

Ice Age 681

Chapter 681: Detached Villa

After receiving his Points Card, Zhang Yi was planning to find Baili Changqing to ask about the situation.

However, the Yan Yun Major stopped him.

"Sorry, Mr. Zhang Yi. You can't go anywhere right now!"

Zhang Yi looked at him with surprise. "Is there something else?"

The Yan Yun Major replied, "We've received orders from the top. You and your group are currently not allowed to leave. For the foreseeable future, you'll need to stay within a designated area. Any movements will need to be approved beforehand."

"Until approval is granted, you're not allowed to go anywhere."

His words made the Superhumans from the Outer City exchange confused looks.

Wasn't this basically house arrest?

Zhang Yi lowered his head, thinking for a moment, before a meaningful smile appeared on his lips.

The failed operation had severely impacted Blizzard City.

It seemed the upper management wanted to control the situation.

He didn't refuse — instead, he smiled and nodded. "Alright, as you wish."

If he really wanted to leave, no one could stop him anyway.

After all, his spatial teleportation ignored all physical obstacles.

The Yan Yun Major breathed a sigh of relief and gestured. "Then, please follow me!"

Zhang Yi, Liang Yue, and Hua Hua followed him to a black car.

As for the others, the injured would naturally be taken away by the medical department.

Soon, Zhang Yi and Liang Yue arrived at a new area.

It wasn't the apartment buildings where they had stayed before — instead, they entered Zone A, a place resembling a villa district.

They were led to a standalone villa with a small courtyard and two floors.

In all of Blizzard City, this was considered one of the top living spaces.

The Yan Yun Major said to Zhang Yi, "If you need anything during your stay, you can contact the Yan Yun Guards stationed nearby. I hope you enjoy your residence."

Zhang Yi nodded in thanks.

The Yan Yun Major then left the villa.

However, around the villa, soldiers armed with rifles guarded all four directions.

If Zhang Yi tried to leave, they would know immediately.

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow and said lightly, "Looks like things really have gotten out of hand."

Hua Hua, however, didn't care about any of this — she immediately jumped onto the sofa and began rolling around.

Liang Yue placed her longsword on the table, a worried look on her face.

"Are they... putting us under house arrest? We just fought for the District and contributed. Why are they treating us like this?"

Zhang Yi shrugged. "Why else? It's clearly because the failed operation caused chaos within Blizzard City."

"There might even be a power struggle brewing among the upper ranks — who knows?"

"In any case, as long as our safety isn't threatened, I don't care. I'm not interested in their internal politics."

Given how outstanding he had been in the battle, the Blizzard City leadership would definitely try to rope him in.

Judging by the treatment he was receiving now, Zhang Yi even suspected they might offer him a Captain position.

Sigh, guess I'll have to figure out how to politely refuse again... what a hassle.

He still naively thought that hiding himself away would mean peace and quiet — but with his sharp mind, keen insight, and powerful spatial abilities, he was destined to stand out.

"Ah, being too talented really is a burden!"

Zhang Yi sat on the sofa, dramatically covering his forehead with a look of sorrow.

Liang Yue, however, couldn't be as calm as he was.

The gap in strength led to a natural difference in mentality.

She paced back and forth in the room, thinking for a long time, then finally said she wanted to call the Shelter.

She told Zhang Yi her plan.

"Shouldn't we call home and let them know we're safe? The situation here is so unstable... letting them know would ease their worries."

"Besides, there's something else that worries me. Jiangning City isn't far from Tianhai City. If the Moon of Corrosion fled there, Tianhai City wouldn't be able to defend itself."

Zhang Yi's eyes narrowed slightly.

He hadn't considered that.

Based on the previous intelligence, the Moon of Corrosion's goal was to head inland to the Central Plains, not stay near the coast.

After all, according to the Neon Nation's invasion plan, most coastal areas would sink after the Ice Age ended.

There wouldn't be much point for them to linger in Tianhai City.

Still, since Liang Yue mentioned it, Zhang Yi decided he should prepare for the worst.

Better safe than sorry.

He pulled out his satellite phone — their phones had all been encrypted and couldn't be monitored, not even by Jiangnan District.

Zhang Yi trusted Yang Xinxin's tech skills.

After a moment of thought, Zhang Yi dialed Yang Xinxin's number.

She was the smartest person in the Shelter and had calm judgment.

The call connected quickly.

On the other end, Yang Xinxin's anxious voice came through — she sounded like she was about to cry:

"Brother Zhang Yi, how are you doing in Blizzard City? We were all scared to death!"

The explosion of the Death God of Love in Jiangning City had been visible even from Tianhai City.

It had even knocked out the city's electronic devices temporarily.

Yang Xinxin had been terrified.

If she hadn't known Zhang Yi's cautious nature — knowing he wouldn't recklessly put himself in danger — she might have lost her mind with worry.

Zhang Yi heard the concern in her voice and smiled gently.

"Relax, we're all fine. How's everything in Tianhai City?"

Yang Xinxin exhaled in relief. "Still peaceful, nothing unusual."

No news was the best news.

Zhang Yi hoped the Shelter could stay calm and safe.

He said, "Listen carefully — this is important and secret. Only you need to know for now. Don't tell the others."

"This time, Blizzard City's operation against the Moon of Corrosion failed. Their status is currently unknown."

"Tianhai City is close to Jiangning City. Don't leave the Shelter. If anything suspicious happens, notify me immediately and move into the underground bunker."

"Also, inform Xiao Honglian's family and the others — just tell them to be cautious. No need to mention the Moon of Corrosion, just warn them to stay alert and ready."

Given the Shelter's security, even if members of the Moon of Corrosion survived, they wouldn't easily breach it.

Yang Xinxin frowned slightly after hearing all this.

"Got it. I'll remember, Brother."

"And... I've also been doing some digging into the Moon of Corrosion. I found some interesting things. I'll send them over once I finish organizing the info."

Zhang Yi's eyes flickered. "Oh? Really? Jiangnan District investigated too, but didn't find much. How did you manage it?"

Yang Xinxin chuckled mysteriously:

"Their programmers can't compare to me. Even with their superior equipment, their skills are no match for mine!"

Zhang Yi laughed. "True enough — they're all clinging to their cushy government jobs."

In this world, the best hackers and tech geniuses rarely worked for official institutions.

Yang Xinxin was the perfect example.

They chatted casually for a while — it had been a long time since they last talked, and Yang Xinxin had a lot to say.

After regaining the use of her legs, her personality had grown much livelier.

Toward the end of the conversation, Zhang Yi, almost unconsciously, said:

"Take care of yourself, alright? Protect yourself no matter what."

Yang Xinxin's face flushed with happiness.

Being so cared for by Zhang Yi filled her with pure joy.

"Brother... did you only call me? Or did you call the others too?"

Zhang Yi froze for a second, then smiled. "Of course, I called you first."

"I knew it! Brother loves Xinxin the most!"

Yang Xinxin said sweetly, her cheeks glowing red.

Zhang Yi chuckled helplessly.

He simply felt that only Yang Xinxin could handle such sensitive information calmly.

If it had been someone like Zhou Ke'er, they'd probably have panicked in fear.

"Xinxin will never disappoint you, Brother."

"I won't be a burden. I'll protect myself," Yang Xinxin said softly.

Lowering her head, her long bangs shaded her eyes, where a strange, dangerous glint flickered — almost tipping into madness.

Zhang Yi didn't notice — over the phone, he couldn't see her expression.

"I never thought of you as a burden. Xinxin is the best. You've always been my greatest helper!"

Yang Xinxin nodded. "Mm. Thank you, Brother."

They ended the call.

Zhang Yi set down the phone, leaned back, and started thinking about his next move.

Ultimately, it would depend on the Jiangnan District leadership's stance.

Meanwhile, Yang Xinxin clutched the satellite phone tightly.

Standing motionless for a long time, she finally made a decision.

Wearing her fuzzy slippers, she slowly walked toward Zhou Ke'er's infirmary.

Inside, Zhou Ke'er was busy experimenting — using a live fish to test her Doctor Ability limits.

The fish had been captured from seawater Zhang Yi had collected earlier — kept not for eating, but for ornamental purposes.

In the apocalypse, keeping live creatures helped relieve mental stress.

Zhou Ke'er was using it to explore and expand her healing powers.

Zhang Yi had told her: Superhuman Abilities were like extra limbs — unique for each person — and could only be fully developed through constant practice.

Zhou Ke'er firmly believed it.

Knock, knock, knock!

There was a knock at the door.

Zhou Ke'er put down her work and looked up. "Come in!"

Yang Xinxin pushed the door open, her face glowing with a sickly flush and a strange smile.

"Big sister... let's start that experiment."

Chapter 682: Dangerous Game

Yang Xinxin found Zhou Ke'er and made a request.

The request made Zhou Ke'er's expression change slightly.

"Have you really thought this through, Xinxin? That experiment is extremely dangerous."

"And it's unbelievably painful. It might be the most agonizing experience a human can endure."

Yang Xinxin walked over with a smile, her hands clasped behind her back, looking up playfully at Zhou Ke'er.

"Big sister, Xinxin also wants to gain greater strength... to help Brother!"

"So, let's begin!"

Seeing the determination hidden within Yang Xinxin's smiling face, Zhou Ke'er realized her mind was made up.

She sighed softly. "Alright, then."

Without saying much else, Zhou Ke'er led Yang Xinxin over to a surgical table.

