

Ice Age 701

Chapter 701: The Tianlong Pirate Crew

Ji Yushen scoffed, “But they don’t have anyone else they can use right now!”

He shrugged. “They’re not seriously going to mobilize the Yan Yun Guards to do the raid, are they? Sure, they’re team combat specialists, but their job is to protect Blizzard City. Commander Zhu would never send them away.”

“Other than us, there’s no better option left.”

A wild glint flickered in Ji Yushen’s eyes.

“Captain, who’s to say you can’t be Commander Zhu’s successor someday?”

Gao Changkong raised an eyebrow, glanced at Ji Yushen, then turned to look at Gu Man.

Gu Man smiled back at him.

Gao Changkong chuckled. “You guys are thinking too simply. Compared to the other captains, I’m just a guy from the bottom. No connections, no background—even if I pull off something huge, it’s still hard to climb the ranks.”

Gu Man leaned against him with a bright smile. “That’s not necessarily true! Times are different now. In the apocalypse, strength is what really matters.”

“The old order has pretty much collapsed. Even if Blizzard City hasn’t completely abandoned the old systems, it’s not going to hold onto them forever.”

“Old Gao, this is your chance!”

Ji Yushen grinned too. “Yeah, Captain! If we take down the Moon of Corrosion, our reputation in Blizzard City will skyrocket!”

“At that point, you could totally break into the city’s core power circle.”

Ji Yushen leaned back in his chair, eyes drifting to the ceiling, already fantasizing about that future.

“Then we can rewrite the rules of this world.”

“You wouldn’t just be representing yourself—you’d be representing all the little guys like us who clawed their way up from the bottom!”

Guys like him, or Gao Changkong—if they hadn’t awakened superhuman abilities, they’d just be nobodies stuck at the lowest rungs of Blizzard City.

Those with power and privilege—like Deng Shentong, the child of an influential family, or Bian Junwu, who came from a military background—

They all got access to the district's best resources at the start of the apocalypse just because of who they were.

Why else would they be stronger than other superhumans?

Talent's one thing. But background counts just as much.

Take the Outer City, for instance—did you think there were no naturally gifted superhumans there?

There were. Plenty of them.

But over 90% of those gifted people died not long after the apocalypse began.

The dead—that's what's normal.

The ones who survived—they're the real exceptions.

Like Zhang Yi.

Like Yang Xinxin.

Like the leaders of all the major forces.

Blizzard City's abundance of top-tier superhumans isn't some coincidence.

Gao Changkong twisted the cup in his hands and looked out the window.

Between Zone A and Zone B stood a gray wall, towering and immovable like an unbreakable barrier.

And those kinds of walls stood between every district.

"I'll take this mission. I'll make it mine."

Gao Changkong said deeply.

...

In the southern seas, thousands of islands were scattered like stars, earning the name Star Cluster Islands.

Before the apocalypse, many tiny nations were located here.

But after the end of the world, their governments collapsed almost overnight.

Power became the only standard for survival.

Countless superhumans rose up, carving out their own territories and forming factions.

Because of the region, many of them became pirates.

Half a year passed, and after countless battles and takeovers, the pirate forces in the Star Cluster Sea had consolidated into several major powers.

The strongest among them was the massive force known as the Tianlong Pirate Crew.

Their captain was Li Fengxian, known as the Sea Dragon King.

Under his command were seven fleets, each led by a powerful superhuman.

On this day, an icebreaker plowed through the crashing waves, arriving at the Tianlong Pirates' headquarters—Tianlong Island.

A man stepped out in front of Sea Dragon King Li Fengxian and his horde of vicious pirates.

The interior of Tianlong Island was like a massive lair.

Li Fengxian sat atop a high throne, looking down at the slender man in the gray newsboy cap below.

"You're the leader of the Moon of Corrosion? You're the one who stirred up chaos right under the Jiangnan District's nose?"

Word of the Moon of Corrosion conflict couldn't be kept quiet.

With deliberate spread by certain parties, the whole world already knew about it.

Naturally, it hadn't escaped the Sea Dragon King's attention either.

If not for that, some no-name ronin like this guy wouldn't even be qualified to stand here.

Phoenixin Ren adjusted the brim of his hat.

All the pirates around him were baring their teeth, faces twisted like they were ready to devour him alive.

But not a hint of fear appeared on his face—instead, he smiled devilishly.

“That’s right, honorable Sea Dragon King! I am the squad leader of the Moon of Corrosion—Phoenixin Ren!”

Li Fengxian stared him down, then suddenly burst out laughing.

“Hahahaha! You’ve got some guts, kid. Showing up on Tianlong Island all by yourself—aren’t you afraid of dying?”

But then his face turned cold, and the temperature in the whole cavern seemed to drop to freezing.

“How did you find this place? You’d better explain clearly—or this’ll be your grave!”

The pirate crew's headquarters was top secret.

With countless islands across the Star Cluster Sea, they used the terrain to hide themselves.

Tianlong Island was tucked away in one of the most hidden regions.

As long as they stayed on the move and used the local geography, no force could track them down.

Anyone unfamiliar with the terrain could get lost among the islands and become a sitting duck.

Yet this ronin from Neon Nation, Phoenixin Ren, had found their headquarters with pinpoint precision.

That alone sparked murderous intent in the Sea Dragon King's heart.

"Hehehe!!"

The surrounding pirates had already drawn their daggers and guns.

Some of them licked their blades, the salty scent of blood making them all the more frenzied.

If Phoenixin Ren's answer displeased them in any way, they'd rush in and hack him to pieces!

But Phoenixin Ren remained unfazed by the bloodlust.

"It's simple. Because I have the ability. If I want to find your base, then I'll find it—no matter what."

The Sea Dragon King's eyes narrowed.

"An ability, huh? I see."

He leaned back in his chair, muttering, "This world's getting crazier by the day. Superhumans are appearing with all kinds of powers—no one knows what might show up next."

But that didn't mean he wasn't prepared.

Tianlong Island's location always changed at the whim of the Tianlong Pirate Crew—they never stayed in one spot for long.

“Ronin, why are you here? Tell me your purpose.”

“Let’s hear it.”

Chapter 702: Persuasion

Phoenixin Ren adjusted his clothes, glanced around at the pirates eyeing him like wolves, and slowly spread his arms.

“Your Majesty, Sea Dragon King, I’ve come bearing a great gift! A massive fortune for the Tianlong Pirate Crew!”

The moment he said that, the place erupted with mocking laughter.

Even the Sea Dragon King himself chuckled.

“Hahahaha!!”

“That guy just said he’s bringing us a huge fortune?”

“Ridiculous. Who does he think he is?”

“And who does he think we are?”

...

Phoenixin Ren paid no attention to the laughter.

He raised his voice. “Of course I know—gold and jewels mean nothing now. In this frozen world, it’s weapons, energy, food, and people—those are the real treasures!”

Beside the Sea Dragon King’s throne, a man with short silver-gray hair and dark red glasses pushed up his frames and said coolly,

“Ronin, do you even know what scale of ‘treasure’ means something to us Tianlong Pirates?”

In the southern seas, the only things worth hunting were entire nations.

Country-hunting—that was the kind of business that caught their interest.

Phoenixin Ren chuckled.

“Then, what if I told you... I’m here to invite you to share the riches of the Jiangnan District of Huaxu Nation with me?”

The laughter died instantly.

The pirates stared at Phoenixin Ren like he was insane.

Even the Sea Dragon King and his right-hand man, Bailian, frowned.

“You... have you gone mad?”

Bailian asked coldly.

Phoenixin Ren grinned widely and declared, “No, I’m not mad! You should know how rich the Jiangnan District is. A single city there holds more resources than your entire southern sea nation-states!”

“And I’m sure you’ve already heard of our deeds.”

“We, the Moon of Corrosion—thirteen of us—have left the Jiangnan District completely helpless.”

