

Ice Age 581

Chapter 581 – Drawing Attention

Wu Di launched another wave of attacks, but they still couldn't even scratch Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye knew full well that this fight had already drawn attention.

So he couldn't afford to drag it out—better not to reveal too much of his strength.

But at the same time, he had no intention of using his Divine Might or that newly developed killing move.

After all, he didn't plan to kill Wu Di.

So he simply raised his pistol calmly, aimed at Wu Di, and pulled the trigger.

At that moment, Wu Di was still in shock. Instinctively, he activated his halo ability to block the shot.

But this time, the pitch-black bullet tore right through his halo defense and struck him!

“Ah!”

Wu Di cried out in pain, his face twisting as he clutched his chest and dropped to his knees.

Right then, the broadcast voice of the dueling field echoed in everyone's ears.

“Duel over. Wu Di, defeated!”

The sudden end to the match didn't surprise anyone.

Because battles between high-level Variants were always like this—decided in the blink of an eye.

One brief lapse, one small exposed weakness, could instantly determine victory or defeat, even life or death.

Wu Di couldn't believe what he was hearing.

That bullet...

He looked down, and saw a pitch-black bullet lying silently on the ground.

That was the bullet that had pierced through his defense halo and hit his training suit.

Thanks to the suit's protection, he wasn't actually impaled—but the dueling system had already registered the damage and declared him the loser.

“O—Origin Bullet?! How the h*ll did you get something like that?!”

Wu Di shouted toward Zhang Ye in disbelief.

But the two were too far apart, and Zhang Ye didn't hear him.

He just gave a faint smile. “The match is decided. That's all there is to it.”

With that, he turned and walked away.

But everyone had clearly seen what just happened.

Deng Shentong watched Zhang Ye's back as he left, eyes gleaming with interest.

“This guy... definitely clever.”

Even Liao Honglei and Bai Chunyu behind him couldn’t help but glance over.

“First he used regular bullets to lull Wu Di into carelessness, then slipped in an Origin Bullet among them. That kind of attack... yeah, easy to make someone slip up.”

“Still, in the end, it’s just because Wu Di lacks real combat experience.”

Liao Honglei’s tone clearly looked down on Wu Di.

Arms crossed, he smirked, “If it were one of us seasoned soldiers, we wouldn’t have made that mistake! Wouldn’t have even given Zhang Ye the chance to fire!”

Next to him, the sharp-featured Bai Chunyu chuckled softly. “Still, he’s got serious combat instincts, doesn’t he? Knowing how to use his strengths and cover his weaknesses—that’s a rare quality.”

Deng Shentong didn’t respond to his two subordinates.

He just stared at Zhang Ye, admiration flickering in his eyes.

Then he thought to himself: “The investigation team’s roster is fixed. I can’t just add new people at will. But Zhang Ye... he’s already qualified to be a full member of the Celestial Team. Maybe... I should just kick Lu Yinghao out. His strength is becoming a liability anyway.”

Back in Zhu Zheng’s viewing room, everyone’s eyes were burning with interest after witnessing Zhang Ye’s victory.

Beating Wu Di meant Zhang Ye had the skill to be an elite member of the investigation team.

After all, Wu Di ranked pretty high within the Black-Robed Investigation Unit.

“Looks like our intel on Zhang Ye really was off.”

Zhu Zheng frowned slightly.

Was Zhang Ye hiding this well, or did Bai Li Changqing deliberately leave something out in his reports?

No, not exactly.

Bai Li Changqing had reported accurately—Zhang Ye was a Variant skilled in defense.

From an offensive perspective, he relied more on tactics than raw power.

It just meant his ability wasn’t built for damage output—but he was incredibly good at fighting.

“But... how did he get an Origin Bullet?”

As Zhu Zheng spoke, he looked toward his secretary, Lan Xincheng.

Origin Bullets were a tightly held national secret in Huaguo. They were co-developed by the tech departments of the six major regions, and everything—from materials to the manufacturing process—was completely classified.

Even in Blizzard City, only people like Yun Yan, the investigation team, and top-level headquarters guards had access to them.

The materials were so rare that ordinary people had zero chance of ever getting one.

No wonder Zhu Zheng was on edge.

Lan Xincheng quickly responded, "It's possible he got a few by chance during a mission the Black-Robed Team ran in Tianhai City. I'll follow up with Zhang Ye and Bai Li Changqing to confirm."

Zhu Zheng nodded.

"If that's the case, then it's fine."

A few stray bullets being used wasn't a big deal.

"This Zhang Ye... might be worth keeping an eye on."

Seeing Zhu Zheng's growing interest in Zhang Ye, Lan Xincheng asked, "Commander, should we transfer him to Blizzard City? Get him trained up and consider assigning him to the Yan Yun Unit or one of the investigation teams?"

Zhu Zheng thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"Let's hold off for now. He's still the leader of the Tianhai City Variants. That place is in shambles and short on combat strength. If we pull him out now, Tianhai could fall into chaos."

Lan Xincheng nodded. "Understood, sir."

He'd worked under Zhu Zheng for years and understood the man's way of thinking.

The subtext was clear: while Zhu Zheng appreciated Zhang Ye's abilities, he didn't love them.

After all, in terms of raw strength, Zhang Ye was mid-to-upper level compared to the investigation team and the Yan Yun Unit.

Zhang Ye left the dueling field and headed to the second floor.

Bai Li Changqing looked at him with no hint of surprise in his expression.

“Thanks for going easy on him.”

Zhang Ye shrugged casually. “It wasn’t a big deal.”

As far as he was concerned, someone like Wu Di wasn’t even worth worrying about.

“So... what about the weapon you promised?”

Bai Li Changqing grinned. “If you’re that eager, I’ll take you over there right after this.”

The investigation team’s armory was inside the operations center, not far from here.

Zhang Ye nodded. “Alright. I’ll go change first.”

Speaking of the training suit he was wearing, Zhang Ye really didn’t want to take it off.

His old combat gear had great defense and came with a ton of tech enhancements, but it didn’t come close to this sleek black bodysuit.

Not only was its defense top-tier, but it could also boost basic physical stats—which was insanely useful.

Zhang Ye seriously wanted to snag a set to wear under his combat gear. That combo would be perfect.

Too bad that was just wishful thinking—there’s no way Bai Li Changqing would hand over a full set of this high-tech gear.

But thankfully, he had Lu Keran.

Zhang Ye looked at Lu Keran nearby. She gave him a small nod, her eyes brimming with confidence.

Zhang Ye's lips curled into a faint smile.

Looks like he would be getting his hands on this gear after all.

Chapter 582 – Sir, Please Wait

Zhang Ye headed to the locker room and changed out of his training suit.

He still loved the feel of the material, but there was no way he could take it with him from here.

Fortunately, he had Lu Keran, a master mechanic. Later, he'd count on her to analyze the material and recreate a set for him.

Once he was changed, Zhang Ye stepped out of the locker room.

Wu Di was already outside.

From the look on his face, it was clear he was frustrated. But that hostility he'd once held toward Zhang Ye was gone.

Now that they'd fought, the obsession in his heart had finally been released.

He also understood that Zhang Ye hadn't even gone all out. If he still lost under those conditions, then there wouldn't be a chance next time either.

He just felt a bit unwilling, that's all.

As Zhang Ye came out, he overheard Wu Di talking to Bai Li Changqing. "I really thought I was fully prepared this time. Thought I had a chance to beat him."

Bai Li Changqing was reassuring, "You've only just joined the investigation team. What you lack is real combat experience. You'll get there with time."

Zhang Ye walked over. "You two done chatting? If so, mind taking me to pick up my prize?"

Bai Li Changqing waved toward the distance, and soon, one of the investigation team members, Meng Siyu, came over carrying a black case.

She handed the case to Zhang Ye. "This is what you asked for."

Zhang Ye's eyes lit up. He was just about to open it and check out his new weapon.

But Bai Li Changqing placed a hand on the case and gave him a look. "Better to wait until you're back."

Standard Edman alloy weapons weren't considered top-secret in Blizzard City, but even so, regular soldiers weren't authorized to use them.

Giving one to Zhang Ye was technically a grey area. Luckily, the city's temporary rules didn't detail this restriction.

