

Ice Age 1071

Chapter 1071: Zhu Zheng's Melancholy

Zhu Zheng had already inquired with Jingwei. Not long after, Deng Shentong and Linghu Feixue also arrived at the office.

They were currently unaware that they were being monitored by the Night Crow Squad and came as usual to report on the battle situation.

Everything they reported was already known to Zhu Zheng.

Nevertheless, Zhu Zheng still asked the two of them for their opinions on Zhang Yi.

"He didn't choose to return with you. What do you think is the reason?"

The two of them glanced secretly at each other, each with their own thoughts.

Linghu Feixue frowned and said indifferently, "I think he probably believes that, in his current state, he doesn't need to report anything to you anymore!"

"After all, he is now the noble Epsilon!"

Linghu Feixue didn't know the full story.

She only knew that Zhang Yi had deceived everyone, obtained the Divine Source alone, and then let them fight on the island.

Therefore, she held some unfavorable views of Zhang Yi in her heart.

Deng Shentong, on the other hand, said with a smile, "Perhaps he's weary from the long battles and wants to reunite with his family first."

"Moreover... there are some issues that the Region needs to help him resolve."

Zhu Zheng chuckled.

He tapped the table with his right hand and nodded with a smile.

"Yes, he has accomplished a great deal this time. Hmm, obtaining the Divine Source is the greatest merit!"

"However, he has indeed caused me a great deal of trouble. The East Sea Region will require a lot of effort to soothe their feelings again."

"And the Shengjing Region also needs a report from us."

Zhu Zheng let out a long sigh and said with a bitter smile, "Being this commander is not easy!"

These words were indeed heartfelt.

But if Zhang Yi could completely become one of his people, then all his negative emotions would vanish.

To put it bluntly, he still wasn't that confident in Zhang Yi, the lone wolf.

"Alright, you two go back and get some proper rest first! You've both worked hard on this mission."

Deng Shentong and Linghu Feixue said, "Then we'll take our leave."

The two of them left Zhu Zheng's office.

Zhu Zheng propped his cheek on his left hand, gazing eagerly at the communicator on the desk.

"Zhang Yi, Zhang Yi... Ah, you guy, why can't you be used by me? It's fine if you can't be used by me, but why do you have to be so powerful?"

"When the subordinates are too strong, it's difficult for me as the leader!"

"Ah, forget it, forget it. This time, I'll be the first to lower my head."

He activated the communicator.

"Xiao Ai, help me connect to Zhang Yi."

What Zhang Yi was waiting for was Zhu Zheng's communication.

He needed Zhu Zheng to express an attitude: first, apologize for breaking his word before, and also express an attitude regarding the Jingwei surveillance incident.

This wasn't being nitpicky, but rather to let others know his bottom line. Otherwise, continuous forbearance would only lead others to become increasingly aggressive.

At home, Zhang Yi saw Zhu Zheng's communication invitation. He waited for it to ring three times before finally answering.

Zhu Zheng's amiable and kind face appeared before him.

"Haha, Zhang Yi, congratulations! You successfully obtained the Divine Source and have become an Epsilon-level superhuman. This is a fortunate event for our entire Jiangnan Region!"

"On behalf of the Jiangnan Region and all the high-ranking officials of Blizzard City, I extend my congratulations to you!"

Zhang Yi gave a faint smile.

"Thank you, Commander Zhu."

Zhu Zheng seemed to ignore this indifferent attitude.

"You've returned, so why not come to our Blizzard City? I've already had people prepare a victory banquet specifically to welcome you back and celebrate!"

"You are now the greatest contributor to the Jiangnan Region. How can we skip the ceremony?"

"If others found out, they'd think the Jiangnan Region doesn't value talent!"

Zhang Yi chuckled.

"Commander Zhu, it's not that I don't want to return, but I'm worried that going back might make some people unhappy!"

Zhu Zheng said with a stern face, "Ah, what kind of talk is that? We are all overjoyed. Who would be unhappy?"

Zhang Yi curled his lips and said slowly, "I heard that you've cultivated a superhuman named Zhu Yu there? With a new favorite, I'm afraid you've long forgotten about me, the old one."

"It's said she was cloned from the cells of my old friend Yuan Kongye. I guess, with the entire Region's cultivation now, her power is advancing by leaps and bounds?"

Hearing this, Zhu Zheng naturally understood the dissatisfaction in Zhang Yi's heart.

Ever since Zhu Yu appeared, Zhu Zheng's attitude towards Zhang Yi had cooled somewhat.

Especially after Zhang Yi returned from the sea, Zhu Zheng never mentioned the matter of giving him priority use of the Divine Source again.

He even sent Jingwei to monitor him, all to prevent Zhang Yi from monopolizing the Divine Source.

The smile slowly faded from Zhu Zheng's face. At this moment, his face was filled with sorrow, transforming from the high-spirited Regional Commander back into a weathered old man.

"Zhang Yi, in this matter, I was at fault first. I am sorry to you. But the Region needs balance; we cannot let one person dominate."

Zhang Yi interrupted him, "I'm not here to listen to grand principles. You have your considerations, but I also have my own thoughts. I won't sacrifice myself for anyone. That's not a valid reason."

Zhu Zheng and Zhang Yi weren't meeting for the first time. Of course, he understood Zhang Yi's temperament.

Playing the emotional card was a complete waste of time. It was better to offer something tangible.

"Alright then. To express my apology, the Region has prepared a large amount of strategic supplies for you. You can come and collect them anytime!"

"The members of your household are still at a low level, aren't they? I imagine you don't want them to hold you back. The Region will provide them with the best resources to help them improve their strength!"

"And you don't need to worry about the issues with the East Sea Region. I will handle them."

At this point, Zhu Zheng let out a long sigh. "Those guys are difficult to deal with. After all, this time they lost many elites. Including Baihu from the Four Spirits Fleet, and the two fleet commanders, Bai Ze and Xie Zhi."

"Not to mention you killed their Operations Department Head, Li Tianyang, right in front of so many people. Isn't that slapping them in the face?"

"That old fellow Li Guangxiao just called me. That guy gave me an earful! I estimate the Region will have to pay a hefty price this time to appease his feelings."

Mentioning this, Zhang Yi could barely suppress the smile at the corner of his mouth.

These troublesome problems were ones he intentionally created.

Among them, there was no lack of intention to retaliate against Zhu Zheng.

And he also knew that Zhu Zheng could only swallow his anger at this moment.

Because he needed Zhang Yi's support.

An Epsilon-level superhuman held almost supreme strategic value. Any price was worth paying.

Zhu Zheng's sighs and laments were essentially playing the victim card to quell the anger in Zhang Yi's heart.

Chapter 1072: Qin Qigong

Zhang Yi wasn't swayed by Zhu Zheng's attempt to play the victim in his heart.

Because all of this was exactly what Zhu Zheng deserved.

However, for now, he still needed someone like Zhu Zheng to serve his purposes.

So he wouldn't rip the mask off and openly break with Zhu Zheng.

But, Zhang Yi also had a slight concern at the moment.

That was Yuan Kongye's clone, Zhu Yu.

He crossed his fingers and stared at Zhu Zheng as he asked, "How is that precious Zhu Yu of yours doing now? I'm quite curious about her, after all, she was the one I killed back then."

Even now, Zhang Yi still felt an extremely strong sense of wariness towards Yuan Kongye in his heart.

Yuan Kongye's ability was too terrifying, capable of almost limitless growth.

That method of directly plundering others' abilities to strengthen oneself was excessively horrifying.

Moreover, the people around Zhang Yi, Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya, had both awakened their powers through the Ice Soul.

He wasn't clear whether Zhu Yu's abilities might affect them.

Mentioning Zhu Yu caused Zhu Zheng's gaze to falter slightly.

"Don't worry, the clone and the original are completely different people now. She is my goddaughter now, no matter what enmity existed between you in the past, it has nothing to do with her."

Zhang Yi stared at Zhu Zheng, "So, is she an Epsilon-level now?"

Zhang Yi felt that wasn't the case.

If Zhu Zheng truly had an Epsilon-level in his hands, his attitude towards Zhang Yi wouldn't be this deferential.

Sure enough, Zhu Zheng let out a light sigh.

"A clone is, after all, just a clone, unable to achieve the original's full effect. We've tried many methods, but we couldn't make her break through to the Epsilon level."

He offered Zhang Yi an explanation.

The Ice Soul was, in fact, Yuan Kongye's reproductive cells.

