

Ice Age 591

Chapter 591: Absolute Power

Zhu Zheng completely ignored the uproar below and calmly continued speaking.

“Third point: internal strife within the District is strictly forbidden! In the past six months, the number of human casualties caused by infighting has been horrifying—including some Superhumans.”

“I don't want to see that kind of situation again. And I doubt any of you want to live in constant fear either.”

“So, internal conflict must end immediately! If anyone attempts to invade another region, you can report it to the Confederation. I will send someone to adjudicate!”

That third point did make a few factions waver.

Not every Superhuman was aggressive by nature.

After all the brutal fighting since the Apocalypse, there were definitely people who simply wanted a peaceful life.

Zhou Ke'er looked over at Zhang Yi with a bit of hope in her eyes. "If this actually works, wouldn't that be great?"

Zhang Yi gave a slight smirk and scoffed quietly.

"Too naive. That's just something to listen to—not something to believe."

If problems like that could be solved so easily, history wouldn't be so full of chaos and war.

Human greed has no end.

There will always be people who crave greater power, more resources, and will resort to conquest to get them.

Sure enough, as soon as Zhu Zheng finished speaking, the female leader of Daze City—Gu Hongdie—raised her hand. With a sweet, seductive tone, she asked:

"But what if a weak faction is sitting on a territory rich in resources? Isn't that just a waste?"

As she spoke, her eyes flicked toward Zhang Yi's group.

And it wasn't just her—many others instinctively looked at Chen Jingguan.

Chen Jingguan's face turned beet red with anger.

But there was nothing he could do. Today, he had pretty much become a laughingstock across the entire Jiangnan District—utter humiliation.

Zhu Zheng's brows furrowed slightly, and he replied in a firm voice,

"The District will handle resource redistribution. Besides, the resources within your own faction's territory should be sufficient for survival, shouldn't they?"

Currently, the survivor population in the Jiangnan District had dropped below 5%.

There simply wasn't a resource shortage serious enough to threaten basic survival.

Clearly, what Gu Hongdie meant wasn't survival supplies—but strategic resources.

Like machinery factories.

Like weapons.

Like vehicles.

Like... manpower.

If a faction wanted to expand and become even more powerful, all of those were essential.

Not everyone just wanted to survive in the Apocalypse.

Plenty of people had ambition—hoping to carve out their own kingdom in this chaos and rise to dominance.

Gu Hongdie pursed her lips, a mischievous smile on her face—it was obvious she hadn't taken Zhu Zheng's words seriously.

The expressions on the Superhumans present were filled with contempt.

They all felt like the demands from the Jiangnan District were far too overbearing and unreasonable.

Then, a man completely wrapped in white cloth stood up in the crowd.

He locked his cold, sharp eyes on Zhu Zheng and said,

“So what you’re saying is, the Jiangnan District wants to absorb all of us—turn us into your puppets?”

“If we have to obey your every command, how is that any different from being your lapdogs?”

His words sparked murmurs of agreement across the crowd.

Zhu Zheng’s face didn’t change in the slightest.

But suddenly, a faint whoosh cut through the air.

In the next moment, that Superhuman’s head went flying from his neck.

Blood sprayed everywhere, splashing onto the faces of those nearby.

His body remained standing, while his head landed with a dull thud on the table in front of him.

Zhang Yi’s eyes narrowed sharply—he had just caught what had happened.

The man was at least thirty meters away from the stage, but in that instant, one of the guards behind Zhu Zheng made a move.

Three ultra-thin steel wires shot out from the guard's sleeve—decapitating the man from a distance!

The strike was so fast, no one had time to react.

Whizz!

The three wires shimmered silver in the air.

They were so fine that you could barely see them—if not for the droplets of blood clinging to them, no one would've noticed.

Sun Luxuan retracted his wires, then calmly adjusted his black goatskin gloves before folding his hands behind his back, smiling pleasantly at the crowd.

That move plunged the entire hall into absolute silence once more.

Because the man who had just spoken out was well-known—one of the faction leaders from Xichuan City!

Word had it his strength was terrifying, a Delta-level Superhuman, on par with figures like Xiao Honglian and Wei Dinghai.

And yet this was someone who had been one-shotted and decapitated!

What kind of overwhelming deterrent was that?

If Sun Luxuan could instantly kill a Superhuman like him, he could surely do the same to nearly everyone else in the hall.

Even Zhang Yi's gaze turned more serious.

"The guard beside Zhu Zheng... terrifying strength. Might even be stronger than Bian Junwu."

Of the thirteen cities in Jiangnan, most—aside from Blizzard City and Tianhai City—had never interacted directly with the Jiangnan District.

So they had no idea how their strength compared to the top-tier forces of Blizzard City.

Their petty victories in their own little territories had given them the illusion of being powerful.

They mistakenly thought they were qualified to stand on equal footing with Zhu Zheng.

Even though they were only a few dozen meters from Zhu Zheng right now—

In terms of power and authority, the gap was like a bottomless chasm.

One Superhuman muttered in shock,

“H-he actually struck...”

Sun Luxuan’s attack shattered many people’s delusions.

And right after he made his move, the side and rear doors of the hall opened up.

Baili Changqing entered, leading the Black Robe Squad and a large force of Yan Yun Guards.

The atmosphere immediately turned cold and intense.

Even Deng Shentong cracked his knuckles, his eyes turning icy, a mocking smile on his lips.

That overwhelming pressure made the people in the room visibly uneasy.

Zhang Yi's eyes shimmered slightly.

He didn't believe Blizzard City would go full purge-mode, but he was already mentally preparing to bolt.

Cough, cough!

At that moment, Zhu Zheng's voice rang out through the speaker system.

"Don't misunderstand me!"

He glared coldly across the hall.

"I'm not here to negotiate—I'm here to inform you."

"Anyone who refuses to join the Superhuman Confederation will be seen as opposing the Confederation—no, as opposing the entire Jiangnan District!"

“And forces or individuals like that... simply don’t deserve to exist on this land!”

A faint, indifferent smile curled on Zhang Yi’s lips.

As expected. He’d seen it coming.

What surprised him wasn’t Zhu Zheng—it was how many idiots were actually dumb enough to try reasoning with a behemoth like the Jiangnan District.

Some even had the guts to openly oppose him.

Their brains must’ve been frozen solid by the -60°C weather.

Chapter 592: Who’s In Favor, Who’s Against?

Nothing about this surprised Zhang Yi.

He’d already spoken privately with Baili Changqing and was well aware of the Jiangnan District’s overall plan.

To be fair, he thought this approach was actually pretty reasonable.

If Zhang Yi were in Zhu Zheng's position, he would've made the same call.

If things were allowed to spiral out of control—faction after faction fighting—it was only a matter of time before the entire Jiangnan District shattered into pieces.

And if some external force invaded at that point, what would be left to resist them?

As for Zhang Yi personally—did he have any complaints?

Sure, but not many.

Being under someone else's command wasn't ideal, but hey—the Jiangnan District was just that powerful.

They had the muscle, so Zhang Yi didn't mind giving them some face.

Of course, if they ever tried to send him on a suicide mission, that would be a hard no.

Until then, he had no intention of falling out with the Jiangnan District.

After finishing his speech, Zhu Zheng once again looked around at the crowd.

After that ruthless show of force earlier, no one dared to stand up or speak out again.

“I just asked,” Zhu Zheng said coolly, “Who’s in favor, and who’s against?”

Everyone glanced around, and in unspoken agreement, kept their mouths shut.

Zhu Zheng’s tone turned cold:

“If no one says anything, I’ll take that as unanimous consent. In that case, please sign your names on this membership agreement.”

As soon as he finished speaking, his secretary Lan Xincheng adjusted his glasses and signaled the Yan Yun Guards outside.

Two teams immediately entered from the aisles, carrying stacks of prepared membership forms, handing one to each faction leader.

Signing that form meant one thing—their organization was now officially under the Jiangnan District’s authority, and would follow orders from the top.

Zhang Yi received one too.

He scanned it quickly and saw it matched exactly what Zhu Zheng had laid out—no hidden clauses.

