

Full Time 631

Chapter 631: Independent Action Brigade_2

Aviloya felt another surge of relief, immensely proud of having personally established the Special Operations Squad. Ding Zhou, what do you have to compete with me? I'm a seasoned Ninth Power Level, while you're still struggling to break through to it. And your underlings? A bunch of good-for-nothings! Can they even compare to my strong and capable troops? Hmph! A wave of smug satisfaction washed over her. She quickly issued a series of orders, knowing that the Digital Group, after this disastrous defeat, would likely be driven to desperate measures, so she made sure to prepare defenses in advance.

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Ding Zhou soon learned about the events in Pine Wave City, which left him in a foul mood for the entire day.

Of course, he didn't want the Digital Group to succeed; the evil organization was an enemy of the entire Bureau of Mystic Security, and indeed, of all humanity.

But he wished his own people had been the ones to defeat the Digital Group, not Aviloya's. Her success would only make his own position more precarious.

However, he had an important meeting that evening, so he adjusted his mood in the afternoon. After work, he took a car straight to the agreed-upon location.

It was a lakeside courtyard on the Capital Star. Buildings like this were extremely rare in this era, especially on the Capital Star. However, this courtyard was not a private residence but an exclusive private club.

The club only accepted one group of guests per day. After Ding Zhou identified himself, he was led inside by a waitress who could have been a supermodel. Only one middle-aged man had arrived so far; he greeted Ding Zhou warmly. They waited for a short while before the other two guests arrived.

The middle-aged man smiled and said, "Allow me to make the introductions."

"This is His Excellency Ding Zhou, First Deputy Director of the Bureau of Mystic Security and a peak Eighth Energy Level powerhouse!"

"This is General Du Lifeng."

"And this is Ms. Xiaoga Hanami, representing the entire Xiaogasa Family."

"As for who stands behind me, I believe everyone here is aware."

Ding Zhou and the other two guests nodded. They were, of course, aware that the middle-aged man, Bernice, was backed by a prominent figure from the Senate; otherwise, he wouldn't have the standing to arrange such a gathering.

Du Lifeng was an influential general representing a faction within the military—one that opposed Bai Yunpeng.

The Xiaogasa Family was also a top-tier aristocratic family.

"I believe we're all clear on our objectives," Bernice continued. "Now, let's discuss how to proceed with our plan and achieve our common goal as quickly as possible."

Reflecting on his current predicament, Ding Zhou said, "I need elite soldiers and skilled commanders. Aviloya's Special Operations Squad is composed entirely of elites, and I currently lack personnel capable of contending with them."

Bernice looked towards Du Lifeng. The general pondered for a moment before saying, "We have a secret unit that we can lend you. However, once you become Director-General, they must return to the military."

"That's certainly not a problem," Ding Zhou replied. "What I need right now is to quickly curb Aviloya's growing influence. Can your people accomplish that? She has Chen Gu."

Du Lifeng smiled. Truthfully, if it weren't for dealing with Chen Gu, he would have been genuinely reluctant to lend this unit to Ding Zhou.

"To be frank," Du Lifeng said, "this special unit was originally established to counter the 'Heroic Volunteer King.' My men guarantee they will accomplish the mission."

Ding Zhou nodded and extended his hand to Du Lifeng. "My thanks!"

The two men shook hands firmly.

On the side, Xiaoga Hanami—a beautifully preserved woman with delicate skin and exquisite makeup that made her appear to be in her twenties or thirties, her true age a mystery—pondered for a moment before speaking, "We can also lend you three individuals. They are high Energy Level practitioners secretly cultivated by our family. Their professional skills are quite unique, and I trust they will not disappoint Your Excellency."

Ding Zhou's eyes lit up. He had long heard that the Xiaogasa Family possessed a unique type of practitioner: the Elemental Ninjas. Their abilities were diverse, bizarre, and unpredictable, and they were trained using ancient methods, making them vastly different from most contemporary practitioners.

If such a group were to join his ranks, they would undoubtedly serve as a formidable surprise element.

"Once I defeat Aviloya and become Director-General, all of you will certainly receive generous rewards!"

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The Digital Group's four cover operations had indeed ended in a complete rout. The Bureau of Mystic Security remained on high alert, outwardly calm but inwardly vigilant, strictly guarding against any further retaliatory actions from them.

On the internet, however, the long-absent Creator Zero finally surfaced, stating:

"We must not allow anger to blind us and make us forget our true purpose!

"The Purification has been severely delayed due to your successive failures.

"If the wildfire of Purification cannot blaze up from within the Confederation, then it is the Confederation's loss.

"It is time to consider the other Star Nations."

At this, the enraged members of the Digital Group calmed down, shifting their focus from the Confederation to the other three major Star Nations.

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Almost simultaneously, Ding Zhou swiftly initiated a series of procedures within the Bureau of Mystic Security. He specially recruited a batch of operatives to be placed under his direct command, forming a new department: the Independent Mobile Squad.

Just from the name, anyone with a discerning eye could tell it was clearly intended to counter the Special Operations Squad.

Chen Gu and his team had already finished the wrap-up work in Pine Wave City and were returning together to the Capital Star.

Upon seeing the establishment of the so-called Independent Mobile Squad, Chen Gu scoffed. Like Aviloya, he was convinced Ding Zhou was doomed to fail. Everything Ding Zhou did seemed like the futile yelps of a defeated dog—utterly laughable in the eyes of a victor.

Great Actor Chen's mood had gradually improved over the past couple of days because the box office numbers for his movie were being tallied, and the results were excellent!

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In this era, due to the population explosion and numerous colonial planets, movie box-office revenues were frighteningly high.

For big productions, the standard for "passable" box-office revenues started at over one billion Starshield; "good" was pegged at 1.5 billion, and "excellent" at two billion. To be considered a "smash hit," a film had to rake in at least five billion Starshield.

However, this particular film had encountered investment problems and could no longer truly be called a "big production."

So, when the box office hit five hundred million Starshield after just half a week, Chen Gu was already quite satisfied. With this momentum, breaking seven hundred million in the first week was no issue, and the total box office was expected to be around two billion. It could possibly even go higher.

Given the current box-office profit-sharing ratio, there was no doubt it would be a lucrative windfall.