Precisely because of this, Yuan Kongye, as the Parent Organism, could control the superhumans who fused with the Ice Soul and absorb their power.

Zhu Yu was cloned using the Ice Soul, and she only possessed half of Yuan Kongye's genes within her body.

Her power naturally couldn't be identical to Yuan Kongye's.

Therefore, rather than calling it a clone, it would be more accurate to say Zhu Yu is Yuan Kongye's child.

Hearing this, Zhang Yi suddenly asked with curiosity:

"Then who is her father?"

Since they wanted to create the strongest superhuman, the selection of the paternal genetic material surely couldn't be taken lightly either!

Zhu Zheng laughed, "That's something I'll have to keep a secret. After all, this kind of matter isn't something to be casually spoken about for the person involved."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, images of several male squad captains like Deng Shentong and Lu Huang flashing through his mind.

He even wondered if that old geezer Zhu Zheng had used his own genes for the experiment.

But upon careful thought, Zhu Zheng wouldn't be foolish enough to joke around with something like this.

Who Zhu Yu's father actually was ultimately didn't matter.

After all, she was merely the military's experimental subject, a human weapon.

Zhu Zheng expressed his sincerity: "Zhang Yi, you have always been the superhuman I hold in the highest regard! I hope we can continue to cooperate in good faith in the future, working together to maintain the stability and peace of the Jiangnan Region."

Zhang Yi gave Zhu Zheng a deep look, then said with a smile:

"That is indeed something we can discuss."

"However, I would like to meet Zhu Yu."

He still wasn't entirely at ease about that girl, stemming from the immense pressure Yuan Kongye had once exerted on him.

He wasn't someone who would just believe whatever Zhu Zheng said.

Zhu Zheng thought for a moment, then nodded in agreement to Zhang Yi's request.

"Very well, when will you come over then?"

"The day after tomorrow. I'll come over the day after tomorrow."

"Alright then."

The two ended the call.

Zhu Zheng leaned back in his chair, forcefully rubbing the space between his eyebrows.

This time he had bet wrong, never expecting Zhang Yi to suddenly rise as a dark horse, fighting his way out from under immense pressure.

But this was also an opportunity for him.

His relationship with Zhang Yi was delicate, but at least the Jiangnan Region now had its own Epsilon-level.

In the future, other forces would likely feel some degree of wariness because of this.

And forces like the Erosion Moon or the Tianlong Pirate Crew wouldn't dare to infringe upon the Jiangnan Region's territory anymore.

However, next, he would need to pay a heavy price.

At the very least, he would have to hand over half of Blizzard City's resources.

One part to win over Zhang Yi, and another part to compensate the East Sea Region to obtain their forgiveness.

Before Zhu Zheng even had time to think about how to arrange things for Zhang Yi's visit tomorrow.

Another message came through on the communicator; a call from Li Guangxiao, the supreme commander of the East Sea Region.

Zhu Zheng gave a bitter smile, quickly composed his expression, and prepared to face Li Guangxiao's storm of fury.

In recent days, his calls with Li Guangxiao had numbered over a dozen.

Li Guangxiao was genuinely furious. Being so thoroughly played, resulting in the loss of troops and generals, and having his operations chief publicly executed.

This hot-tempered supreme commander of the East Sea Region absolutely could not tolerate it!

If it weren't for Xuanwu and the others being severely weakened and Zhang Yi having already become an Epsilon-level, he would have wanted to mobilize forces to attack Tianhai City.

Zhu Zheng could only try to placate him with gentle words, then promise sufficient compensation.

Between the two of them, there was another round of back-and-forth tug-of-war over this matter.

Li Guangxiao, who appeared enraged, was actually aiming to obtain more compensation; the emotion was just seasoning, the real goal was benefit.

He also couldn't really do anything to Zhang Yi, who was now Epsilon-level, so he could only extract some compensation from Zhu Zheng.

Furthermore, judging by the battle situation on Star Island back then, the involvement of the joint forces had already made their chances of victory slim from the start.

Plus, the losses suffered by the Columbus Ocean's Hell's Lock were even more severe. Relatively speaking, the maritime pressure on the East Sea Region had actually lessened considerably.

In short, the power plays among the higher-ups couldn't be judged by surface appearances.

No matter how much they tugged back and forth, in the end, it still came down to how much money could be offered, and then past grievances could be wiped clean.

However, after dealing with the East Sea Region, an even bigger problem arrived.

Zhu Zheng received a call from Qin Qigong, the supreme commander of the distant northern Shengjing Region.

Facing Qin Qigong, Zhu Zheng's heart was actually much calmer.

Nominally, the Shengjing Region was the overall command for the Six Major Regions.

But this operation was a joint action between the Jiangnan and East Sea Regions; it hadn't damaged the Shengjing Region's interests.

At most, Qin Qigong could only say they hadn't informed Shengjing.

But what Zhu Zheng didn't expect was that the purpose of Qin Qigong's call wasn't to reprimand the two regions for their concealment.

He just spoke to Zhu Zheng in a grave tone: "This time, you've stirred up huge trouble."

Zhu Zheng was taken aback.

"What trouble?"

Qin Qigong fell silent for a moment, then said slowly, "I told you before, the Divine Source, while powerful, also contains immense danger and secrets. If you discovered it, you absolutely had to notify Shengjing."

"You didn't listen to the advice, acting on your own. I think you've already released a truly terrifying existence!"

Hearing this, Zhu Zheng's mind immediately went to the black-armored, bizarre humanoid creature that emerged from the depths of the Mist Valley, as reported by Jingwei.

He swallowed hard, "What exactly is that?"

Chapter 1073: Enhanced Abilities

Qin Qigong paused for a few seconds.

Then he said to Zhu Zheng, "We don't know what that thing is either. But I can tell you, back when we found the Divine Source in the Qinling Mountains' dragon vein, that place has now become a complete forbidden zone."

"Even now, we haven't managed to clean up the trouble there."

"Where the Divine Source appears, there exists great terror. Do not touch it recklessly!"

Zhu Zheng narrowed his eyes, pondered for a long while, and then said leisurely, "Hmm, I understand. But fortunately, this time the place where the Divine Source was discovered is overseas. Even if there is danger, it won't affect the Huaxu Kingdom's mainland."

Qin Qigong said, "I heard that your region's [Chaos] obtained the Divine Source, and now he's already an Epsilon-level superhuman?"

Zhu Zheng replied, "That's right, it's him."

Qin Qigong said, "That's quite good as well. You all indeed need to bolster your combat strength."

The call ended here. Qin Qigong didn't continue to inquire about the mission details, nor did he hold the Jiangnan Region and the East Sea Region accountable for not reporting it.

At this point, everyone has a tacit understanding. Everyone urgently hopes to enhance their own power.

As for Zhu Zheng, he just sneered repeatedly at Qin Qigong's words, not taking them to heart at all.

"Even if there is the greatest terror, your Shengjing Region gained immense benefits from the discovery in the Qinling Mountains."

"Why can you do it, but we cannot? If I were truly scared off by your few words, I wouldn't be Zhu Zheng!"

...

Zhang Yi planned to go to Blizzard City tomorrow.

He wanted to personally see what that Zhu Yu was really like, to settle a lingering concern in his heart.

At this time, everyone at home was busy absorbing the source sprites to enhance their own superhuman ability index.

Zhang Yi didn't call anyone, just began carefully preparing his equipment himself.

For this trip to Blizzard City, he was being extremely cautious.

Although the probability was low, he still had to avoid Zhu Zheng playing tricks on him. In the unlikely event that Zhu Yu had already reached Epsilon-level, he couldn't completely rule out the risk of Zhu Zheng wanting to eliminate him.

After the Apocalypse, the reason Zhang Yi could survive until now was entirely due to his caution and his pessimistic mindset of not trusting anyone.

In the evening, Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya came to Zhang Yi's room to chat with him.

After absorbing the source sprites, both of their powers had been enhanced.

As support-type superhumans, they didn't need to deliberately train anything specific. As long as the scope of their abilities increased, that was sufficient.

"Zhang Yi, I have a new ability now. Come over and try it."

Zhou Ke'er, wearing a blue velvet nightgown, knelt on the bed and patted her firm thigh with a smile.

She practiced yoga every day and often played ball games with Yang Siya and the others, so her body proportions were very well-balanced.

Her figure was neither too fat nor too thin, with a perfect ratio of fat to muscle.

Because Zhang Yi liked slightly fuller figures, she had even deliberately used her [Doctor] ability to adjust her fat ratio.

Zhang Yi lay down on her lap, enjoying the soft and warm pillow of her thighs.

