

Ice Age 771

Chapter 771: Echo of Time

Gao Changkong stood atop the ruins, holding the Solar Wheel Sword.

"Zhang Yi, Deng Shentong, come at me together! What does Gao Changkong have to fear?"

Activating the Fearless Lion Seal, he launched an assault toward Zhang Yi in midair.

After delivering the strike, Gao Changkong seized the opportunity to abruptly turn and charge at Zhu Zheng!

Killing Zhu Zheng would end everything.

But the moment he moved, Zhang Yi's figure swiftly shifted positions—

Appearing right in front of Zhu Zheng.

Holy Judgment slashed out violently, clashing fiercely with the Solar Wheel Sword.

Dark flames collided with golden Buddhist light, splitting the sky into two contrasting colors.

One half dark as a demonic nightfall, the other golden like a gathering of ten thousand Buddhas.

"BOOM!"

The entire ceiling of the high-rise shattered, yet the debris flew upward instead of falling.

Mutants below deputy captain level couldn't withstand this tremendous force, getting blasted away and scattered across the command center.

Instantly, intense battles erupted below.

The Yan Yun Guard, city defense forces, and Celestial Squad members began encircling the Reincarnation Squad members.

Deng Shentong rose to his feet, wielding his rapier as he attacked Gao Changkong from behind.

Lan Xincheng staunchly shielded Zhu Zheng.

Gao Changkong's gaze turned icy—he had no retreat now. Only Zhu Zheng's death could conclude this!

Even facing two captain-level mutants simultaneously, he remained convinced of his invincibility.

"I've already seen your futures—prepare yourselves!"

Using Reincarnation Deduction, Gao Changkong had discerned Deng Shentong and Zhang Yi's abilities and combat styles.

Deng Shentong was manageable, but Zhang Yi posed the real threat.

Thus, he activated the Heavenly Dance Treasure Wheel, aiming to shatter Zhang Yi's Dimensional Space first!

If absorbed energy exceeded its limits, the dimensional space would collapse.

Raising the Solar Wheel Sword high, a terrifying energy storm erupted around Gao Changkong.

"Zhang Yi, can you block this?"

Gao Changkong roared.

The next instant, the Solar Wheel Sword came slashing down at Zhang Yi!

The colossal energy storm seemed capable of annihilating heaven and earth, targeting both Zhang Yi and the entire building behind him!

Undoubtedly, this devastating storm could obliterate everything behind Zhang Yi in an instant.

Zhang Yi instinctively glanced backward.

Zhu Zheng was there.

If he dodged, Zhu Zheng and Lan Xincheng would certainly die.

Lan Xincheng's fate mattered little, but after rushing back with such effort, Zhu Zheng must survive.

After all, a new Blizzard City commander might not serve Zhang Yi's interests as well as Zhu Zheng.

His eyes turned solemn as dark energy swirled in his left pupil.

"[Echo of Time]."

After absorbing Takeuchi Mayumi's essence, Zhang Yi had awakened a new ability.

This power didn't directly enhance combat strength but granted exceptional battle awareness.

It maximized his survival odds in fights by:

First: Predicting incoming attacks and reacting accordingly.

Second: Identifying weaknesses in enemy assaults to neutralize them.

Activating Echo of Time transformed his left eye's vision into an entirely different world.

He instantly pinpointed the storm's eye—the core of Gao Changkong's power.

Raising Holy Judgment, Zhang Yi aimed at the raging energy storm.

"Blade Breaker!"

Dark matter infused with void energy condensed into a massive arrow, shooting from Holy Judgment's tip to collide violently with the Solar Wheel Sword.

The black arrow pierced the storm's eye—then the raging tempest suddenly expanded.

Like a bursting balloon, the energies annihilated each other, only unleashing peripheral winds without affecting the area behind Zhang Yi.

Yet this single exchange demolished over half the command center.

Gao Changkong's pupils constricted sharply.

"This... is impossible!"

The scene completely contradicted his foreseen future.

His deduction had predicted only two outcomes:

Either Zhang Yi dodged, resulting in Zhu Zheng's death.

Or Zhang Yi absorbed the attack with Dimensional Space, causing its collapse.

Yet a third possibility had emerged!

Unbeknownst to him, Zhang Yi also possessed deduction abilities.

Gao Changkong's deduction resembled program execution—prone to deviations.

But Zhang Yi's power operated on temporal rules—true future sight.

Against this superior ability, his Reincarnation Deduction became obsolete.

"Zhang Yi, why obstruct me?"

Gao Changkong spoke calmly: "I'm not your enemy. Like me, you rose from humble origins. Why serve these people?"

"Killing Zhu Zheng will reshape Jiangnan Region's order."

"Don't you hate seeing these old fossils maintaining their lofty positions?"

"Join me in reforming this twisted world!"

Gao Changkong attempted persuasion.

Zhang Yi responded only with a cold sneer.

"Silence, traitor! Commander Zhu's brilliance guides Jiangnan Region's future."

"Your selfish rebellion would destroy countless people's hard work—you're the true criminal!"

These words were deliberately spoken for someone present.

Zhu Zheng, deeply moved, thought:

"Zhang Yi's truly loyal! I misjudged him—such pure-hearted devotion!"

He resolved to nurture Zhang Yi after surviving this crisis.

As for Deng Shentong?

Well, though he helped defend, losing to Gao Changkong diminished his merits.

Now Zhu Zheng only saw Zhang Yi as his courageous, loyal warrior.

"Moreover," Zhang Yi's murderous gaze locked onto Gao Changkong, "you plotted my death in Tianhai City. This debt demands repayment!"

This part was utterly sincere.

Realizing persuasion failed, Gao Changkong abandoned words.

"Very well—let's see who laughs last!"

The Heavenly Dance Treasure Wheel behind him blazed brilliantly as he glared at Zhu Zheng with killing intent.

"Die!"

He lunged at Zhang Yi and Deng Shentong simultaneously.

Fighting both alone, Gao Changkong remained unbeaten.

But his real challenge wasn't defeating them—it was breaching Zhang Yi's defense!

Zhang Yi wasn't an offense-specialized mutant.

Though now mastering void energy more fluidly, his close-combat skills still lagged behind Gao Changkong's.

Yet Gao Changkong couldn't overcome him either.

Against Zhang Yi's spatial powers, all attacks got absorbed and reflected!

Thus, Gao Changkong and Zhang Yi became this battle's true protagonists.

While the injured Deng Shentong was relegated to a minor role.

This frustrated him immensely, yet he remained powerless.

In terms of balanced offense and defense, both surpassed him.

Fortunately, Zhang Yi's presence made killing Zhu Zheng impossible for Gao Changkong.

Chapter 772: Great Annihilation Netherflame

Zhang Yi's timely intervention thwarted Gao Changkong's attempt to kill Zhu Zheng.

The situation was growing increasingly unfavorable for him.

Unable to breach Zhang Yi's defenses—especially under the effects of [Echo of Time] which allowed Zhang Yi to anticipate all his attacks—Gao Changkong found himself at a severe disadvantage.

Echo of Time, being the superior ability to Meditation Seal, completely suppressed Gao Changkong's predictive capabilities, sealing away his foresight techniques.

Not to mention Zhang Yi's absurd defensive prowess.

With Blizzard City's entire combat force converging on their location, it was only a matter of time before the Reincarnation Squad faced annihilation if this dragged on.

Taking a deep breath, Gao Changkong made the decision to abort the mission.

"Retreat!" he commanded through the comms system to all Reincarnation Squad members.

The squad members couldn't help but feel a pang of bitterness upon hearing this.