So he signed it without hesitation.

Zhu Zheng cared about procedure, but Zhang Yi honestly didn't.

If Zhu Zheng ever tried to send him to die, a piece of paper like this wouldn't mean a thing.

Flexibility is key—there was no need to play the hero.

Some others signed with calm acceptance; some looked bitter and reluctant.

But in the end, fear of the Jiangnan District outweighed their anger, and one by one, they all signed the form.

Seeing the thick stack of documents in Lan Xincheng's hands, Zhu Zheng nodded with satisfaction.

A faint smile appeared on his face.

“Don’t worry. I won’t make you work for nothing,” he said.

“Starting next month, each of you will receive a supply package—including special weapons and equipment made by the District.”

“Also, if you complete missions assigned by the District, there will be special rewards.”

After speaking, Zhu Zheng reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small glass vial, holding it up between his fingers.

Everyone’s eyes locked onto that tiny bottle, curiosity piqued.

Zhu Zheng spoke in a solemn tone:

“This is called Compound No. 2. Its function is to enhance and unlock latent Superhuman Abilities.

Simply put—using this will make your powers stronger.”

“This compound is also listed among the mission rewards!”

The moment they heard what Compound No. 2 could do, everyone’s gaze turned fiery with desire.

Up to now, the only known way to enhance one’s Superhuman Ability was devouring—and that method came with big problems.

First, you had to kill a Superhuman and absorb their origin—easier said than done, since Superhumans were already rare.

Second, as one’s ability level increased, the effects of devouring diminished, forcing people to hunt higher-level Superhumans for stronger gains.

But those weren’t easy prey.

Now Zhu Zheng was telling them there was a drug that could enhance their powers.

Of course they wanted it.

In the Apocalypse, power is everything.

But Zhang Yi frowned slightly when he saw the vial.

He had heard some things about these compounds from Baili Changqing in passing.

The reason the Jiangnan District was so powerful, and had so many high-level Superhumans, was precisely because of these chemical enhancers.

Bian Junwu, for instance, was rumored to be a user.

Even the side effects of his mutation might've been caused by the compound.

Sure, you'd gain power fast—but the risks were enormous.

Zhang Yi had no interest in making that trade-off.

Still, it was clear that everyone else had taken the bait—hook, line, and sinker.

“No wonder the Jiangnan District has so many powerful Superhumans. Turns out they've got drug support!”

“Wait... does this mean we can get it too?”

“As long as we complete the missions they give us... That doesn’t sound so bad.”

Zhu Zheng had come with a stick in one hand and candy in the other—and most people’s resentment was melting away.

At least for now, it looked like joining the Jiangnan District came with some real perks.

Just as everyone was weighing the pros and cons, Zhu Zheng continued:

“You’ve arrived at the perfect time. As it happens, there’s an opportunity waiting for you.”

“Not long ago, a group of Ronin from Neon Nation appeared in Linhai City.”

“There are thirteen of them in total—and they’ve already taken over the city.”

“Whoever can eliminate these Ronin will receive ten vials of Compound No. 2, and also gain control over Linhai City!”

The room exploded with noise.

Because the words Neon Ronin carried some serious weight.

No matter how fierce their internal conflicts were—those were still family feuds.

But this? Foreign invaders?

Their hatred immediately shifted focus.

“Those d*mn Ronin! How dare they set foot on Huaguo’s land? They’re asking to die!”

“Do they really think just because the world ended, they get to act like they own the place?”

“Kill them! Every last one—don’t leave a single one breathing!”

Zhang Yi narrowed his eyes slightly.

Neon Ronin... bold move.

They'd occupied an entire Huaguo city.

That could only mean one thing—the original forces in Linhai City had been wiped out.

That was something no one could tolerate.

Uncle You clenched his teeth and spat a curse, "Mtherf**ers. I say we wipe them all out!"

The crowd was seething with rage.

But others weren't just angry—they were tempted.

Ten vials of Compound No. 2—enough to significantly boost ten Superhumans.

That alone could drastically strengthen any organization.

But the real prize... was control of Linhai City.

The local powers were already gone, which meant whoever completed this mission would become Linhai's undisputed ruler—

With official recognition and protection from the Jiangnan District.

Plenty of people were seriously tempted.

But some were also thinking hard about how dangerous the mission might be.

After all, this Ronin group had taken down an entire city's Superhuman force...

Chapter 593: Recruitment

Zhu Zheng took in the expressions of everyone below the stage.

He knew some of them were still waiting for specific intel.

Zhu Zheng didn't bother playing games and went straight into the details about the ronin.

"This group of ronin comes from the north of the Neon Nation. They're part of a notorious yakuza organization called Moon of Corrosion."

“After dominating Kanto, they set their sights on the mainland of Huaguo and came across the sea.”

“We’ve already communicated with the top powers of the Neon Nation. These people’s actions have nothing to do with their official authorities—they’re acting on their own. So, you can rest assured and go hunt them down!”

“Of course, they’re no pushovers. You need to be prepared for that. But we’ve got the numbers. As long as you’re willing, anyone can take on this mission! All I want to see is the heads of those thirteen people!”

Someone in the crowd slowly raised his hand.

Zhu Zheng and Zhang Yi both looked at him.

He was fully wrapped up, with only a pair of eyes exposed.

Zhang Yi had already noticed him back at the subway platform. The man carried a distinct military air—clearly a retired veteran.

And now, he was the leader of a faction.

The veteran opened his mouth and asked, “The Neon Nation’s higher-ups claim these guys weren’t sent by them. That’s hard to believe. What happens if we’re attacked by official forces while carrying out this mission?”

Quite a few people nodded in agreement with the veteran.

People from the Neon Nation were known to flip sides and backstab. Could anyone really trust what came out of their mouths?

What if, after they deployed, it turned out this group was just an advance force—and more reinforcements followed?

That would put them in serious danger!

Zhu Zheng curled his lips into a smirk, his tone full of disdain.

“That doesn’t matter. What matters is that their government denies any connection to these people.”

“Which means we’re free to hunt down these ronin however we want! The Neon folks won’t dare say a word!”

“Otherwise, heh—”

Zhu Zheng let out a cold laugh. “If we do prove they’re linked to the Neon Nation’s leadership, that actually makes things easier!”

“If they make the first move, we can go all out in retaliation!”

Zhu Zheng’s words laid things bare.

If this group really was connected to Neon Nation officials, it would mean they’d already fired the first shot of an invasion—and that would open the door to all-out war.

Even their allies wouldn’t be able to defend them.

Those words fired up the confidence of the superhumans present.

With the military might of the Jiangnan District behind them, there was nothing to fear.

All they had to do was launch a massive hunt against those ronin!

The veteran nodded silently, clearly agreeing with Zhu Zheng.

As for why Zhu Zheng had to mobilize forces from all twelve cities of the Jiangnan District—well, that was simple.

This was a coordinated hunt. They were surrounding the Moon of Corrosion and wiping them out to the last man.

The enemy wouldn't just sit there waiting to be taken down. Of course they'd try to escape.

To pull off a full-scale encirclement, you needed a force ten times larger than the enemy.

Just like hundreds of years ago in the Ming Dynasty, when they had to mobilize 300,000 troops to eliminate a few thousand Wokou pirates.

Uncle You couldn't help but say to Zhang Yi, "Zhang Yi, we should join in on this operation."

As a retired soldier himself, Uncle You still had a strong emotional connection to this kind of mission.

Zhang Yi rested his chin in one hand, tilting his head slightly as he calmly watched Zhu Zheng and the fired-up crowd on stage. But his mind was already analyzing the situation.

The ronin were certainly detestable, but Zhang Yi never acted out of pure emotion—he always weighed the pros and cons.

They should be eliminated. But why wasn't Zhu Zheng sending in his own investigation teams?

Even if the Black Robe Squad had lost Bian Junwu, the Celestial Squad was still at full strength.

Not to mention, they had 5,000 Yan Yun Guards.

There was only one likely answer—Zhu Zheng wasn't willing to risk his own elite troops.

