't matter whether these individuals joined the Followers of the Snow God or even became their enemies.

Because Yuan Kongye's real ability was never **【Blessing】** .

It was **【Death Return】** !

In other words, when someone who awakened through Ice Soul died, their ability would return to Yuan Kongye.

That meant she could acquire an endless number of abilities. And judging by her power, these weren't just minor boosts—her superhuman energy was terrifyingly strong.

During the Five Armies War, Zhang Yi had come across many dead Superhumans whose essence was completely gone.

Back then, he couldn't understand where their abilities had vanished to.

Now he realized—they had awakened their powers through Ice Soul. And when they died, their abilities returned to Yuan Kongye.

This process didn't just give her new abilities—it also strengthened her existing ones.

And in the months since the apocalypse began, how many Superhuman abilities had she secretly absorbed?

Not to mention, after this battle in Tianhai City, countless Superhumans had died.

Suddenly, an even more terrifying thought surfaced in Zhang Yi's mind.

Could Yuan Kongye be the mastermind behind the zombie outbreak in Tianhai City?

The more he thought about it, the more horrifying the possibility seemed.

If that were true, then the seemingly harmless, devout priestess was actually the most ruthless, inhuman monster in the entire city!

And now, Zhang Yi couldn't even begin to imagine how powerful she had become.

His face turned grim, and his legs began to tremble involuntarily.

It was a sign of unease.

Though all of this was just a theory for now...

If it turned out to be true, then in the near future, he would be facing an unimaginably powerful enemy.

For now, at least, this was just speculation.

There were still things he couldn't explain.

First, the zombie horde.

If the Followers of the Snow God could control the zombies, why had they been oppressed by the major bases all this time?

With the power of a zombie horde, they could have easily wiped out Tianhai City.

Second, what was Yuan Kongye's goal?

As the leader of a religious sect, she prided herself on being the most devoted follower of her god.

So why would she destroy the foundation of her own faith?

The casualties among the Followers of the Snow God had been catastrophic. There were barely any of them left.

Without believers, could it even be called a religion anymore?

"I can't figure it out... I just can't!"

Zhang Yi murmured to himself, his mind in turmoil.

He wanted to believe he was overthinking.

But the pieces fit together too well. He couldn't ignore it.

Zhou Ke'er quickly moved closer, concerned. "Zhang Yi, what's wrong?"

Zhang Yi didn't respond. He was lost in deep thought.

Yes, this was just his own theory for now.

Aside from knowing that Yuan Kongye had multiple abilities, he had no concrete proof.

Even if he told people, they wouldn't believe him.

More importantly, he didn't want to alert her just yet.

"Hopefully, I'm just imagining things."

Zhang Yi muttered to himself.

Looking up, he saw Zhou Ke'er's worried expression and forced a smile.

"It's nothing. You did great. But remember—never go near Yuan Kongye. She's bad news."

Zhou Ke'er nodded. "Okay, I got it. But... you seem really troubled."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow but ultimately decided against telling her.

For now, this was just his theory.

If he was right and Yuan Kongye found out he suspected her, the consequences were not something he was ready to face.

Chapter 497: A Flawed Logic

After finishing his conversation with Zhou Ke'er, Zhang Yi stepped out of the car.

He gazed at the white Gothic-style church, his emotions complicated.

"Am I just overthinking this... or is it real?"

If the Followers of the Snow God truly had the ability to control the zombie horde, there was no reason for them to wait until now to act.

Unless there was some special reason.

But if Yuan Kongye was really the mastermind, she had the perfect opportunity a few nights ago to eliminate everyone while they were weak.

That, too, didn't make sense.

And from her behavior, she didn't seem like someone capable of commanding a zombie horde.

This was a mess.

The more Zhang Yi thought about it, the more the logic didn't add up.

No matter how he looked at it, the Followers of the Snow God didn't have the means or motive for such a scheme.

His suspicion was purely based on her multiple abilities.

"I should investigate further in secret."

With that thought in mind, Zhang Yi's attention was drawn to the sound of coughing in the distance.

