

## **Ad Infinitum 211**

### Chapter 211: Punch Combo

Amidst the continuous salvo, music—mainly consisting of suona sounds—penetrated the cover and echoed in the parking lot behind the technology building.

At this moment, the armored vehicle had already run into Shang Jianyao—who was hiding behind the concrete pile—under the tall murloc’s control.

Upon seeing this, Shang Jianyao leaped up and quickly climbed over the concrete pile with his hands and feet before jumping to the other side.

Bang!

The armored vehicle slammed into the concrete, causing the ground to tremble and rocks to fly everywhere.

After this collision, the tall murloc wearing the wreath laurel almost flew out the driver’s seat, in which he would’ve smashed the windshield and flown out.

Fortunately, his irrationality from the prior corniness wasn’t serious. He remembered to fasten his seatbelt.

As the inflated airbag pressed against his chest, he felt a certain level of depression. The abnormally tall murloc suddenly snapped to attention. Why did I do that? Isn’t this exchanging my own safety for a single enemy’s life? Was I influenced? He’s an Awakened?

As his thoughts raced, the murloc wearing the wreath laurel drove the car again, wanting to turn around and leave.

His vehicle was very sturdy, so he didn’t suffer any damage from the collision. The engine’s roar sounded as expected.

At this moment, the unusually tall murloc saw a black figure land on the hood of the car, causing the car to tremble slightly.

A furry face with a protruding mouth that exuded a lively vibe appeared in his eyes.

Shang Jianyao had run back and jumped onto the hood of the car! During this process, he inserted the two pistols back into his belt. He then removed all his grenades and piled them in front of the car's windshield.

This car wasn't a pure armored vehicle. Instead, it was a high-engine capacity vehicle that had been modified with armor and bulletproof glass. Under such circumstances, it wasn't necessary for the bulletproof glass to be able to withstand the simultaneous explosion of multiple grenades.

Of course, Shang Jianyao wasn't sure that the explosion would blast open the windshield. His main goal was to scare the other party.

Just like Shang Jianyao wasn't certain if the windshield would shatter, the tall murloc wasn't sure either!

Nobody would do such an exaggerated experiment during a performance test. Even if the modifier made the bold claim that it would be fine, nobody would believe them without reservation in such a situation.

Upon seeing the string of dark-green grenades slowly roll in front of the windshield, the tall murloc instantly held his breath, almost forgetting to maintain Asphyxiation.

The next second, when the car started to reverse, Shang Jianyao smiled.

Unfortunately, the murloc couldn't see it because of the mask.

At the same time, Shang Jianyao pulled out a grenade's ring. He put down the grenade and waved at the tall murloc behind the windshield. Shang Jianyao then jumped off the car and rolled to the back of another fortification.

The tall murloc anxiously opened the door the moment Shang Jianyao pulled the grenade's ring, but his hands were unable to complete the action.

Hands Immobility!

At the critical moment, he didn't suffer any restrictions. The door to the driver's seat opened by itself. It was as if a pair of invisible hands were opening the door for the tall murloc.

He jumped out in a panic and rolled to the back of a half-collapsed concrete mound.

Boom! Boom!

Explosions sounded one after another, but they sounded at fast intervals, making them sound like one long blast.

Flames soared into the sky, accompanied by the soundless shattering of the windshield.

The explosion subsided a little, and the Dagger Group Prelude echoed again.

Shang Jianyao seemed augmented by the music. He swung his arms and rushed out of his hiding spot, heading straight for the tall murloc.

The Asphyxiation effect had vanished.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Shang Jianyao felt like he was running a race, and he wasn't too far from his goal.

Suddenly, his heart beat faster as if he had heavily stepped on the accelerator, and the brakes had miraculously failed.

Amidst thumping sounds, his running slowed down. His back bent slightly as if he were relieving his shortness of breath and dizziness.

After a lot of concrete was blown up, the tall murloc stood up.

The dark-blue cloak he wore was tattered, and his grayish-black scales were covered in dust. At this moment, he had already given up on maintaining Asphyxiation and switched to using Heartbeat Acceleration to deal with Shang Jianyao.

Facing an Awakened who had closed the distance between them, the murloc didn't dare be careless at all. He wanted to resolve this as soon as possible.

...

Redstone Collection's defense line around Aiur Supermarket and Sixth Day Mall was already on the brink of danger. In many places, the mountain monsters had already rushed forward and engaged in close combat.

Long Yuehong's numb mind—a result of a lack of oxygen—suddenly cleared up. He then breathed in the air that he usually didn't find pleasant; even the smell of gunpowder was intoxicating.

After taking a deep breath, Long Yuehong picked up the grenade launcher and turned around to fire.

But just as he completed the first action, he saw the mountain monsters—who had already climbed up the collapsed building. He saw their blue skin under the moonlight and the grenades that were being thrown over.

Grenades.

F\*ck... Long Yuehong cursed inwardly.

At the same time, he instinctively kicked with his feet and horizontally flew toward the wall on the other side of the room.

During this process, he saw Bai Chen perform a similar jump and roll before entering the second prepared fortification.

Thud!

Long Yuehong abandoned the grenade launcher as soon as he landed. He scrambled around the wall and hid behind a pile of sandbags.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The violent blast brought about by the grenades swept across the original defense line, causing the walls on both sides to collapse gradually. Several Redstone town guards—who didn't react quickly enough—were torn apart as blood splattered everywhere, their corpses incomplete.

Immediately after, seven to eight mountain monsters—armed with submachine guns and assault rifles—jumped over the collapsed windowsill and entered the first defense line.

Without any hesitation, they swept their guns around.

Amidst the gunfire, several town guards—who had tried to counterattack—were peppered with bullets until their bodies were covered in bloody holes and had their limbs blasted off.

Soon, only Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, Han Wanghuo, and a few others remained along this line of defense. They remained calm and didn't rashly show their heads even though the enemy was approaching.

The sweeping fire quickly subsided to a certain extent. Bai Chen put down the Orange rifle, took off her coat, and placed it to the side.

She then threw her coat up and jumped out from beside the fortifications.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

Her coat was riddled with many holes.

In midair, Bai Chen had already taken out an Ice Moss and a United 202 to fire at the eight mountain monsters scattered across the room.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Bai Chen's every shot hit a target, but some hit the vital spots, while others landed on their limbs.

Upon hearing the mountain monsters' screams, Long Yuehong's heart palpitated. Without hesitation, he raised the Berserker assault rifle he slung around his body and half-kneeled.

With the sandbag between him and the enemy, he fired at the area with more mountain monsters.

This didn't require precision. It was mainly to provide suppressive fire so that Bai Chen could hide in time after her firing.

This was part of the Old Task Force's training. Although Long Yuehong had never used it in actual combat, he—who had plenty of experience—was no longer flustered and lost like before when facing danger. Now, he could calm down and make decisions.

This way, he could unleash most of his training. Furthermore, he had worked with Bai Chen back in Weed City and had a certain level of tacit understanding with her.

As he fired, Long Yuehong saw Han Wanghuo take the opportunity to counterattack. His marksmanship was extremely precise, and not a single shot missed.

After this round of counterattacks, more than half of the eight mountain monsters that rushed in had fallen. The remaining three found cover and began firing at Bai Chen, Han Wanghuo, and the others.

Without a doubt, Long Yuehong and the others had the upper hand, but more mountain monsters were still rushing over from behind them!

In addition, Long Yuehong was most worried that the feeling of suffocation would come again. This would result in the defense quickly losing combat strength in a minute or two.

...

In the parking lot behind the technology building.

The tall murloc moved a distance in the opposite direction to avoid being affected by Shang Jianyao's Awakened abilities.

Shang Jianyao tried his best to approach or draw his gun to fire, but he couldn't succeed because his heart was beating faster and faster. He was already approaching his limits, but he had a stubbornness that was engraved in his bones as he slowly walked forward.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian—who was blocked by the flower bed—suddenly jumped up. She held an Ice Moss in one hand and a United 202 in the other.

Bang! Bang!

Her pupils locked onto the murloc wearing the wreath laurel, and she pulled the triggers.

She had long woken up and had been pretending to be unconscious, waiting for an opportunity!

After she fainted, the auxiliary chip in her biological prosthetic limb sensed that something was wrong with her body. It activated an emergency function and used the stored electric capacitance to stimulate her and wake her up.

When Jiang Baimian pulled the triggers, the tall murloc's gaze froze.

The concrete blocks around him flew up and blocked between him and Jiang Baimian, forming a wall with many gaps. It was as if there were many invisible hands controlling everything.

Bang! Bang!

The two bullets that Jiang Baimian fired were blocked by the concrete blocks and missed their target.

However, her attack liberated Shang Jianyao. His heart no longer beat erratically. Furthermore, he quickly recovered due to his powerful bodily functions.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Shang Jianyao rushed in front of the tall murloc in a few strides and punched out with his right fist.

The tall murloc wanted to raise his hands to block, but he realized that he couldn't do so.

Shang Jianyao's fist passed through the gap in the concrete the next second. Amidst the majestic melody produced by the suona and various instruments, it struck the side of the murloc's face heavily.

With a bang, the teeth of the tall murloc fell off as his body tilted in the corresponding direction. The pieces of concrete floating around him fell to the ground with a thud.

Shang Jianyao's left fist followed closely behind and struck the other half of his face, righting his body.

Shang Jianyao then slid his hands down, grabbed the enemy's shoulder, and pressed him down. At the same time, he bent his knee and propelled it upward.

Bam!

The tall murloc's body stiffened, but Shang Jianyao didn't stop. He raised his arm, clasped his hands, and swung them at the other party's neck like a club.

Bang!

The tall murloc fainted.

## Chapter 212: The Meaning Behind the War

Long Yuehong switched positions from time to time and fired from the top, left, and right of the sandbag, not giving the mountain monsters a chance to approach.

Both sides hid behind their respective covers and exchanged shots.

Bai Chen and Han Wanghuo also joined in, but they didn't put all their attention on this. One took the opportunity to quietly remove a grenade and search for a suitable angle. The other observed the



mountain monsters' activity patterns and slowly adjusted the muzzle's position, hoping to seize the opportunity to kill the enemy with one shot just as they were about to fire.

At this moment, an artillery shell landed outside the window and landed on the top of the collapsed building.

Boom!

A violent shockwave—mixed with crimson flames—surged into the windowless and glassless room, forcing Bai Chen, Han Wanghuo, and Long Yuehong to retreat to the fortifications and lay prone.

After the explosion subsided a little, the remaining mountain monsters rushed out from their cover under their leader's lead and ran toward Han Wanghuo and the others.

Long Yuehong had just looked up from behind the sandbag when he saw a mountain monster—who was not shorter than him—rush over. The assault rifle in his hand spewed out bullets with a roar.

He reflexively shrank back again, hearing the bullets hit the sandbags and them flying over his head.

Long Yuehong knew that hiding wasn't a solution. He mustered his courage, jumped out from the side of the fortifications, and counterattacked with his Berserker assault rifle.

Gunfire echoed in the room. Of the two parties, one rolled on the ground, and the other ran forward. However, they failed to hit the other.