More importantly, after this film, he would be considered a true "movie star"—a status he had dreamed of achieving in his past life.

In high spirits, Great Actor Chen invited Wu Yihuo out for a celebratory drink that night—only to return home and receive a life-threatening call from Bai Hongyue.

"Chen Gu!" Bai Hongyue's voice rose a full eight octaves. "Wu Yihuo said he was with you tonight, is that true? I'm warning you, don't cover for him; a woman's intuition is very accurate!"

Chen Gu was utterly confused. What's going on?

"Yeah, he was with me. Want me to show you the surveillance footage of us at the bar?"

Bai Hongyue, oblivious as to why Chen Gu could so readily provide such surveillance footage, was adamant about seeing it. "Good! I must clear this up today!"

With no other choice, Chen Gu used his Bureau of Mystic Security privileges to get hold of the night's surveillance footage. Although he initially planned to send it online, considering the night's oddity, he decided to deliver the video personally.

Arriving at Wu Yihuo's house, Bai Hongyue opened the door. The hostess stood with arms crossed, her face grim, the atmosphere in the household heavy. Chen Gu peeked inside and almost laughed: Wu Yihuo stood obediently in a corner, resembling a schoolboy who had done something wrong.

Seeing Chen Gu arrive, Wu Yihuo immediately shot him a pleading look.

Chen Gu, however, instantly put on an act. He cheekily advised Bai Hongyue, "Sis Bai, what's wrong? How did this guy provoke you? You're being far too lenient! Let me tell you, a woman needs some leverage at home. Hmm... ever heard of a tool called a washboard?"

"Do you know of an input tool called a keyboard?"

"And do you know of a delicacy called instant noodles?"

By the time Chen Gu had explained these things in detail to Bai Hongyue, Wu Yihuo's face had gone pale. No, Instructor! I thought we were on the same side! I thought you were here to rescue me! I... I was too naive.

But Bai Hongyue was not so easily deceived. No matter what Chen Gu said, she simply stretched out her hand. "The surveillance footage!"

Chen Gu handed over the footage. Bai Hongyue scrutinized it thoroughly, wary of Chen Gu using any technical trickery to fool her.

Chen Gu could only laugh ruefully. "Sis Bai, do you really have so little confidence in yourself? No way, you're an award-winning actress..."

Wu Yihuo's recent "mysterious movements" had tested Bai Hongyue's patience to the limit, and today she finally erupted.

Chen Gu turned to see the mighty Hell Titan standing pitifully in the corner, being made to stand there as punishment. As a fellow professional, Chen Gu felt a wave of melancholy—yet why was there an irrepressible smile tugging at his lips?

After checking for quite a while, Bai Hongyue couldn't find any flaws—truth be told, with her lack of technical savvy, she wouldn't have noticed them even if there were real issues.

"Is it really you?" Bai Hongyue asked incredulously. She turned to Chen Gu, distraught. "I always thought you were my benefactor in my career, but it turns out you're after my husband!"

"I thought I'd lost to some little temptress, but it turned out to be a man!"

Chen Gu: "???!!!"

Wu Yihuo's jaw dropped. "..."

Hold on, Sis Bai, you've got to be misunderstanding something! Even if I were interested in *you*, there's no way I'd be interested in Wu Yihuo!

Bai Hongyue couldn't be blamed. This era was filled with all kinds of romantic relationships and wild imaginations, far surpassing what an old-fashioned man like Chen Gu could conceive.

Seeing the situation, Chen Gu didn't hesitate to throw Wu Yihuo under the bus. "You explain it to her yourself."

Wu Yihuo quickly asked, "Can I?"

"Inform her about the confidentiality agreement first."

"Yes, Instructor!"

Bai Hongyue's tears fell. "Instructor... the games you two play are really wild..."

Chen Gu beat a hasty retreat. The entertainment industry was too chaotic; actors were too worldly-wise.

"Honey, listen to my explanation..." Once outside, Chen Gu heard a classic 'scumbag's excuse'.

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The next day, Chen Gu went to report to the Bureau of Mystic Security.

It was a turbulent period, and he was spending more time at the Bureau lately anyway. As for the school... well, the teachers wouldn't have any objections.

Most of the teachers were at the Sixth Energy Level. Chen Gu could now exert power equivalent to the Sixth Energy Level—if it came to a real fight, those teachers would be utterly defeated.

It was well known that the ambition to surpass one's master had been imprinted on the Soul of every "disciple" since the ancient days of Yang Guo.

But the atmosphere at the Bureau was a bit off today. Reaching the leaky floor of the Special Actions Squadron, he saw the little she-demon with her feet propped on the desk, snickering coldly.

Chen Gu asked her, "What's up?"

"The Independent Action Squadron has arrived," Selena answered, then pointed next door. "Right beside us. This is a provocation!"

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She leaped agilely from the chair like a cat, landing on the floor. Baring her small tiger teeth, she said fiercely, "Chen Gu, take me to smash their place!"

Chen Gu laughed. "What's gotten into you? Wanting me to take you? Usually, in a situation like this, you'd have charged over and smashed their office by now."

The little demoness's bravado instantly vanished. She drooped and whispered into Chen Gu's ear, "There are three women over there, and they look like trouble..."

Indeed, the little demoness had never been afraid of men... uh, it was quite possible she'd go her whole life without a man. But she was afraid of women.

Chen Gu's interest was piqued. "Really? Then I must go see for myself what kind of people could intimidate you."

He turned and headed for the adjacent offices, Selena following behind him.

This floor originally housed only Chen Gu's Special Action Division, along with its supporting action group, administrative group, and clean-up group. The remaining space was used as a storeroom for miscellaneous items.

Now, these storerooms had been emptied, cleaned, and a copper plaque hung on the door: Independent Operation Division.

"The plaque looks pretty good," Chen Gu remarked. He was just about to step inside when suddenly a narrow blade was pointed at his ankle, and an icy voice asked, "Who are you?"

A slender figure appeared from behind the door. Her Bureau of Mystic Security uniform had clearly been tailored, fitting her like a second skin.

She was like a leopardess poised to hunt, blade in hand, coiled and ready to pounce at any moment. Her eyes, filled with a wild, murderous hunger, stared intently at Chen Gu.

Chen Gu withdrew his foot and chuckled. "It seems our new neighbors aren't very friendly."

