

Ice Age 541

Chapter 541: Superhuman Toxin

Zhang Yi and Yuan Kongye clashed once again.

The prolonged battle with no clear advantage left Yuan Kongye increasingly irritated.

It wasn't that she lacked strength—her power was overwhelming—but her inexperience in real combat was a glaring weakness.

And Zhang Yi's constant taunts only fueled her determination to kill him right here, no matter the cost.

But the longer she fought, the more discomfort she felt in her body.

A dizziness overtook her, as if she were suffering from severe motion sickness. Nausea churned in her stomach, and her vision began to blur.

The more intensely she unleashed her abilities, the worse the sensation became.

Then, a sudden realization struck her—this wasn't caused by her emotions, nor was it some sudden illness.

With that thought, she stopped midair, clutching her forehead as she clenched her teeth and demanded,

"You... What did you do to me!?"

Zhang Yi's smirk grew wider.

So, it had finally begun.

No, I can't celebrate yet. I need to push her deeper into the abyss.

Mocking, he said, "Looks like you still can't fully control your own power."

"Maybe... the souls of all those Superhumans you absorbed are haunting you, making you suffer like this!"

Yuan Kongye glared at him with hatred, her body wracked with pain.

But his words struck a nerve, causing a flicker of unease in her heart.

After all, in her pursuit of power, she had used countless ruthless methods, consuming the abilities of many Ice Soul Superhumans.

Among them were not just her devout followers but also—the most important one of all—Zheng Yixian.

"Shut up! What do you even know!?"

Through sheer willpower, she ignored the pain and unleashed another violent assault on Zhang Yi.

The ground shattered.

Dark clouds churned.

Winds howled.

Flames roared.

Ice surged.

She wielded countless powerful abilities with ease.

But none of it could truly harm Zhang Yi.

Like an unyielding tumbler doll, he absorbed every devastating strike yet refused to fall.

The only real advantage Yuan Kongye had over him was her immense energy reserves.

But Zhang Yi had two things working in his favor—

First, he had obtained Xing Tian's Xing Tian Legion ability.

Second, his Dimensional Space was stocked with an overwhelming supply of energy-rich food, enough to sustain him through countless energy-consuming battles.

But what was the point of this fight?

Even with his strongest techniques, he couldn't kill Yuan Kongye. So how was continuing to fight going to change anything?

The answer lay in her body's reaction.

All the plans he had secretly set into motion were finally working.

This was Plan B: Superhuman Toxin.

Plan A had relied on Yuan Kongye and Zheng Yixian perfectly controlling their zombie horde, forcing them to weaken themselves.

That plan had failed.

So, Plan B had begun.

And its core lay in Bian Junwu.

Previously, it had been noted that mutations in this world were not always beneficial. Some carried fatal flaws.

Bian Junwu's ability was one such case—every time he used his skills, he paid the price with irreparable damage to his body, including the loss of his eyesight.

Since these mutations occurred on a genetic level, modern medicine couldn't cure them.

And because Yuan Kongye had absorbed the abilities of Ice Soul hosts, she had also inherited their negative side effects.

This wasn't just Zhang Yi's speculation.

Li Jian had once written him a letter detailing an incident.

Li Jian had met a female priest in the Followers of the Snow God, a woman whose power allowed her to control ice and snow with her breath.

But this ability came at a cost—it damaged her lungs, causing her to cough violently whenever she used it.

Eventually, Yuan Kongye had strangled that priest to death with her own hands.

Then, one day, Li Jian witnessed something shocking.

After using her powers to perform a divine miracle for her followers, Yuan Kongye coughed—just like that priest had.

That detail stuck with Li Jian, and he described it in full to Zhang Yi.

So Zhang Yi deduced that if Yuan Kongye absorbed the powers of others, she must also absorb their negative mutations.

Thus, Plan B was born—a meticulously crafted trap centered around Bian Junwu.

The critical flaw in Bian Junwu's ability was known only to Zhang Yi.

No other faction in Tianhai City had this information.

Which meant that Yuan Kongye had no idea about the deadly price of using Oblivion.

When she obtained the power to annihilate everything in sight, she had been ecstatic.

She couldn't wait to unleash it and obliterate all her enemies.

But as an Epsilon-level Superhuman, the stronger her ability, the more devastating the backlash would be.

Take Bian Junwu, for example—when he fully unleashed his power, he burned through his own life force in an instant, perishing like a fleeting firework.

And all Zhang Yi had to do—was drag the fight out until she overused her abilities.

The forces of Tianhai City had been fighting her in a war of attrition.

First, the investigation team and dozens of Superhumans had worn her down.

Once they had been defeated, Zhang Yi stepped in.

His smirk grew wider.

If he could kill Yuan Kongye, not only would Tianhai City's crisis be resolved...

But—no one would be left to stop him from taking her Superhuman Core.

An Epsilon-level Core.

If Zhang Yi could absorb it, he'd gain the abilities of dozens of Superhumans all at once.

Perhaps—he could even ascend to the Epsilon level himself.

But, of course, he wasn't about to tell Yuan Kongye that.

If she realized the truth, she might just stop fighting and run.

And there would be nothing Zhang Yi could do to stop her.

So instead, he provoked her with words.

"I know you hate this world. You want to destroy everyone in it. But let's be real—you're not exactly innocent, are you?"

"If your parents hadn't founded a cult, scamming their followers out of their life savings, you wouldn't have ended up like this."

Yuan Kongye's pupils shrank.

That piece of her past—was the one thing she never wanted to face.

Her deepest, darkest scar.

Zhang Yi's words forced her to relive memories she had tried to bury.

She remembered how her parents had died in a plane crash.

At their funeral, furious cult members stormed in and toppled their coffins.

Among them, someone shoved her to the ground.

Then came the brutal, endless torment.

Zheng Yixian had fought like a wounded beast, desperately trying to save her, but they pinned him down and stomped on his head.

No matter how he screamed and begged, his eyes bloodshot, they never stopped.

For an entire day and night, the suffering had carved itself into her very bones—so much so that she once doubted if she would even survive.

"AHHHHHHHH!!!!!"

Yuan Kongye suddenly clutched her head, letting out a soul-wrenching wail.

A violent storm of power erupted from her body, radiating outward like an unstoppable force!

Chapter 542: Incurable

Yuan Kongye's vision had grown so blurry that she could no longer make out Zhang Yi's silhouette.

Her headache worsened, and an overwhelming sense of danger gripped her heart.

"Zhang Yi, what did you do to me?! Answer me!"

From a distance, Zhang Yi watched her, surprisingly calm.

This kind of superhuman backlash was incurable—once it took effect, it would only spiral further out of control.

"Why don't you take a guess?" He grinned.

There was no way he'd let her figure out the truth.

His carefully laid plan was finally bearing fruit, but he wasn't about to get careless now.

Yuan Kongye glared at him murderously.

She was convinced that at some point, he had used an ability on her, something that was now wreaking havoc on her body.

"Arrogant fool!" she spat coldly.

A brilliant white light erupted from her body, enveloping her completely.

This was her ability—Blessing, capable of healing any injury or illness.

But this time, the moment she activated it, something unexpected happened.

Her symptoms didn't fade.

In fact, the more she pushed her power, the worse she felt—her vision blurred further, and her headache intensified.

"Kh... Khh... cough cough!"

A sharp pain seized her chest, and suddenly, she was coughing violently.

Now's the time to strike!

Zhang Yi had no intention of giving her even a moment's respite.

Only a dead enemy was a safe enemy.

"Divine Power!"

Once more, his strongest attack surged toward her!

Sensing the immense threat, Yuan Kongye barely managed to counter with Oblivion.

She blocked the attack—but her body had deteriorated even further.

"Cough... cough... cough!"

From afar, the injured survivors watched in stunned silence.

They had noticed Yuan Kongye suddenly weakening, coughing uncontrollably.

But what confused them the most—was that Zhang Yi hadn't done anything visible.

Those who knew him well were even more bewildered.

Zhang Yi was a spatial-type Superhuman—he had no ability related to poison or curses.

Besides, poisoning an Epsilon-level Superhuman in the middle of a battle was practically impossible.

Then, realization dawned on Baili Changqing.

"It's the Captain's ability."

Not just him—everyone from the Investigation Team understood.

Tianhai City's Superhumans might not know about Bian Junwu's ability flaws, but they did.

Meng Siyu muttered, "She absorbed the Captain's ability... and with it, she also inherited its side effects."