So while it was fine for Zhang Ye to use it, flaunting it publicly wasn't a great idea.

After all, this was the Operations Center. If word spread, someone might use it against him.

Zhang Ye understood and promptly stashed the weapons case into his alternate dimension.

Some familiar faces from the Black-Robed Squad were nearby as well.

They had clearly watched the fight too, and now looked at Zhang Ye with growing admiration.

In terms of combat strength, Wu Di was second only to Bai Li Changqing in their squad.

Zhang Ye had defeated him effortlessly while holding back. That showed not just power but impressive tactical thinking.

Bai Li Changqing laughed and wrapped one arm around Zhang Ye's shoulder, the other around Wu Di's.

"Now that you've had your brawl, let's call it even, yeah? Hopefully you two can be friends from now on."

Friends?

The word made Zhang Ye's lips curl into a meaningful smile.

His standards for friendship were pretty high.

But he'd still give Bai Li Changqing some face. Besides, saying something nice didn't cost anything.

Zhang Ye smiled and extended his right hand to Wu Di. "Let's look out for each other from now on."

There had never been any personal grudge between him and Wu Di.

Now that they'd fought, Wu Di clearly felt the difference in strength. He was proud but respected those stronger than him.

Zhang Ye offering a handshake made him a little embarrassed, but he still reached out and shook it.

“Yeah.”

After the fight, the sky had already darkened.

There was a curfew in Blizzard City—not that it applied to Bai Li Changqing and the others.

But Zhang Ye was new here and didn’t want to give anyone an excuse to target him by breaking the rules.

He said, “We’ll head back to rest. There’s a gathering tomorrow.”

Bai Li Changqing nodded. “Alright. After the gathering, let’s hang out again sometime! I didn’t even get to treat you to a proper drink today—poor host on my part.”

Zhang Ye gave a light smile. “If I’ve got time, we can definitely have a few.”

Zhang Ye and his group left the Operations Center—no need to mention the details.

Back at the dueling field, the spectators each had thoughts of their own.

Deng Shentong was already thinking about bringing Zhang Ye into his fold.

But since he’d already met Zhang Ye earlier, going to him again today would seem a bit too eager—not his style.

“He doesn’t even know who I am... Deng Shentong. Not surprising, really—he’s from a small place.”

After some thought, he turned to Bai Chunyu. “Go find Zhang Ye later. Ask him to come visit my residence after the gathering tomorrow.”

Bai Chunyu was careful and composed—unlike the impulsive Liao Honglei. He was the perfect one for this job.

“Oh, and don’t forget to take him past the leaderboard. Let him see who I am.”

In Blizzard City, personal merit points were the real hard currency.

The quickest way to earn them was by going out on missions.

So the top of the leaderboard—the Heaven List—was a clear indicator of strength.

Deng Shentong had always ranked number one on it.

He had to make sure Zhang Ye understood his power. That way, he’d be more willing to join his team.

Right now, Zhang Ye seemed much closer to the Black-Robed Squad.

If Bai Li Changqing managed to rope him in, that’d be a serious waste of talent.

Bai Chunyu kept his usual gentle smile and nodded. “Yes, Captain.”

With that, he turned and left the room, heading to find Zhang Ye.

...

...

Zhang Ye and his team were on their way back to the apartment building after leaving the Operations Center.

Having just received a new weapon, Zhang Ye was itching to get a good look at it.

At least now he wouldn't have to keep sharing Longming with Liang Yue.

Still, he was curious—since both were made from Edman alloy, how did his new saber compare to Longming?

Another concern nagged at him—he hoped the fight with Wu Di hadn't drawn too much attention from Blizzard City's upper brass.

If they got greedy for his strength and tried to force him to stay, that would be a problem.

Just as they stepped outside the Operations Center, a cold, soft voice suddenly called out behind them.

“Mr. Zhang Ye, please wait.”

Everyone turned instinctively at the sound.

On the steps behind them stood a sharp-featured man with a pale face and long shoulder-length hair, wearing a silver-white combat uniform and squinting slightly.

Zhang Ye had never seen this guy before.

But anyone who showed up here clearly wasn't ordinary.

“And you are?”

“My name is Bai Chunyu. I’m with the Celestial Team.”

As he spoke, Bai Chunyu slowly walked down the steps and came up to Zhang Ye.

He smiled. “I watched your battle with Wu Di from the Black-Robed Squad just now. Your combat instincts are clever, and your abilities are quite... intriguing.”

Celestial Team?

Immediately, an image of Deng Shentong’s flashy figure popped into Zhang Ye’s head.

So this is a recruitment attempt, huh?

Chapter 583 – The Sabre

Bai Chunyu didn’t bother with vague hints. He got straight to the point: “After you’re done with the gathering tomorrow, our captain would like you to come meet him.”

“People from the outer cities like you don’t really know how things work in Blizzard City. You might get tricked into going somewhere you shouldn’t.”

He smiled warmly as he continued, “If I’m not mistaken, Bai Li Changqing from the Black-Robed Squad has already tried to recruit you into his team, hasn’t he?”

Zhang Ye thought to himself: Bai Li Changqing doesn’t have the guts. If I joined, he wouldn’t be able to keep his position as team captain.

But Bai Chunyu clearly thought he'd guessed right.

His smile deepened. "After their former captain Bian Junwu died in battle, the Black-Robed Squad's overall strength dropped to the bottom of the six major investigation teams. There's even talk they might lose their team status altogether."

"So I hope you'll be careful. Don't let yourself get roped into something you'll regret."

Zhang Ye understood that Deng Shentong inviting him over was likely a prelude to recruiting him.

Unfortunately for them, Zhang Ye had no intention of staying in Blizzard City.

Still, he wasn't the kind to reject a smiling face. And according to Bai Li Changqing, Deng Shentong held even higher standing in Blizzard City than Bian Junwu once did.

So there was no need to offend the man.

Zhang Ye said, "After the gathering, I'll pay a visit to Mr. Deng Shentong."

Bai Chunyu's eyes opened slightly, a satisfied smile spreading across his face.

"Great. I'll come find you then. It'll also be a good chance to tell you about the history of our Celestial Team—and let you see our strength firsthand."

With that, he turned and headed back into the Operations Center.

The others looked toward Zhang Ye.

Fatty Xu sounded worried. "Boss, now you've really got their attention. What can you do? You're like a sparkling diamond—there's just no hiding that shine!"

Zhang Ye said calmly, “With my level of strength, it was inevitable they’d start noticing.”

Even before absorbing Yuan Kongye’s source energy, Zhang Ye’s performance had already been enough to attract Bian Junwu’s interest.

So this wasn’t something he could avoid.

Being too good—it was its own kind of headache.

“But if I’m not interested in joining Blizzard City,” Zhang Ye continued, “I doubt they’ll try to force me.”

Both Bian Junwu and Bai Li Changqing had told him the same thing.

The investigation teams and the Yan Yun Unit placed heavy emphasis on loyalty.

So the process of recruiting Variants from outside was extremely strict. They didn’t just look at power, but also background, character, and more.

As for forcibly drafting someone—only if your ability was so powerful they’d swallow their pride just to keep you.

If Zhang Ye ever revealed the full extent of his strength, that might happen.

But right now, he’d only shown the level of an elite investigation team member.

In the context of Blizzard City, that level of power wasn’t common, but the six investigation teams and the Yan Yun Unit had plenty who measured up.

Hearing this, everyone around him let out a quiet sigh of relief.

From what they'd gathered, Blizzard City had a maze of rules. Your access to survival supplies depended on your contribution level.

If Zhang Ye got transferred here, they'd probably have to come too. And life under those restrictions would be a far cry from the freedom they had in Tianhai City.

Meanwhile, Lu Keran couldn't take her eyes off the box in Zhang Ye's hands.

Zhang Ye knew exactly what she was thinking and smiled. "Come on, let's head back."

He was eager to get a good look at this new weapon too.

The group returned to the apartment complex.

The female attendant who'd received them earlier looked visibly relieved to see them back safely.

Her brows furrowed ever so slightly, and though she didn't say anything, her expression clearly showed a bit of displeasure.

Still, she didn't dare make it obvious. Her polite smile just turned a bit colder.