The blade vanished. Another figure emerged from within: a tall, brawny young man whose muscles strained the fabric of his uniform.

"I am Gao Deng, captain of the Independent Operation Division. This is the highly classified office of the Division, directly under Director Ding Zhou. It's not a tourist spot for casual visits. If, as special agents, you lack even this basic awareness of confidentiality and just 'drop by' unannounced like ordinary people, I'd advise you to resign—this morning."

With that, he snorted, shot Chen Gu a contemptuous look, and exuded a dangerous aura. Chen Gu's expression turned grave, not because of Gao Deng's arrogance and disdain, but because he could sense that the man was a Seventh Energy Level adept!

Gao Deng and the woman went back inside, and the door closed automatically.

Outside, Chen Gu was still thinking. How can he be so young and already at the Seventh Energy Level? Being a practitioner isn't something one can 'cultivate' from childhood. Instead, the body must mature and become strong enough to awaken.

The little demoness peeked out from behind him and whispered, "That woman... isn't she terrifying?"

Chen Gu shook his head and turned back. When he had first arrived, the office had been nearly empty, but by now, Gong Shuxu and Chen Jixian had both come in. Chen Gu asked Gong Shuxu, "Senior, what's the background of those people?"

Gong Shuxu also shook his head. "It all happened so suddenly. I've just called a few old friends; they're helping me ask around."

While they were still in the dark about these sudden rivals, an administrative staff member took a call. After a few brief responses, the staffer stood up, their expression grim, and announced, "Everyone, they've come making demands."

"The Independent Operation Division demands a clear delineation of jurisdiction between our two sides! The Director-General and Director Ding Zhou have already conferred and scheduled a meeting this afternoon at the Number Nine Refinement Field!"

Everyone fell silent. Of all the available meeting rooms, they had specifically chosen the Number Nine Refinement Field. Clearly, they intended to settle matters with force. There was no doubt that the "prime" jurisdictional areas would be fiercely contested. If neither side was willing to yield, it would be settled in the Refinement Field—winner take all.

Chen Gu frowned. Gao Deng was at the Seventh Energy Level, but the strongest on their side were only at the Sixth Energy Level. And the confrontation was set for this very afternoon. What were they going to do?

Chapter 634 Utter Failure

At noon, Bai Yunpeng suddenly called. "Chen Gu, come out and have lunch with me. There's something inconvenient to talk about over the phone; we need to meet face to face."

Chen Gu was a bit puzzled and guessed it might be related to the current predicament he was facing. He arrived on time at the restaurant Bai Yunpeng had mentioned. It was an ancient Chinese restaurant that seemed not to have been renovated in many years. The holographic neon sign at the door, combined with the all-wooden decor, surprisingly matched well—so much so that for a moment, Chen Gu felt this era should look exactly like this.

Dressed in casual wear, Bai Yunpeng came with several guards and sat down with Chen Gu in the reserved private room. The enthusiastic chef, wearing a white hat, personally came over and chatted familiarly with Bai Yunpeng. "Brother Bai, it's been a while since you last came. What's the matter, is my eight-treasure duck or steamed mixed rice not to your liking anymore?"

Bai Yunpeng apologized with a laugh and then told him to prepare the food as usual. The chef, sensing they had business to discuss, spoke a few more words and then tactfully went off to cook. On his way out, he told the guards at the door, "Let me know when to serve the dishes."

Once the door of the private room closed, the bustling noise outside seemed to recede all at once.

Bai Yunpeng sighed. "There's scum in the military too. Your... Independent Action Squad—its key personnel were lent to Ding Zhou by Du Lifeng."

It hadn't occurred to Bai Yunpeng that just recently, they had all sat together with Ding Zhou to discuss investing in a movie. Now, however, they were at loggerheads.

"Gao Deng and those people?" Chen Gu asked.

"Right," Bai Yunpeng confirmed.

Chen Gu, full of questions, asked, "How did he advance to the Seventh Energy Level? At his age, it's simply impossible."

Bai Yunpeng spoke gravely. "That's why I had you come out here. These matters aren't good to talk about over the phone. And even though I'm very certain it's all true, I don't have any evidence. Otherwise, I would have gone to the Elders' Council to file a complaint against him long ago."

"Gao Deng can no longer be considered human. He's a product—a product that was finally created after countless failures."

"The origin of this product was likely a very old 'Super Soldier' program, back in the Great Exploration Era. Some in the military hoped to create exceptionally strong warriors through genetic engineering."

"However, the project was soon abandoned by the military. The genetic engineering risks were too high, and professionals already met the requirements of super soldiers well enough. The military therefore turned to fully developing professional warriors instead."

"But this plan to produce super soldiers through genetic modification, like a ghost, always lurked within the military."

"Over the years, the military always had some of its budget spent on inexplicable things. But when a serious investigation was conducted, it either turned up nothing, or key witnesses would invariably die unexpectedly at critical moments."

"I really don't understand. We already have professionals. Why, after all these years, are there still so many in the military clutching at the 'Super Soldier' project?"

Bai Yunpeng finally got to the point. "Gao Deng's prototype is the ultimate product of this project..."

Chen Gu couldn't help interrupting him. "Prototype?"

Bai Yunpeng nodded. "Yes, prototype. It's a biological entity with a genetically engineered physique of extreme combat strength—I'm not even sure if it should be called 'human' because... these prototypes have no Souls!"

"They have even abandoned some human qualities in the pursuit of tremendous power: emotions, a sense of right and wrong, and so on."

"And Gao Deng... that was his original name. He was human when he joined this project. But after a promotion failure, he was destroyed by the military."

"Then the military extracted his memories, cleared the mental contamination, and injected them into a prototype."

"He advanced rapidly because he didn't need to consider the risks of promotion. As soon as the conditions were met, he could advance. One failure, two failures, three failures... these failures all became experience for his next promotion."

Chen Gu understood. It's a cycle of memory transfers, using new bodies, without the worry of promotion risks, and with the experience of many failures—no wonder he reached the Seventh Energy Level so quickly!

"No, that's not right..." Chen Gu murmured, a sudden realization striking him. "If he's continuously switching prototypes, it's very difficult to determine his actual biological age!"

Chen Gu remembered meeting Gao Deng. His professional's keen perception had noted Gao Deng appeared very young, in his twenties. So that must have been the age of that particular prototype, he now thought.