That's why he wanted the outer-city forces to go in first.

If the mission succeeded, great. If not, they'd still gain intel on the enemy. Then Blizzard City's elites could step in.

At this rate, any future high-risk tasks would probably also fall to outer-city forces first.

And his elite squads would be preserved unless a truly special mission came up.

After all, the Jiangnan District's power was built on military strength. Zhu Zheng had to consider that.

Self-interest—people always have it.

Once he'd thought it through, Zhang Yi calmly said to Uncle You, "Let's observe the situation first. I want to ask Baili Changqing for more detailed intel."

Clearly, there were things Zhu Zheng wasn't telling them.

Zhang Yi was the type to make a plan before acting—that's the only way to stay safe.

On the podium, Zhu Zheng waved his arm with authority and declared:

"All organizations participating in this mission can head to HQ to pick up weapons, gear, and all necessary supplies!"

Zhang Yi thought to himself: This is also a way to confirm how many factions are actually getting involved.

If there weren't enough, Zhu Zheng might have to start assigning tasks directly.

Sure enough, people immediately stood up, pledging to take their teams to Linhai City to wipe out the ronin.

In the blink of an eye, five factions volunteered.

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, thinking: In that case, I'll keep a low profile for now.

Whether they were motivated by patriotism or just the rewards Zhu Zheng promised, plenty of people were clearly willing to go.

Zhang Yi never made himself a target—even if the rewards looked good.

So, let them go first.

If they managed to wipe out the ronin, perfect.

If they failed, Zhang Yi could gather valuable intel from their attempt.

And by the time he made his move, his chances of success would be much higher.

Watching the crowd of fired-up superhumans, a flicker of cold light flashed through Zhang Yi's eyes.

Just thirteen people had wiped out every force in Linhai City. How powerful was this Moon of Corrosion team, really?

Could they be on par with the Blizzard City investigation team?

If that were true, how many of these attackers would die?

The meeting ended amid an atmosphere of fiery enthusiasm.

Those willing to go hunt down the Moon of Corrosion quickly signed up and collected their supplies.

As for Zhang Yi, he quietly left the hall with his team, without making a sound.

...

Operations Center, Commander's Office.

Zhu Zheng sat on a sofa, reading the report Lan Xincheng had submitted.

“In total, ten factions signed up to go to Linhai City and hunt down the Moon of Corrosion. That’s not bad—it’s a strong force.”

Zhu Zheng nodded.

Even though plenty of factions had come to Blizzard City, many couldn’t participate for various reasons.

Some were too far from Linhai geographically. Others had their own concerns.

But what bothered Zhu Zheng most was this:

Nowhere on the report did he see any signatures from Tianhai City leaders. Most notably, he didn’t see Zhang Yi’s name.

That made him frown.

“Tianhai City is close to Linhai, and Zhang Yi’s strength is more than enough. But he’s avoiding the fight. I’m very disappointed.”

He was starting to agree more and more with what Baili Changqing had said.

This Zhang Yi—too scheming, too hard to control.

Chapter 594: Vanguard

Zhu Zheng thought back to Baili Changqing's assessment of Zhang Yi and couldn't help letting out a sigh.

"That man prioritizes personal gain above all else. He's really not suitable to be brought into Blizzard City."

Standing beside him, Secretary Lan Xincheng leaned in with a smile and said, "After the zombie tide chaos, Tianhai City is pretty much a ruin."

"Not only are living people scarce, but all the major powers have taken heavy losses. With their current strength, they simply can't maintain regional stability."

"And now that Zhang Yi's also shown such a disappointing attitude, why not consider supporting some new forces?"

Zhu Zheng raised an eyebrow at that—it had clearly piqued his interest.

Tianhai City used to be a mega-metropolis with a population of twenty million.

It was a city rich in resources.

Now, its population was decimated, and aside from Zhang Yi's team, the other major forces guarding it had no capacity to govern.

So why not bring in strength from other cities?

First, it would stabilize the Tianhai region. Second, it would keep Zhang Yi in check and prevent him from becoming the sole authority in Tianhai.

To put it plainly, Zhu Zheng just didn't like Zhang Yi's lone-wolf attitude.

He tapped his fingers on the table, then said slowly, "Let's add that to the plan."

"Coincidentally, we've got ten factions taking part in the Linhai City operation."

"When the task is done, there won't be enough territory in Linhai for all of them. We'll just move a few over to Tianhai City. Problem solved."

Just like that, with a casual exchange, they'd divided up Tianhai City like it was a piece of cake.

To Zhang Yi, though, this didn't matter much. His team was small—they only needed the Lu River District and West Hill District.

Whatever Zhu Zheng stirred up wouldn't affect him. It'd just hit the other three factions.

But if anyone tried to snatch food from his

mouth? Heh.

Zhang Yi was willing to give face to the Jiangnan District—you could come.

But once you came... could you still leave?

At that moment, Zhu Zheng got a report from the front desk.

“Commander, Captain Deng Shentong of the Celestial Squad is requesting to see you.”

Zhu Zheng raised his hand and said, “Let him in.”

Lan Xincheng smiled. “He’s probably here to ask for a deployment.”

The Celestial Squad led by Deng Shentong had the biggest name in Blizzard City.

Deng Shentong was young, strong, and battle-hungry!

He was always the most eager to take on missions, hungry to make his mark and build a fearsome reputation.

He'd been dominating Blizzard City's points-based Heaven List for nearly two months now.

Because of this, many in Blizzard City considered him the number one expert in the Jiangnan District.

With his outstanding background and handsome looks, he was hugely popular among the residents of Tianhai City.

Many even believed that if Zhu Zheng ever stepped back from command, Deng Shentong would be the one to take his place as district commander.

Zhu Zheng himself had great appreciation for this young prodigy.

Soon, Deng Shentong stepped through several doors and entered Zhu Zheng's office.

As soon as he arrived, he asked, "Commander, why aren't we being sent to carry out this mission?"

“Even though many superhuman teams are being deployed, it’s obvious this enemy isn’t some ordinary group. If they really try to escape, those outer-city forces won’t be able to catch them.”

He added with a hint of contempt, “They’re just not professionals. And with all the internal rivalries, there’s no way they’ll cooperate effectively.”

But Zhu Zheng chuckled when he heard that.

He leaned back on the sofa, relaxed, and casually asked, “Do you know much about Moon of Corrosion?”

Deng Shentong opened his mouth, but no words came out.

They’d never had any contact with that ronin group from the Neon Nation, and there was no intel to go on.

Zhu Zheng took a deep breath and said, “These days, the Neon Nation is split into two factions: Izumo in Kanto, and Pelican in Kansai.”

“And Moon of Corrosion is a ronin organization that rampages through Kanto. Even Izumo, which controls nearly all official power in Kanto, can’t deal with them.”

“That alone shows just how powerful these ronin are. They might even be on par with your investigation squads!”

Zhu Zheng fixed his gaze on Deng Shentong, his expression turning serious.

“Without solid intel, there’s no way I’ll send you in. After all, the six investigation squads are the pillars of Blizzard City.”

Deng Shentong frowned.

“The Neon Nation is just a tiny island country. What kind of strength could a bunch of rogue superhuman groups even have?”

Zhu Zheng shook his head and looked at Deng Shentong with a touch of exasperation.

“Don’t underestimate your opponents! To belittle them is to belittle yourself.”

“Even during the War to Defend the Nation, our casualty ratios against them were five-to-one, sometimes even nine-to-one!”

“Strategically, we can look down on them. But tactically—we must respect them. We cannot afford carelessness!”

Deng Shentong calmed down and silently reflected.

Sure, the Neon Nation wasn't large in terms of territory—but it was still equivalent to a province, with over a hundred million citizens.

From a pool that big, it wasn't surprising for many powerful superhumans to emerge.

Deng Shentong even joked to himself, the Neon people have always been kind of extreme—so after mutation, it makes sense if they turned out even more dangerous.

He now understood Zhu Zheng's reasoning.

"So, what you mean is... sending the outer-city factions to Linhai City is really about using them to gather intel on Moon of Corrosion?"

