

Ice Age 501

Chapter 501: A Warning

Zhang Yi smiled at Bian Junwu. "Have you seen any creatures stronger than the Zombie Kings?"

Bian Junwu frowned. He didn't understand what Zhang Yi was getting at.

"If you have something to say, just say it directly."

Zhang Yi's gaze darkened.

At this point, he needed to keep the investigation team in Tianhai City.

As long as they stayed, the Followers of the Snow God would be under pressure.

If Zhang Yi's suspicions were correct—that Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian were the true masterminds—then as long as the investigation team remained, they wouldn't dare act too boldly.

"I suspect that there's someone controlling the corpse tide from behind the scenes."

"The Zombie Kings we killed were just puppets."

“Or worse... there’s an even more terrifying possibility.”

Zhang Yi clenched his jaw and said, “What if the entire corpse tide was just an act—to trick you?”

“They made it look easy to resolve so they could get you to leave and mislead the Jiangnan District.”

Bian Junwu stopped walking, turning around to look at Zhang Yi coldly.

Even through his dark sunglasses, Zhang Yi could feel the sharpness of his gaze.

But he pressed on. “This battle seemed like a hard-fought victory. But in my eyes, it went way too smoothly.”

“The corpse tide’s movements were almost too coordinated, as if they were deliberately working with us instead of against us. Doesn’t that strike you as odd?”

Bian Junwu was silent for a long moment before finally speaking. “What proof do you have? I need evidence.”

Zhang Yi took a deep breath, thought for a moment, then shook his head helplessly.

“I don’t have hard evidence yet... but the inconsistencies are real.”

Bian Junwu’s lips curved—not in mockery, but in something closer to approval.

“You’re cautious. That’s a good trait. Being too careful might make life exhausting, but it certainly keeps you alive.”

“But you don’t have to worry too much. No matter what happens in Tianhai City, to the Jiangnan District, this is just a minor disturbance.”

He extended his long, bony hand, palm facing upward.

“No matter how big the problem gets, if we decide to suppress it, we will suppress it.”

Zhang Yi chuckled and didn’t press further.

After all, this was just a theory—he had no solid proof.

He never expected to convince Bian Junwu on the spot.

But if he could plant even a seed of doubt in his mind, then someone as sharp as Bian Junwu would eventually notice if something was truly wrong.

“I get it. If I discover anything, I’ll let you know immediately.”

“You won’t just ignore it, will you?” Zhang Yi said, half-jokingly.

But he wasn’t joking at all.

If his suspicions were correct, then what they were dealing with wasn’t just a corpse tide—it was an enemy far more terrifying.

Bian Junwu adjusted his sunglasses and replied, “Any threat serious enough to endanger a Jiangnan District-controlled area will be dealt with.”

“Of course, if you’re still worried, you might as well come with us. There’s no safer place than Blizzard City.”

Zhang Yi smiled. “We’ll see.”

After saying his goodbyes, Zhang Yi and his team boarded their vehicle and left the Followers of the Snow God’s base, heading back to the Shelter.

As the car rumbled away from the battlefield littered with corpses, Zhang Yi glanced at the base through the rearview mirror, his emotions mixed.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small white cloth covered in tiny handwritten notes.

“Hm? What’s that?”

Zhou Ke’er leaned over curiously.

Zhang Yi calmly tucked it away, smirking. “Nothing. Just an old pair of underwear I changed out of.”

Zhou Ke’er’s expression twisted in disgust.

“You actually had time to change underwear?”

They had been stuck in the Followers of the Snow God’s camp for ten days, with no chance to even bathe.

Zhang Yi’s answer sounded suspicious as hell.

But since he didn't explain further, she didn't press the issue.

A few hours later, they arrived back at the Shelter.

Along the way, they spotted scattered zombies, wandering aimlessly without direction.

Without a Zombie King to control them, they were like lost souls, drifting across the frozen wasteland.

Some had already frozen stiff, likely dead for good.

Even the most resilient viruses couldn't survive long in minus sixty-degree temperatures.

With no food source, their extinction was inevitable.

Back at the Shelter, everything was just as they had left it—nothing had changed.

As soon as they stepped inside, they were met with a rush of excited voices.

“Brother, you’re okay?! I was so worried about you!”

Yang Xinxin threw herself at Zhang Yi.

Lu Keran looked guilty. “Big brother... You were risking your life outside, and we were just hiding here, doing nothing to help... I feel awful.”

Zhang Yi chuckled, ruffling both girls’ heads.

“There was never any real danger. See? We’re all fine.”

“Everyone has their role to play. There’s no need to blame yourselves.”

Yang Siyah, wearing an apron, emerged from the kitchen with Zhou Haimei, carrying trays of food.

They had prepared a feast to welcome them home.

Zhang Yi smiled at her. “Did anything unusual happen while we were gone?”

Yang Siyah shook her head. “It was eerily quiet. Nothing happened at all.”

Zhang Yi nodded. That was reassuring.

The whole group gathered around a large round table, sharing a hearty meal.

As they recounted the horrors of the corpse tide, the lingering fear in their voices was unmistakable.

“No one even knows how many people are still alive in Tianhai City...” Lu Keran said softly.

“Maybe we’re the only ones left.”

Her expression was a mix of sadness and unease.

Even if the other survivors weren’t necessarily friendly, the thought of an entire city being empty was unsettling.

Isolation had a way of eating at the soul.

But before the atmosphere could grow too heavy, someone raised a glass.

“Cheers!”

Laughter and clinking glasses filled the room.

For now, at least, they were safe.

Zhang Yi hadn't forgotten to check in with Yang Siyah about the Superhuman Energy Dishes.

Stockpiling resources was a priority.

He would rather overprepare and let food sit untouched in Spatial Storage than risk running out at a critical moment.

Yang Siyah smiled. “I've been making them every day! You were fighting on the front lines, but I couldn't just sit around doing nothing.”

“Oh, and I stored everything in the fridge.”

Zhang Yi paused. “It's been over ten days. Have the dishes lost their effect?”

Yang Siyah nodded.

"I've been monitoring them. After seven days, their potency starts to drop. By ten days, they lose all their effects."

Zhang Yi mentally noted this important detail.

This was a limitation of her ability.

But someday, knowing this could be a game-changer.

For now, everyone focused on celebrating their return.

With food, laughter, and drinks, half a day passed in joy and relief.

Chapter 502: Yuan Kongye's File

After the meal, everyone was stuffed, their bellies round and full. Some were even completely drunk.

Take Fatty Xu, for example—he had been so terrified during the battle that he nearly wet his pants. So when he got back, he indulged like there was no tomorrow, downing two whole bottles of top-tier red wine by himself.

Uncle You carried him to the restroom, letting him throw up for a while before finally dragging him back to his room to rest.

Zhang Yi had also had a fair amount of alcohol, but his tolerance was high, so he remained sober.

Once the banquet was over, he called out to Yang Xinxin.

“Xinxin, come with me to the control room.”

Yang Xinxin nodded and followed Zhang Yi inside.

Zhang Yi pushed open the heavy alloy doors of the control room and switched on the lights.

Bright light illuminated the massive room, revealing an advanced, futuristic aesthetic—like the control panel of a battleship. Even the ceiling and the floor were transparent OLED display screens.

Zhang Yi wheeled Yang Xinxin inside and shut the door behind them.

It wasn’t that he wanted to keep secrets from the others.

He just needed to understand everything himself first before deciding what to share. Some matters weren’t meant for group discussions—too many opinions could cloud one’s judgment rather than help it.

That was why Zhang Yi preferred discussing things with Yang Xinxin.

She was smart, and like him, she was purely rational.

Zhang Yi walked to the console and accessed the information Xiao Honglian had sent over.

Soon, he retrieved the files containing data on the leaders and key figures of various factions.