“We’ve beaten them head-on. Twice!”

The Sea Dragon King's eyes flickered with intrigue.

Of course he'd heard those stories.

Phoenixin Ren's words sparked murmurs among some pirates.

"I heard that district really has been having a hard time dealing with the Moon of Corrosion."

"Two defeats, and they only sent a few people. Maybe that place isn't as strong as we thought?"

"The facts are right here—Moon of Corrosion's leader is standing here, alive. Looks like whatever strength they had before the apocalypse took a real hit."

"They couldn't even wipe out thirteen people... tsk tsk, maybe they're not even as strong as our Tianlong Pirate Crew."

...

But just then, the captain of the First Fleet—Niro, a man with a hooked nose and ghostly pale skin—spoke up.

“Don’t underestimate a powerful nation. The depth of their foundations isn’t something you can guess.”

“If they were really as weak as you say, why didn’t you take that big prize for yourself? Why come begging to us?”

“Hahahaha!!”

The pirates burst into fresh laughter.

Phoenixin Ren laughed too. “We don’t have the manpower. So naturally, we can’t do much. That’s why I came here—to propose a partnership!”

Phoenixin Ren locked eyes with the ambitious pirate king on the throne.

“Your Majesty, Sea Dragon King, I imagine you’re not content ruling just these little seas, are you?”

“The oceans are resource-poor. They can’t sustain your looting forever.”

“But if you could score big from the Jiangnan District—that rich land could fund your pirate crew for decades!”

“And it would make the Tianlong Pirate Crew a household name!”

He pointed to himself.

“If you’re worried about how strong they are, then let me be your proof. I’ve exposed their hollow strength—they’re nowhere near as powerful as the rumors claim.”

Bailian snapped, “Silence! A mere ronin, trying to use us as bait? You think we’d fall for such a cheap trick? You’ve got a death wish!”

“Clang!”

“Click!”

Dozens of weapons were drawn and pointed at Phoenixin Ren.

The pirates who were laughing a moment ago had now completely turned hostile.

Phoenixin Ren, however, remained calm.

He didn't even glance at Bailian—his eyes stayed fixed on the silent Sea Dragon King.

With his hands in his pockets, he smiled. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You have the strength. I can guide you and help you avoid the navy."

"Trust me—if you don't seize this chance, you'll never get another shot at that fertile land!"

He turned to face the other pirates.

As they listened, some of them started to waver.

They were rulers of the southern seas. They'd destroyed many small southern nations. On the ocean, they had no rivals.

But the constant small raids were starting to bore them.

If there really was a chance to take down a major power and plunder its wealth—

That was the kind of insane move that could ignite the hearts of every Tianlong pirate!

Bailian folded his arms. After a brief silence, he sneered.

“Foolish.”

“You might’ve scored a few small wins, but you have no idea what it means to challenge a true superpower.”

“A pathetic ronin gang, daring to provoke a major force? That’s pure suicide.”

“You’re a lunatic, sure—but we’re not!”

“Pirates can be wild, but we’re not idiots!”

Bailian’s scolding made Phoenixin Ren’s eyes narrow.

“You’re right. I am a lunatic. But if even we could pull this off—what’s stopping the rulers of the southern seas?”

“You...”

Bailian was about to snap back but was silenced by a single look from the Sea Dragon King.

Bailian bowed slightly and stepped back.

The Sea Dragon King rested one hand on his knee, watching Phoenixin Ren with an amused look.

“So your name is Phoenixin Ren? You’re quite the character. Crazy enough. Bold enough.”

“A guy like you—if you showed up in the southern seas, I’d kill you without hesitation.”

“You’re too dangerous to leave as an enemy, and way too untrustworthy to accept as a subordinate.”

He waved a hand at Phoenixin Ren. “So—get lost. I’m not buying what you’re selling.”

The Sea Dragon King’s booming voice echoed through the cavern of Tianlong Island.

Phoenixin Ren narrowed his eyes.

The Sea Dragon King’s rejection was firm and final—and a major disappointment.

They'd lost five members in the last battle. To keep launching operations, they needed new reinforcements.

So he and Shinguuji Seiichiro had split up to search for help.

The pirates ruling the southern seas had seemed like the perfect allies.

But the Sea Dragon King rejected him flat-out, without a shred of hesitation.

Phoenixin Ren knew further persuasion would be pointless.

He smiled and bowed politely to the Sea Dragon King.

"As you wish."

Then he lifted his head, eyes blazing with fanatic fire.

"But I will show you—I'll set that land ablaze."

Chapter 703: Pirates and Ronin

Phoenixin Ren turned away with a shadowed glare after failing to sway the Tianlong Pirate Crew.

But just as he stepped out of the cave, a strange and eerie gaze followed him from the crowd behind.

The Sea Dragon King's voice echoed through the cavern.

“Foolish ronin! He has no idea how terrifying the foundations of such transcendent powers truly are.”

“In this apocalypse, ignorant men—even with great strength—will only waste their lives in vain.”

His gaze swept over those below him.

He noticed—some of his subordinates were tempted.

After all, their mortal enemy was the navy of the major nations.

Those advanced warships, equipped with the most cutting-edge weaponry, could annihilate their massive, mixed fleets with just a single vessel.

On land, armor and artillery had limitations, but out on the deep sea, naval power was as deadly as ever.

That was why, despite dominating the Star Cluster Sea, the Tianlong Pirate Crew never ventured beyond the coastal waters.

They dared not even approach the sharply defined deep-sea territories.

“You all listen carefully!”

The Sea Dragon King roared, “Without my permission, no one is to have any contact with those ronin! Otherwise, don’t say I didn’t warn you!”

The crowd below hurriedly bowed their heads in submission.

“Yes, my King!”

But among them, one skeletal, sharp-toothed man with a face like a demon had a strange gleam in his eye.

...

After leaving the cave, Phoenixin Ren didn’t rush to leave Tianlong Island.

As the Pirate Crew's main base, the island wasn't just home to pirates—it housed their families and laborers too.

Thousands of ships were moored around the island, though most were small boats and fishing vessels.

They'd only seized seven military ships from southern micronations, and even those were outdated models.

That was another reason the Sea Dragon King refused to take a risk with Phoenixin Ren.

Even if all thousand-plus ships attacked at once, they'd still be no match for a single modern battleship.

Phoenixin Ren thought for a moment, then traded a piece of bread to a roadside child for directions to the nearest bar.

The child cheerfully pointed him there, and Phoenixin Ren went. Amid everyone's surprised glances, he bought a few drinks.

As for payment—he used his gun and bullets.

Tianlong Island was a chaotic place, full of strangers. Even though Phoenixin Ren looked unfamiliar, no one suspected him of being an outsider.

Plus, members of the Pirate Crew came from different nations and regions, including some from Neon Nation.

Relying on his charisma and wit, Phoenixin Ren quickly blended in and started drinking happily with a group.

But the moment a few people wearing luxury-brand parkas and felt hats walked in, the bar's atmosphere fell silent.

A pirate next to Phoenixin Ren whispered that these men were under Kanute, captain of the Western Squadron.

In the strictly hierarchical Tianlong Pirate Crew, they ranked far above regular pirates or laborers—true military elite.

Among them was a short, squat man who looked almost comically stubby.

As the three entered, the short man greeted everyone around with a friendly grin.

Phoenixin Ren, holding a drink, smiled and sipped as he watched them.

The three of them slowly made their way to Phoenixin Ren's table.

The others immediately stood up and made room for them.

But Phoenixin Ren remained still, quietly observing.

The trio, acting as if he weren't even there, ordered drinks.

The short, round one was especially chatty. After a drink or two, he launched into stories of his past.

From what he said, he used to be a criminal and gang member in the Puron Archipelago.

He had the flair of a born comedian—whenever he got excited, he'd jump up, though even standing, he wasn't tall.

