

Ice Age 691

Chapter 691: Gao Changkong

Gao Changkong came from a humble background and had never served in the military.

You could say he represented the ultimate underdog success story in Blizzard City—his life was downright inspirational.

That's why he had immense support among the public.

Countless girls in the city were die-hard fans of his.

Some even joked in private that their dream was to marry Deng Shentong and keep Gao Changkong as their secret lover.

One was the classic rich, powerful, and handsome CEO type, while the other was a warm, radiant “first love paladin” type.

Zhang Yi could now fully feel the zeal of the fan culture.

But it wasn't a bad thing.

After the apocalypse, people no longer idolized pretty boy celebrities—but brave, fearless warriors.

He wondered if one day, he'd get that kind of attention too.

He stayed half a step behind Baili Changqing, not wanting to draw too much attention.

But Gao Changkong's gaze still lingered on him for a moment.

Some people couldn't hide who they were.

Just standing there made them shine.

Baili Changqing walked up and gave Gao Changkong a bear hug with a laugh.

“Old Gao, congrats! Everything went smoothly at Beiting Lake?”

Gao Changkong smiled, “It went okay. The creature we faced was strong, but not smart. The problem was it had too many minions, so the battle dragged on.”

He turned to Zhang Yi. “And this is?”

Baili Changqing quickly introduced him, “Let me introduce you—this is Zhang Yi, an Awakened from Tianhai City. There’s a long story behind him, we can talk about it later.”

Though the intro was brief, Gao Changkong’s expression remained fully respectful.

Anyone Baili would personally bring over in his car had to be someone of comparable strength.

A top-tier elite.

Gao Changkong made that assessment silently.

He walked up to Zhang Yi and offered his right hand.

“Zhang Yi, nice to meet you. I’m Gao Changkong, captain of the Reincarnation Squad.”

Zhang Yi glanced at the offered hand—covered by a black leather glove.

He was also wearing gloves, so he gave a firm shake.

“Captain Gao, I’ve heard a lot about you.”

While sizing up Gao Changkong, Zhang Yi also casually swept his eyes over the rest of the Reincarnation Squad.

They had nine members total.

But the two most eye-catching ones were standing closest to Gao.

To his rear left was a tall, gentle-looking woman with thick, black, waist-length hair.

That kind of hair length was rare—and striking.

Combined with her graceful figure and beautiful face, it was easy to see how someone could become infatuated.

On the other side stood a handsome man with a center-part hairstyle and hands in his pockets.

His expression carried a mix of wildness, arrogance, defiance—and just a hint of disdain.

Facing the crowd, Gao Changkong raised his voice.

“Thank you—thank you, everyone! We’ve returned safely. Thank you for your support!”

The crowd erupted in cheers once again.

Someone in the crowd shouted, “Brother, go take out those Neon punks!”

That one comment instantly lit a fire among the spectators.

Fueled by emotion, many held deep contempt for the Neon Nation.

After watching Blizzard City lose twice in their campaign against Moon of Corrosion, people were furious.

They all hoped Gao Changkong would take the lead and win back the honor of the Jiangnan District, and of the entire Huaxu Nation.

“Captain Gao, kill those Neon bastards!”

“Crush them! They’re absolutely despicable!”

Zhang Yi couldn't help but feel speechless at the shouting.

These people had no idea how powerful Moon of Corrosion really was.

Approaching your enemy with arrogance and underestimation would only trap you in ignorance.

It's not weakness or ignorance that gets you killed—it's arrogance.

Gao Changkong's expression shifted slightly at those comments, but he didn't answer. He simply smiled and waved.

Then he turned to Baili Changqing and Zhang Yi and said, "I'm heading to HQ to report to Commander Zhu. After that, let's grab a drink. I've been away for a while—time to catch up on what's been going on in Blizzard City."

Baili scratched his head. "You just came back victorious—they should be throwing you a welcome banquet!"

Gao Changkong shook his head.

“I turned it down. When I was on my way back, HQ told me about some recent developments regarding Moon of Corrosion.”

“It’s not the right time for celebrations. It would just cause unnecessary misunderstandings.”

After all, Celestial Squad suffered heavy casualties, and Deng Shentong died in battle. The Deng family and the Operations Center were still in mourning.

If the Reincarnation Squad threw a party now, it’d look like they were rubbing it in.

Gao Changkong was too thoughtful to make that kind of mistake.

“In that case, let’s just have a quiet get-together later,” Baili said with a smile.

Zhang Yi didn’t say anything. He wasn’t the type to speak much around strangers.

When you don’t know someone well, saying less means fewer mistakes—and fewer chances to expose your weaknesses.

Gao Changkong gave some instructions to his squad, especially to his vice captain, that center-parted guy named Ji Yushen.

“I’ll ride with them.”

Ji Yushen stared at Zhang Yi for a long moment, then nodded.

Gao Changkong got into Baili’s car, taking the front passenger seat while Zhang Yi sat in the back.

The car headed for the Operations Command Center.

Meanwhile, as the welcome ceremony wrapped up, the fans all returned to their jobs.

Joy was temporary. Most of the time, they still had to work hard just to survive.

On the way, Gao Changkong and Baili chatted casually.

Zhang Yi could tell they were genuinely close friends.

Gao Changkong asked about Moon of Corrosion.

Baili let out a long sigh. “It’s not looking good.”

He recounted the events in detail—including how the last mission ended in failure.

Gao Changkong frowned as he listened.

“Even Deng Shentong couldn’t win?”

Baili said, “You came back at just the right moment. Unless something unexpected happens, the next mission will probably fall to you. So you better be mentally prepared.”

Gao Changkong gave a light laugh. His gaze turned serious, though his tone remained calm.

“We’re the defenders of order in Jiangnan District. No matter who tries to disrupt the peace here—no matter how strong they are—we’ll face them without fear.”

Baili nodded. “Headquarters is clearly taking Moon of Corrosion more seriously this time.”

“Blizzard City will be deploying more forces. Commander Zhu will definitely tell you more when you see him.”

“And Moon of Corrosion didn’t come out of it unscathed either. Even though their leader killed Deng Shentong, he was badly injured in the process.”

“They lost five members.”

As he spoke, Baili tilted his head toward the back seat and gave a thumbs-up.

“And the guy behind me? He’s the one who took out one of Moon of Corrosion’s elite members all by himself.”

Chapter 692 – First Meeting

Baili Changqing’s words made Gao Changkong turn his head, giving Zhang Yi a careful look.

He had just returned and didn’t yet know the details of what happened, so naturally, he had no idea what Zhang Yi had done.

But now, Baili Changqing was saying that 80% of the casualties in Moon of Corrosion were caused by a single Outsider from the Outer City.

That was more than a little shocking to Gao Changkong.

Zhang Yi waved his hand. “Don’t exaggerate. I just cleaned up after two guys, that’s all.”

Baili Changqing sighed. “Was it really just cleaning up?”

He knew very well that even if Kamiya Gedou and Akutsu Shinichiro had been in peak condition, they still wouldn’t have stood a chance against Zhang Yi.

Gao Changkong chuckled.

“That’s not surprising. Our land of Shenzhou is vast, and our population is thriving. Talents emerge constantly.”

“It’s not like only people born in big cities or with wealthy families can be powerful.”

Zhang Yi remembered at that moment—Gao Changkong also came from an ordinary background.

That statement seemed to carry a sense of kindred understanding.

The three chatted casually, but given their military backgrounds, both Baili Changqing and Gao Changkong held things back.

Baili Changqing didn’t mention the headquarters’ plan to form the Celestial Squad.

Gao Changkong also withheld a lot about the mission he had just completed.

As for Zhang Yi, he wasn't the type who liked chatting with strangers. From start to finish, he only responded with a few words and then went quiet.

Not long after, the vehicle arrived at the Operations Command Center. Gao Changkong went to see Zhu Zheng.

Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing waited downstairs in the lounge, sipping tea as they waited for him to return.

Gao Changkong didn't spend long in Zhu Zheng's office.

The mission intel had already been delivered to Zhu Zheng before their return to the city.