"But... was this Zhang Yi's plan from the start? Or just a coincidence?"

She turned to Baili Changqing, her eyes full of disbelief.

Was it a coincidence?

Not a chance.

If this had been Zhang Yi's intention all along, then that meant—he had manipulated Bian Junwu from the very beginning.

From inside his sleeping bag, the weakened Wu Di swore weakly, "That bastard... he actually used us!"

"No," Baili Changqing replied calmly.

"Given the situation back then, that was the only way to ensure our survival. I think the Captain knew Zhang Yi was using him, but he still went through with it." ¶NoBEs

He watched the battlefield, growing more and more impressed with Zhang Yi.

"But to orchestrate something of this scale... that's just insane. Even we were just pieces on his board."

Though being used left a bitter taste, Baili Changqing couldn't help but respect Zhang Yi's cunning and strategic brilliance.

Wu Di grumbled, "Brilliant, my ass! That bastard, I swear, one day I'm gonna—cough cough cough..."

His body was too weak to even finish his threat before nearly passing out.

Meng Siyu patted him reassuringly. "Alright, let's just focus on staying alive for now."

With Yuan Kongye visibly deteriorating, hope ignited in everyone's hearts.

For the first time, they saw a chance at survival.

Because only if Zhang Yi defeated Yuan Kongye—could they live.

And they all knew it.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi continued to eat, replenishing his energy while maintaining a long-range battle against her.

Yuan Kongye's body was failing. Her vision was fading. Every move felt wrong.

Zhang Yi stopped using Divine Power.

It was too energy-draining. Even though he could replenish his strength by eating, he couldn't afford to waste resources carelessly.

After all, he needed to maintain his full combat strength until the battle was truly over.

Because once Yuan Kongye fell...

Every other Superhuman on the battlefield would come after her Core.

An Epsilon-level Superhuman Core.

Zhang Yi knew that if he wanted to claim it, he had to stay strong until the very end.

So, he switched tactics—

He pulled out Bian Junwu's modified pistol and loaded it with Origin Bullets.

This gun was larger than an ordinary handgun, with an extended barrel.

The black bullets that fired from it carried a destructive force unlike any conventional ammunition.

Against normal people or objects, it wasn't that different from an ordinary bullet.

But against Superhumans—its effects were devastating.

Even in Qi Guangming's hands, it would have done some damage to Yuan Kongye.

And in Zhang Yi's hands?

It was lethal.

Using spatial teleportation, Zhang Yi dodged her attacks while taking advantage of her weakened state to fire precise shots.

Each Origin Bullet carried a power that couldn't be ignored.

Yuan Kongye could have dodged them.

She could have used telekinesis to move at high speed and escape the gunfire.

But at first—she refused to dodge.

Because the moment she started dodging, it would mean she was losing.

As someone who believed herself to be a god, that was unacceptable.

So instead, she chose to block the bullets with sheer force.

But doing so drained her energy even faster.

And the side effects of Bian Junwu's ability worsened.

By the time she realized the danger, it was too late.

If she stopped using her abilities, Zhang Yi would kill her instantly.

And if she kept using them, her own body would destroy her.

Not to mention—the other Superhumans were already watching, waiting for their chance to strike once she fell.

"Am I... really going to lose?"

For the first time, that thought crossed her mind.

She didn't want to believe it.

She and Zheng Yixian had planned for this day for so long.

She had absorbed the powers of dozens of Superhumans—including top-tier ones like Bian Junwu.

She had believed herself unstoppable, convinced that no one in Tianhai City could withstand even a single attack from her.

But Zhang Yi...

He had pushed her to the brink.

In terms of raw attack power, Zhang Yi wasn't even a real threat to her.

Even Divine Power, though strong, had a limited range—if she had wanted to escape, he wouldn't have been able to stop her.

But his defense was overwhelming.

And even as an Epsilon-level Superhuman...

She couldn't break through it.

Chapter 543: Overestimating Oneself

Yuan Kongye wasn't weak.

If a more experienced fighter had possessed her abilities, Zhang Yi wouldn't have had such an easy time executing his plan.

Of course, maintaining this stalemate wasn't easy for him either.

Without the boost from Xing Tian's Legion and his constant intake of Superhuman food, he wouldn't have lasted this long against her.

An Epsilon-level Superhuman represented the pinnacle of human evolution.

The sheer amount of energy in Yuan Kongye's body was overwhelming—even Zhang Yi found it difficult to deal with.

Luckily, he had external energy sources.

"Yuan Kongye, what's wrong? You've been fighting for so long—are you about to surrender?"

Zhang Yi kept up his attacks, refusing to give her a moment to breathe.

"If you surrender now and disable your abilities, I might consider letting you live."

His words were laced with temptation, meant to shake her resolve.

Yuan Kongye's vision was blurry, but her raw combat strength remained terrifying.

She had dozens of abilities.

Even though she couldn't see clearly, her enhanced physique allowed her to sense everything around her.

Her response was a massive ice spear hurled at Zhang Yi!

But he simply swallowed it into the Dimensional Gate.

She was running out of ways to deal with him.

At the start of the battle, she had planned to wear him down.

After all, she far outclassed him in raw power.

And as an Epsilon-level Superhuman, her energy reserves were several times greater than Zhang Yi's.

But what she hadn't expected was just how much Superhuman food Zhang Yi had stockpiled in his Dimensional Space.

It was like a low-level player bringing 10,000 healing potions to fight a world boss.

Sure, his attack power was weak, but he could outlast her.

And if that had been the only issue, she could have endured it.

But the biggest problem was that her body had started to fail.

By now, she had realized the truth.

Her mutation wasn't natural—it had been caused by the Ice Soul she had given to Zhang Yi and the others.

She had planned everything out carefully.

The Ice Soul could awaken Superhuman abilities, enhance potential, and was something any faction leader would want to keep for themselves—either for their own use or to empower promising newcomers.

Then, when those people died, their abilities would return to her.

But what she hadn't expected—was that someone would deliberately use the Ice Soul as a trap.

Someone had given it to a Superhuman with a devastating genetic defect, ensuring that when she absorbed their power, she would also inherit its flaws.

And by the time she realized it, it was already too late.

The mutation's side effects had already taken root, ravaging her body.

Not even her healing abilities could counter it.

Mutations occurred at the genetic level—and they were irreversible.

Yuan Kongye's face twisted with fury.

Through clenched teeth, she demanded, "You... When did you do this to me? Tell me! I need to know!"

Zhang Yi smirked.

"Go ask the King of Hell yourself."

With that, he fired an Origin Bullet straight at her head!

"Hmph!"

With a flick of her wrist, a massive ice wall formed in front of her, blocking the shot.

But the moment she used her ability, a piercing pain shot through her skull—

Like thousands of needles stabbing into her brain.

She clutched her head in agony, her body staggering in midair.

"I can't... I can't keep fighting like this!"

She finally realized the truth—this battle was pointless.

The man in front of her was her perfect counter.

She had to retreat, fix her body, and return stronger.

When she fully adapted to her newfound power—she would come back and kill them all.

Making up her mind, she ignored the pain and suddenly turned around, fleeing in the opposite direction!

Zhang Yi wasn't surprised at all.

He had predicted every possible move Yuan Kongye might make.

And no matter what—she wasn't leaving this battlefield alive.

"Didn't you claim to be a god?" he taunted. "Then why are you running?"

Casually munching on more Superhuman food, Zhang Yi chased after her.

But he didn't rush.

He kept his distance, careful not to get too close.

After all, she had absorbed the powers of multiple Superhumans, including those with enhanced close-combat abilities.

If he got within melee range, she could still be deadly.

But none of that mattered.

Because her condition was only going to worsen.

All Zhang Yi had to do was wait—

And let her own body kill her.

He was a hunter, and he had endless patience.

Yuan Kongye's flight speed was impressive.

With telekinesis, she soared through the sky as a streak of white light.

But no matter how fast she was—

She couldn't outrun Zhang Yi's spatial teleportation.

And as she fled, the watching survivors—Baili Changqing and the other faction leaders—grew excited.

Yuan Kongye was running.

Which meant—

Zhang Yi had won.

Baili Changqing's eyes darkened as he stared at her retreating figure.

An Epsilon-level Superhuman, heavily injured and fleeing—

If someone took her Core, their power would skyrocket.

And he wasn't the only one who realized this.

All around him, the other survivors' gazes burned with greed.

In the apocalypse, power was everything.