Of course, there was nothing on Yangsheng Base.

But Zhang Yi only truly cared about two people—Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian.

The rest were just a smokescreen to keep Xiao Honglian from guessing his real intent.

Yang Xinxin sat beside him, curiously watching as he opened file after file.

“Gege, what are you doing? Can you tell me?”

Zhang Yi didn’t hide his thoughts from Yang Xinxin.

Taking a deep breath, he told her everything he had seen at the Bai Xue Jiao encampment over the past few days, down to the smallest detail.

Then, he voiced his suspicions.

“There’s no concrete proof yet, but I have a feeling that Bai Xue Jiao might be involved in the zombie horde outbreak in Tianhai City.”

“If there really is a massive conspiracy behind this, then it’s a huge threat to us.”

“That’s why I need to investigate this thoroughly. If I don’t, I won’t be able to sleep at night.”

Yang Xinxin’s eyes widened in surprise.

She wasn’t the type to believe in conspiracy theories, but if what Zhang Yi suspected was true, then whoever was orchestrating everything behind the scenes was an absolute mastermind.

She didn't rush to form an opinion.

Like Zhang Yi said, it was all speculation for now.

She leaned in closer, joining Zhang Yi in examining Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian's files.

Zhang Yi opened Yuan Kongye's file first.

As expected, Xiao Honglian hadn't lied—the information she had gathered was incredibly detailed.

It documented Yuan Kongye's entire life, from her family background to her upbringing.

After reading it, Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin sat in silence for a long time.

Her story was simply... too tragic to put into words.

The summary was as follows:

Yuan Kongye, 20 years old, a mixed-blood of Huaguo and Nihon descent, born in Nara Prefecture, Nihon.

Her father was Yuan Suiyun, and her mother was Wagatsuma Kamiko.

Both were devout followers of a Nihon-based cult called Shinri-kyo.

When Yuan Kongye was three years old, her parents brought her to Tianhai City in Huaguo, settling at 256 Jinling Street in Changlan District.

That same year, Yuan Suiyun and Wagatsuma Kamiko established a branch of Shinri-kyo in Tianhai City.

(Note: Shinri-kyo is classified as a cult in Huagu and operates underground.)

Yuan Suiyun became the cult leader, while Wagatsuma Kamiko served as the high priestess.

To attract followers, the couple claimed that their daughter, Yuan Kongye, possessed divine powers, declaring her the "Holy Maiden" of Shinri-kyo.

Through religious manipulation, the Yuan family quickly amassed a fortune.

Because of this, Yuan Kongye grew up in luxury.

Within Shinri-kyo, she was treated like a princess.

However, that life came to an abrupt end when she turned sixteen.

Her parents, Yuan Suiyun and Wagatsuma Kamiko, died in a plane crash while traveling to Nihon for a Shinri-kyo gathering. They were killed on the spot.

After their deaths, the cultists gradually realized they had been deceived.

Yuan Kongye, still young, had no means to control the situation, and the truth was exposed—she had no divine powers at all.

Shinri-kyo's teachings claimed that followers could receive divine blessings through financial donations and that, upon death, they would ascend to a heavenly kingdom.

It was even said that those who donated the most could choose which country they would reincarnate into in their next life.

Because of this belief, countless followers donated everything they had, going bankrupt in the process, giving all their wealth to Yuan Suiyun and Wagatsuma Kamiko.

But after the couple's sudden deaths, the furious cultists demanded their wealth back.

Unfortunately, most of it had already been squandered by the Yuan family.

With no way to reclaim their losses, the enraged followers turned their fury on the only remaining target—sixteen-year-old Yuan Kongye.

Records from the Tianhai City police department in 2046 confirmed a report about the incident.

The case was classified as particularly heinous.

By the time Yuan Kongye was taken to the hospital, she had been tortured beyond recognition, her body covered in permanent lacerations.

However, due to the involvement of a cult and the sheer number of perpetrators, the case was handled ambiguously and never fully pursued.

From that moment on, Yuan Kongye seemed to vanish from the face of the earth.

She only resurfaced after the apocalypse—when she suddenly reemerged as the leader of Bai Xue Jiao.

Using the same manipulative tactics she had learned in Shinri-kyo, she gradually built up her power, turning Bai Xue Jiao into one of the largest factions in Tianhai City.

Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin finished reading the file, falling into deep silence.

For a long time, they simply stared at the screen, unable to find the right words.

Xiao Honglian had worked in law enforcement before, so she was well aware of the case. She had even managed to obtain the original records.

According to the report, a total of 136 individuals had been involved in the attack on Yuan Kongye.

It was difficult to even imagine the level of suffering she had endured.

After a long pause, Zhang Yi finally spoke.

“A person like that... and she somehow became a savior in the apocalypse? Doesn’t that seem strange?”

He turned to Yang Xinxin.

“Do you believe it?”

Yang Xinxin shook her head.

Her eyes were dark as she spoke slowly.

“After experiencing something like that, it’s impossible to remain mentally stable. If it were me, the only thing on my mind would be destroying the world... or reshaping it into something I could control.”

Zhang Yi crossed his arms, taking a deep breath.

“There are a few things that finally make sense now.”

“Before, everyone—including myself—thought Bai Xue Jiao had suffered the heaviest losses in this zombie crisis.”

“After all, they lost nearly ten thousand followers.”

Then, his tone shifted.

“But now, I don’t think that’s the case at all.”

“Maybe... Yuan Kongye never cared about those people in the first place.”

“Maybe... she orchestrated their deaths to cover up something even bigger.”

Yang Xinxin lifted her head, staring at Zhang Yi.

“Gege, do you have any proof to back that up?”

A faint smirk appeared on Zhang Yi’s lips.

“I didn’t before. But now, I do.”

Chapter 503: Li Jian’s Letter

Zhang Yi wasn’t in a hurry. He calmly laid out all the suspicious points he had noticed.

“From the beginning, I knew Yuan Kongye had multiple superhuman abilities.”

“And not just different applications of the same ability, but completely unrelated powers.”

“【Blessing】 , 【Gift】 , superhuman-level physical abilities, and that ice-based power that felt strangely familiar.”

Zhang Yi crossed his arms, his tone indifferent. “That’s definitely not normal.”

“If those powers were truly her own, there would be no reason for her to keep them hidden for so long during the battle against the zombie horde.”

“But she never reveals them. That means there’s something she doesn’t want people to know.”

“So, I’m certain—those abilities were taken from others! And the key lies in the Ice Soul that separated from her body.”

Yang Xinxin’s expression grew serious.

“If that’s true, then no one really knows how powerful Yuan Kongye is now.”

“Every superhuman ability has a weakness. But if one person possesses the abilities of many, she’s practically invincible!”

Zhang Yi nodded. “That’s why she wants Tianhai City to remain in constant warfare.”

“Because as long as those who received the Ice Soul are still alive, they’re useless to her. Only by dying can their abilities become hers.”

A sharp glint flickered in Zhang Yi’s eyes.

“Perhaps... the so-called purge wasn’t just aimed at outsiders.”

“It could also be targeting her own people.”

“After all, Bai Xue Jiao has plenty of superhumans.”

“Their deaths would only benefit Yuan Kongye.”

Yang Xinxin found herself nodding unconsciously.

Zhang Yi's reasoning made perfect sense.

The only issue was the lack of direct evidence to prove it.

Yang Xinxin said, “Just this isn't enough to convince the other factions, and more importantly, it won't convince the investigation team.”

“If that's the case, we can't just confront Yuan Kongye head-on by ourselves.”

Zhang Yi lowered his gaze, his expression cold and contemplative.

“But this time, we can't just bury our heads in the sand.”

“She used the zombie horde to cripple more than half of our forces in the West Hill Base.”

“And on top of that, she gave us the Ice Soul. That was a message—she's getting ready to make her move against us!”