They had come so close to success, only to fail at the final moment!

Countless rehearsals had led to this day.

Yet fate had other plans.

They had accounted for every variable within Blizzard City—except for Zhang Yi, this outsider from the Outer City.

Though disappointed, they obediently regrouped as ordered.

The superhuman commonly known as [Martial Arena]—whose real name remained obscure—opened a dimensional portal.

Gao Changkong cast one last profound glance at Zhu Zheng before shifting his gaze to Zhang Yi.

"Zhang Yi, you win this round! I underestimated you. But next time won't be so easy!"

Zhang Yi remained silent while Deng Shentong stepped forward, gripping his sword as he glared at the spatial gateway.

It undoubtedly led somewhere outside the city—the Reincarnation Squad's prearranged escape route.

"Do you really think you can escape?" Deng Shentong growled.

Gao Changkong regarded Deng Shentong with undisguised disdain—not out of deliberate contempt, but simply because he no longer saw this former rival as a threat.

"Deng Shentong, you should thank Zhang Yi for saving your life. Without him, you'd already be dead."

Deng Shentong's face flushed with anger, but he restrained himself—aware he stood no chance against Gao Changkong in his current state.

His eyes darted to Zhang Yi, silently pleading for intervention.

Not one to mince words, Zhang Yi flexed his right hand as dark flames from Holy Judgment wreathed his fingers.

"I'm quite adept at spatial manipulation myself. Care to wager whether you'll escape under my watch?"

What others couldn't accomplish, Zhang Yi could—including destroying their spatial passage.

Gao Changkong's brow furrowed slightly.

Just then, two figures materialized midair—Ji Yushen and Sun Luxuan.

The two had been locked in fierce combat within Ji Yushen's [SOLO] domain this entire time without either gaining the upper hand.

Only upon receiving Gao Changkong's order did Ji Yushen finally deactivate his ability.

Assessing the situation, Ji Yushen strode forward with sword in hand to stand before the Reincarnation Squad.

"Captain, take everyone and go. I'll cover the retreat."

His squad members' faces twisted with anguish.

"Vice Captain!"

Being the rearguard meant staying until the spatial gate fully closed—a guaranteed death sentence in hostile territory.

Yet no one protested further.

From the moment they joined this operation, each had been prepared to sacrifice themselves.

Every Reincarnation Squad member had risen from the bottom under Gao Changkong's personal tutelage.

And every one of them harbored deep resentment against Blizzard City's injustices.

Had circumstances differed, any of them would have made the same choice without hesitation.

Gao Changkong didn't refuse Ji Yushen's offer.

Placing a hand on his vice-captain's shoulder, he said gravely, "You'll always be my brother. Be my bravest brother now."

Ji Yushen took a steadying breath. "Yes, Captain!"

From his pocket, he produced a Compound-5 tablet and swallowed it without hesitation.

Zhang Yi couldn't suppress a sigh. "Again? You people really love your performance enhancers, huh?"

Though he'd always disdained these self-destructive one-time boosters, witnessing their use in life-or-death battles never failed to send chills down his spine.

Compound-5 worked frighteningly fast, burning through the user's life force at an alarming rate—overdosing meant certain death.

But with death already accepted, Ji Yushen held nothing back.

"BOOM!!"

Towering green flames erupted around him, instantly transforming the surrounding kilometer into an inferno of emerald fire!

Zhang Yi, Sun Luxuan and Deng Shentong hastily retreated, unwilling to risk contact with the mysterious flames.

Hundreds of nearby soldiers weren't so lucky—engulfed before they could react.

Screaming, their orifices spewed green fire as flesh and organs burned away, leaving only intact uniforms and weapons draped over charred skeletons.

"Great Annihilation Netherflame!"

Ji Yushen slowly raised his massive green greatsword, eyes and body now radiating the same eerie emerald flames.

When a captain-level combatant goes all-out, even the bravest would tremble.

Gao Changkong led his squad through the portal one by one—unopposed, as none dared challenge the death incarnate that was Ji Yushen.

"KILL...THEM...ALL!!!"

"HAHAHAHAHA!!!"

Ji Yushen's maniacal laughter echoed as a condemned man's final revelry.

Fear nothing, and nothing in this world can bind you.

The inferno raged indiscriminately, slaughtering everything in its path.

Recognizing the danger, Zhang Yi subtly positioned himself behind the others—no sense risking his life against a dead man walking.

"I'll go protect Commander Zhu. You handle this guy."

He turned to leave, only for old man Sun Luxuan to grab his arm with a knowing smile.

"The Reincarnation Squad's gone. The commander's safe now. Young man, let's face this together."

Zhang Yi's expression darkened, but he reluctantly nodded.

Meanwhile, Zhu Zheng had already evacuated the combat zone under Lan Xincheng's protection.

His first act upon reaching safety? Activating his satellite phone to contact distant Shenjing Region headquarters.

"This is Zhu Zheng of Jiangnan Region. Execute Code: [Tiger]."

Back on the battlefield, facing the death-embracing Ji Yushen, the trio remained vigilant.

"We must contain him," Sun Luxuan warned. "Otherwise, he'll reduce Blizzard City to rubble."

"Understood!" Deng Shentong immediately activated his Great Void Illusion Realm, attempting to disorient Ji Yushen with hallucinatory techniques.

Chapter 773: Hell's Guillotine

Ji Yushen had no choice but to close his eyes to avoid being affected by the illusion technique.

However, unlike Gao Changkong, he didn't possess such sharp senses, so both his combat ability and sense of direction were severely impaired.

Zhang Yi, Sun Luxuan, and the third attacker assaulted him simultaneously from three directions.

The battle wasn't easy - the fighting razed several miles of land around the Operations Command Center.

Ji Yushen ultimately died from overdosing on Compound-5, which exhausted his life force until he burned out completely.

This was the terrifying nature of captain-level fighters - devastating offensive power coupled with extreme resilience.

No wonder so many people had doubted Deng Shentong's fake death back then.

Zhang Yi gazed at Ji Yushen's corpse and heaved a long sigh of relief.

"What a pity that Gao Changkong managed to escape!" Zhang Yi lamented.

"They won't get far!" Deng Shentong gritted his teeth. "Even if they fled Blizzard City, they'll be designated as S-class fugitives hunted across all of Huaxu Nation!"

"They're as good as dead!"

Zhang Yi countered, "But given Gao Changkong's abilities, killing him will be extremely difficult."

Gao Changkong's powers were abnormally potent. While his predictive abilities fell short of true future sight, he could repeatedly employ this power during combat, allowing faster growth than ordinary people.

When targeting specific individuals, he could tailor his training precisely.

Combined with the six powerful seals of the Heavenly Dance Treasure Wheel, his strength remained formidable even among captain-level fighters.

Zhang Yi analyzed, "Deng Shentong's ability index is only 9300, so Gao Changkong must be at least 9600. He's probably the closest to Epsilon-level among all superhumans currently."

He added after a pause, "Except for me, of course."

As the trio conversed, Zhu Zheng's voice came from nearby.

"Don't worry, he won't escape!"

Zhang Yi turned to look.

Though Zhu Zheng appeared weary, thanks to everyone's protection he remained largely unharmed - only sporting a bandaged arm from a minor scrape during retreat.

Zhang Yi couldn't help asking, "Do you still have an ace up your sleeve?"

Zhu Zheng smiled faintly. "Naturally."

He raised his head, gazing skyward.

"He's already dead."

Zhang Yi wondered about Zhu Zheng's confidence.

Had he not arrived in time, Zhu Zheng would have been killed by Gao Changkong already.

