

## **Ice Age 551**

### Chapter 551: Laying the Cards on the Table

Kong Sheng's words had everyone nodding in agreement.

Meng Siyu rested her chin on her hand in frustration. "If he joins the investigation team, I'm applying for a transfer to another squad. Hmph!"

Everyone knew she was just venting.

Squad assignments were determined by the higher-ups—switching teams wasn't that easy.

The usually silent sharpshooter, Qi Guangming, suddenly spoke up.

"What if... we don't report his achievements to the district? Then he wouldn't be able to become our captain, would he?"

The moment he said this, the room fell into stunned silence!

Not because no one else had thought of it—

But because no one had dared to say it out loud.

Withholding information and hiding key intelligence was a serious crime.

If the higher-ups in the district found out, they could be labeled as traitors and executed!

Meng Siyu stared at him in shock. "Are you insane? How can you even suggest that?"

Qi Guangming took a deep breath and spread his hands.

"I was just thinking out loud."

The group fell into a heavy silence. This topic was too dangerous.

But despite themselves, they all found their gazes drifting toward the door.

With Bian Junwu dead, Vice Captain Baili Changqing had taken over as the temporary leader. He was the most respected member of the squad now.

If they were going to do this, the decision had to come from him.

Zhang Yi led Baili Changqing away from the others.

They entered a quiet room next door, which happened to be a recreational billiards room.

Zhang Yi leaned against the pool table, dropping the arrogant smirk from his face.

His sharp gaze locked onto Baili Changqing.

“Brother Baili, do you support me becoming the captain?”

Baili Changqing’s eyes flickered with an unreadable emotion, but he maintained a friendly smile.

“With the merit you’ve earned, even without my support, the higher-ups would likely choose you.”

Zhang Yi nodded.

“You’re right.”

“As long as you report my achievements truthfully, and given my current strength, the higher-ups will have no choice but to appoint me as captain.”

Baili Changqing took a deep breath through his nose.

“I don’t want to discourage you, but things aren’t as simple as you think.”

“There are only six elite investigation teams in all of Jiangnan District. Each one is formed through a rigorous selection process, consisting of the strongest Superhumans.”

“And the selection of a captain is even stricter—it’s practically inhumane.”

“Even though you’ve achieved great things, you’re still a newcomer.”

Baili Changqing scratched the back of his head and gave a sheepish smile.

“Of course, I’m not saying it’s impossible. I just don’t want you to get your hopes up too high, so consider this a little reality check.”

Zhang Yi chuckled. “I appreciate your concern. But I’m confident.”

Baili Changqing’s expression tightened.

He looked at Zhang Yi. “Can I ask you something? Your current strength... exactly how strong are you?”

“Stronger than Bian Junwu.”

Zhang Yi answered before he could even finish his sentence.

At this point, Zhang Yi had developed abilities that were even more powerful than Bian Junwu’s [Annihilation]—and without any side effects.

In terms of overall combat ability, he had already surpassed the former captain.

Baili Changqing was momentarily stunned, then a look of realization crossed his face.

His fists clenched unconsciously, but he quickly relaxed them.

He looked at Zhang Yi and smiled. “You might already be at the Epsilon-tier of Superhumans. If that’s the case, then you do have the qualifications to be our captain.”

Epsilon-tier—a level of Superhuman so powerful that ordinary logic no longer applied to them.

If Zhang Yi had truly reached this level, then no matter how many flaws he had, he was still more than qualified to be captain.

Zhang Yi pondered for a moment before shaking his head. "I don't think I'm quite there yet."

Bian Junwu had once explained that Delta-tier was a major dividing line for Superhumans.

The biggest difference was whether or not someone possessed the [Devour] ability.

Beyond that, the distinctions between tiers were much more ambiguous.

Most of the time, classification was determined by specialized scientific institutions within major factions.

Otherwise, only Epsilon-tier Superhumans themselves could accurately judge their own level.

Based on his own experience, Zhang Yi was certain he hadn't reached that stage yet.

After all, when Yuan Kongye had just ascended to Epsilon-tier, the power he displayed was nothing short of apocalyptic.

Baili Changqing smiled. “The more you downplay yourself, the more confident you sound.”

Zhang Yi noticed a hint of disappointment on Baili Changqing’s face.

If Zhang Yi’s strength was similar to his, he might still have a shot at becoming captain.

But now, he knew he was far weaker.

Zhang Yi was young, yet overwhelmingly powerful.

If Zhang Yi became captain, Baili Changqing might never have another chance in his lifetime.

But then, Zhang Yi’s lips curled into a meaningful smile.

“What’s wrong? Are you giving up so easily?”

Baili Changqing frowned. “What do you mean by that?”

Zhang Yi waved a hand dismissively. “Come on, don’t pretend. You really don’t want to be captain?”

Baili Changqing let out a hearty laugh.

“Well, maybe I did consider it in the past. But—” his expression grew serious, and he looked Zhang Yi in the eyes. “The investigation team needs a strong leader. You’re more qualified than I am.”

The investigation team constantly danced on the edge of life and death.

They were all elite warriors, but in this apocalyptic world, no one could claim invincibility.

To maintain order in Jiangnan District, they often had to face unimaginable threats.

They had already lost several teammates in the past.

And in the battle for Tianhai City, even their strongest captain had perished.

At a time like this, ambition was natural—but it could never take priority over survival.

However, Zhang Yi’s response took him by surprise.

“That’s not entirely true. In reality, I wasn’t the biggest reason Yuan Kongye was defeated.”

His eyes locked onto Baili Changqing’s, his tone firm.

“It was your investigation team.”

Baili Changqing’s body stiffened, his expression turning to one of disbelief.

The mission had technically been a success, but Bian Junwu’s death and Zhang Yi’s overwhelming achievements had left them all feeling defeated.

And now, Zhang Yi was claiming that they had been the real key to victory?

“Zhang Yi, what are you trying to say? Everyone knows that you killed Yuan Kongye. Without you, we wouldn’t have stood a chance against an Epsilon-tier Superhuman.”

Chapter 552: A Trade of Interests

Zhang Yi spoke calmly to Baili Changqing, “But without you all, I wouldn’t have been able to defeat her on my own.”

The key factor had been Bian Junwu's sacrifice.

And the existence of the investigation team itself had been a major check on the Followers of the Snow God.

If not for the fact that they were still stationed in Tianhai City, Yuan Kongye would have likely started a full-scale purge of other factions long ago.

Of course, Zhang Yi had his own reasons for telling Baili Changqing this.

In his mind, he still saw himself as unbeatable.

“Yuan Kongye died because the residual energy from Captain Bian’s ability backfired on her. I was just there to take advantage of the situation.”

“All in all, Captain Bian Junwu should be recognized as the real hero.”

“So, I want my credit to be attributed to him.”

Baili Changqing was utterly shocked.

He could hardly believe what he was hearing.

The disaster that had struck Tianhai City was classified as an A-rank crisis, one of the highest-level threats imaginable!

Zhang Yi was the greatest contributor to its resolution. If he went to Jiangnan District Headquarters, the higher-ups would undoubtedly shower him with rewards.

In Blizzard City, he could have anything he wanted—resources, women, housing, genetic serums, and prestige.

And yet, Zhang Yi was just giving it all up? So casually?!

Baili Changqing wasn't a fool. His initial shock quickly turned into deep thought, piecing together Zhang Yi's true intentions.

Moments later, he suddenly understood.

"You don't want to go to Jiangnan District Headquarters, do you?"

Zhang Yi's smirk widened.

Crossing his arms, he sat on the pool table and smiled.

“It’s always easier dealing with smart people. That’s right—I have no interest in that so-called Blizzard City.”

Baili Changqing was surprised but, after considering Zhang Yi’s lifestyle in Tianhai City, he found it understandable.