“The only thing keeping her in check is Jiangnan District. The moment Bian Junwu and his team leave, Bai Xue Jiao will act.”

At that, Zhang Yi reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of white cloth.

“And besides, I have this—proof that my suspicions are justified.”

Curious, Yang Xinxin took the cloth from him.

It was covered in densely written words.

“This is...?”

Zhang Yi explained, “It’s a letter from Li Jian. That old man slipped it into my hand the night before I left.”

Thinking of Li Jian’s face—hollow, like dead wood—Zhang Yi sighed.

“His son died. If not for that, I don’t think he would have risked telling me these things.”

Yang Xinxin carefully read the letter.

It wasn’t written in ink—but in blood.

The contents were summarized as follows:

Li Jian’s Letter:

28 days ago, my family and I, along with our neighbors, were taken in by the Great Decree and brought to Bai Xue Jiao.

Yuan Kongye knew of my ability, so she took me to an abandoned building next to the cathedral.

There, I saw a massive plant they called the Blood Vine.

Yuan Kongye told me my duty was to cultivate it using my ability.

My ability allows plants to grow rapidly, making them stronger and more resilient.

At first, I thought it was just a food source for Bai Xue Jiao, so I fed it my own blood every day.

But over time, I realized something was wrong.

No—something was wrong with Bai Xue Jiao itself.

First, after eating the red fruit produced by the Blood Vine, people would experience euphoria and hallucinations, similar to drug-induced trances.

Every distribution of the red fruit took place inside the cathedral—where followers were made to listen to Yuan Kongye's sermons while eating it.

I suspect this is a form of hypnosis, making them fanatically loyal to her.

Many cults in history have used hallucinogenic substances to brainwash their followers.

Realizing this, my wife and I secretly agreed never to eat the fruit.

Luckily, as a priest, I was given other supplies, so food wasn't an issue for us.

Zheng Yixian seemed to notice my resistance, but since they needed my abilities, he didn't confront me directly—he only gave me a subtle warning once.

Second, the Blood Vine isn't a food-producing plant at all.

Bai Xue Jiao's people throw corpses into the abandoned building where it grows. The vine then wraps around the bodies, forming pods that absorb their nutrients.

But I noticed something strange—some of the pods were much larger than the others.

Unlike the normal pods that eventually shriveled up, these larger ones kept expanding, as if they were absorbing energy from the smaller ones.

It felt as though something was being nurtured inside them.

For a while, I suspected they were incubating some kind of creature.

But when I returned later, those pods were gone.

I can't shake the fear that whatever emerged from them might be the source of the zombie virus.

I have no proof, just a terrible suspicion.

But if someone could study the Blood Vine, they might uncover the truth.

Third, Yuan Kongye is insane!

Any underage boys who join Bai Xue Jiao are subjected to a "purification ritual."

It's not a ritual—it's castration.

I never understood why.

Since we arrived here, I lived in constant fear that my son would be taken for this ritual.

We were always careful, but in the end, we couldn't escape.

She's a monster.

Fourth, I once accidentally witnessed Yuan Kongye murdering a female priest with her own hands.

That woman was someone I trusted. She had always been cautious and never did anything to anger Yuan Kongye.

But that day, I saw Yuan Kongye grip her by the throat and strangle her to death.

I don't know if this information will be of any use to you.

My son is dead. And I am filled with grief.

As his father, I have no power to avenge him.

But if one day, the opportunity presents itself, I hope this information will help you.

After finishing the letter, Yang Xinxin slowly lifted her head to look at Zhang Yi.

Only now did she truly understand why he was so certain that something was deeply wrong with Yuan Kongye.

"If all this is true, then I can finally understand why she's done everything she has."

Zhang Yi crossed his arms and spoke calmly.

"Li Jian was closer to Yuan Kongye and Bai Xue Jiao than we ever were. What he sensed is invaluable to us."

“Taken together, all of this makes it almost certain—Yuan Kongye and Bai Xue Jiao are hiding something massive.”

“The worst-case scenario is exactly as I feared.”

“The so-called Ice Soul is just part of a grand scheme. That ‘generous gift’ was only given to us so she could take something back in return.”

“That’s why she has every reason to plunge Tianhai City into chaos and fill the streets with corpses.”

“The more people die, the faster she can reclaim their abilities.”

“And it’s very possible that this massive zombie crisis was orchestrated by her from the start.”

“If the Jiangnan District forces hadn’t arrived when they did, forcing her to act cautiously, we might already be dead.”

Zhang Yi’s gaze was filled with deep wariness.

If Yuan Kongye truly possessed such terrifying power, then soon, there would be no one in Tianhai City capable of stopping her.

Not even Zhang Yi himself.

Chapter 504: A Desperate Situation

“The more people die, the more she benefits.”

"From the very beginning, we were all deceived by her."

Yang Xinxin sighed softly. "Even most of Bai Xue Jiao's followers have been fooled, willingly sacrificing themselves for her."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. "I'd say she has an antisocial personality disorder."

Yang Xinxin looked at him and murmured, "With a past like that, would it be surprising if she turned out this way?"

Zhang Yi took a deep breath.

Yuan Kongye's experiences were undeniably tragic.

But she wasn't entirely innocent, either.

Cause and effect—she had been born into a cult, enjoying the wealth that her parents amassed through deception.

Everything that followed could only be seen as karmic retribution.

"I don't have the energy to pity her right now. What matters is how we deal with the threat she poses."

A heavy weight settled in Zhang Yi's chest.

A superhuman like Yuan Kongye was like a mountain pressing down on all of Tianhai City.

At this point, no one knew how many abilities she had absorbed.

Just how powerful was she now?

Zhang Yi couldn't say for sure, but he knew one thing—she was stronger than any superhuman in Tianhai City.

Including himself.

Right now, Yuan Kongye was practically invincible.

And an invincible enemy was almost certainly going to make a move against them.

The Ice Soul she had given them—that was the signal.

She wasn't asking them to submit.

She was preparing to kill them.

"We need to figure out how to deal with her," Zhang Yi said, exhaling deeply, trying to ease the tension in his chest.

Yang Xinxin lowered her head in thought for a moment before calmly responding,

"We can't take her on alone."

"First, we have to make sure all the factions in Tianhai City know about her conspiracy."

"And most importantly, we must gain the support of Jiangnan District."

"After the recent battles, every faction in Tianhai City has suffered heavy losses. Even if they join forces, they might not be able to defeat Yuan Kongye."

Zhang Yi nodded.

"I understand, and you're right. But the problem is—even if I tell them everything I suspect, they may not believe me."

"And as for Jiangnan District... Even if Yuan Kongye has deceived everyone, what does that have to do with them?"

He let out a cold chuckle. "Jiangnan District is the dominant power in this region. Their priority is stability, not justice."

"So even if Yuan Kongye manipulates us, as long as it doesn't threaten Jiangnan District's interests, they have no reason to act against her."

"They might even try to recruit her instead."

As he spoke, Zhang Yi felt his heart sink further.

Without Jiangnan District's support, could they really defeat Yuan Kongye?

A bitter thought crept into his mind—if it came to that, maybe he should just accept Bian Junwu's offer and take his people to Jiangnan District.

If he couldn't fight her, couldn't he just leave?

But... could he really abandon the shelter he had spent so much time and effort building?

Zhang Yi gritted his teeth, his expression twisted with conflict.

He didn't want to leave.

Here, he was free—free from anyone's control, free to make his own choices.

But in Jiangnan District, according to Bian Junwu, he'd become nothing more than a cog in the machine of Blizzard City.

Living there required a price.

Just look at Bian Junwu—

Even knowing that using his abilities was shortening his lifespan, he had no choice but to keep pushing forward every day.