Almost at the same time, their magazines were emptied.

Long Yuehong didn't hesitate. He gave up on the assault rifle and reached for his belt with both hands. Upon seeing this, the mountain monster threw the assault rifle in its hand at Long Yuehong's head.

Long Yuehong hurriedly ducked and stood up when the rifle hit the ground. However, the mountain monster had already rushed in front of him and drawn a bayonet.

It was only then that Long Yuehong saw his enemy clearly.

He was taller and stronger than most of the mountain monsters in the vanguard team. Apart from his slightly blue skin and sharp teeth in his half-open mouth, he was no different from a normal human. He had thick eyebrows, large eyes, and a square face with thick lips.

Long Yuehong didn't have the time to draw his gun. He turned to the right and dodged the other party's bayonet.

He constantly dodged and was in danger under the mountain monster's indomitable attacks. Fortunately, this was the role he often played during combat training. Therefore, he was relatively adept despite having constant close shaves.

Long Yuehong was gradually forced behind the sandbags.

Suddenly, he stepped on a piece of concrete that appeared from nowhere and lost his balance.

Upon seeing this, the mountain monster smiled—this was what he had expected. He had been forcing Long Yuehong to the rubble-covered ground. Then, banking on his outstanding balance from climbing cliffs as if they were flat ground, he just needed to wait for Long Yuehong to fall.

Since the opportunity had appeared, he naturally wouldn't let it go. He suddenly pounced forward and waved the bayonet in his hand.

At this moment, Long Yuehong suddenly exerted strength with his waist, slowing down his fall. He then tightened his right thigh and lashed it upward.

Bam!

His right leg kicked the mountain monster's abdomen, making him bend his back uncontrollably.

Long Yuehong seized the opportunity to roll on the ground and stand up again with the rebound. During this process, he also drew his Ice Moss pistol.

Bang! Bang!

He repeatedly pulled the trigger, causing blood to bloom from the mountain monster's body.

Upon seeing that the enemy had fallen to the ground with serious injuries and with no weapons beside him, Long Yuehong cast his gaze at Bai Chen in an attempt to provide support.

At this moment, Bai Chen happened to circle behind another mountain monster and kicked upward with her foot.

Bam!

The mountain monster revealed an extremely pained expression as its body involuntarily curled up.

Bai Chen took the opportunity to draw her gun and blow his head off.

As red and white splattered everywhere, Han Wanghuo also finished off his enemy. He used his left arm as bait to withstand a slash forcefully. He then seized the opportunity to get a hold of the other party and kick him out.

As the mountain monster staggered forward, Han Wanghuo pulled out the United 202 from his waist and gave it one last blow.

Bai Chen glanced at Long Yuehong and saw that he was fine. She quickly rushed to the first line of fortifications from before and picked up the Death rocket launcher that Jiang Baimian had left behind.

She carried the rocket launcher and half-kneeled. She then looked at the charging mountain monsters and merfolk outside and calmly fired.

Boom!

A fireball bloomed among the Subhumans and devoured many lives, reducing the enemy's momentum.

This was like a signal flare. The Redstone town guards from different areas of the defense line counterattacked.

Before long, Redstone Collection's artillery produced their own salvos.

Boom! Boom!

Amidst the fierce salvo, the mountain monsters and merfolk's charge was interrupted.

Before long, a whistle sounded. The Subhumans abandoned the corpses and returned to their original base.

...

Phew... An Awakened at this level hasn't experienced much mutation in their bodies... Uh, I can't think of it that way. Otherwise, Shang Jianyao would say that it's inauspicious again... Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief when she saw that Shang Jianyao had successfully knocked out the tall murloc who wore a wreath laurel.

She quickly ran over and prepared to make the final preparations.

At this moment, the skin of the tall murloc on the ground suddenly twitched strangely. It looked like countless gigantic parasites were burrowing around, making it appear extremely terrifying.

An indescribable aura emanated the next second, instantly dimming the moonlight in the area.

A vortex and a black hole seemed to appear inside the tall murloc's body. They were about to devour everything around them and give birth to a living being that didn't belong in the world.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian felt like her breathing had stopped and that her heart stopped beating.

Although this couldn't compare to the gaze that came from behind Bishop Renato's door when he contracted the Heartless disease, it was still very terrifying.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao held his breath, drew both pistols, and pulled the triggers at the mutated tall murloc as if he were unaffected.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He hit the target with every shot, but an invisible barrier seemed to appear around the murloc's body, preventing the bullets from penetrating.

Shang Jianyao remained unfazed. He continued firing under the accompaniment of Dagger Group Prelude.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Jiang Baimian was infected by this stubbornness and firm attitude. She also stepped forward and aimed the United 202 at the tall murloc on the ground.

The two of them fired crazily without hesitation.

Finally, the invisible barrier shattered, and bloody holes appeared on the murloc's body.

He contorted a few times and completely lost his life. The anomaly in his body also stopped as if it had never happened.

...

After a hard-fought battle to force the merfolk and mountain monsters into a retreat, Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and said to Bai Chen and Han Wanghuo, "I'll go check if anyone is still alive."

This was to prevent the enemy from launching a sneak attack at critical moments. Of course, the targets he checked included the town guards. He wanted to see who could still be saved.

After a round of inspection, he realized that the mountain monster—which he had shot twice—was still alive.

Upon seeing Long Yuehong—who was wearing a fat pig mask—walk toward him, the mountain monster, who had already entered a critical state, exhaled and said, “You’re very strong.”

He used mountain monster language, but it seemed to derive from Ashlandic. It was closer to a dialect, so Long Yuehong could barely understand him.

Long Yuehong was happy and a little embarrassed when he heard his enemy praise him. He squatted down and honestly said, “I’m the weakest on my team.”

The dying mountain monster was stunned for a moment. “Aren’t you from Redstone Collection?”

“We are mercenaries,” Long Yuehong replied kindly when he saw that the other party was about to die.

“They were really lucky to hire such a strong team like yours,” said the dying mountain monster as he panted.

Seeing him on his last breath, Long Yuehong couldn’t help but ask, “Why must you seize Redstone Collection? Why must you become enemies with the townsfolk here? I heard that there are farms and coal mines in the mountains. There’s no need for you to go to war.”

The dying mountain monster fell silent for a moment before he gasped for breath. “This is an obsession passed down by us mountain people from previous generations. M-my great-grandparents and grandparents have repeatedly told me that this fertile lake—this Old World city is our hometown.

“They said that there were a garden and a swing in a courtyard by the lake. There was a very small vegetable field with gentle winds, clean water, and white pigeons from the city. One of the rooms in the courtyard was specially prepared for the children. There were toy blocks, jigsaw puzzles, toys, comics, and books...”

His voice became softer and softer before gradually falling silent.

...

“What happened just now?” Jiang Baimian muttered without expecting an answer.

Shang Jianyao squatted down to search the corpse and replied seriously, “Reanimation.”

“...You learned that from the radio programs?” Jiang Baimian’s facial muscles twitched as she asked.

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao was very calm.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “Is this something that happens to all Awakened at this level after they die, or is this Awakened abnormal?”

Shang Jianyao sincerely said, “You’ll have to ask him.”

“Do you think he will answer?” Jiang Baimian asked angrily. She then muttered to herself, “We can consult Harbinger Song later.”

At this moment, Shang Jianyao took out a neatly folded map from the pocket of the tall murloc’s tattered dark-blue cloak.

This map was very old. It was obvious that it came from the Old World.

Shang Jianyao quickly unfolded it and realized that it was identical to the map given by Song He—they were all city tour maps from the past.

This map didn’t label many things. It only had a red circle drawn somewhere in the city.

Outside the red circle was a word in the Red River language: “Home.”

Chapter 213: “Devils”

Jiang Baimian looked down at the map and the fallen wreath laurel. She recalled Han Wanghuo’s description of the merfolk and mountain monsters, and she fell silent for a few seconds before laughing self-deprecatingly. “Why do I feel like I’ve really become a villain?”

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao’s response, she sighed again. “But there’s nothing wrong with Redstone Collection’s townsfolk protecting their homes...”

...

“This f\*cked up world!” Long Yuehong fell silent for a long time before softly cursing when he saw the mountain monster in front of him completely lose his breath and become a corpse.

Long Yuehong stood up and walked back to Bai Chen’s side. As he reloaded the grenade launcher with ammunition, he sighed sincerely. “I’m beginning to understand Shang Jianyao’s dream of saving all of humanity.”

Han Wanghuo—who wasn’t too far away from them—had sharp ears and looked over in surprise.

After equating the words ‘Shang Jianyao’ with the strange young man, he felt that everything was only right. It wasn’t surprising for such a person to have such an ideal.

Bai Chen heard the mountain monster’s last words and replied, “There are all kinds of grudges, but it has nothing to do with us. I just need to do my job well.”

She paused and added, “How can the few of us save all of humanity? Even if we have an amiable ability like Harbinger Song’s and are 1,000 times stronger, we can only make the humans in this area trust each other and stop killing each other. After we leave, everything will slowly return to normal.”

She originally wanted to say that Inference Clowning could only create a false peace, but seeing how Han Wanghuo and another town guard were around, she changed her mind and used Harbinger Song He as an example.

Long Yuehong fell silent for a moment before saying, “What we are doing now is not meaningless. Without figuring out the reason for the Old World’s destruction and finding the true origins of the Heartless disease, even if the Salvation Army can realize their ideal and establish a beautiful New World, things will return to their current situation at any moment due to a Heartless disease outbreak. It might even be worse.

“I think Shang Jianyao has the same thoughts. We should figure out the cause of the illness before we can treat it completely.”



As he listened in to their conversation, Han Wanghuo felt increasingly puzzled. Although he had previously determined that this was a Ruin Hunter team from a large faction, he didn't expect the team to have such 'far-reaching' goals or ideals.

Can the four of them accomplish such an ideal? This is something that First City and United Industries can't do... Han Wanghuo shook his head silently and maintained his surveillance of the merfolk and mountain monster camp.

...

After sighing wistfully, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao, "Do a quick search. We have to evacuate. The merfolk and mountain monsters' charge has come to a temporary pause. It won't be long before they organize people to investigate the situation."

Shang Jianyao neatly folded the map and placed it back into the pocket of the tall murloc's tattered cloak.

He then took out a pile of items. There were dried fruits, roots of certain plants, crudely packaged green sweets, and a few thick needles.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian had already walked to the edge of the parking lot. As she picked up her discarded gun, she looked back.

She swept her gaze across the items in Shang Jianyao's hand and frowned slightly. This was a little beyond her expectations.

Without wasting any time on discussion, she quickly walked to the side of one of the Redstone town guards wearing an exoskeleton.

She was an ordinary person. Unlike Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao who had undergone genetic enhancement or modification, she still showed no signs of waking up. Even if Jiang Baimian squatted down and nudged her body, it was useless.

Fortunately, I prepared some FECA... Jiang Baimian quickly took out the biological agent used for emergency treatment and injected it into the Redstone town guard's vein.

After Shang Jianyao helped the merfolk wear his wreath laurel again, he walked back, switched off the small speaker, and stored it in his tactical backpack.