Yet now he appeared so self-assured.

Just then, a metallic clanking sound of dragging chains reached Zhang Yi's ears.

He, Deng Shentong and the others instinctively turned toward the noise.

Suddenly, a hazy mist materialized in the air as the chain sounds grew increasingly distinct.

From within the fog emerged two chains - one pitch black, one pure white - transforming from solid to ethereal as they rapidly extended forward.

An aura of death permeated around the chains.

Sinister, terrifying, evoking primal fear from the depths of one's soul!

Zhang Yi's danger senses screamed.

He instantly teleported hundreds of meters away from the ominous chains.

Deng Shentong and Sun Luxuan reacted similarly.

Moments later, they saw the chains targeting a bewildered Yan Yun Major.

Before realizing what happened, the Major found himself tightly bound by the chains.

"What the hell is this? Let me go!" he screamed, struggling desperately.

Yet despite exerting all his strength and abilities, the chains remained completely unaffected.

Zhu Zheng's confident expression collapsed into shock.

"How could this happen?!"

The chains constricted tighter around the Major.

Then Zhang Yi witnessed a sight that made his hair stand on end.

From within the mist slowly emerged two towering figures.

Both stood over twenty feet tall - one clad in black robes, the other in white, wearing tall pointed hats.

The black hat bore the words "Coming for You", the white one read "You're Next".

"Black and White Impermanence!" Zhang Yi murmured.

Nearly everyone in Huaxu Nation recognized these iconic underworld deities.

The ghostly pair floated toward the chained Major, their feet nonexistent.

Everyone in the ruins froze in terror.

Even Zhang Yi's group instinctively held their breath.

From these deities emanated terrifying rule-based power far surpassing captain-level!

The panicked Major's fellow guards tried freeing him - shooting, using abilities - but the chains wouldn't budge.

Within moments, the ghostly enforcers reached their target, gripping the soul-binding chains.

Ignoring everyone else, they dragged the Major forward.

Before them materialized an enormous platform.

Like a colossal gate reaching into the heavens, its towering height disappeared into the clouds.

The ghosts bound the Major to the platform.

Only then did the "gate's" true form become visible.

When everyone saw it clearly, chills ran down their spines.

This wasn't any heavenly gate - but a massive guillotine!

From thousands of feet above, an enormous black blade hung tilted in the clouds - capable of bisecting anything with a single drop!

The Major screamed hysterically but remained locked in place.

"BOOM!!"

The guillotine descended from the heavens, cleanly splitting him from crown to sole!

His body separated perfectly - from the front he appeared untouched.

Then all supernatural phenomena vanished.

The enforcers and guillotine dissipated like smoke.

The Major's bisected corpse collapsed forward and backward.

This horrifying death left everyone gasping.

Nobody had seen anyone attack the Major.

It was as if he'd been... cursed!

Zhu Zheng trembled - not from fear, but rage.

"Gao Changkong! You've outmaneuvered me again!!"

Zhang Yi had an epiphany, sensing something peculiar.

"Commander Zhu, what's happening? Who's attacking our people?"

After prolonged silence, Zhu Zheng finally answered:

"I requested assistance from that person in Shengjing Sector to eliminate the traitor Gao Changkong! This is his ability [Hell's Guillotine]. Anyone he marks is guaranteed to die - an absolute rule!"

Gritting his teeth, he added, "Damn Gao Changkong must have foreseen this! He escaped again!"

Chapter 774: The Medium

This incident left Zhang Yi deeply shaken.

Rumors claimed that Epsilon-level superhuman in Shenjing possessed the ability to execute long-range assassinations. But this was his first time witnessing it firsthand.

What truly surprised him was that his first encounter with [Hell's Guillotine] resulted in such a massive blunder. The terrifying nature of Hell's Guillotine left him profoundly disturbed—that absolute rule-based power filled even him with deep dread.

Zhang Yi contemplated: if that power locked onto him, would there be any chance of escape?

Yet reality showed Zhu Zheng had originally intended Hell's Guillotine for Gao Changkong, only for Gao Changkong to somehow redirect it. This meant the guaranteed execution required specific conditions to activate.

A new layer of caution settled in Zhang Yi's mind. He'd need to carefully consider every demand Blizzard City made of him, especially regarding personal belongings. Those could easily become weapons turned against him.

Despite his fury and regret, Zhu Zheng felt relief at surviving unscathed. His gaze towards Zhang Yi overflowed with gratitude and admiration.

"Zhang Yi, we owe you our lives this time! Had you not arrived when you did, we'd all be dead."

Sun Luxuan and Deng Shentong also regarded Zhang Yi with undisguised gratitude. Even the prideful Deng Shentong showed no resentment at being upstaged—after all, Zhang Yi had saved them all.

Zhang Yi chuckled inwardly while maintaining a humble expression. "I merely did what any Jiangnan Region citizen should."

Zhu Zheng appreciated Zhang Yi's attitude, already mentally drafting a hundred ways to promote him. But first, other matters demanded attention.

With the battle concluded, department heads from Blizzard City swarmed the scene to pledge loyalty.

"Commander Zhu, are you unharmed?"

"Thank heavens! When news of the rebellion reached us, I nearly died from worry!"

"Commander Zhu, you can't imagine how terrified I was!"

These officials had been conspicuously absent during the fighting, yet now performed tearful displays of concern with practiced ease. None were fools—with traitors exposed within Blizzard City, Zhu Zheng would undoubtedly purge collaborators. Only by loudly distancing themselves from the Reincarnation Squad could they hope to survive.

Zhu Zheng's icy gaze swept across the assembled leadership. The rebellion couldn't have succeeded without internal support—someone here had aided the Reincarnation Squad.

From that glacial stare, Zhang Yi glimpsed the coming storm of retribution. Not that it concerned him.

Turning back, Zhu Zheng heartily praised Zhang Yi before dismissing him to rest. He similarly commended Sun Luxuan and Deng Shentong for their protection efforts.

"Return to your quarters. Medical teams will attend to you shortly."

Zhang Yi examined himself—the battle had left him completely unscathed. "No need to waste medical resources on me. I'm uninjured."

Zhu Zheng nodded and departed surrounded by Lan Xincheng and others.

Sun Luxuan clapped Zhang Yi's shoulder. "Fine work, lad!" before following his charge. With the city still unsettled post-rebellion, the bodyguard couldn't leave Zhu Zheng's side.

Medical personnel soon arrived to treat the wounded. The Reincarnation Squad's assault had left many soldiers dead or severely injured. Deng Shentong, having used Compound-5, still bled from his mouth yet conversed casually as if unharmed.

"Never realized how deep you ran. I thought Gao Changkong had finished you."

Zhang Yi side-eyed him. "Likewise, I'm surprised you survived."

Deng Shentong smiled faintly. "I live for those who didn't."

"During that mission, I sensed something wrong—there were traitors in Blizzard City. But I suspected people actually present, not Gao Changkong."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. Gao Changkong had been stationed at Beiting Lake during the operation—he shouldn't have received real-time battlefield intelligence or coordinated with the Reincarnation Squad. Which meant... accomplices remained within the city.

Zhang Yi inhaled sharply. The coming purge would claim many lives—the inevitable price of failed rebellion.

"Deng Shentong, how did you escape Jiangning City?" Zhang Yi suddenly asked.

Deng Shentong adopted a mysterious smile. "Nothing special really." His eyes narrowed. "Just sleight of hand."

He offered no details, but Zhang Yi understood. Deng Shentong's Great Sumeru Illusion manipulated light to affect all five senses—creating a death illusion for Phoenixin Ren and command center observers would be trivial.