Yang Xinxin's amber eyes studied Zhang Yi. A smile played at her lips as she spoke softly,

"Zhang Yi gege, if you want to drag Jiangnan District into this... maybe there's a way."

Zhang Yi lifted his head, meeting her gaze.

Yang Xinxin was eerily calm, showing no panic despite the dire situation they faced.

"Xinxin, what are you thinking?"

She smiled faintly. "The world moves for profit. As long as you grasp their core interests, you can make them work for you."

"So... what is Jiangnan District's greatest concern?"

Zhang Yi answered without hesitation, "That their rule might be challenged."

"That includes the investigation team. The reason they're here is to prevent the zombie outbreak from spreading into Jiangnan District and causing further chaos."

Yang Xinxin tilted her head playfully.

"In that case, all we need to do is make sure they know that the zombie horde was artificially created by Yuan Kongye."

Zhang Yi let out a short laugh.

"I'd love to. If I had proof, I would've already used it. But I don't."

He had been to the Blood Vine's location, gathered its leaves, and even smuggled out a dried-up corpse.

But after Zhou Ke'er's analysis, no traces of the zombie virus were found.

Yang Xinxin smiled mysteriously.

"Gege, sometimes... you don't need solid proof to take action."

"You just need to make Jiangnan District aware that there's a possibility."

"If they start suspecting Yuan Kongye, they'll launch their own investigation. And if she resists, it will confirm that she has something to hide."

"If she doesn't resist and allows them to investigate, then sooner or later, they'll find evidence on their own."

Understanding dawned in Zhang Yi's eyes.

"You're saying... spread a rumor? Exaggerate Yuan Kongye's threat so Jiangnan District is forced to intervene?"

"Exactly," Yang Xinxin replied casually.

"As Jiangnan District's ruling power, they won't tolerate such an unpredictable factor in their territory."

"Besides, there's one thing we already know for certain—Yuan Kongye has multiple superhuman abilities."

"If you tell Bian Junwu that, what do you think Jiangnan District will do?"

Her final words struck Zhang Yi like a bolt of lightning.

Of course!

All he needed was to attract Jiangnan District's attention.

Whether or not Yuan Kongye was truly behind the zombie crisis didn't matter.

As long as she was exposed and put under scrutiny, she wouldn't be able to act recklessly.

Hell, Jiangnan District might even decide to take her away themselves.

And if that happened, Tianhai City would be safe.

Zhang Yi felt a surge of excitement.

Resting his chin on his hand, he leaned against the control console, deep in thought.

This idea had merit.

He needed to refine it further, but at the very least, it was a viable backup plan.

A reckless decision could be dangerous, but careful planning... that was a different story.

Seeing Zhang Yi's contemplation, Yang Xinxin gave a small, satisfied smile.

"Gege, we still have one more file to read."

Chapter 505: The Zombie Horde, Bai Xue Jiao, and the Blood Vine

Only then did Zhang Yi remember that he hadn't checked Zheng Yixian's file yet.

He raised an eyebrow. "At this point, does he even matter?"

Zheng Yixian was strong, but after multiple battles, Zhang Yi was certain he was at most on the same level as Xiao Honglian, Wei Dinghai, and Xing Tian.

He wasn't a major threat.

Zhang Yi said, "For a long time, Yuan Kongye hid in the shadows, seemingly uninvolved in Bai Xue Jiao's affairs, leaving everything to Zheng Yixian."

"But now, it's clear—Zheng Yixian was just a puppet."

Yang Xinxin's slender, fair fingers lightly tapped the armrest of her wheelchair.

Leaning lazily on her hand, she tilted her head and opened Zheng Yixian's file.

"But there's one thing we still don't know," she said.

"Is this Yuan Kongye's personal scheme, or is the entire Bai Xue Jiao in on it?"

"That makes all the difference."

"If it's the latter, then we're up against an entire cult of sinister superhumans."

"But if everyone else has been deceived—if Yuan Kongye tricked her own people—then we have a chance to turn her followers against her."

Zhang Yi stuffed his hands into his pockets, recalling the time he had spent in Bai Xue Jiao's encampment.

"In that battle, Bai Xue Jiao lost nearly 90% of its people."

"Even their superhumans suffered heavy casualties."

"If they knew the truth, then they're damn good actors—because they threw their lives away without hesitation."

"So I don't think many people knew what was really going on. It's likely that only Yuan Kongye and a select few were in on it."

Yang Xinxin nodded. "Then let's see what Zheng Yixian's file says. Maybe we'll find some answers."

Zhang Yi leaned forward and scanned through Zheng Yixian's personal records.

His life story was rather uneventful.

He was born into a middle-class family in Tianhai City and had a comfortable upbringing.

His parents weren't religious, but they were neighbors with Yuan Kongye's family.

As a result, he had known Yuan Kongye since childhood.

He was five years older than her and had always acted as her big brother.

After Yuan Kongye's tragic ordeal, her whereabouts became a mystery.

But interestingly, records showed that Zheng Yixian also left Tianhai City around the same time.

Xiao Honglian speculated in her report that the two of them likely lived together.

There were indications that the mentally shattered Yuan Kongye had spent time in a well-known rehabilitation center.

And Zheng Yixian had been by her side the whole time.

After reading the file, Zhang Yi fell into deep thought.

"It seems Zheng Yixian knows everything about Yuan Kongye's plans."

"In fact, it's possible that this entire scheme was something they devised together."

"As for the rest of Bai Xue Jiao... most of them were just blind followers, drawn in by Yuan Kongye's so-called 'Blessing,' only to be led to their deaths."

A bitter smile tugged at Zhang Yi's lips.

"It's just like that joke."

'You think you're earning interest, but in reality, they're after your principal.'

"Those who joined Bai Xue Jiao thought they were gaining protection. They had no idea that most of them were walking straight to their deaths."

"And the ones who are still alive... probably won't last much longer either. Especially the superhumans."

"They were nothing more than Yuan Kongye's livestock, raised for her to harvest."

Suddenly, everything clicked into place.

"This all makes sense now!"

Zhang Yi's thoughts became clearer as he analyzed the situation.

"I've always said that there's no such thing as a free lunch."

"No wonder Bai Xue Jiao was so aggressive in recruiting followers, even when their own resources were running low."

"Because those people weren't recruits... they were food!"

"That was the only way to secure a steady supply of test subjects."

"The Great Decree was used to filter out those with potential, bestowing them with the Ice Soul to awaken their abilities."

"And once they awakened, they were eliminated in various ways, allowing Yuan Kongye to reclaim their powers!"

Zhang Yi's mind flashed back to the battlefield during the Five Armies War.

He had found so many corpses of superhumans—empty husks.

When they died, he couldn't absorb their abilities.

That was because their powers had already been transferred back to Yuan Kongye!

"Just how many abilities has she absorbed?"

A shiver ran down Zhang Yi's spine.

Yuan Kongye had been planning this since the very beginning of the apocalypse.

Now, she had become the most powerful superhuman in Tianhai City.

Her level of scheming was terrifying.

Zhang Yi rubbed his temples.

The sheer amount of information he had just processed left his mind in chaos.

Too much.

"...I need to go back and think this through. Xinxin, help me figure this out too."

"How do we keep Bai Xue Jiao from wiping us out?"

Zhang Yi wasn't deluding himself with false hope.

Yuan Kongye had sacrificed tens of thousands of her own followers without hesitation.

There was no reason she would spare him.

Especially since she had given him the Ice Soul.

And among the superhumans of Tianhai City, Zhang Yi was undoubtedly one of the strongest—perhaps second only to her.

Have you ever seen a cat that doesn't eat fish?

Zhang Yi had only two choices.

Flee to Jiangnan District and abandon everything.

Or find a way to kill Yuan Kongye—either by taking her life or stripping her of her power so that she was no longer a threat.