Zhu Zheng nodded in approval.

"That's right, that's the idea."

"Of course, if they do manage to take those superhumans down, even better."

“But even if they fail, they’ll still reveal something about Moon of Corrosion. At that point, you’ll get credit for a third of the results. As for those who didn’t go? Let’s just say—tough luck.”

Now that Deng Shentong understood Zhu Zheng’s thinking, he felt at peace.

“Still, I doubt those forces have the strength to pull this off.”

For some reason, a figure suddenly flashed in Deng Shentong’s mind—Zhang Yi.

Among all the outer-city forces, very few caught his eye—but Zhang Yi was undoubtedly the most outstanding.

Because he had defeated Wu Di.

Deng Shentong couldn’t help but ask, “Is Zhang Yi from Tianhai City going?”

Hearing the question, Zhu Zheng, Lan Xincheng, and Sun Luxuan were all slightly surprised.

It was rare to hear this prideful Celestial Squad captain mention anyone by name.

Zhu Zheng looked a bit annoyed. “That guy? He didn’t even sign up for the mission. Such a schemer!”

Deng Shentong’s eyes glinted, but he smiled. “You could also say he’s smart. At least he sees this mission isn’t that simple.”

Zhu Zheng clearly didn’t like that take.

He crossed his arms and frowned. “If everyone acted like him—so self-centered—the Superhuman Federation would fall apart!”

Zhu Zheng was a military man. Military men lived by the code of unconditional obedience to orders and the chain of command.

But Deng Shentong wasn’t like that. Neither was Zhang Yi.

So rather than see Zhang Yi as rebellious, Deng Shentong admired his intelligence.

For Deng Shentong, what mattered most was talent. Everything else could be tolerated.

After all, a great leader knows how to identify the strengths of their people—and how to make the best use of them.

Chapter 595: Arrogance Unmasked

Elsewhere.

Zhang Yi led his group away from the Tianchang Conference Center, which remained as lively as ever.

Though the meeting was over, many still lingered inside, eagerly discussing the situation in Linhai City.

Zhang Yi didn't need to join their chatter—he'd get more accurate intel by asking Baili Changqing.

Just then, a mocking voice reached their ears.

"Tianhai City's right next to Linhai, and now that those Neon ronin have invaded, you lot are actually running away with your tails between your legs? What a f***ing disgrace!"

The words immediately darkened everyone's expressions.

Especially Chen Jingguan—his face turned red and pale by turns, his eyes filling with fury and shame.

Because the speaker was none other than Sun Jianming, one of the faction leaders from Daze City. Zhang Yi frowned slightly and glanced over.

He saw the three major factions of Daze City grouped together, also heading out.

Their numbers far exceeded Tianhai City's—more than three times as many superhumans.

Naturally, their presence was more imposing.

Xiao Honglian and the others looked nervous.

The gap in numbers was overwhelming—if it really came to a fight...

Xiao Honglian instinctively looked at Zhang Yi.

If Zhang Yi made a move, they might still have a chance.

No—if he fought, they'd definitely win!

Because Zhang Yi never fought battles he couldn't win.

Thinking that, Xiao Honglian suddenly felt a lot more secure. That handsome side profile of his just became even more captivating.

Once they returned to Tianhai City, she was definitely going to get closer to Zhang Yi.

The Jiangnan District's power dynamics were sure to shift in the future, and she needed a solid umbrella to shield Yangsheng Base.

The three faction leaders from Daze City approached.

Though there was still some distance between them, it was clear from their body language they weren't exactly friendly with each other.

But when it came to applying pressure on Tianhai City, their goals were perfectly aligned.

Zhang Yi chuckled lightly and said, "Didn't Commander Zhu say it himself? This mission is strictly voluntary. I don't think our actions are any of your business."

Sun Jianming exchanged glances with the other two. The disdain in their eyes deepened.

Even the superhumans behind them started laughing mockingly.

“You actually said that with a straight face? What a f***ing joke!”

“The nation’s in crisis, and you’re hiding like cowards in your shells. Seriously, you guys still think you have the right to represent Tianhai City?”

“If you ask me, Tianhai City’s powers are already worthless. Just look at that so-called leader of Chaoyu Base—tsk tsk!”

“You can’t handle such a prime area? Might as well give it up while you’re ahead.”

...

The Daze City superhumans mocked Tianhai’s people without restraint.

It made every single one of them look utterly humiliated.

Even someone as mild-tempered as Liang Yue furrowed her brows and glanced subconsciously at Zhang Yi.

If he just gave the word, they'd charge forward and beat the crap out of these guys.

But Zhang Yi listened to their jeers without the slightest change in expression.

The weak get angry when provoked—people like Chen Jingguan.

He was insecure because of his weakness, which made even the smallest insult unbearable.

But to the strong, the voices of ants were just too faint to register at all.

Why would Zhang Yi lose his cool over a bunch of bugs?

All he felt for them... was pity for their ignorance.

Still, Zhang Yi wasn't going to make a move outside the Tianchang Conference Center.

Clearly, the other side was trying to provoke a fight—then hit back hard once Tianhai's people responded.

That way, if Blizzard City's higher-ups laid blame, they could pin everything on Tianhai.

Zhang Yi narrowed his eyes, and a flicker of cold killing intent passed through them.

These annoying insects... he really wanted to crush them one by one.

He smiled slightly. "Excuse us."

Then turned to the others and said, "Let's go."

With that, Zhang Yi turned and walked off toward the apartment complex without looking back.

Xiao Honglian, Chen Jingguan, and the others had been waiting for him to act.

But he didn't even flinch? Just walked away after all that mocking?

They were stunned.

So were the superhumans from Daze City.

To take that level of insult head-on and not even react?

Was he spineless and weak, or just way too good at holding it in?

Only Liang Yue, Uncle You, Fatty Xu, and the rest left with cheerful smiles, following behind Zhang Yi.

They already knew how Zhang Yi operated.

You think a few sarcastic comments would provoke him? Dream on.

Seeing Zhang Yi's group walking off, Xing Tian hurried to follow as well.

From beginning to end, Zhang Yi hadn't even acknowledged him.

In Zhang Yi's eyes, if they were dumb enough to pick a fight with Daze City, he wouldn't stop them.

Xiao Honglian and Chen Jingguan's people finally understood something. They shot vicious glares at the Daze City superhumans, then turned and left silently.

Sun Jianming spat viciously at the ground.

“Pah! Gutless cowards! What a f***ing joke!”

Elsewhere, the leader of the Ice Butterfly organization, Gu Hongdie, chuckled and said:

“Their leader looks so weak. How’s someone like that even supposed to lead a team?”

A true leader needed strength and presence.

If you couldn’t even protect your own territory and people, who’d follow you?

To Gu Hongdie, Zhang Yi’s approach was just straight-up cowardice.

At that moment, the third faction leader, Chen Liangyu, flashed a sly look and said with a grin, “Isn’t this exactly what we wanted to see?”

Sun Jianming, Gu Hongdie, and Chen Liangyu all looked at one another—then broke into sinister grins.

They had a clear idea now of the situation in Tianhai City.

Chaoyu Base, once one of the five great powers of Tianhai, was now led by a Gamma-level superhuman—someone Sun Jianming could beat down single-handedly.

Back in Daze City, that kind of power level would barely qualify as a squad captain.

They'd deliberately come to pick a fight—just to gauge the strength of Tianhai's remaining forces.

And the result?

They'd hurled public insults and not a single one of them dared talk back. Just slinked away with their tails tucked.

"This is a golden opportunity," Sun Jianming said coldly.

Gu Hongdie giggled and glanced at the other two. "It's rare for the three of us to be together. Why don't we grab a drink and have a little chat?"

Sun Jianming and Chen Liangyu readily agreed.

They all knew exactly what the others were thinking.

With outside forces distracting the Jiangnan District and most of Tianhai's neighboring factions off hunting ronin in Linhai City...

No one was paying attention to what happened in Tianhai.

None of them had signed up for that mission.

Their real goal—was to carve up the juicy meat of Tianhai City!