"Oh? Looks like there's a pleasant surprise."

Zhang Yi said with a smile.

Zhou Ke'er extended her slender, jade-like hands, placed them on Zhang Yi's head, and began a gentle massage.

Something miraculous happened.

As her hands stroked Zhang Yi's head, he felt his tense emotions relax.

He was a pessimist, so he always liked to consider many possibilities. It was rare for him to be able to relax his mind on ordinary days.

But as Zhou Ke'er's hands pressed on his head and slowly moved across his scalp, they made him briefly forget all his troubles. His whole being attained a happiness akin to flying on clouds.

"This is an ability I specifically trained for you!"

Zhou Ke'er whispered softly, "It's called Dopamine Slow Release. It can help you relax. Zhang Yi, you're usually too tired. You also need to relax properly occasionally. It's very helpful for both your body and mind."

Zhang Yi made an "Mhm" sound, feeling so comfortable he didn't want to say a single word, just wanting to immerse himself in this tranquility.

Zhou Ke'er's hands, glowing with a soft, gentle light, slowly moved from his head down his body.

The accumulated negative substances within Zhang Yi's body were completely dispersed.

Even some negative substances that Zhang Yi himself hadn't noticed were all eliminated.

During the days Zhang Yi wasn't at home, everyone had been working hard to improve their own abilities, so as not to hold Zhang Yi back.

As a doctor, Zhou Ke'er was also considering what she, who couldn't go to the battlefield, could do for Zhang Yi.

This special massage technique could allow Zhang Yi's body and mind to relax completely, restoring his physical condition to its most perfect state.

There were even some special auxiliary abilities related to men, which would be verified later.

Although it couldn't turn an ordinary person's body into a superhuman's, it could definitely bring a person's body to its optimal state.

This kind of thing, seemingly just a support ability, actually had a very significant effect.

Because for someone like Zhang Yi, who often goes out to perform high-intensity missions, whether it's mental stress or hidden physical injuries, they are not easily detected.

Accumulated over time, they become major problems, either erupting all at once when one gets older.

What Zhou Ke'er was doing wasn't easy at all; it required extremely precise control of her ability.

But when she saw Zhang Yi's relaxed, baby-like expression, she smiled with satisfaction.

Seeing this, Yang Siya reached out, took out some pastries she had made, then picked one up with two fingers and brought it to Zhang Yi's mouth.

"Zhang Yi, this is a pastry I just learned to make recently. Try it."

Zhang Yi opened his mouth and ate the pastry. It was soft, fragrant, and glutinous in his mouth.

After swallowing it, he couldn't help but praise, "Suya, your culinary skills are getting better and better!"

Yang Siya smiled until her eyes narrowed into slits. "I'm glad you like it. Then I'll learn more new varieties in the future, trying my best to let you eat something different every day."

Receiving Zhang Yi's praise was her greatest happiness.

Yang Siya was that typical type of girl from a modest family. After the Apocalypse, she couldn't do much else, so she focused all her attention on Zhang Yi.

It had a rather strong feeling of "the husband being the wife's guiding principle."

But she never tired of it.

It wasn't that she lacked ambition and only knew how to depend on a man.

It was that everyone's abilities were different, so one needed to understand where their own strengths lay and then apply them appropriately.

Like this, she and Zhou Haimei felt they were living very happily.

The saying goes, "A coquettish woman has the best fate." This is probably a principle that a straightforward woman like Liang Yue would find hard to understand.

The night passed without words, long and drawn-out. The three of them, who hadn't seen each other for a long time, had many things they wanted to share, all conveyed in silence.

Chapter 1074: The Weapon Problem

The next day, Zhang Yi woke up from bed feeling refreshed and energetic.

He went to Lu Keran's workshop and handed over all his weapons and equipment to her.

"Keran, my weapons are starting to fall behind my current power level. Is there any way to improve them further?"

After becoming an Epsilon-level superhuman, the power of firearms was no longer sufficient.

For Zhang Yi, they had become a rather useless tool—unpleasant to keep, yet a pity to discard.

When dealing with lower-tier superhumans, they could still be used to clear out the small fry.

But when facing more powerful superhumans, or even someone like Yasin Canero who was close to the Epsilon level, his current weapons couldn't truly unleash his full strength.

Lu Keran had a black sweatband tied around her head and was cutting core materials salvaged from the warship.

Fine beads of sweat covered her wheat-colored skin.

Looking at the firearms Zhang Yi brought back, she said helplessly:

"Brother, the field of mechanics isn't omnipotent. These old-fashioned weapons have inherent, significant limitations."

"Bullets are solid metal, relying on the propulsive force of gunpowder to gain massive kinetic energy, then used to injure opponents."

"Previously, your ability could accelerate the bullets, causing greater destructive power. But now, your power has surpassed what ordinary bullets can withstand."

"Moreover, the gunpowder-propelled firing method also has its limits."

Zhang Yi stroked his chin, "I know. But when I was on the battlefield, I encountered a guy who used revolvers. He seemed capable of compressing his superhuman ability into bullets and then firing them."

"So I'm wondering, can you achieve something like that?"

Lu Keran looked up, crossing her arms as she pondered seriously.

Whenever advanced mechanical technology was mentioned, she always became exceptionally focused.

"Is that so? Analyzing from a materials perspective, I believe Adamantium alloy is the best material, as it's currently the toughest known material in the world."

"If firearms could be reforged using Adamantine Metal, it might indeed be possible. But the most crucial issue is solving the bullet problem."

"Using superhuman abilities as bullets requires a sufficiently powerful carrier. I've heard of this technology, but I've never had the chance to work with it. To obtain this technology, we'd have to go through the military."

Zhang Yi thought for a moment.

"Adamantium alloy, and advanced weapons technology. I understand. Tomorrow when I go to Blizzard City, I'll have Old Zhu get them for me."

As long as there was a way, that was fine.

He really wanted something like Billy the Kid's Goldenrod revolver too.

After all, without a suitable weapon, his abilities would be greatly diminished, at least in terms of long-range attacks.

While chatting with Lu Keran, Zhang Yi's gaze swept around her workshop.

"By the way, how's your recent research on the mech going? I'm really looking forward to that thing!"

Mentioning this, Lu Keran's eyes instantly lit up with brilliant sparkles.

"Brother Zhang Yi, I've already finished the design drawings! Hmm... a large-scale mech is very difficult to achieve right now. After all, the primary power source is still fossil fuels. Power consumption would increase dramatically in the extreme cold, so building a large mech isn't the problem; it's just that the cost-performance ratio is too low."

"So, my goal is to create powered exoskeletons!"

"Combining the concept of combat suits with the functionality of exoskeleton armor."

Lu Keran clenched her fists excitedly, looking up at Zhang Yi. "This way, even people without strong combat abilities, as long as they can master the armor, can possess power not inferior to superhumans!"

Zhang Yi blinked, feeling a surge of anticipation in his heart.

"What you're describing, is it similar to Iron Man's suit?"

Lu Keran scratched her head. "Not that exaggerated! After all, we can't condense a reactor into a tiny generator on the chest right now."

"But with my abilities, I can give it many more unexpected functions. Hehe, just look forward to it, brother!"

Lu Keran placed her hands behind her back, smiling with a mysterious air.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but chuckle.

"Alright, I've always been looking forward to little sister Keran's masterpiece!"

After returning from Mist Valley, Zhang Yi had been working hard to help the people around him improve their strength.

He didn't expect to build an exceptionally powerful team.

After all, high-level superhumans require not only sufficient talent but also massive resources to cultivate.

He just hoped the people at home could have more self-preservation abilities.

If, one day, something unexpected happened in Tianhai City and Zhang Yi couldn't protect them at all times, they would have an extra sliver of hope for survival.

And Lu Keran's mechs were actually the fastest way for ordinary people or superhumans with low talent to boost their combat power.

Zhang Yi casually picked up a piece of silver metal from the table, then looked seriously at Lu Keran.

"So, how is your research on the Divine Source going?"

Back then, Zhang Yi hadn't used all the Divine Source he obtained, keeping a tiny bit.

He was very curious about this mysterious power and wanted to know what it actually was.

So he gave this fragment of the Divine Source to Lu Keran for her to study its composition.

Lu Keran furrowed her brows, her expression turning serious.

"That thing... is miraculous, a substance I've never encountered or heard of before. I might need to spend more time researching it."

...

Zhang Yi left Lu Keran's workshop. As he walked toward the living room, he suddenly saw Liang Yue coming up from the underground training ground.