Zhang Ye couldn't be bothered with her and headed straight to his room with the others.

Xiao Honglian and the rest had stayed behind at the apartment, so they had no idea about Zhang Ye's duel with Wu Di.

Now, everyone gathered in Zhang Ye's room, their eyes fixed eagerly on the black box he was holding.

Liang Yue and Lu Keran were the most curious about the new weapon.

Zhang Ye wasn't the type to keep people guessing. He placed the box on the table and opened it right in front of them.

A soft hiss sounded as the lid popped open, releasing a faint white mist.

Zhang Ye instinctively frowned and stepped back, but Lu Keran quickly reassured him, "It's a chemical preservative for the metal—to prevent corrosion. Only the most valuable treasures and weapons get stored like this."

Zhang Ye relaxed.

As the mist dissipated, the weapon inside was finally revealed.

Everyone instinctively leaned in to get a closer look.

At first glance, the sabre already gave off an extraordinary vibe. Its design was distinctly cyberpunk. Under the light, the blade shimmered with a cold blue hue, while the handle was wrapped in black leather.

The sabre wasn't long. Blade and handle together measured just a little over one meter—around 1.2 meters in total.

Compared to Liang Yue's long sabre, Longming, it was noticeably shorter.

The blade was straight and sharp, good for both stabbing and slashing.

It wasn't a weapon for wild, sweeping attacks—but it was perfect for close-quarters combat, parrying, and defense.

Its strengths were speed in tight spaces and ease of carry.

“What a blade!”

Liang Yue recognized it instantly. “It’s modeled after the Tang horizontal sabre. Not quite the ancient style, but definitely made for close combat.”

Zhang Ye lifted the sabre. Though he wasn’t a sword expert, he could feel how sharp the blade was. It was definitely on par with Longming.

Lu Keran couldn’t wait. “Brother Zhang Ye, can I take a look?”

Zhang Ye gave a slight smile. “Go ahead.”

In the apocalypse, cold weapons were mostly only useful to strength-type Variants.

After all, this wasn’t ancient times—modern firearms were widely available and highly effective.

Zhang Ye had asked for this blade mostly as a symbolic trophy, something for close-range self-defense. He didn’t expect to use it much.

That’s why Bai Li Changqing hadn’t minded parting with it.

Of course, that didn’t mean it wasn’t valuable—it just meant that for someone at Zhang Ye’s level, abilities were usually more practical than weapons. Unless you were a Variant who specialized in melee combat.

Lu Keran took the sabre. It wasn’t heavy, probably five or six pounds at most, but it was razor sharp.

Perfectly suited for someone like Zhang Ye, who wasn’t built like a tank.

Lu Keran ran her fingers over the blade, activating her Mechanized Control ability. Immediately, she began analyzing the materials and construction of the entire weapon.

Chapter 584 – Divine Judgment

Lu Keran finished analyzing the Edman alloy sabre.

Seeing the deep frown on her face and her serious expression, Zhang Ye couldn't help but ask, "Well? Is this kind of metal something you can replicate?"

Everyone looked at Lu Keran with anticipation.

If they could get weapons forged from the hardest metal available in the modern world, who wouldn't want one?

Even someone who couldn't swat a fly could still use it for self-defense.

After all, in the apocalypse—who didn't love divine weapons?

But Lu Keran looked at everyone and said, "I've completed the analysis. Edman alloy is extremely complex to forge. Besides the rare materials, the manufacturing process itself is incredibly intricate."

"For me, I can use Mechanized Control to eventually refine the Edman alloy, but shaping it into a weapon will take more time to figure out."

No one seemed disappointed by this answer—in fact, they all smiled.

"Well, that makes sense. If top-grade cold weapon materials from the major regions were that easy to crack and recreate, everyone else might as well pack it in."

Zhang Ye and Liang Yue already had their own weapons. Among the rest, only Uncle You was a melee-type Variant, the only one who truly needed a weapon.

So no one was too anxious about getting their hands on Edman alloy gear just yet.

Zhang Ye reassured Lu Keran, “No need to rush. Just take your time and go step by step.”

Haste makes waste—especially with high-end tech like this. Patience was key.

If it were so easy to replicate, Blizzard City’s army would’ve already mass-produced it.

Encouraged by Zhang Ye’s words, Lu Keran nodded firmly. “I’ll figure it out as fast as I can—along with how that black bodysuit was made!”

Liang Yue took the sabre next and examined it carefully.

As a martial artist, she had a deep love for weapons—especially famous or rare ones.

She also used sabres herself.

But what really pleased her right now was that Zhang Ye finally had his own blade, which meant he wouldn’t be using Longming all the time.

In truth, Zhang Ye usually only handed over Longming during big battles.

Otherwise, he preferred to use it himself for practice. After all, no man could resist the allure of a fine blade.

“Zhang Ye, you should give this sabre a name!” Liang Yue said. “A treasured weapon has to have a name. That’s what makes it truly belong to its master.”

Zhang Ye took the sabre back. He didn’t sheath it.

His alternate dimension served as the perfect scabbard—and keeping it unsheathed made it easier to draw in battle.

Staring at the blade, which shimmered with a cold blue glow, Zhang Ye thought for a moment and said, “I’ll call it Divine Judgment.”

A sacred judgment—one that judges life and death.

Slicing through foes like cutting paper. That was the meaning Zhang Ye gave it.

With the name chosen, Zhang Ye told everyone to head back to their rooms and rest—tomorrow was the big gathering for Variant organizations from the Jiangnan Region.

...

...

Operations Center

After the battle, Zhu Zheng felt a growing appreciation for Zhang Ye—but Bai Li Changqing’s evaluation still lingered in his mind. He frowned slightly, thinking about where a “shield” like that could be placed.

That’s right—not a sword or a spear. A shield.

Zhang Ye gave him the impression of someone extremely skilled at defense—someone who ensured his safety before ever counterattacking. A stalwart shield.

This kind of person might seem dull, but in the right place, they could yield unexpected results.

At that moment, his secretary, Lan Xincheng, walked in and leaned in to whisper a few words.

Zhu Zheng looked up and said in a dignified tone, “Let him in.”

Lan Xincheng nodded and soon returned, bringing someone with him.

That person was none other than Wu Di, who had just fought Zhang Ye.

Wu Di walked up and stood straight, offering a sharp salute.

“Commander, I wasn’t strong enough and failed to defeat Zhang Ye. I await your punishment!”

As it turned out, Wu Di’s appearance at the Cipher Bar and his “random” challenge to Zhang Ye hadn’t been a coincidence at all.

It had been under Zhu Zheng’s orders.

Ever since the Tianhai City battle ended, Zhu Zheng had taken a special interest in Zhang Ye’s name.

No matter how Bai Li Changqing reported things, there was one fact that couldn’t be hidden—

In that final fight, it was Zhang Ye alone who stood up to the newly ascended Epsilon-level Variant, Yuan Kongye!

Though it was mentioned only briefly, Zhu Zheng couldn’t overlook it.

He knew better than anyone what an Epsilon-level Variant meant.

Even with all the talent gathered in Blizzard City, there wasn't a single one among them officially recognized as Epsilon-level—not even Deng Shentong or Bian Junwu. They were close, but not quite there.

And yet Zhang Ye had repeatedly blocked Yuan Kongye's attacks?

That alone spoke volumes.

So Zhu Zheng had already made his move.

He knew Zhang Ye would show up at the gathering—and this fight had been planned in advance.

Only... the result had left him a bit disappointed.

So Zhang Ye really was just good at defense, with rather limited offensive capabilities?

That's why Zhu Zheng had lost some interest, deciding instead to treat Zhang Ye as a "special-use shield," someone who could be deployed in critical situations.

He glanced at Wu Di.

The defeated Wu Di stood there, clearly ashamed. He didn't even dare meet Zhu Zheng's eyes.

But Zhu Zheng smiled kindly. "Heh, what's there to be punished for? You've only had your powers for three months and just joined the Black-Robed Squad."

"Wu Di, you've got potential. The reason you lost to Zhang Ye is simply lack of experience."

Then his expression turned serious.