They had witnessed how terrifying Yuan Kongye had been.

An Epsilon-level Superhuman was on a completely different level—an unstoppable force against weaker opponents.

Who wouldn't want that kind of power?

And right now, Zhang Yi wasn't nearby.

He was trailing Yuan Kongye, keeping his distance.

Which meant—this was their chance.

In the ruins, Wei Dinghai stared at his crippled arm.

He gritted his teeth and made a decision.

"Tianhai City is finished. My strength is crippled. If I don't take a risk now, I'll lose everything."

His eyes turned ice-blue, and a storm swirled within his pupils.

The next moment—he merged into the snow.

As Yuan Kongye fled,

A massive vortex suddenly formed on the ground beneath her—

Then, in an instant, it transformed into a razor-sharp spear, shooting straight toward her!

Even though her vision was gone, her senses remained sharp.

Snarling, she punched downward—

The ice spear shattered like it had slammed into an iron wall.

An invisible force crushed it to dust.

"BOOM!"

The entire ice storm exploded into fragments.

Wei Dinghai was slammed into the ground.

The ice armor covering his body shattered like glass.

He lay motionless, buried deep in the earth.

A moment later—

Blood began seeping from underground, staining the snow a deep, ominous red.

Chapter 544: Killing Through Attrition

Wei Dinghai had tried to ambush the wounded Yuan Kongye, hoping to steal her Superhuman Core.

But he had underestimated her.

Even in her weakened state, she was still terrifyingly powerful.

With just one attack, she killed him instantly.

The sight shocked everyone watching from the ruins.

Even injured, Yuan Kongye was far beyond their level.

They weren't Zhang Yi—they didn't have limitless resources, and they certainly didn't have his insane spatial defense.

Zhang Yi might have been untouchable, but she could wipe them out like insects.

After disposing of Wei Dinghai, Yuan Kongye quickly fled into the distance.

Zhang Yi pursued at a leisurely pace.

As he walked, his gaze swept over the survivors hiding in the ruins.

He smiled and said, "Everyone, Yuan Kongye is severely wounded right now. If you want her Core, go ahead."

His voice was calm, but to the others, it dripped with mockery.

He was clearly ridiculing Wei Dinghai's foolishness.

A wounded Epsilon-level Superhuman was still beyond their reach.

Of course, even though none of them dared to act, they had all been thinking about it.

Silence filled the air.

Everyone knew they stood no chance against Zhang Yi.

After scanning the crowd one last time, Zhang Yi smirked—then vanished through a spatial jump, continuing his pursuit.

He wasn't in a hurry.

Because time was on his side.

Yuan Kongye couldn't kill him.

And he couldn't kill her—yet.

But they were both human.

She needed rest. She needed food.

And now—she was blind.

No sleep. No food.

No matter how strong she was, she would eventually break.

Meanwhile, he had everything he needed.

He even had military-grade stimulants to keep himself awake and alert.

This was a battle of endurance.

As Zhang Yi and Yuan Kongye disappeared into the distance, the survivors finally exhaled in relief.

Slowly, they emerged from their hiding spots.

Baili Changqing stared after Zhang Yi, his expression complex.

"In the end... he's the biggest winner."

If Zhang Yi absorbed Yuan Kongye's Core, he might immediately ascend to the Epsilon level.

At that point, he would become the strongest Superhuman in Jiangnan District.

And when that happened—they wouldn't even be able to stand in his shadow.

Baili Changqing scratched his head.

"The Captain wanted him to join our team back then..." He laughed bitterly. "But if he did now, he'd probably be our leader."

Explosives expert Ye Jikang walked over, his face serious.

"But why do I feel like... this was all part of his plan?"

"We were all his chess pieces."

Baili Changqing glanced at him, then sighed helplessly.

"Maybe we were. But what choice did we have?"

"He was one step ahead of us."

He had no resentment toward Zhang Yi.

As long as the outcome was good, and their mission was accomplished, he had no reason to be bitter.

Because without Zhang Yi, they never would have uncovered the secrets of the Followers of the Snow God.

If their mission had failed, the entire Jiangnan District—maybe even all of China—would have been doomed.

"It's just a shame about the Captain... Maybe... he could've lived longer."

A shadow of grief flickered in Ye Jikang's eyes.

Bian Junwu had been their pillar of strength.

His death was a devastating loss to the team.

Baili Changqing fell silent.

Could they blame Zhang Yi?

If Zhang Yi hadn't been involved, maybe Bian Junwu would've lived a little longer.

But they all knew—his body had been deteriorating for a long time.

Even without Zhang Yi, he wouldn't have lasted much longer.

And at least—he had died in battle, going out in a blaze of glory.

Perhaps... that was the best ending for him.

Meanwhile, Yuan Kongye was still running.

She knew she couldn't beat Zhang Yi—but she was determined to outlast him.

But she was blind.

Her body was falling apart.

She needed to find a place to heal.

She had dozens of abilities, including several healing powers.

If she could just find some time, she might be able to cure herself.

But she wasn't alone.

She could feel his presence—

The cold, predatory gaze watching her every move.

Even without seeing him, she knew he was there.

Waiting.

Like a vulture, circling a dying animal.

Zhang Yi wasn't in a hurry.

He kept his distance, just watching.

Every time she tried to stop and rest, he fired an Origin Bullet, forcing her to keep moving.

And if she turned back to fight him—

He would simply teleport away, dodging her attack.

Each time she used her abilities, her condition worsened.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi would just sit somewhere, pull food from his Dimensional Space, and quietly eat.

This was like breaking a wild eagle.

He had even injected himself with a military stimulant.

It kept his body alert and his mind sharp, allowing him to stay awake for three days straight.

He could wait.

And when it was finally over—

He would claim the greatest prize of all.

The Superhuman Core of an Epsilon-level Superhuman.

The concentrated power of dozens of elite Superhumans.

With that—he would ascend.

Yuan Kongye stumbled through the snow, her body barely holding together.

Her vision was completely gone.

All she could do was run on instinct.

On the second day, she somehow managed to find a supermarket buried in the snow.

But just as she was about to enter—

A rocket flew in from the distance, striking the store dead center.

BOOM!

The explosion obliterated the building, incinerating all the supplies inside.

Yuan Kongye was numb to everything now.

But after an entire day without food, desperation finally began to creep in.

She turned around, her lifeless gray eyes staring into the distance.

Atop a small hill, Zhang Yi stood—

A rocket launcher on his shoulder.

A wisp of smoke curled from its barrel.

His expression was playful.

And the scent in the air—

Was the scent of despair.

Yuan Kongye's face was blank.

She lifted a hand, summoning a raging blizzard, aiming to bury the entire mountain in ice.

But—

No matter how powerful the storm, it couldn't touch him.

Two massive Dimensional Gates surrounded him in a triangular formation, shielding him from everything.

"Nothing can touch me."

Zhang Yi looked at her calmly.

"You still haven't given up?"

"Everyone you cared about is dead."

"Your parents are dead. Zheng Yixian is dead. The tens of thousands of followers of the Snow God—you led them all to their deaths."

"And now, you're alone."

"Even if you had won, you would've been alone."

"Every single person died because of you. Do you really feel no guilt?"

"Because the truth is—"

"The one who should've died first—"

"Was you."

Chapter 545: The End of All Evil

Yuan Kongye listened to Zhang Yi's words in silence, her face blank and devoid of emotion.

After unleashing another massive storm upon the battlefield, she turned away and kept running.

Zhang Yi followed at a steady pace, showing no concern.

Blind and exhausted, Yuan Kongye ran purely on instinct, like a headless fly, lost in a world she could no longer see.

On the third day, she reached the edge of Tianhai City.

By now, her body was failing.

Her once delicate face, now paler than snow, looked as fragile as paper.

For three days, she hadn't eaten a single bite of food.

Every time she tried to find something, Zhang Yi destroyed it.

She couldn't rest, either—because she knew that the moment she stopped, Zhang Yi's gun would be aimed at her head.

Despair.

A despair so absolute, so suffocating, that it felt like being cut apart with a dull knife.

Slowly, agonizingly, peeling back her skin...

Then slicing her flesh...

Then shaving down her bones.

If she had faced a stronger Superhuman, someone who could have killed her instantly, she wouldn't have suffered like this.

But Zhang Yi wasn't a normal opponent.

He was relentless, like a leech stuck to her soul.

And there was nothing she could do about it.