Don't let Zhu Zheng's righteous speeches fool you about "no internal conflicts."

If they seized Tianhai first, there were plenty of ways to justify it afterward.

Like: "Helping a fellow city maintain security," or "Targeted support for impoverished and weak regions."

As long as the facts were already established, the Jiangnan District wouldn't say a word.

Who ever speaks up for the weak, anyway?

Chapter 596: Don't Let Emotions Cloud Your Judgment

Zhang Yi walked ahead, heading toward the apartment.

Later, he planned to meet with Baili Changqing again, then follow up on Deng Shentong's invitation. If nothing else came up, he'd return to Tianhai City.

As for that group of bastards from Daze City, Zhang Yi had already seen right through them.

Those guys clearly thought the forces in Tianhai City were weak and easy to bully—and were now eyeing it as a target.

No doubt, with the district's attention fixed on the ronin invasion, this was the perfect time for them to make a move.

When that time came, Zhang Yi would give them a very big surprise.

Xiao Honglian, Chen Jingguan, and a few others followed close behind.

Chen Jingguan kept glancing toward Zhang Yi's back, his lips twitching but not daring to speak. Still, he felt uneasy about Zhang Yi's earlier approach.

They'd been publicly humiliated, and Zhang Yi was now the leader of Tianhai City—he couldn't even talk back?

Xiao Honglian, being closer to Zhang Yi—she had helped him before—and as a woman, had a bit of an edge in these situations. Even if she spoke up, Zhang Yi was unlikely to get angry.

So, she stepped forward and said with a careful smile, "Zhang Yi, um... it's not like we're criticizing you or anything. It's just that... maybe your attitude toward them earlier was a little too, I don't know, passive?"

"What kind of attitude?"

Zhang Yi glanced at her coldly and asked.

“I mean... it kind of came off as weak. You really didn’t need to act that way,” Xiao Honglian replied.

Zhang Yi let out a scornful laugh.

Hands in his pockets, he shot a glance toward Chen Jingguan behind him, a trace of disdain in his eyes.

“Then what do you think I should’ve done? Fought them on the spot and gotten punished for violating Blizzard City’s regulations?”

“Or maybe shouted back and got into a screaming match like some market hag? They’ve got so many people—do you really think we could out-yell them?”

Zhang Yi shook his head. “Pointless moves like that just aren’t worth doing.”

Xiao Honglian still tried to explain, “But doing that might make people think Tianhai City is weak and easy to push around.”

“Heh. That’s not my fault,” Zhang Yi sneered.

Chen Jingguan flushed red and quickly dropped his head—Zhang Yi’s words were clearly aimed at him.

Xiao Honglian wanted to say more, but Zhang Yi was starting to lose patience.

“I’ve always lived my life on my own terms. I don’t owe anyone an explanation.”

That shut Xiao Honglian up instantly. She lowered her head and mumbled, “Don’t be mad... I was just asking.”

Then she quietly stepped aside.

Once they reached the apartment, Chen Jingguan went to heal up, and the others returned to their rooms.

Everyone had their concerns—especially the leaders of the three base organizations. They were deeply worried about Tianhai City's future.

Times had changed. The three bases were no longer dominant forces.

Now, even in the face of blatant provocation by Daze City's three superhuman factions, they could do nothing but swallow the insult.

To put it bluntly, even if the three of them joined forces, they still wouldn't be as strong as any one faction used to be on its own.

Right now, they had no choice but to rely on Zhang Yi.

If Daze City's superhumans—or any other force coveting Tianhai City's resources—launched an attack, they'd be wiped out for sure.

So, they had to seriously consider their path forward.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi gathered his people into a room.

Once the doors and windows were shut, Liang Yue was the first to speak.

"Zhang Yi, when are we going to make our move?"

Zhang Yi wasn't the type to sit back and take things lying down.

Those guys had already stepped all over them—there was no way he'd just let it go.

The reason he didn't act earlier was simply because it wasn't the right time yet.

Zhang Yi sat down on the sofa. Upon hearing her question, the corner of his mouth lifted slightly.

"We're not the ones in control here. We need to wait for them to make the first move."

"Wait for them?" Liang Yue frowned. The others also looked puzzled by Zhang Yi's decision.

"Wouldn't that put us in a passive position?"

Zhang Yi smiled at them all. "Oh? Then why don't you tell me—what should we do instead?"

Unexpectedly, Fatty Xu, usually the more timid type, stood up boldly.

Gritting his teeth, he said, "Those guys were way out of line! They humiliated us in front of so many people—I couldn't stand it!"

"If you ask me, we should get ahead of them—ambush them on their way back to Daze City!"

He turned to Zhang Yi with a big flattering grin.

"With your strength, Boss, taking them out would be a piece of cake, right?"

But Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow and asked, "Oh? Do you know how strong they are?"

"I..." Fatty Xu couldn't answer. He had no idea about the strength of the Daze City superhuman factions.

Zhang Yi asked again, “Then do you know my strength?”

Fatty Xu was about to say something, but when he saw the amused glint in Zhang Yi’s eyes, he wisely kept his mouth shut.

The others looked at Zhang Yi, clearly waiting for him to explain the real plan.

Zhang Yi spoke earnestly, “Since we’re all on the same team, I’ll be honest with you. First off, my strength still doesn’t match Yuan Kongye’s level. Even with devouring-type superpowers, the absorption isn’t complete. And Yuan Kongye’s origin itself was already flawed—that might be tied to the nature of her abilities.”

“So don’t go around thinking I’ve reached Epsilon-level power. At best, I’m among the stronger ones at Delta level.”

“And don’t underestimate anyone either! You’ve seen Sun Jianming’s strength—he totally crushed Chen Jingguan. The other two faction leaders probably aren’t much weaker.”

“To attack without knowing their capabilities is plain foolish.”

“And for us to go ambush them now, when we know nothing? That would just be blind arrogance.”

Zhang Yi’s words made everyone feel strangely conflicted inside.

For some reason, they’d all subconsciously assumed Zhang Yi was already at—or near—Yuan Kongye’s level.

Back then, Yuan Kongye’s destructive power had left too deep of an impression on them.

They believed Zhang Yi could solo anyone below Epsilon level and win easily.

But now, it seemed that wasn't quite the case.

Zhou Ke'er was sharp enough to pinpoint the real issue.

"Actually, even if Zhang Yi's strength is higher than theirs, that's just based on logical guesswork. We still don't know their actual abilities."

"So acting rashly—especially going out of our way to ambush them— isn't a smart move."

Zhang Yi nodded in approval. Then he looked at Fatty Xu and Uncle You.

"You two let anger cloud your judgment. Remember what I'm about to say—if you want to survive in the apocalypse, you must stay rational at all times."

Chapter 597 — Chen Jingguan's Agony

Zhang Yi's explanation convinced everyone.

That was just like him — he would never put himself in danger out of arrogance.

Who in this world is truly invincible?

Back then, Yuan Kongye thought she was unbeatable too, yet she still ended up dying at the hands of Zhang Yi, whose strength was far beneath hers.

Zhang Yi wasn't about to make the same mistake.

Even a lion goes all out when hunting a rabbit!

“You don’t have to worry. Instead of charging at them in a rage and exposing all our weaknesses, it’s better to wait it out and fight them on our own turf,” Zhang Yi said with a smile, his eyes shining with intelligence.

In truth, he already had a plan to deal with those people.

Fatty Xu quickly chimed in with a laugh, “Boss, I knew you wouldn’t let them off that easily!”

Zhang Yi shrugged. “It’s not about me letting them off or not. It’s that they’ll definitely come asking for death themselves.”

Then Zhang Yi calmly laid out his plan.

“Their arrogance is just a front. They’re simply testing the strength of Tianhai City.”

“Now that Chen Jinguan has been beaten up, and we’ve swallowed our pride after being mocked, they’ll get the impression that Tianhai City is easy to bully.”

“So, it won’t be long before they decide to invade.”

A smile crept further into Zhang Yi’s eyes. “By then, when they’re on our turf, wouldn’t it be even easier to wipe them all out?”