Yang Xinxin kicked off her shoes, revealing her feet wrapped in white cotton socks, then climbed up onto the surgical table, lying down with a smile.

Zhou Ke'er, expressionless, used restraints to secure Yang Xinxin's wrists and ankles, tying her body down as well — to prevent her from struggling during the experiment.

Throughout the entire process, Yang Xinxin kept smiling — a smile of acceptance.

Zhou Ke'er felt a pang of guilt. She took a deep breath and gave a final warning:

"You still have time to regret this. I'm really afraid you won't be able to endure this pain."

Yang Xinxin slowly closed her eyes.

"Big sister... let's start."

Zhou Ke'er said no more. Deep down, she also understood — Yang Xinxin was making the right choice.

Though this method wasn't guaranteed to work, their long-term research had concluded that it was worth trying.

Zhou Ke'er pushed over a transparent frame — a box made of acrylic, just large enough to enclose Yang Xinxin's head.

Once the device was set up, she connected monitors to track Yang Xinxin's heart rate.

Watching Yang Xinxin lying there with her eyes closed, Zhou Ke'er reached out and opened the valve linked to the acrylic tank.

Whoosh—

Water began pouring into the tank, quickly submerging Yang Xinxin's head.

Yang Xinxin's face twisted in pain. She struggled instinctively, gasping for air.

After about a minute, her struggling weakened, and her heart rate plummeted.

Zhou Ke'er's eyes stayed glued to the heart monitor.

Beep—

The ECG line flattened into a straight line.

But Zhou Ke'er didn't rush to drain the water — she kept watching both Yang Xinxin and the timer on her watch.

Two minutes passed without any change.

Only then did Zhou Ke'er swiftly drain the tank, her hands turning transparent as she reached straight into Yang Xinxin's chest.

One hand gripped her heart, the other her lungs — using her Doctor Ability to perform CPR.

Before long, Yang Xinxin's heartbeat resumed.

She suddenly jolted upright on the table, coughing up a mouthful of water.

As soon as she woke up, she instinctively checked her body.

However, this time — she didn't feel any change.

"Did... the experiment fail?"

Yang Xinxin's expression dimmed with disappointment.

Zhou Ke'er calmly reminded her:

"I studied your cells — they have indeed undergone some mutation under gamma radiation."

"But this phenomenon is common among most post-apocalyptic organisms. It doesn't necessarily mean you'll develop a Superhuman Ability."

"So you need to be mentally prepared."

Near-death experiences were the best stimulus for triggering abilities.

If awakening didn't occur under those conditions, there weren't many other options left.

Zhou Ke'er looked at Yang Xinxin with pain in her heart.

To awaken an ability, she had chosen such an excruciating path.

"Originally, you could have obtained an Ice Soul."

Zhou Ke'er understood Yang Xinxin's position in Zhang Yi's heart.

As a genius computer specialist, she should have been Zhang Yi's first choice to receive an Ice Soul.

Yang Xinxin stared blankly up at the surgical light above.

"I've always believed that the Ice Soul's awakening method is flawed."

"Big sister, did you forget what we concluded?"

"The true determinant of a Superhuman Ability's strength... should be Will."

"When facing death, the obsession within your heart crystallizes into your awakened ability. The stronger the obsession at the moment of death, the stronger the power."

"You three all obtained support-type abilities — which proves my theory."

"And I, if I want greater power, must push my will to its absolute limit — using this method."

This was the real reason Yang Xinxin refused the Ice Soul.

She had her own ideas.

She wanted to become a unique existence at Zhang Yi's side — irreplaceable.

Zhou Ke'er took a deep breath and tried to comfort her.

"Even if you don't awaken an ability, you can still help Zhang Yi greatly."

Yang Xinxin shook her head.

"That's not the same."

No one ever disliked having more power.

And she understood — in Zhang Yi's mind, she would always be the delicate girl who needed protection.

But Zhang Yi didn't know — she also wanted to face danger alongside him, to fight side-by-side.

Zhou Ke'er reached out, planning to untie Yang Xinxin's restraints.

Yang Xinxin, however, said coldly:

"Continue."

Zhou Ke'er froze, her hand stiff in the air.

"You..."

She was too shocked to speak.

The sensation of dying — it was something no one wanted to experience again.

Yet Yang Xinxin wanted to go through it again?

Yang Xinxin looked at the stunned Zhou Ke'er and smiled sweetly.

"Don't worry, you're here. I won't actually die."

"But next time, maybe wait a little longer. Let me really feel the despair of dying. It might be more effective."

Zhou Ke'er's body began trembling slightly from fear.

Her little cousin... was terrifying.

But she couldn't refuse Yang Xinxin's request.

Gritting her teeth, she began the second round of the experiment.

With her here, Yang Xinxin wouldn't die.

But repeatedly dancing on the edge of death... just thinking about it made one's scalp tingle.

...

Linhai City.

After fleeing Jiangning City, the remnants of the Moon of Corrosion regrouped at Linhai City.

This was the only place they had completely emptied — no enemies remained here.

Although they had defeated the Celestial Squad and slain Deng Shentong, they had paid a heavy price themselves.

Naruse Hanachiyo, Wagatsuma Nanako, Takizawa Takashi, Kamiya Gedou, and Akutsu Shinichiro.

These five had all died in that battle.

This kind of loss had never happened in the Moon of Corrosion's history.

Even back in Kanto, when facing powerful enemies, they had always escaped danger thanks to Takeuchi Mayumi's foresight.

Now, the remaining members returned to their hidden icebreaker ship docked at the harbor and set sail.

Led by Phoenixin Ren, the eight survivors stood at the bow, silently mourning the land they were leaving.

Though they were a band of desperate outlaws, their time together had forged genuine bonds.

They mourned the five fallen companions from the depths of their hearts.

After the mourning, Phoenixin Ren put on his gray newsboy cap.

"This battle went beyond our expectations. Mayumi's prophecy was disrupted... but overall, we won."

"Next, we must create even greater chaos — and use it as leverage to negotiate with Jiangnan District!"

Hearing this, Takeuchi Mayumi's face darkened.

She lowered her head, speaking sorrowfully:

"Their deaths were my fault. I failed in my duty. My divination... went wrong."

Phoenixin Ren quickly turned around and gently gripped her shoulders.

"Mayumi, it's not your fault."

"Hanachiyo was already at risk. You tried to save her — we just didn't anticipate the Celestial Squad's Captain appearing nearby."

"But as for the deaths of Kamiya and the others... that's a different story."

A dark glint flashed in Phoenixin Ren's eyes.

Those five were key combat assets — losing them dealt a heavy blow.

At that moment, Shinguuji Seiichiro pushed up his glasses and said coldly:

"Among our enemies... I encountered someone extremely dangerous."

Everyone turned toward him.

"A dangerous enemy? More dangerous than Deng Shentong?"

Phoenixin Ren asked with a light laugh.

"No — it's a completely different kind of danger."

Shinguuji Seiichiro recalled the events of that day, a chill creeping up his spine.

"Kamiya and Akutsu were both seriously wounded when they were killed — but even in that state, they shouldn't have been finished off by ordinary bullets."

"The man I faced was an incredibly powerful spatial-type ability user. His bullets carried monstrous force."

"If he were just a sniper, it would be manageable. But when my shikigami attacked him... he swallowed them."

Hearing this, the others' faces turned grim.

Shinguuji Seiichiro's shikigami were powerful — each on par with a Delta-class Superhuman.

For someone to crush his abilities so easily... their level must be terrifying.

At that moment, Tsukamoto Nobunaga also spoke up.

"If you're talking about that guy... I have an impression too."

Everyone turned to him.

Nobunaga said calmly:

"Wagatsuma Nanako and Takizawa Takashi were sent to chase him. Likely, they died at his hands."

The Moon of Corrosion members were all stunned.

In other words — out of their five dead companions, four had been killed by the same man!

Who exactly... was that person?

Chapter 683 – The Only Hope

When Phoenixin Ren recalled Takeuchi Mayumi's performance during the battle, his expression turned frighteningly grim.

"Isn't that guy the one who disrupted Mayumi's prophecy?"

Once all the clues were pieced together, everything became clear.

Takeuchi Mayumi's prophecy couldn't predict anything related to that man.

Even characters who were originally on a normal track within her visions — once they crossed paths with that sniper — their fates would change.

"He's someone outside of destiny!"

Takeuchi Mayumi murmured softly.

"In the next operations, if this man gets involved again, things are going to get very difficult for us. Unless... we find a way to kill him!"

Phoenixin Ren narrowed his eyes.

"No rush. I still want to learn more about that sniper."

"There'll be a chance to kill him!"

The Icebreaker Ship slowly left the coast, heading toward the southern seas.

Over the next few days, Zhang Yi and the others, including Liang Yue, stayed in the residence assigned to them by Blizzard City and weren't allowed to leave freely.

But aside from that restriction, the other arrangements were pretty good.

The food was exquisite, and hot water was provided without time or quantity limits.

Considering how limited solar power was now, and how scarce resources like gas and coal were, unlimited hot water was an incredible luxury.

Ordinary citizens in Blizzard City had strict rations for hot water, electricity, and food every day — not a drop was wasted.

Being stuck indoors wasn't so bad; Zhang Yi finally got a few days of proper rest.

He retrieved the corpse of Nishijumu Satoru (Heartseer Demon) from his Dimensional Space.

"These Neon folks... they're all elite Delta-levels. If I absorb their power, I can definitely get even stronger!"