Holding a bottle in one hand, he told tales of gang life with exaggerated flair.

People around laughed heartily, and Phoenixin Ren, sipping his drink and lighting a cigar, chuckled along.

“Seven years ago—yeah, exactly seven years. We took out a traitor in Manhattan. I lost it at the time and strung that b*stard up on a power pole.”

“Predictably,” he shrugged, pulling a helpless expression, “the cops nabbed me.”

The bar burst out laughing.

“Hahahaha! You’re a f***ing genius!”

“You should’ve hung him outside the police station instead!”

The short man shook his head in mock frustration and continued, “Then those pigs—especially this 200-pound porker—tied me up.”

“They asked, ‘Who sent you to kill that guy?’ Wanna know what I told them?”

He scanned the room with playful anticipation.

Everyone stayed silent, waiting for the punchline.

The little man put on a straight face. “I told him, ‘Eat sh*t.’”

His vivid delivery made the bar erupt with laughter again.

After the laughs, he kept going. “Okay, so the fat guy punches me out cold right then and there.”

“Then they splash cold water on me to wake me up. He looks all smug and goes, ‘Remember anything now?’”

“So I go, ‘Didn’t I tell you to eat sh*t? What are you still doing here?’”

This time, the laughter was thunderous.

For these pirates, past crimes—especially jail time—weren’t stains. They were like medals of honor.

Even Phoenixin Ren couldn’t help but laugh.

“You’re one hell of a character.”

The moment he said that, the previously joking short man went dead serious.

The clownish grin vanished from his face.

He stared coldly at Phoenixin Ren, and his gaze sent a chill down everyone's spine.

"What did you just say? What do you mean by calling me a 'character'?"

Phoenixin Ren narrowed his eyes slightly.

He had already guessed—these guys were either sent by the Sea Dragon King or were his men.

"I just meant your story was entertaining."

The short man stared daggers at him. "Entertaining? So you're saying I was telling jokes for your amusement? Like a clown, just to make you laugh?"

The bar went silent.

The clown had changed faces in an instant—no one doubted it now.

When he was smiling, he seemed harmless and funny.

But now that he'd turned, people remembered—this man was an important officer in the pirate crew.

A killer without hesitation—for him, taking lives was as easy as eating a meal.

Chapter 704: Kanute

The short man suddenly lashed out at Phoenixin Ren, making the atmosphere in the tavern turn ice-cold in an instant.

Some people had already begun quietly slipping out, afraid that a fight might break out and drag them into it.

After all, the Western Squadron officers were notorious for killing without batting an eye. If they felt like it, they could kill just for fun.

The short man kept staring at Phoenixin Ren. "Tell me—what the h*ll did you mean just now? What the fk do you mean by saying I'm fking interesting?"

His eyes were as sharp as blades—only someone with bloodstained hands could look like that.

Yet Phoenixin Ren still smiled with ease.

He said casually, “I said you’re f**king interesting, and I meant it.”

The short man’s face darkened. His hand slowly reached into his coat, making the motion openly, without any pretense.

But then, suddenly, he burst out laughing and pointed at Phoenixin Ren.

“D*mn, this guy’s got guts! I almost thought I could scare you just now!”

The surrounding pirates laughed loudly as well.

“Hey, Druna! You owe us two machine guns!”

The short man—Druna—shook his head helplessly. “I underestimated him!”

Phoenixin Ren maintained his calm smile, watching these temperamental pirates.

This kind of trick might work to amuse others.

But compared to him, the so-called crimes of these pirates were nothing more than child’s play.

He was the real villain.

“Who sent you here?”

Phoenixin Ren downed a shot of whiskey and placed the empty glass aside, speaking lightly to the bartender, “You didn’t put enough sedative in the drink.”

The bartender’s face changed slightly but only smiled and took the glass away.

Druna said to Phoenixin Ren, “Let’s go. There’s someone who wants to see you. He’s very interested in what you said today.”

A smirk flickered in Phoenixin Ren’s eyes.

He knew it—those greedy and arrogant pirates couldn’t possibly ignore what he said.

No matter how strictly the Sea Dragon King forbade it, someone would always dare to take the risk.

Otherwise, they wouldn’t be pirates.

Phoenixin Ren followed the Western Squadron members onto a car. They drove around Tianlong Island for quite a while before arriving at a massive ironclad warship.

This was the headquarters of the Western Squadron of the Tianlong Pirate Crew.

And this ship belonged to the Western Squadron's captain—Kanute.

After hearing Phoenixin Ren's pitch earlier, this short, brown-skinned pirate from the southern seas was filled with desire.

He'd heard about the Moon of Corrosion stirring up chaos in the Jiangnan District.

To him, if just thirteen ronin could cause that much trouble,

Then his Western Squadron, with thousands of pirates and over thirty powerful Superhumans, could do far more.

If he could collaborate with Moon of Corrosion and raid that rich land, his name—Kanute—would become known across the world!

He might even earn the Sea Dragon King's favor and rise to become the leader of all seven fleets!

Phoenixin Ren was brought to Kanute's quarters.

The brown-skinned man with a hooked nose stared at him with sinister eyes.

"Ronin! What you said earlier in front of the Sea Dragon King—was it true?"

"Is the Jiangnan District really as weak as you claim?"

The smirk on Phoenixin Ren's lips deepened.

He spread his arms and said, "Of course not! If we were to take them head-on, say, by launching a direct assault on their capital—Blizzard City—just the thirteen of us wouldn't stand a chance."

"I'm very clear on that."

"But," his voice rose, "their territory is enormous! Larger than most nations."

"But they don't have enough manpower to defend every part of it!"

Phoenixin Ren extended his hand to Kanute.

“We’re not stupid enough to clash head-on. All we have to do is keep harassing them, wear them out, stretch their defenses thin.”

“Then, we can take whatever we want.”

“If it’s just Moon of Corrosion acting alone, our gains will always be limited. That’s why I came to you.”

“With the Tianlong Pirate Crew’s manpower, you’d be able to plunder freely.”

He shrugged, a touch of regret in his tone. “It’s just... I overestimated the Sea Dragon King’s courage.”

A murderous glint flashed in Kanute’s eyes. He barked, “Shut up! Who do you think you are, talking about our King like that?”

Phoenixin Ren smiled, raised his hands slightly, “Apologies, apologies. I meant no offense.”

“But this is a rare opportunity. Once missed, it won’t come again.”

He smiled as he added, “You won’t find allies like us that easily.”

Kanute narrowed his eyes.

He said slowly, “The biggest problem with reaching the Jiangnan District from the southern seas is their navy.”

“So tell me—do you have a way to bypass their defenses?”

Phoenixin Ren nodded with a smile.

“Of course.”

“If we couldn’t do that, how do you think we managed to land there in the first place?”

With Takeuchi Mayumi around, they could avoid any danger—Zhang Yi’s incident had been an exception.

“Heh heh... Heh heh heh! Interesting. Very interesting.”

Kanute's cold eyes locked on Phoenixin Ren. After a long moment, he finally broke into a grin.

"If that's the case, then let's go all out together!"

Phoenixin Ren laughed, "Here's to a great partnership!"

Before he could finish the sentence, a cold pistol was pressed against his forehead.

"You better not play any tricks. Or I'll personally put a bullet in your head."

Phoenixin Ren didn't even blink at the gun at his head.

"Of course. We're partners now... aren't we?"

...

Zhang Yi's side.

He only stayed one day in Tianhai City.

The Western formula drug was handed to Zhou Ke'er, who scraped some powder off for research. The rest was kept by Zhang Yi for emergencies.

Then, he brought a few people back to Blizzard City.

This time, aside from Liang Yue and Hua Hua, he also brought along Yang Xinxin.

The three of them took the Blizzard City express train back.

As soon as they got off, they were greeted by two familiar faces.

Two bodyguards in black combat uniforms and sunglasses.