He looked up and saw Bian Junwu coughing violently, while Wu Di and Baili Changqing watched him with concern.

Bian Junwu had a white handkerchief pressed against his mouth, coughing so hard it seemed like his lungs might give out.

Zhang Yi frowned slightly.

"Could it be... Yuan Kongye is wary of the Jiangnan District people?"

Zhang Yi shook his head, realizing he was becoming too paranoid.

He was thinking like a conspiracy theorist, scrutinizing everything with suspicion.

Shoving his tangled thoughts aside, he walked toward Bian Junwu's group.

The investigation team members had different reactions when they saw him.

Most of them were friendly.

Bian Junwu had previously mentioned wanting Zhang Yi to join their investigation team.

He was nearing the end of his life due to the side effects of his ability and had been searching for a new member to replace him.

Zhang Yi's performance in Tianhai City, particularly during the recent battle, had earned the team's recognition.

Although his sniping skills overlapped somewhat with Qi Guangming's, having two snipers in a squad wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Besides, they had different specialties.

Only Wu Di looked at Zhang Yi with clear hostility.

Zhang Yi had no idea when he had offended Wu Di, but he had no interest in unnecessary conflicts and chose to ignore him.

"Captain Bian, how's your condition?"

Zhang Yi approached with concern.

Bian Junwu removed his handkerchief, and Zhang Yi noticed the dark red stains on it.

His heart sank—Bian Junwu was clearly terminally ill.

It seemed that during the last decapitation operation, he had used his abilities again, worsening his condition.

Zhang Yi felt a pang of regret.

Bian Junwu had left a good impression on him—calm, wise, and incredibly strong.

Without his team's help, Tianhai City likely wouldn't have survived the zombie crisis.

Bian Junwu spoke in a flat tone, "Same as always. Won't live much longer."

He was discussing his own death, yet his face remained emotionless, as if he had long since come to terms with it.

Wu Di looked anxious. "Boss, don't say that! We need to head back to Blizzard City as soon as possible. If you receive treatment there, we can at least stop the deterioration!"

Bian Junwu shook his head.

He knew his own body best.

Jiangnan District had tried every method to save this battle-hardened Delta-class Superhuman.

But mutation was irreversible.

The consequences of using his ability had to be borne by him alone.

Bian Junwu turned to Zhang Yi. "We'll do one final sweep, confirm there are no Zombie Kings left in Tianhai City, and then we'll leave."

He suddenly smiled. "So, what do you think? Tianhai City is in ruins now. It'll be difficult to withstand any future disasters, natural or man-made. Want to come with us?"

"Not just you—your friends can come too."

Zhang Yi's group was full of elites. If they went to Blizzard City, they could all find decent positions.

Zhang Yi chuckled. "I don't have any plans to leave yet. But maybe in the future."

Wu Di snorted. "As if you can just pick and choose! You think Blizzard City is a place where anyone can just walk in?"

Zhang Yi didn't bother arguing and simply smiled. "I still have friends here. Besides, Tianhai City is my home—I'm used to it here. Leaving isn't easy."

Bian Junwu didn't push the issue.

"Think it over. With your abilities, you deserve a bigger stage."

Zhang Yi glanced at the others. Wu Di, as usual, had an arrogant expression, always looking down his nose at people.

Not wanting to continue the conversation, Zhang Yi simply told Bian Junwu to take care and was about to leave.

"Hey, Zhang!"

Wu Di suddenly called out, staring at him intently with a provocative tone.

"I heard you're strong—one of the top fighters in Tianhai City. Want to spar with me?"

Some of the investigation team members exchanged glances—some amused, others deep in thought.

Bian Junwu said nothing.

He simply watched Zhang Yi, curious about how he would respond.

Zhang Yi didn't hesitate.

He immediately raised his hands in surrender.

Grinning, he said, "Brother, spare me! I'm not much of a fighter. My skills are only good for sniping and carrying supplies."

"You're an elite from Blizzard City. If we fight, wouldn't that just be bullying me? I surrender! I surrender!"

Zhang Yi had no idea why Wu Di was so hostile toward him.

But he wasn't the type to get into meaningless fights.