“Now that Bian Junwu has fallen in battle, the Black-Robed Squad’s strength has taken a major hit. You need to grow fast. In the future, you’ll have to carry the team with Bai Li Changqing!”

Wu Di clenched his fists tightly. At the mention of Bian Junwu—the man he saw as a father figure—grief filled his heart, but also a surge of determination.

That’s right. Now he had to hold up the banner for the investigation team.

With Bian Junwu gone, he had to become everyone’s pillar.

He was still young. His power still had enormous room to grow.

So a single defeat didn’t mean anything.

Wu Di lifted his head high and said loudly, “Yes, Commander! I won’t let you down!”

Chapter 585: Tianhai City's Predicament

Early the next morning, everyone who came from the Outer Cities received a notification: they were required to arrive at the Tianshang Conference Center in the heart of Blizzard City before 9:30 a.m. According to the previous notice, the gathering was officially scheduled to begin at ten o'clock, so asking them to arrive half an hour early was reasonable enough. When Zhang Yi got up, his eyes were a little hazy. Truth be told, he hadn't slept well the whole night. After all, he was in an unfamiliar city and an unfamiliar room—it was hard to get proper rest. Not to mention, last night's battle had stirred up countless thoughts in his mind, and he didn't fall asleep until the latter half of the night. In the morning, a group of attendants wearing matching uniforms arrived at the apartment, pushing food carts. They delivered meals room by room. Whether by prior agreement or coincidence, the leaders of the other three factions and Zhang Yi's team members all gathered in his room to eat together. Zhang Yi's room wasn't that big—once everyone showed up, there wasn't even enough space to sit. So they sat on the floor or the bed, eating while discussing the upcoming gathering. As for the topics—they were mostly just things that had been discussed before, being brought up again for emphasis. Zhang Yi responded to them casually, but made sure to highlight some important reminders about being here. “Listen up! This is Blizzard City. We might be the big shots back in Tianhai City, but compared to the regional headquarters, our power is still tiny.” “Not to mention, right now this place is packed with Superhuman forces from twelve Outer Cities. One careless move and there could be a serious clash.” “That’s why—I

don't want any of you getting into conflicts with others." At this point, Zhang Yi stressed again, "If something really does happen, hold it in for now! We'll settle things after we leave Blizzard City." "Even if someone points at your nose and cusses you out while we're here, you're not allowed to fight them!" Xiao Honglian frowned slightly when she heard that—she knew it wouldn't be easy. With so many people crammed into one place, conflict was bound to happen. Especially given Tianhai City's current state, they'd probably be seen as the easiest target. Still, she nodded. "Zhang Yi, now that we've agreed to follow your lead, we'll do as you say!" Xing Tian smiled. "Same here." Only Chen Jingguan had his brows deeply furrowed, his face full of concern. Zhang Yi noticed something was off and asked calmly, "What's wrong, Chen Jingguan? You have a different opinion?" Chen Jingguan was startled, then quickly forced a smile. "Of course not. I think what you said makes perfect sense." "It's just... I'm worried that even if we want to keep things peaceful, this trip to Blizzard City might not go smoothly." Everyone turned to look at him. Chen Jingguan held a somewhat unique status—he came from the higher-ups of the Jiangnan Region. Even though Huaguo wasn't founded long enough to have centuries-old family clans, his parents had once held considerable power and influence in Jiangnan. Even now, he still had quite a few relatives and old connections in Blizzard City. They might not be reliable, but they could still offer intel that others didn't have access to. Zhang Yi said, "Chen Jingguan, unless you plan to stay in Blizzard City for good, you're still with us in Tianhai City. We share the same interests. If you've got news, you should share it." Chen Jingguan shook his head. "I have no interest in Blizzard City. Better to be the head of a chicken than the tail of an ox—I get that much." He said to the group, "Yesterday after arriving in Blizzard City, I heard some news... and it's not good for us." "The zombie horde issue in Tianhai City has already spread throughout the entire Jiangnan District. Especially the surrounding cities—they've all been affected by the zombies that spilled over." "Right now, just about everyone knows Tianhai City suffered chaos from the horde. The major forces were nearly wiped out, and we've got no strong powers left." "But Tianhai City is still rich—huge population, tons of resources. When we were strong, nobody dared mess with us. But now? We look like a fat lamb, just waiting to get bitten." Xiao Honglian and Xing Tian immediately looked furious. "They wouldn't dare!" Zhou Ke'er and the others looked worried too. They had only just started to enjoy a few peaceful days—was war about to break out again? Only Zhang Yi remained calm, as if none of this came as a surprise. "That's it? That's the big news?" Zhang Yi said with a relaxed tone. Chen Jingguan looked at him in disbelief. "Zhang Yi, how can you not care at all?" "Survival of the fittest—that's just how the apocalypse works. What's so surprising about it?" Zhang Yi replied with a grin. "But..." Before Chen Jingguan could argue, Zhang Yi cut him off, "If anyone dares to make a move, we'll just kill them. It's not a big deal. That's how we used to settle things between factions anyway." If something's bound to happen, there's no point trying to dodge it. From an outsider's perspective, Tianhai City was indeed too weak right now. With so many resources, of course the neighboring cities would be tempted. Zhang Yi had already guessed this would happen back after that battle, so it didn't catch him off guard. To the others, Zhang Yi's calmness came off as a quiet confidence, a sense that he had everything under control. So they all felt much more at ease—following Zhang Yi seemed like the right choice. But in truth, Zhang Yi's thinking was very simple. If anyone tried to mess with Tianhai City, he'd strike back. Even if the enemy was too powerful to take head-on, he'd just protect his own turf. As for the other three factions? If they didn't have the strength, they had no right to hoard so many resources. It was fine to be greedy, but without power, greed only led to destruction. The little bond he had with the other factions wasn't enough to make him risk his life fighting for them. After breakfast, they checked the time—it was already past 8:30—so they all set out for the venue. After leaving the apartment, they saw other Superhuman groups from different cities

heading the same way. Each force moved as a unit based on their city of origin. They may have been competitors before, but now they were sticking together—displaying strength to avoid being underestimated. In a world ruled by strength, if you’re seen as weak, you’ll be the first to get wiped out. Among the twelve cities, Tianhai City’s group looked the most underwhelming. They had the fewest people. Unlike the others who showed up with hundreds, even large-scale teams. It wasn’t that Xiao Honglian and the others didn’t want to bring more—they just didn’t have the numbers anymore. Even within their current group, some weren’t even Superhumans. Looking at the other cities’ imposing squads, Xing Tian felt a bit nervous and muttered to himself, Let’s just hope nothing goes wrong...

Chapter 586: The Land of Neon

Zhang Yi and the others arrived at the main hall of the Tianchang Conference Center, where it was already packed with people. Many factions from various cities were mingling—some clearly knew each other and were engaged in conversation. After all, in the apocalypse, anyone who managed to become the leader of a faction was likely someone who once held power or influence. Most were former military officials like Chen Jingguan, and others were high-ranking local bureaucrats. Of course, there were also people like Zhang Yi and Xing Tian, who had carved out their own domains through sheer strength. Zhang Yi didn’t have much contact with the world beyond Tianhai City, so he wasn’t looking to socialize. He simply followed the staff’s guidance, leading Liang Yue, Zhou Ke’er, and the others into the hall and quietly finding a place to sit. The venue was huge, designed like a lecture hall, capable of seating up to two thousand people for a conference. Zhang Yi chose a spot toward the middle-rear section and sat down to wait patiently for the gathering to begin. The factions led by Chen Jingguan, Xiao Honglian, and Xing Tian also took seats nearby. But even after waiting for quite a while, right up until 10:30, there was still no sign of Zhu Zheng arriving to host the meeting. Zhang Yi yawned, lazily leaning back in his cushioned seat, clearly bored out of his mind. Meetings in Huaguo rarely ever started on time. If they began within an hour of the scheduled time, that was already pretty good. Especially this time, when it involved integrating powers across the entire Jiangnan Region—there were far more variables to consider. Back when Zhang Yi was still working a regular job, he was used to waiting during meetings, so he wasn’t bothered. He simply chatted casually with Zhou Ke’er and Lu Keran. However, murmurs of unrest began to spread through the hall. Zhang Yi pretended not to hear them. What he didn’t expect was that this meeting would be delayed all the way into the afternoon. And the reason wasn’t that Zhu Zheng or the Jiangnan Region higher-ups were intentionally leaving them hanging. Something had happened. The clock turned back to 7:00 a.m. Zhu Zheng had woken early, completed his morning workout, and was having breakfast with his wife and children. But the meal wasn’t going down smoothly. He had just received an urgent message from Tu Yunlie over in the Operations Department. Zhu Zheng only glanced at the message through his comms device, and his brow instantly furrowed, turning grim. He immediately set down his chopsticks and said to his wife, Li Yunping, “You guys eat without me—I have to step out.” Li Yunping sighed, a little exasperated. “At least eat something, or you’ll be complaining about being hungry later.” But she wasn’t surprised. This kind of situation had happened many times before. Ever since the apocalypse, the entire Huaguo relied on the six major military districts to hold things together. As the Commander of the Jiangnan Region, Zhu Zheng bore heavy responsibility—nothing could happen without his involvement. Li Yunping skillfully pulled a