Full of anticipation, Zhang Yi placed his hand on the forehead of one of the Moon of Corrosion members.

Very quickly, that familiar sensation returned.

His 【Devouring Ability】 allowed him to absorb the powers of deceased superhumans.

However, this time, that thrilling rush didn't come.

He did absorb some energy, but overall, the boost he felt was minimal.

"What's going on?"

Zhang Yi couldn't understand what was happening.

Actually, this phenomenon had already appeared before.

When he wiped out the superhumans in Daze City, he absorbed their essence, but the improvement in his abilities was almost negligible.

Back then, he thought it was because their powers were too weak.

But now, the superhumans he absorbed from the Moon of Corrosion were no weaklings.

Yet, the result was still barely noticeable.

"Could it be... I've hit a bottleneck?"

This thought suddenly flashed through Zhang Yi's mind.

Once the idea appeared, it made perfect sense to him.

If superhumans could evolve infinitely by absorbing others, then everyone would eventually become limitless monsters.

In that case, there would be no way the Outer City's superhumans could compare to Blizzard City's elites.

This situation meant that 【Devouring Ability】 must have its limits too.

From now on, if Zhang Yi wanted to evolve further, he would have to devour even stronger superhumans.

"So that's how it is! But honestly, it's not necessarily a bad thing. At least this way, I won't be completely outclassed by those investigation captains from Blizzard City who are showered with resources and training by the top brass."

Comforting himself with that thought didn't feel too bad.

After all, when it came to resources and background, how could he possibly compete with people born into privilege?

Looking at the three other corpses on the ground, Zhang Yi thought it over and then called over Hua Hua and Liang Yue.

Rather than wasting the corpses by devouring them himself for minimal gain, it would be better to boost the strength of his own team.

When Liang Yue realized Zhang Yi was willing to share superhuman essence with her, her face was full of disbelief.

Soon after, she seemed to think of something, and an unnatural blush crept up her cheeks.

Hua Hua didn't bother with any of that.

The moment it spotted a delicious feast, it immediately pounced and devoured one corpse without hesitation.

But after consuming one superhuman, Hua Hua couldn't manage to eat a second.

These superhuman essences were incredibly powerful — even one would take a long time for it to digest.

Liang Yue, however, easily absorbed the essences of the other two.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but marvel inwardly — the Martial Arts Master's foundation was truly deep.

Who knew how far she could evolve in the future?

At this moment, Zhang Yi couldn't accurately tell what level Liang Yue and Hua Hua's abilities had reached.

Because superhuman energy ranks were, by nature, a rather vague concept.

However, at the very least, both Liang Yue and Hua Hua's potential now reached high Delta level — or possibly even higher.

Liang Yue and Hua Hua went off to digest the powers they had just absorbed.

Meanwhile, feeling bored, Zhang Yi felt like chatting with Baili Changqing.

But no matter how many times he called, Baili Changqing's phone stayed unreachable.

All he got was: "The number you have dialed is currently powered off."

Zhang Yi guessed that Baili Changqing must be at the Operations Command Center, accompanying Zhu Zheng and the others to discuss matters after the battle's failure.

And because of the extreme confidentiality, all communication devices were prohibited.

The only people Zhang Yi could reach now were his friends at the Shelter, and his nominal team members Chen Xiaoxiao and Peng Li.

Compared to Zhang Yi's accommodations, Chen Xiaoxiao and Peng Li's living conditions were clearly not as good.

Still, since they had contributed during the battle, they were placed in Area A — though their lodgings were high-end apartments, not standalone villas.

Chen Xiaoxiao and Peng Li's attitude toward Zhang Yi had completely changed long ago.

After all, he had saved their lives — they were deeply grateful.

And partly out of admiration for his strength, and partly out of wanting to cling to a powerful figure, the two women often sought him out to chat.

Zhang Yi didn't mind.

Since he couldn't go anywhere anyway, chatting helped kill time.

A few days later, Zhang Yi received the information about the Moon of Corrosion sent over by Yang Xinxin.

Only then did he put aside his leisurely mood and begin to seriously study these Neon superhumans.

Sure enough, the materials Yang Xinxin sent were quite different from what Blizzard City had provided.

It couldn't be ruled out that Blizzard City had intentionally withheld information.

Still, Zhang Yi discovered many interesting things.

There were detailed biographies of the thirteen members of Moon of Corrosion, along with descriptions of their abilities.

When Zhang Yi flipped to the profile of Takeuchi Mayumi, his fingers paused on the page.

Takeuchi Mayumi, a novice miko from an ancient shrine.

The 126th-generation successor of the Takeuchi family.

Her ancestor was Takeuchi no Sukune, an official during the Buretsu era, whose title was passed down through generations.

Those who inherited the name of Takeuchi no Sukune had a duty similar to that of a historian in the Huaxu Nation.

However, instead of recording history through writing, they memorized it orally and passed it down by word of mouth.

Even after the Takeuchi no Sukune position vanished with time, the Takeuchi family's responsibility continued unbroken.

Every generation's successor strictly adhered to ancestral teachings, preserving Neon's history through memory.

This was called: "Never forgetting the ancient past, never losing the present, and never severing the future."

"This is actually a profession passed down through generations... interesting."

"But according to the theory of superhuman abilities, one's power is related to their obsession.

If that's the case, could her ability really be memory?

Impossible. Such a power would be useless."

"Then... a miko, the Takeuchi family... Could it be... the Book of Prophecy!"

A bold idea surfaced in Zhang Yi's mind.

Through observing two battles, and the enemy's precise control over the battlefield, he felt this hypothesis was highly reasonable.

They weren't professional military forces.

They had no powerful equipment, were fighting on foreign soil without reinforcements.

No advantage in timing, location, or support — none of it was on their side.

So how could they have repeatedly defeated Blizzard City's allied forces?

If that miko named Takeuchi Mayumi possessed a prophecy-like ability, then everything made sense.

Zhang Yi's expression grew serious.

"If that's the case, the most terrifying person in all of Moon of Corrosion isn't their leader, Phoenixin Ren..."

"It's Takeuchi Mayumi!

She is the true core of the Moon of Corrosion!"

A chill ran down Zhang Yi's spine.

Prophecy?

Able to see through the future?

If someone really had such an ability, even if they didn't fight personally, their strength would absolutely be ranked as Epsilon-level!

On the battlefield, their value would be limitless!

But then again — if she could really foresee everything without fail, why had five of their people still been killed by him?

Thinking of this, Zhang Yi began pacing back and forth in his room, trying to figure it out.

"Even with the power of prophecy, it's impossible to grasp every tiny detail of the future perfectly."

"Maybe... they focused all their attention on the Celestial Squad and neglected my existence."

"No, no... They shouldn't have been able to distinguish identities individually.

If it's prophecy, it should be centered on themselves."

"Then... how exactly did I break through her ability?"

Zhang Yi fell deep into thought.

He even had a feeling that if he could figure out this mystery, it could become the key to destroying the Moon of Corrosion!

Meanwhile, during the period when Zhang Yi was confined to his residence, undercurrents were beginning to stir throughout Blizzard City.

The top brass of Blizzard City was doing everything they could to suppress the news, trying to prevent word of the second failed assault on the Moon of Corrosion from spreading and shaking public morale.

However — where in the world is there a wall without cracks?

The Celestial Squad had mysteriously disappeared.

In the past, whenever they returned victorious, it was celebrated loudly.

But this time, nobody had seen that handsome silver-haired man make a public appearance.

Although the official announcement declared a victory, judging by the higher-ups' behavior, it seemed like they were deliberately avoiding mentioning it.

The feeling was like winning a world championship — only to not even make the front page of the gaming news.

No one knew where it started, but a rumor slowly began to spread through the city:

"Hey, did you hear? The Grand District's operation to wipe out the Neon ronin actually failed. Tons of people died! Even the Celestial Squad's captain, Deng Shentong, was killed!"

"What? Seriously? We couldn't even handle a bunch of Neon guys?"

"Yeah, tell me about it! Haven't you noticed how weird the atmosphere in the city's been lately?"

They keep claiming victory, but the Commander and Deng Shentong haven't shown their faces even once.

All the news outlets did was say a few nice-sounding lines."

"That's... disgusting! Are they taking us for fools?"

"But if even the Celestial Squad lost... then, are we really unable to beat the Neon scum?"

"Stop it, you're scaring me. I don't even dare think about it.

If the investigation teams lost, then what chance do we ordinary folks have?"

Chapter 684 – An Unstable Situation

In Blizzard City, the rumors surrounding the recent battle spread wider and grew more exaggerated.

Because deep down, no one could have imagined that Blizzard City would actually lose a fight against the Moon of Corrosion!

And the emotions swirling around weren't just anger — but also fear.

If they couldn't even suppress a small ronin organization, how could they guarantee the safety of the people?

At this time, another voice began to emerge:

"It's not that our warriors weren't strong enough — it's the commanders' poor decisions that caused our soldiers' lives to be wasted!"

"The Celestial Squad's combat power was absolutely trustworthy, but the higher-ups forced them to launch prematurely without sufficient intel, pushing them onto the battlefield in haste!"

"Our warriors lost because of the information gap. It's all the command level's fault!"

Deng Shentong and the Celestial Squad had a huge following inside Blizzard City.

Once this kind of opinion appeared, it quickly gained a lot of support.

People shifted their anger toward the commanders.

They believed that no matter what, the ones giving orders should be held responsible.

Although this criticism couldn't be spread openly, in private, almost everyone was discussing it.