That shelter had better living conditions than most places in Blizzard City.

More importantly, it was his territory.

Better to be the king of a small domain than a servant in a larger one.

Here in Tianhai City, Zhang Yi reigned supreme. But if he went to Jiangnan District, no matter how high his status, he would still be someone else’s subordinate.

“I see now. You came to us today because you want us to conceal the truth about this event so you won’t be summoned to Jiangnan District, right?”

But Zhang Yi didn’t confirm it outright.

A real negotiation required maintaining control.

If he gave away his full intentions too easily, Baili Changqing and the others would start making demands of their own.

So Zhang Yi simply crossed his arms and gave a faint smirk.

“Not exactly. I don’t oppose the idea of going to Blizzard City. To be honest, Bian Junwu once suggested that I should go there and make a name for myself, and at the time, I was a bit tempted.”

“But after watching you all struggle so much, I started to hesitate.”

“So, if I can avoid going, I prefer not to.”

“But—”

Zhang Yi’s gaze turned sharp as he locked eyes with Baili Changqing. A wave of pressure surged through Baili Changqing’s chest.

Zhang Yi spoke slowly and deliberately.

“If I do go to Blizzard City, I must become a captain.”

Captains were an elite rank among Superhumans.

With Bian Junwu dead, Baili Changqing barely had the qualifications to take his place.

But if Zhang Yi entered the competition, Baili Changqing's chances would be slim to none.

His strength was simply nowhere near Zhang Yi's level.

Zhang Yi stepped forward and clapped Baili Changqing firmly on the shoulder.

Then he said meaningfully, "I'm really struggling with this decision. I could go, but I'd rather not."

"But I'm bad at making choices. So, I'll leave this decision to you."

"No, actually—" Zhang Yi's smirk deepened. "You should ask yourself: Do you want to be captain, or do you want to remain vice-captain?"

His meaning was crystal clear.

He had already seen through Baili Changqing's ambition.

After all, what man would be content living under another's rule forever?

Baili Changqing's heart pounded.

Zhang Yi was handing him an irresistible opportunity.

A captain's status was vastly superior to a vice-captain's.

In Blizzard City, there were only six captains in total, and they enjoyed A-rank resource distribution—

Second only to the Commander and the top leadership.

Baili Changqing furrowed his brows, looking at Zhang Yi.

His smile gradually faded, replaced by a serious expression.

"But if we hide the truth from headquarters, and they find out later, we'll face severe punishment."

“Commander Zhu is from a strict military background. Blizzard City follows a militarized system with strict discipline and consequences.”

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, feigning surprise.

“Hide the truth? Why would you need to hide anything? When did I ever tell you to conceal information from the higher-ups?”

Baili Changqing blinked in confusion. “Huh?”

Zhang Yi’s smirk turned sly.

“Did you see me kill Yuan Kongye with your own eyes?”

Baili Changqing was taken aback. “Well... no.”

Zhang Yi pressed further.

“Do you know the exact level of my current strength?”

Baili Changqing hesitated, then shook his head after a brief pause.

“No, I don’t.”

Without a direct battle, he had no way of gauging Zhang Yi’s full power.

“But logically speaking—”

Zhang Yi bit his thumb and casually cut him off.

“We’re not here to discuss logic. We’re here to talk about evidence.”

“You don’t have proof of what happened, so choosing not to report something you’re uncertain about isn’t the same as hiding information.”

His reasoning was a bit... unconventional.

But when you really thought about it—there was nothing technically wrong with his logic.

Baili Changqing felt his head spinning from Zhang Yi's roundabout argument.

"But even so, we still have to report how the Tianhai City mission was completed."

Zhang Yi waved a hand dismissively.

"I've already figured that part out for you."

"Just credit everything to the fallen Captain Bian."

Zhang Yi recalled the moment Bian Junwu died before his eyes.

In truth, when Zhang Yi had urged Bian Junwu to use Ice Soul, the man had likely already seen through Zhang Yi's intentions.

But at that moment, he had no other choice.

Thinking about it now, Zhang Yi did feel a slight sense of guilt toward Bian Junwu.

Not much. Just a little.

He was someone who always put himself first, but he never deliberately wronged those who had done him no harm—

Unless his own life was at risk.

Zhang Yi had always lived by a simple principle:

He would never sacrifice himself for others.

Nor would he allow the world to use him for its own sake.

So now, he had made a decision.

The credit for defeating Yuan Kongye would be given to Bian Junwu.

At the very least, this would ensure that the wife and children Bian Junwu left behind would have a better life.

Chapter 553: The Wind Never Ceases

"Without Bian Junwu's ability affecting him, Yuan Kongye wouldn't have died. So, the biggest credit goes to Bian Junwu."

"And Yuan Kongye's death wasn't because of anything I, Zhang Yi, did. It was under the leadership of your investigation team, with the cooperation of all the Superhumans in Tianhai City, that Yuan Kongye exhausted his energy, leading to the side effects of his abilities erupting and killing him."

"What do you think of this explanation?"

Zhang Yi casually wove a story.

Baili Changqing let out a deep sigh after hearing it.

"You don't seem like a warehouse manager. You sound more like someone who writes web novels."

Zhang Yi scoffed. "What a joke. Web novel authors are all broke. They'd starve to death."

"Anyway, I've said what I needed to say. I can't control what you think—what you do is up to you."

Zhang Yi had made his stance clear.

He believed Baili Changqing and the others would make the right choice.

After all, no one would go against their own interests.

At that moment, Baili Changqing finally understood why Zhang Yi had come in with such an overbearing attitude.

He had deliberately left a bad impression on the team members, making them unwilling to accept him as their captain.

Now, as long as Baili Changqing went back and used his influence within the team, they should readily agree to the arrangement.

There was also another key point—Zhang Yi had completely given up the credit for Yuan Kongye's death, meaning the investigation team would receive it instead.

The team members would all be rewarded handsomely.

Zhang Yi could see that Baili Changqing was tempted.

Barring any surprises, he had successfully made Baili Changqing his mouthpiece.

Seeing Baili Changqing still deep in thought, Zhang Yi reached into his pocket and pulled out a pitch-black pistol—Bian Junwu's sidearm, which had been loaned to him during the battle.

The gun was custom-made, with Bian Junwu's name engraved on it. Zhang Yi figured it was only right to return it.

The gun itself wasn't particularly special. What was special were the bullets inside.

Baili Changqing sighed at the sight of Bian Junwu's weapon.

An old friend of many years was gone forever.

Zhang Yi looked at him and asked, "The bullets you were using before, those are called Origin Bullets, right?"

Zhang Yi was very interested in them.

If they could threaten high-level Superhumans, they were definitely something he wanted.

After all, among his attack methods, firearms played a crucial role.

His principle was simple—if he could use a gun, he wouldn't bother fighting hand-to-hand. If he could strike from a distance, he'd never get close.

The ultimate strategy: long reach versus short reach.

Baili Changqing glanced at Zhang Yi with a serious expression. "Don't even think about it. Origin Bullets are strictly controlled strategic materials, even at the district headquarters."

"There's no way they'd give them to you."

Zhang Yi grinned. "Can't we negotiate?"

Baili Changqing sneered. "If you want Origin Bullets, there's only one way—join headquarters and become part of the investigation team!"

Zhang Yi chuckled helplessly. Just as he expected, getting his hands on those bullets wasn't going to be easy.

"Forget it. I'm not about to trade my future for a few bullets."

"Well then, that settles it. I'll be heading back now. If we ever—"

Zhang Yi paused and changed his mind.

"Never mind, let's just not see each other again."

If he ever ran into Baili Changqing again, it would only mean more trouble.

And Zhang Yi had had enough of that.

He walked to the door, ready to leave.