They weren't from the Yan Yun Guards or the City Defense Force.

They were private bodyguards—or rather, private troops—of the Deng Family.

Zhang Yi suspected the Deng Family had considerable forces under their command as well.

“Mr. Zhang Yi, we were sent by Mr. Deng Yuanbo. He would like to invite you to lunch today—would that be convenient for you?”

Chapter 705: Lavish and Grand

Zhang Yi was a bit surprised by the Deng Family’s invitation.

He didn’t have much of a connection to them—he had only visited Deng Manor once before, and that was because of Deng Shentong’s invitation.

Now that Deng Shentong had died in battle, he assumed Deng Yuanbo would be too grief-stricken to deal with external matters.

Who would have thought he'd invite him over for lunch?

Zhang Yi pondered for a moment. Though he wasn’t sure what Deng Yuanbo’s intentions were, he had a strong feeling it was related to Deng Shentong’s death.

The Deng Family held considerable power in the Jiangnan District, and since the family head was personally inviting him, Zhang Yi decided to show proper respect.

He looked at the two bodyguards and smiled, “Mind if I bring a few friends along?”

The two guards looked at Yang Xinxin and Liang Yue, then nodded.

“Of course.”

Their job was only to escort Zhang Yi. Whether he brought others or not wouldn’t affect the conversation.

“Alright then. Thank you.”

The two bodyguards stepped aside respectfully. “This way, please.”

Zhang Yi and the others followed them into a car, which headed toward Deng Manor along a road Zhang Yi found somewhat familiar.

The black luxury vehicle was very spacious in the back—warm and lavish, with a built-in fridge stocked with alcohol and drinks.

Zhang Yi looked at the driver and the guards up front and quietly pulled out his satellite phone.

He exchanged a glance with Liang Yue and Yang Xinxin. Both instantly understood—he wanted to communicate via text.

Zhang Yi: “The Deng Family invited me to lunch. What do you two think? Is this a friendly gesture... or something more hostile?”

Liang Yue furrowed her brow and thought for a while. “I’m not sure either...”

Hua Hua, sitting on Zhang Yi’s thigh, curiously jumped onto his shoulder. It couldn’t read, but still acted interested, wanting to join the fun.

Yang Xinxin smiled and quickly typed on her phone:

“Recruitment.”

Zhang Yi glanced at her and typed another question: “How do you figure?”

Yang Xinxin’s lips curved into a mysterious smile.

“Based on current intel, Blizzard City doesn’t have many top-tier combatants. We know of the six Investigation Captains, Chief of Operations Tu Yunlie, and Sun Luxuan, the bodyguard at Zhu Zheng’s side.”

“Given the city’s management structure, it’s unlikely that hidden powerhouses exist—and even if they do, not many.”

“The Deng Family heavily relied on Deng Shentong, a top-level superhuman, to maintain their position.”

“Now that he’s dead, that’s going to seriously shake their standing.”

“And with Bian Junwu also having fallen, the power balance in Blizzard City is seriously off. A reshuffling may be imminent.”

“Inviting you here isn’t about targeting you—it wouldn’t help them at all.”

“Most likely, they want to bring you in. Make you one of theirs.”

Yang Xinxin’s analysis made perfect sense, easing some of Zhang Yi’s nerves.

In the world ahead, top-tier strength would determine the rise and fall of factions.

Regular soldiers—even hot weapons—were slowly losing dominance on the battlefield.

Otherwise, how could the thirteen members of Moon of Corrosion be so arrogant in the Jiangnan District?

“They want to recruit me?”

Zhang Yi frowned.

He typed: “But I don’t want to get involved in Blizzard City’s power games.”

He’d never been someone who sought power.

If he had, after taking down Yuan Kongye, he could’ve gone straight to Zhu Zheng to claim credit.

Yang Xinxin thought a bit and replied: “Just feel them out first. But clearly, the Deng Family won’t openly oppose you right now. Even if you’re going to say no, you should still leave them some hope.”

Zhang Yi nodded in understanding.

He knew how these social games worked.

Still, he found it amusing—after all this apocalyptic chaos, people still clung to such etiquette wherever social structures remained.

Half an hour later, the vehicle arrived at Deng Manor.

The place looked just as he remembered, though it now felt colder and heavier.

Even the expressions of the Deng Family's guards seemed more grim than before.

The Celestial Squad's failure and Deng Shentong's death had cast a long, somber shadow over this family.

It was a gloom that hadn't lifted since.

Upon arrival, they were greeted by a sharply dressed, elegant man.

He looked around forty years old, but was strikingly handsome and had the demeanor of a gentleman.

This was Lian Cheng, the Deng Family's butler.

"Mr. Zhang, Miss Yang, Miss Liang—welcome to Deng Manor. The Master has prepared a grand lunch and invites you to join him."

Hua Hua, nestled in Yang Xinxin's arms, let out a dissatisfied "meow," seemingly unhappy at being ignored.

Lian Cheng was surprised, then quickly smiled. "Ah, my apologies for the oversight—I'll have some cat food brought immediately!"

Satisfied, Hua Hua narrowed its eyes and snuggled back into Yang Xinxin's arms.

It mostly slept during the day anyway—too lazy to care about much else.

The three of them followed Lian Cheng forward.

Zhang Yi had never been to Deng Yuanbo's residence before.

Upon entering the parlor, he saw dozens of women in elegant qipaos lined up on both sides, bowing politely.

"Welcome, Mr. Zhang Yi, Miss Yang, Miss Liang!"

The room glittered with gold and jade, and it stretched so far you couldn't see its end—it was impossible to tell how vast the space truly was.

With all these beautiful women lined up, Zhang Yi could clearly feel Deng Yuanbo's sincerity.

Yang Xinxin, however, frowned slightly—she wasn't a fan of this kind of reception.

Walking beside Zhang Yi, Lian Cheng smiled and asked, "Mr. Zhang, are you satisfied with the environment?"

Zhang Yi thought: I'm very satisfied.

But in front of Yang Xinxin and Liang Yue, he had to suppress his grin and gave only a cool nod.

"Not bad."

This level of calm? Zhang Yi was giving himself full marks.

Even Lian Cheng was surprised by Zhang Yi's composure.

He thought, No wonder the Master thinks so highly of him—what nerves! I used to dismiss him as a mere warehouse clerk. I was wrong.

Soon after, they passed through an opulent hallway and arrived at the dining room.

The entire place was decked out in red—lively, even a bit festive.

It felt... odd to Zhang Yi.

Deng Shentong's body wasn't even cold yet, and they were already throwing such a grand affair?

But maybe the old man liked liveliness. Understandable.

After the Ice Age arrived, many people had developed a fondness for the color red—it gave them psychological warmth.

Deng Yuanbo sat at the massive round table, wearing a bright red Tang suit, smiling warmly.

Lian Cheng announced, "Mr. Deng, Mr. Zhang Yi and guests have arrived."

Zhang Yi stepped forward and greeted him politely, "Hello, Mr. Deng. Sorry to intrude."

Yang Xinxin and Liang Yue also said calmly, "Hello, Mr. Deng."

Chapter 706: Deng Yuanbo's Gift

Deng Yuanbo looked at Zhang Yi and the others with a beaming smile. "Good, good, I'm very happy that you all came."

"Come, come, have a seat! Make yourselves at home."

"Zhang Yi, you and my nephew Deng Shentong have met before. If you don't mind, you can call me Uncle Deng."

Zhang Yi was a little surprised.

Deng Yuanbo was clearly trying to close the distance right away. Just as Yang Xinxin said, he was trying to win Zhang Yi over.

Zhang Yi smiled and nodded. No one slaps a smiling face, and given Deng Yuanbo's age, calling him "Uncle" wasn't a loss.

"Uncle Deng."

Hearing Zhang Yi's greeting, Deng Yuanbo's smile deepened.