Even some people inside official agencies whispered about it behind closed doors.

The reason was simple — this matter directly affected their survival and dignity.

Naturally, this unrest reached Zhu Zheng's ears.

Already frustrated, hearing these rumors made him even more irritable.

He hadn't eaten a single grain of rice for several days.

Whenever he thought about the near-total annihilation of the Celestial Squad — including Captain Deng Shentong — it felt like his heart was bleeding.

Building an investigation team took an enormous amount of effort and resources.

Losing the Celestial Squad's combat strength was likely a loss that couldn't be replaced.

And now, Zhu Zheng's prestige in Blizzard City had taken a massive hit.

He had to find a way to stabilize public morale.

Thus, exterminating the Moon of Corrosion became an absolute necessity!

But right now, who could he even use?

The Black Robe Squad had no captain-level superhuman holding the fort, and the Celestial Squad was nearly wiped out.

Other investigation teams across the districts were all tied up with important missions and couldn't return.

Even if he wanted to fight again, he had to learn from last time's lesson — he had to bring out his strongest hidden forces and never underestimate the enemy again.

In other words, it would take at least two investigation teams' worth of firepower to ensure success.

At this critical juncture, a key figure arrived to help Zhu Zheng:

The head of the Deng Family, Chairman of the Deng Group — Deng Yuanbo.

On a gloomy morning, under heavy snowfall, Deng Yuanbo's motorcade arrived at the Operations Command Center.

This pillar of the Deng Family, now over fifty years old, made his first public appearance since the disastrous battle.

Many were secretly watching his movements.

Was Deng Yuanbo here to confront Zhu Zheng? Or to support him?

His attitude was crucial.

At this moment, Deng Yuanbo's stance could sway the entire city's public opinion.

Moreover, as someone who had just lost his heir, he was also one of the biggest victims of the operation's failure.

Thus, his words carried even more weight.

When Zhu Zheng learned that Deng Yuanbo had arrived, his expression grew stern.

He had Lan Xincheng personally invite Deng Yuanbo into his office, and the two of them spoke behind closed doors for a long time.

No one knew exactly what was said.

But afterward, Lan Xincheng noticed that the gloomy look on Zhu Zheng's face had lightened significantly.

He let out a long sigh of relief.

Seeing Zhu Zheng pull himself together was the outcome he most wanted —

because if Zhu Zheng, his direct superior, collapsed, Lan Xincheng's own future in Blizzard City would be jeopardized.

After sending Deng Yuanbo off, Zhu Zheng thought for a moment and calmly told Lan Xincheng,

"Lift the confinement order on Zhang Yi and the others. Bring Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing to me — I need to speak with them."

Lan Xincheng nodded and answered, "Yes, sir."

He hurried off to pass along the order.

Soon after, Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing, having received the summons, arrived at the Operations Center.

The two bumped into each other in the lobby on the first floor.

Baili Changqing gave Zhang Yi a bitter smile.

Zhang Yi instantly understood.

Back then, the two of them had worked together to deceive the Jiangnan District leadership, hiding Zhang Yi's true strength.

But in the recent operation against the Moon of Corrosion, Zhang Yi had clearly shown power far beyond what the District had anticipated.

Given that, the District would definitely hold Baili Changqing accountable.

And during this time, they hadn't been able to communicate — they couldn't even coordinate their stories.

Now that Zhu Zheng was calling them both in, it was obvious what was coming.

For Zhang Yi, it didn't matter much.

He wasn't originally part of Blizzard City anyway.

Even if Zhu Zheng wanted to blame him, at most he could scold him — he couldn't impose real punishment.

After all, hiding one's strength wasn't a crime.

But for Baili Changqing, a captain within the investigation teams, it wasn't so simple.

Depending on Zhu Zheng's mood, the charges could be made big or small.

Lan Xincheng personally came downstairs to meet them.

He was handsome, but had a slightly effeminate air about him — perhaps because he was a civilian official.

Zhang Yi didn't particularly like him.

Lan Xincheng had the look of a sharp, cunning man — the type who was always scheming.

Dealing with such people usually meant trouble.

Still, Zhang Yi wasn't worried about that.

He actually found Lan Xincheng's pretentious cleverness rather funny.

True intelligence was often hidden deep, not flaunted openly.

"Gentlemen, please come upstairs. Commander Zhu has been waiting for you," Lan Xincheng said.

Zhang Yi smiled calmly and nodded, following him upstairs.

Baili Changqing, face stiff and forehead damp with sweat, had no choice but to follow.

Soon, the two of them entered Zhu Zheng's office.

Lan Xincheng stayed outside and quietly closed the door behind them.

Inside the room were only Zhu Zheng and his personal guard, Sun Luxuan.

Zhu Zheng sat behind a mahogany desk, hands clasped under his chin.

The late afternoon light cast a shadow across half his face — as well as over Sun Luxuan, who stood silently in the background.

The atmosphere was strange.

Zhang Yi thought to himself:

They probably want me to continue fighting against the Moon of Corrosion.

Well, I don't mind taking down the Neon ronin — but if they want me to risk my life recklessly, heh, no way.

Let's see how he puts it.

Baili Changqing stood beside Zhang Yi, looking stiff and nervous, cold sweat forming at his brow.

Zhu Zheng raised his head and gave them a slight smile, saying in a deep voice,

"You're here. Sit down."

"Yes, sir!"

Baili Changqing responded loudly, clearly tense.

Zhang Yi, still smiling, nodded and said,

"Thank you, Commander."

The two of them sat down at the mahogany desk.

Zhu Zheng's gaze immediately settled on Zhang Yi.

"Zhang Yi, your performance during the Moon of Corrosion operation was remarkable.

You really surprised me.

I never thought there would be such a powerful superhuman hiding in the Outer City."

He smiled and pointed at Zhang Yi:

"You little rascal, you sure know how to keep a low profile!"

As he spoke, he cast a glance at Baili Changqing.

"Even our District's investigation teams didn't discover you."

Baili Changqing felt his throat tighten.

He wanted to explain something, but didn't know how to start.

Zhang Yi, seeing this, opened his mouth to help relieve the pressure:

"Even a crafty rabbit has three burrows.

Keeping a few hidden cards was just my way of surviving in the apocalypse.

I hope Commander Zhu can understand."

Zhu Zheng nodded.

"Quite right. You're cautious enough — and good at concealing yourself.

That's a very admirable quality.

On the battlefield, soldiers like you are the ones most likely to survive till the end."

Hearing this, Baili Changqing couldn't help but grumble inwardly:

Wasn't it you who always said Zhang Yi was too defensive, too focused on self-preservation, and not a real soldier?

Wow, you sure flip sides faster than turning a page!

Chapter 685 – Outside the Cycle

Facing Zhu Zheng's praise, Zhang Yi remained very calm.

You couldn't take flattery seriously — who knew what kind of work they'd make him do afterward?

"You overpraise me, Commander. My strength still has a long way to go compared to Blizzard City's elites. Especially compared to professional soldiers, my combat training is still far too lacking."

Hearing that, Zhu Zheng couldn't help but think of the fallen members of the Celestial Squad —

and of Deng Shentong, the junior he had pinned so many hopes on.

His eyes turned icy.

"Let's not talk about that anymore."

"This battle has taught me a lot."

Zhu Zheng sighed heavily, his gaze becoming distant.

"In the era of the Great Mutation, the role of regular soldiers is getting weaker and weaker.

In high-level battles between superhumans, even the best-trained regular fighters — no, even low-level superhumans — are almost entirely irrelevant to the outcome."

Zhu Zheng thought back to the fallen Celestial Squad.

Every single one of them had been highly trained.

Yet they were defeated — by Neon's ragtag bunch of corporate drones.

"In other words, the arrival of the new era means a new form of warfare!"

"This battle gave us all a harsh lesson."

"Only top-tier superhumans — and intelligence gathering — are the keys to winning battles!"

Zhu Zheng sighed again.

"Before, we were too arrogant. We were still clinging to the advantages of numbers and home-field advantage.

If we don't change that mindset, we'll keep suffering heavy losses in the future."

Zhang Yi listened and nodded along seriously.

Of course, he was mostly just showing agreement for the sake of the leadership.

In truth, he had already understood this long ago —

starting from the battle against the Daze City superhumans.

Almost a thousand troops, seventy-two superhumans, and eight hundred elite soldiers —

yet none of them could withstand a single Spear of Annihilation launched remotely by Zhang Yi.

That was the shape of the new era of warfare.

Superhumans would become the dominators of the battlefield, surpassing even hot weapons —

perhaps only second to the Death God of Love, humanity's last dignity in the age of firearms.

"So," Zhu Zheng placed his hands flat on the desk, his gaze fixed firmly on Zhang Yi,

"our revenge from here on must be superhuman-led — and led by high-level superhumans!"

"I've decided to hand battlefield initiative over to you."

"So, Zhang Yi, I hope you'll lead a team and carry out the next mission!"

The air fell silent.

Zhang Yi said nothing.

Baili Changqing turned his head slightly in shock, his face full of disbelief.

The campaign against the Moon of Corrosion —

this massive operation —

was going to be led by Zhang Yi, an outsider from the Outer City?!

Baili Changqing could hardly believe his own ears.

But thinking about it carefully, Blizzard City really didn't have anyone left to use.

Two major investigation teams had been crippled, and they had lost their peak combat strength.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi, who had singlehandedly slain five members of the Moon of Corrosion,

had ironically become the most suitable candidate.