And Zhu Zheng, as a soldier himself, didn't care for long-winded official speak.

They chatted briefly about the mission, commended his contributions, and quickly shifted to the topic of Moon of Corrosion.

Half an hour later, Gao Changkong came down to the first floor and smiled warmly at Zhang Yi and Baili Changqing. "All right, debriefing's done. Let's go grab a few drinks, the three of us!"

Zhang Yi wasn't usually one to join in on this kind of thing.

But this operation to wipe out Moon of Corrosion—he knew Gao Changkong's Reincarnation Squad must have been the main force.

Having drinks with him might lead to some useful intel.

And even if it didn't, building a good relationship with a squad captain couldn't hurt.

So he agreed readily.

The three of them rode in Baili Changqing's car to Code Bar.

Gao Changkong's appearance immediately caused a stir throughout the place.

Veterans, bartenders, even the dancers greeted him with great enthusiasm.

“Hey! Captain Gao, welcome back!”

“Bet you nailed the mission again, huh?”

“Once you wrap things up with Neon Nation, we’re counting on you!”

“Make sure to win some respect for our Huaxu Nation!”

Gao Changkong smiled and nodded to everyone before taking the elevator upstairs amid the cheers, heading into a private lounge.

This time, even the general manager of Code Bar came out in person to inform him that tonight’s expenses would be on the house.

Mind you, this wasn’t the world before the apocalypse.

Alcohol itself had become an expensive luxury—something regular folks wouldn’t even dare to dream about.

And Code Bar was notoriously pricey, with the average tab exceeding 20,000 points.

As for clients like Gao Changkong or Baili Changqing, a single night’s bill could easily hit six figures.

So a comped bill at Code Bar? Extremely rare.

Gao Changkong gave a wry smile. “I rarely got this kind of treatment in the past.”

Baili Changqing laughed. “It’s because everyone has high hopes for you now.”

Gao Changkong furrowed his brows slightly and let out a sigh.

“In the end, it’s because the Celestial Squad failed... and now everyone’s scared, huh?”

The more chaotic things got, the more people craved a hero to appear.

And right now, the people of Blizzard City were uneasy.

Gao Changkong returned in triumph, instantly becoming the symbol of hope in their hearts.

Once the drinks came, they clinked glasses and drank. As the alcohol kicked in, the conversation gradually opened up.

The main topic, unsurprisingly, was still Moon of Corrosion.

Gao Changkong looked at Zhang Yi, smiling, but with a subtle, thoughtful glint in his eyes.

“Zhu Shuai already told me about you. I was shocked when I heard.”

“Someone like you—if you’d shown up in Blizzard City, you’d definitely be made a squad captain, or at least a deputy commander in the Yan Yun Guards.”

Zhang Yi raised his glass toward Gao Changkong. “You’re too kind! Compared to you, Captain Gao, I still have a lot to learn!”

Gao Changkong laughed heartily. “You’re being modest.”

The two clinked glasses across the table and downed half their drinks.

Baili Changqing smiled as he looked at Gao Changkong.

“Did Zhu Shuai tell you anything else? Is it something you can share?”

“Nothing that can’t be shared.”

Gao Changkong said, “For example, there’s the matter of merging Celestial Squad and the Black Robe Investigation Team into the new Celestial Hound Squad.”

He pointed at Zhang Yi. “Zhu Shuai told me—he really hopes you’ll take the position of squad captain.”

Zhang Yi shrugged. “But I turned it down.”

He sighed. “Not gonna lie—I’m just a regular warehouse manager from Tianhai City.”

“I don’t have leadership skills or big ambitions. I’m just not cut out to lead.”

He spread his hands toward Gao Changkong. “Now that you’re back, and you’re in charge of this operation anyway—why not have you lead Celestial Hound Squad too?”

Gao Changkong shook his head helplessly.

“That’s not gonna happen.”

“If both Celestial and Black Robe are put under my command, the higher-ups won’t be okay with that.”

Zhang Yi realized at that moment—the higher-ups wouldn't want anyone holding too much power.

After all, this was the apocalypse.

Order was collapsing, and Blizzard City was only barely holding things together. It looked strong on the outside, but the structure was shaky.

One wrong move and it could all come crashing down.

If Gao Changkong really consolidated both squads under his control, there wouldn't be any force left in Blizzard City that could balance them out.

Zhu Zheng and the others had good reason to be cautious.

Baili Changqing frowned.

"But right now, there aren't many people in Blizzard City who can lead a squad. The few who can are all in key positions and can't leave."

"If you don't take the lead, who can?"

Gao Changkong just smiled indifferently.

“Zhu Shuai and the rest will make the right call. We’re just the ones holding the guns—our job is to follow orders.”

His calm, unbothered expression made it clear he didn’t really mind how the top brass decided things.

Chapter 693 – Balance

Gao Changkong, the popular investigation captain in Blizzard City, came across as sunny and laid-back.

He was elegant and easygoing, able to get along with just about anyone.

When Zhang Yi talked with him, he found the man had a really pleasant personality.

Gradually, Zhang Yi also began to talk with him more deeply about other topics—for instance, the missions carried out by the investigation teams.

“Captain Gao, there’s something I’m not sure if it’s okay to ask. It’s about your investigation team’s missions.”

Gao Changkong thought for a moment and then smiled. “Go ahead and ask. Some things the higher-ups want us to keep confidential, but honestly, most missions aren’t all that secretive.”

Zhang Yi put down his wine glass. “There are six investigation teams in the Jiangnan District, operating outside for long stretches of time.”

“Even this time, when Outsiders from Neon Nation appeared in the area, no recall order was given for all the investigation teams.”

“What exactly are the missions you’re carrying out? Are they ranked even higher than Moon of Corrosion?”

Gao Changkong thought about it, then answered with a smile. “That’s not an easy question to answer in one sentence. All I can say is—our missions vary a lot. All sorts of things, strange and unpredictable.”

He pointed at Baili Changqing.

“Take the Black Robe Investigation Team for example—they primarily deal with people. If large-scale unrest breaks out in any city, they’re the ones sent in to suppress it.”

“As for our Reincarnation Squad, recently we’ve been handling problems involving beasts.”

Zhang Yi frowned. “Shou problems?”

That sounded a bit philosophical.

“‘Beast’ as in wild animals. Mutant beasts.”

Gao Changkong saw the amusement in Zhang Yi’s eyes and chuckled as he explained.

“You probably know already—after the apocalypse, we entered an era of mass mutation. It wasn’t just humans that evolved—other life forms did too.”

Zhang Yi nodded. “Yeah, I know that.”

His pet Hua Hua, and the demon hound Lele under Xing Tian’s command, were both mutant creatures.

Gao Changkong continued, “But in urban areas, mutated species are relatively rare. You don’t usually find overly dangerous creatures.”

“However, out in the mountains and rivers, in places where wild animals gather, that’s where you get large-scale mutation clusters.”

“It’s just like with us humans—the more individuals gathered in one place, the higher the chance of mutations.”

“And the more powerful those mutants tend to be!”

“In fact, some regions are now dominated by mutated beast hordes.”

Gao Changkong’s expression grew serious.

“Take Beiting Lake, for instance. Many of the mutated beasts there had developed intelligence—some even rivaling humans!”

“Even regular mutated jackals, tigers, and leopards have physical capabilities far beyond anything humans can match.”

“With the global catastrophe, we’re practically back to the primitive era. Our advantage in weaponry has been severely reduced.”

“And that’s allowed the beast clans to rise.”

“The five cities around Beiting Lake had all been taken over by the beast horde.”

“And it was only with full support from Blizzard City that we managed to take the region back. It took us three full months.”

Zhang Yi couldn't help but gasp.

Wasn't that basically a beast tide?

But thinking about it more, it actually made perfect sense.

Humans had evolved over countless generations, but in truth, weren't all that well-suited for the natural world.

The sudden cataclysm wiped out the vast majority of people almost instantly.

Meanwhile, animals—being far more adaptable to environmental changes—began to rise.

After all, most beasts already had better physical capabilities than humans.