At this moment, the exoskeleton-wearing female town guard finally woke up.

After opening her eyes, the first thing she saw was a graceful monk mask.

To the residents of Redstone Collection, this wasn't something to be afraid of. She quickly asked, "You are? Where's the enemy?"

Jiang Baimian shouted at Shang Jianyao first. "Give that guy a FECA too." She was referring to the other exoskeleton-wearing town guard.

After giving the instructions, Jiang Baimian smiled at the woman in front of her. "We are mercenaries hired by Captain Han. The enemy has been dealt with."

"Dealt with?" The female town guard blurted out in surprise. The monster that looked like a god or devil has been killed by these two humans? Even I was as frail as a baby despite wearing an exoskeleton in front of the monster.

"Yes." Jiang Baimian watched as Shang Jianyao picked up the clothes he had used as bait and walked to the other town guard's side. She smiled and replied, "We have to thank you for this. If it weren't for the fact that you attracted his attention and cleared out most of his guards, we wouldn't have been able to succeed."

Without waiting for the female town guard's response, Jiang Baimian urged, "The enemy forces will be here soon. We have to leave this place as soon as possible."

Upon seeing her companion awaken under the monkey-masked mercenary's help, the female town guard sincerely said, "Thank you."

"There's no need to thank me. One of the reasons I woke you up was to use you as bait to attract the enemy's firepower and make our journey back a little easier. In any case, there shouldn't be any problems with you wearing an exoskeleton." Jiang Baimian smiled like a fox. Unfortunately, this was blocked by the mask.

The female town guard was momentarily at a loss for words.

About ten seconds later, she and her companion ran out of the parking lot behind the technology building and returned to Aiur Supermarket and Sixth Day Mall.

This undoubtedly attracted the attention of the merfolk and mountain monsters. Some shells and bullets flew at them.

With the help of the military exoskeleton, the two town guards easily dodged the attacks. They jumped onto the collapsed building and disappeared from the enemy's line of sight.

The existence of the two exoskeletons concealed Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian's furtive retreat. They circled around and easily climbed to the top from the side of the collapsed building that the enemy couldn't see.

As they approached the original fortifications, Shang Jianyao shouted, "It's us! It's us!"

Not only was he confirming his identity to prevent any friendly fire, but he was also informing his companions to provide cover fire.

Of course, Jiang Baimian was originally prepared to use the walkie-talkie to inform them, but Shang Jianyao had immediately shouted.

She could only sigh helplessly and retract her hand from her belt.

They quickly used the cover fire to get back to the room where Bai Chen and Long Yuehong were.

With a glance, she saw corpses, blood, bullet holes, and traces of explosions everywhere. Jiang Baimian nodded at Long Yuehong and said, "Well done."

Being able to survive the onslaught of a large number of enemies was something worth praising.

"Indeed," Bai Chen echoed.

Shang Jianyao gave a thumbs up. If he didn't wear a mask, Long Yuehong would've seen a sunny smile.

"It's mainly because of everyone's teamwork," Long Yuehong said humbly, happy and embarrassed.

At this moment, Han Wanghuo asked, "How's the situation over there?"

Upon seeing that Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian could return alive from the terrifying Awakened murloc, he raised his evaluation of their strength by several levels.

Before Jiang Baimian could say anything, Shang Jianyao sighed and said, "I couldn't play him a lullaby. The track isn't in the speaker."

"..." Han Wanghuo felt that the other party's reply was incongruous.

Jiang Baimian then replied, "It's been resolved. There's no need to worry about sudden asphyxiation."

"It's been resolved?" Han Wanghuo asked in surprise.

Even the inexperienced townsfolk could determine how terrifying the Awakened Subhuman was from their previous encounter, much less a Senior Hunter like Han Wanghuo.

Being able to suffocate hundreds of humans at the same time from 100 meters away was an ability only an oracle or devil incarnate had!

Even if Bishop Renato were still around, he couldn't do such a thing.

Such an Awakened Subhuman had actually been killed by two normal humans—who were nothing special apart from their height and looks!

"Yes." Jiang Baimian nodded. "Without your suppressive firepower and those two military exoskeletons, we couldn't even approach."

Frankly speaking, if not for the two military exoskeletons attracting attention and finishing off the guards, she would've considered finding an opportunity to give Shang Jianyao an 'electric shock' and drag him away without 'disturbing' the Awakened murloc.

Han Wanghuo fell silent, his gaze moving back and forth between Shang Jianyao and the others.

At this moment, he began to think that this team might really be investigating the reason for the Old World's destruction and doing things that many large factions couldn't accomplish.

Where do they come from? This question popped up in Han Wanghuo's mind.

...

In the parking lot behind the technology building, a mixed reinforcement team consisting of merfolk and mountain monsters arrived.

The first thing they saw were corpses strewn across the ground, complete or incomplete.

Their hearts tightened as they quickly entered the depths of the parking lot and quickly saw the tall murloc.

He lay on the ground with his eyes tightly shut and body covered in blood. He was no longer breathing, but the wreath laurel on his head was still neatly worn.

"Oracle..." the murloc in the lead muttered in horror.

In their eyes, the Oracle was the strongest human in the world. If not for his powerful performance, the mountain monsters wouldn't have cooperated and been so obedient.

But now, he—who had begun transforming in the direction of a deity—was dead. He had been killed by a small team sent by the enemy.

In the indescribable silence, a murloc shouted as if he had a mental breakdown, "Devils! They sent out devils!"

...

Just as the Redstone town guards were worried about a second wave of attacks that the Subhuman alliance was about to launch, the merfolk and mountain monsters began to retreat.

With three sharp whistles, they disassembled their artillery and other items and retreated from the city ruin like a receding tide.

Chapter 214: Those Items

After the sky gradually lit up, Han Wanghuo put away the walkie-talkie and looked at Shang Jianyao and the others. "Their retreat has been confirmed. We just need to leave some people behind to guard and reconnoiter."

He meant that this war had temporarily come to an end.

Although Jiang Baimian was wearing a mask, she still covered her mouth and yawned. She then put down the Death rocket launcher, stood up, and smiled. "Then, is our employment contract over?"

"If nothing goes wrong," Han Wanghuo replied very carefully.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen also put away their weapons.

Jiang Baimian smiled. "We'll stay in Redstone Collection for a few more days. Remember to pay the rest when the time comes."

This included a military exoskeleton and a week's supply of food for four people.

"No problem," Han Wanghuo replied without hesitation. From his point of view, Redstone Collection might've been wiped out if not for the four 'mercenaries.' Of course, the premise was that the Vigilance Church couldn't come up with a solution at the most critical moment.

Jiang Baimian looked at the strangely quiet Shang Jianyao and turned to Han Wanghuo. "We'll be leaving first then. Uh, remember to inform us when the captives recover. I want to ask some questions."

As a small number of casualties had occurred within Redstone Collection's defense line, the Subhuman alliance couldn't evacuate them when they retreated.

"Alright." Han Wanghuo still had this bit of authority.

After leaving the defensive line and arriving at the parking lot, Long Yuehong was a little dumbfounded.

The area was quite unlucky; it seemed like an artillery shell had landed here. The yellow all-terrain vehicle's windows were shattered, and the tires had gone flat.

The Old Task Force's jeep was rather sturdy. Under the protection of the thick armor, bulletproof glass, special tires, and the vehicle beside it, it only suffered a few scuffs.

"We can't drive this car anymore..." Jiang Baimian glanced at it and said thankfully, "Fortunately, it's not ours."

As she spoke, she walked to the jeep and opened the driver's door. "I'll do the driving. Little White has been up all night; we have to be careful."

"It's fine actually." Under Jiang Baimian's persistence day after day, Bai Chen had completely accepted her nickname.

Shang Jianyao took the initiative to 'explain' Jiang Baimian's actions. "She's still a little excited."

"Whoa." Jiang Baimian let out a disdainful sound. "You're back in the game? Why did you look listless just now? Are you hungry?"

It was time for breakfast.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, "I was thinking about something."

"What was it?" Jiang Baimian regretted it the moment she said that. She quickly sat down and started the car.

This didn't stop Shang Jianyao. He said from the backseat, "How do we make Redstone Collection's people peacefully coexist with the merfolk and mountain monsters?"

"...That's very difficult." Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before she exhaled. "Even if you rely on Inference Clowning to make them brothers that don't share the same blood and complete a round-robin validation, this effect won't last long because you will eventually leave."

If one didn't rely on their Awakened abilities, they just needed to look at the corpses and the dark blood that dyed the ground red when they cleaned the battlefield and think about how many such situations had happened in the past to understand how difficult this matter was. At least a few generations of persistent effort was needed to resolve the hatred between them.

Shang Jianyao quietly listened and sighed regretfully. "Unfortunately, I can't split out more 'me.' I'll leave one here."

Is your point the same as what I wanted to say? Jiang Baimian was speechless.

Their perspective was completely different.

As Long Yuehong watched the jeep drive through the city ruins and listened to his team leader and Shang Jianyao's conversation, he took off his mask and said with a complicated expression, "A mountain monster said something to me before he died."

"Oh?" Jiang Baimian cooperated by making an inquisitive sound.

Long Yuehong truthfully recounted the mountain monster's response and his thoughts during its death.

Jiang Baimian listened carefully and sighed with a smile. "Have you gained a deeper understanding behind the meaning of our work? Only by figuring out the cause of the illness can we find a more effective method to treat this f\*cked-up world!"

As she spoke, she almost lost control of her emotions.

Shang Jianyao then smiled. "So, are you guys going to save all of humanity with me in the future?"



Jiang Baimian smiled. “How can we miss such a meaningful thing? After we investigate the reason for the Old World’s destruction and find the pathology and treatment for the Heartless disease, we’ll save the world!”

Long Yuehong chuckled as well and didn’t answer like Bai Chen. He felt that he couldn’t shoulder such an endeavor. What he wanted to do the most now was to get his life straight.

After ending the topic, Jiang Baimian looked at the rearview mirror. “Take out all the items you got from the Awakened murloc. Why did I feel that something was amiss?”

“You have to shout ‘hey,’” Shang Jianyao emphasized.

“Huh?” Jiang Baimian couldn’t keep up with Shang Jianyao’s train of thought again.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “Didn’t you say that his team nickname is Little Red? Hers is Little White, and mine is Hey.”

“...” Jiang Baimian’s expression under the mask changed repeatedly. She was peeved and amused.

At this moment, she saw from the corner of her eye that Bai Chen’s facial muscles were slightly raised.

Their masks didn’t completely wrap around their faces. Parts of their faces could be seen from the side.

“Were you laughing?” Jiang Baimian flew into a rage out of humiliation.

Bai Chen pursed her lips tightly. She didn’t admit or deny it.

The atmosphere in the jeep became a little more cheerful because of this. Shang Jianyao then took out the dried fruit, some kind of plant root, a simply packaged green sweet, and a few thick needles.

Jiang Baimian looked back. “What’s all this?”

Are these items carried by a powerful Awakened?

Bai Chen turned around and studied the items for a while.