It was... a little ridiculous.

Zhang Yi remained silent —

his mind briefly blanking out.

He had known that Zhu Zheng would want him to return to the battlefield,

but he hadn't expected Zhu Zheng to hand him leadership of the operation.

This responsibility came too fast — and it was incredibly heavy.

Zhang Yi was a naturally lazy person.

He didn't like leading teams, especially not unfamiliar ones who might drag him down.

"I think my abilities aren't enough to shoulder such an important responsibility.

You should pick someone else, Commander.

Blizzard City has no shortage of outstanding talent."

Zhu Zheng looked at him meaningfully.

"You're right."

"But you possess something that no one else has —

something that is the Moon of Corrosion's greatest weakness!"

Zhang Yi stared at Zhu Zheng, a faint suspicion arising in his heart.

Before he could ask, Zhu Zheng continued explaining:

"Although our losses this time were extremely heavy,

after paying the price, we also obtained enough intelligence."

"We not only learned more about the Moon of Corrosion's superhuman abilities —

we also identified their most critical figure."

Zhu Zheng pressed his hands firmly against the desk, his gaze sharp as a blade.

"We've been wrong all along —

Phoenixin Ren is not the core of the Moon of Corrosion!"

"Their true core is the miko with the power of prophecy — Takeuchi Mayumi!"

Zhang Yi: So it really was like that! Looks like I guessed right.

Zhu Zheng continued:

"We've already figured out her ability."

He raised two fingers.

"First, she possesses a prophetic-type ability that allows her to glimpse the future to some extent."

"Because of that, they were able to dispatch the perfect countermeasures to every one of our moves."

"Just this ability alone weakened our effectiveness by at least thirty percent!"

"Even deploying the Death God of Love couldn't eliminate them!"

Zhu Zheng thought back to the time they launched the Death God of Love,

still feeling lingering fear.

He let out a long breath.

"You can't imagine it.

She predicted what I would do...

minutes before I even made the decision!"

Zhang Yi's face didn't show much surprise.

He had already figured out a lot of this, being the one closest to the battlefield.

But Baili Changqing couldn't help but raise a question:

"But... something doesn't add up!

If she can truly foresee the future, then why were five of her comrades still killed by Zhang Yi?"

Zhu Zheng responded decisively:

"Exactly! You've hit the nail on the head!"

"We found that on almost every battlefield, they had overwhelming initiative.

But there was one person —

whose appearance disrupted her foresight."

Zhu Zheng lowered his head and stared at Zhang Yi, eyes blazing like he had found an invaluable treasure.

"Wherever Zhang Yi appears, her prophecy becomes ineffective.

It's incredible!"

"Zhang Yi, that's why I want you to lead this mission."

"Because only you can break our current deadlock —

only you can shatter her prophetic advantage!"

Baili Changqing stared at Zhang Yi, utterly dumbfounded.

He couldn't figure it out either.

Zhang Yi's abilities were clearly space-based.

But why could he interfere with Takeuchi Mayumi's prophecy?

It didn't make sense.

Zhu Zheng leaned forward, his head almost touching Zhang Yi's,

and asked each word with great seriousness:

"Zhang Yi, at this critical moment, I hope you can be honest with us.

How exactly are you able to disrupt her prophetic abilities?"

Zhang Yi sighed deeply, meeting Zhu Zheng's questioning gaze with clear, calm eyes.

"I don't know.

Honestly, when I first started executing missions, I already noticed something was off.

But I have no idea why I'm... special."

This was a lie.

In truth, Zhang Yi had already vaguely guessed the real answer.

Prophetic powers —

in another sense —

were a form of causality weapon.

They relied on a predetermined fate.

However, Zhang Yi was a reborn individual.

Although it might also be related to some yet-undiscovered ability of his,

on the original timeline, Zhang Yi was supposed to be dead.

Thus, his future couldn't be predicted.

And the space he occupied had become a unique field —

nullifying the effects of future prophecy on him.

Chapter 686 — Tengu

Zhu Zheng continued laying out his plan to Zhang Yi.

"We have to wipe out Moon of Corrosion. Only after they're gone can there be peace and happiness."

"You and your wife could be chilling at home, eating hotpot and singing karaoke, and bam—Moon of Corrosion suddenly shows up!"

"That's why the days without Moon of Corrosion are the real good days."

Zhang Yi still didn't really want to take on the responsibility.

"I still think I'm not cut out for this, Sir. You might want to think about it again."

"If I fail, that's one thing—but disappointing you and bringing shame to Jiangnan District and even all of our Chinese people, that's a huge sin!"

Zhu Zheng frowned, then suddenly realized what was going on.

Clearly, Zhang Yi wasn't going to shoot without seeing the rabbit first.

Asking him to take on a big task without offering something in return? Of course he wouldn't agree.

Zhu Zheng slammed his palm on the table.

"For this operation, I'm planning to merge the remnants of the Celestial Squad with the Black Robe Squad into a new team! You'll be the one leading it!"

"I even thought of a name already—'Tengu'!"

Zhang Yi's eyes widened.

"T***u? Wow... what a name."

Zhu Zheng went on, "Tengu devours the moon! The purpose of this squad is simple—to wipe those motherf***ing Moon of Corrosion bastards off the face of the earth!"

He got so worked up he slammed the table again.

Then he opened his arms toward Zhang Yi.

"Zhang Yi, you'll be the captain of this squad. Which means—congratulations! You'll officially become an Investigation Captain!"

Zhang Yi heard that but didn't even flinch.

He stroked his chin and said casually, "But there's nothing appealing about this for me."

Baili Changqing was feeling extremely complicated inside.

Zhu Zheng hadn't even asked for his opinion before deciding Zhang Yi would be the new captain.

In other words, he'd only been a captain for less than a month—and now he wasn't one anymore.

But to be honest, during this time, Baili Changqing had clearly felt that he really didn't have what it took to be a captain.

And the others never really treated him as a captain either.

This world was cruel and brutally realistic. Without real strength, nobody would take you seriously.

Still, Baili Changqing wasn't surprised at Zhang Yi's reaction.

He knew exactly what Zhang Yi wanted.

Zhu Zheng and his personal guard Sun Luxuan both showed a strange look.

Zhu Zheng asked, "Do you even realize what it means to be an Investigation Captain?"

"In all of Jiangnan District, Investigation Captains have enormous authority. Other than a few high-ranking officials, their power is second to none."

"If you become a captain, you'll have supreme power, fame, and admiration from the masses—you'll be a hero!"

But Zhang Yi's face didn't even twitch.

He just smiled faintly and said lazily, "I don't want to be a hero. Fame and power, those things mean nothing to me. I just want a stable life, and plenty of material and spiritual enjoyment."

"And honestly, I'm not lacking in either."

Sun Luxuan's eyes flashed with surprise.

He looked at Zhang Yi, and couldn't help but feel a surge of admiration.

A young man who could treat fame and fortune so lightly—rare indeed!

Zhu Zheng fell into a brief silence.

He tapped his fingers on the table, deep in thought.

If even these things couldn't move Zhang Yi, then what could?

But Zhang Yi spoke up on his own.

"Like I said before—if you need my help to fight Moon of Corrosion, I absolutely won't back out."

"But don't ask me to be a captain. I prefer working alone. At most, I'll cooperate with you. I'm not good at commanding people."

Zhang Yi really hated dragging a bunch of hangers-on around.

Having dead weight in your squad was just asking for trouble.

"Oh, so that's what you're thinking!"

Zhu Zheng took a deep breath.

Zhang Yi agreeing to join the next offensive was already enough to make him pretty satisfied.

Still, he didn't get why young people these days were so passive.

Why, even when offered promotion and fame, would he turn it down?

Zhu Zheng scratched his stubbled chin.

"But honestly, there's no one else better suited for this job than you right now."

"After all, merging two major investigation squads isn't something just anyone can handle. The captain must have overwhelming strength!"

Zhu Zheng really didn't have a better candidate.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have even considered letting an outsider from the Outer City temporarily take the helm of the Tengu Squad.

Zhang Yi smiled slightly.

"Anyway, please think about it carefully. I'm sure there are people better suited for the role than me."

Being a captain was just asking to take the fall.

If anything went wrong, you'd be the first one blamed.

Zhang Yi would rather die than do it.

Zhu Zheng's expression was a bit conflicted, but after thinking for a while, he smiled and said,

"Alright then, I'll think about it. But as long as you're willing to join Tengu, that's already great news."

"You can also take some time to think it over—if you change your mind, the position will always be open for you."

Zhu Zheng was trying hard to keep a warm, friendly smile on his face.

Baili Changqing stared, dumbfounded.

The fierce Zhu Zheng, famous for his strictness, almost never showed such an expression.

Even Deng Shentong used to get scolded by him for being too casual.

Baili Changqing couldn't help but look at Zhang Yi again.

That face, wearing a bored little smile—aside from being good-looking, he didn't seem that special.

But clearly, his status in Zhu Zheng's heart was already different.

Zhang Yi leaned forward slightly and grinned,

"By the way, Commander Zhu, since you want me to go fight Moon of Corrosion... shouldn't the material supplies be unlimited?"

No way he was gonna work for free.

If there were benefits to grab, not grabbing them would be plain stupid.

Blizzard City had deep pockets—this was a golden opportunity to milk them dry.

Besides, Zhang Yi still had that 420 million points he hadn't spent yet.

He couldn't eat them, so he might as well use them up!