Another question burned in Zhang Yi's mind as Deng Shentong swallowed medication from a case.

"How much do you know about that Epsilon-level superhuman's abilities in Shenjing?"

Ever cautious, Zhang Yi sought intelligence on potential threats.

Deng Shentong gave him an odd look. "Why would I know? You think they'd disclose classified capabilities?"

"Doesn't it terrify you? If Black and White Impermanence had marked you instead, could you have escaped?"

Deng Shentong shuddered recalling the scene. "Stop overthinking! Just stay obedient—unlike Gao Changkong—and you'll be fine."

Zhang Yi frowned at the unsatisfactory answer. "So even the Deng Family lacks intel."

Deng Shentong's expression darkened until Zhang Yi glared. "What's that look? I saved your life—is this how you treat your savior?"

Deng Shentong swallowed his retort—the accusation was undeniable. After a pause, he muttered, "My guess? Something like a voodoo curse requiring a physical medium. So... watch your belongings."

Chapter 775: Cleanup

As soon as Deng Shentong finished speaking, a medical team immediately approached. The Deng Family had their own medical personnel who came to examine Deng Shentong. Meanwhile, the medical department staff, likely sent by Zhu Zheng's orders, arrived with an especially large team for Zhang Yi.

"Captain Chaos, are you feeling any discomfort?" A doctor asked Zhang Yi with utmost seriousness. Several young, pretty nurses beside him gazed at Zhang Yi with eyes full of admiration and reverence—they already knew everything that had transpired here. At this moment, Zhang Yi had become the hero of all Blizzard City.

Zhang Yi waved his hand. "I'm fine, unharmed. Go tend to the other wounded." The doctor, however, wore a stern expression. "I strongly recommend a comprehensive examination. Sometimes, internal injuries from battle aren't immediately apparent but can become life-threatening if left untreated."

The doctor made a valid point—some hidden injuries might not show on the surface but could indicate severe internal damage. Neglecting them might lead to irreversible consequences. Yet recalling Deng Shentong's parting words, Zhang Yi grew wary. A full examination? That would mean blood tests and possibly surrendering other bodily samples. Cautiously, he took a few steps back. "No need. I have my personal physician." Without waiting for the doctor's response, he turned and left. As he departed, he thought he glimpsed a flicker of disappointment in the doctor's eyes.

Zhang Yi returned to his villa in Zone A. The entire city was under lockdown, hunting down Reincarnation Squad members and purging their collaborators. Though uninterested, Zhang Yi spent the day listening to the constant wail of sirens echoing through Blizzard City. With all external communications jammed and no way to contact the outside world, he simply lay in bed to rest.

Later, Tu Yunlie returned with his team. After regrouping, the Celestial Hound Squad also came back to Blizzard City and immediately plunged into the operation to root out the rebels—some possessed private militias that required armed suppression. Investigations quickly revealed who had conspired with the Reincarnation Squad. In a city as tightly stratified as Blizzard City, with its two million residents divided into rigid hierarchies, identifying such collaborators wasn't difficult.

Baili Changqing also returned to Blizzard City. By absorbing Daiku Kai Enzu's core energy, he had saved his own life, avoiding the same fate as Bian Junwu. His first act upon returning was to visit the home of his former squad leader, Wu Zhengheng—the man who had disabled the command center's security systems for the Reincarnation Squad at the start of the rebellion.

Wu Zhengheng was at home, feeding medicine to his bedridden son while his wife fretted anxiously beside him. "With such chaos in the city, could it affect us? Old Wu, maybe you should return to work so the leaders don't blame you." Ignoring his wife's nagging, Wu Zhengheng smiled as he spoon-fed formula to his son. The boy had congenital heart disease, further complicated by post-apocalyptic conditions, leaving him bedridden for over half a year and able to consume only liquids.

Baili Changqing came alone, without subordinates, wanting to grant his former comrade and squad leader some final dignity. He pushed the door open and entered with a face like thunder. Wu Zhengheng's wife jumped up in fright, but Wu Zhengheng calmly said, "He's here for me." Approaching Baili Changqing with a pleading look, he asked, "May I say a few words before leaving with you?" Baili Changqing gave a stiff nod.

Wu Zhengheng began explaining things to his wife in front of Baili Changqing. Only then did his wife realize something was terribly wrong, and she soon broke into tears. Baili Changqing remained unmoved, his heart filled only with fury. After Wu Zhengheng finished speaking, the two men stepped outside.

"Why?" Baili Changqing glared at him. "Why betray us? Answer me!" Wu Zhengheng looked up at the towering man and sighed heavily. "You're still young, still able to dream. But when you reach my age, with a wife and child desperate for money, you'll understand. I've sacrificed everything for those above me, yet in the end, I couldn't even provide for my family. Tell me—why should I keep serving them?"

Baili Changqing fell silent. In the pre-apocalypse world, someone of Wu Zhengheng's caliber could've easily provided a comfortable life for his family. But now, human life was cheap, and mere survival was a luxury. Even Baili Changqing himself struggled just to secure a three-bedroom apartment in Zone A.

Wu Zhengheng sighed and extended his wrists. "The winners reign, the losers suffer. I've nothing more to say. I only hope that when my wife and son die, their bodies can be buried with mine. At least there are no wild dogs now—burying us in the snow should keep the scavengers away." A wry smile crossed his face.

Veins bulged on Baili Changqing's forehead. With a click, he handcuffed Wu Zhengheng and said slowly, firmly, "Don't worry. After you're gone, I'll take care of them." A glimmer of light pierced the gray despair in Wu Zhengheng's eyes. "Baili... you!" He hadn't cried when arrested, but now his voice choked up. "Really?"

Baili Changqing nodded. "You know I don't lie." Wu Zhengheng laughed through his tears. "Good... thank you! Thank you!" As long as his family could live safely, he could die without regrets.

Similar scenes played out across Blizzard City. The scale of the Reincarnation Squad's rebellion—the sheer number of people involved—was staggering. After reviewing the reports, even Zhu Zheng had to admit Gao Changkong's planning had been frighteningly thorough. "He spent all this time building his reputation and quietly uniting so many factions within Blizzard City, all for today's move."

Lan Xincheng snorted coldly, his eyes sharp. "These traitors deserve death! Commander Zhu, execute them all!" Zhu Zheng studied him deeply. "Execute them? Many are vital technicians, and most are only accomplices at worst. Killing them would devastate Blizzard City. How many citizens do we even have left?"

Lan Xincheng argued, "But disloyalty can't be tolerated! Keeping them is just inviting future disasters." After a long silence, Zhu Zheng sighed. "Humans are monsters enslaved by their own desires. This incident isn't entirely their fault—the world itself is to blame. Even if we purge them, who's to say their replacements won't do the same?"

Ultimately, Zhu Zheng opted for a softer approach. Only those who had conspired with the Moon of Corrosion to harm Celestial Hound Squad members were executed. The rest received lighter punishments, though another reshuffling of core departments' organizational structures was inevitable.

Chapter 776: The Idol

The purge in Blizzard City was still ongoing. Zhang Yi had initially thought it would take quite a long time to complete. After all, the Reincarnation Squad had nearly destroyed Blizzard City's headquarters and killed Zhu Zheng this time.

But unexpectedly, the purge ended rather quickly. To prevent widespread panic among Blizzard City's residents, Zhu Zheng adopted a conciliatory approach, executing only the main culprits. This actually made Zhang Yi view Zhu Zheng in a new light.