lunchbox from under the cupboard, filled it with some food, and ran outside to hand it off to Zhu Zheng's driver. Standing next to the car was Zhu Zheng's personal guard, Sun Luxuan. When he saw Li Yunping, he simply nodded in greeting. She didn't take offense. Sun Luxuan wasn't just any ordinary bodyguard. He was one of the top fighters in Blizzard City, and his sole duty was to ensure Zhu Zheng's safety—he didn't concern himself with any other matters. Zhu Zheng got into a black bulletproof car, which sped toward the Operations Center. When he arrived, Tu Yunlie was already waiting at the entrance. Zhu Zheng walked up quickly, his tone serious. "What's going on?" The two of them briskly headed toward the Commander's office. Tu Yunlie followed alongside and gave his report in a low voice: "Per your orders, I sent people to Linhai to investigate why their local factions never reported to Blizzard City." "But when our team got there, they discovered that all three factions in Linhai had been completely wiped out!" Zhu Zheng's face darkened. They stepped into the elevator, heading to the top floor where the Commander's office was located. "Linhai's forces weren't exactly top-tier, but they still had thousands of members and over fifty Superhumans in total!" "Taking all of them out isn't something just anyone could pull off. Do we know who did it?" Tu Yunlie replied, "Our team ran into the attackers when they arrived." His voice dropped lower. "I sent some of the best from the Yan Yun Guard—even though there were only four of them, their combat power was solid. But three of them were killed in action! Only one, a guy named Chen Qi, made it back." "And according to him, those people were speaking Japanese!" The moment the words left his mouth, Zhu Zheng's eyes went razor-sharp. He whipped his head around. "You're saying—they're from the Land of Neon?" Behind him, Sun Luxuan pushed his gold-rimmed glasses up his nose. A chilling murderous gleam flickered in his narrow eyes. It was an emotion etched deep into his bones. And now, in a world torn apart by chaos, the people of the Neon Kingdom dared to step onto Huaguo's soil again—not only wiping out Linhai's Superhuman factions, but even killing members of the Jiangnan Region's Yan Yun Guard? This was tantamount to a declaration of war! Zhu Zheng's expression turned terrifyingly grim—even Sun Luxuan and Tu Yunlie felt the pressure. Though the old general had no Superhuman abilities of his own, the power he wielded could wipe the entire island nation clean off the map. If it was confirmed that these attackers were Superhumans dispatched by the Neon Kingdom, then this would be an outright escalation of war. Tu Yunlie's voice crackled through the comms from inside his collar. "Based on the intel we have so far, their numbers are small. It doesn't appear to be a full-scale military deployment—possibly just an advance unit." "Please allow me to lead a team to wipe them out!" Zhu Zheng remained silent, his face unreadable. He was weighing the implications of the situation. The destruction of Linhai's Superhuman factions wasn't a huge loss in itself. The real problem was what this act represented—an indication that the island nation was once again setting its sights on Huaguo's territory. Zhu Zheng didn't even consider Neon Kingdom a real threat. Just the power of the Jiangnan Region alone was enough to flatten that island. But launching an aggressive military strike came with serious consequences. Neon had ties to several other countries—making this a highly sensitive matter that could easily trigger a wider conflict. Zhu Zheng pondered for a moment. Fortunately, the damage so far was still manageable. As Commander, he couldn't act on impulse—he needed a clear plan before taking any action. "Where's that Yan Yun Guard survivor, Chen Qi?" Zhu Zheng turned to Tu Yunlie. Tu Yunlie rumbled, "He's already here, waiting to give you a detailed report!" Just as he finished speaking, the elevator arrived at the top floor. Zhu Zheng stepped out first. "Then what are we waiting for!" This was no trivial matter. He had to find out whether this was truly the Neon Kingdom launching a full-scale invasion—or just the actions of a rogue ronin faction. Those were two completely different situations.

Chapter 587: The Long Wait

Zhu Zheng arrived at the office and saw Yan Yun Guard's Chen Qi, who was wrapped in bandages and visibly weak.

"Chen Qi, tell me exactly what you saw in Linhai City—leave nothing out!"

Zhu Zheng had him sit down to give his report.

The situation was urgent, and there was no time for comforting words.

Chen Qi swallowed hard and recounted everything they'd encountered during the investigation in Linhai City.

The main details were more or less what Tu Yunlie had already explained, only in more detail.

But one thing was certain—the people who slaughtered Linhai's Superhumans were speaking Japanese.

Zhu Zheng's face remained stern as he calmly asked, "How many were there?"

Chen Qi replied, "We only saw three of them. And throughout the whole fight, only one of them actually made a move—he used a sword. His blade was fast—he chopped off Xue Ting's arm in a single strike!"

Chen Qi's face turned gloomy as grief overtook him at the memory of his fallen comrades.

"As soon as we clashed, we realized we were on a completely different level from them. So the other three did everything they could to hold the enemy back, just to buy me a chance to escape and report back."

"Luckily, our vehicle was faster than theirs. That's the only reason I survived."

Suddenly, Chen Qi clenched his fists and shouted to Zhu Zheng, "Commander, we have to kill every last one of those b*stards! We have to avenge our fallen brothers!"

Zhu Zheng rested his chin on his interlaced fingers, his expression unreadable.

But his tone was calm and resolute. "Don't worry—we won't just sit back and let this go. Those Neon Kingdom thugs dared to run wild on our soil. There's only one outcome for them—death!"

Zhu Zheng's words were as firm as iron, like the grim reaper passing judgment.

He looked at Chen Qi, his tone softening slightly.

"Go back and focus on recovering. Leave the rest to the region—we'll handle it."

Chen Qi nodded obediently, then leaned on a crutch and limped out of the office with a nurse's assistance.

Tu Yunlie kept his eyes on Zhu Zheng, just waiting for the order to move out and wipe those Neon intruders off the map.

But Zhu Zheng was deep in thought.

They needed to confirm the identity of these Neon operatives first.

The first step was to notify the Shengjing District and get in touch with Neon's higher-ups.

There were really only two possible outcomes:

First, the Neon authorities admitted the attackers were their people—which would mean full-scale war was imminent.

That was the less likely scenario, since Neon simply didn't have the national power to stand against Huaguo.

They'd have to be out of their minds to think about invading Huaguo territory.

The more likely outcome was the second—Neon's leadership would deny any connection to those people.

And that didn't matter.

Whether these intruders came as rogue organizations or under Neon's orders, once the government denied them, it meant they wouldn't go to war for their sake.

Which meant the Jiangnan Region could deal with them however they wanted.

"A mere Neon Superhuman squad dares to act up on Huaguo soil? They're asking to die."

Zhu Zheng let out a cold snort and picked up the comms device to contact the higher-ups in the Shengjing District.

Since this involved foreign powers, it was considered external affairs—protocol dictated that Shengjing handle communication.

Meanwhile, Zhu Zheng was delayed by the incident in Linhai City, and so naturally couldn't attend the meeting as planned.

Back at the Tianshang Conference Center, everyone had been waiting from morning till noon, and they were beginning to get impatient.

Sure, they respected the power of the Jiangnan Region—but they were still powerful figures in their own right. Being made to wait like this didn't sit well.