Yang Xinxin nodded, fully aware of the gravity of the situation.

There were still too many unanswered questions.

And this wasn't just about Zhang Yi.

The survival of their entire shelter depended on their next move.

They had to be extremely careful and come up with a flawless plan.

Zhang Yi left the control room and returned to his quarters.

Kicking off his shoes, he jumped onto his velvet-covered bed.

This bed was a custom order from Rome, purchased by Young Master Wang for millions.

It was ridiculously comfortable.

Zhang Yi thought: If I really have to leave Tianhai City, I'm taking this bed with me.

No, not just the bed. I'll take all the furniture I can.

Then he laughed at himself.

At a time like this, he was thinking about furniture?

Was it really the bed he couldn't bear to leave behind?

No.

It was the peaceful, comfortable life he had built in the shelter.

But right now, a massive crisis loomed ahead, forcing him to plan ahead.

"Zombie horde, Bai Xue Jiao, Ice Soul, Blood Vine..."

The words swirled through his mind.

There were still too many unanswered questions.

And until he figured them out, he wouldn't know what move to make next.

Every battle plan depended on two key factors.

First, overwhelming power.

Second, detailed intelligence.

Neither could be lacking.

Chapter 506: The Key Point

Zhang Yi lay on the bed, his mind in turmoil.

At this moment, he was certain—Yuan Kongye was the source of Tianhai City's chaos!

But what was her connection to the zombie crisis?

Even with superhuman abilities, it was impossible for her to control the countless zombies spread across the entire city.

And from the way the Bronze Armored Flying Corpse attacked the cathedral that night, it was clear she didn't have direct control over the undead. Otherwise, she wouldn't have exposed her ability to wield multiple powers so easily.

That meant the zombies weren't under her command.

Was someone else working with her?

Zhang Yi rubbed his temples, unable to make sense of it all.

For a time, he believed the zombie tide was connected to the Blood Vine.

Something about Li Jian's words had given him a vague suspicion.

But he had personally verified that the Blood Vine contained no trace of the zombie virus.

If it had created the undead, there would have been evidence.

With these unanswered questions lingering in his mind, Zhang Yi gradually closed his eyes.

After fighting relentlessly for so long, he was truly exhausted.

It was easy to fall asleep once he lay in his own bed.

Yet in his dreams, Zhang Yi found himself back inside that abandoned building.

The towering Blood Vine before him was even larger than in his memory, stretching for over a thousand meters!

That was strange—he clearly remembered it being just over a hundred meters at most.

But as the blood-red mist dispersed, he witnessed an astonishing sight.

Beneath the vine, its tangled, sprawling roots burrowed deep into the ground—

And embedded in those roots, like peanuts in soil, were countless zombies.

Their bodies were pierced by the vine's tendrils, constantly absorbing a steady flow of crimson nutrients.

"So that's how it is!"

Zhang Yi's eyes widened. He finally realized what he had overlooked—

The roots of the Blood Vine!

The zombies lived underground, perfectly adapted to the damp, shadowy depths.

In the haze of his dream, a shadow appeared overhead.

As the vision zoomed in, Zhang Yi saw his face clearly—

Li Jian, the man with the Sacrifice ability.

Li Jian approached the Blood Vine, slashed open his wrist, and let his blood flow into its ravenous roots.

The vine greedily absorbed every drop—

And then, its roots flourished even more. The zombies hanging from it swelled, their bodies brimming with energy.

"Li Jian... so he's the key!"

Everything clicked into place.

Just then, the countless zombies entangled in the roots abruptly opened their crimson eyes, locking their gaze onto him.

Zhang Yi jolted awake.

He gasped for breath, swiping a trembling hand across his forehead. His skin was cold with sweat.

Yet, the tangled web of clues in his mind had suddenly unraveled—

Everything was clear now.

"I understand. I finally understand everything!"

His eyes gleamed with newfound clarity.

He had found the thread buried within the chaos—

Now, he only needed to follow it to piece together the full picture.

Zhang Yi climbed out of bed, grabbed a notebook from the bedside table, and hurriedly recorded his thoughts while his mind was still sharp.

"The zombie crisis erupted 21 days ago, when all five major factions of Tianhai City were attacked simultaneously."

"Li Jian was taken to the Followers of the Snow God a month ago."

"That means, before that, zombies hadn't appeared in Tianhai City because the Blood Vine's power was too weak."

"But once it absorbed Li Jian's 'Sacrifice' ability, it could rapidly produce a large number of mature hosts."

"That must be the origin of the Zombie King."

"Once the Zombie King emerged, it could inject the virus into suitable bodies, mass-producing more undead."

"But even among the horde, the Zombie King and the Bronze Armored Corpses are different from ordinary zombies. They possess true life... even intelligence."

"The Zombie King is the horde's brain, while the Bronze Armored Corpses are its muscle."

"Yuan Kongye can control the Blood Vine and command the Zombie King, but she cannot directly control the horde."

"The Zombie King's intelligence is limited. It can only follow simple orders. This explains why it had to slowly learn human behavior."

"Which also explains why the Bronze Armored Flying Corpse attacked Yuan Kongye."

"As for why I couldn't find any useful information from the Blood Vine—

That must be because, before we reached the Followers of the Snow God, they had already hidden the most crucial evidence."

"They even left behind false leads to misdirect us and dispel our suspicions."

Finishing his notes, Zhang Yi tossed his pen onto the desk and let out a long breath.

"Finally, everything makes sense. This has to be the truth."

His gaze sharpened, all traces of confusion replaced with certainty.

"As long as I understand the root cause, I can figure out how to counter it."

Zhang Yi stroked his chin.

"If the zombie tide is under Yuan Kongye's control, there's no way she'd allow her greatest weapon to be destroyed so easily."

"Which means... it's all just an act."

"Not for us, but for the Jiangnan District Investigation Team!"

"They fear Jiangnan District's strength, so they must make the investigators believe that Tianhai City's zombie crisis has been resolved—"

"Only then will they leave."

"But the moment Bian Junwu's team departs... Yuan Kongye will make her move against us."

"No matter how many superhuman abilities she has absorbed, no matter how terrifying her power has become—"

"She can't wipe out every faction alone."

"So... she must have retained a significant portion of the zombie horde."

"Possibly even more than what we saw outside the Followers of the Snow God's base!"

The deeper Zhang Yi thought, the more he grasped the true horror of Yuan Kongye.

He had seen her before—

A young woman in her early twenties, cold and expressionless.

Yet beneath that youthful face hid an incredibly meticulous mind.

The realization sent a chill down his spine.

But as he reconsidered, he found her strategy entirely logical.

If he possessed her abilities, he would have done the exact same thing.

"The situation is extremely dangerous now. The first priority is to keep Bian Junwu and his team from leaving Tianhai City."

"But... she has already absorbed so many superhuman abilities and immense power."

"Even if we expose her true nature... who can kill her?"

Zhang Yi fell silent, lost in thought.

If it came down to an all-out confrontation, he had no confidence in taking Yuan Kongye down.

Perhaps Bian Junwu could fight her—

But given his current condition, another battle against a top-tier superhuman would surely accelerate his decline.

Would he even agree to fight?

As Zhang Yi mulled over this dilemma, a knock came at his door.

From outside, Yang Xinxin's voice called out.

"Zhang Yi-gege, can I come in?"

Chapter 507: Necessary Measures

The Followers of the Snow God.

After Zhang Yi and the other factions left, the remaining survivors—fewer than a thousand—began rebuilding their home.

Most of them were high-ranking church members and their families, along with a handful of ordinary followers who were lucky enough to escape the zombie horde.

They had lost most of their loved ones, their hearts filled with grief.

But life had to go on, no matter how much despair they had endured.

Under the priests' guidance, they cleaned up the battlefield, moving the corpses to the building where the Blood Vine was located.