Only someone with such decisiveness could truly lead a major region. When the Celestial Hound Squad returned to Blizzard City, Yang Xinxin came back with them. As for Liang Yue, she stayed home to recuperate from her injuries.

Zhang Yi inquired about the current situation in Tianhai City. Yang Xinxin's answer made him sigh. Although local forces hadn't participated in the main battle against the Moon of Corrosion, they still suffered heavy losses. The already weakened base organizations lost another thirty percent of their forces fighting against the Tianlong Pirate Crew.

"If this continues, Tianhai City's population will keep dwindling," Zhang Yi remarked.

Yang Xinxin asked curiously, "Brother, do you want to increase Tianhai City's population? That seems different from your original stance."

Zhang Yi shrugged. "While I despise scheming and power struggles, I don't want to see Tianhai City become a ghost town either. Besides, I'm no longer worried about anyone coveting our shelter." With his current strength, he had nothing to fear.

Yang Xinxin giggled. "Rebuilding the population would be a long-term project. Even if everyone in Tianhai City started having babies now, we wouldn't see results for over a decade. Though given current circumstances, we could lower the reproductive age like in ancient times."

Zhang Yi shook his head—he couldn't be bothered with such thoughts. Living day by day happily was enough; why worry about the distant future?

"How are Liang Yue and Old You doing?" During the battle, Old You and Fatty Xu had joined the fight against the pirates. Zhang Yi had been too occupied to look after them, but with the equipment he'd provided, they couldn't possibly lose to ordinary pirates.

Yang Xinxin replied, "Teacher Liang suffered severe arm injuries—her bones were shattered. Luckily, Sister Zhou helped reset them. She'll recover after some rest. As for Old You, don't worry about him—his regeneration is incredible; he didn't even need Sister Zhou's help. And Fatty Xu? That guy hid at the back the whole time without a scratch."

Zhang Yi nodded in satisfaction. It was good that his people were safe. After surviving the harsh early days of the apocalypse and building precious bonds, he didn't want anything bad to happen to any of them.

"After this battle, we can finally rest for a while." Zhang Yi closed his eyes and relaxed on the sofa. With the Jiangnan Region's internal unrest quelled and both the Moon of Corrosion and Tianlong Pirate

Crew's forces destroyed, coastal cities would enjoy relative peace. The only remaining concern was the escaped Reincarnation Squad. Their whereabouts remained unknown, but they were now on the nationwide most-wanted list with an S-class priority. Once found, special squads from all regions would hunt them down.

Zhang Yi wasn't too worried about Gao Changkong seeking revenge. Gao Changkong was smart enough to avoid meaningless actions—his target had always been Zhu Zheng and Blizzard City's leadership. Attacking Zhang Yi in Tianhai City would be both futile and risky, likely exposing his location. Zhang Yi guessed he'd probably lay low as before, waiting for another chance to overthrow Zhu Zheng. But that had little to do with him now.

...

"Investigation confirms that former Reincarnation Squad members, led by captain Gao Changkong, betrayed the people and their ideals, colluding with Ronin from Neon Nation to inflict severe damage upon the Jiangnan Region!"

"However, under Commander Zhu Zheng's leadership, the united Jiangnan Region foiled their conspiracy to split the region and seize power!"

"Throughout this operation, Celestial Hound Squad leader, codenamed [Chaos], displayed exceptional courage by spearheading efforts to defeat both the Moon of Corrosion and pirate forces."

"He promptly returned to Blizzard City and personally repelled the traitorous former Reincarnation Squad members."

"Comrade Chaos's ideological consciousness sets an example for the masses. Special commendation is hereby issued."

"All Jiangnan Region citizens must immediately report any information regarding Reincarnation Squad members to authorities. Failure to report will be treated as complicity."

This was the morning news broadcast. Zhang Yi ate breakfast in his room while watching the report. The incident had been too significant to conceal, becoming common knowledge throughout the city. But Zhu

Zheng's propaganda department wasn't idle—with Gao Changkong fallen, they needed a new hero to reassure the public. Thus Zhang Yi, the outsider with extraordinary abilities and remarkable achievements, became the perfect candidate—a grassroots underdog rising to prominence, fulfilling commoners' fantasies.

Seeing the situation stabilized, Zhang Yi decided to bid Zhu Zheng farewell and return to Tianhai City for some well-deserved rest. When he left his villa, the guards outside saluted him respectfully. The Yan Yun Guard soldiers gazed at him with fiery admiration—the look reserved for heroes.

As soon as he stepped outside, excited screams erupted from beyond the fence. Zhang Yi turned to see crowds gathered—men and women alike shouting his codename [Chaos]. Among them were beautiful young ladies, charming married women, and sons of high-ranking officials. Only A-zone elites' family members could appear here. Notably, no one was taking photos—regional regulations prohibited photographing special department personnel to prevent intelligence leaks. After the Reincarnation Squad incident, such restrictions tightened further, even making Zhang Yi's real name classified information.

Zhang Yi smiled and waved, triggering another wave of ecstatic screams. He couldn't help recalling Gao Changkong's former popularity.

"Well now I've become an idol," he mused. In these apocalyptic times, people indeed needed idols for spiritual solace.

"I need to visit headquarters," Zhang Yi told a guard, who promptly arranged his assigned vehicle. Boarding the car, Zhang Yi headed toward the new command center.

Chapter 777: Conversation with Zhu Zheng

Zhang Yi arrived at the new Operations Command Center.

Since the original site had been destroyed in the battle, with many records lost, the new center was exceptionally busy.

Beyond needing reinforcement to headquarters' standards, they also had to restructure the organization—people were constantly coming and going in the bustle.

Zhang Yi hadn't seen Baili Changqing for a while.

After using Compound-5, Baili had managed to hold on for some time, but his body ultimately suffered adverse effects.

Absorbing Daiku Kai Enzu's life force had saved him, but now he was undergoing treatment in the medical department—though no one knew what state he'd end up in.

Truthfully, Zhang Yi had always kept his distance from the power granted by such drugs.

If Baili Changqing someday developed an incurable genetic disease like Bian Junwu, it wouldn't surprise him in the least.

Upon arriving at the new command center, Zhang Yi was immediately met with an overwhelmingly warm welcome.

This wasn't mere politeness—they genuinely admired and were grateful to him.

Had Zhang Yi not intervened when he did, most of them would have died.

Even those who survived would have lost everything they had due to Zhu Zheng's death.

The atmosphere strongly reminded Zhang Yi of when Gao Changkong had first returned victorious from battle.

Zhang Yi had no time for nostalgia. He directly stated his purpose for coming.

Soon, Zhu Zheng summoned him to his office.

Lan Xincheng personally came to greet Zhang Yi.

The once-arrogant secretary now treated Zhang Yi with exceptional respect—whether out of gratitude for saving his life or due to his sharp intuition recognizing that Zhang Yi's status would be fundamentally different from now on.

This change stemmed from the power Zhang Yi had displayed.

At the very least, his current strength surpassed that of standard squad captains.

Zhang Yi found Zhu Zheng wearing a standard green military shirt, reading documents by the window.

The moment he saw Zhang Yi, his face lit up with enthusiastic warmth.

"Zhang Yi! Come, have a seat!"

They sat on the sofa while Lan Xincheng had coffee served.

Zhu Zheng effusively praised Zhang Yi, though his words covered the usual platitudes.

Zhang Yi listened with a faint smile before stating his purpose.

"The Moon of Corrosion threat has been dealt with. It's time I returned to Tianhai City—I came to bid you farewell."

Zhu Zheng immediately tried to persuade him to stay.