"Zheng Yixian... if only you were still alive."

Staggering, she dragged herself up a snowy mountain, step by step.

One kilometer behind her, Zhang Yi followed at a casual pace.

Compared to her withering state, he looked as energetic as ever.

He had injected himself twice with military-grade stimulants, keeping his mind sharp and body active.

He knew victory was within reach.

Watching her falter, he could already see the end.

As Yuan Kongye climbed the mountain, the icy wind brushed against her face.

It was cold—but it didn't feel unpleasant.

What she really felt... was tired.

The freezing storm couldn't stop her exhaustion.

She could barely keep her eyes open.

But every time she started to drift into unconsciousness—

A black bullet would whistle through the air, narrowly missing her head.

"I'm so tired."

She whispered to herself.

Her expression, once proud and untouchable, was now filled with helplessness.

She looked nothing like the holy and revered leader of the Followers of the Snow God.

Instead, she was just a lost girl, bullied, alone, seeking someone to protect her.

"God... am I not your most devoted follower? Please... save me."

She clasped her hands together, praying desperately.

But—there was no answer.

"Why? Why won't you guide me? Did I do something wrong?"

"But everything I did... was to create a world free of filth and impurity!"

"Zheng Yixian... Zheng Yixian... what should I do? Tell me!"

She was no longer the cold, divine priestess.

She was just a frightened child.

In her blurry vision, faces appeared.

Her parents, smiling at her, reaching out their hands.

"A'Ye, come with us... let's go to heaven together."

Then—Zheng Yixian's serious expression.

"A'Ye! Wake up! Wake up!!"

The next moment, she saw a warm, gentle woman, smiling at her softly.

"Xiao Ye, are you okay?"

Seeing that face, Yuan Kongye's dry, lifeless eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Sister Chen Rou..."

A lullaby floated through the air.

"Sleep, sleep, my dear child..."

"Sleep, sleep, my dear princess..."

The sound wrapped around her like a cocoon.

She couldn't fight it anymore.

She was too hungry.

Too tired.

Her body was nothing but an empty shell.

The lullaby pulled her down, whispering—

"Give up."

"Just give up."

"Everyone you loved is dead."

"Because of you."

"What's the point of living?"

"If you die... you'll see them again."

Staggering, Yuan Kongye dragged herself toward a withered tree at the edge of the mountain.

Slowly...

Slowly...

She leaned against it—

And collapsed.

"Zheng Yixian..."

She whispered his name one last time.

"I'm hungry."

Muttering the words like a child, she finally closed her eyes.

From afar, Zhang Yi watched her fall.

Without hesitation, he raised his gun—

And fired.

"Bzzzt—"

The bullet stopped just one meter before reaching her, trembling in midair before dropping into the snow.

"Still alive?"

Zhang Yi murmured.

His eyes remained sharp, but he didn't move closer.

A wounded beast was the most dangerous kind.

If she was on the verge of death, her final counterattack would be the strongest yet.

So he wasn't rushing.

He wasn't reckless.

His Origin Bullets were gone.

From his Dimensional Space, he pulled out a high-caliber anti-material sniper rifle.

He aimed—not at her head, but her body.

If the shot hit her head, it would destroy it completely.

And that might damage her Superhuman Core.

He waited a few minutes, then took his first shot.

Yuan Kongye's telekinetic barrier stopped it.

Zhang Yi didn't react.

Her defenses were running on instinct.

He didn't rush in.

Instead, he kept his distance, firing every once in a while, waiting.

And so, one day and one night passed.

Finally—

The first Epsilon-level Superhuman in Tianhai City—

Ran out of energy.

A high-caliber sniper bullet tore through her fragile body—

No.

It ripped her apart.

It was a brutal sight.

A young girl, split in two.

But against someone as terrifying as Yuan Kongye—

Zhang Yi had no choice.

This was war.

Even the dead had to be handled with caution.

And in the end—

She had deserved it.

Because she had orchestrated the zombie outbreak in Tianhai City.

Because of her, millions had died.

This was justice.

Watching her final moments, Zhang Yi let out a deep breath.

His eyes were bloodshot.

He hadn't slept for three days and nights.

If not for the stimulants, he would have collapsed just like she had.

But it was over.

He had won.

Suppressing his excitement, Zhang Yi slowly walked forward.

"The final step is always the hardest."

He checked his surroundings—no one was coming.

Even if they did, he wasn't afraid.

His energy was low, but his abilities were intact.

Anyone who tried to interfere—

Would be wiped out instantly.

With Bian Junwu and Yuan Kongye dead, no one in Tianhai City could challenge him now.

Now—

All he had to do was absorb her Core.

And then—

He would ascend.

Placing his hand on her forehead, Zhang Yi felt it.

An incomprehensible surge of power roared through his body.

Like a raging river, crashing into his soul.

His right eye glowed blindingly bright—

And in his left eye, a deep, ominous darkness began to stir.

Chapter 546: Void

No one knew how much time had passed before Zhang Yi finished absorbing the remnants of Yuan Kongye's superhuman energy.

He could feel himself growing significantly stronger.

On every level, it was an epic enhancement.

Even something as basic as the Dimensional Gate now had a drastically improved defense threshold. His control over spatial power had become even more refined, and it seemed like he could develop even more formidable abilities in the future.

However, there was one thing Zhang Yi was unaware of.

As a superhuman who had ascended to Epsilon level later in life, Yuan Kongye's abilities had inherent flaws.

Her powers were all stolen—none of them truly belonged to her.

Moreover, she had only recently ascended, and her core energy was not yet stable. Suffering through a massive battle had severely damaged her foundation.

In reality, Zhang Yi had only absorbed a fraction of Yuan Kongye's core power.

But even that fraction far exceeded the power of any Delta-level superhuman in Tianhai City.

Now, Zhang Yi's next task was to fully integrate this power as his own.

Closing his eyes, he focused on sensing the changes within himself.

He stood in the midst of the wind and snow, and after a long moment, he finally opened his eyes.

Slowly, he stretched out his hand.

A streak of black lightning flickered in his palm—at first, just a faint spark, but it rapidly expanded, transforming into a dark mass that resembled both fire and electricity.

"Crackle—"

A distorted sound echoed.

Zhang Yi controlled the energy, compressing it in his palm until it took solid form.

In the end, it condensed into a long, pitch-black spear, unstable and pulsating with immense power.

Even Zhang Yi found it difficult to hold onto.

Without hesitation, he raised his arm and hurled the spear into the distance.

"Whoosh!"

The black spear pierced through the void and embedded itself in the distant mountainside without a sound.

Then—

A dark explosion erupted from the impact site, expanding into a massive black sphere over a thousand meters in diameter!

When the black sphere vanished, it left behind a perfectly circular void in the mountainside—an enormous crater with a smooth surface, as if something had wiped reality itself clean.

"The power of the void..." Zhang Yi murmured.

The moment he acquired this power, he instinctively understood its nature.

Void energy could consume everything.

It was an upgraded version of Divine Power, far deadlier and more terrifying.

"If I combine it with the Dimensional Gate, is there anyone in this world I can't kill?"

Zhang Yi looked down at his right hand.

He even felt that this power allowed him to surpass the limits of humanity—to hold dominion over life and death itself.

When someone suddenly gains immense power, their mind naturally swells with arrogance.

But Zhang Yi quickly suppressed these thoughts.

"There are too many strong people in this world—I can't let arrogance blind me."

"Otherwise, I'll end up like Yuan Kongye."

He thought of Bian Junwu's terrifying final attack and Yuan Kongye's overwhelming command over dozens of superpowers, effortlessly slaughtering superhumans in Tianhai City.

Zhang Yi knew he had to stay calm.

Especially since Bian Junwu had warned him—there were other Epsilon-level superhumans in this world.

The one in Shengjing District could take a life from thousands of miles away.

"This world is still full of danger. I must remain cautious." Zhang Yi told himself.

"But at the very least, even if I encounter a stronger superhuman now—I can protect myself!"

Clenching his fists, his eyes shone with confidence.

Even when facing the monstrous powerhouse that was Jiangnan District, he felt no fear—not out of arrogance, but because he knew they would now try to recruit him at all costs.

Which meant that even if they discovered how he had manipulated Bian Junwu into luring Yuan Kongye into a trap, there would be ways to smooth things over.

Zhang Yi activated his communicator and contacted Uncle You.

"Hello, Uncle You. It's Zhang Yi. Yuan Kongye is dead. We're safe now."