People who constantly sought to prove themselves were the first to die. Zhang Yi understood that well.

Besides, when he did choose to fight, it meant he was prepared to kill.

And there was no benefit to killing Wu Di.

So, he wouldn't fight.

Wu Di was caught off guard.

He hadn't expected Zhang Yi to just surrender outright.

Furious, he pointed at Zhang Yi. "You didn't even fight! How can you just give up? You're supposed to be a leader in Tianhai City, and you have no shame?"

Zhang Yi simply waved his hand with a smile.

"What leader? We're just a group of friends sticking together. They listen to me out of respect, that's all."

"I've got things to do. We'll talk later!"

With that, Zhang Yi quickly walked away, not giving Wu Di another chance to pick a fight.

Wu Di was so angry he trembled.

Pointing at Zhang Yi's back, he turned to Bian Junwu. "Boss! This guy is a coward! You really want him on our team? Just look at him—he doesn't belong with us!"

Baili Changqing burst into laughter.

Even Bian Junwu smiled.

He looked at Wu Di with a meaningful gaze and said, "That's exactly why I like him."

"If everyone in the investigation team were like you, we'd be doomed."

Zhang Yi ignored Wu Di's provocation.

In his eyes, arrogant people like Wu Di wouldn't last long in the apocalypse. If it weren't for his strength and Bian Junwu backing him up, someone would have taken him out long ago.

If Wu Di really wanted to fight, Zhang Yi had a hundred ways to make sure he died miserably.

After leaving Bian Junwu's side, Zhang Yi felt relieved knowing they wouldn't be leaving just yet. Regardless of whether the Followers of the Snow God had any schemes, with the Jiangnan District people present, Tianhai City wouldn't fall into chaos.

He headed toward Yangsheng Base to find Xiao Honglian.

The soldiers at Yangsheng Base were very familiar with Zhang Yi. After several battles, they had developed a deep respect for him.

As an enemy, they feared him.

As an ally, they admired him.

"Mr. Zhang, please wait a moment. I'll go inform her right away."

A Superhuman Captain quickly went to find Xiao Honglian.

Before long, she arrived.

"Oh? What brings you to me?" Xiao Honglian asked with a bold smile.

Zhang Yi glanced around and said, "Let's take a walk."

Xiao Honglian looked surprised, sizing him up with a strange expression. “You don’t seem to be lacking women, do you? Let me warn you, don’t get any funny ideas about me.”

Zhang Yi couldn’t help but laugh.

“You’re overthinking. I just need your help with something, and there are too many people here—it’s not convenient to talk.”

“Alright then.”

The two of them strolled casually out of the camp, walking through the snow and ruins.

Once they were sure there was no one around, Xiao Honglian asked, “So, what do you want?”

Zhang Yi got straight to the point. “Didn’t you say before that you could get your hands on information about anyone in Tianhai City?”

“Yeah,” Xiao Honglian replied, blinking at him. “Why? Who are you looking for?”

With most people in Tianhai City already dead, whoever Zhang Yi was looking for was most likely in the Followers of the Snow God’s camp.

She was very curious about his intentions.

Zhang Yi said calmly, “I need information on the leaders and deputies of Qingfu Base, Chaoyu Base, and the Followers of the Snow God.”

Xiao Honglian raised an eyebrow. “You don’t trust them?”

Zhang Yi chuckled. “It’s not about trust. I’m just a cautious person—I like to be prepared.”

Xiao Honglian smirked. "Want my information too while you're at it?"

Zhang Yi laughed. "If you're offering, I wouldn't say no."

"Keep dreaming."

She rejected the idea outright.

There was no way she'd let her own details fall into Zhang Yi's hands.

Zhang Yi smiled at her. "Well? Can you do it?"

Xiao Honglian furrowed her brows, her eyes filled with suspicion.

She didn't know what Zhang Yi was planning.

The files she had weren't detailed enough to include every individual's full history.

But when the apocalypse began, she had leveraged her former position to gather as much information as possible on key figures in every faction.

So, overall, her data was quite comprehensive.

But those records were from before the world ended. They weren't as valuable now.