She was wearing workout clothes, her hair damp as if she had just showered.

Liang Yue was a fitness fanatic. As a martial arts grandmaster of the Huaxu Kingdom, her combat prowess was absurdly high, and this wasn't solely due to exceptional talent.

It was also because, from the moment she could walk, she spent a huge amount of time practicing every day.

Even after coming to the comfortable Shelter, she maintained the habit of waking up at five in the morning to practice martial arts.

The two of them ran into each other. Liang Yue's eyes widened slightly. Looking at Zhang Yi, she seemed to remember something, a blush appearing on her cheeks as she lowered her head and said:

"Morning!"

Zhang Yi looked at her curiously. "Morning. But why is your face red?"

Liang Yue pursed her lips. "Vitality overflowing!"

Zhang Yi clapped his hands. "Alright, alright, alright!"

Today, he would go to Blizzard City to see Zhu Yu and, by the way, discuss future cooperation terms with Zhu Zheng.

But since it was still early, he called Liang Yue over to the living room to have a good chat with her.

Currently, Hua Hua's superhuman ability index had reached an extremely high level. Although it hadn't been evaluated by a professional organization, based on Zhang Yi's experience, it should be above 9800.

That's right. After using the Divine Source, its life form had undergone a tremendous leap.

Coupled with Zhang Yi's force-feeding method of supplementing it with high-level superhuman origin energy, its strength had rapidly increased to a terrifying degree.

It could be said that in the current Jiangnan Region, Hua Hua's strength was enough to utterly defeat the vast majority of superhumans, including the other current captain-level superhumans.

However, Zhang Yi still held great expectations for Liang Yue.

In his view, with Liang Yue's foundation, as long as she continued to grow, reaching Cadillus's level wouldn't be too distant a prospect.

As for whether she would obtain a second Divine Source or similar miraculous substances in the future—such uncertain matters—Zhang Yi wouldn't dwell on them.

Chapter 1075: Happiness Above All

Liang Yue had already finished absorbing the source sprites Zhang Yi brought back for her.

The superhuman energy within her body had received a substantial boost, but this enhancement wouldn't be reflected in her combat power so quickly.

She needed time to integrate this power into her training, to let herself adapt to this brand new strength, and only then could she become even more powerful.

However, as the most talented enhancement-type empowered individual within Zhang Yi's team, Zhang Yi didn't need to worry about Liang Yue's cultivation in the slightest.

Sometimes, he even felt Liang Yue was overdoing it with her efforts, spending the majority of her day and night on cultivation.

"Soon, your power should reach the squad leader level. You'll be the most powerful superhuman in Tianhai City besides me. You'll have to help me share the burden of protecting this home, you know!"

Zhang Yi said to Liang Yue with a smile.

He deliberately omitted mentioning Hua Hua, as he didn't want Zhang Yi giving the Divine Source to Hua Hua to become a knot in Liang Yue's heart.

Liang Yue smoothed back her hair, opening her big eyes wide to glance at Zhang Yi.

She wasn't the same type of beauty as Zhou Ke'er or Yang Siya.

Purely in terms of facial features, her countenance was more resolute than those two, especially during battle, when a murderous aura would emanate from her.

However, Liang Yue was the kind of woman who grew on you; the independent, self-reliant air she carried inspired genuine respect from even Zhang Yi.

"That's a given. Even if you didn't say it, I would fight with all my strength to protect everyone!"

She paused, lowering her head and speaking softly, "I also hope to be able to help you, not always watching you go out to take risks alone like this."

A surge of warmth welled up in Zhang Yi's heart.

His gaze softened as he reached out to stroke her warm cheek.

Liang Yue's body was warm after her recent training.

"Having this intention is enough. Don't worry, next time something comes up, I'll definitely bring you along."

The trip to Star Island wasn't because Zhang Yi didn't want to bring Liang Yue and the other family members.

It was simply that the mission level was too high; even squad leader-level individuals going over there could end up as cannon fodder.

A flush rapidly spread across Liang Yue's face, coloring it all the way to the back of her ears.

"Are you going to Blizzard City today?"

She suddenly stared at Zhang Yi and asked.

Zhang Yi nodded, "That's right, need to go handle some matters. And meet some people I want to see."

Liang Yue said, "But it's still very early. Do you want to come over? It's been a long time since we practiced together."

Liang Yue's room wasn't far from Zhang Yi's.

She hadn't slept well last night. Sometimes, her desperate cultivation might not be purely out of passion.

But because she had too much pent-up energy with no outlet.

Liang Yue was 27 this year, the prime of a woman's life, a time of burgeoning vitality.

Her maternal instincts made her keenly yearn for some affection from the opposite sex.

Zhang Yi felt his lips were a bit dry. He picked up a glass of water from the table and drank it.

"Indeed, it has been a long time since we practiced together. How about we spar a bit!"

"Lately, I feel my skills have improved greatly."

Liang Yue pursed her lips, her big, beautiful eyes looking at him, "We'll only know that by trying!"

...

An hour later, Zhang Yi walked out of the underground training hall.

The time was actually still early. Usually, everyone had the habit of sleeping in, and the others hadn't gotten up yet.

But when he reached the living room, Zhang Yi heard the sound of the television.

Looking closely, it turned out to be Fatty Xu sitting on the sofa with his legs crossed.

The screen was paused on a game interface. He had one arm draped over the sofa back, his two eyebrows wriggling like caterpillars as he looked at Zhang Yi with a suggestive expression.

"Boss, you're up really early!"

Zhang Yi coughed, "Yeah, got up early to exercise a bit."

The expression on Fatty Xu's face gradually twisted, "Heh heh heh, was it training with Teacher Liang, right?"

Zhang Yi looked completely unfazed and retorted, "Teacher Liang and I have a master-disciple relationship. She has always been instructing me in martial arts. Isn't that a very normal thing?"

Seeing Zhang Yi still being stubborn, Fatty Xu couldn't help but say, "Yang Guo and Little Dragon Girl were also master and disciple, and they still got together in the end! Boss, I saw it, don't try to deny it!"

Zhang Yi turned his head to look at Fatty Xu, his face expressionless.

Fatty Xu suddenly felt a chill run down his fat neck.

He swallowed his saliva, "Actually... I was just guessing blindly, I definitely didn't see anything!"

Zhang Yi walked over with a cold laugh and slapped him on the head.

"Damn thing, what did you see!"

Fatty Xu covered his head, tears welling up in his eyes.

"Wah, boss, I just wanted you to take me to Blizzard City with you. You don't have to hit me, do you?"

Zhang Yi casually took out a towel and wiped the oil off his hand.

Fatty Xu seemed to have gotten a bit fatter recently; slapping him once left his hand greasy.

"Fatty Xu, show some restraint. Be careful you don't die on the battlefield one day, but instead collapse on a Blizzard City technician."

Fatty Xu said indignantly, "What's there to be afraid of! Back when I was so mighty and didn't die, I even awakened my superhuman ability instead. I think I'm just born with a Great Sword Sage constitution!"

Zhang Yi rolled his eyes, too lazy to listen to his nonsense.

But thinking about it carefully, Fatty Xu really had it tough.

When Zhang Yi wasn't home, he didn't dare to go out easily either. He must have had a hard time these past two weeks.

So Zhang Yi said, "Alright, then you can come with me this time."

Fatty Xu happily jumped up from the sofa, "Boss, I knew you were the best to me! Heh heh, don't worry, I'll definitely keep your and Teacher Liang's matter a secret."

Zhang Yi sneered, "Keep it a secret? What secret? In all my actions throughout my life, why would I need to explain myself to others?"

The relationship between him and Liang Yue had gradually broken through over time.

In this apocalypse, with the world order disrupted, everyone was lost about tomorrow and the future, thinking only of seizing pleasure in the moment.

So perspectives on some traditional concepts had long since become as light as a breeze and thin as a cloud.

It's just that due to certain irresistible forces, this change in relationship wasn't very convenient to state explicitly.

Seeing it was still early, Zhang Yi wasn't in a hurry to eat. He sat down on the sofa and started playing games with Fatty Xu.

"Hey, Fatty Xu. Tell me the truth, don't you really want to find a partner?"

While playing the game, Zhang Yi casually asked Fatty Xu.

Fatty Xu said offhandedly, "Bro, how many times have I said it. I no longer believe in love!"

As if suddenly remembering something, a sweet expression appeared on his face.

"Instead, every time I go to the entertainment center in Blizzard City, the masseuses there gently care about my life, soothing my soul and body. I think they are the ones who truly understand me."