Everyone in the room gasped in amazement.

“That’s brilliant!”

“Your way is way better! I was just so mad I wanted to go fight them right away.”

“Fighting on home ground, laying traps and waiting for them, that gives us the upper hand and minimizes our losses.”

Everyone admired Zhang Yi’s smarts, especially his composure.

After all, not everyone could keep their cool after being publicly humiliated.

Lu Keran blinked curiously at Zhang Yi and asked, “If that’s the case, big bro, why didn’t you just explain it clearly to Xiao Honglian and the others?”

Zhang Yi chuckled softly.

“There were too many people around back there. I can’t just reveal my plan in the open.”

“I’ll tell them everything once we’re back in Tianhai City and get them to cooperate with the operation.”

“Besides, it’ll teach them a lesson. They need to know exactly what level their strength is at now — and who they really depend on!”

Tianhai City had been too peaceful for too long. Without the pressure of foreign enemies, even though the three major bases respected Zhang Yi on the surface, they still held on to unrealistic hopes and were reluctant to hand over full authority.

But now, with the threat from Daze City’s Superhuman Organization looming, they would soon realize just how important Zhang Yi was to them.

This was a wake-up call — one that would make them more obedient.

Before leaving, Zhang Yi still needed to meet with Deng Shentong and Baili Changqing.

He called Baili Changqing, only to be told that they were busy in the Operations Center.

Zhang Yi asked, "Is it about that ronin group in Linhai City?"

Baili Changqing replied in a serious tone, "It's worse than you think. I can't tell you more without overstepping. Just be careful."

Zhang Yi's heart sank.

He wasn't exactly close to Baili Changqing — the man only owed him a favor.

For him to offer this much of a warning was basically spelling it out: the mission to wipe out Moon of Corrosion was extremely dangerous.

Zhang Yi understood immediately, and it confirmed that his thinking wasn't wrong.

Commander Zhu Zheng was clearly sending them as the vanguard — to probe the enemy's strength before sending Blizzard City's elite forces.

It wasn't exactly wrong, since baiting the enemy is a common military tactic.

But Zhang Yi wasn't Zhu Zheng's soldier. There was no way he would risk his life so easily.

"Thanks, I got it," Zhang Yi said, ending the call. He decided to observe for now and not make any moves.

If Blizzard City's leadership really wanted him involved, they would have to provide enough intel and supplies.

Zhang Yi had never fought an unprepared battle, and he wasn't about to start now.

Unable to reach Baili Changqing, Zhang Yi figured Deng Shentong was probably busy too.

After all, right now, only their two investigation teams were stationed in Blizzard City.

Zhang Yi didn't even have Deng Shentong's contact info, so he decided to wait a few more days.

If no one came looking for him by then, he would just head back to Tianhai City.

It's not like Blizzard City had given them a deadline anyway.

Zhang Yi then instructed his people — and through them, the members of the three major bases — not to get into any conflicts with any other factions during this period.

No matter how much others taunted them, they were to act like they hadn't heard a thing.

Just as Zhang Yi predicted, the incident at the Tianchang Conference Center quickly spread among the Superhuman communities of all twelve cities.

In no time, Tianhai City became the laughingstock of countless conversations.

People mocked them for being cowards, too scared to fight even though Linhai City was right next door.

They ridiculed them for their lack of strength, saying that even the leader of Chaoyu Base got beaten like a dog by Sun Jianming from Daze City.

They laughed at them for being weak and spineless, bullied to their faces without uttering a word before slinking away.

The comments were harsh and infuriating to hear.

But everyone, having been reminded by Zhang Yi, chose to ignore it.

Some even stopped leaving the apartments altogether and just stayed inside.

But for one person, those words were like a devastating earthquake to the heart.

That person was Chen Jingguan, the current leader of Chaoyu Base.

The mockery and humiliation Tianhai City faced hit him the hardest.

After all, everyone saw him get beaten to a pulp by Sun Jianming that day.

Now, his reputation was in ruins.

Even the subordinates he brought from Chaoyu Base were starting to treat him differently.

In his room, Chen Jingguan stared out at the sky, watching the snowflakes fall. They reminded him of his old leader, Wei Dinghai.

“Boss, I miss you...” Chen Jingguan mumbled to himself.

Wei Dinghai had died at the hands of Yuan Kongye after coveting her Superhuman essence.

Left with no choice, Chen Jingguan had reluctantly stepped up.

He thought that with no wars on the horizon, he could take it easy.

But he didn’t expect that a gathering in Blizzard City would expose his true strength.

After all, he was only a Gamma-level Superhuman.

Compared to Delta-level faction leaders like Xiao Honglian and Xing Tian, he wasn't even on the same playing field.

In Blizzard City, Sun Jianming hadn't dared to go all out on him, but now that his weakness was exposed, what if Sun Jianming led a fleet to attack them by sea?

If that happened, Chaoyu Base would be finished — total destruction would only be a matter of time.

Chapter 598 — Submission

The trip to Blizzard City made Chen Jingguan fully aware of his own strength — completely insufficient to support a powerful base.

After much deliberation, he finally made a decision.

That very day, he stood outside Zhang Yi's room and rang the doorbell.

When Zhang Yi saw Chen Jingguan, he thought for a moment and assumed he was here to ask for help in taking revenge.

So, Zhang Yi planned to say a few words and send him away.

But to his surprise, the moment Chen Jingguan stepped inside, he dropped to his knees, pressing his head firmly against the floor.

“Mr. Zhang Yi, please! I beg you to take over Chaoyu Base!” he pleaded sincerely.

Zhang Yi was a little surprised. Once he registered what Chen Jingguan had just said, he immediately understood the reason behind it.

Looking down at Chen Jingguan, Zhang Yi’s eyes were sharp and cold as he thought, He’s realized it. Chaoyu Base is doomed sooner or later in his hands. If he wants it to survive, he has no choice but to rely on me.

Zhang Yi remained composed, silently weighing the pros and cons of taking over Chaoyu Base.

As for the downside, there wasn’t much.

At most, he’d have to look after the people of Chaoyu Base.

It’d be a bit troublesome, sure, but Chaoyu Base was self-sufficient, so it wouldn’t be too big of a problem.

He just needed to make sure no other factions attacked them.

As for the benefits — Zhang Yi would gain complete control over Chaoyu Base.

There were over a thousand people there. While there weren’t many fighters, the rest were all experienced seafarers and fishermen.

If Zhang Yi ever needed to go out to sea, these people would be invaluable.

After some thought, Zhang Yi found this deal to be quite profitable.

However, he couldn't agree too easily.

Zhang Yi remained silent for a long time, making the kneeling Chen Jingguan increasingly anxious.

Does Zhang Yi look down on Chaoyu Base?

After all, the team is made up of elites, and they aren't short on supplies. It wouldn't be surprising if he thinks we're not worth it.

But right now, he's the only one I can rely on.

Just then, Zhang Yi's voice sounded above him.

"Get up first. Tell me — how do you see this situation?"

Zhang Yi moved to the couch and sat down.

Hearing this, Chen Jingguan raised his head. Seeing Zhang Yi's calm expression, with no hint of his true thoughts, Chen Jingguan nervously got up and walked over.

He sat across from Zhang Yi, fully prepared with what he wanted to say.

"I've been with Chaoyu Base's fleet for seven years. I have deep feelings for the team."

"After Wei Lao died in battle, I had no choice but to take on the role of base leader. But I'm not strong enough, and now, because of my own mistakes, people look down on Chaoyu Base."

"In these chaotic times, someone is bound to target Chaoyu Base like a piece of fat meat. I'm sure it won't be long before they invade."

Chen Jingguan clenched his fists tightly on his knees.

“We no longer have the power to protect ourselves. If Chaoyu Base falls, who knows what fate awaits the old brothers of the fleet.”

“So, I hope you, Zhang Yi, can take over as leader of Chaoyu Base and protect our brothers!”

Zhang Yi nodded.

“You’ve got a point. If outsiders take over Chaoyu Base, no one knows what they’ll do next.”