"Good. Since you called me Uncle Deng today, I can't let that go unrewarded."

He gave a glance to the side.

Soon, a beautiful woman in a qipao walked over to Zhang Yi, carrying a tray.

On the tray was a silver box.

"Consider this a greeting gift. I hope you won't mind."

Deng Yuanbo said with a cheerful grin.

"Oh, as for these two young ladies, there are gifts prepared for them later as well."

Deng Yuanbo's attitude was direct, almost shamelessly trying to win Zhang Yi over.

Zhang Yi remained alert inside.

No one shows kindness for no reason — well, that sounded a bit rude.

Better to say, “No one comes to the Temple of Three Treasures for nothing.”

Still, he was curious about what this greeting gift was.

After all, he didn’t feel like he lacked anything right now.

So he asked, “Uncle Deng, what is this?”

Deng Yuanbo noticed the indifference in Zhang Yi’s gaze.

But his expression turned a little playful.

“Poor child, you’ve suffered out there for over half a year and haven’t had a single good day. What’s inside this box,” he pointed at the silver container, “can save you half a year’s worth of training time!”

Zhang Yi’s expression froze immediately.

Liang Yue and Yang Xinxin also looked serious.

“It... can boost my strength?”

Zhang Yi looked at Deng Yuanbo in disbelief.

“But...”

Deng Yuanbo smiled. “But you think that for a Superhuman to get stronger, they can only absorb someone else’s origin, right?”

Zhang Yi smiled and nodded. “That’s right.”

Deng Yuanbo chuckled proudly.

“Technically, that’s true. But that method is no different from a beast feeding.”

“And the biggest difference between us humans and beasts is that we know how to use tools.”

“This thing is called Compound X. Only our Deng Family can produce it. Once you use it, a Superhuman’s strength can grow rapidly.”

Zhang Yi nodded thoughtfully.

“I see. So that’s why Blizzard City doesn’t have a large population, yet it’s full of elite Superhumans?”

Deng Yuanbo sighed with emotion.

“That’s right! In this vast world, there are countless gifted individuals. How could they all just happen to gather in Blizzard City?”

“It’s because once a Superhuman’s potential is discovered here, they get the best resources for cultivation. That’s why they become so powerful!”

“Maybe some people around you had the potential to become Investigation Captains. But before they even awakened, they died in all kinds of crises.”

Zhang Yi nodded, unable to help but sigh. “It’s true, being born in a good place really matters.”

Though he remained calm on the surface, Zhang Yi’s mind was still focused on that Compound X.

He rubbed his chin. “Uncle Deng, just how much can this thing increase someone’s strength?”

Right now, Zhang Yi had hit a bottleneck in his power.

He had absorbed a Delta-level elite from Moon of Corrosion, but the gain was minimal.

So he was highly skeptical of the compound's effectiveness.

Deng Yuanbo smiled and said, "Let me put it this way — you know Deng Shentong, right? His rapid growth to his current level was all thanks to this stuff."

A flash of surprise crossed Zhang Yi's eyes.

Deng Shentong?

Even a Superhuman of Investigation Captain caliber relied on drugs?

But then... could this be like what Bian Junwu used, with serious side effects?

Deng Yuanbo saw the doubt in Zhang Yi's heart.

He said, "Actually, this compound works similarly to your Superhuman Devouring ability."

"The only difference is, we use scientific methods to extract the source of a power, so you can absorb it more efficiently."

Zhang Yi felt uneasy. He never trusted people easily.

Let alone someone he was meeting for the first time, like Deng Yuanbo.

"This gift is too heavy, Uncle Deng. I really can't accept it!"

Zhang Yi said with a polite smile, trying to decline.

Who knew if this stuff had toxins? What if the Deng Family used it to control him?

Deng Yuanbo nodded.

"You're cautious. That's a good thing. If you weren't, you probably wouldn't have survived in the danger-filled Outer City and achieved what you have."

He pointed at the box of Compound X and said with a calm but forceful tone:

“I rarely give gifts. And when I do, no one turns them down. This is just a greeting gift. I, Deng Yuanbo, wouldn’t stoop so low as to demand anything in return for such a thing.”

With Deng Yuanbo putting it like that, it would be rude for Zhang Yi to refuse again.

He nodded. “Then I’ll thank Uncle Deng for your generosity!”

Zhang Yi took the silver box and stored it in his Dimensional Space.

Only then did Deng Yuanbo nod in satisfaction.

“Alright, you’ve come a long way, and you must be hungry. Let’s eat!”

Lian Cheng clapped his hands, and a dozen maids floated in gracefully, each carrying golden trays. In no time, the table was covered with dishes.

The food was lavish. The Deng Manor had its own chefs and stockpiles of ingredients.

So everything on the table looked incredibly appetizing.

Zhang Yi didn't hold back. He picked up his chopsticks and began to eat.

But after a few bites, he noticed the ingredients weren't fresh.

On second thought, it made sense.

No matter how powerful the Deng Family was, they couldn't enjoy fresh luxuries in the apocalypse.

In this regard, Zhang Yi had them beat.

During the meal, Deng Yuanbo didn't discuss any other topics. "Don't talk while eating, don't speak when sleeping." He was someone who held high standards for quality of life.

It wasn't until they finished the meal and the maids had cleared the table that Deng Yuanbo called Zhang Yi into the nearby study.

Meanwhile, Yang Xinxin and Liang Yue were invited by Lian Cheng to the lounge next door.

Zhang Yi entered the study. After a few polite exchanges, Deng Yuanbo got straight to the point.

“Zhang Yi, you don’t have any background in Blizzard City. If you want to stand firm in Jiangnan District, you’ll have to make some achievements.”

“Zhu Shuai wanted you to be the captain of the Celestial Hound Squad. Why did you turn it down?”

Chapter 707: Deng Yuanbo’s True Motive

Deng Yuanbo’s words sounded like he was lobbying on behalf of Zhu Zheng.

But Zhang Yi couldn’t quite read his true intentions, so he said, “I’ve gotten used to my freedom—I don’t like being ordered around. If I become this squad captain, wouldn’t I have to do whatever the higher-ups say?”

Deng Yuanbo smiled. “But even if you're in Tianhai City, do you really think you can ignore orders from Blizzard City?”

Zhang Yi gave a meaningful smile. “At the very least, there's room for flexibility.”

He couldn’t reject them openly, but what about passive resistance behind the scenes?

Blizzard City couldn't possibly impose strict control over all of the Jiangnan Thirteen Protectors. At the very least, they wouldn't force them to act.

Otherwise, the entire region would collapse.

Deng Yuanbo raised an eyebrow. "Why are all the young people nowadays like you? Not interested in fame or fortune, just wanting to lie flat and live your own life. You're even turning down leadership roles."

He sighed. "Ah, times really have changed!"

Zhang Yi chuckled.

"Indeed, it's not like your generation anymore. So please understand my decision!"

Deng Yuanbo shook his head.

"That part doesn't matter to me. Let's put it this way—what if we made you a temporary captain? Would that be acceptable to you?"

"Temporary captain?"

Zhang Yi repeated those two words, his demeanor calm, saying nothing more.

Wasn't that just a temporary team leader who had to take responsibility?

And what benefits would there be after the mission was over?

Deng Yuanbo walked over and smiled at him. "Making you the captain was a decision made after much discussion by many people."

"Everyone appreciates your laid-back nature and lack of ambition."

"Rest assured, as long as you agree to this, your efforts won't be in vain. I'll offer you something you won't be able to refuse."

Zhang Yi's eyes lit up.

"Oh?"

Deng Yuanbo said slowly, "You people from the Outer City have no concept of superhuman powers. The fact that you've managed to grow step by step is thanks to your natural talent, but otherwise, you've been groping around like blind men feeling out an elephant."

"That leads to a lot of detours—wasting your talents for nothing."

“Our Deng Group, on the other hand, has been studying superpowers for over fifty years!”