A little mutation was all it took to turn them into terrifying opponents.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but say, "Good thing I live by the coast!"

The coastal areas, with their relatively low salt levels, were mostly frozen over.

Even if there were mutated sea creatures, they weren't overly strong.

Sure, the deep sea was probably crawling with terrifying monsters...

But at least they weren't coming up on land to cause trouble.

Zhang Yi asked curiously, "So, are the other investigation teams dealing with similar problems?"

Gao Changkong gave a small smile. "Everyone's got their own mess to deal with."

He didn't go into detail, and Zhang Yi realized this was one of those things outsiders weren't supposed to know.

After all, he still wasn't formally enlisted in Blizzard City's ranks. There were some things people would naturally keep from him.

The three of them drank for over an hour before calling it a night.

This was Zhang Yi's first time meeting Gao Changkong. He had a good impression of him—thought he was a pretty interesting guy, easy to talk to and not full of himself.

But still, they only spoke on the surface. Nothing too deep.

Zhang Yi gave Zhu Zheng a call and mentioned he was planning to make a quick trip back to Tianhai City to check in on his companions.

Zhu Zheng chuckled. "That's fine—but make it quick. The moment Reincarnation Squad got back, we started planning the next operation. We can't do it without you!"

Zhang Yi rubbed his forehead and agreed without hesitation.

Right after, he had Baili Changqing drop him off at the subway station so he could take the train back to Tianhai City.

Meanwhile, over at the Operations Command Center, Zhu Zheng had just ended the call with Zhang Yi and was now calmly looking at the person across from him.

On the sofa sat an elderly man with a face like a serene Buddha, leisurely sipping his tea.

Zhu Zheng spoke. "Mr. Deng, now that everyone's assembled, we can move forward with our plan. Do you have any further questions?"

Deng Yuanbo set his cup down.

He looked at Zhu Zheng and smiled.

“Have you finalized the personnel?”

Zhu Zheng frowned slightly. “Zhang Yi is an excellent choice. I asked for his opinion, and he’s not willing to take the squad captain role.”

He clasped his hands over his knees.

“His abilities are crucial to this operation, but what I value even more is his ability to block prophetic abilities from the enemy—not just his combat strength.”

“As for the squad leader, we can choose someone else. In terms of command, Baili Changqing might be a better fit.”

Deng Yuanbo’s smile widened.

“But does Baili Changqing have enough strength to earn everyone’s respect?”

Zhu Zheng snorted softly. “He may not be one of the six captains, but he’s still at deputy-captain level. He’s only slightly behind them.”

“If we don’t promote Baili Changqing, are we supposed to hand everything over to Gao Changkong?”

Deng Yuanbo chuckled. “I know you’re not the type to give that much power to any one person.”

“But this time, Blizzard City can’t afford another failure. If we lose again, you know full well what the consequences will be.”

Zhu Zheng’s gaze grew deep.

If they failed against Moon of Corrosion again, as the commander of Jiangnan District, there’d be no excuse—he’d have to resign in disgrace.

But... could they really afford to let Gao Changkong hold that much power?

Deng Yuanbo spoke slowly. “From my perspective, Zhang Yi is still the best candidate. He refused the captain post because your offer wasn’t tempting enough. It just didn’t move him.”

Chapter 694 – As Long As the Price Is Right

Zhu Zheng frowned when he heard that. “The offer’s not high enough?”

“I already promised him a formal investigation captain title, full access to Blizzard City’s A-level supply benefits.”

“Even the armory exchange privileges have been nearly all opened up to him.”

“That’s already an incredibly generous offer! If it weren’t a critical time right now, he wouldn’t have this kind of opportunity at all.”

Deng Yuanbo simply shook his head.

“Commander Zhu, you’re a soldier, but you don’t know how to do business. On that point, I have to speak up.”

“Business is about mutual benefit. If you want Zhang Yi to agree to your terms, first you’ve got to offer him what he needs.”

Zhu Zheng looked thoughtful. “What he needs?”

He had no idea what Zhang Yi actually wanted.

From what he could see, Zhang Yi didn’t seem to have any urgent needs.

Deng Yuanbo smiled pleasantly. "Heh, if this is proving difficult for you, how about letting me handle it?"

Zhu Zheng could hardly believe his ears.

Since when had Deng Yuanbo been so generous?

A meaningful glint flickered in Deng Yuanbo's half-squinted eyes.

"But if I succeed in persuading Zhang Yi, then you'll owe me a favor."

Zhu Zheng's brow furrowed. This old fox wasn't going to do a favor for nothing.

"What kind of favor?"

Deng Yuanbo said leisurely, "The next operation against Moon of Corrosion, I want Zhang Yi to take the lead. Not only that, I want his name to be widely publicized."

Zhang Yi had no ties to the Deng family.

Clearly, Deng Yuanbo wasn't doing this for his sake.

Zhu Zheng instantly figured out Deng Yuanbo's true motive.

"You're worried Gao Changkong's reputation will skyrocket after this and that it'll pose a threat to your Deng family's influence in Blizzard City, aren't you?"

Deng Yuanbo just smiled, not directly answering the question.

"Commander Zhu, surely you don't want someone under your command becoming too powerful, do you?"

Zhu Zheng fell into deep thought.

"But no matter how you look at it, Gao Changkong is the better candidate."

Zhang Yi might've accomplished something impressive last time, sure, but that was mostly thanks to his personal strength—and a bit of luck in cleaning up after Liao Honglei.

But when it came to commanding a team in actual battle, Zhu Zheng didn't quite have faith in Zhang Yi to lead the operation.

Deng Yuanbo smiled warmly. “Young people might be a bit green in that area, but that’s what mentors are for!”

“We’ve got to let the young ones gain experience. In the apocalypse, we need to cultivate talent quickly—and that means giving them chances!”

Zhu Zheng snorted.

“I’m not that old yet.”

“But what you’re suggesting... I’ll think about it.”

Deng Yuanbo’s smile deepened.

“Excellent. In that case, I’ll go talk to Zhang Yi.”

He stood up, getting ready to leave.

As he walked to the door, Zhu Zheng suddenly asked behind him, “How’s your boy doing?”

Deng Yuanbo paused mid-step.

Then he let out a soft sigh. "That incident hit him hard. For now, it's best not to disturb him."

Zhu Zheng nodded. "Fair enough."

Zhang Yi returned to Tianhai City with Liang Yue and Hua Hua, taking the subway.

Tianhai City was still as cold and desolate as ever.

These days, fewer than ten thousand people were alive in the city—it was eerily empty.

When Zhang Yi pulled out the snowmobile and brought everyone back to the shelter, only then did he feel a touch of warmth—like coming home.

They hadn't told anyone they were coming back, so when people saw them, everyone was overjoyed.

Fatty Xu had been gaming in his room. When he heard Zhang Yi was back, he ran out barefoot, hollering with joy.

The moment he saw Zhang Yi, he let out a cry and pounced to hug his thigh.

“Boss, what took you so long this time? Wuwuwu... while you were gone, I was worried sick every day!”

Seeing Fatty Xu like this, Zhang Yi rolled his eyes.

“You’re still as chicken as ever, huh? Nothing’s happened in Tianhai City—what are you so scared of?”

Fatty Xu wiped his eyes and muttered resentfully, “Tianhai City may be quiet, but didn’t they set off an H-bomb over there?”

He was pointing in the direction of Jiangning City.

Even though it was hundreds of kilometers away, the effects of the Death God of Love’s deployment could still be felt in Tianhai.

Zhang Yi had already told Yang Xinxin not to share anything about Moon of Corrosion, but there was no way to hide something as massive as an H-bomb.

He said calmly, “Relax. Everything’s under control—including the Death God of Love deployment.”

Zhang Yi scanned the room. Only Yang Siya and Zhou Haimei were there.

Uncle You, Zhou Ke'er, Lu Keran, and Yang Xinxin were all nowhere to be seen.

As he changed clothes, Zhang Yi asked, "Where is everyone? What are they up to?"