In this era, due to advances in technology, many wealthy people look very young. Rainbow, for instance, appears to be just over thirty. However, a professional's sensing ability can reveal that she's much older than she looks.

Bai Yunpeng continued, "Du Lifeng's target is likely me. Our enemies have united. Chen Gu, you must be extremely careful this time. I've already discussed it with Aviloya. If things go south, we retreat. Ultimately, the decisive showdown will be between Aviloya and Ding Zhou, and Ding Zhou is bound to lose. Your temporary retreat can be seen as a strategic withdrawal. A true man knows when to bend and stretch."

Chen Gu frowned and remained silent. Thinking Chen Gu was reluctant, Bai Yunpeng added persuasively, "Gao Deng is extremely dangerous. Not only is he at the Seventh Energy Level, but he was also initially created as a weapon of war. He feels no pain, knows no fear, and his combat experience is incredibly vast..."

Chapter 635 Utter Failure_2

Chen Gu nodded. "Marshal Bai, I understand. Don't worry, I will not be rash or impulsive."

Bai Yunpeng smiled with relief, and Chen Gu asked again, "That woman, is she also from Du Lifeng's side?"

"No," Bai Yunpeng replied, having also made inquiries. "They are from the Xiaogasa Family. And not just one of them, there are three—a set of triplet sisters. They cooperate with a rare tacit understanding, and their coordinated attacks are terrifying. Moreover, Elemental Ninjas are notoriously unpredictable and diverse in their attacking methods, so we cannot underestimate them."

Chen Gu stroked his chin. This time, the enemies truly seemed formidable.

"Marshal Bai, one last question, what Profession does this Gao Deng belong to?"

"An Alchemist Exorcist. He's said to be extremely adept at making all kinds of bombs." Bai Yunpeng felt he had said enough and waved to the guards. "Let them serve the food."

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The entire afternoon, the atmosphere within the Special Operations Squad was heavy. Gao Deng, a Seventh Energy Level Professional, weighed on each of their minds like a colossal boulder.

Chen Gu returned at three o'clock in the afternoon and immediately sequestered himself in a small office. Everyone knew he was searching for a way to defeat Gao Deng.

Chen Gu, being at the Fifth Energy Level, had the ability to defeat many at the Sixth Energy Level—on this matter, everyone had confidence in him. Even Gong Shuxu wouldn't dare to claim absolute victory against him now.

But asking him to challenge someone at the Seventh Energy Level, to fight across two Energy Levels, was indeed a tough task. The attack at the Angel Theater, involving that Electric Light Operator, served as a precedent.

The time for that "meeting" was set at four o'clock. Every member of the Special Operations Squad, including Shang Qingye, who was still just an auxiliary member, gathered and headed to Hammering Yard Nine.

Before entering the Hammering Yard, Gong Shuxu gently patted Chen Gu's shoulder and whispered words of comfort, "Don't put too much pressure on yourself. The sky isn't falling; above us, we still have the Director-General."

Hammering Yard Nine, located within the Director-General's Building, had the highest security clearance. It spanned three entire floors with vast, interconnected internal space.

It employed the most advanced reinforcement techniques and expensive high-energy generators capable of withstanding attacks from any Professional up to the Eighth Energy Level.

Normally, it was not opened lightly. Lower-level operatives had other Hammering Yards at their disposal for training.

Chen Gu and his group arrived a bit early. At precisely four o'clock, Ding Zhou and Aviloya arrived together.

Although both were openly competing for the highest authority within the Bureau of Mystic Security, they maintained the decorum of top-tier experts and entered politely.

Behind Ding Zhou followed the entire Special Operations Squad: seven men and three women, a total of ten people. Behind Aviloya, however, there were only two: Rainbow and Qing Ruyan.

Chen Gu carefully observed the seven men with Ding Zhou and indeed noticed that these people were almost identically built regarding height and build, with just slight differences in their faces.

As expected, they are embryonic bodies created by genetic modification and cloning technology.

Gao Deng was currently the most successful product, while the others were somewhat inferior.

The Hammering Yard could simulate various environments. Today, someone with a perverse sense of humor had simulated the setting of a currently popular combat game:

Ding Zhou and Aviloya took opposite sides, with the Independent Action Squad and the Special Operations Squad each standing behind them, as if they were commanders about to send their warriors into battle one by one.

However, those behind Aviloya all looked somber and serious. In contrast, the seven men behind Ding Zhou had faces as if cast in steel, utterly emotionless, while the three women adopted a relaxed and confident posture, clearly indicating their assurance of victory.

Qing Ruyan stepped forward, consulted Ding Zhou for his opinion, and then began to preside over the "meeting."

"The topic of today's meeting is well known to us all. We have divided the Confederation into twenty-four regions to allocate the responsibilities for each area."

Behind her, a holographic projection appeared, showing the entire star map of the Confederation, with the twenty-four different star domains marked in different colors.

Then she looked toward both parties. "Does anyone have any objections?"

Nobody from Chen Gu's side spoke up, but suddenly Gao Deng stood out. "Why must we divide within the Confederation? Why not simply divide into two major jurisdictions: within the Confederation and outside the Confederation?"

Even Gong Shuxu, who rarely showed his emotions, had a change in expression at this. This was nothing less than a blatant move to push the Special Operations Squad out of the Confederation—it was an outrageous affront!

Chen Jixian's eyelids flickered as he silently gripped his warhammer!

Qing Ruyan glanced at him indifferently. "This was decided upon after discussions between the Director-General and Deputy Director Ding. If you have any objections, you may bring them to Deputy Director Ding."

Ding Zhou was also somewhat displeased internally; after all, Gao Deng wasn't truly one of his own people. He gestured for Gao Deng to stand down. "Obey the orders."

Gao Deng stepped back into formation.

Chen Gu narrowed his eyes, looking at Gao Deng across from him, trying to conceal the dangerous glint in his gaze as much as possible.

Qing Ruyan continued, "Now for the rules. This time, the operatives sent by both sides must be below the Third Energy Level..."

"What?" This was previously unmentioned, and even Chen Gu was taken aback.

Moreover, considering their high-level combat strength, the Independent Action Squad held an absolute advantage. Why would Ding Zhou agree to this rule?