Zhang Yi’s eyes sparkled. “Half a century? Does that mean Superhumans have existed for that long?”

Deng Yuanbo replied, “Mutation is an inevitable part of biological evolution.”

“With such a massive human population, Superhumans have appeared in every era. It’s just that now, due to mass-scale mutations, it's become common knowledge.”

“Back then, the study of Superhumans was mostly for medicine and military use. Honestly, those studies brought our Deng Group quite a bit of profit.”

He smiled at Zhang Yi. “We have a professional team that can help you and your companions improve your strength, unlock your potential, and provide top-notch training.”

“You’re strong now, yes. But there’s still a lot of room for growth. And don’t even get me started on your companions.”

“By now, they probably can’t even keep up with your pace, right?”

Zhang Yi had no way to refute that.

The gap in natural talent had made the power disparity within his team more and more obvious.

Still, Zhang Yi wasn't ready to trust Deng Yuanbo so easily.

"I don't get it—why are you helping me?"

"To be blunt, if your aim is to turn me into a tool for the Deng Family, someone who follows your every command, I can't do that."

To his surprise, Deng Yuanbo burst out laughing, head tilted back.

"Hahahahaha!!"

"Of course I don't have such thoughts. Even Zhu Zheng couldn't tempt you with the position of Investigation Captain—I'm not arrogant enough to think I can offer better terms."

Zhang Yi was even more puzzled.

“Then what’s in it for you? Why go so far to help me?”

Deng Yuanbo’s smile gradually faded.

Whatever he thought of, it caused him to fall silent. He slowly turned his back and looked out into the courtyard at the falling snow.

Zhang Yi waited for his answer.

After nearly a full minute—just as Zhang Yi was about to lose patience—Deng Yuanbo finally spoke in a deep voice:

“I’m helping you to avenge my nephew.”

Zhang Yi immediately thought of Deng Shentong, the confident and striking young man he’d spoken with only briefly.

His death had come as a complete shock to Zhang Yi.

And as the head of the Deng Family, Deng Yuanbo clearly couldn’t accept such a cruel reality.

“Revenge? Even if you didn’t say it, I was already planning to wipe out everyone from Moon of Corrosion.”

Zhang Yi said quietly.

To his surprise, Deng Yuanbo shook his head.

“The people of Moon of Corrosion were just the knife. The real culprit... must be someone inside Blizzard City!”

Zhang Yi’s heart trembled.

He had his suspicions too, but hearing it straight from someone like Deng Yuanbo gave the theory much more weight.

“Someone from Blizzard City killed Deng Shentong? That...”

Zhang Yi didn’t know what to say. This matter had nothing to do with him, and he had no desire to get caught in Blizzard City’s internal power struggles.

Deng Yuanbo’s eyes were full of gloom.

“My nephew was gifted from a young age—exceptionally bright. After the apocalypse began, our Deng Family spared no effort in nurturing him, turning him into one of the strongest Superhumans in the Jiangnan District!”

“His future was boundless. He could’ve become the most brilliant figure of this era.”

“But jealousy is inevitable.”

Deng Yuanbo turned back to Zhang Yi.

“Someone borrowed Moon of Corrosion’s blade to kill him!”

Zhang Yi frowned slightly. “If you know who it was, why not go to Zhu Shuai? With the Deng Family’s power, even if the perpetrator is an Investigation Captain, you should be able to eliminate them, right?”

Deng Yuanbo said, “I don’t know who exactly did it. But I can narrow it down.”

“Who benefited most from Shentong’s death? That’s your prime suspect.”

He didn’t name names.

But his words sent a deep shock through Zhang Yi.

Not going to Zhu Zheng... that implied he didn't trust even Zhu Zheng.

Because it was possible that Zhu Zheng had Deng Shentong eliminated to solidify his own power.

And as for the other factions in Blizzard City—Tu Yunlie, the Reincarnation Squad, and more—they could all be suspects in the plot.

Zhang Yi felt the weight of it all, and said to Deng Yuanbo:

"I don't want to get involved. No matter how tempting your offer is, if I'm swept into a storm of power struggles, I and everyone around me will be buried with no grave to speak of!"

If Zhu Zheng really was the mastermind—what could he possibly do to fight back?

Chapter 708: Enhancement Experiment

Deng Yuanbo shook his head.

"Don't worry, I'm not asking you to go after anyone for me. All I want is for you to complete this mission—and do it well."

He stared at Zhang Yi, enunciating each word: “All you need to do... is perform better than the Reincarnation Squad.”

After hearing that, Zhang Yi suddenly realized that Deng Yuanbo’s real purpose was to block Gao Changkong’s path to promotion.

“You suspect Gao Changkong?”

“Not just Gao Changkong!”

Deng Yuanbo said grimly.

“This mission must be completed by you. And you’re going to be the key figure we put forward as our banner.”

“Someone killed my nephew to use his death as a catalyst for reshuffling power in Blizzard City!”

“That’s something I, this old man, absolutely won’t allow!”

“Only if an outsider like you handles this matter will the balance of power in Blizzard City remain stable.”

Zhang Yi didn’t completely believe the old man’s words.

This guy was a thousand-year-old fox—when it came to scheming and political maneuvering, he was far more experienced than Zhang Yi.

If he believed him too easily, he might end up being sold out without even knowing it.

Still—

“So you’re saying the reason you’re helping me and my teammates grow stronger... is just to make sure I’m the one who takes down Moon of Corrosion? So the credit doesn’t go to anyone else?”

“Yes, exactly.”

Deng Yuanbo nodded.

“Whoever takes down Moon of Corrosion will gain the highest prestige in Blizzard City! Since they come from Neon Nation, they’re very special—you understand that.”

This explanation was just convincing enough for Zhang Yi to accept.

The Deng Family had suffered a major blow, and what they feared most was another power reshuffle in Blizzard City.

Only by preventing others from earning that massive merit could the Deng Family maintain their footing.

Putting that aside, Zhang Yi was very interested in what Deng Yuanbo had said about helping his team members get stronger.

“How exactly are you going to help us? With that Compound X?”

But Deng Yuanbo gave a cunning smile—that kind of grin that didn’t look like a good guy’s. More like Uncle Li sneaking off with something stolen.

“That stuff’s not really useful for you—it’s actually meant for your teammates!”

Zhang Yi: “Huh?”

So it doesn’t work on me?

Deng Yuanbo said, “You’ve been through countless battles and absorbed a massive amount of Superhuman essence. Frankly, I’m amazed—it’s nearly impossible to cultivate someone of your caliber in the Outer City. But you did it. That’s nothing short of a miracle!”

A figure flashed through Zhang Yi's mind—Yuan Kongye.

Back then, she had absorbed the essence of over thirty Superhumans and unlocked her Epsilon-level power.

In the end, Zhang Yi absorbed the remnant of her essence.

That was an incredible stroke of fortune!

Without it, there was no way he'd be at his current level.

"Just a lucky break."

Zhang Yi said flatly.

Deng Yuanbo continued, "I don't know what kind of stroke of luck you had, but clearly, you've hit a bottleneck. At this stage, it's extremely difficult to grow further just by absorbing more essence."

"And yes, Compound X won't help either."

As he spoke, he reached over and picked up a celadon teacup from the table.

“It’s like this teacup. It can only hold so much water, right? No matter how hard you keep pouring, it’ll just overflow.”

Zhang Yi quickly understood what he meant.

“You’re talking about increasing the container’s capacity?”

Deng Yuanbo nodded with satisfaction.

“Exactly!”

Zhang Yi suddenly thought of Deng Shentong.

He shook his head and gave a wry smile. “So you still haven’t found a way to do that yet, have you? Otherwise, Deng Shentong wouldn’t have been stuck at Delta-level power.”

At the mention of Deng Shentong, Deng Yuanbo sighed deeply.