It wouldn't be a big deal to give them to Zhang Yi.

"I could give them to you, but—"

Xiao Honglian grinned. "What are you offering in exchange?"

She wasn't about to hand them over for free.

Zhang Yi smiled faintly. "What do you want? Food, energy, or weapons?"

"I don't need any of that."

Xiao Honglian waved dismissively.

With so many people dead, Tianhai City's resource shortage was actually easier to manage now.

She didn't need those things at the moment.

"If I give you the information, I want a promise from you."

"A promise? What kind of promise?" Zhang Yi asked.

Xiao Honglian looked at him and smiled. "If one day, we're in danger, I want you to help us."

Damn. Even in the apocalypse, she still believed in promises?

Zhang Yi found it amusing.

"You think a promise like that is worth anything?"

Xiao Honglian, however, was serious. "I think it is. We're the only ones left in Tianhai City. If we want to survive, we need to cooperate and maintain some level of order."

“Otherwise, in complete chaos, no one will feel secure.”

Zhang Yi thought for a moment. It was an easy condition to agree to.

If Xiao Honglian ever needed his help and the problem was easy to solve, Zhang Yi wouldn't mind stepping in.

But if it required a significant sacrifice, then that was another story.

“Alright, I can agree to that.”

Zhang Yi nodded.

For Xiao Honglian, this was a deal with no losses. She didn't have to give up anything significant—just some data stored in their system.

“The files are on our base's server. I'll send them to you once I get back,” she said.

“When are you planning to leave?” Zhang Yi asked.

As they walked, Xiao Honglian replied, “Things here are more or less settled. It's time for us to go back and rebuild our home. We'll be leaving tomorrow.”

“There's also the matter of reorganizing our military force.”

She took a deep breath. “This battle cost us too much.”

Then she turned to Zhang Yi. “What about you guys? Not leaving yet?”

Zhang Yi smiled faintly. "Soon."

There were still some things he wanted to observe.

He also needed to communicate with the investigation team.

Before returning to the Shelter, he had to confirm that all the Zombie Kings in Tianhai City were completely eradicated.

If even one survived, with their rapid virus spread, it wouldn't be long before another terrifying horde rose again.

Back at the camp, Zhang Yi acted as usual. He even greeted Zheng Yixian and the Followers of the Snow God with a smile.

He showed no sign of suspicion toward them or the sudden appearance and disappearance of the corpse tide.

That night, Xiao Honglian informed everyone of their plans to leave.

"Tianhai City is in ruins, and Yangsheng Base has suffered heavy losses. We have to rebuild from scratch," she announced.

"We need to get back as soon as possible and start reconstruction."

Everyone understood.

But at that moment, Yuan Kongye suddenly spoke up.

"Everyone, after this battle, Tianhai City is severely weakened. Every faction has suffered great losses, and our overall combat power has declined."

“Therefore, I have decided to offer my humble contribution.”

As she spoke, she took out five small wooden boxes.

Everyone immediately recognized them.

These boxes had previously been distributed among the major factions in Tianhai City.

Inside them was Yuan Kongye’s own separated Ice Soul.

For her, separating an Ice Soul was no easy task.

Because the Ice Soul was the most refined part of her own cells, she could only produce a few hundred in her entire lifetime.

Each time she generated one, her body would enter a weakened state.

Yet now, she was offering a portion to five factions, including the investigation team.

“There’s a limited supply. I’ve given each faction two Ice Souls. If you find someone with potential, give it to them.”

“But if you don’t have anyone with the ability to see auras and judge talent, it’s best to use it on an existing Superhuman.”

“It can awaken hidden potential and make them even stronger.”

As she spoke, her gaze swept lightly over the leaders present.

Chapter 499: Death's Return

The moment Yuan Kongye took out the Ice Souls, a chilling sensation surged in Zhang Yi's heart.

It was like walking through a blizzard on the Arctic ice fields, only to suddenly realize a polar bear was watching him.

His suspicions grew stronger.

If his theory was correct—if Yuan Kongye's ability was Death's Return—then her distribution of the Ice Souls meant that, sooner or later, she planned to take action against everyone.