Baili Changqing watched his retreating figure and suddenly called out to him.

"Zhang Yi, with the power you have now, are you really content living a quiet, ordinary life?"

"In chaotic times like these, you could accomplish great things."

Without turning back, Zhang Yi replied, "Not interested."

A life of idling away was what he had always wanted most.

He enjoyed his current lifestyle—no job, lounging at home, chatting and joking with a few friends, eating, drinking, and having fun.

Surrounded by beautiful women.

Life was already heaven—what more could he ask for?

Zhang Yi didn't bother explaining further.

Everyone had their own way of living. As long as he was happy, that was enough.

Baili Changqing watched as Zhang Yi disappeared from view.

Once he was gone, the furrow in Baili Changqing's brow smoothed out.

Unconsciously, a relaxed smile crept onto his face.

Finally, he could take the captain's position without any guilt.

Zhang Yi left the investigation team's headquarters and planned to head back to the Shelter.

Xing Tian had been waiting for him outside.

Beside him stood a massive dog, nearly five to six meters tall, and an adorable little girl.

Seeing Zhang Yi come out, Xing Tian greeted him enthusiastically.

"Old Zhang, you're done talking already?"

Zhang Yi replied indifferently, "Just some casual chat. I said what I needed to say and left."

He didn't intend to talk much, but Xing Tian was overly friendly.

Right now, Tianhai City was in ruins, and the major factions had been crushed.

Without Zhang Yi's protection, there was a real risk that Qingpu Base could be wiped out.

"Lingling, didn't you always say you admired Uncle Zhang Yi? Go say hello to him."

Xing Tian shot meaningful glances at his goddaughter, Zhou Lingling.

Zhou Lingling, still young, was puzzled by her godfather's hints.

Who was this "Uncle Zhang Yi" she supposedly admired?

Still, she timidly walked up, her big eyes blinking as she stared at Zhang Yi, looking absolutely adorable.

Seeing such a cute little girl, Zhang Yi couldn't help but smile.

"Hello."

"Hello~"

Zhou Lingling spoke hesitantly.

"Call him Uncle Zhang!"

Xing Tian urged her.

"Z-Zhang... Uncle Zhang."

Zhang Yi nodded, then feigned regret.

"Ah, you should've told me earlier that you had a daughter! I was in such a rush that I didn't bring a gift. I'll make it up next time!"

Xing Tian chuckled. "Come on, we're brothers—no need to be so formal! It's getting late. Why don't you stay for dinner?"

Zhang Yi sighed and patted Xing Tian's arm.

"Alright, cut the act. It's pointless."

"If you ever run into trouble, I'll help if I can. But—" Zhang Yi's gaze sharpened, "from now on, you and Qingpu Base take orders from me. Got it?"

Xing Tian didn't mind at all and agreed readily. "No problem! Take whatever you need from here. We'll follow your lead from now on!"

Zhang Yi gave him a once-over.

This guy was surprisingly decisive—giving up his authority without hesitation and willingly becoming Zhang Yi's subordinate.

Of course, circumstances forced him into it, but still, showing zero reluctance was rare.

Xing Tian laughed carefreely. "Power is useful, sure, but I was never meant to be a leader."

"You're smarter and stronger than me. Handing Qingpu Base over to you? I've got no worries about it."

Xing Tian's greatest strength was his self-awareness.

What did submitting to Zhang Yi really mean?

At the very least, it meant having a powerful backer.

Without Zhang Yi, wiping out Qingpu Base would be effortless for any major force.

Indeed, among the three major base organizations, there was barely any defense left.

Most Superhumans were dead, and even skilled soldiers had been wiped out.

Zhang Yi took a deep breath.

He wasn't particularly relieved.

Once, Tianhai City had been a powerhouse, with five major factions and his own team forming a formidable force.

As one of the most populous cities in China, Tianhai's combat strength had been top-tier nationwide.

Of course, it couldn't compare to the six military zones, but it outclassed most cities.

Now, thanks to the Followers of the Snow God, Tianhai City lay in ruins, its strength gutted.

Zhang Yi no longer had to worry about internal threats, but external forces from nearby cities could become a problem.

Tianhai City had always been wealthy and resource-rich.

To surrounding factions, it was now a massive, juicy piece of meat.

"What a damn headache."

Zhang Yi exhaled.

Afraid?

Not at all.

With his current strength, unless he actively sought trouble, there were few in the Jiangnan District who could threaten him.

But as long as chaos persisted, his peaceful life would remain out of reach.

"The tree wants to be still, but the wind never stops."

Zhang Yi rubbed his neck.

"Looks like the Jiangnan District's power structure is both necessary and inevitable."

#### Chapter 554: Devouring Moon

The cold wind cut like a knife, and the setting sun bled across the sky.

The dim twilight lingered at the edge of the sea and sky.

The ocean surface was eerily still, an endless expanse of frozen silence.

Through the desolate ice seas, a massive icebreaker slowly made its way forward.

It had been drifting across the ocean for days. Without such a colossal vessel, no one could possibly navigate these frozen waters in this icebound apocalypse.

Yet, despite the ship's size, there were barely any crew members visible on board.

The ship's reinforced hull could withstand the icy sea, but it couldn't block the razor-sharp, bone-chilling winds.

The entire Shirase was operating on autopilot. By 2050, artificial intelligence had taken over most mechanical tasks.

And yet, within this harsh environment, the ship carried a faint, melancholic melody.

On the deck of the Shirase, a man wearing a gray newsboy cap and a matching vest leaned lazily against the railing.

He was tall and thin, appearing to be around thirty or so.

The fact that he could stand in such extreme cold without protective gear meant only one thing—he was a Superhuman. Either his physique was incredibly strong, or he possessed a power that allowed him to resist the cold.

The deep, resonant music came from the shakuhachi in his hands.

As the song came to an end, he gazed out at the silent sea before lifting his head toward the distant horizon.

A sly smile crept onto his face—a smile that carried an unsettling, scheming air, like a fox plotting in the shadows.

He stowed away his shakuhachi and turned toward the ship's interior.

Below deck, the cabin was much livelier.

The warm air from the vents made the environment cozy and comfortable.

As the man in the newsboy cap entered, he passed by a samurai lounging lazily against the wall by the door.

The samurai had long hair tied into a traditional chonmage, wore a deep blue kimono, and was barefoot.

Though he seemed to be asleep, his arms remained tightly wrapped around a katana bound in red thread.

Beneath his kimono, the faint outline of a hidden dagger could be seen.

Further inside, near the bar, two men were gambling—playing a simple game of coin toss.

One, a slick-haired man with gold-rimmed glasses, acted as the dealer.

The other, a scar-faced man, was guessing heads or tails.

Despite the seemingly fair game, the scar-faced man was losing every round. Soon, a pile of empty sake bottles formed in front of him.

The man in the newsboy cap walked past them, heading to the center of the cabin.

There, a small table was set up.

A woman dressed in a traditional shrine maiden outfit sat before it.

In front of her lay an ancient scroll, and she held a calligraphy brush adorned with a small demon sculpture on the handle.

She dipped the brush into an ink box beside her.

But the ink wasn't black—it was red, as crimson as fresh blood.

The man knelt before her, grinning.

"What's my fortune today?"

The shrine maiden respectfully bowed to him.

"Great fortune."

The man nodded in satisfaction and let out a long breath.

"That's wonderful! At this rate, we'll be landing in that city called Linhai soon."

He glanced toward a nearby sofa, where a man nearly two meters tall, built like a grizzly bear, was sitting.

But rather than an intimidating brute, the man wore a black suit and was casually flipping through a maritime magazine. The contrast was almost comical.

"Daigoumai, how much farther do we have to go?"

The hulking man, named Daigoumai Nobutsu, didn't even look up.