On the other end, Uncle You let out a long breath.

After a few seconds, he finally spoke.

"That's good. That's really, really good!"

"Where are you now? What's the situation with the other factions in Tianhai City? And what about the investigation team?"

During the three-day pursuit, Zhang Yi had focused entirely on Yuan Kongye and hadn't contacted anyone back home.

Now that everything was settled, there were still loose ends in Tianhai City to tie up.

Uncle You answered, "Wei Dinghai is dead. His second-in-command, Chen Jingguan, is still alive and has taken the remaining survivors back to Chaoyu Base."

"The other factions are in a similar state. Meanwhile, the investigation team has gone to Qingfu Base. They suffered heavy casualties—especially Wu Di, who looks like he's barely hanging on. They're recovering at Qingfu Base."

"As for us, we're all at home, waiting for you."

Zhang Yi nodded.

"Alright, I'll be back soon."

The remaining factions could no longer stir up much trouble.

This battle had completely crippled Tianhai City.

Of the Five Major Factions, only Zhang Yi's side remained intact. The combat forces of the others were practically wiped out, leaving only a handful of scattered superhumans.

From now on, they could no longer pose any threat to Zhang Yi.

As for the investigation team—they were the ones he cared about the most.

Zhang Yi summoned his Snow Vehicle from Spatial Storage, set it to autopilot, and returned to the Shelter.

Everyone was waiting for him.

The moment he arrived, their faces lit up with emotion.

This Tianhai City crisis had nearly cost them their home—and their lives.

But in the end, it was Zhang Yi who saved them all.

"Zhang Yi!"

"Zhang Yi!"

"Big Brother Zhang Yi!"

"Boss!"

"Leader!"

One by one, they all rushed toward him, eager to embrace him.

But Zhang Yi raised a hand, stopping them.

Smiling, he said, "I just want to rest for now. We'll talk after I wake up."

Like caffeine, stimulants force the body to stay awake—but the fatigue always comes crashing down later.

Now that he was home, Zhang Yi's mental exhaustion had reached its peak.

Ignoring the others, he walked straight to his room.

It was still warm and luxurious.

His Hästens bed was neatly covered with a white swan-down duvet.

The warm lighting cast a cozy glow, while outside the window, snowflakes drifted peacefully through the night.

Everything was quiet and serene.

Zhang Yi stripped off his clothes, locked the door behind him, and collapsed onto the bed.

Right now, all he wanted—was to sleep.

Chapter 547: Extra—Yuan Kongye

June 2046.

The early summer heat in Tianhai City was suffocating.

The monsoon winds from the East Coast failed to drive away the subtropical humidity, leaving behind nothing but stifling moisture in the air.

Summer always arrived earlier in the south than in the north.

Even the cicadas in the banyan trees were more diligent than their northern counterparts, climbing up the branches early to produce their maddening cries—"Zhi—Zhi—Zhi—"

The shrill buzzing echoed outside the courtyard of the Shenli Church, restless and impatient, as if a crowd of people were arguing fiercely.

Under the eaves of a Japanese-style courtyard, a young girl dressed in a shrine maiden's outfit sat quietly, her hands resting at her sides, curiously watching a single green cicada perched on the treetop.

As the Saintess of the Tianhai Branch of Shenli Church, Yuan Kongye had been raised since childhood as the future successor of the church.

Her parents claimed she possessed an extraordinary gift.

Because of this, every new member who joined the church had to undergo her baptism and receive her blessings.

When she was young, she thought these rituals were fascinating.

She didn't understand why the believers looked at her with such reverence, but she didn't dislike the feeling of being admired and respected.

However, as she grew older, she began to realize—she had no special powers at all.

The so-called blessing rituals were nothing more than a placebo, a means to comfort the believers—or rather, a tool for her parents to amass wealth.

Gradually, Yuan Kongye started to hate it.

She could no longer stand the desperate, hopeful gazes directed at her—eyes like drowning souls clutching at a straw, expecting salvation.

With age came rebellion.

Yet, she could not defy her parents.

Perhaps deep down, she still enjoyed being worshipped—enjoyed the privilege that came with being a saintess.

Because the moment people discovered she was just a normal girl, not some divine messenger, she would lose everything.

Her status, her comfortable life—gone.

And so, throughout her adolescence, Yuan Kongye lived in a constant struggle between guilt and indulgence.

She tapped her wooden clogs against the ground, her feet tightly wrapped in pristine white socks.

Shenli Church originated from Neon (Japan), so she was always dressed in traditional shrine maiden attire.

The red and white robes stood out—an odd, almost unnatural sight in Tianhai City.

She rarely wore them outside.

Behind her, the church was buzzing with noise.

She had no idea what they were arguing about—the people in the church always seemed to be up to something strange.

Seeking fresh air, she had stepped outside.

Yet, when she lifted her head, the layers of white clouds drifting in the sky seemed to resemble mountain peaks, slowly shifting and pressing down upon her.

The air felt heavy.

A suffocating pressure settled in her chest.

It was as if—something terrible was about to happen.

She placed her right hand over her heart, feeling its rhythm quicken.

"Is... something bad going to happen?" she murmured to herself.

At that moment—

"Clatter!"

The wooden door behind her was forcefully pushed open.

Yuan Kongye turned abruptly, seeing the Great Elder of Shenli Church standing there, his face stern and solemn.

This was Elder Qin, the man who had always been kind to her since childhood.

But today, his expression was different.

"Saintess, I must inform you of something. Two hours ago, the plane carrying the Chief Priest and the High Priestess crashed over the East Sea."

Boom!

It felt like an explosion went off in Yuan Kongye's mind.

Her brain went blank.

She couldn't hear anything else the Elder said.

She only saw his face—colder and more severe than ever before.

Even his bald head, which she had once found amusing, now seemed like an icy, lifeless stone.

The summer of 2046.

Yuan Kongye's life took a drastic turn.

From paradise—into hell.

A month later, the funeral for Yuan Suiyun and Watari Kameko was held.

Their bodies were never recovered.

But with their deaths, Shenli Church collapsed into crisis.

For years, the Chief Priest and the High Priestess had told their followers that faith in the Shenli Church would bring happiness and protection from calamity.

Countless believers had devoted themselves to this fantasy.

Among them were the desperate and destitute, the terminally ill, the parents who sought miraculous cures for their children...

For a dream, they donated everything they had to Shenli Church.

Some even scammed their own families and friends just to offer more.

But the moment Yuan Suiyun and Watari Kameko died—that dream shattered.

People woke up.

They realized they had been deceived.

At the funeral, Yuan Kongye knelt before their memorial, dressed in mourning black.

Not a single person came to pay respects.

Instead—an angry mob of former believers arrived, screaming curses at her family.

The faces that had once smiled with devotion now twisted into something grotesque.

Only one person stood by her—Zheng Yixian, her childhood friend.

Dressed in a black suit, he positioned himself firmly in front of her.

But Zheng Yixian alone was too weak.

Hundreds of furious ex-believers began as an angry mob—but soon turned violent.

They raided the Yuan household, smashing and looting everything they could find.

Some, with nowhere else to vent their rage, stormed up and kicked over the ancestral memorial tablets.

Yuan Kongye watched in horror.

Tears streamed down her face as she pleaded, "Please! Take whatever you want—but leave my parents' photographs alone! I beg you!"

Seeing her desperate expression, the mob felt a twisted sense of satisfaction.

A hand slapped her across the face.

"You damn liar! Your whole family deserves to die! Even a hundred deaths wouldn't atone for your sins!"

Half of Yuan Kongye's face swelled instantly.

Yet, she clung tightly to her parents' photographs, clutching them to her chest.

Zheng Yixian shielded her, speaking in a humble tone, "A'Ye is innocent. If you must take your anger out on someone, take it out on me instead. Please, let her go—she's just a child."

The mob did not refuse.

After all, their rage was already burning uncontrollably—they needed an outlet.

And so—

Zheng Yixian was beaten to the ground.

Kicks and punches rained down on him like a storm.

Yuan Kongye clutched the photographs, her entire body trembling as she watched in horror.

Somewhere within the mob—

A hand suddenly reached out toward her.

"The sins of the father must be repaid by the child!"

"Since you're still alive, you must atone for your parents' crimes!"

Her mind went blank.

Her body—suddenly went cold.

"Rip—Rip—"

She was shoved hard against the floor.

Countless hands reached for her.

She had never felt anything like this before—the overwhelming violation left her numb.