"Zhang Yi, your performance in this operation left everyone speechless. You're extraordinarily talented—not just in combat prowess, but also in battlefield command. Most importantly, your loyalty to the Jiangnan Region has been made abundantly clear!"

"I hope you'll remain. I can retain your position in the Celestial Hound Squad as a full-fledged investigation captain."

"Though Blizzard City has resolved the external threat, internal issues remain. Bian Junwu died in battle, and Gao Changkong's betrayal leaves us vulnerable. We desperately need elite combatants."

"Will you stay?" Zhu Zheng gazed at him earnestly. "Name your terms—anything within my power, I'll grant."

Zhu Zheng was practically starving for talent, and Zhang Yi was the one he most wanted to secure.

Zhang Yi chuckled softly and sipped his coffee.

"I don't care for a life of constant fighting. I appreciate the offer, but no."

He showed no hesitation—giving Zhu Zheng an opening would only invite more persistent attempts to keep him.

Zhang Yi owed Zhu Zheng nothing; if anything, Blizzard City owed him a massive debt. There was no need for courtesy.

Zhu Zheng sighed inwardly but couldn't press further—not when Zhang Yi had saved his life (and frankly, he lacked the means to compel him). Yet relinquishing such an asset pained him.

After some thought, he made another proposal.

"What if you became an external agent? You wouldn't need to stay in Blizzard City. I'll retain your Celestial Hound Squad position with captain-level—no, above-captain-level privileges and benefits!"

"A 20% increase over standard captain-level compensation!"

Captain-level benefits were substantial—primarily priority access to cutting-edge weapons, equipment, and gene-modifying drugs.

But these held little appeal for Zhang Yi now.

He shook his head.

"I've no worldly desires."

Zhu Zheng's brow furrowed deeply.

"If the Jiangnan Region faces another crisis, would you refuse to act?"

Zhang Yi took another sip as he carefully phrased his response.

"If it's truly a matter of survival, I'll intervene."

"But if it's for personal interests, I'll have to decline."

His words were diplomatic, but the truth was simpler—he wouldn't participate unless there was something in it for him.

The Moon of Corrosion invasion had been an exception.

He refused to become anyone's subordinate or hired muscle.

Zhu Zheng's current politeness (even deference) would vanish the moment Zhang Yi agreed to become an investigation captain.

It was like when resigning from a job—employers sweet-talk you to stay, but their attitude flips instantly afterward.

Appearances could deceive; sentimentality led to regret.

Having been saved by Zhang Yi, Zhu Zheng couldn't push further.

"Very well. I'll keep the Celestial Hound Squad captain position open for you. You'll still receive monthly headquarters benefits."

"If Blizzard City encounters difficulties, I only hope you'll consider assisting. That's all I ask."

Zhang Yi replied with deliberate hesitation, "If circumstances permit... I'll help."

When rejecting requests, be decisive. When agreeing, be cautiously noncommittal.

Zhu Zheng nodded before shifting to casual conversation, asking about Zhang Yi's future plans.

Zhang Yi had no particular ambitions—content with his current lifestyle, he simply planned to rest and enjoy himself in Tianhai City.

Once Tianhai stabilized, he might take a sea voyage using one of Chen Jingguan's large ships—not going far, just coastal fishing and perhaps sightseeing in southern ice waters.

Mention of maritime matters reminded Zhang Yi of the pirate invaders. He inquired about them.

Zhu Zheng responded dismissively, "Those overambitious fools? I've already asked the Eastern Sea Region to handle them."

Chapter 778: Astonishing Ceiling

The Tianlong Pirate Crew's invasion of Tianhai City was a grave misstep.

The East Sea District had already taken action without much ado, launching missile strikes against multiple port bases of the Tianlong Pirate Crew.

Hundreds of ships were sunk, and the Tianlong Pirate Crew suffered heavy casualties.

This was a warning, a clear signal of the stance of all six major districts of the Huaxu Kingdom.

"However, completely eradicating them is still somewhat difficult," Zhu Zheng admitted honestly.

"They don't have fixed strongholds and roam freely across the Starry Sea, where countless islands and complex terrain make it inconvenient for our navy. Our forces move like dragons on the open ocean but cannot easily penetrate such landscapes."

"Deploying too many troops would waste excessive resources without any worthwhile gains. So this will remain just a warning."

The apocalypse was upon them, and the world was in chaos; the navy had many threats to guard against.

For example, the new naval forces in regions like Neon and the Colombian naval troops stationed in the Neon Archipelago.

Investing huge resources to wipe out a ragtag group of pirates would be a thankless task.

Moreover, due to Zhang Yi's prior preparations, Tianhai City suffered no significant losses from the pirates, so this matter would ultimately be minimized or quietly dismissed.

Zhang Yi furrowed his brow with some concern.

“Will Tianhai City face retaliation from them in the future?”

Kanute and others had all been killed by Zhang Yi’s hand, and Tianhai City was a coastal city, so naturally Zhang Yi worried about this.

Zhu Zheng immediately responded, “Rest assured, we will provide Tianhai City with the strongest protection!”

Zhang Yi’s mouth twitched slightly.

Well, can I really trust what you say?

But thinking it over carefully, Tianhai City’s defense forces were indeed too weak right now.

If a large enemy force attacked, only Blizzard City behind them could truly hold the line.

So Zhang Yi requested a batch of heavy weapons from Zhu Zheng; he planned to set up defenses near Chaoyu Harbor.

Zhu Zheng readily agreed, approving a shipment of coastal defense artillery for Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi could handle the ammunition supply himself.

After some small talk, someone soon came to see Zhu Zheng.

Knowing Zhu Zheng had been busy lately, Zhang Yi took his leave.

After sending Zhang Yi off and watching his retreating figure, Zhu Zheng was filled with an inexplicable feeling.

“A man who dislikes power and lacks no material wealth—how can I make him serve me?”

“Could it be that what he truly desires is a woman?”

Zhu Zheng pondered silently.

After Zhang Yi left, a woman entered Zhu Zheng’s office.

She was Li Lingxue, the Minister and Chief Expert of the Scientific Research Department.

Wearing a white lab coat and thick black-rimmed glasses, her long hair was casually tied up with a carbon pen.

She was a textbook example of a female scientist.

“Commander Zhu, the latest evaluation report is ready.”

She placed a report on Zhu Zheng’s desk.

Zhu Zheng picked it up and saw it was Zhang Yi’s profile.

This was a reassessment by the Scientific Research Department based on Zhang Yi’s recent performance.

Just as Zhang Yi had anticipated, according to Blizzard City’s latest evaluation, his superhuman ability index had been raised to 9,600 points, far exceeding the average at the captain level.

“9,600... isn’t that close to the Epsilon standard?”

Zhu Zheng’s eyes widened.

Li Lingxue's voice remained calm and steady.

"By definition, yes. And I've discovered a very interesting phenomenon."

"Generally, captains find it nearly impossible to increase their superhuman index through Co-Devour once it reaches 9,000 points. Every 100-point increase results in a massive power gap."

"However, Zhang Yi doesn't fit this pattern."

Li Lingxue adjusted her glasses, "When he fought in Tianhai City, his superhuman index was around 9,200 points. But after absorbing the essences of Phoenixin Ren, Takeuchi Mayumi, and Kanute, his index surged by 400 points in one go!"

Zhu Zheng looked at her. "What does this mean?"

Li Lingxue explained, "It means he's different from other captains."

A gleam of excitement flashed in her eyes, the feeling of discovering an intriguing research subject.

"My conclusion is that he's not a Delta-level superhuman, but Epsilon or even higher."