"Three days."

The man in the newsboy cap squinted at the ceiling, a smirk forming on his lips.

"Three days, huh?"

"In three days, we'll set foot in that land they call Shenzhou."

"And then, we'll carve out a legend of our own."

The investigation team had completed their mission in Tianhai City.

Baili Changqing led his team back to Jinling, returning to the heavily fortified military stronghold known as Blizzard City.

Snow blanketed the sky, and the massive gray fortress loomed over the landscape like a crouching beast.

The towering walls stood over fifty meters high, with armed soldiers in black combat gear stationed every three meters.

Every ten meters, a watchtower was equipped with high-speed machine guns capable of firing 6,000 rounds per minute—enough to shred any carbon-based lifeform in an instant.

This massive fortress, spanning thousands of square kilometers, had been under construction for decades.

According to Shengjing's military strategy, Blizzard City and five other fortified strongholds were the last line of defense for Huaguo.

They housed the nation's most elite troops and advanced weaponry.

No matter the crisis, as long as these fortresses stood, Huaguo would never fall.

Baili Changqing's vehicle arrived at the towering gates.

After a thorough security check, they were allowed entry through the massive metal doors.

Inside Blizzard City

, silence reigned—a silence so oppressive it felt suffocating.

There was no famine or riots here—food shortages were never a concern.

But the entire city operated under strict military control.

The streets were devoid of civilians.

Only soldiers and personnel assigned to Blizzard City could be seen.

As soon as Baili Changqing and his team returned, staff members arrived to conduct inspections.

Every returning team member had to undergo a rigorous health check to ensure they weren't carrying any unknown pathogens from the outside.

After the lengthy process, a young military officer appeared before Baili Changqing.

He was dressed in a crisp green uniform, his slicked-back hair neatly groomed, and a pair of expensive gold-rimmed glasses perched on his nose.

Upon seeing Baili Changqing, he spoke.

"Lieutenant Colonel Baili, please come with me."

Baili Changqing nodded and followed the young officer.

This officer wasn't just anyone—he was Lan Xincheng, the personal secretary of Zhu Zheng, the Supreme Commander of Jiangnan District.

Born into a prestigious family, Lan Xincheng had a powerful background and was deeply trusted by Zhu Zheng.

As per protocol, returning teams had to report directly to Zhu Zheng.

And this time, the situation in Tianhai City was serious.

The death of a team captain was enough to shake the entire upper echelon of Blizzard City.

Lan Xincheng led Baili Changqing to the command center, stopping before Zhu Zheng's office.

"Commander, Baili Changqing has arrived," Lan Xincheng reported through the intercom.

A moment later, Zhu Zheng's voice came through, granting permission to enter.

The dark silver metal doors slowly parted.

Baili Changqing took a deep breath, his expression tightening as he stepped forward.

After all, this time, he was here to lie to Zhu Zheng.

Though he had already discussed the matter with his team, and they had agreed on their story, the sheer presence of Zhu Zheng was enough to intimidate anyone.

Even a seasoned veteran like Baili Changqing couldn't suppress his nerves.

Chapter 555: Blizzard City

Baili Changqing stepped into Zhu Zheng's office.

Zhu Zheng was in his fifties, his hair streaked with gray, and his frame lean.

Yet his face bore an unwavering steel-like resolve, and his sharp eyes were like a hawk's.

As Baili Changqing entered, his gaze instinctively flickered to the bodyguard standing behind Zhu Zheng.

The man appeared slightly younger than Zhu Zheng, likely in his late forties. He had an unremarkable face, wore old-fashioned round glasses, and had a small braid tied at the back of his head.

But Baili Changqing knew—this man was undoubtedly one of the top three strongest in all of Blizzard City.

Bian Junwu had once told Baili Changqing that within a hundred paces, this man could kill him easier than slaughtering a chicken.

"Commander!"

Baili Changqing stood before the mahogany desk and saluted solemnly.

Zhu Zheng nodded at him with his hands clasped behind his back.

"You all did well on this mission. I originally thought you'd have to retreat and leave Tianhai City to be obliterated by headquarters."

"This outcome is preferable. The city has been preserved."

Zhu Zheng's tone was indifferent—he had little attachment to Tianhai City.

He was well aware that nearly all of its residents had perished in the zombie horde, with less than one percent surviving.

In his eyes, the city was entirely expendable.

Baili Changqing replied, "We owe this success to Captain Bian. If he hadn't sacrificed himself to restrain the leader of the Followers of the Snow God, we would have all died there."

Before returning, they had already submitted their report to headquarters.

The contents closely mirrored Zhang Yi's version of events, albeit slightly refined.

However, the majority of the credit was attributed to the investigation team, with a strong emphasis on Bian Junwu's contribution.

At the mention of Bian Junwu, Zhu Zheng's expression darkened with sorrow.

Bian Junwu had once been one of the military's finest.

Even after the apocalypse, he had made immense contributions to the Jiangnan District.

His death was an irreplaceable loss.

Though Zhu Zheng had always known this day would come, it still left him with regret.

He looked at Baili Changqing and gestured toward a chair.

"Sit. Let's talk."

Once they were seated, Zhu Zheng continued.

"During your time in Tianhai City, did you come across any promising talents that could be brought to headquarters for training?"

Baili Changqing had already sent Zhu Zheng a detailed report via email.

So Zhu Zheng didn't bother discussing the mission further—he was more concerned with recruitment.

After all, while the Jiangnan District was rich in talent, losses were frequent.

Fresh blood from surrounding cities was essential.

Baili Changqing straightened in his seat, and the first person that came to mind was Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi's current strength was undoubtedly on par with Bian Junwu at his peak.

And beyond raw power, his intelligence and personality made him someone worth taking seriously.

But according to their agreement, Baili Changqing couldn't expose Zhang Yi's true abilities.

Quickly weighing his options, Baili Changqing replied:

"There are indeed a few skilled individuals in Tianhai City."

"After our assessment, I believe seven people are qualified to join the investigation team."

"Xing Tian from Qingpu Base, Xiao Honglian and Zhuge Qinting from Yangsheng Base, Chen Jingguan from Chaoyu Base, and from Zhang Yi's team—Zhang Yi, Liang Yue, and Yang Siyah."

Most of these individuals were formidable combatants.

Yang Siyah, however, had a powerful support ability that made her invaluable to a team.

Zhu Zheng nodded slowly after listening.

"You already mentioned them in your report."

He folded his hands on the desk and suddenly asked, "I'm particularly interested in this Zhang Yi. Can you tell me more about him?"

Baili Changqing felt a jolt of tension in his chest.

"Here it comes!"

Some things could be concealed, but others were impossible to hide.

For instance, Zhang Yi's actions during the zombie crisis had been too extraordinary.

He was the only team leader unaffected by the initial outbreak.

During the battle against the Followers of the Snow God, his expert sniping had nearly wiped out every Copper-Armored Corpse single-handedly.

And in the final showdown, it was his space-based defensive abilities that stalled Yuan Kongye long enough for the tide to turn.

Without Zhang Yi, the mission would have failed, and none of them would have survived.

Such a list of achievements—no matter how much Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing tried to downplay them—couldn't be entirely erased.

So Baili Changqing chose to omit the final battle, where Zhang Yi had outlasted Yuan Kongye alone.

But even with that detail hidden, there was still more than enough to make Zhu Zheng take notice.

Baili Changqing met Zhu Zheng's gaze seriously.

"Zhang Yi is indeed a talent. He's highly capable and possesses a rare spatial-type Superhuman ability."

"If he were to join our headquarters, he would undoubtedly be considered an elite within the investigation team."

He started by praising Zhang Yi.

Then, he deliberately changed his tone.

"However... his mindset and personality make him difficult to trust."