To make matters worse, Zhu Zheng had to consult with the Blizzard City leadership regarding the situation, so there were no high-ranking officials present to keep order in the hall.

Fortunately, the two Investigation Team Captains showed up with their people and coordinated with the Yan Yun troops to maintain discipline, keeping the hall from descending into chaos.

Still, the Superhumans from the twelve city factions were growing more and more restless.

By noon, Blizzard City had arranged lunch for them.

However, since no one knew when Zhu Zheng would show up, everyone was told not to leave the venue. The meal consisted of basic boxed lunches.

Zhang Yi's group was in much better shape by comparison.

After all, he had plenty of food stored in his alternate dimension, so meals were no issue.

While others were eating the simple boxed meals from the Blizzard City cafeteria, Zhang Yi's group was enjoying hearty dishes—steaming hot, full of rich aroma. The smell alone made nearby groups look on with envy.

If there was one thing bothering them, it was the hard seating. The conference chairs were stiff, and sitting for too long was starting to make their butts sore.

By 1 p.m., there was still no sign of Zhu Zheng or any of the Blizzard City higher-ups.

Xiao Honglian couldn't help but complain, "Are they messing with us? Just leaving us hanging like this—is that how they do things around here?"

Zhang Yi, though also a bit impatient, didn't show any sign of frustration.

He simply said, “Power speaks louder than anything else.”

Xiao Honglian’s face turned red with anger. “Still, this is just too—”

Zhang Yi waved her off, signaling her to stop.

“No point talking about it. The situation is what it is. There are Superhuman factions from twelve cities here. We don’t need to stick our heads out—someone else will lose their cool first.”

Hearing that, Xiao Honglian glanced westward. Sure enough, murmurs were beginning to spread throughout the hall.

If you listened closely, you’d hear people grumbling about how the Jiangnan Region was handling this situation—some were even starting to say some pretty nasty things.

Xiao Honglian frowned. “So we’re just going to sit here and wait?”

Zhang Yi chuckled.

“Just think of this as the meeting already happening. Honestly, even if they did start it formally, you probably wouldn’t pay attention anyway.”

He had a laid-back attitude about it all.

Important matters are discussed in small meetings—big gatherings like this are usually just for show.

Truthfully, Zhu Zheng’s purpose in calling them here was to inform them of Blizzard City’s decisions, not to actually consult anyone.

So the contents of the meeting wouldn't make much difference, whether they listened or not.

It wasn't like their opinions were needed.

Just then, Zhang Yi glanced toward the entrance of the hall and spotted a familiar figure.

It was none other than Baili Changqing, the Captain of the Black-Robed Squad.

His large frame was easy to recognize. He had just entered and was scanning the hall with sharp, watchful eyes.

Zhang Yi thought to himself: If Blizzard City dares to let so many Superhumans in, they must have absolute confidence in keeping them under control. Looks like powerful forces are already on standby outside.

If anything happens here, they'll crush it without hesitation.

The meeting was growing increasingly dull. With so many people crowded in one place, the air was getting thick and stale.

Suddenly, Zhang Yi stood up and said to the others, "I'm going for a walk."

As he turned to leave, Zhou Ke'er quickly said, "I'll come too!"

But Zhang Yi waved her off, stopping her and the others who looked like they wanted to follow.

"I'm going to chat with Baili Changqing. You all stay here and don't wander around."

There were too many people here—too chaotic. Wandering around risked bumping into someone and sparking unnecessary conflict.

Zhou Ke'er obediently sat back down after hearing that.

Liang Yue, Uncle You, and Fatty Xu were seated on the outer edge—if anything did go down, they'd be able to protect the others right away.

Chapter 588: Veil!

Zhang Yi stepped out the back door, immediately drawing the attention of nearby guards.

But when Baili Changqing saw him, he waved for the guards to stand down and walked over.

“Zhang Yi,” Baili Changqing greeted him with a smile.

Zhang Yi returned the smile. “You know what’s going on?”

Baili Changqing glanced around and pulled Zhang Yi to the side.

Then he said, “Something major happened. The Commander can’t make it right now—what’s going on over there is urgent and needs to be handled immediately.”

“So it’s not like they’re deliberately leaving you hanging. Once that’s settled, they’ll come meet with everyone.”

Zhang Yi nodded, understanding. “Ah, I see. Can I ask what the issue is?”

Baili Changqing shook his head. “No idea. You know how it is—we’re just an armed Investigation Team. We follow the orders from the top, but beyond that, we’re not in the loop.”

Zhang Yi frowned slightly, but still said, “But it looks like something big is brewing in the Jiangnan Region.”

Gathering Superhumans from twelve cities into one place? That alone was huge.

Yet Zhu Zheng was still caught up with something else—whatever it was had to be even more urgent.

Zhang Yi had a bad feeling rising in his gut. He suspected that whatever was going on might end up involving him too.

Maybe none of the forces in the Jiangnan Region would be able to stay clear of this one.

But right now, without knowing anything, worrying wouldn’t help.

Zhang Yi stretched lazily. “If that’s the case, they should’ve just told us to go wait elsewhere. Why make us sit around here for nothing?”

Baili Changqing chuckled wryly. “Tell me about it. You’re stuck waiting, and we’ve got to stay close by to maintain order.”

“From what I heard, the incident was so sudden that the higher-ups were called into an emergency meeting. That’s why no one’s had time to deal with things here.”

“Doesn’t sound like good news,” Zhang Yi said with a smile. “I’m starting to feel a little nervous.”

Baili Changqing let out a deep sigh, his expression clouded with worry. “You’re not the only one.”

If something serious really broke out, their Investigation Teams would be the first to hit the front lines.

He hadn’t been in his captain’s seat for long, and ever since Bian Junwu died, the Black-Robed Squad’s strength had taken a massive hit.

If there was going to be large-scale conflict, would he even make it back alive?

Seeing his expression, Zhang Yi pulled out a pack of He Tianxia cigarettes from his spatial storage and offered one to Baili Changqing.

His eyes lit up immediately.

Before the apocalypse, a pack of He Tianxia cost over a hundred yuan. Now that the cigarette industry had collapsed, no force would waste resources on luxuries like this.

That made the value of this pack even greater.

In Blizzard City, it could easily be traded for a decent weapon.

Zhang Yi lit his own first, then lit one for Baili Changqing.

Baili took a deep drag and let out a satisfied sigh.

The two of them started chatting casually.

Better than sitting around inside with nothing to do—Zhang Yi figured he might as well pass the time talking and maybe pick up a few insights about the Jiangnan Region while he was at it.

They weren't the only ones—one after another, others came out to stretch their legs too.

The area around the conference center was heavily guarded, so no one was allowed to wander too far.

Soon enough, small groups of people were gathered outside, smoking and chatting in twos and threes.

Suddenly, Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing heard a commotion in the distance.

They turned their heads, curious.

Nearby voices piped up:

“Come on, let’s go check it out! Someone’s fighting!”

“Nice! Some action at last—perfect way to kill time!”

Baili Changqing immediately called nearby Yan Yun Guards to ask what was happening.

He got a response quickly.

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow at him.

Baili chuckled. “Yep—someone’s gotten into a fight!”

Zhang Yi arched his brow and asked with a smirk, “And you guys aren’t stepping in?”

Baili Changqing shrugged. “As long as they don’t damage Blizzard City property or mess with civilians, we don’t interfere.”

It wasn’t against any of the city’s rules.

Zhang Yi laughed. “Maybe they’re just bored and looking for fun.”

Baili gave him a teasing look. “Well, I heard one of the people fighting is from your Tianhai City.”

Zhang Yi's gaze sharpened instantly.

"Tianhai City?"

He'd specifically warned everyone not to get into any conflicts with Superhumans from other cities.

Even if something happened, it was to be handled after the meeting.

Who was so hotheaded they couldn't hold back?

He just hoped it wasn't someone from his own team.

Baili asked, "Wanna go check it out?"

Zhang Yi had already turned and was heading toward the noise.

Baili followed beside him, and the two of them made their way through the growing crowd.

Voices were shouting excitedly:

"Kill him!"

"Beat the crap outta him!"

With Baili leading the way, the onlookers quickly stepped aside, clearing a path.