“Shentong did hit his limit. Delta-level—that was his cap. We tried all kinds of ways to break through that biological ceiling and trigger a more powerful mutation.”

“But genetics is the domain of the gods. Mortals like us... can’t touch that so easily.”

He pointed at Zhang Yi with the hand holding the teacup.

“You’re the same. Even though you’re still a bit below the Investigation Captain level, it’s nearly impossible to close that gap in a short time.”

“So, boosting your teammates is the most cost-effective option.”

He poured himself another cup of tea, sipping it as he looked through the glass window toward the lounge next door—where Liang Yue sat with her long blade in her arms, eyes closed in meditation.

“Forcefully enhancing someone’s power requires a tough vessel and a vast enough capacity. Otherwise, the body can’t withstand the sudden influx of energy.”

“This kind of experiment isn’t for everyone. You have to pick someone with top-tier potential and unwavering willpower.”

“That martial artist beside you—she’s a flawless piece of raw jade. If we can fully awaken her potential, I believe she won’t be any weaker than you. She’ll be a powerful asset!”

With Deng Yuanbo’s resources, it was a simple matter to look into Liang Yue’s background.

And it was jaw-dropping.

Three generations of martial artists. Her grandfather and father were both national martial arts masters.

Liang Yue herself had mastered over three hundred martial arts styles, including many practical fighting systems from abroad.

By seventeen, she had already earned the Wu Ying-level title and served as a bodyguard for high-ranking officials.

Someone capable of all that couldn’t be called one-in-ten-thousand—it was more like one-in-a-million.

Deng Yuanbo glanced subtly at Zhang Yi and kept one thought to himself.

In his eyes, Liang Yue—with her superior all-around qualities—had even more potential for growth than Zhang Yi.

After all, someone who had become a bodyguard for that place must have passed trials that were practically hellish. Deng Yuanbo understood that all too well.

And Zhang Yi?

He was just a humble warehouse manager in Tianhai City.

Even with talent, he couldn't compare to someone like Liang Yue, who'd undergone strict, elite-level training from childhood.

"So, Zhang Yi—will you accept my help? It can only benefit you."

"You're going to need reliable people by your side for the battles to come."

Zhang Yi stared at Deng Yuanbo's shoes, his brow furrowed, caught in deep internal conflict.

Could he trust Deng Yuanbo?

That was hard to say.

But clearly, this was a rare opportunity.

If Deng Shentong hadn't died, the Deng Group wouldn't be offering him help at all.

It'd be a shame to let this chance slip by.

Deng Yuanbo didn't press him, even offering kindly, "This is something worth thinking over carefully. After all, you and the Deng Family don't have much of a relationship—it's normal for you to be wary of us."

"But this is truly a rare opportunity for you. I hope you can seize your future."

Zhang Yi took a deep breath. "I need some time to think. Not long—just a bit."

Deng Yuanbo smiled. "Of course."

Zhang Yi couldn't decide on his own.

He decided to talk it over with Yang Xinxin.

Chapter 709: Liang Yue's Willingness

Zhang Yi quickly headed to the lounge next door and found Yang Xinxin and Liang Yue.

He had them both lean in as he quietly explained the situation.

This was an opportunity he couldn't afford to miss—he didn't want to waste time. Besides, who knew when Moon of Corrosion might resurface? Time was of the essence.

If a decision was to be made, it had to be made fast!

Liang Yue felt a sudden stir in her heart after hearing Zhang Yi's explanation.

The Deng Family definitely had advanced knowledge when it came to Superhuman genetics.

It was rumored that the gene serums used in Blizzard City were all developed with their assistance.

Liang Yue was eager to grow stronger.

So she said to Zhang Yi, "I'm willing to give it a try! After all, I'll be the one taking the risk. Let me go first—if it works and there are no side effects, we can let the others do it too."

Zhang Yi gave her a sideways glance. “Have you always been this brave?”

He didn’t even know what to say to her.

Liang Yue always had this unexplainable sense of justice and self-sacrifice.

But to Zhang Yi, it just felt like she didn’t take her own life seriously enough.

Liang Yue replied helplessly, “What else can I do? We’re about to go to war with Moon of Corrosion again. If we don’t boost our strength, we’ll just drag you down.”

She thought about the last time—she’d basically just been along for the ride.

If she hadn’t been with Zhang Yi, could she really have taken on the Superhumans from Moon of Corrosion?

Most likely not.

Those Superhumans had probably devoured countless others to reach their level.

And her? She'd always been living off Zhang Yi's leftovers.

Even though she'd absorbed the essence of two Moon of Corrosion members before, the boost still hadn't satisfied her.

She wanted to grow stronger—strong enough to protect everyone around her!

The feeling of losing someone she cared about... she never wanted to experience that helplessness again.

At that moment, Yang Xinxin also spoke up after careful consideration.

"I think... we don't necessarily have to reject the offer."

Zhang Yi raised his brows. "Oh?"

"Xinxin, what's your take on this?"

Yang Xinxin looked at Zhang Yi, then glanced at Liang Yue, and said in a soft voice:

“The Deng Family has no reason to harm us.”

“Blizzard City needs you right now, Brother. And since you accepted the mission, they need to protect you even more.”

“So they won’t try anything right now. Instead, they’ll help you defeat Moon of Corrosion to preserve Jiangnan District’s reputation.”

There was more she didn’t say out loud.

Even if the Dengs were scheming something, as long as it was Liang Yue going and not Zhang Yi, the risk was manageable.

To her, if it didn’t directly involve Zhang Yi, then it wasn’t a big deal.

Seeing that even Yang Xinxin recommended accepting the Deng Family’s help, Liang Yue said, “Zhang Yi, let me do it!”

Zhang Yi gave her a deep look.

After thinking it through, he decided to cooperate with the Deng Family.

Because if Liang Yue succeeded, maybe the others could also become stronger through this method.

So Zhang Yi gave a firm nod, then returned to Deng Yuanbo's study and made his stance clear.

"We're willing to accept the Deng Family's help!"

"But I need to say something first—it might sound a little impolite."

Zhang Yi's eyes glinted with a warning light.

"You were the one who offered to help us. We're doing this because it benefits both sides. So we don't owe you anything."

"I am grateful, yes. But if I ever find out that you've secretly done something to my companions..."

His voice turned cold.

"Then I won't pretend like nothing happened."

Deng Yuanbo smiled pleasantly and leisurely sipped his tea.

“Of course.”

Zhang Yi then discussed the specifics of the support with Deng Yuanbo.

Liang Yue would need to undergo the experiment herself.

Theoretically, this was essentially a synthetic form of Devouring—using genetic techniques to rapidly unlock a Superhuman’s potential.

Take Zhang Yi, for example—he was immensely powerful now, but only because of all the essence he’d absorbed from other Superhumans.

If not for that, even with Delta-level potential, his starting power when first awakening wouldn’t have been that high.

Superhuman ranks didn’t directly equate to strength. They reflected innate potential.

Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon...

Each tier meant higher potential and greater talent.

It was like drawing cards in a gacha game—N, R, SR, SSR, UR.

Since the age of mass mutation had just begun, the classification of Superhumans was still somewhat rough.

People could only be categorized based on clearly distinct differences between ranks.

In reality, even within the same rank, there were wide gaps in talent—often dictated by power type.

The higher the rank, the faster the growth and the greater the ceiling.

Yet even immensely gifted Superhumans had died at the hands of lower-ranked ones—or even ordinary humans—if their potential had never been unlocked.

That was why a Delta-level Investigation Captain from Blizzard City could easily crush an Outer City lord of the same rank.

Blizzard City used science and technology to maximize Superhuman potential.

Meanwhile, most Outer City Superhumans grew in a crude, undisciplined manner—raw and undeveloped.

But Liang Yue? She was like an ultra-rare SSR card!

Her base stats were already close to the limit of human potential.