If they ran into brutal types, there could even be a massacre.

Chaoyu Base wasn’t just home to warriors and technicians — there were families, the old, the weak, women, and children.

Once conquered, would other factions even bother to feed them?

Never gamble on human kindness — you’ll lose every time.

And Chen Jingguan knew Zhang Yi well enough.

Zhang Yi might be ruthless and cunning on the battlefield, but he never killed innocents.

If Zhang Yi became the leader, at least the people of Chaoyu Base would be safe.

Suddenly, Zhang Yi laughed.

“You’re pretty smart. You know I’ve always been lazy and don’t like managing people. Even if Chaoyu Base recognizes me as the leader, aren’t you the one who’s still going to be running it?”

Chen Jingguan quickly said, “I won’t dare disobey any orders!”

“As long as you protect Chaoyu Base, we’ll meet any of your demands! Whether it’s food, weapons, or even women — we’ll offer them all!”

He gritted his teeth, “There are quite a few beautiful women in the base. If you don’t mind married ones, they could—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!”

Zhang Yi quickly cut him off.

He already had his hands full with the women around him. Plus, he had zero interest in breaking up families.

What do you take me for, Chen Jingguan?

Chen Jingguan stared at Zhang Yi with pleading eyes, desperate.

Zhang Yi chuckled. “Now you realize just how badly you’ve screwed up?”

Chen Jingguan lowered his head, “I know... I was too reckless.”

Leaning back on the couch, Zhang Yi said flatly, “I don’t mind becoming Chaoyu Base’s leader, but you’ll have to hand over the key to the Chaoyu Shelter.”

Chaoyu Base had two cores — the fleet and the underground shelter.

Each shelter had special keys, and only those with the keys could open its doors.

In other words, whoever had the shelter's keys was its true master.

Zhang Yi had learned this from Xing Tian.

Without hesitation, Chen Jingguan reached into a hidden pocket of his jacket and took out a black metal box, handing it to Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi had seen the shelter's keys before — Chen Jingguan couldn't fake this.

Inside the black box were three keys.

Normally, the keys were split among three people. Only by placing them all into the box's key slots could someone gain control over the shelter's doors.

But now, Chen Jingguan had all of them.

He handed Zhang Yi a full set.

This meant that from now on, Chaoyu Base was fully open to Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi took the keys and the controller, giving Chen Jingguan a deep look before the controller vanished into his palm and entered his spatial storage.

Chen Jingguan let out a sigh of relief and bowed his head deeply.

"Thank you, Chief!"

The moment Zhang Yi accepted the keys, it officially marked him as the new leader of Chaoyu Base.

Zhang Yi said calmly, “You’ll still handle the daily operations of Chaoyu Base. I’ll give you orders when necessary.”

“Yes, sir!”

A faint smile appeared on Chen Jingguan’s face.

It felt like he was back to being a dependable deputy again.

Truthfully, he was never fit to be a true leader — following a boss suited him better.

“Boss, what’s our next move? Do we head back to Tianhai City or find a chance to deal with those Daze City people?”

Chen Jingguan asked eagerly.

Zhang Yi replied flatly, “I’ll handle it. Wait for my orders. Once we’re back in Tianhai City, I’ll tell you what to do.”

Seeing how confident Zhang Yi was, Chen Jingguan finally relaxed.

After working with Zhang Yi for so long, he knew Zhang Yi’s style well.

So, he didn’t ask further.

He simply gave Zhang Yi a deep, respectful bow and left the room.

Chapter 599 — Deng Manor

Zhang Yi completely ignored all the gossip outside.

A strong person has a strong heart — the words of clowns were nothing but a joke to him.

The next day, Bai Chunyu came to see him.

This member of the Celestial Squad showing up at the apartment complex immediately caused a stir.

After all, the six investigation squads were Blizzard City's official violence apparatus, and some had experienced firsthand just how terrifying these people could be.

What puzzled everyone was that Bai Chunyu was looking for Zhang Yi — a guy with an unimpressive reputation, who even stayed silent and fled in front of the Daze City superhumans.

People were baffled.

But Bai Chunyu paid no mind to the rumors. He walked straight to Zhang Yi's place.

Zhang Yi had actually been waiting for him and politely invited him in for tea.

Bai Chunyu chuckled, "There's been quite a few rumors about you lately."

Zhang Yi calmly smiled, "Just some bored people talking nonsense. I can't be bothered."

Bai Chunyu took a sip of tea. "You've got quite the temper."

He had seen Zhang Yi's strength before — even among investigation teams, Zhang Yi ranked at least mid-to-upper tier.

Seeing Zhang Yi's composure now made him admire him even more.

“Our captain wants to meet you tonight at his manor,” Bai Chunyu said.

When Zhang Yi heard the word “manor,” his eyebrows raised.

“Did you just say... manor?”

For a second, he thought he misheard.

Blizzard City wasn’t particularly large or small, but it housed over a million people — each an elite in their field.

In this environment, owning a two-bedroom apartment was already considered top-tier.

As for a manor? That was almost unthinkable.

Bai Chunyu nodded with a smile. “That’s right.”

“Our captain’s family played a major role in building Blizzard City. One of the conditions was for the city to be built around the Deng Family’s territory.”

“Deng Manor existed long before the apocalypse, so don’t be too surprised.”

How could Zhang Yi not be surprised?

The Deng Family?

A major family from Jinling?

Sorry, never even heard of them.

But after thinking it over, Zhang Yi let it go.

The truly top-tier families often kept a low profile, yet their power could be terrifying.

“Sorry for my ignorance,” Zhang Yi said. “I’ve never heard of the Deng Family. What kind of family are they?”

Bai Chunyu’s smile grew wider.

“It used to be a secret, but not anymore. The Deng Family holds enormous power and wealth. Many of Jiangnan’s major corporations are actually under their control.”

“Especially in the high-tech sector — that’s their specialty.”

“Hmm... you’ve seen the Origin Bullets and the combat suits worn by investigation members, right?”

Zhang Yi nodded. Those items were things he coveted greatly.

“They were all developed with the Deng Family’s help,” Bai Chunyu explained. “Without the Deng Family’s support, Jiangnan District would’ve lost at least 20% of its strength.”

Zhang Yi cursed silently, Filthy rich bastards!

But on the surface, he put on a shocked expression. “That’s incredible!”

Bai Chunyu crossed his arms, clearly satisfied with Zhang Yi’s reaction, wearing pride all over his face.

“So now you understand, being chosen by our captain is a huge honor for you.”

Zhang Yi nodded, "It certainly is."

You still had to say the flattering words, after all.

Bai Chunyu put down his teacup and stood up.

"Tonight at six, the captain will meet you. A car will come to pick you up at five. Don't wander off before then."

Zhang Yi nodded. "Alright, I'll be there on time."

After saying his piece, Bai Chunyu left the apartment.

Zhang Yi sat on the sofa, deep in thought, reassessing Deng Shentong.

A powerful family background, strong superhuman talent — possibly family-cultivated too — and an arrogant, conceited personality.

Even if he couldn't be an ally, it was best not to become an enemy.

He figured he could smooth-talk a bit, then find a good excuse to politely decline the guy's recruitment.

— —

At 5 PM sharp, a black luxury car pulled up in front of the apartment building.

It had no license plates but gave off a solid and heavy feeling, like it was more of a tank than a car.

Closer inspection revealed its surface didn't even reflect light.

Two men in black combat suits got out and came into the apartment, heading straight to Zhang Yi's room.

"Mr. Zhang Yi, our young master invites you to meet him," one of them said.

Zhang Yi knew they were Deng Shentong's people, so he nodded and followed them out.

Many bystanders were watching, whispering about what bigshot might have come to take Zhang Yi away.

Only a few insiders quietly wondered:

"What kind of skills does Zhang Yi have, to be personally invited by the captain of the Celestial Squad?"

"Could it be that Tianhai City actually has a hidden powerhouse?"

Zhang Yi got into the car, which was surprisingly plain inside — nothing flashy — but it gave off an undeniable sense of security.