Zhu Zheng smiled and replied, "Of course! You can pick any weapons you want. If you see it, you can take it."

"Ahem!"

Right then, Sun Luxuan coughed softly behind him.

He leaned forward and whispered,

"Commander Zhu, don't forget—he's a Spatial-type Superhuman."

Zhu Zheng's face froze.

A cold sweat broke out on his back. His forehead even started to drip.

Holy sh*t.

If he'd let Zhang Yi take whatever he wanted, Blizzard City's whole damn armory might get wiped out!

"Ahem, well—why don't you make a list of supplies you want. I'll have people deliver it to you."

Seeing his plan fall through, Zhang Yi sighed regretfully.

"Alright, that's fine too. Anyway, we can talk about supplies later. For now, I just hope you can get me the best top-tier gear available."

"Especially those close-fitting black combat suits—I want several sets!"

The black combat suits had left a deep impression on Zhang Yi.

Even without using speed-boosting skills, just wearing them could enhance his physical capabilities.

He wanted them badly.

Chapter 687 — Just Want to Lay Flat

Zhu Zheng asked curiously, "You want that many sets—are they for your friends?"

After all, once they officially became members of the temporary investigation team, Tengu, that combat suit would definitely be standard gear.

But Zhang Yi wasn't just thinking about himself.

He had a lot of companions back home—he figured it'd be best if everyone had a set.

Zhang Yi nodded.

"I should be able to get one set for myself, right? As for the others, I'll use my points to exchange for them. Is that okay?"

Hearing this, Baili Changqing quickly reminded him,

"Zhang Yi, that stuff is Blizzard City's top-level classified tech. It can't be allowed to circulate outside."

But Zhu Zheng interrupted him.

"Why not?"

Baili Changqing: "..."

Zhu Zheng's gaze was burning as he stared at Zhang Yi.

To redeem his honor and crush Moon of Corrosion once and for all, he was willing to satisfy almost any condition Zhang Yi proposed.

As long as this kid, who could counter the enemy's causality manipulation, agreed to join Tengu.

Zhu Zheng was a soldier, but he was also a leader with serious commanding ability.

He knew exactly how to win people's loyalty—never be stingy when it mattered most.

He crossed his arms and said,

"It's just a few combat suits. If you want to exchange your points for them, go ahead—follow your heart. After all, we're all on the same side!"

Zhang Yi quickly waved his hand.

"Hey, I just said I'll participate in the operation this time—but that doesn't mean I'm agreeing to join Blizzard City officially. I still prefer chilling in my little nest."

Zhu Zheng chuckled,

"That's fine, no rush to make a decision."

Right now, the priority was wiping out Moon of Corrosion.

As long as Zhang Yi could help him deal with them, Zhu Zheng would even call him "Big Brother" if necessary.

"Then, if there's nothing else, can I head out now?"

Zhang Yi pointed over his shoulder toward the door.

He was itching to go exchange for a few sets of black combat suits.

The one he'd worn before had been secretly lent to him by Baili Changqing—and he had already returned it.

Now he couldn't wait to get his own.

Zhu Zheng smiled and nodded.

"Of course. Let Baili Changqing go with you."

"And while you're at it—you'll also get to meet someone very special today."

Hearing this, both Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing looked at him curiously.

"Someone... special?"

"How special?"

Zhang Yi couldn't help getting curious.

Zhu Zheng grew serious.

"This time, we've learned from the mistakes of last time. We will not underestimate the enemy's strength again—we're deploying overwhelming force to crush them."

"Because of that, I contacted several other investigation teams who are out on missions."

Zhang Yi's eyes narrowed slightly.

"More investigation teams are coming?"

Baili Changqing swallowed nervously.

"Which team...?"

Zhu Zheng smiled lightly.

"The Reincarnation Squad."

The moment he said that, Baili Changqing's face instantly lit up with joy.

Zhang Yi could feel his genuine happiness.

Clearly, someone in the Reincarnation Squad had a close bond with him.

"That's great! If it's them, our chances just went way up!"

Zhu Zheng nodded.

"Most of the other squads are tied up with critical tasks and can't return. Only the Reincarnation Squad just finished their mission up north. The moment they got my message, they rushed back at full speed."

"Once you two squads join forces, you'll definitely be able to wipe out Moon of Corrosion in one blow!"

Zhu Zheng clenched his fist, the smile on his face barely masking the fierce hatred he felt toward Moon of Corrosion.

Zhang Yi scratched his cheek.

Honestly, he didn't know much about the other investigation squads.

He had only heard a few names mentioned briefly by Baili Changqing.

The one that stuck with him most was the Rose Squad—because that team was made up entirely of women.

"Alright, I'll cooperate well with them," Zhang Yi said.

He was getting a little curious about the Reincarnation Squad now.

But first, he was still eager to go claim his gear.

So after politely excusing himself, he left Zhu Zheng's office.

Baili Changqing also got up to leave.

But Zhu Zheng called him back.

"Baili Changqing."

Zhu Zheng was still smiling, but the warmth vanished quickly, replaced by his usual cold, stern expression.

"Commander Zhu..."

Baili Changqing swallowed hard, feeling extremely nervous.

Zhu Zheng locked eyes with him, an intense light shooting from his brown pupils, making Baili Changqing's back break out in cold sweat.

"Make sure you seize this opportunity."

"And—there better not be a next time."

Baili Changqing instantly understood.

His little scheme with Zhang Yi to deceive the district's leadership—yeah, Zhu Zheng wasn't dumb. He figured it out.

The only reason he wasn't being punished now was because Blizzard City desperately needed manpower.

This was a last chance.

If Baili Changqing didn't perform well during the upcoming operation—or if he screwed up again—he would absolutely be facing a court-martial and the harshest punishment possible.

"Yes, sir! Thank you, Commander Zhu!"

Baili Changqing snapped to attention, standing like a thick pillar.

Only after he finally left Zhu Zheng's office did he realize his back was soaked with sweat and his legs were trembling slightly.

He let out a long sigh, his face pale.

But after expelling that chilled breath from his lungs, he felt a lot more relaxed inside.

He had survived... for now.

Zhang Yi was leaning against a nearby wall, watching calmly.

This matter didn't concern him much anyway—and he knew Zhu Zheng wouldn't punish Baili Changqing right now, not when they needed every capable hand.

"You alright?" Zhang Yi asked.

Baili Changqing glanced around.

Sure enough, several Yan Yun Guards nearby were peeking over curiously.

He immediately straightened his back, pretending nothing had happened, and walked over to Zhang Yi.

"Nothing! Commander Zhu just encouraged me a bit, haha!"

Typical middle-aged pride—had to save face no matter what.

Zhang Yi didn't call him out on it.

"Come on, take me to the weapon exchange. I only want those black combat suits—everything else, I don't care."

Zhang Yi didn't lack daily necessities.

Only the cutting-edge tech weapons from Blizzard City's warehouses could really tempt him.

Baili Changqing tilted his head and looked at him.

"Uh, the points required for those are pretty high. You sure you want to blow all your points on them?"

Zhang Yi casually touched his face and said,

"Well, I don't really need anything else right now."

"And besides—"

He gave a sly grin.

"When the time comes for the real assault on Moon of Corrosion, I'll have free access to whatever weapons I want, right? I seriously doubt Commander Zhu would be stingy about that."

Baili Changqing was speechless.

He pointed at Zhang Yi and couldn't help blurting out,

"You... you really know how to scheme!"

Zhang Yi stuck his hands in his pockets with a satisfied smirk.

But Baili Changqing leaned in and said mysteriously,

"You know, you're still underestimating the district's resources."

"The real good stuff—you haven't even seen it yet."

Chapter 688 — Genetic Drugs

Baili Changqing's words piqued Zhang Yi's curiosity.

"What do you mean? If you've got something to say, just say it. You know I hate guessing games," Zhang Yi said, annoyed.

Baili Changqing chuckled,

"Sure, weapons made from Adamantine Metal and the nano-fiber black combat suits are great gear."

"But those are still just external enhancements. They can boost your basic combat ability—but they can't raise your limits."

Zhang Yi immediately started to catch on.

"You're talking about genetic drugs, aren't you?"

Zhu Zheng had once tricked Outer City Superhumans with a little box of laundry powder, claiming it was Compound No. 2 that could boost superhuman abilities.

Logically, something like that should also be on the exchange list.

But Zhang Yi didn't dare mess with it lightly.

The example of Bian Junwu was still fresh in his mind.

Although Bian Junwu had become incredibly powerful soon after the apocalypse began, he had also paid a heavy price.

In the end, he died from hidden injuries inside his body.

Zhang Yi had always suspected that it was the so-called genetic drugs from Blizzard City that caused it.

Baili Changqing nodded.

"After the apocalypse hit, the pressure on the District was massive."

"At that time, the whole world was in chaos. Mutated creatures popped up everywhere. Even Blizzard City struggled to maintain stability."

He took a deep breath, a hint of emotion flashing in his eyes.

"As the District tasked with guarding Jiangnan, we had to quickly gain enough strength to stabilize the region."

"Genetic drugs were actually a research project from many years ago, originally intended for military use."

"But now, they're being used to accelerate Superhuman evolution. However... developing these drugs required plenty of test subjects to verify the effects."

Zhang Yi narrowed his eyes and stared at Baili Changqing.

"So you guys became the lab rats?"

Baili Changqing sighed.

"Captain Bian was among the very first batch."

Zhang Yi sneered.