Fatty Xu blinked. "Uncle You has been practicing boxing on B3 these days! He says it might help him break through his limits."

Uncle You had gradually realized he was falling further and further behind Zhang Yi in strength. If it kept up, he'd only be dragging the team down.

Zhang Yi never said anything out loud, but Uncle You couldn't help but feel guilty.

So after Zhang Yi left, he doubled his training hours.

Other than eating and sleeping, he basically stayed in the basement all day.

Yang Siya brought over two mugs of hot milk, handing them to Zhang Yi and Liang Yue to warm them up.

Meanwhile, Zhou Haimei thoughtfully opened a can of cat food for Hua Hua.

Yang Siya said, "We haven't been slacking. I've been preparing ability-enhancing food like you asked. As for Ke'er and Xinxin—they've been holed up in their rooms. Not sure what they're doing."

Zhang Yi nodded. "I'll go check on them."

His main reason for coming back this time was to hand over those chemical compounds for Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran to study.

Yang Siya quickly asked, "What do you want for dinner? I'll get started."

Zhang Yi answered casually, "Whatever works—just make it a bit more festive."

He wouldn't be staying long—tomorrow, he'd be heading back to Blizzard City.

And from then on, he'd be tied up for quite a while with the campaign to wipe out Moon of Corrosion.

"Got it!"

Yang Siya smiled and cheerfully went off to prepare dinner.

Zhang Yi made his way downstairs to find Zhou Ke'er and the others.

Outside Zhou Ke'er's medical room, he heard the sound of rushing water.

Curious, he wondered what she was doing.

That much water? What was going on?

Was she... practicing swimming?

He walked up and knocked on the door.

"Ke'er? You in there?"

There was a crashing sound from inside—something breaking.

Zhang Yi grew concerned and pushed the door open without thinking.

What he saw made him freeze on the spot.

Yang Xinxin was tightly tied to a chair, soaking wet. Her cute, palm-sized face was as pale as death.

Chapter 695 – Xinxin’s Awakening

Zhang Yi stood frozen, utterly stunned. He couldn’t make sense of what he was seeing.

Zhou Ke’er stood nearby, covering her mouth in shock. Her eyes were filled with worry... but also a hint of hope.

“This is the thirty-seventh experiment... is it finally... going to succeed?”

Just then, a flicker passed across Yang Xinxin’s nearly lifeless face. Her pupils rolled back into place.

She saw Zhang Yi—and in those dim eyes, a sudden light burst forth.

While Zhang Yi was still trying to process what was happening, he saw something truly surreal.

Behind Yang Xinxin, an angel slowly emerged—bearing six immaculate white wings and holding a holy bow.

Sacred light radiated throughout the room, dazzling and pure, so bright it was almost blinding.

Yang Xinxin basked in that glow, the corners of her lips curling into a faint, sickly smile.

“Big Brother... you’re finally back!”

“Xinxin’s experiment succeeded. I’m... an Awakened now!”

It took a while before Zhang Yi finally understood what was going on.

Though Yang Xinxin had survived with Zhou Ke’er’s help and managed to awaken her ability, the repeated torment she endured pushed both her mind and body to their absolute limits.

She soon collapsed into Zhang Yi’s arms and fell into a deep sleep.

Zhang Yi gently laid her down on the sofa, letting Zhou Ke’er help her change into dry clothes and cover her with a blanket to rest.

Clearly, Yang Xinxin had awakened her powers.

That was the good news.

But after hearing Zhou Ke'er describe the awakening process, Zhang Yi felt a chill run down his spine—and an ache in his heart.

Zhou Ke'er sat quietly beside him, recounting everything.

“After our long research, we finally discovered that awakening abilities is strongly linked to human obsession.”

“The stronger a person’s obsession at the moment of awakening, the greater the potential of the power they might receive.”

“Love, hatred, jealousy, greed... all of these can fuel awakening.”

“That’s why Xinxin refused to use the Ice Core. She wanted a stronger, purer kind of power.”

“And the way to obtain that power... was through repeated brushes with death—to push her potential to the limit by refining her inner will to its purest form.”

Zhang Yi looked at the girl sleeping peacefully on the couch, heart tangled in complicated emotions.

He held his head. "If I didn't know her so well, I'd swear she was insane."

Who the h*ll uses that method to awaken an ability?

Constantly walking the line between life and death—thirty-seven times! Thirty-seven death experiences!

Just imagining it sent shivers down his spine.

Zhang Yi had died once—he knew all too well what that felt like.

Yet Yang Xinxin was willing to endure the cycle of endless death just to gain power.

And now, Zhang Yi couldn't help but feel a sliver of anticipation.

What kind of power had Yang Xinxin awakened?

Just the way she awakened it was already terrifying.

Zhang Yi couldn't help but think—Yang Xinxin already had a top-tier brain. If she now had elite combat capabilities too, wouldn't she be practically unstoppable?

Zhang Yi felt genuinely happy for her... and deeply pained.

Watching her sleep soundly, he didn't want to disturb her, so he pulled Zhou Ke'er aside.

"Come with me to find Keran. There's something I need you both to study."

Zhou Ke'er nodded, and the two headed for Lu Keran's workshop.

When Lu Keran saw Zhang Yi return, she rushed over excitedly.

"Big Bro, you're back! Weren't you out on the Moon of Corrosion mission? You're not hurt, right?"

She'd heard about the H-bomb incident that shocked the world and rushed over to check Zhang Yi's body, worried he might be missing any limbs.

"I'm fine—really," Zhang Yi replied with a warm smile, touched by her concern.

In the shelter, aside from Hua Hua, Lu Keran was the one person he could talk to freely.

Her brain was as simple and pure as Hua Hua's, so he never had to filter what he said.

Lu Keran patted her chest.

It seemed the little lady had matured a bit since he last saw her.

"That's great! But what's really going on in Blizzard City? Did you guys take care of Moon of Corrosion or what?"

Zhang Yi smiled. "We'll get to that. First, I want to show you both something."

He took out several pharmaceutical compounds he had exchanged for and handed them over.

They were in tablet form—easy to scrape for analysis.

Lu Keran's ability could analyze molecular structures, and Zhou Ke'er, being a doctor, could assess the drugs' effects and side effects.

Of course, Zhang Yi wasn't expecting them to recreate the meds.

This kind of synthesis was far harder than crafting weapons.

He brought them back mostly out of habit.

If Zhou Ke'er and Lu Keran could replicate them, that would be ideal.

That way, Zhang Yi could solve a major issue: helping Uncle You and Fatty Xu rapidly strengthen themselves.

Not that he thought they were weak...

It's just that Zhang Yi's own power was growing too quickly.

If things kept up, the gap between him and the others would become a real problem.

Zhou Ke'er took the pills and asked curiously, "What are these?"

Zhang Yi smiled. "Very expensive stuff. I spent a ton of points in Blizzard City to get them."

He stroked his chin. “They’re supposed to be gene-enhancement drugs. Each one has different effects—they can strengthen existing abilities or even increase the chance of awakening.”

The moment they heard that, Zhou Ke’er and Lu Keran’s eyes lit up.

“There’s... stuff that amazing?!”

“No wonder the Jiangnan District is so advanced!”

Zhou Ke’er furrowed her elegant brows. “But drug development is super complicated. Without professional equipment and materials, it’d be nearly impossible to replicate.”

Lu Keran pursed her lips. “My ability lets me analyze molecular structures, so I don’t need much in the way of tools.”

“But even if we know the components, we still don’t understand the refining process. That’s going to be tough.”

Zhang Yi had already anticipated that, so he wasn’t disappointed.

“I’m probably heading into a big fight soon. I need you two to help me figure out what these drugs actually do—and what side effects they might have. I need to know what I’m working with.”

“As for duplicating them... give it your best shot. If you can, great. If not...”

Zhang Yi spread his hands. “Then it is what it is.”

He was never the kind of guy to make unreasonable demands.

Chapter 696 - I Just Want to Get Stronger So Badly

Zhou Ke’er immediately said, “I’ll head to the infirmary later and scrape off a bit of powder. That should be enough for research.”