Zhu Zheng's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Oh? What do you mean? Does he have a bad temperament?"

For the Jiangnan District's investigation team, loyalty to the district was more important than raw ability.

This wasn't outdated ideology.

In times of chaos, the wrong mentality could lead to internal disasters.

Baili Changqing was well aware of this, which was why he framed his response carefully.

"Zhang Yi is extremely selfish. Like many other Superhumans from independent cities, he's likely been hardened by the cruelty of the apocalypse, leaving him with no sense of collective responsibility."

"Even in battles against the zombies, he always prioritized his personal survival, keeping an escape plan ready at all times."

"Additionally, he's ruthless in achieving his goals, showing no sign of faith or greater belief."

Baili Changqing suddenly realized he might have gone too far.

Smearing Zhang Yi's reputation too much could affect how leadership viewed him.

He quickly added, "That being said, his attitude is understandable. It's difficult to find anyone with unwavering convictions in a world like this."

Zhu Zheng's interest in Zhang Yi visibly waned after hearing this.

An unstable Superhuman, no matter how strong, was not someone he wanted.

In his eyes, Zhang Yi was just a Delta-Class Superhuman.

And while Delta-Class Superhumans weren't abundant in the Jiangnan District headquarters, they weren't exactly rare either.

But if Zhu Zheng knew that Zhang Yi had devoured the remnant essence of an Epsilon-Class Superhuman, things would be a whole different story.

Chapter 556: The Summoning Order

Regarding Yuan Kongye's essence, Bai Li Changqing had already given Zhu Zheng an explanation.

The report stated that Yuan Kongye had been obliterated, leaving no remains, and his essence had dissipated into the world.

Zhu Zheng had no reason to doubt this report. There were two main reasons for this.

First, he trusted the loyalty of the investigative team, and they had no reason to hide anything. If they had obtained the essence themselves and grown stronger, they would have been prioritized for training by the district.

Second, in past missions, there had been brutal battles where Superhumans were completely annihilated, and their essence dispersed. It was not uncommon.

Not to mention, in battles of this magnitude, where casualties numbered in the millions and entire cities were wiped out, the loss of Yuan Kongye's essence seemed entirely plausible.

Though unfortunate, there was no point in dwelling on it.

After a brief conversation, Zhu Zheng looked at Bai Li Changqing, his gaze filled with contemplation.

The six major investigation teams of headquarters each required a powerful Superhuman as a leader.

Now that Bian Junwu had died in battle, there was no one in Blizzard City who could match his strength.

That made Bai Li Changqing the best candidate to take over as captain.

Although Bai Li Changqing was not as strong as the other captains, he was still far more capable than the average team member. More importantly, he was experienced and respected within the team.

Zhu Zheng raised his head and spoke seriously:

“Bai Li Changqing, Bian Junwu has fallen. His death pains me, but we cannot leave the investigation team without a leader.”

“Starting today, you will take over as captain of the Black Robe Squad.”

Bai Li Changqing’s sturdy frame trembled, his eyes filled with uncontrollable excitement.

The difference between a vice-captain and a captain was just one word, but the change in treatment was vast!

This meant that he and his family would now enjoy Class-A privileges in Blizzard City.

With tears in his eyes, Bai Li Changqing stood up and saluted Zhu Zheng.

“Thank you for your trust, Commander! I will give my all for you and Blizzard City!”

Zhu Zheng nodded.

“The official appointment documents will be in your hands within the next two days.”

“As for Bian Junwu... we will confirm the first-class merit you reported for him personally, and your Black Robe Squad will receive a collective first-class merit as well.”

“His family will receive the benefits of fallen hero status, ensuring lifetime access to Class-A resources from headquarters.”

Bai Li Changqing nodded vigorously.

“Thank you, Commander!”

Leaving Zhu Zheng's office, Bai Li Changqing stepped outside into the gloomy but bright sky.

His mood was soaring. Though he had just lied to Zhu Zheng and concealed some details about Zhang Yi, the outcome was a win-win for everyone.

Zhang Yi wouldn't have to come to Blizzard City.

Bai Li Changqing had been promoted to captain.

The deceased Bian Junwu had somehow earned first-class merit, securing a lifetime of stability for his wife and children.

This result couldn't have been better.

Just as Bai Li Changqing was lost in thought, a cool, crisp voice sounded from a distance.

"Vice-Captain Bai Li... oh wait, I should be calling you Captain Bai Li now, shouldn't I?"

Bai Li Changqing turned his head and saw a tall woman in a white lab coat walking toward him.

She had a lazy yet indifferent expression, her long hair casually pinned up with a ballpoint pen.

The moment Bai Li Changqing saw her, he broke into a smile.

"Ah, Professor Li!"

The woman was Li Lingxue, the chief professor of Blizzard City's research department.

In Blizzard City, few people dared to disrespect the research department.

After the Great Mutation, their importance sometimes even surpassed the military.

Li Lingxue approached and spoke lazily, “Where’s that thing you mentioned?”

“Oh, right here. I was planning to deliver it to you personally after reporting to the commander.”

Bai Li Changqing took out a silver metal box from his combat uniform pocket and handed it to her.

Li Lingxue eyed the box curiously. “This is that mutated plant you were talking about?”

Bai Li Changqing nodded. “It has an incredible growth rate and can produce a zombie virus that infects hosts.”

Li Lingxue raised an eyebrow. “Doesn’t sound that impressive.”

Bai Li Changqing felt awkward—this thing had nearly wiped out all of Tianhai City.

But coming from Li Lingxue, it seemed like nothing.

Not surprising, though. She had studied far stranger things.

Without another word, Li Lingxue pocketed the box containing the Blood Vine’s root and left without a greeting.

Bai Li Changqing was used to her attitude. It wasn’t arrogance—she simply wasn’t interested in anything outside of research.

He shrugged and turned toward home.

...

After Bai Li Changqing left, Zhu Zheng sat in his chair, his expression grave.

The crisis in Tianhai City had been far more severe than he had expected.

The loss of a captain-ranked officer was a first since the apocalypse began.

And it had only been six months since the world fell apart.

Even with the talent in Blizzard City, they couldn't sustain this rate of loss.

An idea that had been lingering in Zhu Zheng's mind resurfaced.

He clasped his hands together and stared out at the snow-covered landscape of Blizzard City.

Muttering to himself, he said, "Blizzard City alone can't maintain stability in Jiangnan District for long. It seems I'll have to rally the other regional forces."

He activated his communicator and summoned his secretary, Lan Xincheng.

Lan Xincheng stepped forward respectfully. "Commander, what are your orders?"

Zhu Zheng's gaze was sharp.

"Xincheng, issue an official announcement in my name. The target is all significant factions in Jiangnan District."

"Inform them that in ten days, I will be hosting a Superhuman Assembly in Blizzard City. Attendance is mandatory."

Lan Xincheng was momentarily surprised but then chuckled. “So you’ve finally decided to unify Jiangnan District?”

A deep light flickered in Zhu Zheng’s eyes.

“I’ve been considering it for a while. But Bian Junwu’s death made me realize we need to act faster—we can’t delay any longer.”

He hadn’t done this sooner because the timing hadn’t been right.

With countless factions locked in constant conflict, even Jiangnan District’s overwhelming power wasn’t enough to manage them all.

Issues like poor communication and difficult transportation made centralized control nearly impossible.

Overreach would only cause more problems.

But now, circumstances had forced his hand.

If Blizzard City continued to bear the burden alone, it would weaken their core strength.

Lan Xincheng bowed. “Understood. I will draft the decree immediately, summoning all major faction leaders in Jiangnan District.”

A glint of cold amusement flashed in his eyes as he adjusted his glasses.

“If any faction refuses to comply, may I send an investigation team to eliminate them?”