Kill them. Absorb their power.

Zhang Yi recalled what Zhou Ke'er had once said.

Back then, Yuan Kongye had offered an Ice Soul to Zhou Ke'er, but she had refused.

That proved that the choice to use the Ice Soul lay with the recipient, not Yuan Kongye herself.

Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, and Xing Tian all looked thrilled.

They had all benefited from the Ice Souls before. It was thanks to these very Ice Souls that the first batch of Superhumans had been created, allowing them to rise to power and establish their respective factions.

For them, Ice Souls were incredibly valuable.

Especially now, when they desperately needed to rebuild their military strength.

And they had no reason to doubt the Ice Souls.

From the beginning, they had conducted thorough tests.

The substance had no adverse effects on the human body and contained no mind-controlling properties.

So, they felt completely safe using them.

Xiao Honglian eagerly accepted her share.

“Master Yuan, we appreciate this greatly!”

Wei Dinghai and Xing Tian also hurried to claim theirs.

Bian Junwu, however, remained expressionless.

But he was intrigued by such a fascinating object.

Taking it back for research wouldn't hurt.

One of his secondary missions in Tianhai City was to evaluate Yuan Kongye's ability level.

If she could truly awaken abilities in others without any cost, she would be classified as a terrifying Epsilon-level elite Superhuman.

Of course, given that her power was limited by how many Ice Souls she could produce, the effect was somewhat reduced.

Still, her ability remained immensely valuable, likely placing her among the Delta-level Superhumans with flaws, just like himself.

Zhang Yi maintained a bright smile, mirroring the others as he put the Ice Soul away with anticipation.

“This puts us in your debt. If you ever need anything, just let us know.”

He smiled at Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian.

Zheng Yixian’s smile deepened, clearly pleased.

Yuan Kongye nodded slightly. “Perhaps, in the future, we will all become one. Coexistence and mutual support should be the way forward.”

But inside, Zhang Yi remained on high alert.

With these two additional Ice Souls, he now had a total of three in his possession.

If Death’s Return worked the way he suspected, then these Ice Souls could create three new Superhumans.

However, as long as the host remained alive, their power wouldn’t return to Yuan Kongye.

And based on past tests, they didn’t seem to have any negative side effects.

That much had already been confirmed by the Western Alliance Base through extensive research.

Their technological capabilities far surpassed Zhang Yi’s, so he didn’t need to conduct further tests himself.

One thing was clear—Yuan Kongye wanted the leaders and strongest Superhumans of each faction to use the Ice Souls.

But Zhang Yi? He would never use them.

Not now. Not ever.

However, he could give them to Ke'er, Xinxin, and Keran in the future.

That way, he could create three new Superhumans under his control.

Of course, their talent would determine the upper limit of their abilities, and that was an unknown factor.

As for Xiao Honglian, Xing Tian, and the others, Zhang Yi thought for a moment before deciding not to warn them.

He still couldn't fully trust them.

If he went out of his way to warn them, it might tip them off that he was suspicious of Yuan Kongye.

If they wanted to use the Ice Souls, let them.

As long as they didn't die, it didn't seem like there would be any immediate consequences.

Everyone thanked Yuan Kongye for her generosity before leaving the cathedral.

That night passed without incident.

The next morning, the people from Yangsheng Base packed their things, preparing to head back.

Their mobility was superior, so their return journey would be quick.

As for Chaoyu Base, they still had too many wounded and needed a few more days to recover.

Xing Tian's group had suffered the least casualties, but since their combat style involved close-quarters battles, they had expended a lot of energy.

So, they also planned to rest before setting out.

In the end, only Xiao Honglian's group left the Followers of the Snow God's base.

Zhang Yi and the others naturally came to see them off.

After surviving a battle together, the relationships between them had grown more harmonious, with a shared sense of having braved death together.

“Don't forget our deal when you get back,” Zhang Yi said, smiling as he reached out to shake Xiao Honglian's hand.

She was momentarily surprised, then let out a laugh. Instead of a handshake, she strode forward and wrapped him in a strong bear hug.