Zhang Yi nodded. “Alright, no rush on this one.”

According to the intel the Jiangnan District had gathered so far, Moon of Corrosion had suffered heavy losses and vanished without a trace.

Most likely, they were laying low to recover or recruiting reinforcements.

In other words, Zhang Yi would have a period of relative peace.

Thinking of how Yang Xinxin had just awakened her superhuman ability and was still resting, Zhang Yi smiled and said, “Let’s go eat first. Once Xinxin wakes up, I’ll tell you all what’s been going on lately.”

Zhou Ke’er wrapped her arms around Zhang Yi’s shoulders, leaning in with a tone of dependence, “Okay! You’ve got to spend tonight telling me everything in detail.”

Tonight, Zhang Yi absolutely had to go to her room and have a good talk.

Zhang Yi shrugged. "As you wish."

Zhou Ke'er stayed in the infirmary to watch over Yang Xinxin.

After someone awakens their superhuman ability, there's always a period of adjustment, and someone needs to be there to avoid any accidents.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi went upstairs with Lu Keran to meet the others.

Zhou Haimei and Yang Siya were busy preparing food. A lavish welcome feast took a lot of time to put together.

Zhang Yi ran into Uncle You, who had just come back from training downstairs, drenched in sweat.

But now, he didn't look like a man in his forties at all.

His body was covered in bulging, corded muscles. His arms were even thicker than Zhou Ke'er's thighs.

He wore a black tank top and had a towel hanging around his neck, wiping away his sweat.

As soon as he saw Zhang Yi, Uncle You gave him a warm, simple smile.

"Zhang Yi, you're back? How was the mission in Blizzard City? You didn't get hurt, did you?"

Just like everyone else, Uncle You asked about Zhang Yi's health right away.

Once he knew Zhang Yi was okay, he relaxed.

But right after that, he started grumbling.

"I told you already—if you were gonna fight those Neon Nation punks, you should've taken me with you!"

He thumped his chest with a loud thud, thud.

"Uncle You might not be good at much, but I've still got some strength left! Worst-case scenario, I'd do a one-for-one with a Neon punk—at least that'd lighten your load a little!"

Zhang Yi chuckled.

Moon of Corrosion wasn't just your average gang of ronin—their strength was terrifying.

Rumor had it that back in eastern Neon Nation, they'd wiped out dozens of superhuman organizations.

With Uncle You's current level, it'd be tough for him to go toe-to-toe with their members.

If the drugs in Blizzard City really can boost a superhuman's power with no side effects, then maybe it could help Uncle You and Fatty Xu, Zhang Yi thought to himself.

After all, both of them were below Delta-level superhumans.

In theory, they couldn't absorb the superhuman essence from others to rapidly increase their strength.

But with the advent of the Great Mutation Era, no one dared to claim they fully understood mutation anymore.

What if—just what if—even a Beta-level superhuman pushed their ability to the limit? What kind of power would that be?

Zhang Yi pondered the thought for a moment, but didn't go deeper into it—this wasn't an area he understood well enough.

Still, with more interactions with the Jiangnan District in the future, he might get a chance to meet their researchers and gather intel on this stuff.

He pulled his mind back and smiled at Uncle You. "Things were pretty chaotic at the time. Everyone was assigned by the district—I couldn't just call in whoever I wanted."

Uncle You sighed, his eyes dimming a bit.

"I know... I know there's a huge gap between my abilities and yours."

"I've been working hard to regain my military skills—shooting, hand-to-hand combat, recon."

"But the further I go, the more I realize how terrifying superhumans really are."

"If we run into another monster like Yuan Kongye, there's no way a regular human can handle that."

Even now, everyone in Tianhai City and the Black Robe Investigation Team had a lasting impression of Yuan Kongye's fearsome power.

That kind of strength—just a flick of the wrist could shake heaven and earth—could destroy a warrior who had trained hard for two and a half years in an instant.

Zhang Yi patted Uncle You on the shoulder.

“Monsters like that are rare. You can’t judge things by normal standards. Everyone has their own strengths. What matters is playing to them. No need to compare yourself to others.”

Just like Yang Siya.

Her ability was just to make superhuman energy dishes. She wasn’t exactly a battlefield asset—honestly, she had no combat power at all.

But she still found a way to contribute.

Day or night.

“Hahaha, you’re right!”

A confident spark lit up in Uncle You’s eyes.

“There’s gotta be something I can do for you!”

He looked at Zhang Yi with determination.

Zhang Yi felt a warm glow in his heart. “It’s something we do for each other.”

Two hours later, Zhou Haimei and Yang Siya finally finished preparing a massive feast.

Yang Xinxin, under Zhou Ke’er’s care, had also woken up.

They all came down to the first floor. When Yang Xinxin saw everyone, her expression was composed.

But from her lifted lips, it wasn’t hard to see a proud gleam she couldn’t hide.

She was still an eighteen-year-old girl, after all. It was hard for her to balance maturity and intelligence perfectly.

But that was understandable.

Yang Xinxin walked gracefully over to Zhang Yi and, without a shred of hesitation, gave Fatty Xu a look.

Fatty Xu obediently moved over to a small stool nearby.

Yang Xinxin sat beside Zhang Yi, sweetly wrapping her arms around his and tilting her head up to look at him with a bright smile.

“Big Brother, from now on, I can help you!”

Zhang Yi was curious about her superhuman ability and playfully flicked her soft little nose.

“You’ve always been my best helper.”

Yang Xinxin giggled. “It’s different now.”

She didn’t need to hide away in the shelter anymore.

Now, just like Liang Yue and Hua Hua, she could follow Zhang Yi into battle.

That piqued Zhang Yi’s curiosity even more.

Logically speaking, Yang Xinxin’s awakening had been extremely intense—she’d gone through thirty-seven cycles of death.

But as far as brutal awakenings went, it was hard to say hers was more extreme than Zhang Yi's.

After all, Zhang Yi had been hacked to death slowly, one cut at a time, until his deep resentment finally triggered his awakening.

Yang Xinxin, although she'd experienced many deaths, subconsciously knew it was just an experiment—Zhou Ke'er would save her at the critical moment.

He leaned in close to her ear, his warm breath brushing against her crystal-clear earlobe.

"So, what exactly is your ability? Tell your big brother."

Yang Xinxin's neck turned bright red. Like a mischievous little devil, she lowered her head and whispered, "Big Brother, wanna try it out for yourself?"

Zhang Yi was dumbfounded. "Try it out?"

So, it wasn't a purely offensive-type ability, huh?

Chapter 697 - Desire Angel

Yang Xinxin gave a playful smile, but spoke to Zhang Yi with gentle sincerity: "My ability... I'd never use it on you, Brother."

Zhang Yi's expression turned odd. Just what kind of ability is it...?

Yang Xinxin didn't keep him guessing.

She said, “I’ve named my ability Desire Angel. Its power is the manipulation of human emotion.”

“Love, lust, hatred—any kind of feeling. Once someone is struck by the angel’s arrow, they’ll feel it from the depths of their heart.”

“And then, they’ll be completely controlled by that emotion.”

Yang Xinxin cupped her face in her hands, cheeks flushed with an almost sickly pink.

“To toy with people’s hearts at will—what a wonderful ability, isn’t it?”

Zhang Yi couldn’t help but swallow hard.

An ability that manipulates emotions... it fit this twisted, obsessive girl perfectly.

He immediately grew wary—if this girl took advantage of him and made him fall in love with someone, or hate someone else, that would be a nightmare.

Even though he knew Yang Xinxin wouldn’t hurt him.

But in the eyes of a yandere girl, “harm” and “help” could be defined in very... creative ways.

So he carefully circled back, subtly probing for more information about the specifics of her ability.

Yang Xinxin didn’t hide anything from Zhang Yi. She told him everything she currently knew about her power, in full detail.

After hearing it all, Zhang Yi fell silent for quite some time.

This ability, born through such a terrifying awakening method, had a sky-high ceiling... but also a dangerously low floor.

In the hands of an average person, it would be useless, even dangerous—easy to lose control and backfire.