"Even if it's fake, I'm happy."

"As long as a person can be happy, there's nothing wrong with living a lifetime in a lie."

Chapter 1076: A Grand Welcome

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow after hearing Fatty Xu's words and didn't say anything more.

He actually agreed with Fatty Xu's theory.

The difference between Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu, however, was that Zhang Yi believed in the existence of love.

But a long time ago, he had already stopped believing such a thing would appear in his own life.

If not for the arrival of the Apocalypse, he probably wouldn't have had any emotional or physical connection with a woman in his entire life.

As for the feelings born from gathering together due to harsh external circumstances and comforting each other, could they be called love?

It wasn't important, and Zhang Yi didn't really care.

He had always been someone who only considered the results. At the very least, they were living together very comfortably and harmoniously now, and that was enough.

After finishing lunch, Zhang Yi leisurely took Fatty Xu to Blizzard City.

Before setting off, he carefully checked all his weapons and equipment once again.

While White Owl and Thunderbolt couldn't unleash his full current power, the compound bow he obtained from Baldier was quite good.

Additionally, he naturally had to bring his royal cat, Hua Hua.

Fatty Xu asked curiously, "Boss, with your current strength, is there anyone among those rookies in Blizzard City who could be your match? Is it necessary to be this careful?"

Zhang Yi said calmly, "Even if the probability is only one in ten thousand, I must guard against Zhu Zheng turning against me."

He didn't trust anyone.

Fatty Xu was greatly shocked. His expression suddenly turned serious as he held his chin with one hand and muttered to himself, "Right... when I went to Blizzard City for those massages before, could they have secretly done something to me? Damn, the more I think about it, the scarier it gets!"

Fatty Xu shuddered. He felt that some things shouldn't be pondered too deeply. Once you started thinking that way, everything around you seemed full of danger.

"I'll just obediently cling to your thigh from now on, boss!" Fatty Xu said, sidling up to Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi gave him a kick in the butt with annoyance. "Get in the car!"

Fatty Xu drove while Zhang Yi sat in the back seat, with Hua Hua curled up on his lap. Then they headed towards Xiaomiaoshan Subway Station.

Not long after, they boarded the special train arranged by Blizzard City and traveled all the way to Blizzard City.

Actually, for Zhang Yi, using his spatial traversal ability would be much faster.

Now, his spatial traversal range had increased to 3 kilometers. He could cover these few hundred kilometers in just a few minutes.

But he didn't like using his abilities casually.

Because doing so might expose his true capabilities, allowing others to calculate his ability data.

So, Zhang Yi and the others took the underground special train for over an hour to reach Blizzard City.

Zhang Yi wasn't worried about sudden attacks.

All Things Follow Traces, which had fused with Echo of Time, possessed both active and passive abilities.

When he wasn't consciously targeting a specific person or thing, it automatically detected danger for Zhang Yi.

Only when he actively activated the ability could he predict the activity trajectory of a specific person or object within the next two seconds.

"Hiss—"

After the special train arrived at the station, the doors made a familiar steam sound and quickly opened.

Zhang Yi looked outside the doors. The usually quiet and deserted Blizzard City subway station was now densely packed with people.

At a glance, hundreds of people stood there, arranged in row after row. Moreover, decorations were hung everywhere, making the scene look as festive and lively as the New Year.

Behind them, over a dozen banners were held high, with contents that basically read:

"Warmly Welcome Captain Chaos's Triumphant Return from Star Island!"

"Salute to the Great Hero of Huaxu Kingdom, Guardian Deity of the Jiangnan Region, the Supreme Captain of the Celestial Hound Squad, Chaos!"

...

This scene made Zhang Yi's memory blur for a moment.

The last time he saw such a grand spectacle was when he first met Gao Changkong, that guy returning from his expedition against the mutated beast clans at Beiting Lake.

And this time, the scene was far more magnificent than that one.

Mainly because the people who came to welcome him were all the high-level officials of Blizzard City, including the two investigation team captains, Deng Shentong and Linghu Feixue.

As for Lu Huang and Jingwei, one was severely injured and hadn't recovered, while the other had a status similar to a covert guard, unsuitable for appearing publicly, so they didn't show up.

Zhang Yi's old friend Baili Changqing and the members of the Celestial Hound Squad were also conspicuously present here.

A slight smile curled at the corner of Zhang Yi's mouth. He thought to himself: Old Zhu is really thoughtful.

Although he wasn't deeply moved, Old Zhu's sincerity was definitely at its peak.

Behind Zhang Yi, Fatty Xu looked at this grand reception, his jaw dropping in shock. He nervously swallowed several mouthfuls of saliva.

He muttered to himself, "I'm just here for a foot massage and wellness treatment. Do they need to be this grand? It seems the economy in Blizzard City isn't doing too well right now."

With Hua Hua perched on his shoulder, Zhang Yi leisurely stepped out. Fatty Xu hurriedly followed behind him.

Zhu Zheng, wearing a brown military overcoat with his graying hair neatly combed, walked over with a beaming smile.

"Captain Chaos, you've finally arrived! Do you know that all of us have been waiting for the arrival of our great hero!"

Zhang Yi shook hands with Zhu Zheng. True to his military background, Old Zhu's right hand was strong and forceful.

Zhang Yi smiled faintly. "I wouldn't dare, I wouldn't dare. This operation was a result of everyone's concerted efforts. All glory belongs to Blizzard City and the organization. My personal contribution is insignificant."

Zhu Zheng looked at Zhang Yi with a reproachful expression. "Look at you, being modest again!"

At that moment, a group of stunningly beautiful young women ran out from behind, holding bouquets of flowers. Shouting Zhang Yi's name, they rushed over.

These girls were all exceptionally beautiful. A few of the more outstanding ones could even rival Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya in terms of looks.

However, Zhang Yi quickly understood their identity.

He glanced at Fatty Xu. "It's your turn to step up!"

Fatty Xu's eyes had already glazed over when he saw these beautiful girls.

Seeing Zhang Yi being so righteous, he excitedly snorted two plumes of white steam from his nose, his grin stretching almost to his ears.

He swaggered over. "Heh heh, thank you all for such a warm welcome! Come on, come on, no need to rush! Line up, everyone. Photos are fine, give all the flowers to me!"

Seeing this, Zhu Zheng raised an eyebrow.

According to the intelligence he had received, there were many beautiful women in Zhang Yi's Shelter.

So he wanted to win Zhang Yi over from this angle.

Therefore, the women selected this time were all formerly famous movie stars or top models.

He hadn't expected Zhang Yi's self-control to be so strong.

His opinion of Zhang Yi rose even higher in his heart, but he also felt quite regretful.

But since the people were already arranged, it wouldn't be bad to build good relations with those around Zhang Yi. So he simply let Fatty Xu have his way.

Chapter 1077: Bipolar Reversal

Zhang Yi simply smiled at Zhu Zheng's tactics.

His defensive mindset was extremely strong; even now, he remained constantly vigilant.

Naturally, he wouldn't accept the sugar-coated bullets Zhu Zheng was sending his way.

Fortunately, he had brought Fatty Xu along this time, so he could let him handle the 'digestion'.

Soon after, others also came over to congratulate Zhang Yi on his successful promotion to Epsilon.

They were all familiar faces, like Deng Shentong, Linghu Feixue, and a group of Celestial Hound Squad members including Baili Changqing.

Linghu Feixue was still holding a grudge over Zhang Yi hiding the truth and didn't give him a very pleasant look.

Zhang Yi couldn't be bothered with her either. He turned his head and warmly greeted Deng Shentong.

"Old Deng, why didn't your uncle come? Come to think of it, I haven't seen him in a long time. I was actually thinking of paying him a visit later!"

Upon hearing this, Deng Shentong gave Zhang Yi a deep look, then casually stole a glance at Zhu Zheng.

Sure enough, Zhu Zheng's expression underwent a subtle change.

As the current supreme commander of Blizzard City, he naturally didn't want Zhang Yi getting too close to other factions.

And Zhang Yi deliberately mentioning Deng Yuanbo in front of so many people was also a way of giving Zhu Zheng a little warning.

Everyone understood each other's thoughts perfectly well.

It's just that you have to understand certain rules of the game, otherwise people won't take you seriously.

Deng Shentong said to Zhang Yi with a beaming smile, "My uncle has been talking about you too, saying you're a once-in-a-generation genius. The Jiangnan Region is fortunate to have you!"

Lan Xincheng walked over at this moment, interrupting their conversation.