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As expected, Gao Deng stepped forward, his expression devoid of emotion, and stated his opinion, "I oppose..."

Ding Zhou said indifferently, "Obey the command!"

These words seemed to hold a strange power over Gao Deng. The rest of his sentence, yet unspoken, died on his lips. He then mechanically retreated and returned to his position.

Ding Zhou inwardly shook his head, already resolved to vigorously cultivate his own true loyalists. Gao Deng was powerful, but he had opposed Ding Zhou's opinion in front of everyone twice. Even if Ding Zhou won this time, it would make others doubt his control and greatly damage his image.

Aviloya had suddenly called Ding Zhou to discuss this rule before they arrived. Aviloya had paid a certain price, and after consideration, Ding Zhou had agreed.

Moreover, Ding Zhou felt he saw the situation very clearly: in fact, among the lower Energy Levels, Gao Deng's subordinates held an advantage over the Special Action Squad.

Chen Gu inwardly sneered. All the preparations he had made were now in vain. It was just as Gong Shuxu had said: even if the sky fell, the Director-General would be there to handle it.

He secretly glanced at Aviloya. The Director-General was as calm as still water, her thoughts inscrutable.

Qing Ruyan continued to explain the rules, "There are a total of 24 regions, and each side selects 12. The competition is divided into three rounds; winning one round grants the first pick of four regions."

Therefore, winning the first round was crucial, as it would allow for the first choice of the three best regions.

Both sides immediately began discussing which team members to send. If they won, they would definitely choose the region where Capital Star was located first. Then, the regions containing prosperous colonial stars were also priority choices.

"I'll do it!" Charles said through gritted teeth, volunteering.

Chen Jixian and Gong Shuxu exchanged glances. Indeed, there was no one more suitable than him.

Actually, there was one more: Marcus. However, now was not the time for Marcus to act, as it might trigger an adverse transformation.

Soon, both sides had selected their three contestants.

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In the Bureau of Mystic Security building, although it was nearly time to get off work, nobody was packing up to go home.

Everyone sat dutifully at their desks, but very few were actually working. Most were slacking off, waiting for the results.

Some were even secretly messaging technicians they knew, "Hey, hey, hey, set up a live stream from the Ninth Training Ground."

"I don't want the Director-General to personally order my dismissal."

Unable to see what was happening inside the Ninth Training Ground, everyone in the Bureau was itching with curiosity. Even special agents on missions away from the Bureau kept messaging their friends, "What's happening? Are the results out yet?"

By 5:30 PM, some couldn't hold back any longer. Finding various excuses to leave their workstations, they secretly ran to the door of the Ninth Training Ground to wait.

But the great doors were firmly shut, and not a sound came from inside.

It wasn't until 6:15 PM, 15 minutes after the workday had ended, that the doors suddenly opened. Ding Zhou walked out with an air of unruffled serenity, leading his Independent Action Squad.

Then the doors closed again.

A good while later, Qing Ruyan emerged with the members of the Special Action Squad. One look at their faces was enough to know the outcome hadn't been good.

Although the final decision on the allocation of jurisdictional regions hadn't been announced, rumors had already started flying wildly within the Bureau building and, as if they had wings, spread beyond its walls:

The Special Action Squad had lost!

Various speculations erupted, many finding it unbelievable, "The Special Action Squad has Chen Gu, and they still lost?"

"What could Chen Gu do? I heard Gao Deng is a Seventh Energy Level. You pit a Fifth Energy Level against a Seventh Energy Level; how could you expect the Fifth to win?"

"Chen Gu lost..." Many were disheartened, "Could this defeat be a blow to such a generational talent, causing him to fall into decline from which he'll never recover?"

Others were indignant, "Deputy Director Ding Zhou won without honor!"

"Whether he won without honor or not, a win is still a win."

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Inside Training Ground Nine, only Aviloya and Rainbow remained.

It was only in front of Rainbow that Aviloya heaved a soft sigh. "Even if we lost, so be it. Their overall strength was already inferior. My actions were merely to allow them to cling to a sliver of hope. My true purpose wasn't this."

Rainbow asked, "What price did you promise Ding Zhou to get him to agree to these rules?"

The corners of Aviloya's mouth curled into a mysterious smile. "I told him that if he agreed to this rule, the Bureau would provide him with the most critical super-material he needs for his ascension to the Ninth Power Level."

Logically, at Ding Zhou's level, the Bureau should provide all materials necessary for advancement. However, the Bureau of Mystic Security was still in Aviloya's hands, and she had many ways to withhold these materials.

Rainbow was taken aback for a moment, then understood. "You want Ding Zhou to advance!"

"Of course," Aviloya said. "The people behind him value him precisely because he has the qualifications to challenge me; that's why they support him so vehemently."

"And the most important reason he has such qualifications is not because he is the First Deputy Director, but because he has the potential to strive for the Ninth Power Level."

"To completely settle this tiresome power struggle, I'm simply accelerating this competition to its final stage, allowing him to gather the resources needed for his ascension."

Chapter 637 - Utter Failure_4

"If he fails, then he will never receive any more support. If he succeeds, I will defeat him at the Ninth Power Level—either way, I can get rid of this nuisance forever."

As for Aviloya directly going to "beat up" Ding Zhou, who was at the Eighth Energy Level, at this moment—well, the esteemed Valkyrie wouldn't stoop to such a thing.

Rainbow looked at her with sparkling eyes and smiled too. "So you used what you originally planned to give him in exchange for him agreeing to a condition favorable to the Special Operations Team? Nice move."

Aviloya finally showed a hint of regret. "It's a pity, though, that those youngsters failed to seize the opportunity and were utterly defeated..."

Rainbow said, "You can't blame them. The guys under Gao Deng, they're simply not human."

Aviloya replied, "Indeed, you can't blame them. I also made a wrong judgment, thinking that under such a restriction, they would have a chance."

She shook her head, as if in a trance. "Actually, I was fooled by that little thief Chen Gu; he gave me the illusion that my Special Operations Team was extremely strong. In fact, among the younger generation, except for him and Wu Yihuo, no one else can be considered a genius."

"He deceived me with one success after another—it was actually him alone who supported this Special Operations Team."

Rainbow looked at her, surprised. "You're actually speaking highly of him; this is the first time."