“These should be dried plums.” Bai Chen pointed at the black piece of dried fruit. She naturally didn’t dare to taste the unknown with her mouth; she only picked it up and sniffed it.

Dried plums? Jiang Baimian suddenly felt her saliva seep out.

As for what the plant roots and green sweet were, they couldn’t figure it out in a short period of time.

Just like that, they drove the jeep to the fortress-like Vigilance Cathedral.

At this moment, Harbinger Song He had already returned with the cathedral’s armed personnel. Compared to when they set off, this team had fewer people.

Upon seeing the four familiar masks enter the hall, Song He—who had just bowed at Eidolon Nun—asked, “I heard that you finished off the Awakened murloc?”

Jiang Baimian—who had already answered this question for the third time—tersely acknowledged it and nodded.

Song He sighed and said, “Without you guys, I would’ve considered abandoning the cathedral and letting Brand leave the room.”

“I thought you were a hidden powerhouse.” Shang Jianyao expressed his regret.

Although I think so too, don’t say it out loud... Jiang Baimian couldn’t stop him in time.

Song He was stunned for a moment, but he didn’t get angry. He smiled bitterly. “I was afraid that the price would worsen, so I didn’t dare continue improving myself. I’m already very satisfied with obtaining the Kalendaria’s grace; I can’t ask for more.”

Afraid... He previously mentioned that the older one is, the more timid they are...

While Jiang Baimian was in thought, Shang Jianyao took out the pile of items on the Awakened murloc and sincerely asked, "Do you recognize these?"

"Where did these come from?" Song He took a few steps forward and examined the items carefully.

"From the Awakened murloc," Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

Song He became more focused. After a while, he pointed at the crudely packaged green sweet and said, "This is plum candy from United Industries. The children love it."

In a large number of wilderness nomad settlements, sweets were also a luxury good.

Plum candy? Jiang Baimian frowned slightly.

Song He continued to identify the items. "This should be a dried plum, and this is a needle. There's nothing to say.

"Th-this is a type of plant root produced in the nearby forest. We call it 'Eating for Nothing.' It has a slight toxicity that can cause diarrhea, but it's very refreshing. When I was young, I followed them to hunt in the wilderness. If I needed to stay up late and wait, I would chew a piece during my sleepest period."

'Eating for Nothing' meant that eating it was equivalent to not eating anything because it would be excreted very quickly and might even empty everything in the bowels.

After Jiang Baimian heard that, she looked at Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and the others. "Plum candy, dried plum, plant roots that invigorates the mind, and a thick, long needle. What can these mean?"

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, "Pregnant!"

“What has needles got to do with pregnancy? Also, which pregnant woman will eat something that can cause diarrhea?” Jiang Baimian couldn’t understand Shang Jianyao’s train of thought.

Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness, “One is prone to constipation during pregnancy. Needles are used to sew children’s clothes.”

Jiang Baimian couldn’t find any flaws in Shang Jianyao’s explanation.

He was an official member of the Life Ritual parish.

“These should be used to invigorate the mind.” Bai Chen gave her thoughts in a timely manner. “Dried plums and plum candy can give a certain stimulation to keep us awake temporarily. Needles can also do the same.”

In order to stalk prey, she had slapped herself several times to prevent herself from falling asleep.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged her words and glared at Shang Jianyao. “That Awakened murloc carried so many similar items with him. This means that he often needs to stay awake. Did the price he paid have to do with being easily sleepy and easily tired?”

“Perhaps that’s the case.” Song He agreed.

Taking this opportunity, Jiang Baimian got to the point. “Harbinger Song, there was an anomaly after the Awakened murloc fell unconscious...”

She described the strange aura emitted from the Awakened murloc’s body after he fainted. She described the parasite-like squirming under his skin and emphasized that Shang Jianyao’s previous shots had encountered an invisible barrier and failed to hit the target.

Song He listened quietly and thought for a moment. “Are you trying to ask what’s going on?”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian’s response, he hesitantly said, “I heard from the person who brought me into the parish mention it before. He’s now a member of the Terror Episcopal. He said that the powerful Awakened who have explored the depths of the Mind Corridor can leave their auras in the Mind Corridor or even in the real world. Such auras can be combined with items to produce a magical and terrifying effect.

“I suspect that the Awakened murloc had combined with such an aura. He probably hasn’t entered the Mind Corridor yet.”

#### Chapter 215: Illness

Song He didn’t know much about the Mind Corridor. After Jiang Baimian asked a few more questions, she led Shang Jianyao and the others back to the hotel camp. They entered their respective rooms and slept.

Jiang Baimian woke up in a reverie. She felt her forehead burning, and her body was sore. She felt weak and uncomfortable.

I’ve fallen ill? She propped herself up and placed the pillow behind her back.

When she reached out to touch her forehead, she swept her gaze and saw Shang Jianyao sitting by the other bed. Using the sky’s glow outside the window, he held a needle and thread and seriously sewed up the coat with multiple bullet holes.

This was a necessary skill every Pangu Biology employee who had carried out missions in the Ashlands for a long time was equipped with.

Back when she first formed the Old Task Force, Jiang Baimian had planned on having a special lesson on this matter. However, she realized that Shang Jianyao was more skilled than her.

Upon recalling that Shang Jianyao had lived alone after the age of 15, she came to a realization and stopped mentioning such matters.

“What time is it?” Jiang Baimian retracted her hand from her forehead and confirmed that she was really sick. She didn’t even have the energy to look at her watch.

Ever since she survived the critical period stemming from genetic modification, apart from the inflammation caused by her injuries, it had been ages since she had fallen ill.

Was it because my heart was overloaded last night and also because of the electric shock? I didn’t rest in time after that, resulting in my illness? As Jiang Baimian thought about it, Shang Jianyao put down the needle, thread, and clothes and flipped his wrist to look at his watch.

“It’s almost one.”

“It’s already so late?” Jiang Baimian was slightly surprised. She didn’t feel hungry at all.

“You seem to be sick,” Shang Jianyao pointed out.

“How did you notice?” Jiang Baimian subconsciously asked.

Shang Jianyao stood up, took out the small mirror he carried with him to ‘mislead’ himself, and handed it to Jiang Baimian.

“Your cheeks are very red, and your lips are dry. You even spoke in your dreams when you were sleeping. You seemed to be calling ‘Mommy’ and ‘Daddy’...” Shang Jianyao described every detail that supported his inference.

“Stop!” A force surged out of Jiang Baimian’s body and forcefully stopped Shang Jianyao from continuing.

She felt that her image as a hardened female warrior had been seriously damaged.

After saying that, she felt weak, and her mouth was dry. She stretched her hand toward the bedside table, which was filled with junk, and tried to pick up her waterskin.

Before she could complete the series of actions, Shang Jianyao had already walked over quickly. He picked up the waterskin, unscrewed the cap, and brought it to her mouth.

“Whoa.” Jiang Baimian was shocked.

She didn’t refuse and gulped down a few mouthfuls of water before smiling. “Is this an act of repentance for acting on your own last night?”

“This is what companions should do,” Shang Jianyao replied without changing his expression.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and took the opportunity to ask, “Why did you rush out back then?”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “If I didn’t finish off that Awakened, all the Redstone townsfolk would’ve died.”

Jiang Baimian looked at his dark-brown eyes and realized that they were limpid.

“Sigh, at least you remembered to inform me in advance this time.” Jiang Baimian sighed helplessly.

“Why aren’t you sick?” At this point, she suddenly felt a little angry. It would only be fair if both of us are sick! Furthermore, Shang Jianyao is the one who should fall sick. He might even take the opportunity to crack the Island of Diseases.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “I wasn’t close to fainting back then.” This meant that the load on his heart had yet to exceed its limits, nor had he suffered any subsequent electric shocks.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and fell silent for a moment. “That’s true...”

She then said, “Quick, boil some hot water and get a towel. I need to apply it to my forehead. Regardless, you have to be punished for your independent act last night!”

Shang Jianyao had no objections. He skillfully boiled the tap water, adjusted the temperature, and wrung a towel before passing it over.

Jiang Baimian began instructing him to do all kinds of things, including but not limited to communicating with Bai Chen and Long Yuehong in the room next door, helping the patient to the bathroom, changing the towel, sewing clothes, and filling the waterskins.

As she watched Shang Jianyao busy himself, Jiang Baimian suddenly came to a realization. He’d already become familiar with such matters back when his mother was sick.

With this in mind, Jiang Baimian’s eyes lit up. She patted the edge of the bed and said, “We were in a blind spot previously!”

“What?” Shang Jianyao looked like he was trying to understand.

Afraid that his train of thought would go in a strange direction, Jiang Baimian didn't keep him in suspense and directly explained, “Haven't we been considering how to resolve your fear of diseases? Actually, with your attitude toward life and death, you shouldn't be so afraid of diseases.”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “Diseases will make me unable to do anything or be unable to do anything in time. I'm still afraid.”

Jiang Baimian replied in exasperation and amusement, “That's not the point.”

She then said, “I think your fear of disease is mostly fear that it will take away the people around you and that it leaves you helpless.”

Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought and didn't speak for a long time.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “I'll show you what it means to have a strong body and how illnesses mean nothing! If the company's genetic enhancement technology becomes widespread and genetic modification is no longer that dangerous and becomes controllable, humans will then be freed from the threat of most diseases.”

With that said, she leaned against the pillow and said in satisfaction, “When I recover, you can give it a try from this direction. Alright, get me something to eat; I'm starting to feel hungry. This is a good sign!”

After lunch, the responsibility of interrogating the Subhumans was handed to Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong because Jiang Baimian was sick.

According to Jiang Baimian's instructions, they first headed to the Vigilance Church and invited Harbinger Song He to join in on the interrogation.

This was to use the other party's amiable ability to prevent Shang Jianyao from exposing his Inference Clowning.

Song He had just woken up not long ago. Despite being an old man at his age, he didn't show any signs of discomfort after staying up all night. His body was indeed well-maintained.



He happily accepted Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong's invitation. He led two Church guards, rode his car to Redstone Collection, and entered the lowest-level's Public Security Department.

With the Harbinger in the lead, although Han Wanghuo was still resting and didn't come over, Shang Jianyao and the others easily entered the interrogation room and saw the captive with the lightest injuries.

He was a murloc. His body was covered in grayish-black scales, and gills trembled from the bottom of his ears to his neck.

In Long Yuehong's eyes, all merfolk looked the same. They could only be distinguished by their height and weight.

After they took their seats, Shang Jianyao hurriedly asked, "Who's the murloc that can suffocate others?"

The captive behind the iron railing glanced at him with his protruding eyes, lowered his head, and fell silent.

At this moment, Song He smiled and said, "It's not like it's a confidential matter."

The murloc thought about it and realized that it made sense. His attitude quickly softened as he looked up and hesitantly said, "He's the Oracle."

"Oracle? Which Kalendaria's oracle?" Long Yuehong was very polite and only asked after receiving Song He's permission.

"Not a Kalendaria." The murloc shook his head. "He was originally our third priest. We believed in the Old World's Christian God; later, he made us change the way we called him to Oracle."