Zhu Zheng nodded. “Yes. If necessary, strike down a few as an example.”

This assembly was not optional.

Anyone who refused would be considered defiant.

And if they refused to submit, they had no place in Jiangnan District.

Chapter 557: The Two Ice Souls

[Tianhai City]

After the great battle with the Followers of the Snow God, the entire city fell into silence.

The major factions were all devastated, no longer capable of expanding their territories. Or rather, expanding territory had lost all meaning.

Among the remnants of the Followers of the Snow God, only a dozen people survived, including Li Jian and his wife.

Gathering those who had escaped the catastrophe, they established a new, peaceful home centered around St. John's Cathedral.

One unexpected benefit came from the disaster—fewer living people meant resources were no longer as scarce.

The Followers of the Snow God had stockpiled enough supplies to sustain thousands, and with only a dozen survivors, they could now live quite comfortably.

Moreover, there was no longer anyone to fight over these resources.

Aside from the remaining factions, almost no one else was left alive in Tianhai City.

The three surviving bases—Qingpu, Yangsheng, and Chaoyu—had suffered severe losses but managed to retain their foundations and continue surviving.

All three factions reached out to Zhang Yi, pledging their allegiance and begging for his protection.

However, Zhang Yi had no interest in becoming the ruler of Tianhai City.

All he wanted was to live in peace, undisturbed.

So, he simply told them to live their lives and not to bother him again.

Despite this, the three factions frequently tried to curry favor with him, sending him supplies as gifts.

But Zhang Yi lacked nothing at home.

The only time he was pleased was when Chen Jingguan and his people brought him fresh seafood.

Everything seemed to be settling into a peaceful rhythm.

But Zhang Yi had been focused on something else—studying Yang Siyah, who had awakened her Superhuman Energy through an Ice Soul.

With Yuan Kongye dead, Zhang Yi wasn't sure if those who awakened their powers through Ice Souls would be affected in any way.

He still had two Ice Souls in his possession.

If Yang Siyah showed no adverse reactions, he would consider giving them to Zhou Ke'er and the others.

After all, in the apocalypse, having another life-saving ability was beneficial for both individuals and the team.

Ten days passed in a flash, and Yang Siyah showed no abnormalities.

Following Zhang Yi's orders, Zhou Ke'er conducted daily check-ups on her, while Zhang Yi personally examined her in every possible way.

When he confirmed that there were no negative side effects, he finally relaxed.

"So, the Ice Soul acts as a kind of catalyst. It unlocks a person's mutation potential without causing harm."

"The only drawback disappeared with Yuan Kongye's death."

"Which means... it's now a pure treasure!"

With that realization, Zhang Yi immediately decided to use the remaining two Ice Souls.

He summoned Yang Xinxin, Zhou Ke'er, and Lu Keran to his room and carefully explained his plan.

"I've confirmed that the Ice Soul still works even after Yuan Kongye's death. I have two Ice Souls left, and they can be used by you."

"But... there are three of you, and only two Ice Souls."

"You are all important to me, and I don't want to show favoritism. So, I'll leave the decision up to you."

Yang Xinxin was the team's strategist and a top-tier hacker.

Lu Keran was a mechanical engineer.

Zhou Ke'er was a doctor.

Each of them had immense value.

Zhang Yi didn't want to create resentment by making the choice himself, so he let them decide.

As soon as he finished speaking, Lu Keran and Zhou Ke'er's eyes sparkled with excitement.

Of course, they wanted to awaken their Superhuman Energy.

After seeing what Superhumans could do, it was impossible not to be envious.

Surprisingly, Yang Xinxin remained calm.

"I don't need it. Give the chance to them," she said indifferently.

Zhang Yi and the others were stunned.

This was a treasure that everyone in the apocalypse dreamed of, yet Yang Xinxin was giving it up without hesitation?

She explained, "My mind is my greatest power. Compared to me, they need this ability more."

Zhang Yi thought about it and nodded in agreement.

Yang Xinxin's intellect was her true strength.

Having been paralyzed for years, she had long adapted to relying on her mind over her body.

As a support specialist, she wouldn't get much use out of an ability anyway.

On the other hand, both Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran clearly longed for this opportunity.

By stepping back, Yang Xinxin made the decision easier.

Lu Keran looked at her and hesitated. "Are you sure, Xinxin?"

Yang Xinxin smiled gently. "I'm sure. Don't worry about me. Go and get your abilities."

Her eyes carried a soft warmth.

Seeing her resolve, Lu Keran and Zhou Ke'er stopped hesitating.

Their eyes burned with anticipation as they stared at the wooden box in Zhang Yi's hands.

Opening the box, Zhang Yi revealed two silver-white Ice Souls.

"You already know how to use them—just place them on your forehead."

As he spoke, he watched them closely, ready to intervene in case anything went wrong.

Lu Keran and Zhou Ke'er eagerly took the Ice Souls.

The orbs felt ice-cold to the touch, soft and slightly elastic—almost as if they were alive.

Pressing them to their foreheads, the Ice Souls quickly melted into their skin and fused into their brains.

Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin watched in anticipation.

The fusion process was swift.

Both of them had strong constitutions, so unlike Yang Siyah, they didn't suffer from rejection.

Still, they lay on Zhang Yi's bed, letting their bodies adapt to the foreign power.

Zhang Yi sat nearby, patiently waiting for the changes to take effect.

After about ten minutes, Lu Keran was the first to recover.

She was drenched in sweat, her forehead, neck, arms, and chest covered in tiny droplets, as if she had just run a ten-kilometer marathon.

Physically, she looked the same, but Zhang Yi noticed that her eyes seemed sharper—like a pair of glistening black diamonds.

"How do you feel? Did it work?" Zhang Yi leaned forward curiously.

Lu Keran took a deep breath, still panting.

Then, with a gleam of excitement in her eyes, she looked at Zhang Yi and grinned.

"Big Bro, I did it! I awakened my Superhuman Energy!"

## Chapter 558: Awakening

When someone gains a Superhuman Energy, it feels as if they've suddenly grown an extra arm or an additional finger.

It just appears—sudden yet natural. And just like knowing how to move their own body, Superhumans instinctively understand how to control their newfound powers.

Under Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin's expectant gazes, Lu Keran began explaining her ability.

She picked up a spoon from the table, and without using any physical force, she caused the metal to bend instantly before their eyes.

"My ability is related to metal and machinery. It seems I can control any metal I touch."

Her eyes burned with excitement, and she clenched her fists, exclaiming, "This is amazing! With this power, I can create all kinds of powerful weapons!"

Zhang Yi rested his chin on his hand and asked thoughtfully, "So your ability is mechanical-based... Can you enhance the performance of weapons?"

Without hesitation, Lu Keran nodded. "Of course!"

She smiled as she twirled the bent spoon in her hand. "With this ability, I can fine-tune every intricate detail of a weapon, optimizing it to its absolute peak!"

"And not just weapons—any mechanical construct that comes into my hands will be transformed into its perfect form!"

Zhang Yi chuckled. "That's great! Your ability aligns perfectly with your role as a mechanic. Once you're ready, enhance all my firearms."

"Got it! Consider it done!" Lu Keran grinned, her face glowing with excitement.

"Oh, by the way, boss, can you name my ability for me?" she suddenly asked.

Zhang Yi laughed. "This is your power. Shouldn't you name it yourself?"

But Lu Keran looked at him seriously and said, "Boss, you saved my life, and you gave me this power. So my ability should also be named by you!"

Zhang Yi understood her sentiment—this was her way of expressing gratitude and loyalty.

After pondering for a moment, he said, "Since your ability is about controlling machines, let's call it Divine Mechanization."

Lu Keran's eyes sparkled. She repeated the name excitedly.

"Divine Mechanization... Divine Mechanization... I love it! I'm officially a Superhuman now!"

Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin exchanged amused glances. They were already considering how to maximize the potential of Lu Keran's new ability.

Just then, Zhou Ke'er also regained consciousness.

Unlike Lu Keran, she was drenched in sweat, her entire body soaked through. Her skin had an almost luminous glow.

For some reason, Zhang Yi felt that her already enticing figure had become even more alluring, her proportions somehow even more perfect.

Noticing his intense gaze, Zhou Ke'er blushed slightly.

"Why are you staring at me like that? Do I look good?"

Zhang Yi instinctively nodded and chuckled. "Yeah, you've always looked good."

Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran pouted in jealousy.

Zhou Ke'er, feeling a little shy in front of her two "sisters," quickly changed the subject.

"Keran, you succeeded? What's your ability?"

Lu Keran excitedly explained Divine Mechanization to her.

Hearing this, Zhou Ke'er smiled. "That's a great ability! It suits you perfectly."

Lu Keran's curiosity turned back to Zhou Ke'er. "And what about you, Ke'er-jie? What's your power?"

Zhou Ke'er calmly replied, "My ability is related to medicine."

She didn't hide anything and explained in detail.

"I can accelerate cellular activity, allowing rapid regeneration and healing. This works not only on myself but also on others."

Now they understood why Zhou Ke'er's body looked so flawless.

Yang Xinxin and Lu Keran were genuinely jealous—this was an ability any woman would kill for!

Zhou Ke'er could modify her own body at will, shaping herself into the perfect form.

"But that's not all."

She raised her hands, revealing her long, delicate fingers—the hands of a skilled surgeon.

"My hands can heal injuries and even perform surgeries without tools."

As she spoke, she turned toward Yang Xinxin.

Yang Xinxin looked at her in surprise. "Ke'er-jie, what are you doing?"

Zhou Ke'er knelt in front of her with a gentle smile. "I want to see if I can heal your legs."

Before Yang Xinxin could protest, Zhou Ke'er suddenly extended her hands.

Before their eyes, her hands turned translucent and phased into Yang Xinxin's legs!

Slowly, her hands moved upward, reaching Yang Xinxin's spine.

Yang Xinxin felt something shifting inside her, but it wasn't painful.

On the contrary, she sensed something foreign being removed from her body.

Moments later, Zhou Ke'er withdrew her hands from Yang Xinxin's spine.

In her palms was a mass of dark gray, sticky residue.

As she cleaned her hands, she looked at Yang Xinxin and said, "Try standing up."

Yang Xinxin's pupils dilated with shock.

She had been paralyzed for years. More than anything, she had longed to walk again.

Zhang Yi glanced between Zhou Ke'er and Yang Xinxin.

Was this... a medical miracle?

If Zhou Ke'er could heal paralysis, then there was no injury or illness she couldn't cure!

Lu Keran stepped forward and encouraged Yang Xinxin. "Xinxin, try it!"

She held onto Yang Xinxin's arm supportively.

Yang Xinxin hesitated, then focused on her legs.

For the first time in years, she felt strength returning to them.

Slowly, she pushed herself up from her wheelchair.

"I... I'm standing!"

"I CAN FEEL THEM!"

Overwhelmed with joy, the girl who was usually the composed genius suddenly burst into elated cries, completely shedding her usual cold demeanor.

With Lu Keran's support, she took a few shaky steps.

Then, she adapted quickly, walking smoothly on her own.

Tears streamed down her face as she ran forward—

Straight into Zhang Yi's arms.

"Brother, I can stand! I'm normal now!"

Zhang Yi looked at Zhou Ke'er, who had an awkward expression, and couldn't help but chuckle.

"Yes, that's right. From now on, you can walk on your own two legs again."

#### Chapter 559: Replicating the Origin Bullet

Yang Xinxin was overjoyed when her leg healed, flitting around the shelter like a butterfly. She ran all over the place, spreading the good news to everyone—even Fatty Xu, whom she usually despised, wasn't left out.

Everyone was thrilled to hear about her recovery and congratulated her warmly. When they also learned that Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran had awakened superhuman abilities, they were even more amazed at the growing number of talented individuals in the shelter.

Only Zhou Haimei remained an ordinary person.

But she knew her place and had no complaints. She was a smart woman—not like the young girls who yearned for superpowers. Being a housewife meant she didn't have to fight and kill outside, yet she could still enjoy a comfortable life at home. Wasn't that a good deal?

Zhang Yi needed her as a mental therapist for Uncle You, soothing the loneliness of the old man's heart. She performed her role perfectly.

Her presence even improved the overall atmosphere in the shelter, showcasing the charm of a mature and intelligent woman in keeping the environment lively.

On the other hand, Zhang Yi was pleased to see Yang Xinxin back to normal. He couldn't help but marvel at how convenient superhuman abilities were—capable of achieving what was once impossible for humanity.

Was this an evolution of the species?

Although the apocalypse had wiped out most of the population, the survivors, as the fire of humanity's future, would become stronger and more exceptional.

"I think I might have grasped the pattern of evolution," Zhang Yi muttered as he leaned against the doorway, watching Yang Xinxin dash around the first floor.

Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran, who were leaning on the second-floor railing, turned to him with curiosity.

"In the past, I always felt that a person's superpower was linked to their personality," Zhang Yi continued.

"But after seeing how you two transformed, I can finally confirm it."

He lifted his gaze to them.

"Ke'er, you're a doctor, so your awakened ability is healing."

"Keran, you're a mechanic, so your ability is related to machinery."

"Doesn't that suggest that a person's ability is closely tied to their existing skills—or perhaps their deepest desires?"

"Maybe... the stronger the desire, the more powerful the ability becomes."

The two of them fell into deep thought.

Zhou Ke'er spoke first. "Now that you mention it, that does seem to be the case!"

"Uncle You awakened his ability after getting shot—he wanted a stronger body, so his ability enhanced his physique.

"Xu Chunlei awakened at the brink of freezing to death—he desperately wanted to resist the cold, so his power allows him to withstand extreme temperatures.

"Teacher Liang is obsessed with martial arts—he wished for speed and strength, and that's exactly what he got."

"Thinking back now, it's true. Everyone's mutation seems to be connected to their inner desires."

Lu Keran looked at Zhang Yi with a curious expression.

"Then what about you, big brother? You awakened a spatial ability—was it because you used to be a warehouse manager?"

Zhang Yi's eyes darkened slightly.

What did he desire the most?

His overwhelming resentment after death had brought him back to life.

Had enduring the extreme scarcity of resources in the apocalypse caused him to awaken a spatial ability—to stockpile supplies?

And what about his rebirth—was that a form of ability as well?

Subconsciously, Zhang Yi rubbed his left eye.

"This is an interesting theory."

"We need to understand our abilities better and develop them further. Only by doing so can we survive the apocalypse more effectively."

He lowered his hand and waved at Lu Keran with a smile. "Keran, come here. I have a test for your ability's strength."

Lu Keran ran over excitedly, looking up at him with anticipation. She wanted to be useful to him.

Zhang Yi opened his spatial storage and slowly pulled out a pitch-black bullet, holding it in front of her.

"Can you replicate this Origin Bullet with your ability?"

The Origin Bullet was a product of the Jiangnan District headquarters. Even there, it was classified and restricted to special units like the investigation team.

Its manufacturing process was incredibly complex, requiring rare materials that ordinary arms factories couldn't produce.

It was said that Jiangnan District's special department specifically developed it to counter superhumans, and the supply was extremely limited.

Back when they fought Yuan Kongye, Zhang Yi had gotten his hands on Bian Junwu's pistol. He had returned the gun, but he had secretly kept one Origin Bullet.

This bullet could pierce through superhuman defenses. Even an Epsilon-tier like Yuan Kongye had her psychic shield shattered by it.