He gave Zhang Yi a slight bow and said with an ingratiating smile, "Captain Chaos, you must be tired from your long journey. It's freezing outside. How about heading to the tea room at the Command Center for some rest?"

Zhang Yi's purpose in coming here was also to find Zhu Zheng and Zhu Yu.

However, there were too many people here, and he didn't spot anyone resembling Zhu Yu near Zhu Zheng.

Zhang Yi nodded. "That sounds good."

He pointed at Fatty Xu, who was surrounded by a group of beauties, and said, "This friend of mine came with me. He's a bit rough around the edges, so let's not have him disturb the leadership. Just find him a place to rest!"

Fatty Xu was currently grinning from ear to ear with a silly smile.

"Hehe, I'm done for, I'm surrounded by beauties!"

With a single glance from Zhu Zheng, someone immediately came over to await orders.

Zhu Zheng said, "Arrange a good place for this Mr. Xu. Let him rest well, comfortably."

His subordinate understood and immediately went to invite Fatty Xu and those young ladies to leave by car.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi and Zhu Zheng took Zhu Zheng's private car to the new Operations Command Center.

Once in the car, Zhang Yi asked, "What about your goddaughter?"

Zhu Zheng replied, "Her condition is still unstable. She spends most of her time in the laboratory."

Zhang Yi said with a meaningful smile, "The most cutting-edge technology in all of Blizzard City is on her, right?"

Zhu Zheng, of course, caught the sarcasm in Zhang Yi's words.

This was Zhang Yi mocking him for giving the best resources to Zhu Yu while being stingy with Zhang Yi.

He smiled bitterly. "We did indeed have a plan to create an Epsilon. Zhang Yi, you know that among the Six Major Regions of Huaxu Kingdom, the strength of our Jiangnan Region is relatively low."

"Before you came along, we might even have been the weakest."

"There was no other way. The central plains region has always been the heartland for economic and agricultural development. In the past, we faced no external threats and had no need to develop military power."

"But now, the situation has changed abruptly, something no one could have predicted."

He looked at Zhang Yi. "I still need to have my own core team, don't you agree?"

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, unmoved by Zhu Zheng's tale of woe.

"Yes, you're right."

This indifferent tone made Zhu Zheng feel rather helpless.

"I admit, the supply of resources to you back then was indeed restricted. But that also had to do with you. You were always operating outside of Blizzard City. How could I feel confident about pouring all our resources into cultivating you?"

Zhang Yi was growing somewhat impatient.

These old-timers always loved lecturing the younger generation with a paternalistic air.

Zhu Zheng thought he was good at psychological manipulation, but he didn't realize that Zhang Yi's generation of young people didn't like being lectured.

"You have your rules, and I have my ideas. So discussing this is pointless. I don't need to understand your difficulties, do I?"

Zhu Zheng's breath hitched.

In the past, who would dare speak to him like that?

But now, Zhang Yi's wings had hardened. He already had the capital to speak to Zhu Zheng as an equal, and Zhu Zheng could do nothing about it.

He thought for a moment, then tapped on the smart device on his wrist. A list appeared before Zhang Yi.

"Alright then, I'll switch to a method you prefer. Zhang Yi, the supplies on this list represent my sincerity."

"I hope you can let bygones be bygones and continue to support me in the future."

When Zhang Yi saw the list, his gaze immediately became focused.

With just a quick scan, he realized it was indeed a display of immense sincerity!

Food, daily necessities, weapons and equipment, medicine... all sorts of supplies were there.

He casually scrolled, and there was a long list below.

The unit for each item wasn't KG, but T!

Zhang Yi thought to himself: This old geezer is quite sensible this time. The sincerity shown is quite substantial.

He roughly estimated that these supplies would account for at least 20% of Blizzard City's total reserves.

This time, Zhu Zheng was definitely making a huge sacrifice.

Well, strictly speaking, it was Blizzard City making the huge sacrifice.

Zhang Yi was actually quite satisfied internally, but on the surface, he remained expressionless.

"These things... I'm actually not lacking them."

Zhang Yi said nonchalantly.

He already had most of the common supplies in his possession.

However, he indeed didn't have some of the special medicines and large-scale weapon systems listed.

But he had to say it this way to negotiate what came next.

Hearing Zhang Yi's words, Zhu Zheng couldn't help but twitch at the corner of his eye.

He had shown such great sincerity, and Zhang Yi was still not satisfied?

Suppressing his temper, he looked at Zhang Yi and said, "It's true that you now have the ability to acquire many supplies, but some things are only available through the military. You can't get them from anywhere else."

A smile played on Zhang Yi's lips. "You're right. Some things do need to be obtained from you. However, this list doesn't contain what I want to see."

Hearing this, Zhu Zheng actually felt somewhat relieved internally.

It was good if Zhang Yi had clear demands. The worst was someone with no desires or needs.

"Go ahead, what do you want?"

Zhang Yi patted his own thigh and said leisurely, "I want to enhance the overall combat power of Tianhai City! So I need you to provide the technology and drugs for training superhumans."

"Also, I need access to your most cutting-edge weapons technology. The kind that can convert superhuman energy into weapons... Well, I don't really know what that thing is. But I know you definitely have it."

Chapter 1078: Reunion

When Zhang Yi mentioned these things, Zhu Zheng's expression immediately turned serious.

Weapons were one thing, but genetic technology was Blizzard City's core secret.

If it were leaked, Zhang Yi could potentially even recreate a new Blizzard City.

Zhu Zheng had no intention of sharing leadership with Zhang Yi.

He thought for a moment and said to Zhang Yi, "Genetic technology is a core secret of the Huaxu Kingdom. It's highly unlikely you'll get it, and other regions wouldn't allow it either. However, if you just want to help the superhumans of Tianhai City improve their strength, we can certainly help you with that."

"As for the weapon technology you mentioned, it's the most advanced energy-storage laser weapon technology currently available. That... well, I can actually meet your needs on that front. After all, you are the highest combat asset in my Jiangnan Region, and I'd be happy to see you grow stronger."

Zhang Yi's eyelids drooped, his face expressionless.

Zhu Zheng's answer was within his expectations.

Weapons could be given, but genetic technology was out of the question.

"Then give me more genetic drugs! Tianhai City is too dangerous now. You know I've offended many nations this time. They all hate me to the core."

"If they ever sneak-attack Tianhai City when I'm not around, I need the people close to me to have the ability to protect themselves."

This time, Zhu Zheng agreed quite readily.

Giving the technology was a no-go, but giving the drugs wasn't a big issue.

Of course, if he knew that Zhang Yi's household included a superhuman capable of analyzing drug components and a professional talent in the medical field, he might reconsider his stance.

Given Lu Keran and Zhou Ke'er's current capabilities, given enough time, it was entirely possible for them to replicate such drugs.

With emotions set aside and only interests discussed, the exchange between Zhang Yi and Zhu Zheng became noticeably smoother.

From start to finish, Zhang Yi didn't even mention Jingwei monitoring him.

Zhu Zheng also didn't bring up how Zhang Yi secretly went and obtained the Divine Source, deceived everyone, and made Zhu Zheng take the blame.

Some things were better left understood without being spoken aloud.

Since they weren't going to tear off the mask, all issues could be negotiated; they were just bargaining chips on the table.

Smart people didn't need to dwell on such matters; real, tangible benefits were what mattered.

"I want to meet your goddaughter."

Zhang Yi brought it up again.

Hearing this, Zhu Zheng let out another heavy sigh.

"She doesn't really like meeting outsiders."

It was clear Zhu Zheng wasn't keen on letting Zhang Yi meet Zhu Yu.

But Zhang Yi had his own insistence, "I'm not an outsider. Strictly speaking, she and I are old acquaintances."

Zhu Zheng had no choice. He said to Zhang Yi, "Alright, I'll take you to see her later."

Zhang Yi followed Zhu Zheng to the newly built Operations Command Center building.

Zhu Zheng led Zhang Yi to the Research Department.

Zhang Yi met the Minister and Chief Expert of the Research Department, Li Lingxue. Her hands were stuffed in the pockets of her white lab coat, she wore a pair of very thick black-rimmed glasses, and her hair was casually pinned up with a ballpoint pen.

Her facial features were well-proportioned, but she had thick dark circles under her eyes, giving the impression she never got enough sleep.

"Commander Zhu, and... Chaos? Welcome, welcome!"

Li Lingxue walked over lazily, using polite, formulaic words.

Zhu Zheng, seemingly accustomed to her attitude, smiled and said, "Where's Zhu Yu? Zhang Yi wants to see her."