Merfolk language evolved from the Red River language. Long Yuehong found it difficult to understand him, and it took him a while to understand the murloc.

On the other hand, Song He had clearly learned the local Subhumans' language by himself and eloquently asked, "When was this?"

"Less than a year ago." The murloc seemed to be conversing with a friend.

"What else happened back then?" Song He asked.

Respect and fear appeared in the murloc's eyes. "H-he became very, very strong—very terrifying. He was like an embodiment of a deity. He could easily kill a person or wipe out an entire army."

Shang Jianyao asked with interest, "What about before? Was he strong?"

The murloc glanced at the fellow in the monkey mask and reluctantly said, "He had some superpowers, but they weren't too powerful. He could make a person unable to open their mouth or eat. He could also make a person easily tired like they lack oxygen..."

After hearing the murloc's description, Song He gently asked, "Did he do anything before becoming an Oracle? Or did you encounter anything?"

The murloc sank into his memories. After a while, he said, "We landed on the largest island in the Lake of Wrath. My great-grandfather said that there was a town there and several villages. We were busy protecting ourselves, surviving, farming, and fishing in the beginning, but we kept thinking about it and wanted to get it back. We had never paid attention to their situation."

When he said 'get it back,' his emotions fluctuated a little as if he no longer trusted Song He, but he soon became sufficiently friendly.

"We recuperated after we were repelled the last time. Many young people have become interested in that large island because they have been idle for too long. That island is much larger than the one we live on. The roads are well-preserved, and there are abandoned farms everywhere. We were very curious about where the humans on the island had gone; they shouldn't have been attacked by outsiders.

"After searching for a while, we found the town they used to live in. We found some records."

Unfortunately, Team Leader didn't come. She must be very interested in these matters... Long Yuehong gradually adapted to the merfolk language.

The murloc continued, "From those records, we know that the people on that island quickly believed in a deity named Yama Tiger after the Old World was destroyed. He claimed to be the King Yama from Ashlandic myth. With this deity's blessings, the people on the island didn't suffer any disasters and lived very well. Just as they gathered some strength and planned on occupying the area around the Lake of Wrath, the deity fell asleep and never woke up again.

"After losing the deity's protection, a large-scale Heartless outbreak quickly erupted on the island. The remaining humans probably didn't last long before they were all killed."

Large-scale Heartless outbreak... Long Yuehong's scalp tingled when he heard this description.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao asked excitedly, "You found the sleeping deity?"

The murloc's lips quivered for a moment before he said, "Yes. We discovered the temple 'He' slept in."

Chapter 216: Past Arrogance, Future Submission

Without needing Song He to speak, Shang Jianyao had already 'helped' him ask, "What's it like inside?"

From their exchange, they could determine one thing—this murloc could understand the Red River language as long as he spoke slowly.

The murloc shook his head. "There was a very strange feeling there. We didn't dare enter, so we could only inform the Oracle. Uh, he was only a priest back then."

Song He wasn't surprised by this and asked, "He forbade you from exploring that temple after he came out?"

The murloc was abnormally surprised. "How do you know?"

By figuring it out with our brains... Long Yuehong criticized inwardly.

Upon seeing the smile on Song He's face, the merfolk stopped seeking an explanation and tersely acknowledged it. "Back then, he entered the temple alone and came out in less than 15 minutes. He then said that it was very dangerous inside and that nobody could enter without his permission. In less than two days, he got everyone to evacuate that island."

Song He nodded and asked patiently, "How long after that before he became abnormally strong?"

"I don't know," the murloc replied in confusion. "We only sensed his strength at a Mass two weeks later and started calling him Oracle."

Song He quietly listened and fell into deep thought. He didn't ask any more questions for a short period of time.

Shang Jianyao seized the opportunity and inquired curiously, "Does he usually like to sleep?"

The merfolk felt confused by this question. He was stunned for a moment before saying, "I'm not too sure. He lives behind the cathedral alone; he only comes out for the sermon, Mass, and something major like last night."

Song He and Shang Jianyao took turns asking a few more questions, but they didn't receive a satisfactory answer.

It was obvious that the murloc wasn't hiding anything—he just didn't know the answers.

Song He stood up and said in a friendly manner, "Alright, that's all for today."

The murloc was stunned for a moment before suddenly asking, "Are you guys going to execute me?"

His body trembled slightly.

Shang Jianyao glanced at him and turned his head to Harbinger Song He. "Can I buy these captives?"

What are you going to use to buy them... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Song He fell silent for a moment before smiling and sighing. He then said in Red River language, “They aren’t invaders in the true sense of the word. We also have a home we need to defend. On the battlefield, weapons are blind; it’s normal for either side to kill the other.

“As long as there’s no indiscriminate killing, I don’t think there’s a need to take revenge on a prisoner of war. It’s enough to carry out the corresponding judgment under the gaze of the Kalendaria according to the crimes he has committed. This is one of the bottom lines that humans possess that makes us different from beasts.

“It just so happens that our previous sentry team never returned. Some of the town guards that we later sent out for reconnaissance were also captured by the merfolk and mountain monsters. If they are still alive and the prisoners here haven’t committed any crimes of indiscriminate killing, I will push for the two parties to make contact and exchange captives.”

Upon hearing this, the murloc immediately relaxed. He collapsed into the chair as if he had lost his bones.

After leaving the interrogation room, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Song He walked to Redstone Collection’s parking lot.

When he was about to reach the jeep’s parking spot, Shang Jianyao suddenly thought of something. “Why didn’t I see Baz?”

Song He fell silent for a moment before saying, “He’s also a town guard; he was added to the defense line last night and didn’t manage to return.”

He spoke very euphemistically.

Huh? Long Yuehong was a little stunned. Although he had seen many Redstone townsfolk die in battle last night, he didn’t have deep feelings because he didn’t know them at all. Who knew that Baz—who had previously worked hard to survive and seek protection—would actually lose his life in this battle?

Long Yuehong originally imagined that Baz would be happy to receive the cathedral’s protection after Anhebus and Helvig’s plan was exposed. This left him gloomy all of a sudden.

He dug so many tunnels, but none of them could protect him on the battlefield... In such a war, a single person is really insignificant; they die just like that... Sigh, it would be good if there was no war... Long Yuehong glanced at Shang Jianyao, unable to decipher anything from the monkey mask.

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before asking, "Will you hold a funeral for him? I know a lot about funerals."

Song He tersely acknowledged it. "There's no need to be too sad; he entered the New World under Eidolon Nun's guidance. Our Church doesn't have complicated funerals, but we will have a Requiem Mass."

"Can I participate?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Song He nodded slightly. "Sure. Without you, more people from Redstone Collection would've died."

After bidding Song He farewell, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong silently walked back to the hotel camp.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian had taken anti-inflammatory drugs and slept for a while. Her physical and mental state was much better than in the afternoon.

After learning of Baz's death, she sighed for a while, wistful about the fragility of life.

After Long Yuehong described the large island in the lake, the sleeping deity, the forbidden temple, and the large-scale Heartless disease outbreak, Jiang Baimian's eyes lit up.

These were things that interested her greatly.

"After the deity protecting them fell asleep, the Heartless disease began to erupt on a large scale? Is there really a connection between the two? If there is and if we can find it, we might be able to unravel the secret of the Heartless disease!" Jiang Baimian became more and more excited as she spoke. It seemed like she would ignore her illness in the next second, lift her blanket, and rush to the lake to search for a boat.

Apart from the Heartless disease, a sleeping deity and an Old Era Awakened suspected of having explored the Mind Corridor's depths also filled her with the desire to research.

These were all things that could only be chanced upon by luck.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian's 'sudden spurt of energy,' Long Yuehong quietly hissed. "Team Leader, the Lake of Wrath is the merfolk's territory."

For Subhumans that were good at swimming and had gills and scales, overturning a few boats was easy.

Furthermore, things like sleeping deities, forbidden temples, and large-scale Heartless disease outbreaks sounded very dangerous!

"I'm not stupid. I'm still sick," Jiang Baimian replied in amusement. "Isn't that right, Little White?"

Bai Chen—who had been listening quietly—thought for a few seconds and said, "I agree with the second half of your sentence."

"The second half of the sentence? The sentence 'I'm still sick?' Ha, you think I'm stupid?" Jiang Baimian's brain wasn't as good as it usually was. It took her a while to figure out Bai Chen's meaning.

Bai Chen stood up and replied in all seriousness, "I never said that; I can't help it if that's what you wish to believe."

"..." Jiang Baimian was speechless. She turned to look at Shang Jianyao. "Why do I feel like Little White has been infected by you? I'm starting to miss the Little White who didn't know how to make sarcastic remarks in the past!"

After the little episode, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong returned to the room next door because the patient needed rest. They did their own things and planned on buying some fresh food from Redstone Collection later to make today's dinner more sumptuous.

After watching them leave the room, Jiang Baimian stopped smiling.

She was still tempted; she still wanted to go to the island in the lake and see the sleeping deity. However, this didn't seem to have anything to do with the reason for the Old World's destruction. It wasn't their team's mission. She didn't want to drag Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Shang Jianyao into danger because of her willfulness.

I'm stumped... Do I have to go secretly? But as someone who should set an example for the team, how can I do such a thing? Jiang Baimian leaned back against the pillow as her thoughts wandered.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao—who was sitting on the edge of another bed—suddenly said, “At least give me a signal in advance.”

“Huh?” Jiang Baimian was a little confused.

While confused, she found the words familiar. After careful thought, she realized that she had said something similar.

That was after Shang Jianyao suddenly threatened that group of nobles in Weed City and established the Brotherhood. She had warned this fellow, hoping that he would at least give her a signal or hint before doing such a thing and not launch a sudden attack.

At such a juncture, how could she not support him and protect his back?

What was a companion? A person who could accompany you through life and death with just one look!

Now, Shang Jianyao was using the same words back at her.

He's implying that he supports me and is willing to explore the temple on Lake Heart Island? Jiang Baimian immediately understood and couldn't help but smile. She snorted and said, “I think you just want to go yourself.”

“Yes, yes.” Shang Jianyao readily agreed.

Jiang Baimian glared at him and smiled. “I'm still sick.”



Even if she really wanted to go, she had to wait until she recovered.

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything else. He took out the small speaker from his tactical backpack and carefully checked it.

After a while, he and Jiang Baimian turned around and turned their heads to look at the door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Someone knocked on the door as expected.

"Who is it?" Shang Jianyao wore the monkey mask.

He spoke in Ashlandic.

Soon, someone outside the door replied in clumsy Ashlandic, "Lehman—Merchant Lehman from United Industries."

The arms smuggler who sold the arms to Helvig? He previously refused to see us and didn't want to get involved in Redstone Collection's matters. Why is he here now? Jiang Baimian perked up, put on her coat, and put on her mask.

From his appearance, Lehman didn't look like an arms smuggler at all. His light-blue eyes, slightly messy short blond hair, his nervousness, his height, ordinary looks, and restrained bearing made him no different from the middle-aged Red River slaves in the nobles' manors outside Weed City.

The most eye-catching thing about him was the red nose that appeared due to long-term alcoholism.