But if used properly, at the right moment, it could create truly unbelievable results.

It really did suit Yang Xinxin's personality.

Soon, the food was ready. Uncle You had also showered and came back to the living room, looking fresh and clean.

Though Zhang Yi hadn't been gone long, everything he'd been through made it feel like he hadn't seen everyone in forever.

That warm scene of a big family gathered around a round table, eating together in cheerful noise—it really touched Zhang Yi's heart.

During dinner, the topic quickly shifted to Moon of Corrosion.

Clearly, everyone was very concerned about that foreign group.

After a moment of thought, Zhang Yi decided to tell them the truth.

One way or another, they needed to be mentally prepared.

Because he couldn't guarantee that Moon of Corrosion wouldn't show up in Tianhai City.

Zhang Yi calmly explained what had happened, including the fact that Jiangnan District Headquarters had failed to wipe them out.

As soon as he said it, the table filled with shocked and worried faces.

“Even the people from Blizzard City lost?” Fatty Xu looked completely stunned.

“Didn’t they send out an investigation team? That should be at least the same level as the Black Robe Investigation Team. Plus, with you and all those superhumans from other cities...”

“The Thirteen Guardians of Jiangnan District must’ve thrown in nearly everything they had, right? And they still lost?”

Zhang Yi took a deep breath and helplessly shook his head.

“I didn’t expect it either. Honestly, no one did.”

“It wasn’t just a loss—it was a total disaster. The Celestial Squad was practically wiped out. Captain Deng Shentong died in battle.”

Liang Yue added, “If Zhang Yi hadn’t charged in and taken down the western members of Moon of Corrosion, the battle would’ve been a total annihilation!”

Uncle You found it hard to accept.

He held his forehead, looking anguished.

“Those d***ed Neon punks... are they really that strong?”

Zhang Yi frowned. Deep down, he didn’t want to believe it either.

But facts were facts. Denying them wouldn’t change reality.

At that moment, Yang Xinxin suddenly spoke up: "I smell a conspiracy behind this."

The entire table fell silent. Everyone froze mid-bite.

Fatty Xu silently put his chicken leg back in his bowl.

Zhang Yi turned to Yang Xinxin. "A conspiracy?"

What kind of conspiracy could there be in this?

Yang Xinxin dabbed her lips with a napkin and replied calmly:

"Brother, the only captain-level superhuman I've seen is Bian Junwu—and that was when he was already severely injured, near death."

"Do you think someone at captain-level is easy to kill?"

Zhang Yi shook his head. "Are you kidding? If I don't know their ability, even if they stood right in front of me now, I'd struggle to kill them."

In battles between superhumans, intel is everything.

Suddenly, something clicked in Zhang Yi's mind.

"You're saying... without knowing Deng Shentong's or the other Celestial Squad members' abilities, there's no way they could have been killed so easily?"

Yang Xinxin glanced at him and smiled. "At the very least, escaping should've been possible, right?"

Zhang Yi recalled Deng Shentong's power.

He could manipulate light, which made him ideal for stealth, ambushes, and escape.

A captain-level superhuman, if dead set on fleeing, would be nearly impossible to kill—unless the enemy had an Epsilon-level superhuman.

But... did Moon of Corrosion have an Epsilon-level?

Based on what Zhu Zheng and others had reported, that didn't seem likely.

If they did have someone that strong, they could've steamrolled the entire Neon archipelago before even bothering with Huaxu Nation.

And based on the intel, even in eastern Neon, they couldn't take on the dominant Izumo group head-on.

Zhang Yi murmured, “But they had a superhuman with a prophetic ability. That could explain how they knew Deng Shentong’s powers in advance.”

Yang Xinxin tilted her head and gave a slight smile.

“Brother, if that prophet could predict someone’s superhuman ability to that extent, I’d say they’re already Epsilon-level.”

“Because in fights between superhumans, having intel beforehand affects the outcome by over 30%. In team battles, it’s over 50%.”

“If they really had someone that powerful, why didn’t they take out Izumo back in Kanto?”

Zhang Yi unconsciously put his chopsticks down.

These were things he hadn't fully considered before.

But hearing Yang Xinxin's analysis now, a creeping sense of dread began to take hold in his chest.

"You mean... there was a traitor in Blizzard City?"

Zhang Yi looked at Yang Xinxin, struggling to believe it.

"I don't want to believe that either," he said.

Zhou Ke'er also spoke up. "A traitor in Blizzard City? That seems unlikely. What would they even gain from working with ronin?"

Everyone else chimed in with similar disbelief.

But Yang Xinxin stayed calm. "I know it sounds outrageous. No matter how you look at it, Jiangnan District's strength far surpasses that of some ronin gang."

"So if we're thinking normally, of course we'd never suspect Blizzard City of having a traitor."

"But what if we look at it from a different angle?"

"What if someone in Blizzard City deliberately used Moon of Corrosion to get rid of the Celestial Squad?"

"To my knowledge, Blizzard City isn't exactly a unified front."

Her words instantly sparked something in Zhang Yi's mind.

The Deng Family held enormous prestige and power within Blizzard City.

Deng Shentong wasn't just their heir—there were even rumors that the family wanted to push him as Zhu Zheng's successor.

In the apocalypse, death could come at any time. No one knew how long Zhu Zheng would survive.

So they needed to plan ahead, groom successors—just like the old days with crown princes.

Now Zhang Yi's thoughts grew even more tangled.

If you took that perspective... things became much more terrifying and serious.

Because Zhang Yi had no idea how many factions existed inside Blizzard City.

There was even one terrifying possibility—

Zhu Zheng himself might have wanted Deng Shentong gone.

After all, he was still on the throne, yet someone was already eyeing his seat. That kind of power play was dangerously delicate.

Chapter 698 - Yang Xinxin Volunteers for Battle

Yang Xinxin's analytical thinking opened up a new door in Zhang Yi's mind.

He had never once considered that there might be a traitor inside Blizzard City.

Even with political power struggles, he didn't think anyone would be insane enough to collaborate with Moon of Corrosion.

But when all impossibilities are eliminated, whatever remains—no matter how unbelievable—must be the truth.

Truthfully, Zhang Yi had also been unable to make sense of how the Celestial Squad could be wiped out so easily.

Even if they couldn't win, surely they could have escaped, right?

At the very least, when Zhang Yi took down the western Moon of Corrosion members, it hadn't taken much effort.

Sure, that had something to do with how strong he was, but the Celestial Squad weren't some bunch of nobodies either.

So the most likely explanation was—someone had leaked all of their intel to Moon of Corrosion!

That's why they were so thoroughly countered in battle.

And no one had paid any attention to Zhang Yi, a superhuman from the Outer City.

That was the only reason he was able to exploit the situation and achieve such a glorious victory.

Zhang Yi fell silent.

Too complicated. This whole thing is just way too complicated. I can't figure it out.

Originally, he hadn't planned to get involved in other people's business.

But now, he was caught in the middle of it.

What if I end up getting dragged in and stabbed in the back too?

Seeing Zhang Yi's conflicted expression, Yang Xinxin continued analyzing the situation.

"Brother, Zhu Zheng wants you to become a team captain, to lead a new investigation team, right?"

"Have you ever thought about why that is?"

Zhang Yi looked at her and said, "Because my ability can help them deal with Moon of Corrosion. And judging from the last campaign, I'm strong."

Yang Xinxin nodded.

"Sure, strength is a factor. Strength is always important. After all, if someone really wanted Deng Shentong dead, they've already achieved that."

"So now, no one really wants Jiangnan District to lose to Moon of Corrosion. That means from here on out, no one will try to sabotage the next operation."

"And the person leading the team—not only do they need to be strong, but they must also have one crucial trait: they must not pose a threat to the upper ranks' power."

"Because every strong superhuman in Blizzard City already has a significant status."

"At this point in time, whoever defeats Moon of Corrosion and restores the reputation of Jiangnan District—or even Huaxu Nation as a whole—their fame will soar to unimaginable heights."

"And that person could very well become Zhu Zheng's successor."