Li Lingxue replied, "She's playing."

Zhang Yi, "Playing?"

A clone superhuman in whom Blizzard City had invested enormous resources and placed high hopes actually had time to play?

Li Lingxue explained, "From a biological perspective, her physical age is only ten. But from a life experience perspective, she's less than a year old. It's natural for a child of that age to enjoy playing."

"To ensure the healthy development of the experimental subject, we must take care of her emotional well-being."

Zhang Yi curled his lip, "How very humane of you!"

Zhu Zheng and Li Lingxue ignored Zhang Yi's sarcasm.

Li Lingxue led the way, taking the two of them deep into the research center.

Li Lingxue opened a thick alloy door.

What greeted their eyes was a sea of deathly Barbie pink.

It was a huge playground, filled with dolls, balloons, and various children's toys like rainbow ponies.

This was completely different from what Zhang Yi had imagined.

He had assumed that Zhu Yu, as a killing machine cultivated by Blizzard City, would live in a place of cold metallic colors, with an icy tone throughout.

He never expected to see such a scene.

In the playground, a girl with long silver hair and skin as pale as snow, like a porcelain doll that might shatter at a touch, sat among a pile of foam toys, looking at the group with curiosity.

Seeing Zhu Yu, Zhu Zheng's face broke into a wide smile, "Zhu Yu, this is Uncle Zhang Yi. He's here to see you!"

Zhu Yu's large eyes looked at Zhang Yi. Those amber eyes held a pureness without a trace of impurity.

Her eyes held only curiosity.

Facing her, however, Zhang Yi's entire body was on high alert.

If this girl made any attempt to attack him, or if his [All Things Follow Traces] instinct sensed her intent to attack, he would strike first immediately.

Even now, as an Epsilon-level superhuman, Zhang Yi still couldn't forget the immense pressure that woman had brought him back then.

Battles between top-tier superhumans were always decided in an instant, determining life and death.

The stronger he became, the more cautious Zhang Yi grew internally.

Because he realized one thing—even as an Epsilon, if he lost focus on the battlefield, leading to a misjudgment...

Then, if he failed to activate [Manifold Phenomena] for even a brief moment...

He could potentially be killed by a close-combat superhuman of only Gamma-level.

Of course, this was only a theoretical possibility.

But as long as a theoretical possibility existed, Zhang Yi was unwilling to take that risk.

Zhang Yi looked at Zhu Yu, narrowing his eyes slightly.

"With her like this, if you don't train her properly, how do you expect her to fight?"

Zhang Yi glanced at Zhu Zheng and Li Lingxue.

He suspected everything happening today was just a show put on for his benefit alone.

Li Lingxue adjusted her black-rimmed glasses and said unhurriedly:

"Her ability is extremely powerful; she can absorb the abilities of other superhumans. As long as her level is high enough and she masters a sufficient variety of abilities, she will naturally possess immense power."

"Besides, I'm a scientist, not a martial arts coach."

Zhang Yi looked at Zhu Yu. Zhu Zheng was actually a bit nervous inside; he couldn't quite grasp Zhang Yi's thoughts either.

After a long moment, Zhang Yi said, "I want to fight her."

Zhu Zheng was shocked.

"Zhang Yi... this... is that necessary? She hasn't broken through yet. How could she possibly be your match?"

Zhang Yi said calmly, "Don't misunderstand. I bear no ill will towards her. I just want to see how big the gap is between her and Yuan Kongye."

And, incidentally, gauge how much of a threat this girl posed to him.

Chapter 1079: A Huge Gap

Zhu Zheng still insisted, "But she's just a child!"

Zhang Yi looked at him calmly, with a smile on his face, but his eyes were unyielding.

"A bullet fired from a gun in a child's hand can kill just as effectively as one from an adult's!"

"Don't worry, we're just sparring. I won't go too hard."

Although Zhang Yi's tone was gentle, he didn't leave Zhu Zheng any room for negotiation.

If Zhu Zheng refused, he would lose Zhang Yi's trust, and the foundation of mutual trust between them would crumble.

Helplessly, Zhu Zheng could only nod in agreement.

"But you must promise not to harm her."

"Of course, I wouldn't bully a child."

Zhang Yi promised.

He certainly wouldn't harm Zhu Yu.

He would only kill her outright if he felt this girl posed a threat to him.

Zhu Zheng was extremely frustrated, but he had no choice but to have Li Lingxue inform Zhu Yu of this decision.

Li Lingxue walked over to Zhu Yu's side and said to her with a smile,

"Little Zhu Yu, this uncle wants to play a game with you. It's like dodgeball. You need to dodge all his attacks, and if you can hit him with your ability, you win."

Zhu Yu was confused and naive. She didn't understand what combat was. These things were all taught to her by Li Lingxue and others specially assigned to instruct her in fighting.

In her view, it was just a kind of game.

On Zhang Yi's shoulder, Hua Hua stared at the girl with a strange look in its eyes. Zhang Yi patted its head.

If any unexpected situation arose here, Hua Hua would be the first to eliminate all threats.

A beast with a superhuman ability index of 9,800 points and the potential to reach the Epsilon level was more than enough to sweep through the entire Blizzard City!

The two of them arrived deep within the research center.

After the Martial Arena defected, the research center had built a brand-new combat training ground.

The special materials used here could withstand the energy released by Epsilon-level superhumans during practice.

Zhang Yi and Zhu Yu stood facing each other.

Manifold Phenomena activated instantly, enveloping the entire training hall in a flash!

This entire space was filled with his Dimensional Gates.

Around Zhang Yi himself, dozens of Dimensional Gates formed a polyhedral barrier.

Sixtyfold spatial acceleration activated, pushing his speed to the limit.

All Things Follow Traces also locked onto Zhu Yu.

After making all these preparations, Zhang Yi gestured towards her, "Begin!"

Zhu Yu's gaze was as clear as a spring.

She slowly raised her right hand. In that instant, a raging storm surged around her. Over a dozen massive tornadoes howled as they charged towards Zhang Yi!

Then, in the very next moment, they all vanished into the Dimensional Space.

A flicker of curiosity appeared in Zhu Yu's eyes.

"Is this the power of the spatial type?"

Her small, pale hand flipped over. The surrounding air suddenly became extremely cold. Vast sheets of frost, centered at her feet, began spreading towards all surrounding areas!

The frigid air tried to find a flaw in Zhang Yi's defense to seep through.

But it, too, was absorbed by the Dimensional Gates that covered the entire training hall.

Seeing that her two attempts had achieved no results, and that the man in the distance hadn't moved an inch yet had easily neutralized all her attacks, Zhu Yu couldn't help but feel a bit impatient inside.

So, she spread her hands open, and even more ferocious attacks were launched at Zhang Yi!

Watching Zhu Yu simultaneously use multiple superhuman abilities to attack him, Zhang Yi couldn't help but think of that Yuan Kongye from back then.

However, the current Zhu Yu's strength was far inferior to Yuan Kongye's from that year.

Her superhuman ability index was probably around 9,900 points. She might truly be just one step away from the Epsilon level.

One could imagine how many resources Zhu Zheng had invested in her and how much effort he had poured into her.

However, a clone was ultimately just a clone. No one could perfectly replicate Yuan Kongye using only half the genes.

Zhu Yu's methods of attack were like a baby's play in front of Zhang Yi, who was known as the Absolute Defense.

As for Li Lingxue and Zhu Zheng watching from the sidelines, although they were mentally prepared and knew Zhu Yu was no match for Zhang Yi, they hadn't expected Zhang Yi to handle it so effortlessly.

From their perspective, Zhang Yi was simply standing there, not moving an inch from start to finish.

Yet, none of Zhu Yu's attacks could approach the space within ten meters of his body.

They were completely not on the same level. The gap was far too obvious.

"That's about enough."

In Zhang Yi's mind, he now understood the concept of this so-called imperfect clone.

Perhaps one day in the future, she might truly become an Epsilon, but she would definitely not be as powerful as Yuan Kongye.

At the very least, in the short term, she wouldn't become a threat to Zhang Yi.

"Let's end it here."

Zhang Yi raised his right hand and clenched it in the air. The entire space of the training hall twisted, and all of Zhu Yu's offensive momentum was instantly dismantled!

The entire space fell silent, as if nothing had ever happened.

Zhu Yu stared blankly at Zhang Yi before her, her big eyes filled with confusion.

She didn't understand why this uncle playing the game with her was different from those people before.