Zhang Yi had been eyeing this special ammunition for a long time.

Unfortunately, Baili Changqing and his team wouldn't be generous enough to share any with him.

Now that Lu Keran had awakened her ability, her mechanical expertise combined with her newfound power might make it possible to replicate the Origin Bullet.

If she succeeded, their entire team's combat strength would soar to a whole new level!

Even ordinary people could pose a threat to superhumans with Origin Bullets.

And for Zhang Yi—an elite sniper—this would be the ultimate game-changer.

Lu Keran took the bullet, and the moment her fingers touched it, her mind instantly analyzed its material composition.

A few moments later, she frowned. "This bullet is highly specialized. It's made of twelve rare metals. Just one bullet would cost at least 100,000 credits!"

"Rare metals, huh? No wonder." Zhang Yi nodded.

"So, can you replicate it?"

A proud smirk appeared on Lu Keran's lips.

"In the past, with our limited resources, it would have been impossible. But now? Heh, it's totally doable!"

"The only issue is sourcing the materials. Rare metals aren't easy to find—we'd have to check the major laboratories or university research centers in Tianhai City."

Zhang Yi grinned.

"As long as we can make them, the materials aren't a problem."

"Make a list of what you need. I'll have Xing Tian and Xiao Honglian search for them."

Rare metals had a wide range of uses—no one would suspect he was using them for Origin Bullets.

And even if they did, so what?

Jiangnan District couldn't be so controlling that they forbade others from producing their own Origin Bullets, right?

At least, for now, they didn't have that level of authority.

"Got it! I'll send you the list right away!"

Lu Keran immediately pulled out her satellite phone and compiled a list of the required materials.

Zhang Yi added several other rare materials to disguise their true purpose, then sent the request to three different factions.

He wanted them to collect as much as possible.

Tianhai City had been an economic hub with many scientific labs and top universities. Gathering rare metals wouldn't be a challenge.

When the three factions received Zhang Yi's request, they couldn't figure out what he was planning.

But they were glad—Zhang Yi finally had a task for them.

To them, being asked to help meant he considered them part of his inner circle.

With that, the three factions set out to gather the materials, no questions asked.

## Chapter 560: Holy Silver Bullets and New Equipment

As soon as Zhang Yi gave the order, the factions in Tianhai City scrambled to gather materials for him. Within days, the entire city had been scoured clean, and a massive stockpile of rare materials was delivered to him.

After praising their efforts, Zhang Yi sent everything to Lu Keran's workshop and had her begin replicating the Origin Bullet.

For Lu Keran, this task was a real challenge. The shelter lacked advanced production lines, so she had to rely entirely on her Godly Mechanic ability to carry out the work.

Zhang Yi wasn't in a rush. The war in Tianhai City was over, and there wouldn't be any large-scale conflicts for the foreseeable future. They had time.

Since they now had the materials for the Origin Bullet, Zhang Yi also considered having Lu Keran design a new combat suit using the same materials.

But Lu Keran immediately waved her hands.

"Big bro, you better give up on that idea!"

She carefully explained:

The Origin Bullet was designed to counter superhumans by breaking through their protective energy fields. However, if those materials were used to make armor, the defense wouldn't necessarily be better than regular bulletproof vests.

"Think of it like physical resistance versus magic resistance. If we make a suit from Origin Bullet materials, it'll be highly resistant to superhuman abilities."

"But against someone with a gun or a Strength-type or Beast-type superhuman? This material would actually be weaker than regular armor."

Hearing this, Zhang Yi immediately understood.

He rubbed his chin and thought for a moment. "Then what if we use it as an inner lining? Wear it under the armor?"

Lu Keran's eyes lit up.

"That's actually a really good idea!"

But before Zhang Yi could celebrate, she quickly poured cold water on his enthusiasm.

"Bullets are one thing, but making an entire suit is much harder."

She spread her hands. "First, we'd need to spin the material into thread, then weave it into fabric. Sounds simple, but in reality, it's incredibly complicated."

Zhang Yi smacked his forehead—he had forgotten she was a mechanic, not a tailor.

"Alright, just focus on replicating the bullets for now. We'll figure out the combat suit later."

Lu Keran nodded. "Got it, big bro!"

Before long, Lu Keran successfully replicated the Origin Bullets.

With Godly Mechanic, as long as she had a sample and enough materials, recreating a weapon was easy.

She handed Zhang Yi a case filled with neatly arranged silver bullets.

"Huh? What's this?" Zhang Yi was surprised.

"I remember Origin Bullets being black."

Lu Keran grinned proudly. "I made some improvements! I added rhodium to enhance the bullet's hardness and infused it with heavy metal toxins. If an enemy gets shot, they'll suffer from heavy metal poisoning, worsening their injuries!"

Hearing this, Zhang Yi hesitated mid-reach.

"So... you poisoned them? Wow... that's so my style."

Lu Keran quickly added, "I knew you'd like it, big bro! After all, your usual methods are pretty..."

She trailed off, swallowing words like "ruthless" or "shameless."

Zhang Yi narrowed his eyes. "I'll take that as a compliment."

"But wait—if they're poisoned, how am I supposed to use them?"

Lu Keran explained, "The toxin is inside the bullet. It only activates when fired—after the gunpowder ignites and the bullet hits blood, the poison is released. It's harmless to touch."

"I named them Holy Silver Bullets! This way, they won't be confused with Origin Bullets, and no one will accuse you of knocking off Jiangnan District's ammo, hehe."

Zhang Yi couldn't help but give her a thumbs-up for her cleverness.

He picked up a Holy Silver Bullet. The moment he touched it, he felt a slight discomfort—it really did affect his superhuman energy.

However, since his ability was spatial manipulation, it made no difference whether he used special bullets or regular ones.

As Zhang Yi examined the bullets, Lu Keran brought over another large metal case.

The box was nearly two meters long and looked extremely heavy. Even Lu Keran, who worked with machines all day, struggled to carry it.

"Big bro, I made something extra for you! Check it out—you'll love it!"

The moment Zhang Yi saw the box's length, his eyes lit up.

"Don't tell me... it's a new gun?"

Lu Keran's Godly Mechanic ability allowed her to refine weapons to their absolute peak—meaning she could drastically enhance their performance.

She grinned. "You're sharp, big bro! You guessed it right away!"

Excited, Zhang Yi took the case, placed it on the table, and unlocked the latches.

Inside was an entire set of dark silver weaponry.

Two silver pistols, engraved with intricate violet patterns.

A heavy sniper rifle, with its stock and barrel separated—clearly a high-caliber anti-materiel sniper rifle, Zhang Yi's favorite.

Zhang Yi had a deep passion for weapons. The moment he saw them, he picked them up eagerly, feeling their weight and balance in his hands.

A true expert could tell quality at a glance. The weapons had just the right heft, and the perfect grip made Zhang Yi so thrilled that he nearly wanted to hug Lu Keran on the spot.

"These are amazing! Absolutely amazing!" Zhang Yi exclaimed.

Lu Keran smirked. "The weapons are designed to work only with Holy Silver Bullets. That means even if someone else gets their hands on them, they won't function properly."

"They're custom-made just for you, big bro!"

Her face flushed with excitement. Seeing Zhang Yi so enthusiastic about her work deeply satisfied her pride as a top-tier mechanic.

Then, she revealed the names of her creations.

The two dark silver pistols: White Owl.

The anti-materiel sniper rifle: Thunderstrike.

Zhang Yi quickly got familiar with their mechanics and handling.

His excitement soared, but he didn't forget to reward Lu Keran.

With a playful smile, he walked over and gently patted her soft, fair cheek.

"Keran, you're a one-of-a-kind genius! You've outdone yourself this time. Tell me, what kind of reward do you want?"