"His ceiling is not 9,200 points. 9,600 is definitely not the limit!"

Zhu Zheng's eyes bulged, speechless for a long moment, his whole body trembling with excitement.

"So you mean our Jiangnan Region now has an Epsilon-level superhuman?"

"Our Jiangnan Region will have its own Epsilon!"

He knew very well the concept of an Epsilon-level superhuman.

In the world's ranking system for superhumans, the boundary between Epsilon and Delta is a person versus a city.

In other words, an Epsilon-level superhuman possesses the power to destroy a city of average size.

Simply put, it's like a human weapon of mass destruction.

Li Lingxue said, "But currently, this is only a hypothesis. We can't confirm it yet. Also, we don't know how to help him improve further. After all, the miracle in Shengjing is hard to replicate."

Zhu Zheng pondered for a long time, his mind racing through countless thoughts.

If Zhang Yi could truly wield Epsilon-level power, it would be great for the Jiangnan Region.

But would it be good for him personally?

A superhuman too powerful would be beyond his control.

A deep shadow flickered across Zhu Zheng's eyes.

He thought to himself: I must find a way to make Zhang Yi mine; only then can I rest easy.

After leaving Zhu Zheng's office, Zhang Yi went to the armory to collect a large batch of military supplies.

This mission earned him one billion task points, enough to purchase a massive amount of specialized weapons and equipment.

Among them were SLDS Type 2 black combat suits for every family member.

He also acquired a large quantity of coastal defense cannons for the Chaoyu Harbor base.

Once armed, he visited the Deng Family to bid farewell to Deng Yuanbo and Deng Shentong.

He also took the opportunity to inquire about superhuman evolution.

He wanted to help Old You and Fatty Xu enhance their powers.

Deng Yuanbo welcomed Zhang Yi warmly, inviting him into the tea room along with Deng Shentong.

After hearing Zhang Yi's request, Deng Yuanbo pondered for a while before slowly speaking:

"Liang Yue's condition cannot be replicated. Not everyone has her exceptional physique and strong will."

"Also, this method only works for Delta-level and above superhumans."

But then he offered an alternative.

"However, within their superhuman level range, I can maximize their power improvements."

Zhang Yi's eyes brightened, then he quickly regained composure.

"What needs to be done? If you can help, Zhang Yi will surely reward you greatly."

Deng Yuanbo smiled faintly, "It's nothing more than a small favor. It's difficult for outsiders, but since you are a friend of the Deng Family, there's no need to talk about thanks."

Chapter 779: Preparing to Set Sail for Leisure

Deng Yuanbo explained their method to Zhang Yi.

For low-level superhumans, the way to increase their strength was very simple: help them replenish the origin of their superhuman abilities.

Although this couldn't allow them to break through their genetic limitations and reach a higher superhuman level, it could let them attain the upper limit of their current tier.

Since Uncle You and Fatty Xu's superhuman levels weren't high, enhancing their strength wasn't very difficult.

Deng Yuanbo, wanting to befriend Zhang Yi, expressed his willingness to help him with this favor.

Zhang Yi clearly understood that this friendship would require repayment in some other way in the future.

However, he still agreed cheerfully.

In addition, Deng Yuanbo also told Zhang Yi the usage method of the X compound he had given him before.

For Zhang Yi now, its effect was already limited, but it could be used first on Uncle You.

"His self-healing ability is strong enough to endure the torment of body modification," Deng Yuanbo said with a wicked smile.

Zhang Yi felt a chill run down his spine.

If he had given in to temptation and used it back then, he probably would have had to suffer tremendous physical pain.

After bidding farewell to Deng Yuanbo and Deng Shentong, Zhang Yi took Yang Xinxin and Hua Hua and left Blizzard City.

At departure, the Celestial Hound Squad members all came to see him off.

Except for Baili Changqing, who was heavily injured and needed recuperation, everyone else was there.

“Captain, when... will you be back?” Ye He anxiously asked.

Once Zhang Yi left, he would be stationed in Tianhai City, taking orders but not blindly obeying commands.

He wasn’t like other captains who would obediently follow high-level orders.

If Zhu Zheng wanted him to do something in the future, he’d have to pacify him well and discuss it with him.

This also meant that the Celestial Hound Squad might not have many missions ahead.

Zhang Yi glanced at Ye He and Xue Miao with a faint smile: “Deng Shentong has returned now. You should also go back to your own squads. I will inform Zhu Shuai about this matter.”

But Ye He said, “I don’t want to go back. Boss, I want to follow you!”

Xue Miao also expressed the same attitude without hesitation.

“Me too!”

After witnessing Zhang Yi's strength, they naturally didn't want to miss the chance to latch onto a powerful figure.

Zhang Yi thought for a moment and said indifferently, "Do as you wish! If you want to stay, stay."

He was a carefree person by nature and wouldn't have much time to manage them in the future.

This Celestial Hound Squad had freedom to come and go; Zhang Yi would never restrict them.

Besides, who knew when the next mission would come.

Soon, Zhang Yi took the Blizzard City Express Train back to Tianhai City.

Stepping out of Xiaomiaoshan Subway Station, looking at the snow-covered world before him and breathing the icy air, Zhang Yi felt extremely comfortable.

"Finally, I can rest properly for a while!"

He said with emotion.

Since the Moon of Corrosion landed, the entire Jiangnan Region had been thrown into chaos.

It wasn't just the overseas Ronin causing trouble; the most troublesome problems were inside Blizzard City.

Zhang Yi was passively involved, facing endless troubles.

It was time to truly enjoy a good life.

Zhang Yi and Yang Xinxin returned home, immediately greeted warmly by everyone.

Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya excitedly rushed over and gave Zhang Yi a passionate, full embrace.

"Zhang Yi, you're finally back! Now you can stay at home properly, right?"

"You've worked so hard these past two months."

Yang Siya leaned close to Zhang Yi's ear, her warm voice whispering as she breathed, "Should we eat first, or shower first, or... me?"

Zhang Yi sighed helplessly.

"I just got back; I want to rest properly first."

Yang Siya's face showed some disappointment.

Zhang Yi took off his coat and threw it to Zhou Ke'er.

"I'm going to take a shower first. Who's going to help me wash my back?"

A glimmer appeared in Yang Siya's eyes. She suddenly recalled that when she first met Zhang Yi, it was also in the bathroom...

So, the two of them went off to help Zhang Yi wash his back.

Long, long after, the night had deepened.

Tonight, the snow surprisingly did not continue, and a clean patch of sky appeared, faintly revealing the stars.

Zhang Yi lay on the bed, hands behind his head, slowly pondering everything that had happened in this apocalypse over the past half year.

Half a year's time—it all felt like a dream.

He and everyone around him had been struggling desperately just to survive.

But this feeling did not disgust him.

At the very least, his life was getting better, unlike when he used to work and drifted through each day aimlessly.

“Perhaps, deep down, everyone is secretly looking forward to the end of the world,” Zhang Yi murmured.

This was a line from one of his favorite authors, Haruki Murakami, in the work 1Q84.

Zhang Yi always liked this line.

Zhou Ke'er's hand rested on his chest. This hand, used for surgeries, was exquisite, fair and slender, with nails painted a soft pink.

“Why suddenly start feeling sentimental about these things?” she asked with a smile.

On the other side, Yang Siya muttered, “I guess you must be tired. Rest well for a while!”

She looked at Zhang Yi's profile, feeling a bit of pity as she reached out to gently caress him.

“You don't have to think about anything. Just this is already good enough. We're together, living happily.”

They had long since emerged from the initial panic of the apocalypse.