Her body—no longer felt like hers.

Even when she tried to scream for help—she couldn't.

She was just a lifeless doll, being toyed with by too many hands to count.

And that bald head—the one she once liked to pat so much—was right there, crawling on top of her.

For a long time, Yuan Kongye thought she had died that day.

But in the end—she lived.

But so what if she survived?

She had lost everything.

For the two years she spent recovering in a sanatorium, she had countless thoughts of ending her own life.

It was Zheng Yixian who stayed by her side, always telling her that none of it was her fault—telling her that she was the kindest, most wonderful girl in the world.

But to Yuan Kongye, that warmth was far from enough to fill the massive void in her heart.

"Hey, Zheng Yixian... don't you think this world is far too filthy?"

Sitting in her wheelchair, she gazed at the snowy landscape outside the window and spoke calmly.

"If gods truly existed, why wouldn't they cleanse this world?"

Zheng Yixian knelt before her, his eyes filled with sympathy and sincerity—

But he had no answer.

Yuan Kongye smiled weakly.

"That's right. There are no gods in this world."

"Everything is nothing more than the foolishness of mortals."

"My parents were deceitful frauds. The followers of Shenli Church were greedy, ignorant fools. And even I... I was just a weak, powerless puppet, allowing myself to be controlled."

Suddenly, her expression hardened.

"Humans should not have existed in this world to begin with."

Zheng Yixian held her cold hands, silently trying to comfort her.

But outside—the snowstorm only grew heavier, never ceasing.

Then, without warning—the Great Snowstorm descended.

Blizzards raged endlessly, plunging the world into chaos.

Desperate wails filled every corner of society as everything crumbled.

But Yuan Kongye did not feel fear.

She felt joy.

Because the gods had finally heard her voice.

They had come to purify this wretched world.

During the apocalypse, the darkest sides of human nature were laid bare.

She saw it with her own eyes—children abandoning their parents for food, husbands and wives sleeping under the same roof with knives hidden under their pillows.

Yuan Kongye laughed.

At first, she thought she would die in this cleansed world.

When the world fell into chaos, she and Zheng Yixian were separated.

She should have perished.

But just as she was about to freeze and starve to death—

A voice echoed inside her mind.

She awakened her superpower—"Death Return."

It was as natural as growing an extra limb—the moment she gained it, she understood its purpose.

For the first time, a glimmer of light returned to her hollow eyes.

"This... this is God's guidance."

"This must be my mission as His apostle."

To bless the faithful.

To claim the power of the unworthy.

To become a god—

And pass judgment on the filth of this world.

She thought back to that day in the funeral hall.

If she had been strong enough, none of it would have happened.

If one seeks to change the world, they must possess the power to overturn everything.

And so—Yuan Kongye survived.

She no longer wandered in confusion.

If fulfilling God's will required sacrifices, then so be it.

The first person she killed was a nun named Chen Rou.

In the frozen ruins of the world, Chen Rou had sheltered countless orphans and refugees inside St. John's Cathedral.

She gave them food, medicine—hope.

To many, she was a beacon of light in the endless darkness.

Even Yuan Kongye had once survived under her care.

Because Chen Rou possessed a superpower—"Jehovah's Gift."

With just a touch of her hands, she could heal all wounds and soothe all sorrow.

For the first time in years, Yuan Kongye had felt warmth in her presence.

Chen Rou was a true believer.

A woman of devotion, kindness, and compassion.

But Yuan Kongye needed her power.

In the apocalypse, there was no better ability to manipulate the weak.

And so—

She took advantage of Chen Rou's trust, lured her into an ambush, and used Ice Soul to freeze her in place.

Then, with a kitchen knife, she ended her life.

"It was all for God's will. Sacrifices must be made."

She pressed her blood-stained hands to her cheeks, feeling hot, murky tears trickling through her fingers.

"Sister Chen Rou... you'll forgive me, won't you?"

Chen Rou's death shattered many.

But Yuan Kongye took her place.

She revealed her newfound healing power, identical to Chen Rou's—

And the desperate people quickly forgot.

They were too cold, too hungry—

To think about the past.

Soon, they knelt before Yuan Kongye in worship.

This moment—

Marked the birth of the "Followers of the Snow God."

At first, Yuan Kongye refused to accept male followers.

Because of that night, she despised all men from the depths of her soul.

To her, men were nothing but filthy, lust-driven pigs.

She didn't want to touch them.

She didn't even want to look at them.

Every glance from a man reminded her of that endless nightmare.

But—

When Zheng Yixian found her, everything changed.

The moment he saw her—

He was like a lost dog who had finally found its home.

His body was in tatters, but his eyes—

They shone like the brightest stars in the night.

"A'Ye! Thank God you're safe!"

But Yuan Kongye met his joy with nothing but cold indifference.

"Leave."

Her icy voice crushed his hope in an instant.

Zheng Yixian's face twisted in shock.

"Why?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"Did I do something wrong? Do you hate me now?"

"I know I messed up—I lost you when the snowstorm hit. That was my fault."

"But please—please forgive me. If I lose you, my life will have no meaning."

Yuan Kongye frowned.

She had to eliminate all distractions.

And Zheng Yixian—he was the greatest threat to her beliefs.

So she looked at him and spoke the words that would break him.

"I hate all men."

"So stay far away from me—the farther, the better."

Zheng Yixian's world collapsed.

A bitter smile curled on his lips.

"Back then, when you were in Neon and I was in Tianhai... we were thousands of kilometers apart."

"Yet every day, when I sent you messages, it felt like you were right beside me."

"But now... even though you stand before me, you feel like you're a thousand miles away."

"So tell me, A'Ye—how far is far enough?"

Once two hearts drift apart, even the closest distance is an eternal divide.

Yuan Kongye did not answer.

She simply turned and left him behind.

But the next day—

Zheng Yixian returned.

His body was covered in blood, barely clinging to life.

Yet he smiled.

"You hate men... but I'm not one anymore."

"So I will never hurt you."

"Now—can I stay by your side?"

Chapter 548: A Tiny Bit Stronger

Zhang Yi slept for two full days.

When he finally woke up, he still felt groggy, his body sore all over.

It was inevitable.

After such a prolonged battle, his body was completely drained.

He wasn't a physical enhancement-type superhuman, so fatigue was only natural.

But at this moment, his mind had never felt lighter.

The Followers of the Snow God had been crushed.

And after absorbing the remnants of Yuan Kongye's power, his strength had soared to an unprecedented level.

Perhaps he was still a bit short of what Yuan Kongye had once displayed, but at the very least, he had reached Bian Junwu's level.

"What exactly is the standard for an Epsilon-class superhuman? Am I close to that level now? At least in terms of raw destructive power..."

"Eh, whatever. Either way, there's nothing left in Tianhai City that can threaten me."

Zhang Yi smirked, then summoned a cheeseburger and a Coke from Spatial Storage, devouring them in large bites.

The satisfying fullness made him feel at ease.

Afterward, he changed into casual clothes, opened his bedroom door, and stepped out.

The moment the door swung open, he looked down—

And saw Hua Hua crouching at the entrance, gazing up at him.

"Meow~"

Its eyes were filled with a complex mix of concern and joy, as if it had been afraid Zhang Yi would never wake up.

Not that it was surprising.

Everyone in the Shelter had been worried about Zhang Yi's condition.

After all, this time, he had gone off alone to face an opponent of terrifying power.

Zhang Yi chuckled, clapping his hands.

Hua Hua leaped into his arms, rubbing its head against his chest, purring loudly.

After confirming that Zhang Yi was safe and sound, Hua Hua squinted its eyes in pure bliss.

Petting the fluffy cat's head, Zhang Yi made his way toward the living room.

In the living room, Zhou Ke'er, Yang Siyah, and Zhou Haimei sat on the couch, chatting.

They were discussing two things—

One was their regret over what had become of Tianhai City.

The other was their concern for Zhang Yi's health.

The former was understandable—Tianhai City had been completely devastated by the recent battle, leaving only a handful of survivors.

As for the latter... well, that was obvious.

Zhang Yi had disappeared for days, taking on a terrifying enemy alone.

When Zhang Yi descended the spiral staircase, the women spotted him—and their eyes lit up with joy.

Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siyah rushed over, throwing themselves at him from both sides.

"Zhang Yi, you're finally awake!"

"You slept for two whole days! We were scared to death!"

"Are you feeling okay? Does anything hurt? Let me give you a full medical checkup!"