Even the car doors were nearly 20 centimeters thick, likely made with some kind of special defensive material.

In the apocalypse, besides heating systems, the most important feature of a vehicle was its defensive capabilities.

Sitting in the back seat with his arms crossed, Zhang Yi noticed that neither the driver nor the other man in black spoke a word as they silently drove towards Deng Manor.

About half an hour later, they stopped at a garden district northeast of Blizzard City.

The man in the passenger seat used a communication device to report their arrival.

Moments later, the garden's large gate opened.

"Mr. Zhang, please get out here," the man said. "One of the madams dislikes the smell of gasoline, so our vehicles aren't allowed inside the manor."

Zhang Yi chuckled and nodded. "Alright."

He wasn't the type to make a fuss over such things.

After Zhang Yi stepped out of the car, a small door on the side of the main gate opened, and there stood Bai Chunyu, smiling.

"You're here? Come, let's wait for a bit. The captain still has some matters to finish."

"Okay."

Zhang Yi didn't say much and followed Bai Chunyu into Deng Manor.

The manor was massive and luxurious — so luxurious it was almost shocking.

Despite the freezing weather, with most plants already dead from the cold, inside Deng Manor, some plants were still vibrant and green, growing inside special transparent cultivation chambers.

There weren't many of these plants — only a few rare species, and even those were placed under eaves.

The manor was huge, with heavily armed guards stationed at every entrance and exit.

Zhang Yi had been curious at first, but after looking around, he thought, Meh, nothing special.

Compared to his Shelter, this place was just bigger — nothing more.

Chapter 600: The Art of Language

Bai Chunyu led Zhang Yi into a room. The temperature inside was quite comfortable, and the decoration was exceptionally stylish.

It might not be appropriate to call it luxurious, but it was full of modern vibes. The furniture inside had a cyberpunk style, giving off a vibrant and lively atmosphere.

Bai Chunyu said to Zhang Yi, “Wait here for a bit. Our captain will come over as soon as he finishes the matter on his side.”

As he spoke, he clapped his hands, and immediately a maid entered carrying a teapot, pouring Zhang Yi a cup of tea.

“Thank you,” Zhang Yi said politely, picking up the teacup and taking a sip.

Bai Chunyu left the room, and Zhang Yi started to observe the surroundings while waiting for Deng Shentong.

Outside was a large floor-to-ceiling window, beyond which used to be a garden and a lake—or at least, it probably was.

Now, everything was frozen solid.

Zhang Yi thought to himself, Sure enough, this is a major family of Blizzard City, wealthy as expected, but even they can’t afford to heat the entire manor these days.

Money is useless now. Resource distribution is based on contribution. Even big families can't waste them. After all, Commander Zhu Zheng wouldn't allow it.

The room, meanwhile, was the perfect comfort zone of a rich second-generation kid.

Soft sofas, a huge TV hanging on the wall, and scattered video game cartridges littered across the carpet.

Zhang Yi casually picked up the remote control on the coffee table and turned on the TV.

As expected—just static!

He could play games, but considering the time might be too short, Zhang Yi gave up on the idea.

If I can't fully enjoy it, I'd rather not play at all.

The wait wasn't long. Less than half an hour later, Deng Shentong's voice came from outside the door.

"Zhang Yi, you're here!"

Zhang Yi glanced at the time. 5:58.

Didn't expect the captain of the Celestial Squad to be this punctual.

Deng Shentong took off his coat. His tall and lean figure stood firm and agile, clearly the body of someone who trained regularly.

Zhang Yi turned to look at him. "Just got here not long ago."

Deng Shentong took a hair tie out of his pocket and casually tied his long hair into a ponytail. Then, putting on slippers, he came over to Zhang Yi's side.

"Creak—"

He plopped onto the sofa, letting out a leisurely sigh as if he had just finished some exhausting work.

Zhang Yi watched him curiously. Today, this captain gave off a completely different vibe compared to last time.

"Do I have a flower on my face?" Deng Shentong asked with a charming smile.

"Not exactly. It's just that you're too handsome. I couldn't help but take a few more glances," Zhang Yi replied with a grin.

This time, Deng Shentong was visibly stunned. He didn't expect Zhang Yi to be so unpredictable.

Not many people usually spoke to him like this.

"Hahaha! You're really something!" Deng Shentong slapped his thigh and laughed.

"By the way, I heard you didn't sign up for the operation to wipe out Neon's [Moon of Corrosion]? What's your reasoning?"

The question came out of nowhere.

Zhang Yi thought for a moment and answered with a smile, "The thirteen cities of Jiangnan—even if Blizzard City's Investigation Team and the Yan Yun Guards don't make a move—there are still dozens of forces from the twelve outer cities."

“My participation won’t make much of a difference. Plus, Tianhai City is still in ruins. You must have heard, we all suffered heavy losses. Now’s not the time for more conflict.”

Deng Shentong rubbed his chin and nodded after hearing Zhang Yi’s explanation.

“You make a fair point. But your strength is clearly way above the other superhumans in the outer cities. If you went, I think the chance of taking down the Ronin would be much higher.”

Zhang Yi’s eyes flashed with a strange light.

What’s Deng Shentong trying to imply by saying this out of nowhere?

“But I’m not alone. I represent a whole team.”

Deng Shentong chuckled dismissively.

“If you don’t want to go, don’t go! I was just casually asking. Maybe your choice is the wiser one.”

He actually knew the inside story, but that wasn’t something he could tell Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi, hearing this, grew more certain of his suspicion.

It’s probably just as I thought—the Moon of Corrosion in Linhai City isn’t so easy to deal with!

Next, Deng Shentong said directly, “Let’s not beat around the bush. You should already know why I called you here today. How about it? Join my squad!”

Deng Shentong looked at Zhang Yi with a smile and extended his right hand, listing all the benefits of joining the Celestial Squad.

“The Celestial Squad is the strongest force in all of Jiangnan District!”

“Once you join us, you’ll be untouchable across Jiangnan!”

“You’ll enjoy supreme glory and command awe and respect.”

“And to put it more bluntly, if you want women or resources, I can provide those too. In short, you can get whatever you want with me!”

Deng Shentong spoke with absolute confidence.

He wasn’t just selling dreams—he firmly believed that under his command, these things were all easily attainable.

And truthfully, he did have that kind of power.

Zhang Yi sighed, “You really are incredible! In my life, I’ve seen many outstanding geniuses, but it’s my first time meeting someone as wealthy and gifted as you.”

Zhang Yi’s flattery clearly pleased Deng Shentong.

He flipped his long hair with satisfaction. “That just means you’ve seen too little of the world! But you’ll have the chance to follow me and see a broader one.”

He reached out his right hand to Zhang Yi. “Come on, join the Celestial Squad!”

Zhang Yi’s eyes were filled with "gratitude."

“This... this is really touching. So, if I join the Celestial Squad, I’ll be safe, right? No life-threatening danger?”

Deng Shentong confidently smiled, “Of course! I, Deng Shentong, have the ability to protect my team!”

Zhang Yi let out a long breath.

“Well, in that case, that’s great. I’ll join the Celestial Squad!”

Zhang Yi declared.

Deng Shentong’s face lit up with joy.

But the next moment, Zhang Yi added, “But, I’m actually pretty scared of dying. How about I stay in the city and handle logistics for you?”

Deng Shentong’s smile froze instantly.

“You... you’re kidding me, right?”

Zhang Yi blinked. “Weren’t you the one who said you’d guarantee my safety? I think staying inside Blizzard City is the safest.”

The corner of Deng Shentong’s mouth twitched violently.

What I need is a soldier who can fight! What’s the use if you don’t even leave the city?!

But Zhang Yi went on, “I truly admire your strength and generosity. So, if I join the Celestial Squad, I’ll definitely be better off than before, right?”

“If you know anything about me, you should know that I spent most of my time in Tianhai City hiding inside the shelter. I never took the initiative to leave.”

“Even my ability is mainly defensive. Abilities reflect the true nature of a superhuman. Since I’m naturally defensive, of course I won’t take the initiative to attack.”