Aviloya glared at her playfully. "I'm not praising him; I'm just telling the truth. No matter how much I dislike him, I still recognize his strength."

Rainbow casually said, "Have you ever thought, if you hadn't intervened like this and let him face Gao Deng in a duel, today's outcome might have been different?"

Aviloya was taken aback for a moment, then shook her head with a wry smile. "Impossible."

「...」

The next day, the jurisdiction areas of the Special Operations Team and the Independent Operations Team were announced. The Bureau of Mystic Security's headquarters was once again abuzz: the Capital Star region and most of the bustling star areas had all been allocated to the Independent Operations Team. This made it clear to everyone that the Special Operations Team had not just lost, but had suffered a humiliating defeat.

However, further information came out: Chen Gu and Gao Deng had not participated in the fight, which made many even more eager to see a fair and square showdown between the two!

Within the Bureau, the Special Operations Team had quite a few supporters. Even though they knew Chen Gu's chances of winning were very low, they were unwilling to face the Special Operations Team's disastrous defeat and pinned their hopes on Chen Gu.

Nevertheless, Ding Zhou still greatly increased his prestige within the Bureau of Mystic Security with this victory, and the number of people who favored him to replace Aviloya had grown substantially.

However, most of these people were fence-sitters who believed in "might makes right," and their approval didn't exactly equate to loyalty.

「Three days after this "meeting" had ended, a case was submitted to the headquarters.」

Qing Ruyan was the first to notice this case. Frowning, she retrieved the file and presented it to Aviloya. "Director-General, this case occurred on the border of two star areas. One side falls under the jurisdiction of the Special Operations Team, and the other under the Independent Operations Team. Who should handle it?"

Aviloya said indifferently, "Chen Gu and his team lost last time and must be eager to redeem themselves these past few days. If I let them clash with the Independent Operations Team again, they certainly wouldn't back down. Chen Gu's team would be at a disadvantage. Just send it directly to the Independent Operations Team."

Qing Ruyan actually had the same thought, which was why she had preemptively pulled the case file. She promptly said, "Alright, I'll send it over to them."

「...」

"HUH?" Joseph exclaimed in surprise while browsing the internal system. "I just saw a case that was under our jurisdiction. How did it disappear all of a sudden?"

"You're seeing things," Boluo said listlessly. Indeed, everyone had been feeling quite frustrated these past few days.

"Impossible, I'm a professional!" Joseph protested.

Chen Gu suddenly had an idea. He called Qing Ruyan and got straight to the point, asking, "Where's our case?"

Qing Ruyan thought she must have been too slow and he had already seen it. "That's a border area," she explained. "I sent it to the Independent Operations Team."

Chen Gu hung up the phone, stood up, and announced, "I'm going next door to get our case back. Who's coming with me?"

Chen Gu had been waiting for this opportunity for days!

Chapter 638: The Inevitable Battle

Charles slapped the table and stood up first. "I'm going with you!"

"I'm going too!"

"I'm going too..."

Nearly all the young team members stood up. These past few days had been incredibly frustrating for them, especially for Charles. He had eagerly volunteered to be the lead combatant in the "meeting" with the Independent Operation Brigade, only to be utterly defeated in the first match, losing the most crucial Capital Star region!

Gong Shuxu's office door opened, and he stood at the entrance, knocking forcefully on the door frame. "Calm down!"

"What good does this chaos do?" Gong Shuxu, mature and steady, sought to cool the young people's tempers. "The Director-General and Qing Ruyan arranged this for our benefit."

"This is a long battle; immediate success or failure need not be taken to heart. As long as we don't make mistakes, victory will eventually be ours!"

Gong Shuxu subtly pointed out that Ding Zhou was certainly no match for Aviloya, and victory would come sooner or later.

But Chen Gu shook his head slightly. "Senior, I cannot agree with you this time. Time is of the essence, and I may never learn in this lifetime to rely on others to restore the dignity I myself lost."

Gong Shuxu frowned. "But Gao Deng, he..."

Chen Gu chuckled. "Right, he's at the Seventh Energy Level, and I'm not certain of victory either."

Gong Shuxu initially wanted to persuade him but then realized the implication in Chen Gu's words. "You... how confident are you?"

Chen Gu spread his hands. "I don't know. But I do know that if I don't fight this battle, the whole brigade won't be able to hold their heads up in the Directorate—I can't sleep or eat in peace!"

Without saying more, he turned and left.

It was only a few steps to the Independent Operation Brigade's headquarters. In that short amount of time, Chen Gu even managed to post a message on the internal network: "Chen Gu challenges the Independent Operation Brigade! Hammering Ground Nine. Observers welcome to learn from each other and promote mutual improvement!"

The first person to see this message was a logistics officer who had partied too hard the night before and arrived at work yawning. He had just brewed a cup of strong tea and taken a sip in front of his screen when this bombshell popped up, prompting him to blurt out, "FUCK!"

Soon, the entire internal network exploded. Everyone knew that Chen Gu and Gao Deng hadn't fought in the last "meeting" due to the rules. Now, three days later, Chen Gu had taken the initiative to challenge them and regain face for the Special Operation Brigade.

Look at this message—it sounded so polite, talking about "promoting mutual learning." But it was obvious that after stewing for three days, he'd seized the first opportunity to go on the offensive.

The Special Operation Brigade had a brilliant track record, amassing a considerable following within the Directorate. Their followers, who already favored them, had been frustrated these past few days. Seeing this development led to a series of cheers, with comments streaming beneath Chen Gu's post:

"I'll be there from the nineteenth floor right away!"

"I'll be there from the third sub-level immediately!"

"Wait for me, I'm buying a ship ticket to go back now!"

"To the person above, don't even bother coming back. I'm already here; I'll stream it live for you."

...

But many of Chen Gu's calm supporters worried privately. Can Chen Gu actually pull this off? A Fifth Energy Level challenging a Seventh Energy Level? It's insane!

It wasn't long before a group of supporters of the newly promoted Deputy Director-General Ding Zhou, who subscribed to the "strength-is-everything" philosophy, emerged:

"He's out of touch and just asking for humiliation."

HMPH. "A Fifth Energy Level, volunteering to be humiliated by a Seventh Energy Level. Why bother? Is he trying to get himself shamed?"