"Of course. Safer to test on people whose loyalty is guaranteed. That way, even if they become powerful, you don't have to worry about them going rogue."

But Baili Changqing explained,

"Back then, we really didn't have a choice. If we hadn't done it, Blizzard City might not even exist today."

"For the sake of peace, we had to be willing to sacrifice. As soldiers, we couldn't afford to hesitate."

His eyes were filled with steely determination.

Even now, in the apocalyptic era, he hadn't abandoned his beliefs.

Zhang Yi shrugged.

"I'm not in a position to judge you. Honestly, what you did was admirable. Or maybe... you simply had no other choice."

"But personally, I only care about one thing—whether those drugs have side effects. Even a tiny side effect makes them useless to me."

Zhang Yi would never allow an unknown substance to be injected into his body.

Baili Changqing laughed,

"Over the years, they've continued improving them. Superhuman drugs have become much more stable now. Look at me—I'm perfectly fine!"

He raised his arm and slapped his rock-hard bicep proudly.

"Forget it. I really don't need that,"

Zhang Yi rejected him without hesitation.

Baili Changqing walked over and slung an arm around Zhang Yi's shoulders.

"I still suggest you consider getting Compound No. 5."

Seeing how serious he was, Zhang Yi asked,

"What's that?"

Baili Changqing answered,

"An explosive booster drug!"

"It gives you a massive surge of power for a short period—but after that, there are serious side effects."

"Basically, it's something you use as a last resort. Think of it as a super-powered stimulant."

Zhang Yi immediately understood.

"So basically, it's an emergency lifesaver?"

Baili Changqing nodded.

"I always carry a dose with me. If I get trapped in a hopeless situation, I can use it to save my life."

"Of course, Compound No. 5 is very expensive in terms of points—not everyone can afford it."

"That's why I suggest you exchange for one. It might save your life when it really counts."

Zhang Yi suddenly turned his head and stared at Baili Changqing.

"Then why didn't you use it back in Tianhai City?"

Baili Changqing answered calmly,

"If you hadn't given Captain Bian the Ice Soul, maybe we would have used it."

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Actually, Ice Soul's effect seemed even better than Compound No. 5. Too bad that biological catalyst, harvested from an Epsilon-level Superhuman, can't be replicated."

Zhang Yi started to feel tempted.

Since there was such a good item, it wouldn't hurt to have one just in case.

Better safe than sorry.

The two of them entered the elevator and headed toward the Operations Command Center's weapon warehouse.

On the way, Zhang Yi asked about the Reincarnation Squad.

"How strong is the Reincarnation Squad—compared to your Black Robe Squad and Deng Shentong's Celestial Squad?"

It wasn't surprising.

If everything went according to plan, he'd be working with them during the third assault on Moon of Corrosion.

Knowing a bit of info ahead of time would definitely help.

Baili Changqing's face lit up noticeably when he heard the name.

"In theory, the six major investigation squads of Blizzard City are roughly on par with each other in strength—it's hard to say who's stronger."

"But, if it's confirmed that Moon of Corrosion has a prophet-type ability user, then deploying the Reincarnation Squad is definitely the best choice."

Zhang Yi asked curiously,

"Why's that?"

Baili Changqing smiled mysteriously.

"Can't tell you. It involves the abilities of the Reincarnation Squad's members."

Zhang Yi chuckled.

"Actually, based on what you just said, I can pretty much guess a little. But I won't say it out loud."

Squad names weren't given randomly.

They usually reflected the team's characteristics.

The Black Robe Squad and Celestial Squad both had strong individualistic styles.

Reincarnation Squad.

A name about reincarnation.

And they were specifically effective against prophet-type enemies.

So most likely, their powers involved causality manipulation—either countering prophecy or altering fate.

Even though Baili Changqing wasn't spilling the details, Zhang Yi wasn't rude enough to press him.

Still, Baili Changqing leaned in mysteriously and said,

"When they get back, I'll take you to meet them. I guarantee, once you find out who their captain is—you'll be shocked!"

"Oh? Really?"

Zhang Yi shrugged.

"Well, let's wait and see then!"

He thought to himself—

It's probably just some famous figure from society or whatever.

Chapter 689: Exchange

The two of them stepped out of the elevator onto the first floor and walked toward the weapons warehouse in the back.

As they passed by the entrance, Baili Changqing cheerfully greeted an old man standing guard.

"Brother Wu, you're on duty today?"

The old man beamed the moment he saw Baili Changqing.

"Yeah. Huh? Your friend here looks unfamiliar. Is he a new team member?"

The man, named Wu Zhengheng, looked curiously at Zhang Yi.

Baili Changqing smiled. "He's a friend from Tianhai City, here to assist us. His name is Zhang Yi."

As he spoke, Baili Changqing introduced the man to Zhang Yi.

"Zhang Yi, this is my old platoon leader back from when I joined the army, Wu Zhengheng. Just call him Uncle Wu!"

Zhang Yi had already noticed that the old man looked like he was pushing sixty.

But in the apocalypse, people tended to age quickly. Maybe he was actually younger than he looked.

Still, his body seemed tough and sturdy.

His hair was streaked with gray, and his face showed the wear of time.

Zhang Yi greeted him with a smile, "Hello, Uncle Wu!"

Wu Zhengheng nodded back with a smile. "So young, and already participating in Blizzard City operations as an Outer City Awakened—you've got talent!"

Zhang Yi chuckled, "Not really, I'm just an ordinary guy."

Baili Changqing said, "Brother Wu, we've got things to handle, so we'll get going. I'll treat you to a drink next time!"

Wu Zhengheng's eyes lit up. "Sounds good! It's been ages since we had a drink together. Don't forget, alright?"

Alcohol in Blizzard City was ridiculously expensive—something average folks couldn't afford.

So treating someone to a drink was considered a huge luxury.

It was like treating someone to a five-star dinner before the apocalypse.

Baili Changqing laughed, "Haha, I won't forget!"

After saying goodbye to Wu Zhengheng, the two headed to the weapons warehouse.

Zhang Yi asked, "Is he one of your comrades from the army? He seems a bit... off."

"You mean something's not quite right?"

Baili Changqing's expression dimmed.

"Zhang Yi, guess how old he really is?"

Zhang Yi thought for a moment. "Looks around 50 or 60... Fifty-eight?"

He went with a middle number.

But Baili Changqing gave a bitter smile.

"He's only forty-six this year."

Zhang Yi looked shocked.

"Forty-six? But his hair's completely gray!"

Baili Changqing said, "Like I told you, the earliest Awakened in Blizzard City weren't just mutants. A big group came from military personnel who were part of genetic experiments."

"Captain Bian Junwu is considered one of the success stories."

"But Uncle Wu—he was a failure. The experiment messed up his body badly, wrecking his functions and even cutting his lifespan short."

"And he didn't awaken any ability. The higher-ups took care of him by giving him a security role at the Operations Center."

Zhang Yi fell silent.

Blizzard City had clearly gone through a rough and brutal past.

Baili Changqing suddenly smiled. "Honestly, his ending isn't even the worst. At least his life is secure now."

"Some of our brothers didn't even make it through the agony of the experiments. They died."

As they chatted, they arrived at the weapons warehouse.

Zhang Yi handed over his points card.

According to Major Yan Yun, Zhang Yi had high clearance, so he could exchange for much better gear and supplies than other Outer City Awakened.

Baili Changqing jumped in. "Didn't you want the black battle suit? Just tell them directly."

He turned to the quartermaster managing the warehouse and said, "Exchange for an SLDS2 Battle Suit!"

The quartermaster scanned Zhang Yi's points and clearance level through the system, then replied calmly, "SLDS2 Battle Suit: 50 million points, requires A-level clearance or higher. You meet the requirement. Current point balance: 420 million."

Then he saw a new note in the system—a special authorization from the Commander's Office.

Usually, exchanging black battle suits came with quantity limits.

Even Investigation Team members couldn't request a second suit unless the first one was damaged.

But this time, Zhu Zheng had personally approved unlimited exchanges for Zhang Yi.

"There's no quantity limit for your exchange. How many would you like?"

The quartermaster asked Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi thought it over, then asked about Compound No. 5.

"Can I exchange for Compound No. 5 with my clearance?"

The quartermaster nodded. "Compound No. 5 requires A-level clearance. Cost: 100 million points. You meet the criteria. Would you like to proceed?"

Zhang Yi sucked in a breath.

"This stuff is more expensive than the battle suit?"

Baili Changqing laughed, "Told you—life-saving items like this aren't something everyone can afford. I've only got one myself."

"But honestly, once you use it, don't expect a second time!"

Baili Changqing laughed again.

But to Zhang Yi, that laugh sounded a bit bitter.

It was obvious the side effects of Compound No. 5 were serious.

Still, Zhang Yi chose to exchange for one.

No matter how big the side effects, if it could save your life in a critical moment, it was worth it.

Besides, to Zhang Yi, its biggest use wasn't for himself—it was to bring it back to the Sanctuary for Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran to analyze its ingredients and see if it could be replicated.

Since he was already getting Compound No. 5, Zhang Yi got curious about the other compounds as well.

He asked about their functions and prices.

The quartermaster patiently explained everything one by one.

"Compound No. 1: Helps awaken abilities, increases awakening probability by 20%. Cost: 150 million points."

Baili Changqing whispered, "They say 20%, but in reality... don't expect much."

Zhang Yi nodded. "Probability—I get it."

He'd played enough gacha games to know how that worked.