Many of her previous playmates had ended up torn to pieces or, like a magic trick, turned into a puddle of red liquid.

"Uncle, you're amazing!"

Zhu Yu said with genuine admiration, smiling.

Zhang Yi gave a faint smile, "You're not bad either. Let's stop here for today!"

Zhu Yu nodded, "Mhm, mhm. So when will you come play with me next time, Uncle?"

Zhang Yi chuckled, "If there's a chance, I'll naturally come keep you company."

He put his hands in his pockets and stepped back, leaving the training hall step by step.

The looks in Zhu Zheng and Li Lingxue's eyes as they watched him had changed.

Zhu Zheng's held reverence, while Li Lingxue's was more like looking at a rare beast.

"Captain Chaos, could you cooperate with my research? I really want to see what your gene sequence looks like now!"

Li Lingxue said to Zhang Yi with great earnestness.

Hearing this, Zhu Zheng immediately scolded, "Professor Li! That's too impolite!"

Only then did Li Lingxue realize she had been too abrupt. However, as a researcher, she truly wanted to know to what extent human evolution could reach.

"Sorry, Chaos. But if you're willing to cooperate with my research, I believe we have a great chance of unraveling the mysteries of human evolution!"

Li Lingxue still wore a very serious expression.

Zhang Yi chuckled and waved his hand, "Sorry, but I have absolutely no interest."

A trace of regret appeared on Zhu Zheng's face as he said to Zhang Yi, "She was originally just one step away. But that one step, she just couldn't cross it."

"The Epsilon level... it really depends on talent. It's indeed very difficult to achieve!"

Zhang Yi asked with a playful tone, "So you had Jingwei follow me, trying to get the Divine Source from me?"

Chapter 1080: Visiting the Deng Family

Zhu Zheng argued, "I just thought, if you could obtain the Divine Source, then you'd only need to give her a tiny bit, just a tiny bit would be enough."

Zhang Yi shook his head.

"She is not Yuan Kongye after all. But for you, having such a guardian deity is sufficient."

Zhu Zheng, however, looked at Zhang Yi seriously.

"What matters most is still your stance."

Zhang Yi stretched lazily, then said to Zhu Zheng with a smile, "You know me, I've never had the slightest interest in the power struggles within Blizzard City."

"Whoever can bring me the greatest benefit, I will help them."

"Looking at it now, our cooperation has been quite pleasant. If I don't support you, who would I support?"

Zhu Zheng's expression relaxed somewhat.

Zhang Yi suddenly added, "By the way, can I collect my supplies now? I made an appointment with Deng Yuanbo, and I need to visit the Deng Family later."

Zhu Zheng's lips twitched slightly as he smiled, "Of course, everything is prepared for you! I originally planned to give them to you after the victory banquet ended, but I didn't expect you to be in such a hurry."

Zhang Yi said calmly, "In my hometown, the custom is to visit guests after lunch. That way, you don't trouble the host. I came after eating, so a victory banquet or anything like that is unnecessary."

Seeing this, Zhu Zheng nodded. He understood Zhang Yi's personality.

In the past, Zhang Yi would still be polite with him.

But now, the power dynamic between Zhang Yi and him had reversed, so there was naturally no need to deliberately curry favor.

"Alright then, uh, Xincheng. Take Zhang Yi to collect the supplies!"

Secretary Lan Xincheng walked over and said respectfully to Zhang Yi, "Captain, please follow me! The supplies are already prepared for you, just waiting for you to collect them."

Zhang Yi followed Lan Xincheng by car to the storage area.

This was a heavily guarded military zone.

After getting out of the car, Zhang Yi saw several familiar faces at the entrance of the storage area.

They were superhumans from the Outer City.

Back during the encirclement of the Moon of Corrosion, Zhang Yi had fought alongside them.

He vaguely remembered their names: Chen Xiaoxiao, Peng Li, and Yuan Hao. The others, he couldn't quite recall.

Zhang Yi looked at Lan Xincheng, "Are these people also nourishment for Zhu Yu?"

Lan Xincheng shook his head, "How could that be? They are all Delta-level superhumans, possessing cultivation value."

He explained to Zhang Yi, "Blizzard City's combat strength has suffered severe losses. After several battles, squad leader-level figures have also suffered many casualties, not to mention the superhumans below them."

"Therefore, we need to replenish our forces from outside. So, whenever we discover superhumans with potential, we absorb them."

Hearing this, Zhang Yi felt rather emotional.

"Don't you have any way to identify a superhuman's talent? Like genetic testing or something similar?"

When he first came to Blizzard City, he had wanted to inquire about such things.

To test people from the major bases in Tianhai City and see if there were any geniuses among them.

For example, Lu Dahai was a superhuman who suddenly awakened.

The survivors in Tianhai City numbered less than twenty thousand; those who lived were all elites. It was even possible that among them existed superhumans with Epsilon-level potential.

After the Apocalypse, many people possessed extremely strong talents, but those who could successfully awaken and survive were less than one in a hundred.

In the world, there must first be a Bole, and then there can be a thousand-li horse.

Thousand-li horses are common, but a Bole is rare.

Who knows how many people with extremely high talent died in the Apocalypse before they could even utilize their abilities.

Lan Xincheng shook his head.

"The Apocalypse has only descended for about a year. Various technologies are still developing and are far from mature. So, we cannot perform such identification either."

"But the higher-ups have already realized this and have started focusing on discovering and cultivating talent among the lower ranks."

Zhang Yi inwardly sneered.

After the Apocalypse descended, out of the tens of millions of people in Jinling City, ninety percent were eventually driven out of Blizzard City.

Among those people, how many Deltas, or even Epsilons, were buried and died?

Zhang Yi believed there must have been quite a few.

Just like him, if he hadn't been extremely cautious time and again, facing various dangers, he might have died long ago.

But now, Zhu Zheng had also realized this problem and was starting to remedy it.

Probably in the future, powerful superhumans would appear in large numbers due to the attention from above.

Zhang Yi got out of the car. Chen Xiaoxiao and the others were leading patrols. Now that they had come to Blizzard City, they were already mid-level officers.

Seeing Zhang Yi, their eyes lit up, but then they remembered Zhang Yi's status and saluted with solemn respect.

Zhang Yi nodded towards them, acknowledging the old acquaintances.

Chen Xiaoxiao and Peng Li were very excited. After Zhang Yi walked past, they looked at each other and smiled.

A big shot like Zhang Yi actually still remembered them! They felt particularly proud inside.

Lan Xincheng had someone open a huge warehouse.

The area of this warehouse was no smaller than that giant supermarket warehouse Zhang Yi had emptied back then.

Inside, supplies of all kinds were available, along with a large amount of weaponry and equipment, even including heavy weapons.

Of course, these weapons were basically already phased out in the military.

Not because they weren't powerful enough, but because they were too bulky and heavy, unsuitable for use in the Ice Age.

At most, they could be used as city defense weapons, where they could instead display considerable power.

Giving them to Zhang Yi would just allow them to serve their greatest purpose.

Zhang Yi unceremoniously raised a hand. Manifold Phenomena instantly stored all the supplies into his Dimensional Space, placing them somewhere within the Three Thousand Worlds.

Lan Xincheng said, "The technical blueprints and materials for the laser emitters you requested, as well as the genetic drugs, we need to prepare those. We'll deliver them to you shortly."

Zhang Yi nodded, "I'm going to the Deng Family. Have someone wait at the subway station. I'll collect them when I leave."

"Yes, Captain Chaos!"

Even someone as arrogant as Lan Xincheng had now completely abandoned all his pride before Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi took a car to the Deng Estate.

Visiting the Deng Family was actually just a casual move, meant to warn Zhu Zheng.

He could cooperate with any faction in Blizzard City at any time. If Zhu Zheng ever betrayed Zhang Yi, Zhang Yi would have the ability to support a new faction to take power.

Unexpectedly, after arriving at the Deng Family and meeting Deng Yuanbo and Deng Shentong, he actually gained some surprising insights.

The two received Zhang Yi. Deng Yuanbo proactively brought up the matter of the Mist Valley abyss with Zhang Yi.

"I heard that you released a demon in Mist Valley?"

Upon hearing this, Zhang Yi's hand holding the teacup froze mid-air.

"Demon? What do you mean by that?"

Zhang Yi asked calmly.

Deng Yuanbo wouldn't mention this for no reason; there must be another motive.

Deng Yuanbo smiled faintly.

"Our Deng Family has some connections in Shengjing as well, so we have some understanding of the Divine Source. To be blunt, we might even know more about it than the major administrative region does."