“But Blizzard City has multiple factions keeping each other in check. No one wants to see another side take all the glory.”

Zhang Yi said thoughtfully, “So that’s why they’re pushing someone like me—an Outer City superhuman—into the spotlight?”

“I don’t have any roots in Blizzard City. Even if I complete the mission, I won’t threaten the upper ranks’ power structure.”

“And,” Zhang Yi chuckled, “I’ve always refused Blizzard City’s offers to recruit me. That makes it clear I’m not interested in power or Blizzard City at all.”

“So even if I do succeed and become a hero in everyone’s eyes, they can easily spin it to let me stay in Tianhai City.”

“So that’s it... that’s how it is.”

Zhang Yi wasn’t a fool. After Yang Xinxin’s explanation, things became very clear.

“This whole thing is a damn swamp,” Zhang Yi sighed.

But Yang Xinxin smiled. “Actually, Brother, you don’t need to worry so much. If it really is like that, then you’re actually safer.”

“Because only with you as the Celestial Hound Squad’s captain can Blizzard City reach a relative peace. Only then will the major factions reach a consensus and stop tripping each other up.”

Zhang Yi shrugged. “Let’s hope so. Anyway, I’ve already made up my mind. This mission is a huge challenge. If things go sideways, I’m bailing. Gotta stay alive first.”

He was pretty pragmatic about it.

More importantly, Zhang Yi had a good grasp of himself.

He hadn't let his powerful awakening go to his head. Just because he could fight didn't mean he thought he was invincible.

This whole Moon of Corrosion mess was way too deep—like a giant spinning roulette wheel.

And anyone caught in the wheel could become a sacrifice.

He had to move cautiously, step by step, and never let hot-blooded emotion cloud his judgment.

Yang Xinxin lowered her head and gave a sly, mysterious smile.

"Well, if you're so worried, why not take me along this time? With me there, I can help you come up with strategies too."

The little demon girl had talked so much, but this was her true goal.

Only when Zhang Yi needed her—only then could she stand by his side and prove her worth.

Zhang Yi gave Yang Xinxin a long, thoughtful look.

The girl's intentions were written all over her face—she wasn't hiding a thing.

After thinking for a moment, Zhang Yi said, "You've never experienced a real battlefield. People die out there. I can't even guarantee I'll be able to protect you the whole time. Do you understand?"

Although Yang Xinxin had awakened her superhuman ability, Zhang Yi still didn't fully understand its effects.

She was just an eighteen-year-old girl. If something went wrong on the battlefield... he didn't even want to imagine it.

But Yang Xinxin looked at him earnestly. "I won't drag you down, Brother! Don't treat me like a kid."

"And besides, wouldn't it be safer to have your own people around during this mission?"

At that moment, Uncle You spoke up too. He slapped his thigh and earnestly offered:

"She's right, Zhang Yi. You can't trust the folks from Blizzard City. But you can trust us."

"Let me go with you too!"

Zhang Yi quickly waved his hands. "Cut it out, seriously. This opponent is no joke. Even Blizzard City hand-picked their best elites for the last fight."

"I'll think about it, alright?"

Truth be told, he was seriously considering bringing Yang Xinxin with him.

When it came to brains, she was far more useful than he was.

For small-scale problems, Zhang Yi's smarts were enough. But this current situation was a tangled mess.

Plus, Yang Xinxin came from upper-class society—she understood political maneuvering far better than he did.

He had to focus on strategy and battle, but he also had to deal with Blizzard City's hidden agendas. He just didn't have the bandwidth.

On the other hand, bringing Yang Xinxin would also give him a chance to observe her superhuman ability in action—and help her develop it in the field.

Worst case, he could assign Hua Hua to protect her.

After dinner, Zhang Yi chatted with everyone a little longer. It was mostly warnings not to go out, and to stay alert for any unusual movements in Tianhai City.

Then he pretended he was going back to his room to rest.

But instead, he quietly made his way to Yang Xinxin's room.

Yang Xinxin was sitting on her pink princess bed, looking up sweetly at him.

“Brother, I knew you’d come.”

“You made your choice. Now you have to know what comes next.”

Zhang Yi took a deep breath—and pulled a gun out of his pocket.

Chapter 699 – Preparing in Advance

Zhang Yi pulled out two guns and handed them to Yang Xinxin.

“These two have minimal recoil—you should be able to handle them. Still, make sure you keep practicing. You don’t need to be a sharpshooter, just use them for self-defense.”

“One is loaded with regular bullets, for dealing with ordinary people. The other is loaded with Origin Bullets, for fighting superhumans.”

Yang Xinxin happily took the guns from him.

Zhang Yi giving her weapons clearly meant—he was taking her with him.

Right in front of him, Yang Xinxin expertly disassembled one of the guns, inspected the inside and the magazine, then reassembled it seamlessly.

Seeing the surprise in Zhang Yi’s eyes, Yang Xinxin giggled. “Actually, I’ve been practicing shooting all along! I don’t need you to remind me—I know how to handle myself!”

Zhang Yi couldn’t help but laugh. “So you’ve been scheming for this from the start.”

He rubbed his chin, his gaze skimming across Yang Xinxin’s petite, adorable figure.

Yang Xinxin’s face flushed with embarrassment. “Why don’t you just stay here and sleep tonight?”

Zhang Yi froze for a second, then smiled and shook his head. “Stop it.”

“When we get to Blizzard City, I’ll get you a proper combat suit.”

Her legs had only just recovered recently—her stamina wasn’t great yet.

One way or another, Zhang Yi was going to ask Zhu Zheng to get Yang Xinxin a black combat suit.

Anyone who followed him needed to be just as protected as he was.

“When the time comes, Hua Hua will stay with you and handle your safety.”

“I’ll keep you as close to me as possible on the battlefield. But if we run into a powerful superhuman, you get away from me as fast as you can.”

Zhang Yi carefully explained all the things Yang Xinxin needed to watch out for in battle.

The tenderness in Yang Xinxin’s eyes grew deeper and gentler—melting like water.

“Brother, you’re so good to me.”

The next morning, Zhang Yi summoned the leaders of the major base factions to his home.

He explained the details of the failed Moon of Corrosion siege to Xiao Honglian, Xing Tian, and Chen Jingguan.

The three of them were visibly shaken, full of concern.

Zhang Yi told them, “Good, you’re scared. That’s what I want. From now on, all of you stay inside your bases and don’t go anywhere.”

“Especially you,” he turned to Chen Jingguan. “If the enemy attacks Tianhai City, it’s most likely going to come from the sea. Your people need to watch the coast closely.”

Chen Jingguan looked nervous. “I’ll make sure someone keeps a close eye on the sea! They’ll have a hard time getting past—it’s not like we don’t have patrols out there.”

“Oh?” Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. That was news to him.

Chen Jingguan explained, “Not sure if it’s the Jiangnan District navy or East Sea District, but they do conduct patrols along the coast. We’ve encountered them on past sea trips.”

Zhang Yi frowned. “If there’s a navy patrolling, then how did Moon of Corrosion manage to cross the sea?”

Chen Jingguan replied, “In these conditions, naval patrols are mainly to stop large fleets from invading. Smaller targets can slip through.”

Zhang Yi immediately thought of the prophet-type superhuman among Moon of Corrosion—his doubts faded.

That ability probably helped them exploit the patrol gaps and sneak through.

Especially now, with extreme cold making naval operations even harder, it was impossible to fully guard the entire southeastern coastline.

Zhang Yi looked seriously at the three of them and reminded them, “Linhai City is already gone. Jiangning City... is nearly wiped out too. I don’t want Tianhai City to be next. So be careful.”

That was all Zhang Yi could do. If something really happened in Tianhai City, his top priority would be the people inside his shelter.

As for the three bases—whatever happens, happens.

The three nodded fervently, visibly more alert. They didn’t dare be careless now.

Each of them planned to immediately relocate their people into their respective underground shelters, halting all external operations for the time being.

Just then, Xing Tian seemed to think of something.

He said to Zhang Yi, “Hey, what about the other small groups in Tianhai City? Should we check in on them?”