Zhou Ke'er grabbed his arm, trying to drag him toward the infirmary.

Zhang Yi chuckled, waving a hand.

"I'm fine, really. Just a bit tired. After two days of rest, I feel completely fine now."

Taking a seat on the couch, he continued petting Hua Hua, then casually asked about Tianhai City's current situation.

Zhou Ke'er smiled.

"You should let Xinxin report to you."

As the Shelter's cybersecurity expert, Yang Xinxin was also responsible for monitoring the digital activity of the other factions.

She had the most up-to-date intelligence on what was happening in Tianhai City.

Zhang Yi nodded.

"Alright, call everyone over."

Before long, the rest of the group gathered in the living room.

The first thing they asked about was, of course, his condition.

After all, the moment Zhang Yi returned, he had locked himself in his room and collapsed into bed without a word.

Looking at their worried expressions, Zhang Yi felt a warm sensation in his chest.

With a smile, he reassured them, "I'm perfectly fine. Better than ever, actually."

Hearing that, the tension in the room eased considerably.

But Liang Yue caught something in Zhang Yi's tone.

She narrowed her eyes and asked, "Yuan Kongye... is she dead?"

Zhang Yi glanced upward, as if recalling something, before shaking his head.

"I wouldn't say I killed her. She overexerted herself—both physically and mentally—and died on her own."

Between Bian Junwu's ability backlash and the three-day chase across Xitian, Yuan Kongye had completely drained her energy.

She had died in despair.

When the group confirmed her death, they all let out a collective sigh of relief.

That hidden snake, the leader of the Followers of the Snow God, had caused countless deaths.

Because of her, nearly a million survivors had perished in Tianhai City.

Without her, the zombie tide would never have existed.

Even now, when Liang Yue recalled the battle, she felt a deep sense of helplessness.

She could still see Yuan Kongye, floating high above the battlefield—

A mere gesture from her hands could shatter the earth itself.

It was beyond comprehension.

"Thankfully, Zhang Yi managed to kill her in the end."

But there was still one thing she didn't understand.

"But how... how did you kill her?"

Everyone in the room turned to Zhang Yi.

They knew he was powerful.

But there was still a gap between him and an Epsilon-class superhuman like Yuan Kongye.

There had to be a secret.

Zhang Yi glanced around, his eyes sweeping over the room.

He lifted his tea cup, took a slow sip, then finally answered.

"Strictly speaking... I wasn't the one who killed her."

"She was killed by her own ability."

The room fell silent.

"She absorbed too many powers—too many conflicting abilities."

"Among them were abilities with side effects."

"The more she devoured, the more toxins built up inside her. And when her power became too overwhelming—those toxins exploded within her."

"That's why I was able to defeat her."

Zhang Yi didn't reveal the full truth—that he had orchestrated her downfall using Bian Junwu's ability as a trap.

After all, Bian Junwu had been a high-ranking officer of Jiangnan District.

If word got out that Zhang Yi had deliberately manipulated his power, it could cause unnecessary trouble.

The others nodded in understanding, sighing in amazement.

It was hard to believe.

A being so godlike in strength—in the end, she had perished by her own hand.

"Then... you absorbed her core power, right?"

Liang Yue's burning gaze locked onto Zhang Yi.

If Yuan Kongye was dead and Zhang Yi was still alive—

It was only natural that he had claimed her power.

The others quickly caught on.

They all turned to Zhang Yi, their eyes filled with anticipation.

Everyone knew how powerful Yuan Kongye had been.

If Zhang Yi had inherited her strength—

"Zhang Yi-ge, does this mean you're super strong now?"

"That's amazing! Are you unstoppable now?"

"No one will dare mess with us ever again! Haha!"

"Boss is unbeatable!"

Zhang Yi arched an eyebrow, smirking playfully.

Under the anticipatory gazes, he slowly nodded.

"That's right."

"I've gotten... just a little stronger."

He held up his fingers—pinching the air slightly—

"Just a tiny bit."

Chapter 549: The Game

Something felt off to Zhang Yi.

After absorbing Yuan Kongye's core energy, he didn't seem to have gained the overwhelming power she had once displayed.

Perhaps it was because her ascension had been too recent, leaving her foundation unstable.

Or maybe it was because her power had been stolen, and with her death, her core had rapidly dissipated.

As a result, Zhang Yi had only managed to extract a portion of her essence.

And since energy conversion always came at a loss, it was impossible for him to instantly leap to the level of a world-ending Epsilon-class superhuman.

Even so, the fragment of power he had absorbed had drastically enhanced his abilities.

The Shelter was filled with celebration.

Everyone was excited, believing that Zhang Yi's newfound strength meant they were safer than ever.

But deep down, Zhang Yi had a concern.

The Jiangnan District Investigation Team.

Bian Junwu's death—they would suspect him.

And after returning to Blizzard City, they would report everything to the higher-ups.

That was bad news for Zhang Yi.

Previously, his power had been low-key, and Jiangnan District had little reason to care about him.

But now?

He had killed Yuan Kongye.

It was obvious that he had absorbed her core power.

Would Jiangnan District ignore someone like that?

Of course not.

They would definitely try to recruit him.

But if he joined them, he might end up like Bian Junwu, constantly being sent on deadly missions, walking the razor's edge.

And if he refused, he might make an enemy of Jiangnan District.

If their leaders were narrow-minded, they might decide:

"If he won't work for us, then we can't let him work for anyone else."

Which meant—they might eliminate him.

Zhang Yi wasn't willing to gamble on that risk.

He needed to take control of the situation—before it got out of hand.

After some careful thought, he made a decision.

He would confront the investigation team directly and use them to achieve his own goals.

After spending some time chatting with the others, Zhang Yi left the Shelter alone, driving toward Qingfu Base.

On the way, he contacted Xing Tian and Baili Changqing.

Xing Tian had no objections.

In fact, he was surprisingly eager—even a little flattering in his tone.

Zhang Yi wasn't surprised.

Right now, Tianhai City was, in every sense, his domain.

The Five Major Factions were as good as dead.

The Followers of the Snow God had been wiped out.

The three remaining bases had lost nearly all of their combat forces.

With his overwhelming power, Zhang Yi had become the undisputed king of Tianhai City.

Even Baili Changqing spoke to him with newfound respect.

His words carried a hint of recruitment, suggesting they could work together in the future.

"After all, we're both in Jiangnan District. You'll have to visit Blizzard City at some point, right?"

"Now that our captain is dead, we need some fresh blood."

Baili Changqing chuckled.

But Zhang Yi coldly smirked at his words.

"Your captain is dead... so shouldn't you be looking for a new captain instead?"

A brief silence.

Then Baili Changqing's voice turned a bit stiff, though he forced a laugh.

"Well... let's discuss when you get here."

"Sure." Zhang Yi's voice was icy as he hung up the call.

Meanwhile, at Qingfu Base, Baili Changqing frowned deeply, his face clouded with concern.

With Bian Junwu gone, their team had lost tremendous strength.

He had hoped that Zhang Yi would join them, helping fill the gap.

After all, Zhang Yi was incredibly intelligent and had proven his strength in the Tianhai City battle.

And now, having absorbed Yuan Kongye's core power, he was likely stronger than ever.

If Zhang Yi joined them, it could help them maintain their elite squad status.

In Blizzard City, resources were distributed based on contributions.

If they lost their elite ranking, their quality of life would suffer dramatically.

But from Zhang Yi's tone, it was clear—

He wasn't just looking to join the team.

He wanted to be captain.

A newcomer, demanding the top position right away—

And with his immense power, he was a real threat.

Baili Changqing felt uneasy.

By ranking, after Bian Junwu's death, he was the most likely candidate for captain.

"That bastard... he's got serious ambition."

Baili Changqing sighed.

Should he even let Zhang Yi join?

But without him, how would they make up for Bian Junwu's loss?

Bian Junwu had been one of Blizzard City's top fighters—a near-Epsilon-class superhuman.

Someone like that was rare, even among Jiangnan District's elite teams.

Where could they possibly find another replacement?

Feeling frustrated, Baili Changqing headed toward the team's quarters.

Inside, the investigation team members were recovering from their injuries.

Wu Di, though much better after several days of rest, had suffered permanent effects—his hair had turned silver-white, and it would never return to normal.

Others still bore various injuries from the battle against Yuan Kongye, having barely survived her devastating attacks.

As Baili Changqing entered, his grim expression caught everyone's attention.