In the Ashlands, a person's long-term alcoholism was enough to indicate their status or value.

Amidst his bodyguards' protection, Lehman sat down. He maintained his smile, rubbed his hands, and continued speaking in clumsy Ashlandic. "I heard that you killed a very powerful Awakened?"

Although she wasn't used to his Ashlandic, Jiang Baimian had no intention of letting him switch to the Red River language. She smiled and asked, "Who did you hear that from?"

Shang Jianyao 'cooperated' and added, "They actually leaked our secret!"

Lehman's body immediately stiffened.

Chapter 217: Redstone Collection's Tyrant

Lehman leaned forward slightly, clasped his hands, and deliberated before saying, "I have some friends in Redstone Collection. They heard about your magnificent feat last night."

He didn't dare to say directly that the entire Redstone Collection knew that they had killed a powerful Awakened. Was it still a secret when everyone knew about it?

Jiang Baimian didn't continue the topic and asked, "Mr. Lehman, why are you looking for us?"

Lehman nervously said, "I want to entrust you with a mission. This will be a little dangerous, but don't worry. We will definitely have it issued through the Hunter's Guild and let it come under their review and purview."

Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds before smiling mischievously behind her mask. "Is this mission related to the reason for the Old World's destruction?"

"..." Lehman was confused. He shook his head after a long time. "I don't think so."

Shang Jianyao asked, "Then, is it related to the cause of the Heartless disease outbreaks?"

Whoa, you sure know what's on my mind... Jiang Baimian praised him inwardly.

Lehman couldn't keep up with the two Ruin Hunters' train of thought at all. He replied in confusion, "No."

He had heard that the stronger an Awakened was, the more unstable their mental state was, or that they had very strange habits. Could it be that these two are examples of this? Is that why they can kill that powerful Awakened?

Jiang Baimian held in her laughter and said in all seriousness, “We don’t accept all missions. I’m sorry.”

Lehman immediately understood that the two had posed the questions as an excuse to reject him. He was a little angry and felt that the other party was teasing him.

Of course, as a smuggler, it was an instinct to measure the enemy’s strength. After some thought, he gave up on his anger and said regretfully, “What a pity. The remuneration will be very generous.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t ask about the payment and rejected the other party’s suggestion again. “Our team needs to rest and recuperate. We won’t take on any missions for the time being.”

“Alright, you can come to me at any time if you wish to take it up. I should be staying in Redstone Collection for a few more days.” Lehman sensed the firm attitude of the Ruin Hunter opposite him, so he stood up and politely bade farewell.

After watching the smuggler leave, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “If we hadn’t already reserved an exoskeleton, we really might’ve considered his mission.”

They were an Old Task Force, not real Ruin Hunters. They didn’t rely on taking on missions for their livelihood.

“We have three subsequent targets. The first is to think of a way to contact DiMarco in the Underground Ark and see if he has any information regarding the Old World’s destruction. The second is to go to Lake Heart Island to see the sleeping deity. The third is to gather information on Mechanical Paradise to prepare for any future dealings.” Although she was ill, Jiang Baimian’s train of thought remained very clear.

Shang Jianyao sighed inexplicably. “It’d be nice to get another exoskeleton.”

“That’s true.” Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and nodded. “It’s even better if we make Little White stronger. Who wouldn’t mind having more exoskeletons? We can use them too. Yes, this isn’t too urgent; there’s no need to take too many risks.”

She was just about to take off her mask, take off her coat, lay back in bed, and continue being a patient when she sensed someone heading in their direction.

Seriously, can't a patient get some rest time? Jiang Baimian couldn't help but complain.

Shang Jianyao immediately found a piece of paper and wrote a few words on it. "Please do not disturb."

He had just opened the door and was about to stick the paper to the door when he saw Mrs. Theresa attempting to knock.

This widow of the arms dealer, Helvig, still wore her black, muslin hat. Behind her were several masked men armed to the teeth.

Theresa was stunned for a moment before she directly asked, "I heard that you found the firearms?"

"That's right," Shang Jianyao said happily. "Your half is in the cathedral."

As he spoke, he glanced at the people behind Theresa.

Upon sensing his gaze, the few people's bodies instantly tensed up. They even trembled slightly as if they wanted to find a place to hide at any moment.

They had personally experienced how terrifying the Awakened Subhuman last night was. Now, the person in front of them had killed that Awakened Subhuman!

"It's not a good thing to be too vigilant," Shang Jianyao suggested sincerely.

It was fine if he didn't say anything, but the moment he did, the people who came with Theresa had the urge to turn around and run.

Fortunately, it was merely an urge, and they didn't carry it out. This meant that they were still normal people.

Upon seeing this, Theresa quickly introduced them. "They are Helvig's loyal subordinates, and they are now in charge of protecting me."

Their conversation was in the Red River language.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian walked to the door and smiled. "I'll take you to the cathedral to get the remaining firearms now. Remember to go to the guild to confirm our mission's completion after you get them."

Theresa heaved a sigh of relief and sighed with emotion. "I never expected you to be so strong. Uh, I didn't expect you to be Ashlanders either. I was too agitated back then; although Helvig and I didn't have a good relationship, he was still my husband."

She had clearly learned from the others in Redstone Collection that this was an Ashlander team.

"It's fine." Jiang Baimian had almost forgotten their original conversation.

Theresa fell silent for a moment before asking, "Have you found Helvig's murderer?"

"Not yet," Jiang Baimian replied truthfully. "We just eliminated some suspects."

Uh... Why did you take away half of the firearms when you guys haven't even completed this mission? Theresa wanted to say that, but she recalled the Ruin Hunter team's 'glorious achievements' last night. She also sensed the nervousness and unease of the 'bodyguards' behind her.

She could only force a smile. "It seems like we'll find the real murderer soon."

At this moment, she experienced how some Redstone townsfolk had felt when they faced Helvig in the past few years.

A local tyrant! They could only swallow their anger without saying anything!

Jiang Baimian was still sick, so she didn't say much. She got Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong to drive Theresa and the others to the Vigilance Cathedral.

After seeing Harbinger Song He, they quickly completed the handover.

Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and the others waited outside the cathedral. They stood beside the jeep and watched Theresa and the others busily take stock of the firearms and move the supplies.

As he watched, Shang Jianyao turned his head to the other side.

Viel—who was only 1.6 meters tall—circled around the side of the cathedral and walked toward them.

After standing beside Long Yuehong, Viel looked at Theresa—who was praying in the cathedral hall—and chuckled. “You definitely can’t imagine her true appearance.”

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Viel smiled and said, “Back at Mass, Helvig was in a rush to complete his arms deal. Thus, he deliberately exposed himself, allowing himself to be quickly found. Before long, Mrs. Theresa was also found, but she didn’t leave the cathedral.”

At this point, he felt a little proud. “I saw her from the ventilation duct; she entered Bishop Renato’s room. Heh heh, this might be why Bishop Renato suffered divine punishment and became a Heartless.”

“Huh?” Long Yuehong was momentarily confused, having not fully understood Viel because he had spoken in the Red River language.

After a few seconds, he came to a realization. Bishop Renato and Mrs. Theresa are actually lovers! How many secrets has Viel discovered through the ventilation duct?

As Long Yuehong sighed inwardly, Shang Jianyao sincerely commented, “The Kalendaria sure is busy.”

“Are you mocking me?” Viel glanced at Shang Jianyao and said, “Everyone has many invisible masks. Only through the ventilation duct—a different world—can you see their true appearances when they remove their masks.”

At this point, he laughed again. “Do you want to know what Harbinger Song looks like under his ‘mask?’ You definitely wouldn’t have imagined it.”

Long Yuehong deliberated for a moment and spoke before Shang Jianyao could. “This has nothing to do with us. As long as Harbinger Song doesn’t secretly plot against us, it doesn’t matter what kind of person he is.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao agreed.

Viel pursed his lips and said, “You’ll lose a lot of fun like this.”

Shang Jianyao thought of something and suddenly became excited. “Then, have you observed the situation in the Underground Ark?”

Viel chuckled. “Every vent in the Underground Ark is guarded. There’s no way to sneak in.”

After a pause, he muttered to himself, “However, the people guarding the ventilation duct also communicate with each other about their daily lives.”

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to ask any further, he ran off and disappeared behind a pile of collapsed buildings.

It was only then that Long Yuehong reacted. “Does he mean that he still has a certain level of understanding of the Underground Ark’s internal situation?”

Shang Jianyao thoughtfully said, “If I find him and defeat him, will he tell me what he heard?”

Chapter 218: The Key Is Confidence

Long Yuehong was shocked. He thought that Shang Jianyao was going to ‘cause trouble’ again and quickly said, “He probably has no intention of making a bet with you.”

When his team leader assigned him to carry out missions with Shang Jianyao, he always felt that he had to keep an eye on this fellow and not let him cause any trouble. Of course, Long Yuehong also knew that he couldn’t stop Shang Jianyao from doing anything.

At this moment, Theresa's bodyguards had already loaded the firearms into the car. She also ended her prayers and walked out of the cathedral with Harbinger Song He.

"We can go to the Hunter's Guild now." Theresa nodded at Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong.

Although the hunter team opposite her had yet to figure out the real culprit behind Helvig's death, Theresa was already very satisfied that they could retrieve the missing batch of firearms.

Recently, she had taken out a lot of supplies and distributed them to Helvig's subordinates or to the smuggler, Lehman, as gifts. She hoped to maintain her family's business in arms trading.

Her family had quite a bit of savings, but if there was only expenditure and no income, it would still leave her a little anxious. The return of this batch of firearms was perfect timing.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly and questioned Song He in Ashlandic in front of Theresa. "How can I visit DiMarco directly, Sir?"

Perhaps he found it rude to call him by his full name, so he added the word 'sir.'

Song He laughed and shook his head. "Impossible. Even I can't directly visit Mr. DiMarco. Only the bishop officially appointed by the Terror Episcopal can communicate with Mr. DiMarco through a video call."

After Shang Jianyao heard that, he seemed to have solved a major problem. He clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. "He's really still alive."

What are you saying? Long Yuehong was stunned. He then tried to decipher Shang Jianyao's train of thought.

As DiMarco never went out, nor did he see outsiders, nobody knew even if he was dead. In order to maintain their status and power, the three butlers could disguise the fact that DiMarco was still alive.

This 'inference' was clearly impossible with the fact that the Vigilance Church's bishop could video-chat with DiMarco.



At this thought, Long Yuehong was curious, but he also wanted to change the topic. He asked, “Will Mr. DiMarco attend your Mass at the same time?”

“No.” Song He shook his head. “He will send a butler to participate on his behalf every time. Heh heh, back when he converted to my Lady, he didn’t leave the Underground Ark or let the bishop in.”

That’s too vigilant... Long Yuehong cursed inwardly when he started hearing Shang Jianyao clap.

Long Yuehong wasn’t surprised at all.

After expressing his admiration, Shang Jianyao asked, “Where can we get a boat in Redstone Collection?”

“Anhebus has a speedboat, and so does the town guard. The rest are simple wooden boats.” Song He thought for a moment.