A series of mocking comments drew the ire of Chen Gu's supporters, but despite their angry tirades, they couldn't find any arguments to refute the opposition.

Even though they would all go to support Chen Gu, they each felt a heavy sense of dread about the outcome of the challenge and were somewhat pessimistic.

...

When Qing Ruyan received Chen Gu's call, she knew that with his temperament, things were about to go south. She immediately got up to find the Director-General.

As soon as she entered, Aviloya threw the message down with a cold expression.

Qing Ruyan covered her face with her hand. "Director, what do we do now?"

Only a few days ago, in front of Rainbow, Aviloya had acknowledged Chen Gu's strength. But now, she wished she could grab the little rascal herself, pull out her colossal war sword, and give him a good thrashing with one hundred and eighty strokes on his backside.

"Dammit, causing trouble!" Aviloya already had a comprehensive plan for this power struggle. From her perspective, the successes and failures of subordinates like the Special Operation Brigade were trivial in the grand scheme of things. Consequently, she naturally couldn't understand the frustration of Chen Gu and his comrades.

In her eyes, Chen Gu was like that Monkey King—skilled and capable, but troublesome and always stirring up problems.

Qing Ruyan tried to plead for her friend. "But the Special Operation Brigade is directly under you. Gao Deng is at the Seventh Energy Level. If something unexpected happens, Chen Gu could..."

Aviloya waved her hand dismissively. "If he's brave enough to start trouble, he has to be capable of settling it. You may leave."

With no other choice, Qing Ruyan left, only to see Rainbow leaning against the wall outside the door with a smile. "Let's go. We might as well enjoy the spectacle."

Qing Ruyan asked blankly, "Where to?"

"Hammering Ground Nine, of course."

Qing Ruyan was thrilled. The Director-General might not care, but Senior Rainbow did! She was an Eighth Energy Level; Chen Gu's safety would at least be guaranteed!

"Sure thing!" she replied loudly.

People from all over the Directorate were heading to Hammering Ground Nine, while Chen Gu was actually still at the doorway of the Independent Operation Brigade.

Chapter 639: The Inevitable Battle Part 2

Other departments, aside from the offices of higher-level leaders, usually didn't have access control systems. However, the Independent Action Brigade was different; they had a specialized "recognition system" specifically for members of the Special Operations Brigade. As soon as Chen Gu and his team arrived, the two large doors automatically closed!

This time, Chen Gu didn't hold back and nearly smashed the doors to pieces.

The banging sounds were a clear indication of hostility. Gao Deng quickly came out with his people. Chen Gu got straight to the point, "Give us back the case!"

Gao Deng knew exactly which case he was referring to and said coldly, "No."

Chen Gu decisively beckoned with his finger. "Let's settle this between the two of us. Whoever wins gets the case."

Gao Deng didn't speak. Chen Gu continued, "Come on, I know you've been looking forward to fighting me. I'm personally delivering this opportunity to you. Are you going to back down now?"

Gao Deng remained cold, "Fine!"

「...」

Nearly a hundred people had gathered inside the Number Nine Forging Field—representatives sent by various departments after numerous "competitions."

It was still working hours, after all, so it was impossible for everyone to abandon their work and come to watch the show.

Most of these people normally did not have the authority to enter the Number Nine Forging Field, but this time, Deputy Director Rainbow had granted permission.

They craned their necks, eagerly anticipating, "Where are they? Why haven't they come yet..."

Finally, the doors to the Number Nine Forging Field opened again, and a large group of people poured in, with Chen Gu and Gao Deng at the forefront, followed by other members of their respective teams.

The moment they appeared, the venue erupted into cheers, most of which were in support of Chen Gu. Gao Deng remained unmoved, simply looking at Chen Gu and saying indifferently, "Let's not waste time. After dealing with you, I still have a case to work on."

Chen Gu didn't say a word but made a gesture with his hand. Both men walked into the field as a thick energy shield rose around them.

Rainbow and Qing Ruyan were sitting in an inconspicuous corner. Rainbow took out a small bottle of strawberry-flavored yogurt from his pocket and sipped it slowly, appearing to casually ask Qing Ruyan, "Do you think Chen Gu can win?"

Qing Ruyan was conflicted. "To be honest, I think it's difficult. The difference in Energy Levels is too great. But from what I know about Chen Gu, if he didn't have confidence, he probably wouldn't be so impulsive... I can't think of any way for him to win, unless... he obtained some powerful numbered artifact?"

Rainbow smiled and said nothing, contentedly sipping his yogurt.

Inside the energy shield, a massive explosion sounded unexpectedly. A great blast erupted under Chen Gu's feet, sending him flying and slamming him hard against the energy shield, causing web-like ripples of energy.

"Ah—" There were exclamations from the audience.

Chen Gu slid down the energy shield, looking somewhat disheveled, while Gao Deng stood straight and tall, and no one had even seen how he made his move.

He merely turned his body slightly to face Chen Gu again. "I know you have fought shoulder to shoulder with many Alchemical Adepts before—I study all intelligence thoroughly before a battle—but the

Seventh Energy Level is different from you. With just a thought, within my range of abilities, I can create various objects at will. For instance, right now, I'm creating a blade inside your body."

Chen Gu felt a stabbing pain in his chest!

Indeed more difficult to deal with than I expected, Chen Gu thought, but he refused to simply wait for defeat. His "Doomsday Shelter" activated, spreading out to a ten-meter radius around him.

Gao Deng nodded in acknowledgment. "You've got some skills, but it's useless."

The "Doomsday Shelter," activated at that moment, generated a "seclusion effect," preventing Gao Deng from freely using his abilities within Chen Gu's ten-meter radius, and the sharp pain in Chen Gu's chest gradually faded.

But Gao Deng opened his arms, and one by one, missiles appeared behind him, neatly arranged in a formation. With a push from Gao Deng, the missiles rained down on Chen Gu like a deluge!

Chen Gu looked up, and his "Nuclear Fusion Beam Eyes" activated. All the missiles within his line of sight exploded prematurely.

Yet, unbeknownst to him, two chains, like lurking serpents, slithered across the ground, snapping around his ankles.

Chen Gu, not the least bit perturbed, triggered "Radiation Scouring." The chains around his ankles quickly heated up and glowed red from the radiation, allowing Chen Gu to easily break free.