With just a blade in hand, she could fight a Superhuman in close combat even without activating powers.

Now that she was a Superhuman, no one could predict how high her ceiling might be!

Liang Yue was open-minded about it all. She stepped up to Deng Yuanbo with grace.

“Mr. Deng, I’ll leave it to you!”

Deng Yuanbo’s eyes lit up as he looked at her—the gleam of a perfect jade stone. It was as if he’d discovered the legendary Heshi Jade.

Zhang Yi added, “I need to contact her every day. That must be guaranteed.”

Deng Yuanbo nodded. “You’re cautious—and that’s wise. But this time, I genuinely want to help. If it would ease your concerns, I’d even allow you to stay at Deng Manor and live with her.”

Zhang Yi thought about it, but ultimately turned him down.

The situation in Blizzard City was still unclear. He didn’t want anyone mistaking him for part of the Deng Family.

Deng Yuanbo took a step forward. “Actually, you could try our full package too. Who knows—maybe your potential still has room to grow.”

Zhang Yi smiled and shook his head.

“No need for that.”

Deng Yuanbo laughed heartily. “Well, if you ever change your mind, come find me anytime. I believe you’ll come back!”

Zhang Yi replied with a few polite words and smoothly moved the topic along.

Chapter 710: Unlimited Potential

Liang Yue remained at the Deng residence, where, according to Deng Yuanbo, she would undergo genetic experiments.

The process would be similar to what the members of the Celestial Squad had experienced.

Zhang Yi had already made up his mind—he wasn't going to take any risks for now.

But if Liang Yue succeeded, he could have others like Uncle You and Fatty Xu try next.

As for the cost of the experiment? That wasn't something he needed to worry about.

After all, he'd done the Deng Family a huge favor—it was only right that they repay him with benefits.

But for himself...

Zhang Yi thought about the bottleneck in his power and couldn't help but feel a little lost.

"Is my ability capped at Delta?"

"If not, then why is Devouring getting less and less effective?"

Zhang Yi left the Deng residence with Yang Xinxin, who was carrying Hua Hua in her arms.

Meanwhile, Liang Yue was escorted by the butler Lian Cheng into the internal lab at Deng Manor.

Back in the study, Deng Yuanbo still stood before the giant floor-to-ceiling window, watching Zhang Yi's silhouette disappear into the distance.

"This kid... is cautious to an admirable degree."

Deng Yuanbo sighed.

"If you had even half—no, a third—of his caution, would you have ended up like that?"

His voice was filled with regret.

Just then, from behind what had appeared to be a solid wall, a low voice echoed.

"This guy really is hard to read."

Hearing that voice, Deng Yuanbo turned slightly. "Oh? That's why you have your eye on him?"

“But do you really believe he can beat Gao Changkong?”

Even Deng Yuanbo couldn't help but doubt it.

Zhang Yi had performed impressively during the last raid on Moon of Corrosion.

But in the end, he'd only taken down minor members—and picked off two already-injured ones.

Yet the person behind the wall had insisted: Zhang Yi had to be the one to do it.

Otherwise, Deng Yuanbo would never have treated Zhang Yi with such eagerness.

In Blizzard City, who didn't want access to the Deng Family's technology?

The voice came again, deep and firm: “Don't underestimate him. His potential is not beneath that of the Six Investigation Captains. In fact, it might be higher.”

A flash of shock crossed Deng Yuanbo's eyes.

Blizzard City's six Investigation Captains had all developed their Delta-level potential to the extreme.

If Zhang Yi's ceiling surpassed even theirs, then that meant...

"Epsilon?"

There was a pause behind the wall, then the voice slowly replied:

"Our understanding of mutation is shallow. Even after half a century of genetic research, the Deng Family has only glimpsed vague shadows."

"That's the domain of gods. How can mortals touch it?"

"When I saw Zhang Yi's battle in Jiangning City, I finally understood—everyone underestimated him."

"He's like a massive void—bottomless and unfathomable. People like that... we must win them over. They must not become our enemies."

Deng Yuanbo's eyes burned with determination.

What's the most valuable thing in the 21st century?

Talent.

Especially after the apocalypse began, nurturing a top-tier Superhuman would yield returns a hundred—no, a thousand—times over!

He made up his mind: he would invest in Zhang Yi, turn him into someone on his side.

Right now, Zhang Yi hadn't sided with any faction in Blizzard City. His background was clean—like a blank sheet of paper.

Now was the best time to recruit him.

But... if he had that idea, wouldn't other factions think the same?

Deng Yuanbo frowned slightly.

In terms of foundation, only Zhu Zheng—the Supreme Commander—could rival him in Jiangnan District.

“As long as we keep Zhang Yi from joining them, we’ll be fine. With his laid-back personality, he doesn’t like being controlled anyway.”

“The stronger I help him become, the less he’ll rely on Zhu Zheng.”

...

On Zhang Yi’s end, he and Yang Xinxin had left Deng Manor.

Escorted by Deng Family vehicles, they arrived at Zone A, where a private villa had been specially prepared for him.

After moving in, Zhang Yi gave the place a thorough inspection and found no surveillance equipment.

Only then could he finally relax a bit.

Zhang Yi lay back on the sofa, with Yang Xinxin pressed close beside him. The two of them reclined comfortably against the cushions.

Hua Hua, eyes half-closed, perched on Zhang Yi’s stomach with practiced ease.

Thinking of Liang Yue, now undergoing genetic experiments with the Deng Family, Zhang Yi still felt slightly uneasy.

“I can’t help but feel the Deng Family is being too nice to me. And Deng Yuanbo’s explanation didn’t fully convince me either.”

Yang Xinxin’s lips curled into a soft smile. She rested one arm on the backrest, her gaze toward Zhang Yi full of admiration and affection.

“Brother, you’ve missed one important point.”

Zhang Yi: “Hmm? What’s that?”

Yang Xinxin reached out and tapped Zhang Yi’s nose with her fingertip—cool, soft, and gentle.

“You’re too cautious. You always expect the worst.”

“But you’ve forgotten—right now, you’re one of the top Superhumans in Jiangnan District! No matter where you go, people like you are respected and courted by the major factions.”

“And the Deng Family, having just lost their strongest asset, is trying to make friends with you. Even without the Moon of Corrosion mission, they’d still want to get close to you. Isn’t that obvious?”

Zhang Yi suddenly saw the light.

He let out a long sigh. “I’ve been in cutthroat, backstabbing environments for so long, I’ve practically forgotten how civilized society works.”

Blizzard City still preserved some semblance of civilization—people still dealt in relationships, not just brute force.

With a flip of his hand, Zhang Yi retrieved the silver case containing the Compound X from his Dimensional Space.

Opening it revealed a syringe filled with a pale golden liquid.

This was the drug Deng Yuanbo claimed could quickly unlock a Superhuman’s potential.

Zhang Yi could imagine how valuable it must be.

He felt a strong impulse to use it—a craving that came from the genetic level.

But his caution stopped him.

After thinking it over, he decided to call Baili Changqing for advice.

Soon, Baili Changqing answered.

After a few pleasantries, Zhang Yi got straight to the point.

“How advanced is the Deng Group’s genetic research? Do they have any shady history with drugs?”

Baili Changqing replied, “Let me put it this way—Blizzard City’s entire gene-medicine sector heavily depends on the Deng Family. And after multiple rounds of testing, the drugs are pretty stable now.”

As he spoke, he glanced down at his own arm.

“I’m part of the third batch of trial subjects. Everything’s normal so far—no adverse effects.”

Zhang Yi asked, “What’s the name of the drug you used?”

Baili Changqing thought for a moment. Zhang Yi was pretty much one of them now. Even if he didn’t want to be under the Jiangnan District’s control, the fact that he was willing to join the Celestial Hound Squad and fight Moon of Corrosion meant he could be trusted.

“That drug is called Compound No. 6.”