Now, everyone lived inside this apocalypse fortress.

They enjoyed a life without worries about food or clothing.

They no longer had to struggle for survival like before.

Yang Siya didn't need to pretend to be a flawless goddess in front of others.

Zhou Ke'er didn't have to beg leaders for favors for her position, nor work tirelessly every day performing surgeries.

Everyone was doing what they liked, something unimaginable in the past.

Zhang Yi looked at Zhou Ke'er, then at Yang Siya, suddenly wanting to go out and play for a while.

They desperately needed to relax.

Of course, there were many ways to relax, but sometimes they needed to refresh their minds, not just their bodies like now.

"In a while, let's go out to sea for a trip!"

"There's a large icebreaker ship over at Chen Jingguan's place. We'll just play around the nearshore area, maybe do some fishing."

The two women's eyes instantly lit up with excitement upon hearing this.

“Really?”

Zhang Yi nodded: “Of course it’s real. There’s nothing much to do on land. Going out to sea to see the icy ocean scenery sounds nice.”

By then, they would also visit Chen Jingguan to ask him to strengthen the coastal defenses.

Within the Jiangnan Region’s territory, the coastline wasn’t very long, with only five cities, and Tianhai City was the most prosperous.

With the strength of the Huaxu Kingdom, plus the deterrent effect of completely wiping out the Moon of Corrosion and Tianlong Pirate Crew’s fleets, it was unlikely any reckless overseas organizations would invade.

But one must always be vigilant in times of peace. It was better to guard against trouble before it came.

After all, he had asked Zhu Zheng for plenty of heavy weaponry for coastal defense.

Chapter 780: The Mysteries of the Deep Sea

The next day.

Zhang Yi slept until past ten in the morning before getting up.

Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya were still asleep, having exhausted themselves the previous day.

Yawning lazily, he finished washing up while still in his pajamas and shuffled downstairs in slippers.

The sound of video games echoed from the living room. Peering down from the staircase, Zhang Yi saw Fatty Xu completely absorbed in mashing controller buttons, dark circles prominent under his eyes.

"Aren't you afraid of dying from exhaustion like that?"

Zhang Yi called out while leaning on the railing.

Fatty Xu jumped at the sudden voice, then let out a pig-like squeal.

"Ahhh! Died again! I died again!"

Walking over, Zhang Yi saw Fatty Xu torturing himself with another brutally difficult soul-like game.

"Make me some coffee!"

Zhang Yi kicked him lightly before plopping down onto the soft sofa.

Fatty Xu obediently went to prepare coffee.

Soon, the rest of the household began gathering in the living room.

Liang Yue had risen earliest - she'd already finished her rehabilitation exercises by the time Zhang Yi woke up. As a physical-enhancement superhuman with strong regenerative abilities and Zhou Ke'er's medical care, her recovery progressed swiftly.

Once everyone assembled, Zhang Yi discussed future plans.

First was sending them to Blizzard City for modifications by Deng Group.

Old You eagerly supported this idea, desperate to grow stronger and contribute more to the team.

Fatty Xu, however, expressed fear about being turned into some monstrous cyborg.

"Will they chop off my arms and replace them with mechanical prosthetics? Like in Cyberpunk games? Maybe even implant chips in my brain!"

The thought alone made him shudder.

Zhang Yi rolled his eyes. "Those are robots. Current robots can't compare to superhumans anyway."

Mechanical technology in 2051 hadn't advanced that far yet. Robots frequently malfunctioned in extreme cold and suffered limited endurance.

Simply put, this was an era of radical mutations where supernatural abilities outperformed contemporary technology across multiple fields. Though scientific progress continued, perhaps soon the fusion of technology and superpowers would yield remarkable breakthroughs.

Yang Siya asked curiously, "Do I need to go too? My abilities are support-type after all."

Zhang Yi smiled, squeezing her delicate white hand while gazing at the endless snowscape outside.

"You're exempt."

Deng Group's modification procedures were brutally straightforward, unsuitable for ordinary people. Zhou Ke'er, Yang Siya and Yang Xinxin were all excluded from consideration. Moreover, their abilities possessed unique qualities Zhang Yi wouldn't let Deng Group study.

The final decision: Old You and Fatty Xu would go to Blizzard City for Deng Group's experiments and specialized training, while Zhang Yi took the women to Chaoyu Harbor - both to help Chen Jinguan establish defenses and to acquire an icebreaker for maritime leisure.

Old You raised no objections. Though Fatty Xu grumbled about wanting to join the vacation, Zhang Yi overruled him instantly.

"Go to Blizzard City first. I'll have the Deng family arrange some pretty young companions for you."

Fatty Xu's eyes sparkled at this suggestion, his head bobbing like a woodpecker as he immediately agreed.

Thus both matters were settled cheerfully.

After two more days of relaxed enjoyment, Zhang Yi saw Fatty Xu and Old You off on the special train to Blizzard City before taking the women to Chaoyu Harbor.

The harbor lay in ruins after the recent battle, half-abandoned with shredded shipping containers scattered everywhere like metal confetti. Fortunately, the underground shelters remained intact, allowing residents to continue living safely.

When Zhang Yi's snow vehicles arrived, nearly a thousand people were busy cleaning up the battlefield. Chen Jingguan came to receive them personally.

"Boss, you're here!" Chen Jingguan's eyes immediately noticed the women behind Zhang Yi.

Having rarely ventured out in months, they'd dressed in their finest - luxurious furs and makeup so exquisite they might have been competing in Miss World. Their glamorous appearance drew envious stares from Chaoyu Base's female residents.

"I came to check on your progress. Also, I need some skilled crew and that 'Leisure' icebreaker ship for a short maritime excursion."

Chen Jingguan's expression turned hesitant upon hearing about the sea voyage.

"Boss... there's something I should mention about going to sea."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. "What is it?"

"If you're just cruising near shore, that's fine. But I strongly advise against venturing into deep waters. Because currently... the ocean is more dangerous than land."

Zhang Yi narrowed his eyes. "Mutated creatures?"

Oceans covered seventy percent of the planet compared to land's thirty percent, with vast vertical ecosystems containing countless undocumented species. In this era of radical mutations, who knew what bizarre leviathans now inhabited the depths?

"Have you encountered any during your voyages?" Zhang Yi asked curiously.

Chen Jingguan nodded gravely.

"Yes. We've lost two ships already. The seas contain terrifying horrors - mutated mega-fauna that can capsize ten-thousand-ton steel vessels effortlessly! Now we navigate carefully to avoid monster-infested waters. That's why I'm warning you."

Zhang Yi suddenly recalled Kanute, captain of the Tianlong Pirate Crew's Western Squadron who could transform into a massive Blue Shark. Had their battle occurred at sea instead of land, the Celestial Hound Squad might not have defeated him so easily.

"Understood. I'll just avoid deep waters then." With his current abilities, only exceptionally powerful creatures would pose a threat.

Chen Jingguan nodded. "I'll make arrangements immediately."

Zhang Yi waved a hand. "No rush. First show me your coastal defenses. That last battle exposed critical vulnerabilities against maritime attacks. We can't let that happen again."

Chen Jingguan scratched his head awkwardly, thinking to himself: If you hadn't killed so many of our people, we might actually have proper defenses now.

Naturally, he complied with Zhang Yi's request, leading him and the shelter women on a seaside inspection like a tour guide. While Zhang Yi meticulously examined defensive gaps, Zhou Ke'er and the others happily ignored the serious matters, snapping selfies against the spectacular backdrop of frozen ocean beneath the ashen sky - a breathtaking sight of endless ice stretching to the horizon.