“Don't worry! The moment I get back, I'll send it to you! After all, I really want to secure your help!”

Xiao Honglian had a well-proportioned figure, always clad in her form-fitting combat suit.

But in this embrace, Zhang Yi could clearly feel her curves.

He returned the hug and patted her back.

“Then it’s a deal.”

Just as they were in the middle of their embrace, a heated argument erupted not far away.

“Hm?”

Both of them turned curiously toward the commotion.

At a time like this, when everyone was either resting or preparing to leave, who the hell was causing trouble?

Drawn by the noise, many people started looking over.

They saw a teenage boy and girl locked in an intense conversation.

The boy’s face was flushed red with emotion, his voice shrill and shaky, like it hadn’t fully deepened yet.

The girl, in contrast, remained calm and composed, explaining things to him in a steady tone.

It was none other than Li Kaile and his girlfriend, Xu Beibei.

Or rather—his ex-girlfriend.

Xu Beibei was now wearing Yangsheng Base’s combat uniform, and standing a short distance behind her was a tall, imposing officer from Yangsheng Base.

She gazed at Li Kaile with a steady expression.

“Lele, let it go. I’ve found a better future. I hope you can understand. We’re just not right for each other anymore.”

Li Kaile’s eyes were filled with shock and fear.

In his current state, Xu Beibei was the only hope he had left to keep going.

So why?

Why had she suddenly changed, when things had been fine just before?

Was it... just because he was no longer complete?

Trembling with pain, he let out a desperate cry—

“Beibei, you can’t leave me! I need you! Don’t you remember how good we were together? You said we’d be together forever! Did you forget?! DID YOU FORGET?!”

Xu Beibei’s eyes flickered with a trace of guilt.

But she didn’t waver.

In this apocalypse, the only reason she had survived this long was by keeping a clear head.

Chapter 500: The Harsh Reality of the Apocalypse

Xu Beibei looked at Li Kaile and said, “I’ve found someone better for me. If I leave with him, I’ll have a better life. He’s stronger than you, he can protect me, and he can provide me with everything I need.”

“If you were in my position, you would make the same choice.”

She was not even twenty years old, but after everything she had been through in the apocalypse, she had grown up fast.

For most people, the most basic need was survival.

Love? That was just a little seasoning in this harsh world.

Nice to have, but it couldn’t fill an empty stomach.

But Li Kaile couldn’t accept that.

Tears streamed down his face as he cried, “No! I wouldn’t! Beibei, I love you! Can he possibly love you more than I do?”

Xu Beibei looked at his childish expression and sighed, shaking her head.

“Let me be honest with you. The only reason I approached you in the first place was because your father was a priest.”

“You were interesting, sure. I even liked you a little. But that alone was never enough for me to choose a boy younger than me, someone who couldn’t even protect me.”

“Talking about love in times like these... don’t you think it’s just self-deception?”

The officer standing behind Xu Beibei was growing impatient.

He coldly said, “Enough. It’s time to go. This farewell has dragged on long enough.”

Xu Beibei immediately turned back to him, her demeanor shifting—now she was once again the sweet, delicate girl.

“Sorry, big brother! I didn’t mean to waste your time. Let’s go!”

With that, she turned around and walked away without a second glance.

Li Kaile’s eyes widened with fear.

Xu Beibei was all he had left!

Without her, how was he supposed to survive?

Instinctively, he reached out to grab her arm.

“Beibei, don’t leave me! If... if you dare to go, I’ll kill myself right here!”

Xu Beibei’s patience snapped.

She shoved him away forcefully, her face twisting into an ugly expression.

“Li Kaile, enough already! You’re a damn eunuch now, and you still have the nerve to dream about that kind of life?!”

Silence.

A suffocating stillness spread through the air.

“Eunuch?”

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow in curiosity, confused by her words.

Did this kid get frozen so badly that he lost his 'equipment'?

Li Kaile's face instantly aged ten years, his spirit completely crushed—he looked like a wilted eggplant left out in the cold.

Even Xu Beibei realized she had gone too far.

She lowered her head and muttered, "I'm sorry."