At the same time, they gathered the remaining supplies, preparing for their new lives.

With fewer people left, there was no longer a shortage of resources—perhaps the only silver lining in their tragedy.

Grand Priest Zheng Yixian calmly coordinated the survivors, methodically reorganizing their living spaces.

They consolidated tents, sleeping bags, and other materials, relocating them to a sturdier building that could shield them from the wind and snow.

After assigning tasks, Zheng Yixian entered the church to discuss their next steps with Yuan Kongye.

As always, Yuan Kongye stood before the altar, praying to the image of Jesus.

Zheng Yixian closed the doors behind him and stopped three meters away from her.

“Everything has gone quite smoothly, hasn’t it?”

A faint, almost imperceptible smile played on his lips.

“No one in Tianhai City can stand in our way now.”

“And no one would ever suspect us. The ten thousand dead followers alone are enough to erase any doubts and evoke their sympathy.”

“Now, all we have to do is wait for the investigation team to leave.”

Yuan Kongye slowly opened her eyes—clear and cold, like the frozen waters of the East Sea.

“But there’s still one thing that worries me.”

Zheng Yixian frowned slightly. “Oh? What’s troubling you?”

“Our plan was flawless. There weren’t any loose ends.”

“Even the Blood Vine was handled perfectly.”

Yuan Kongye turned to face him, her gaze steady.

“That night, someone saw me using another person’s superhuman ability.”

A sharp glint flashed in Zheng Yixian’s eyes.

“You mean... that woman Zhang Yi brought?”

At the time, the only outsider in the church had been Zhou Ke’er.

The Followers of the Snow God were bound by strict rules; none of them would reveal anything about Yuan Kongye.

But Zhou Ke’er was not one of them.

She had seen Yuan Kongye wield multiple abilities—if she spoke, it could expose a dangerous secret.

“I’ve been worried about this. I don’t know if it will become a problem.”

Yuan Kongye lowered her gaze.

Zheng Yixian thought for a moment before chuckling.

“Don’t worry, it won’t be an issue.”

“So what if you used different abilities? There are countless types of superhumans in this world. Who’s to say a person can’t possess multiple powers?”

“We suffered the most casualties in this battle—no one would suspect us.”

“And even if they do, what of it? At most, they might uncover the secret of Ice Soul.”

“Jiangnan District won’t interfere with that. As for the other factions? Ha!”

Zheng Yixian’s expression grew arrogant. “Even if they learn the truth about Ice Soul, it’s already too late for them to do anything about it.”

Yuan Kongye nodded.

“You’re right. In the face of absolute power, nothing else matters.”

“The only rule in this world now is survival of the fittest.”

“So, once the investigation team leaves, we should make our move.”

She tilted her head back, eyes filled with devotion.

“The best meal should always be saved for last.”

“As long as I can take the abilities of the leaders from each faction, my power will reach an unimaginable level.”

“I will become the god of this new world.”

Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin talked for a long time, refining their plan. Yang Xinxin helped fill in the missing details.

The plan would be ruthless.

But to survive, it had to be done.

“Let’s keep this between us for now. Telling the others will only create unnecessary panic.”

“As long as we know what needs to be done, that’s enough.”

Zhang Yi said firmly.

Yang Xinxin blinked curiously.

“You’re planning to do this alone?”

Zhang Yi smiled.

Hands in his pockets, his eyes softened slightly.

“At this point, I’m the only one who can.”

The power hierarchy among superhumans was becoming increasingly clear.

The gap between different levels was enormous.

And their opponent was likely an Epsilon-class superhuman—the highest level known to humanity.

Numbers alone wouldn’t be enough to win.

They needed to use every advantage available.

And certain necessary measures.

At a time like this, Liang Yue and Fatty Xu couldn’t do much to help.

Luckily, they trusted Zhang Yi completely.

When the time came, they would follow his lead without hesitation.

That was all he needed.

The next day, the shelter remained peaceful.

Everyone believed the zombie crisis was over, that Tianhai City was finally safe again.

Smiles filled the faces of the survivors.

People chatted happily about their future—some even discussed taking a trip to the East Sea, fishing, and relaxing.

Others wondered if they could negotiate with Chaoyu Base for an offshore voyage.

Zhang Yi listened with a smile, occasionally adding his thoughts, as if he had no worries at all.

After breakfast, he suited up, armed himself, and prepared to head out.

Curious, the others asked where he was going.

Zhang Yi shrugged and grinned.

“The Zombie King is gone, but there are still scattered zombies around. I’m going to clean them up and get some practice with the sword techniques Liang Yue taught me.”

Liang Yue stood up immediately. “I’ll go with you! Clearing zombies shouldn’t be a one-man job.”

Uncle You and Fatty Xu also volunteered to join.

Zhang Yi thought for a moment, then chuckled.

“There’s no need for that. We’re not dealing with the Zombie King or the Bronze Armored Zombies—no need to make a big scene.”

“How about this? We’ll split up. Everyone will clear a different area around the shelter.”

The group agreed that his plan made sense.

So, one by one, they donned their combat gear, grabbed their weapons, and set out on their hunt.

Chapter 508: Searching for the Zombie Horde

Zhang Yi chose to head toward Ci Qu Station. After bidding farewell to the others with a smile, he got into his vehicle and set off.

He was traveling alone, but he brought along his most trusted battle pet, Hua Hua. However, this time, he didn't bring it for protection.

Ever since he developed the Dimensional Gate technique, his survival abilities had reached their peak. As long as he wanted to escape, he could continuously shift through the Dimensional Gate, making it nearly impossible for anyone to catch him.

What he truly needed was Hua Hua's beastly sense of smell.

Arriving at Ci Qu Station, Zhang Yi found the entire subway tunnel frozen solid under thick layers of ice.

He took out his satellite phone, glanced at Tianhai City's subway map, then turned to Hua Hua and said, "Let's go find them."

Hopping into his snow vehicle, Zhang Yi drove along the subway line through the raging snowstorm. Hua Hua crouched in the passenger seat, alert and ready.

After several hours of travel, they reached Tianfeng District, the stronghold of the Followers of the Snow God.

The cult's headquarters was still a dozen kilometers away, but Zhang Yi decided not to proceed further. He parked the vehicle, stored it inside his Spatial Storage, and found an entrance to the subway, jumping down.

Tianhai City's subway system was vast, stretching over 800 kilometers in total length. Traveling on foot would take at least half a month.

Fortunately, Zhang Yi had Dimensional Gate, a technique that allowed him to teleport through space. Since activating the "gate" didn't consume Superhuman Energy, he could use it indefinitely to move forward rapidly.

This time, Zhang Yi had come to Tianfeng District's underground with a clear objective—to locate the hidden zombie horde.

He was certain that a massive, highly aggressive zombie army was lurking somewhere down here. This was Yuan Kongye's hidden trump card, a force meant to wipe out every other faction in Tianhai City.

If he could find them, he could move on to Phase Two of his plan.

Tianhai City's subway system was enormous, but Zhang Yi suspected the zombies were hiding somewhere near Tianfeng District, close to the Followers of the Snow God. That was why he came here first.

Zhang Yi and Hua Hua navigated the tunnels cautiously. The cat perched on his shoulder, its eyes wide like bronze bells.

Hua Hua's powerful nose could detect the scent of zombies within a kilometer. The stench of infected hosts was distinct from regular rotting corpses, making them easy to track.

Zhang Yi proceeded carefully, ready to escape to the surface at the first sign of danger.

In his heart, he prayed that Yuan Kongye wouldn't notice his presence. If she realized she had been exposed, she might strike at him first.

Zhang Yi was confident that his invincible survival abilities would keep him alive.

However, if Yuan Kongye attacked his Shelter, protecting himself would be easy, but protecting everyone else would be far more difficult.