Seeing this, someone asked, "What's wrong?"

After some thought, Baili Changqing spoke bluntly.

"Zhang Yi said... if he's going to join us, he wants to be captain."

Silence.

Then—an explosion of reactions.

Some were furious, calling Zhang Yi arrogant and power-hungry.

Others remained quiet, seemingly acknowledging that he had the strength to compete for the position.

After all—

Everyone knew he had absorbed Yuan Kongye's core power.

And that meant his strength was now unimaginable.

Baili Changqing shrugged, playing the neutral observer.

"To be fair, it's not unreasonable. Everyone wants to climb higher, right?"

"And let's be honest—he was the key player in the Tianhai City battle."

"If we talk about raw power, he's probably more than qualified."

"But... being captain isn't just about strength. He has no experience working with us. There's a big difference between being strong and being a leader."

He pointed at Bian Junwu's example.

"Take Captain Bian. He wasn't just powerful—his leadership made us trust him."

"But Zhang Yi? We barely know him."

The moment he finished speaking, Wu Di lost his temper.

"Zhang Yi? Who the hell does he think he is?! Just because he's strong, he thinks he can walk in and take over?! If he joins, I'm leaving!"

Kong Sheng crossed his arms, frowning.

"That's what he really said? That's... pretty damn arrogant."

Qi Guangming spoke up immediately.

"The only person fit to be our next captain is Baili Changqing! Even if Zhang Yi is strong, he still needs to follow the rules."

Ye Jikang said nothing, simply frowning in thought.

Meng Siyu glanced at the others but chose not to comment.

They all knew Baili Changqing wanted the captain's position.

But none of them really objected.

After all, he had been vice-captain for years, and both his strength and character were respected.

Still, they also knew—they needed Zhang Yi.

Baili Changqing waved his hand, smiling.

"In the end, the higher-ups decide who leads. It doesn't matter if I'm captain or not."

"What matters is making sure our team moves forward."

"Zhang Yi will be here soon. Let's see how he presents himself before we make a decision."

Chapter 550: Arrogance and Domineering

Zhang Yi arrived at Qingfu Base and was immediately greeted with great enthusiasm by Xing Tian.

He had brought dozens of people to welcome Zhang Yi, including his beloved demon dog, Lele, and his goddaughter.

Seeing such a grand welcome, Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow and chuckled. "So many people came to greet me? I must say, I feel quite flattered."

Xing Tian was momentarily stunned before realizing Zhang Yi was still wary of him.

Scratching the back of his head, he laughed heartily. “After all these years, your cautious nature hasn’t changed one bit.”

“But don’t worry, I wouldn’t dare make a move against you!”

As he spoke, he leaned in closer to Zhang Yi, winking.

“After all, your current strength is probably on par with Yuan Kongye’s back in the day, right?”

Everyone in Tianhai City knew that Zhang Yi had killed Yuan Kongye, so they assumed he had absorbed Yuan Kongye’s power and reached the same level.

With his hands in his pockets, Zhang Yi sighed lightly. “It’s not as simple as you think. That battle... sigh, forget it. Just take me to meet the investigation team first.”

Normally, Zhang Yi wouldn’t mind letting people think he was powerful.

But things were different now.

He truly was strong—so strong that he had to downplay it.

The last thing he wanted was for Jiangnan District’s leadership to start keeping an eye on him because of his overwhelming strength.

Of course, he knew that no matter how he explained, Xing Tian might not believe him.

So he left his words unfinished, letting Xing Tian interpret them as he wished. Whether he believed it or not was his own business.

Right now, the most important thing was to meet with the investigation team.

Xing Tian grinned. "Come with me."

He stepped aside, making way for Zhang Yi. Once Zhang Yi passed, Xing Tian followed half a step behind him.

As they walked, Xing Tian continued, "That battle was brutal. Wei Dinghai died, and our teams lost more than ninety percent of their Superhumans. Even the investigation team, as powerful as they are, suffered severe injuries."

"Old friend, from now on, Tianhai City is yours! You have to look after your brothers!"

Zhang Yi glanced at him and responded with a faint, noncommittal smile.

He had no interest in expanding his power.

Managing people and handling affairs would only bring unnecessary trouble.

How could that compare to the freedom he enjoyed now?

They chatted casually along the way.

Zhang Yi already knew most of what Xing Tian told him, and since Xing Tian didn't dare disclose details about the investigation team, Zhang Yi didn't gain any particularly useful information.

Soon, they arrived at the underground shelter where the investigation team was recuperating.

It was a high-level medical facility—not as luxurious as Zhang Yi's mansion, but it was top-tier treatment within Qingfu Base.

After bringing Zhang Yi over, Xing Tian tactfully excused himself and left.

However, Zhang Yi's presence immediately made the atmosphere within the investigation team tense.

Among the six members, some scrutinized him, while others looked at him with a hint of hostility.

Unsurprisingly, Wu Di, who had always had an issue with Zhang Yi, gave him the most intense glare.

He was also the first to speak.

“What are you doing here?”

Zhang Yi looked at Wu Di. The guy's hair had turned completely white—the last battle had taken a heavy toll on him.

Yet, despite his usual unfriendly demeanor, his hostility wasn't as intense as before.

For a long time, Zhang Yi hadn't understood why Wu Di treated him so poorly.

Could it be that he was simply jealous of Zhang Yi's good looks?

Zhang Yi mocked him silently in his mind.

Still, he lazily lifted his gaze, clasped his hands behind his back, and said leisurely:

“The battle's over. Can't I visit the wounded?”

“After all, we might be working together in the future. If I act too indifferent, people might say I lack empathy and don’t care about my teammates.”

At these words, almost everyone in the investigation team frowned.

The phrase “care about teammates” had an underlying implication—was Zhang Yi already considering himself their leader?

Some members of the team welcomed Zhang Yi’s addition, but that didn’t mean they were willing to accept an arrogant and domineering leader.

Even if Zhang Yi did have the strength to back it up.

Wu Di was furious. He pointed a finger at Zhang Yi and shouted, “What are you so smug about?! You think you’re qualified to join our investigation team?”

Zhang Yi cast a light glance at him, his expression calm and unreadable, yet there was an undeniable sense of superiority in his gaze.

“I killed Yuan Kongye. Do you think I’m qualified?”

That one sentence shut Wu Di up.

When they fought Yuan Kongye, the investigation team had barely been able to hold their ground. Wu Di himself had nearly died.

If not for Zhang Yi, they all would have perished.

From that perspective, they owed Zhang Yi their lives.

But, of course, Wu Di would never admit that out loud.

So he turned away with a sour expression, refusing to speak.

Seeing this, Zhang Yi's smirk deepened.

He puffed out his chest and scanned the group. "When you report back, don't forget to tell Jiangnan District's leadership about my contributions. Make sure they recognize my efforts."

"I deeply regret the loss of Captain Bian Junwu. If given the chance, I'd like to inherit his legacy—to protect this land and bring peace and prosperity to the people of Jiangnan District!"

His words sent shivers down everyone's spines, giving them goosebumps.

In an instant, their already declining impression of Zhang Yi plummeted further.

Right now, Zhang Yi was speaking in a completely bureaucratic tone, like a smug politician basking in his own success.

Compared to when they first arrived in Tianhai City—when Zhang Yi had been humble and reserved—he seemed like a completely different person.

Baili Changqing coughed, already feeling irritated, but forced a smile.

"Rest assured, we won't forget your contributions. But as for joining the investigation team, that decision is up to the higher-ups."

Zhang Yi laughed. "Just a formality! Tell me, who else but me is more qualified?"

He strode forward and threw an arm around Baili Changqing's shoulders.

“Brother Baili, let’s have a private chat. Some things aren’t meant for... ‘ordinary’ members to hear.”

As he spoke, he deliberately glanced at the others in the room.

The rest of the team clenched their teeth. If they weren’t worried about how strong Zhang Yi had become, they would’ve jumped him right then and there.

Baili Changqing studied Zhang Yi, curious to probe his true intentions.

So he nodded and smiled. “Alright, since you want to talk privately, I’ll gladly join you.”

The two of them walked out, arms around each other.

As soon as they left, the room erupted.

Kong Sheng, his muscular arms crossed, scoffed. “That Zhang Yi is way too arrogant! He’s not even in our team yet, and he’s already acting high and mighty. If he really joins, or worse, becomes the captain, won’t his ego shoot straight to the heavens?”