Then, without another word, she turned away and climbed onto the military truck with the officer.

She just wanted to survive.

That wasn't a crime.

Li Kaile stood there in a daze, watching as the truck drove away.

But he didn't have the courage to chase after it anymore.

Then, suddenly—he let out a guttural cry, like a wounded animal, and sprinted off into the distance.

Zhang Yi recognized Li Kaile.

But he wasn't particularly close to Li Jian's family, so he simply stood by and watched.

Xiao Honglian, on the other hand, grinned as she finished enjoying the drama.

“That kid has never been beaten by reality before, huh? So naive.”

“But this is good for him. Without pain, how can you grow?”

Zhang Yi didn't laugh at Li Kaile.

Who didn't yearn for love at some point while growing up?

But waking up from that dream—that was the hard part.

Some people woke up and grew stronger.

Some never woke up at all. And they were the ones who ended up broken.

After bidding farewell to Xiao Honglian, Zhang Yi soon saw Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang rushing out, anxiously searching for Li Kaile.

They must have heard about their son and were terrified that something had happened to him.

Both of them looked frantic.

They knew their son too well.

Li Kaile had been sheltered since childhood, never having suffered any real hardship.

That was why he had always been so bright and carefree, though also a bit naive.

But recently, he had suffered a devastating blow, leaving his mind on the verge of collapse.

Now, with Xu Beibei abandoning him too, his last emotional support was gone.

Of course, Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang were terrified he would do something reckless.

Frantically, they asked around about where he had gone.

Someone told them that Li Kaile had run northwest, outside the camp.

Without hesitation, they rushed after him.

But they were gone for a long time.

It wasn't until nightfall that someone finally spotted them again.

By then, Li Jian and Zhang Jianfang looked like empty husks, as if their very souls had been ripped away.

It didn't take much guessing—Li Kaile was dead.

But no one really talked about it.

Too many people had died already.

People had grown numb.

It didn't matter who died—tomorrow would still come, and life would go on.

Two days passed.

Zhang Yi had gathered all the useful intel he could from the Followers of the Snow God.

Meanwhile, Xiao Honglian had sent over the information he requested.

There was no reason to stay any longer.

So, Zhang Yi said his goodbyes to Bian Junwu and the others, preparing to return to the Shelter.

After exchanging a few polite words, no one made an effort to convince him to stay.

But before leaving, Zhang Yi sought out Bian Junwu.

“Captain Bian, can we talk privately for a moment?”

Bian Junwu studied him and chuckled. “Changed your mind?”

Zhang Yi knew he was referring to joining the Jiangnan District.

He smiled faintly. “No, not about that. I just have some concerns I’d like to discuss with you.”

Bian Junwu glanced at his team.

They all gave Zhang Yi curious and amused looks, while Wu Di, as expected, glared at him with open hostility.

No one knew what Zhang Yi was up to this time.

Still, Bian Junwu nodded. “Alright, let’s talk.”

The two of them walked away from the camp, stepping into the deserted ruins outside the Followers of the Snow God's base.

Once they were alone, Bian Junwu spoke calmly, his usual indifference unchanged.

“No one else is here. Say what’s on your mind.”

Zhang Yi glanced at him.

Compared to their first meeting, Bian Junwu looked even paler now.

His skin was so white it was almost translucent, even paler than the snow on the ground.

His lips had turned a bluish-purple, making Zhang Yi worry about his condition.

But he knew Bian Junwu didn’t like wasting time, so he got straight to the point.

“Captain Bian, I think you should stay in Tianhai City a little longer.”

Bian Junwu stared at him, waiting for him to elaborate.

Zhang Yi continued, “This mission... ended too easily.”

“From the beginning, we assumed the Zombie Kings had high intelligence.”

“If that’s the case, then wouldn’t they have realized we were setting up a trap for them? Why would they still gather in one place and let us wipe them out?”,

Bian Junwu responded calmly, “We considered that possibility. But in the end, mutated zombies still aren’t humans. Their intelligence has limits.”

“Besides, since that battle, there hasn’t been another large-scale zombie horde sighting.”