He could roughly guess what Shang Jianyao and the others wanted to do, and it wasn’t his place to persuade them against it. He only reminded them, “The merfolk have absolute dominance in the lake.”

After two seconds, Song He said, “I’ve already reported the matter regarding the temple in the lake to the Terror Episcopal. If you aren’t in a rush, you can wait a while to see if they are interested and if they will specially send people to investigate.”

He’s really nice. He even specially provided us with solutions... Will he unknowingly become friendly if he uses his amiable abilities for long periods? Long Yuehong sighed with emotion and made endless guesses.

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before saying, “Thank you.”

After bidding Song He farewell and getting into the jeep, Long Yuehong smiled and said, “You actually gave him the highest treatment.”

He remembered that Shang Jianyao had said, “Thank you is an improved version of clapping.”

“He’s very sincere.” Shang Jianyao was rather calm.

Long Yuehong tersely acknowledged it. “Then, should we wait for the Vigilance Church to make a decision?”

As Shang Jianyao drove, he turned his monkey-masked head. “Doesn’t he mean that we have to go as soon as possible? We can forget about it once the Terror Episcopal sends people over?”

“...” Long Yuehong replied without much confidence, “You’re reading too much into it.”

“This is the inferred result using Jiang Baimian’s train of thought.” Shang Jianyao was very confident. He then mimicked Jiang Baimian’s tone. “The only thing to worry about is the merfolk’s existence.”

Long Yuehong couldn’t refute Shang Jianyao and could only change the topic. “Are you really going? A sleeping deity is definitely very dangerous, even if it’s only a so-called deity.”

“Look.” Just as Shang Jianyao said that, he saw Long Yuehong shrink back toward the door.

He laughed and said, “Didn’t that Awakened murloc end up fine?”

“You call that fine? Didn’t Team Leader say that a monster was about to be born in his body after he fainted?” Long Yuehong argued.

“Don’t you find that very interesting?” Shang Jianyao looked eager.

This successfully shut Long Yuehong up.

The car continued driving through the city ruin, but Shang Jianyao fell silent and didn’t say anything else.

Long Yuehong gradually felt that the atmosphere wasn’t too good, so he asked, “What are you thinking about?”

“I’m wondering how I can visit DiMarco,” Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

Long Yuehong hissed. “That’s very difficult.”

He racked his brains and suggested, “You can try making friends with the butler DiMarco sends outside. Through him, you can sneak into the Underground Ark and find an opportunity to meet DiMarco.

“Yes, the Underground Ark will regularly replenish supplies. You can consider hiding in a box and entering. With the butler’s help, you definitely won’t be discovered.”

Shang Jianyao quietly listened and commented, “Uncreative.”

“Think of something creative then!” Long Yuehong felt a little angry.

Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought again.

At this moment, a red sedan with a skyroof drove over.

The sedan wasn’t considered new, but it was very clean. Sitting in the driver’s seat was the Public Security Department’s coroner, the playboy—Weiler.

“His car is the same as his person,” Long Yuehong commented.

After waving at Weiler and watching him drive north of the city ruin, Shang Jianyao smiled and retorted Long Yuehong. “How clean is his car? His face is covered in facial hair.”

How is this the same? Long Yuehong held it in for a long time before finally coming up with an explanation. “He might think that a beard represents manliness.”

As they joked and chatted, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong drove into Redstone Collection and ‘escorted’ Mrs. Theresa to the Hunter’s Guild to complete the procedure.

For this mission, each of them obtained 100 credit points.

After this, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Jiang Baimian were still far from becoming Intermediate Hunters. They needed at least 700 more points, while Bai Chen only needed 140 more credit points to become a Senior Hunter.

...

As a human who had undergone genetic enhancement since she was born and then subsequent genetic modification, Jiang Baimian's illness came and went quickly. She was back in the pink of health the second day.

She stretched her body and swung her left arm before smiling at Shang Jianyao. "How is it? Do you find diseases less terrifying?"

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao fall silent, she continued, "Many diseases can be cured by oneself as long as we are strong enough. Look, ain't I fine now? For some diseases, we can rely on medicine, surgery, and other methods to receive treatment before we get better.

"Although we can't deal with a small number of diseases now, as long as human civilization hasn't been destroyed and medical technology is still developing, it's very likely that we can resolve them in the near future."

Shang Jianyao thought for a while before he suddenly revealed an enlightened expression. "I get it!"

"What do you get?" Jiang Baimian asked warily.

Shang Jianyao sat back on his bed and said with a serious expression, "Let me give it a try first."

He then lay down and massaged his temples.

...

In the Sea of Origins, Shang Jianyao followed the previous strategy and transformed into Pangu Biology. He split into countless Shang Jianyaos and formed a proper hospital.

But this time, he prepared an additional, sci-fi-looking Shang Jianyao metal cabin. He then skillfully relied on the Shang Jianyao groups—which had been organized in various ways—to resist the faceless figures draped in white bedsheets.

After the busy and repetitive delivery of medicine, treatment, quarantine, disinfection, and injections, the Shang Jianyao doctors and Shang Jianyao nurses won again. However, they also became abnormally exhausted and gradually had ‘diseases’ arise from within.

Unlike in the past, they were no longer helpless. They ran to the Shang Jianyao metal cabins not far away.

Human cryogenic chambers!

This was a sci-fi item from a radio story. It could allow a terminally ill person to be frozen at ultra-low temperatures until their diseases could be treated in the future.

At the last moment, the Shang Jianyao doctors and nurses looked at each other and shouted, “We have to survive!”

After the cheer, they—who had already become draped in white bedsheets—entered the cryochamber one after another and closed the hatch.

All they saw was pitch-blackness as an unbearable low temperature spread.

The Shang Jianyaos kept their eyes open, unwilling to sleep. They didn’t seem to have much confidence in the future.

In his twenty-plus years of life, the acquaintances who had contracted diseases and recovered appeared on his left one after another as if they were using their success to give him confidence. The people who had died from illnesses appeared on his right one after another. They were gray and gloomy.

After a brief hesitation, Shang Jianyao closed his eyes and chose to believe in his companions and the future.

In the darkness without any light, it was as if they had lost their last consciousness. Their entire bodies were frozen until they couldn't feel anything.

There was also a benefit to this—the benefit was that he couldn't even think of giving up.

After an unknown period of time, Shang Jianyao suddenly felt the darkness in front of him turn red.

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes; he realized that the cryochamber had already been opened and that he was still alive.

He suddenly sat up and looked around. He realized that the Shang Jianyao cryochambers had been destroyed, but four Shang Jianyao doctors and four Shang Jianyao nurses were still alive.

They weren't draped in white bedsheets anymore.

Finally, the few Shang Jianyaos jumped up at the same time and held each other's hands to celebrate their victory.

...

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and saw the expectant Jiang Baimian.

He immediately revealed a sunny smile. "It worked."

"How did you succeed?" Jiang Baimian was happy and curious. Although she knew that Shang Jianyao's method was definitely mind-blowing, she couldn't help but ask this question.

Shang Jianyao immediately shared his successful experience.

Jiang Baimian frowned and thoughtfully said, "When you decided to believe in the future and accept the cold, you'd actually succeeded. The key to defeating the fear of disease is confidence."

With that said, she asked with interest, "Any changes in abilities?"

Shang Jianyao looked down at his hands. “The most obvious change is that I can cast Hands Immobility on nine people at the same time.”

“Why nine?” Jiang Baimian was curious.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “Only nine of me survived.”

“...” The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth twitched.

#### Chapter 219: Experiment

At this moment, Jiang Baimian realized that the deeper one ventured into the Sea of Origins, the greater the price one had to pay. She even suspected that the process of defeating the islands of fear involved magnifying the price one paid.

Jiang Baimian immediately gave up on discussing the ‘nine of me’ with Shang Jianyao to prevent him from deepening his understanding in this regard.

As always, the fantasy in the world of the mind shouldn’t reflect reality.

She deliberated for a moment before asking, “What about the others?”

Shang Jianyao looked at the door. “I’ll have to experiment.”

Jiang Baimian knew what he was getting at and immediately opened the door. She walked into the empty area of the hotel camp and distanced herself from Shang Jianyao.

During this process, she counted the number of steps she took and maintained a straight course.

Before long, Shang Jianyao shouted, “Right there.”

Jiang Baimian stopped, turned around, and raised her hands to gesture.

Was she asking if this was the limit to Hands Immobility?

Her senses just now told her that there was nobody else around and that she didn't have to worry about leaking any secrets.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao nod, she made a rough calculation. "Nearly 20 meters!"

This surprised her a little. Compared to before, the range had increased by about 50%. In addition, it could affect nine people at the same time. As an ability, Hands Immobility could play a crucial role in a gunfight.

This was a qualitative change. At the very least, this was the case for Hands Immobility.

Jiang Baimian began walking back until Shang Jianyao shouted for her to stop.

"Corny?" she asked.

At this moment, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen sensed the commotion outside. They left their room and watched the duo's experiments.

"Yes!" Shang Jianyao replied loudly.

It's slightly equivalent to ten meters... It's indeed a 50% increase... Jiang Baimian continued walking until Shang Jianyao shouted a third time.

At this moment, the two of them were about six meters apart.

After ending the experiment, Jiang Baimian suppressed her voice and asked, "Apart from the changes in range, what else is there?"

Long Yuehong had already made some guesses about this. He was surprised, excited, and happy for Shang Jianyao. "You defeated the Island of Diseases?"

"I can't say that I won, but I survived." Shang Jianyao spoke the truth. He then said, "Corny Person is still a single-target ability, but it seems like I can add a longer period of corniness to the target. Such corny behavior should be something that often happens in the target's life; it won't be too obvious."



“How long can it last?” Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

Since Shang Jianyao had already revealed most of his abilities to the team, she didn’t have to help him hide them.

“I’ve never tried it.” As Shang Jianyao said this, his gaze swept across Long Yuehong’s face.

Long Yuehong instinctively took two steps back.

“I believe it’s on the order of hours.” Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze and voiced his guess.

Jiang Baimian then inquired, “What about Inference Clowning? Can you use electronic products to expand your range of influence like Tan Jie?”

“I’ll give it a try.” Shang Jianyao seemed to have long considered this problem. He excitedly walked to his bed and picked up the small, black speaker with a blue bottom.

This was a multi-purpose product before the Old World was destroyed; it had recording functions.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao turn on the speaker and switch to recording mode, Jiang Baimian silently raised her hands and covered her ears.

Bai Chen did the same thing as her. Long Yuehong didn’t limit himself to that; he even retreated to the door as if he would bolt out the room at any moment.

Shang Jianyao quickly signaled for them to put down their hands. He then aimed the small speaker at Jiang Baimian and played the previous recording.

“You are a member of the Old Task Force, and so am I. You are very good at fighting, and so am I. So...”

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and smiled. “Which direction are you trying to mislead me in? Biological siblings with different fathers and mothers? Pui! Biological siblings?”

“It didn’t work.” Shang Jianyao shook his head with a heavy expression. “I fused my thoughts into my voice and recorded them. However, I didn’t have that sensation when playing it back.”