After half an hour of searching, Zhang Yi had explored every corner of Tianfeng District's subway tunnels—but he found no sign of a zombie horde.

That meant they weren't here.

"How is this possible?" Zhang Yi frowned. "If they're not in Tianfeng District, do I have to search all of Tianhai City?"

"Or... am I overthinking this? Maybe a larger zombie army doesn't exist at all?"

He quickly dismissed that thought.

"No, they must exist."

"Yuan Kongye wouldn't waste such a powerful trump card."

"She may be strong, but she can't fight an entire war alone. She needs a massive army that follows her orders completely."

"I doubt she's satisfied with ruling just one city."

Even though he had found nothing, Zhang Yi had prepared for the possibility of a fruitless search.

"It makes sense," he mused. "There was just a massive battle near the Followers of the Snow God's base. If the zombies were hidden here, someone would have noticed."

“No matter—if they aren’t here, I’ll search every subway tunnel in Tianhai City until I find them.”

A determined glint flashed in Zhang Yi’s eyes.

Sometimes, the simplest methods work best.

To eliminate a potential disaster and protect his people, he was willing to do whatever it took.

He opened his phone, marking all the locations he had searched in Tianfeng District.

There were still over ten districts in Tianhai City that he hadn’t explored yet.

“One by one,” Zhang Yi muttered. “We’ll find them eventually.”

He scratched Hua Hua’s head. The cat closed its eyes in bliss.

“Of course, in an ideal world, I’m just overthinking everything. Maybe there is no zombie horde, and no hidden scheme.”

Zhang Yi chuckled to himself.

That day, he scoured the entire city’s underground subway network.

Then, when he reached the northeastern outskirts of Tianhai City, in one of the most remote and desolate districts, Hua Hua finally reacted.

The moment they entered the area, Hua Hua’s fur bristled. Its eyes locked onto the dark tunnel ahead, and it let out a low, prolonged warning growl.

It had fought zombies countless times before and was intimately familiar with their scent.

For Hua Hua to be this unsettled, there could only be one reason—a massive number of zombies lay ahead.

Zhang Yi's lips curled into a slight smile.

A sense of relief washed over him.

“So this is where they've been hiding.”

They were in Ao Mountain District, one of the most remote areas of Tianhai City, a borderline wasteland.

This place lacked valuable resources, so no faction had ever bothered to claim it.

Yuan Kongye had been incredibly cunning to hide the zombies here.

Zhang Yi's smile didn't reach his sharp, watchful eyes.

He had teleportation abilities, meaning neither he nor Hua Hua were in immediate danger.

However, he had two concerns:

First, he didn't want to alarm the massive zombie horde and accidentally trigger a zombie stampede.

Second, among the zombies lurked intelligent creatures—Zombie Kings.

If they discovered his presence, they would immediately report it to Yuan Kongye.

That would force her hand, launching an early attack on Tianhai City's other factions.

Zhang Yi opened his Spatial Storage and pulled out... a massive gray rat.

It was about the same size as Hua Hua, its eyes glowing with eerie red light.

However, this was not a real giant rat.

It was a mechanical spy that Lu Keran had built for him.

To prevent it from being exposed, Zhang Yi had coated it multiple times with the blood and flesh of real giant rats, ensuring its scent was indistinguishable from the real thing.

He placed it in the depths of the tunnel.

Then, he grabbed Hua Hua and swiftly retreated to a safe distance.

Chapter 509: Luring the Enemy into the Trap

Zhang Yi pulled out his satellite phone and activated the pre-programmed control system to guide the mechanical rat deeper into the subway.

This lifelike mechanical rat, crafted by Lu Keran, was so realistic that only a close inspection could reveal its artificial nature.

It could even mimic a rat's squeaks and engage in simple communication.

The mechanical rat darted through the underground tunnels at high speed. Given how vast the Ao Mountain District subway network was, it wouldn't be possible to scout everything in a short time.

But Zhang Yi wasn't in a hurry—he had all the patience in the world for this task.

Everything the mechanical rat saw and heard was transmitted back to Zhang Yi's satellite phone in real time.

Two long hours passed.

Then, they finally found what they had been looking for.

At the deepest section of Ao Mountain District's subway tunnels, they spotted a horrifyingly large horde of zombies lying in a dormant state.

Layer upon layer of corpses piled up, blocking multiple subway passages entirely.

By Zhang Yi's rough estimate, there were at least 300,000 zombies—and that was just the lower limit.

The actual number was likely far greater, but the mechanical rat couldn't advance any further due to the sheer density of the undead.

“Tianhai City had a pre-apocalypse population of nearly 20 million—a perfect breeding ground for zombies,” Zhang Yi muttered.

“If given enough time, this zombie army could grow to an unimaginable scale.”

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Yi immediately commanded the mechanical rat to retreat from the horde and slip into a drainage tunnel.

There, it entered standby mode—ready to be reactivated if necessary.

If he didn't need it again, it would remain hidden indefinitely to avoid detection.

With the reconnaissance mission complete, Zhang Yi and Hua Hua swiftly withdrew from the subway tunnels.

As he emerged back onto the snow-covered surface, a gust of cold wind hit him.

Gazing at the vast, frozen wasteland before him, he exhaled a long breath.

“I was right... but I can't feel happy about it at all.”

“The real challenge... is just beginning.”

Zhang Yi's eyes narrowed coldly.

Meanwhile, the Investigation Team had not yet left Tianhai City.

Despite their victory against the Followers of the Snow God, where they had eliminated six Zombie Kings and left hundreds of thousands of zombies in disarray...

They still needed to ensure that the zombie crisis was truly over.

Their final task was simple—confirm that Tianhai City no longer had any organized zombie armies led by intelligent creatures.

Thus, they scouted the subway tunnels near major faction territories, searching for hidden hordes.

But after more than ten days, they found no evidence of any surviving Zombie Kings.

Naturally, most of the seven Investigation Team members began to believe the crisis had ended.

Inside a black snow vehicle, Wu Di lounged in his seat with his hands behind his head, lazily muttering:

“Can we go back now? There aren’t any more zombie hordes—just a few scattered brainless ones.”

“Let the locals clean up the rest. We should head back to Blizzard City and take a well-earned break!”

The team chuckled and nodded in agreement.

Vice-Captain Baili Changqing glanced at Bian Junwu, knowing that their leader had the final say.

“Boss, is there anything else we need to wrap up?”

Bian Junwu adjusted his mirrored sunglasses.

“So far, nothing seems off...”

But deep down, he felt uneasy.

That unease was the only reason he hadn’t ordered a retreat yet.

His instincts came from two things:

First, his extensive experience in handling complex crises.

Second, something Zhang Yi had told him before.

The Tianhai City mission had gone too smoothly.

Even though many people had died, the Investigation Team itself had suffered zero casualties.

And in just one battle, they had taken out six Zombie Kings?

It felt like a scripted scenario, far too convenient.

Bian Junwu had handled countless difficult operations. He knew the difference between a natural disaster and a man-made catastrophe.

And this mission... felt staged.

However, despite his suspicions, they hadn't found anything unusual.

And they couldn't stay in Tianhai City forever.

Their superiors had already urged them to return after receiving their reports.

Blizzard City's high command was particularly interested in Yuan Kongye and her Ice Soul ability.

Glancing at his relaxed teammates, Bian Junwu decided:

“Fine. Let's head back to Blizzard City.”

A cheer erupted inside the vehicle.

Qi Guangming and Kong Sheng high-fived excitedly.

With the mission complete, they would soon receive their rewards and enjoy a well-earned vacation.

Baili Changqing laughed, “Too bad Zhang Yi and Yuan Kongye aren’t coming with us.”

Biology and medical expert Meng Siyu raised an eyebrow, amused.

“Oh? Vice-Captain, are you that interested in them?”