The two pushed to the front of the crowd.

That's when Zhang Yi saw who was fighting.

One was Chen Jingguan.

The other was Sun Jianming from Daze City.

As soon as he saw them, Zhang Yi understood what was going on.

Chaoyu Base and Sun Jianming's faction were both maritime forces—they'd clashed before.

Back when Chaoyu Base was at its peak, with Wei Dinghai in charge, they probably pushed Sun Jianming around.

But now Tianhai City was in decline, and Chaoyu Base was running at maybe 30% of its former strength.

Sun Jianming wasn't about to pass up the chance to kick someone while they were down.

The two likely exchanged some heated words—and it escalated into a fight.

As Baili approached, several Yan Yun Guards near him respectfully greeted him.

They weren't part of the same division, but Baili outranked them—and he had risen through the ranks of Yan Yun himself. He was one of their outstanding veterans.

"What happened?" Baili asked one of the Guards in a black combat suit.

The Guard grinned. "They wanted to fight. Put in a formal request and everything. No reason for us to say no."

He, too, looked like he was enjoying the show.

Zhang Yi frowned, watching the scene unfold.

Sun Jianming's power was unique—looked like he was an Enhancement-type Superhuman.

His arms had swollen to the size of a gorilla's, and his hands looked like two massive palm-leaf fans.

Across from him, Chen Jingguan looked battered and bruised, bloodied all over.

It was clear he wasn't a match for Sun Jianming.

Sun Jianming sneered as he watched Chen Jingguan struggle.

"If Wei Dinghai were still alive, maybe he could've given me a real fight. But you? What the h*ll do you think you are?"

At the mention of his fallen superior, rage exploded in Chen Jingguan's chest.

With a roar, he lunged forward.

His body twisted mid-air, elongating like a human-serpent hybrid, aiming to coil around Sun Jianming.

But Sun Jianming didn't flinch. "Heh! You're asking for it!"

His two massive hands snapped out and caught Chen Jingguan mid-air, clamping down hard.

Then, like stretching dough, he yanked Chen Jingguan long and slammed him into the ground with brutal force!

Normally, Chen Jingguan's power let him soften his body, boosting flexibility to the point even bullets struggled to harm him.

But Sun Jianming's right hand unleashed a powerful shockwave that tore through Chen Jingguan's body, striking directly at his internal organs.

"Cough—cough—"

Blood spurted from Chen Jingguan's mouth.

But Sun Jianming wasn't finished.

Laughing wildly, he swung him around like a rag doll.

The fight was over.

The gap in strength was just too big—Chen Jingguan didn't stand a chance.

By now, he was nothing more than a toy in Sun Jianming's hands.

The surrounding crowd roared with excitement, cheering for Sun Jianming.

"Haha! Nailed it!"

"So this is Tianhai City's Superhuman? What a joke!"

"They say he's even a faction leader?"

"Seriously? That's it? Looks like Tianhai City doesn't have any real strength left."

"Tsk tsk. We used to hear rumors—now we're seeing it with our own eyes."

Some of their gazes began to change.

“Tianhai City... that’s a wealthy place, you know...”

Chapter 589: You’ve Completely Shamed Us

This wasn’t a duel—it was a one-sided beatdown.

Chen Jingguan and Sun Jianming weren’t even on the same level.

Based on Zhang Yi’s judgment, Chen Jingguan’s Superhuman ability was just LV3 Gamma Tier, already trailing behind the top-tier level in Tianhai City.

If it weren’t for Wei Dinghai’s death, he never would’ve had a chance to rise.

The ability he prided himself on was now being completely toyed with, making him a laughingstock.

There were still a few subordinates from Chaoyu Base around, but none dared to step in to save him.

Because this was a mutually agreed one-on-one duel, and even Chen Jingguan was getting thrashed—charging in would’ve been pointless.

The Superhumans from Daze City weren’t to be taken lightly.

Zhang Yi spotted Xiao Honglian and Xing Tian in the crowd, too.

But clearly, neither of them had plans to step in either.

When they saw Zhang Yi, both looked toward him with hopeful eyes, clearly asking if he was going to make a move.

Zhang Yi gave a faint smile and looked away.

Baili Changqing glanced at him, worried that Zhang Yi might snap and massacre everyone on the spot.

He put a hand on Zhang Yi's shoulder and offered, "Want me to step in and break it up? It'd be tricky for you to act personally."

Zhang Yi looked at him, then suddenly chuckled.

There wasn't even a hint of irritation in his smile.

"No need. Isn't this fun? At least it gives everyone something to watch."

His relationship with the three major factions in Tianhai City wasn't that close.

Even though they'd all gone out of their way to curry favor, hoping to gain his protection...

This time, Chen Jingguan had directly disobeyed Zhang Yi's warning and gone off to fight Sun Jianming anyway.

That alone was enough to count as insubordination.

Let him suffer the consequences.

As for whether this would make the other cities see Tianhai City as weak?

That didn't matter at all.

If anyone got any funny ideas because of this, they were welcome to try their luck.

After saying his piece, Zhang Yi turned around and walked away.

There was nothing entertaining about watching someone get humiliated in a one-sided beatdown.

It was Baili Changqing who eventually had the Yan Yun Guards step in, under the pretense of "preventing any fatalities," and stopped Sun Jianming.

By then, Chen Jingguan was already half-dead.

But the damage was done. Every Superhuman present had seen it—Tianhai City's Superhumans had fallen hard.

If someone like this could be called a faction leader, it meant Tianhai City's forces were laughably weak.

Zhang Yi returned to the conference hall and took his seat.

Others trickled back inside as well, chatting and laughing about what they'd just witnessed.

Their conversations were laced with open disdain for Tianhai City.

Many even glanced over toward Zhang Yi's group, their expressions mocking and derisive.

Liang Yue let out a quiet sigh. "Now things are even worse. With Chen Jingguan losing like that, people are definitely going to think Tianhai City has no real strength left—that we're easy prey."

If even someone like Liang Yue could see the implications, so could the others.

Worry clouded everyone's eyes.

But Zhang Yi said nothing.

There was no point talking—what mattered was what you did.

Once things were settled in Blizzard City, he'd find someone to make an example of—just to remind everyone that Tianhai City still had real power.

Xiao Honglian, Xing Tian, and the others returned as well, bringing the bruised and battered Chen Jingguan with them.

It was humiliating, but they were all part of Tianhai City's structure.

They couldn't just abandon him.

They sat down not far from Zhang Yi.

Chen Jingguan looked absolutely wrecked—his face swollen and purple—but at least Sun Jianming hadn't dared go for the kill, so his injuries weren't crippling.

As they sat, they clearly heard people around them mocking and jeering, their expressions turning increasingly sour.

Zhang Yi, meanwhile, didn't even glance at Chen Jingguan.

He was laughing and chatting with Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran like nothing had happened.

Finally, Xiao Honglian couldn't take it anymore. She leaned over and said, "Zhang Yi, can Dr. Zhou take a look at Chen Jingguan? I think he's got some internal injuries."

Zhang Yi didn't even turn around. His voice was light, but cold.

"He likes picking fights. Can't handle the consequences?"

Xiao Honglian's face froze awkwardly.

She knew full well—Zhang Yi was pissed that Chen Jingguan had disobeyed his orders and gone ahead with the duel.

Chen Jingguan also realized he was in the wrong, but still tried to explain himself:

"I'm not someone who likes to fight. But he went too far! I was just chatting with some old acquaintances when he came over and started mocking my former commander Wei Dinghai..."

"He said Tianhai City had no one left worth mentioning—that we should surrender and let his people take over."

"Right there, in front of all the other factions from every city—if I just stood there and took it, wouldn't they think Tianhai City's forces are pushovers?"

Zhang Yi finally looked at him, but his tone was still indifferent.

"So... did you make Tianhai City proud?"

That one sentence landed like a slap across Chen Jingguan's face.

Everyone had seen it: a so-called faction leader from Tianhai City reduced to a joke—used as a punching bag by Sun Jianming.

Chen Jingguan had just dragged every Tianhai faction's reputation through the mud.

His face twisted in pain. "I..."

Zhang Yi didn't let him finish. His voice turned cold.