Zhang Yi gave him a sidelong look. “Since when do you care about that kind of thing?”

There were still a few small factions left in Tianhai City, but after Yuan Kongye’s purge, most had been wiped out or were barely hanging on, just scraping by.

Xing Tian chuckled, “I normally wouldn’t care, but this one’s an old friend of yours.”

“An old friend of mine?”

Zhang Yi was about to laugh it off, but then a figure popped into his mind.

He narrowed his eyes. “You don’t mean... Li Jian, do you?”

Xing Tian nodded. “That’s the one.”

Zhang Yi’s gaze grew distant with nostalgia.

Before the apocalypse, he and Li Jian had worked at the same company.

Li Jian was the head of finance, while Zhang Yi was a low-level supervisor in logistics. They didn’t interact much.

But deep down, Zhang Yi had always respected Li Jian.

He was one of the rare people who had managed to keep his humanity in the apocalypse.

A true “good man,” in the traditional sense.

Zhang Yi wasn’t capable of being like him—but that didn’t mean he didn’t admire it.

After all, who would willingly live each day scheming and killing just to survive, unless life forced them to?

Zhang Yi asked, "How's Li Jian doing now?"

Xing Tian replied, "After Followers of the Snow God fell, Li Jian teamed up with a few of their surviving superhumans and formed a small group. They've gathered about 30 to 50 survivors."

Zhang Yi sighed deeply. "That guy always has to do the 'good guy' thing. Makes the rest of us look like villains."

After thinking for a moment, Zhang Yi said to Xing Tian, "Have them join your group. With Tianhai's population so low, you could use the manpower."

Since Zhang Yi had spoken, Xing Tian naturally agreed.

Blizzard City.

Gao Changkong's return had once again stirred the situation into something more complex.

Zhu Zheng lavished him with praise and made it clear he hoped Gao Changkong would achieve new glory in the upcoming Moon of Corrosion purge.

All of Blizzard City, top to bottom, basically assumed that Gao Changkong would lead the third assault.

At this point, everyone was pinning their hopes on him.

And Gao Changkong—what was he doing?

Instead of responding to all the congratulations, he returned to Blizzard City and immediately led his team to Zone E.

Zone E was the poorest area in the entire city.

The people living there all did the dirtiest, hardest labor—the very bottom of the barrel.

Chapter 700: Ambition

The day after their return, Gao Changkong brought his girlfriend Gu Man and Vice-Captain Ji Yushen to Zone E.

They were driving a large truck, packed full of essentials like food and coal, all exchanged using points.

Their arrival thrilled the people in this area.

This place wasn't exactly a slum—Blizzard City still provided decent security for ordinary residents, ensuring they didn't go hungry or freeze.

And every resident allowed to stay in Blizzard City was once an elite in the old world.

Even those who had worked in the service industry were once the best in their field.

But they had families.

Some families relied on one person's labor to support two or three others, making it hard to stretch supplies.

And nowhere was this more evident than in Zone E.

Gao Changkong was someone who had come out of Zone E.

Even though he had once been a shining basketball superstar and financially well-off, after the apocalypse, his abilities didn't bring much value to Blizzard City.

So, he had lived here for over a month.

Later, after awakening his superhuman ability, he joined the City Guards with his outstanding strength, and step by step became one of the captains of the Yan Yun Guards' investigation teams.

That's why every time he came back from a mission, he never forgot to visit the place he used to live, bringing supplies for the people of Zone E who once helped him.

When Gao Changkong arrived at the community, he was greeted with great enthusiasm.

Gu Man smiled and asked everyone to line up to receive supplies.

No useless junk—only the essentials for survival.

At times like this, nothing touched hearts more than heating supplies and food.

Among the crowd, an older balding man looked at the food and coal in his hands, eyes full of gratitude as he watched Gao Changkong unloading supplies.

"If Captain Gao could one day become the commander of the Jiangnan District, that would be amazing!"

As soon as he said it, everyone around nodded in agreement.

“Yeah! Captain Gao is kind-hearted and shows compassion to us common folks. If he were the commander, maybe life wouldn’t be so hard.”

Hearing this, Gu Man’s lips curled into a proud smile.

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and turned to look at the man busy unloading supplies from the truck.

Who would’ve thought that this investigation team captain, a well-known figure in Blizzard City, often did this kind of heavy labor himself?

Gao Changkong heard the chatter and laughed heartily. “Don’t say stuff like that! I’ve only done a few minor things, no need to praise me so much.”

“Commander Zhu has already done a great job with Blizzard City. At least everyone can live in peace.”

Among the crowd, a woman lowered her head and said bleakly, “Living in peace... is it really like that?”

“Jinling used to have 15 million people. After the apocalypse, less than two million were selected to enter Blizzard City.”

“Later, those who lost the ability to work for any reason were ruthlessly expelled.”

She took a deep breath, struggling to hold back her emotions.

Because she thought of her parents—an elderly couple in their seventies—who were driven out of Blizzard City for exactly that reason.

Gao Changkong fell silent.

In the apocalypse, things like this were unavoidable.

Limited resources could only support a limited population.

Otherwise, all of Blizzard City would collapse, and everyone would die together.

“The world will get better in the future! Please believe in that!”

Gao Changkong looked at the people with a determined gaze.

His eyes lifted their spirits and gave them hope.

“If Captain Gao could really become commander, that would be amazing.”

“Commander Zhu’s alright, but even he has to bow to those in power. At the end of the day, we ordinary folks still have it rough.”

“Not everyone can be like Gao Changkong!”

Several women pulled their children close and taught them to look up to Gao Changkong.

“See? Even ordinary people can defy the odds.”

“Captain Gao lived in Zone E just like us. But now, look at him—he’s a big deal.”

The kids were already tired of hearing things like this.

Their parents used Gao Changkong as an example nearly every day.

Gao Changkong was used to this too, so after distributing the supplies, he asked if the community needed help with anything else.

After a busy half-day, the matter was finally settled.

He, Gu Man, and Ji Yushen drove to Zone A and found a café to rest in.

The poor lived in cold, honeycomb-like apartment blocks.

But the rich lived almost like it was before the apocalypse—you could enjoy gourmet food, and even luxury goods were cheaper.

The three of them ordered coffee and desserts and chose a window seat.

The staff treated them with extra respect, and the way the young waitress looked at Gao Changkong was full of girlish affection.

Even though she was a 32-year-old mom, who didn't have a girlish heart?

She was the type who would drag her husband and child along to watch an idol concert in a wedding dress.

Unfortunately, sitting next to Gao Changkong was Gu Man—a woman who could easily make other women feel inferior.

Once the coffee arrived, the three of them started chatting during their break.

Ji Yushen leaned back in his rattan chair and smiled. “We just got back and thought we could rest a bit, but now we’re being sent on another mission. Seems like the Jiangnan District really can’t function without us!”

Gao Changkong took a sip of his mocha and smiled faintly.

“It’s only because we happened to be free. If another investigation team had returned, they’d be the ones sent out.”

Gu Man looked at the side of Gao Changkong’s face and gave a small smile.

“That’s what they call ‘right place, right time,’ huh?”

Gao Changkong couldn’t help but sigh, “Yeah. Sometimes, it really does come down to luck. If we’d been the ones sent to Tianhai City...”

All three of them sighed.

Who could have imagined that a routine zombie-clearing mission would involve an Epsilon-level Superhuman?

Bian Junwu died, and the Black Robe Investigation Team was severely wounded.

Even if they had gone instead—even with Gao Changkong’s formidable power—it wouldn’t have made up for the gap between him and an awakened Epsilon.

Ji Yushen glanced around—there weren’t many people in the café.

He put down his cup and whispered to the two of them, “Captain, Gu-jie, if we succeed in this mission, the Reincarnation Squad will become the top of the Six Investigation Teams!”

“At that point, our prestige will reach an all-time high! After all, this is about driving out foreign invaders!”

Gao Changkong smiled faintly. "It's not that simple. The higher-ups wouldn't hand over such a big credit to me so easily."