In Gao Deng's hands, an electromagnetic anti-material sniper rifle had appeared.

THUD!

A gunshot rang out, and the special electromagnetic armor-piercing bullet he created easily penetrated "Doomsday Shelter," leaving a transparent, bloody hole in Chen Gu's left shoulder!

Qing Ruyan could no longer bear to watch, but Rainbow narrowed his eyes, taking sips of yogurt, looking quite amused.

Staggered by the shot, Chen Gu stepped back a few paces, but he did not abandon "Doomsday Shelter." Gao Deng quickly created a second electromagnetic armor-piercing bullet and swiftly pulled the trigger.

BANG!

But there was no gunshot—instead, the electromagnetic anti-material sniper rifle exploded.

In that split second, Chen Gu had used "Quantum Teleportation" to send the first bullet back into the chamber.

The enormous force of the explosion mangled both of Gao Deng's hands, and shrapnel embedded itself in his body.

Yet Gao Deng seemed unconcerned, casually pulling the pieces out, and his wounds quickly stopped bleeding.

Chapter 640: The Inevitable Battle Part 3

He felt no pain, and his bodily functions were extraordinarily strong.

He simply watched Chen Gu with an icy gaze, sentencing him to death in his heart.

Suddenly, the [Doomsday Shelter] around Chen Gu shrank inward, morphing into [Heavy Nuclear Armor]! Almost simultaneously, a small-yield nuclear bomb appeared in front of him and exploded with a BANG!

The terrible force slammed Chen Gu straight into the energy shield. The external generators surged to their maximum load to neutralize the blast.

On Gao Deng's body, a set of nozzles suddenly appeared, with rocket ejectors at his feet and back, dramatically increasing his speed as he charged at Chen Gu. In his hand materialized a huge warhammer, which he swung down at Chen Gu's head.

But mid-flight, Gao Deng sensed something and swiftly dodged aside.

The blood he had just shed on the ground eerily came together, each drop a miniature nuclear bomb!

Chen Gu smirked, blood pouring out, "Playing with nuclear explosions in front of me?"

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

The continuous explosions made it impossible for Gao Deng to avoid them all. Heavy anti-radiation armor appeared on him, but the shock of the blasts still hurt him, driving him to the very edge of the energy shield.

Chen Gu's figure suddenly vanished, and Gao Deng immediately sensed danger. "Quantum Wizard!"

He swiftly removed the armor from his body—the excessive weight was affecting his speed—and his rocket suit reactivated, trying to distance himself from Chen Gu once more. But he suddenly felt a discernible snag.

"Entanglement Control!" Gao Deng sneered as the rocket pack on his back instantly transformed into an "electricity generator."

ZZZZZZT—

A brilliant blue, high-voltage electrical net enveloped him. However, Chen Gu did not appear as Gao Deng had hoped. Instead, the [Father-Son Sword], under Chen Gu's control, slammed into the net and was repelled with a BANG.

Gao Deng paused, then saw Chen Gu suddenly face-to-face with him inside his electric net!

Two black daggers appeared instantly in his hands, stabbing toward Chen Gu's ribs.

[Heavy Nuclear Armor] surfaced on Chen Gu, and then Gao Deng felt as if his own blood had ignited!

Biological Nuclear Explosion! This guy was actually using his own body as the material for a nuclear explosion!

Gao Deng snorted, "An ant trying to shake a great tree!"

You are merely at the Fifth Energy Level, thinking of attacking a Seventh Energy Level entity directly with a professional skill? Wishful thinking.

Gao Deng's power circulated within his body, forcefully pushing the [Biological Nuclear Explosion] back.

"Skills can backfire!" Gao Deng said coldly. Chen Gu shuddered, giving up on his attack and once again escaping with [Quantum Teleportation].

Gao Deng's daggers stabbed into thin air.

He withdrew his hand, and the two daggers transformed into an energy burst cannon. The muzzle turned, aiming precisely at Chen Gu, who had just reappeared dozens of meters away.

THUD THUD THUD...

The burst cannon fired rapidly, with Chen Gu awkwardly defending. The explosions forced him back, and his [Heavy Nuclear Armor] started to show cracks.

At the same time, blood trickled from Gao Deng's nose.

Although the [Biological Nuclear Explosion] was unsuccessful and Gao Deng had forced it back—triggering a backlash against Chen Gu—it still inflicted great damage upon Gao Deng's body.

「Inside Training Ground Number Nine」

There was a deathly silence. From the start of the battle, Gao Deng had held the upper hand, and Chen Gu kept getting injured. By now, his resilience was nothing short of admirable.

It was like a hero challenging a dragon he had no chance of defeating!

Meanwhile, someone was streaming the fight live, and the supporters of the "strength is everything" philosophy espoused by Ding Zhou had begun to flood the chat with comments:

"Look, I told you he was just humiliating himself!"

"I admit he has courage, impressive resilience, but so what? Not good enough is just not good enough."

"If he doesn't give up now, he might get killed right here."

"This challenge was a joke from the start."

Under a barrage from the energy burst cannon, Chen Gu vanished once again.

With a wave of his hand, Gao Deng made the burst cannon disappear. Simultaneously, black orbs the size of longan fruits began appearing within dozens of meters around him. They were floating mines that would explode with great force at the slightest touch.

Gao Deng said, "The same move, when used too much, loses its significance."

Yet as he vigilantly watched his surroundings, none of the mines detonated. All of a sudden, Gao Deng's body twisted uncomfortably, and he hoarsely said, "[Multistate Special Agent]?"

PFFT—

He forcefully expelled a breath, ejecting the "gas" that had stealthily permeated his body. This triggered a massive wave of mine explosions. Chen Gu, dozens of meters away, dispersed as a gas and took a long time to coalesce again.

Gao Deng remained cold, quietly walking over and opening his arms toward Chen Gu. "Too much time has been wasted. It's time to end this tedious battle."

"Let me show you the strength of the Seventh Energy Level!"

In the void, a mass of gas was suddenly captured by some force. Under the effect of the [Alchemist]'s power, it was being transformed into something else!

Qing Ruyan suddenly stood up, crying out, "It's Chen Gu! He's been captured by Gao Deng's power, and he's being transformed into one of Gao Deng's trophies!"