"Enough. Don't explain. We're not that close, anyway."

A chill ran down Chen Jingguan's spine.

Zhang Yi had just made his stance clear.

You didn't listen to me? Fine. From now on, what happens to you has nothing to do with me. Whether Chaoyu Base lives or dies isn't my problem. I don't need your explanations.

In a panic, Chen Jingguan rushed to apologize.

"Zhang Yi, I'm sorry! I was wrong—I deserve that beating. From now on, I'll listen to everything you say. Please, don't abandon us!"

Chaoyu Base's biggest strength lay in its maritime power.

But after today's incident, Sun Jianming had seen just how weak Chen Jingguan really was.

From now on, there'd be no mercy at sea.

He might even cross the water and wipe them out completely.

If that happened, Chaoyu Base would be finished.

To survive, they needed Zhang Yi's protection.

But Zhang Yi just sneered.

"Wrong? What did you do wrong? You're so capable! You're the proud leader of Chaoyu Base—why should you apologize to me?"

"All you did was reveal your own level of power, letting everyone assume that Tianhai City's forces are pathetic."

"You've just made things harder for everyone else. What's wrong with that?"

Xiao Honglian and Xing Tian didn't say a word, but they clearly disapproved of Chen Jingguan's actions too.

Zhang Yi was just the only one blunt enough to say it out loud.

Chen Jingguan's face turned pale. He stammered, at a loss for words.

He was only in his early thirties.

Technically older than Zhang Yi, but raised in a powerful household and cushioned in the military since day one—his mindset was miles behind.

It only took a little provocation from Sun Jianming for him to lose control and jump into a duel.

He hadn't even been able to judge his own strength properly.

Now, not only had he gotten wrecked, but he'd dragged the reputation of all Tianhai forces down with him.

If he wasn't to blame, who was?

Chapter 590: The Confederation

For someone like Chen Jingguan—who stirs up a storm offstage but turns into a spineless coward onstage—what he needed was a serious slap in the face.

If that slap woke him up, great. If not, Zhang Yi had no interest in wasting his time on him.

Compared to the shrewd and calculating Wei Dinghai, Chen Jingguan wasn't even in the same league.

At this rate, Zhang Yi didn't even need to lift a finger—Chaoyu Base would collapse on its own, or worse, someone under Chen might just stage a coup.

Chen Jingguan was truly terrified now. He bowed his head low.

“Zhang Yi, I was wrong. I messed up. Please, for the sake of us both being from Tianhai City, help me!”

Zhang Yi sneered in disdain.

Since when did “we're both from Tianhai City” become a valid reason for anything?

Did he forget they were ready to kill each other not long ago?

“Shhh.”

Zhang Yi put a finger to his lips, motioning for him to shut up.

“Go get some rest.”

Zhang Yi was honestly blown away by how stupid Chen Jingguan was this time.

But in the grand scheme, this whole mess only accelerated the inevitable conflict between Tianhai City and the other cities.

After the great battle in Tianhai, the population had been decimated—conflict with surrounding cities was bound to happen sooner or later.

Zhang Yi knew he'd have to step in eventually.

Still, Chen Jingguan had to pay the price for his stupidity.

If he didn't show enough sincerity, there was no way Zhang Yi would offer him protection.

At that moment, Zhang Yi was already considering whether to take a few of Chen's large seafaring ships as compensation.

Chen Jingguan was trembling with fear now, stammering, not knowing what to say.

Good thing Zhou Ke'er was sharp.

She picked up on the fact that Zhang Yi hadn't completely shut the door on Chaoyu Base.

So she walked over and said with a smile, “Let me take a look at your injuries first.”

Thanks to Zhou Ke'er's mediation, Chen Jingguan finally felt a little less panicked.

She checked his condition and found that while his injuries didn't look serious on the surface, his internal organs had taken a significant hit.

Left untreated, it would turn into a critical injury soon—possibly life-threatening.

Using her Superhuman Energy as a 【doctor】, Zhou Ke'er gave him some treatment, then pulled out medicine from the pouch she always carried and helped him take it.

Chen Jingguan was overwhelmed with gratitude, thanking her repeatedly and begging her to put in a good word for him with Zhang Yi.

Zhou Ke'er simply smiled and told him to focus on resting—and absolutely avoid getting into any more fights.

She returned to Zhang Yi's side and quietly informed him of the internal damage Chen had suffered.

Zhang Yi's eyes flickered, and he glanced toward the forces from Daze City not far away.

Sun Jianming, with his shiny bald head turned away, seemed to sense Zhang Yi's gaze. He slowly turned his head and gave Zhang Yi a chilling smile—then made a throat-slitting gesture.

Zhang Yi looked away without commenting, simply saying calmly, "Let's wait for the meeting."

Around 2:30 in the afternoon, Zhu Zheng finally arrived at the conference hall.

With him were Minister of Operations Tu Yunlie, and the Celestial Squad's Captain Deng Shentong.

The moment they entered, the atmosphere turned heavy with pressure—the sheer presence of these people instantly silenced the hall.

Zhu Zheng looked extremely serious today—likely tied to the major incident that happened that morning.

But the fact that he showed up at all meant that issue had mostly been dealt with.

Standing on the stage, Zhu Zheng swept his gaze across the thousand-plus attendees.

He could feel the fierce strength and rebellious nature radiating from many of the Superhumans from these twelve cities.

If he could unite this power, it wouldn't be any weaker than his own Yan Yun Guards!

“Welcome to Blizzard City.”

Zhu Zheng's voice rang out, calm and commanding, amplified by the mic so everyone could hear.

“I am Zhu Zheng, Commander of the Jiangnan District. I was delayed by a special matter just now, and I'd like to apologize for the wait.”

“Now, I won't waste any more of your time. Let's get straight to the point—the reason you're all here.”

“Since the Ice Age hit in December last year, the world has descended into chaos. The old social order is gone.”

“It's been six months. Most survivors have banded together, forming forces big and small. Among them, many have awakened Superhuman Abilities, gaining powers beyond normal comprehension.”

“And all of you here—are leaders of the most powerful forces in your regions.”

“I hope we can come together and accomplish big things, instead of remaining scattered and constantly at each other's throats.”

“So, starting today, I’m establishing the Jiangnan Superhuman Confederation. Everyone within the Jiangnan District will be part of it.”

“Especially you—the major powers from the twelve cities—you’ll be core members of the Confederation.”

His voice echoed through the hall.

Many frowned upon hearing that, deep in thought.

Zhang Yi crossed his arms, thinking to himself:

So it is what I thought. Now the question is—what do they want from us, and what are they offering in return?

Because if there’s no benefit, none of the people in this room will be interested.

And if things escalate, even with the Jiangnan District’s power, suppressing all of them would come at a huge cost.

Everyone started murmuring in low voices. The whole conference room buzzed with discussion.

Tu Yunlie, Deng Shentong, and Zhu Zheng’s personal guard Sun Luxuan swept the room with cold, powerful gazes—shutting people up one by one with sheer pressure.

Zhu Zheng continued:

“The Jiangnan Superhuman Confederation will be under direct control of the Jiangnan District Headquarters, with me as the Chairman.”

“Members of the Confederation can still operate within their own territories. But when special events arise, the District will assign missions, and the Confederation’s forces must follow orders. No exceptions.”

That line reignited the noise in the room.

Someone snorted, “So basically, they want us to be Jiangnan’s lapdogs? And we even have to bring our own kibble?”

“Exactly. If we were moving to Blizzard City as part of the District, fine. But no—they want us to stay put and still work for them unconditionally. Might as well put a collar on us.”

Zhu Zheng raised his voice a notch:

“Of course, we’re not asking you to work for free! Complete the tasks assigned by the District, and you’ll earn rewards.”

“The District’s medicine, weapons, and other supplies can all be exchanged using the points earned from missions!”

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. Now that was a bit tempting.

He knew the District’s gear was way ahead of what Tianhai City had.

Things like Origin Bullets, those custom training suits, and weapons made from Adamantium—

That was probably just the tip of the iceberg in the Jiangnan arsenal.

And from what Baili Changqing had once hinted at, the District could already synthesize compounds specifically to enhance Superhuman Abilities.

Now those were some serious perks.