Baili Changqing grinned.

“Actually, there are quite a few Superhumans in Tianhai City that I find impressive. But Zhang Yi and Yuan Kongye stand out the most.”

Meng Siyu thought for a moment, then nodded with a smile.

“That makes sense. Special-Type Superhumans reaching Delta-level strength are extremely rare.”

Zhang Yi’s ability would be invaluable in any team.

Meanwhile, Yuan Kongye’s power was at a strategic level.

By comparison, combat-focused fighters like Xiao Honglian, Xing Tian, and Wei Dinghai were strong, but not rare in Blizzard City.

Bian Junwu thought about Zhang Yi and Yuan Kongye and remarked coolly,

“We’ll discuss them later.”

If Zhang Yi wasn’t interested in joining Blizzard City, Bian Junwu wouldn’t force him.

But if Yuan Kongye’s ability was proven to mass-produce Superhumans...

Then whether she wanted to go or not wouldn't be her choice.

With his decision made, Bian Junwu ordered the team to return home.

Baili Changqing turned the snow vehicle around and drove toward the Tianhai City border.

However, just before they left the city, Bian Junwu's satellite phone rang.

His eyes narrowed slightly.

“Hmm?”

Baili Changqing noticed and asked, “Boss, is it a call from HQ?”

“No,” Bian Junwu replied flatly. “It’s Zhang Yi.”

At the mention of Zhang Yi’s name, Wu Di immediately frowned, his face full of impatience.

“This guy... of all times, he calls us right before we leave? What, is he looking for trouble?”

Wu Di had always disliked Zhang Yi, even showing open hostility toward him.

Zhang Yi was aware of it, but had no idea why—he had never done anything to offend Wu Di.

Bian Junwu ignored Wu Di’s complaint.

As the satellite phone continued ringing, he calmly reached out and pressed the answer button.

Chapter 510: The Investigation Team Returns

“Hello, this is Bian Junwu.”

Bian Junwu’s voice was as cold as the freezing snow around them.

On the other end of the line, Zhang Yi’s voice came through.

“Captain Bian, it’s Zhang Yi. Have you left Tianhai City yet?”

Bian Junwu glanced at the road ahead. They were less than ten kilometers from the city’s border.

“Almost,” he replied flatly.

Zhang Yi’s heart tightened, but he kept his voice calm.

“I see... Before you leave, there’s something important I need to tell you.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve found another zombie horde.”

Bian Junwu’s expression finally changed.

Zhang Yi continued, “And this time... it’s even bigger and more dangerous than before.”

Bian Junwu could no longer ignore it. He turned to Baili Changqing and ordered, “Stop the car.”

Baili Changqing immediately hit the brakes.

The rest of the Investigation Team exchanged looks, puzzled by Bian Junwu's sudden shift in demeanor.

His face was grim—a rare sight, even for him.

“Where did you find them?” Bian Junwu asked.

Zhang Yi's voice was serious.

“The deepest tunnels of Ao Mountain District's subway system. There are at least hundreds of thousands of them, possibly more.”

Bian Junwu took a deep breath, then let it out through his nose.

If what Zhang Yi said was true...

Then his earlier suspicions were correct.

The zombie crisis in Tianhai City had never truly ended.

Everything they had seen—the peace, the victory—was all a carefully crafted illusion.

Why?

To lull them into a false sense of security—to trick them into leaving Tianhai City.

Bian Junwu clenched his thigh with one hand, his anger boiling inside.

They had been played for fools.

This level of deception... and the ability to control such a massive zombie army—it was far beyond a mere Zombie King.

Or perhaps...

The Zombie Kings they had killed were never the real threat to begin with.

Something or someone was controlling everything from the shadows.

Bian Junwu's voice was heavy.

“How did you find them? Can you confirm this information?”

Zhang Yi hesitated for a moment.

He had considered lying—saying he stumbled upon them by accident.

But with someone like Bian Junwu, it was better to be honest.

So, he spoke the truth.

“I've always suspected that the zombie crisis wasn't truly over.”

“So, after you left, I kept hunting stray zombies and scanning the subways.”

“And finally, after a lot of effort... I found them.”

Holding his satellite phone, Zhang Yi waited for Bian Junwu's response.

He needed the Investigation Team to stay.

Bian Junwu was a crucial piece in Zhang Yi's next move.

Only with Jiangnan District's authority and Bian Junwu's strength could they eliminate Yuan Kongye—the greatest threat to Tianhai City.

And according to his and Yang Xinxin's calculations, once Bian Junwu heard this, he would have to stay.

Because as long as the zombie problem remained, the Investigation Team's mission was incomplete.

They had no choice but to report back and investigate.

Bian Junwu's voice came through the phone again.

“Where are you now?”

“At home.”

“Good. I'm coming to see you.”

With that, Bian Junwu ended the call.

He turned to Baili Changqing.

“Turn around. We're heading to Zhang Yi's Shelter.”

Baili Changqing grinned and spun the wheel, sending the snow vehicle into a wide arc across the snowy wasteland, speeding back toward Yuelu District.

The rest of the team looked at each other, confused.

Wu Di frowned, clearly irritated.

“Boss, why the hell are we going back to Zhang Yi?”

Bian Junwu adjusted his mirrored sunglasses.

“Because the zombies might not be gone. We can’t just leave.”

Suddenly, he covered his mouth—and coughed violently.

His body shook with each cough, as if he were about to cough up his lungs.

Wu Di’s expression immediately turned tense.

He hurriedly pulled Meng Siyu over.

“Check on him—quick!”

Meng Siyu opened her medical kit and took out a small bottle of pills. She poured out two and handed them to Bian Junwu.

But when Bian Junwu finally lowered his hand, his palm was covered in fresh, red blood.

The team fell into a heavy silence.

Even Baili Changqing, usually the cheerful one, frowned deeply.

Bian Junwu didn't react to their concern. He simply took the pills and swallowed them.

The medicine wouldn't cure him, but it would ease his pain.

Everyone's eyes held sadness—even though no one spoke it aloud.

Bian Junwu simply wiped the blood from his lips and hand with a tissue.

He spoke calmly.

“There's no need for those looks.”

“I've never regretted gaining my abilities. Because of them, we've survived so many close calls.”

“There's a price for everything.”

“The world doesn't hand out gifts—it always takes something in return.”

“In the apocalypse, you need to accept that reality.”

“Don't waste your time feeling sad—it clouds your judgment.”

“In this world, the most important thing is to stay rational.”

Meanwhile, back at his Shelter, Zhang Yi waited for Bian Junwu to arrive.

He had already planned out exactly what he was going to say.

No matter what happened, he would not let Jiangnan District walk away from this crisis.

They had to be involved.

A few hours later, the Investigation Team's vehicle pulled up at the Shelter's entrance.

Zhang Yi had already instructed Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siyah to prepare food for their guests.

But when Bian Junwu and his team stepped out, their expressions were dark—they had no interest in eating.

Wu Di's face was full of suspicion and hostility as he glared at Zhang Yi.

“Zhang Yi, you'd better explain yourself clearly today!”

“If you're messing with us, I swear—I won't let you off easy!”

Zhang Yi ignored him.

Because Wu Di's opinion didn't matter.

Instead, he turned to Bian Junwu and Baili Changqing.

“Come inside,” Zhang Yi said. “We need to talk.”

Bian Junwu followed him into the living room.

Zhang Yi dismissed everyone else, choosing to speak privately with the Investigation Team.

Once they sat down, Baili Changqing leaned forward.

“Zhang Yi, we’re not strangers. The zombie issue is serious, and Blizzard City’s leadership is watching closely.”

“If you have something important to say—just tell us straight. Don’t joke around.”

Zhang Yi nodded.

“Of course. I wouldn’t joke about something like this.”

“Now... let me show you something.”