"Compound No. 2: Enhances Awakened abilities and may help them evolve, but the effects vary depending on the user's aptitude. Cost: 120 million points."

"Compound No. 4: Military stimulant. Boosts Awakened abilities by 20% for 12 hours. Significant side effects including dizziness, vomiting, and dehydration. Cost: 20 million points."

The quartermaster finished explaining all the available compounds.

But Zhang Yi noticed something was missing—Compound No. 3 wasn't on the list.

"What about Compound No. 3?"

He asked.

The quartermaster looked at him calmly. "Compound No. 3 is not available for exchange."

"Oh? Mysterious."

Baili Changqing said, "These drugs are developed by the research division. Some of them have special functions and aren't public. Even I don't know what some of them do—or that they even exist."

"But these things are crazy expensive!"

Zhang Yi sighed.

Except for the stimulant, every dose cost over 100 million points.

He had thought that with 420 million points, he could go on a wild shopping spree.

But reality hit hard.

Baili Changqing winked at him. "If you join the Investigation Team, you'll be an official member. You'll get internal discounts on this stuff!"

Zhang Yi suddenly understood.

These high prices were for external users—regular soldiers, civilians, or Outer City Awakened.

But members of special forces like the Investigation Team or Yan Yun Guards got better deals.

Made sense. If you developed your own products, it's only fair to offer them cheaper to your own people.

Zhang Yi whispered, "Can you help me exchange them and I transfer you the points later?"

Baili Changqing gave a sheepish grin. "These special items are all registered. Not smart to try sneaky moves."

Zhang Yi spread his hands helplessly.

After weighing his options, he decided not to get the black battle suit for now.

He figured Old Zhu wouldn't be stingy about giving him one during missions anyway.

For now, he wanted to get those compounds back for Lu Keran and Zhou Ke'er to research.

In the end, he exchanged for four types of compounds, spending a total of 390 million points.

Just like that, he only had 30 million left.

Still a decent amount—enough to trade for a ton of food or weapons.

But Zhang Yi didn't lack those, so there was no need to stock up.

Chapter 690: Reincarnation Squad

After finishing his exchanges, Zhang Yi planned to head back to Tianhai City first and deliver the compounds to Lu Keran and Zhou Ke'er for research.

After all, Tianhai wasn't far from here—it wouldn't even take half a day to make a round trip.

But Baili Changqing stopped him.

With a mysterious smile, he said, "I think you should meet the people from the Reincarnation Squad first. Trust me, you won't be disappointed."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, his face full of amusement.

"I'm not trying to be some captain of the so-called 'Simp Squad.' Even if we're going to work with the Reincarnation Squad, I don't need to be the one showing up."

"Brother Baili, why don't you go take that captain's seat instead?"

He patted Baili Changqing on the shoulder with a grin.

Baili Changqing gave a wry smile. "You think I don't want to? But if you're not capable and still force yourself to take on responsibility, that's just a crime."

He shook his head, clearly feeling a bit of regret over his earlier ambition.

“There’s no one more suitable than you to lead Tengu Squad.”

Zhang Yi said, “Oh? So that’s why you want me to meet the Reincarnation Squad?”

“That’s not the only reason,” Baili Changqing said, his grin deepening.

“The main reason is—their captain is a friend of mine. I just want to introduce you two.”

“A friend, huh?”

Zhang Yi curled his lip. “Fine, if that’s the case, I don’t mind meeting him.”

“Great! Come with me then. They’re getting back today.”

“Once you’ve met him, just put in a request to Zhu Shuai and head back to Tianhai.”

Out of respect, Zhang Yi should still inform Zhu Zheng.

He had no objections.

He stored the compounds into his Dimensional Space, then left the Operations Command Center with Baili Changqing.

Baili’s car was parked in the lot just outside, so they headed there.

But as they reached the intersection, they saw a convoy of vehicles speeding down the road.

Even more people were rushing toward East City, visibly excited.

Zhang Yi had pretty good hearing and caught snippets of what they were saying.

“The Reincarnation Squad is back in glory!”

“They really are the pride of the common people. Another flawless mission success.”

“Sigh, compared to them, the Celestial Squad is just...”

“Who says only the rich kids can achieve great things? Our kids from regular families aren’t any worse!”

“Gao Changkong—he’s our pride! I’ve always said he’s way better than Deng Shentong!”

...

Zhang Yi stared blankly as a crowd in down jackets ran toward East City.

Among them was a group of girls waving large flags and chanting something unclear.

Sounded like: ‘With you, I made a vow, never to forget. Your promise to me, I shall uphold for life!’

Zhang Yi was dumbfounded.

How was fan culture still so intense at a time like this?

Baili Changqing drove the car over and couldn’t help laughing when he saw Zhang Yi’s stunned face.
“So? Learned something new today?”

Zhang Yi pointed at the group of girls. “Don’t they have jobs or something? So much free time?”

Baili explained, “The girls who can come out to welcome the Reincarnation Squad either have parents in high-end professions who earn enough points to support them...”

“Or...”

Baili paused, then shrugged helplessly.

“They’re just regular folks who risk everything to chase stars.”

“They’re taking a real gamble. If they miss work and can’t earn enough points, they’ll end up sleeping on the streets. They might not even have enough points left for food, hot water, or electricity.”

Zhang Yi watched their retreating figures, thinking about that chant they kept repeating.

“Gao Changkong... wait, could it be that Gao Changkong?”

Baili Changqing nodded. “Yep. That Gao Changkong.”

Gao Changkong—a household name in the Huaxu Nation.

Not some idol or internet celebrity, but a legendary basketball player.

He first dominated the domestic league, then made it to the NBA, where he played for the Akacheng Red Suns as a small forward for twelve years—and won three championship rings.

Zhang Yi turned to Baili Changqing inside the car.

“Gao Changkong... is the captain of the Reincarnation Squad?”

Baili nodded again, his eyes shining just like those fangirls outside.

“That’s right. He’s an incredible guy!”

Zhang Yi wasn’t into basketball, but even he knew the name Gao Changkong.

Anyone who played basketball would admire him.

Zhang Yi couldn’t help but mutter, “Talk about a winner in life...”

Whether before or after the apocalypse, he was outstanding and dazzling.

Baili Changqing said, “Across all of Blizzard City, he’s one of the most beloved figures.”

“Sure, compared to rich second-gen types like Deng Shentong, his background’s pretty humble, and he didn’t have many resources. But among regular folks, his influence might actually be even greater.”

Zhang Yi wasn’t a fanboy, so he couldn’t really judge.

But thinking about it, someone like Gao Changkong—born with top-tier athletic ability—would obviously be strong post-mutation too. No surprise there.

Zhang Yi calmly got into the passenger seat.

Baili started the engine and headed toward East City.

The closer they got, the more crowded the roads became.

That was rare to see in apocalyptic Blizzard City.

But everywhere Zhang Yi looked, fans were beaming with joy and excitement.

His ears were filled with praise for Gao Changkong and the Reincarnation Squad.

He couldn't help thinking—this kind of enthusiasm probably had something to do with the recent failure in suppressing Moon of Corrosion.

Blizzard City's leadership might even be encouraging this to help ease public frustration.

Thanks to Baili's special license plate, they drove through traffic without any issues.

People would make way the moment they saw his plate, no matter how crowded it was.

In Blizzard City, strict social hierarchy was no joke.

When they reached the city gate, Zhang Yi finally saw the Reincarnation Squad.

Two snow-ready vehicles pulled up, doors swinging open as several team members stood waving and cheering at the crowd.

Staff from Blizzard City unfurled a massive red banner from the top of the 30-meter-high wall all the way to the ground.

"Warm congratulations to the Reincarnation Squad for their victorious return from Beiting Lake!"

On both sides of the road, countless passionate fans were screaming with joy, calling out their names.

And of course, the one they shouted the most was Gao Changkong.

Zhang Yi and Baili parked by the roadside. Baili told him they couldn't go any farther.

This was the Reincarnation Squad's stage now—they had to keep a low profile.

“Got it.”

Zhang Yi replied flatly. But he didn't see Gao Changkong—he must still be inside the vehicle.

Soon, he spotted some familiar faces.

Chief of Operations Tu Yunlie, along with several high-ranking officers, had arrived.

After they showed up, Gao Changkong finally stepped out of the vehicle.

He was tall—officially listed at 1.96 meters.

Zhang Yi sized him up. He had a warm smile and looked incredibly approachable.

His build was strong, clearly well-maintained. No post-retirement bloat like some athletes.

His naturally curly hair added a West Coast vibe.

As expected, Gao Changkong's appearance triggered another wave of screams and cheers.

Tu Yunlie said a few words of praise on behalf of Blizzard City, then left—leaving the spotlight to Gao Changkong and his team.

But Gao Changkong's gaze fell on Baili Changqing's car nearby.

The license plate was unmistakable. He recognized it right away.

With a smile, Gao Changkong raised his hand high, signaling Baili to come over.

Baili grinned and said to Zhang Yi, "Come on. Let's go say hi."

Zhang Yi opened the car door and followed him through the crowd.

Spectators nearby looked at Zhang Yi curiously.

"Who's that guy? Never seen him before."

"Looks like a new face. The guy next to him is Baili Changqing from the Black Robe Investigation Team."

"Eh, the Black Robes are kinda washed now. And the Celestial Squad..."

"The Reincarnation Squad is the real deal. Who says kids from regular families can't outperform the elite?"

Among the city's citizens, many looked at the bright and friendly Gao Changkong in the crowd with genuine pride.