Jiang Baimian made a reasonable guess. “Maybe the thoughts will gradually dissipate after a relatively complicated transformation? It has to be played before the thought completely dissipates.”

After another round of experiments, they confirmed one thing—no matter how quick he was, it would be useless as long as it was recorded, stored, and then played back.

Upon recalling that Tan Jie had used a loudspeaker to complete the long-range Provocation, Jiang Baimian suggested, “Try using a loudspeaker? There’s no need to record or store it; it’s a direct conversion. You might be able to broadcast it before the thought dissipates. If it still doesn’t work out, you can make friends with Tan Jie and draw from his experience.”

Shang Jianyao nodded. “First, we need a loudspeaker.”

“That’s simple.” Jiang Baimian smiled.

Before long, the four people from the Old Task Force entered Redstone Collection and arrived at the Public Security Department.

Han Wanghuo wasn’t out this time. Due to his injury, his left arm had been bandaged. It looked bulging.

“You guys?” Upon seeing Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others enter the Public Security Department, Han Wanghuo stood up and greeted them.

Due to their shared combat experience, Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a monk mask—casually smiled and said, “We’re here to rush the final payment.”

If she had previously felt that Han Wanghuo was deliberately establishing an image of a Knight, it was no longer important whether it was deliberate or not.

As a sheriff, he was undoubtedly a Knight if he could stand at the front lines of the defense line and resist the Subhuman invasion without any regard for his life.

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian's words, Han Wanghuo said awkwardly, "You'll have to wait another two days, but it won't be long. We've already cleaned up the battlefield and confirmed that many merfolk and mountain monsters have died. They won't be able to launch a new round of attacks for the time being.

"After the reconnaissance team reports the final results and both sides exchange POWs, we can hand over the exoskeleton to you."

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, "There's no rush. If it really doesn't work out, we can use Tan Jie as payment."

"..." Han Wanghuo didn't know what expression to make or how to respond.

"He means 'is Tan Jie alright?'" Jiang Baimian coughed and helped 'explain.'

"He fell ill after the battle, but it wasn't too serious," Han Wanghuo replied.

Jiang Baimian deliberately didn't continue the topic and smiled. "We seem to have made a lot of contributions in this war. Can we get some additional payment?"

Team Leader is smiling like an unscrupulous merchant... Long Yuehong couldn't help but mutter.

He was referring to her tone.

Bai Chen had seen many such unscrupulous merchants in her past life as a wilderness nomad and Ruin Hunter.

"This... might... might not be..." Han Wanghuo wanted to say that the Redstone Town Guard probably couldn't accept price raising after the matter was over. However, he sincerely believed that this Ruin Hunter team had made important contributions in the war. What they had obtained in exchange for their efforts was indeed rather disparate.

Jiang Baimian interrupted him and smiled. “Three requests—First, lend us the town guard’s speedboat; second, give us two to three loudspeakers; and third, help us gather information on Mechanical Paradise.”

Uh... Han Wanghuo was rather surprised.

Not only were these three requests not excessive, but they were also very simple. They were conditions that he could agree to without discussing it with the other influential figures of the town guard.

Resisting the urge to ask if this was too little, Han Wanghuo thought for a moment and said, “No problem. When do you want them by?”

“It’s best if you can give us the loudspeakers today. A week for the information. The speedboat will depend on our notice.” Jiang Baimian had already prepared her answer.

Han Wanghuo searched through the Public Security Department for a while and found a slightly old blue and white speaker.

“I’ll give you one first. The rest will be given to you along with the exoskeleton.” He paused and reminded them, “It’s very difficult for humans to compete with merfolk on water.”

When Song He, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong interrogated the merfolk, a Public Security officer beside them had recorded the corresponding information. Therefore, Han Wanghuo knew about Lake Heart Island. He had established many formal procedures for the Public Security Department.

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao suddenly became interested.

You want to fight the merfolk in the water? Jiang Baimian glanced at him and walked out of the Public Security Department.

After buying some raw food and returning to the hotel camp, Shang Jianyao took the loudspeaker, looked around, and impatiently asked, “Who wants to do the honors?”

Long Yuehong subconsciously took a step back, only to discover Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen looking at him at the same time.

“Uh...” A bitter expression appeared on his face.

I can't let the two ladies be experimental subjects, right... Shang Jianyao can't remotely 'mislead' himself... Long Yuehong's thoughts raced as he took a deep breath.

“I'll do it.”

Soon, there was a distance of more than 30 meters between him and Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao raised the speaker, and his eyes instantly turned deep. “Look, you've always been vigilant and don't like taking risks. Redstone Collection's folk tradition advocates vigilance and hiding. So...”

His voice echoed in the hotel camp through the loudspeaker.

In order to prevent others from prying into the Old Task Force's secrets through their words, he used the most ordinary conditions.

Long Yuehong's expression didn't change after hearing that.

After he returned, Jiang Baimian anxiously asked, “Do you feel anything? What do you feel?”

“I suddenly feel an affinity with the people from Redstone Collection.” Long Yuehong examined himself.

“My goal was to make him think he's a resident of Redstone Collection,” Shang Jianyao interrupted.

“Huh?” Long Yuehong came to a realization.

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. “The effects are much worse. From the looks of it, using a loudspeaker can indeed enhance your Inference Clowning’s range, but the corresponding effects will decrease. Yes, Tan Jie’s ‘Provocation’ back then didn’t cause the Awakened murloc to rush out directly.”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and added, “Furthermore, it’s still a single-target ability.”

“Not bad; you can still improve further,” Jiang Baimian said with a smile.

She then looked at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen. “I have to send a telegram and report the matter of the sleeping deity to the company to see what information or suggestions the higher-ups can give.”

“Huh?” Long Yuehong was a little stunned.

Jiang Baimian immediately chuckled. “Do you think I’m really that rash? To do something without any caution!?”

Chapter 220: Something to Pay Attention To

In this report, Jiang Baimian still didn’t mention the suspected Eidolon Nun’s gaze on the night Bishop Renato contracted the Heartless disease.

On the one hand, she felt that the Old Task Force was still under Eidolon Nun’s attention since they were still in Redstone Collection and within the Vigilance Cathedral’s sphere of influence. Taking the initiative to leak the matter might incur the wrath of the Kalendaria.

Of course, Jiang Baimian was still an atheist. She temporarily treated the Kalendarium as powerful creatures that exceeded her imagination. She didn’t have a particularly serious sense of reverence or a strong urge to prostrate herself. She was only considering things based on reality—one had to bow their heads when under the eaves of another.

On the other hand, she had always known that the company hid many secrets. Its attitude toward the Ashlands and the already-destroyed Old World was worth ruminating over. Therefore, she instinctively wanted to hold back a little of what she had acquired—which had nothing to do with the mission—during her investigations.

Furthermore, they now had a friendly relationship with the Vigilance Church and were very respectful to Eidolon Nun. They hadn’t committed any sacrilegious acts against the deity, so they temporarily didn’t need to seek help from the company.

Jiang Baimian didn't give Long Yuehong and Bai Chen the details about the Kalendaria's gaze. She mainly reminded them that there really were Kalendarium in this world. Furthermore, 'They' could gaze at the Ashlands or even descend upon this world.

She didn't share the horror, the hopelessness, and the shock she felt back then to avoid scaring the two team members.

Just as night settled upon them, the Old Task Force received a reply from Pangu Biology. "You can carry out some investigations, but pay attention to the following: First, do not directly touch anything with your hands after entering the temple. You have to wear items like latex gloves or rubber gloves.

"Second, unless it's necessary, do not move the so-called deity's body.

"Third, do not spend more than 15 minutes in the temple. You can't exceed half an hour in the temple's vicinity, and you can't exceed three days elsewhere on the island."

After translating the content, Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion. "The company is no stranger to such matters; they've already created a standard operating procedure."

She was more curious about the reason behind these taboos. Did the company already figure out the source of the problem, or did they use human lives to gather experience?

"Otherwise, how could it be the greatest suspect for destroying the Old World—the current ultimate villain of the Ashlands?" Shang Jianyao replied to Jiang Baimian's sigh in a radio-like tone.

Long Yuehong hesitated for a moment before asking, "Are you sure we are going?"

After seeing the list of things to take note of, he wasn't that afraid.

The unknown was most terrifying. He definitely wouldn't be so terrified if he knew what to do.

Regarding this, Long Yuehong's most direct thought was: It feels good to have a company backing you!

“I think so.” Jiang Baimian was too embarrassed to say that she wanted to set off now. She smiled and said, “But we have to at least wait until we receive the exoskeleton and enhance your strength before we consider it.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong felt even more at ease.

At this moment, Bai Chen looked at Jiang Baimian and asked in thought, “If the company didn’t let us explore it, would you secretly go?”

“How could I?” Jiang Baimian widened her eyes and denied it. “I’m not Shang Jianyao!”

“You can consider becoming Shang Jianyao,” Shang Jianyao suggested excitedly.

Bai Chen ignored Jiang Baimian’s denial and whispered, “Are those who are left behind not considered companions?”

“Huh?” Jiang Baimian made a prompt decision. She raised her right hand and touched her ear. “What did you say?”

She then said righteously, “I won’t leave any companions behind; it’s just that everyone has their own missions.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao suddenly applauded.

Jiang Baimian flew into a rage out of humiliation. She turned around and shouted, “Do you want more combat training?”

She then stood up and stretched her limbs.

Shang Jianyao then realized Jiang Baimian was a force to be reckoned with when she gave her all.



...

The next morning, Shang Jianyao took off his top and got Long Yuehong to apply medicine to the bruises on his back.

“Most of them are gone. Your recovery abilities are indeed better than mine,” said Long Yuehong with a sincere sigh.

This was only his second application of the medicine.

Shang Jianyao sincerely suggested, “Enduring more beatings can effectively enhance one’s resistance.”

“Haha.” Long Yuehong laughed dryly. “I’m not you; how can I last so long under Team Leader’s onslaught? Team Leader is amazing. She only recovered yesterday, but she can already showcase such strength. It seems like she usually holds back.”

“Combat practice might happen only once a week if she doesn’t hold back,” Shang Jianyao said with a smile. “The main problem is that you will most likely have to lie in a hospital bed for a week after every practice.”

Long Yuehong wanted to retort, but he eventually nodded thoughtfully.

As the two of them conversed, Shang Jianyao suddenly turned his head and looked outside.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian—who was enjoying Bai Chen’s application of the medicine—pushed open the door and called out, “Captain Han.”

“Your exoskeleton is here.” Shang Jianyao jumped up and put on his clothes.

Long Yuehong couldn’t hide his excitement and quickly ran to the door.

After Shang Jianyao wore his mask, he immediately opened the door.

At a glance, he saw Han Wanghuo with a rifle on his back, two tattered SUVs, and several Redstone town guards.

They were moving a cardboard box toward Jiang Baimian.

“An AC-42 General exoskeleton. Please take receipt,” Han Wanghuo said in a business-like tone.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at Long Yuehong and smiled. “Come, do a check.”

Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao eagerly walked over, opened the cardboard box, and examined the black metal exoskeleton that exuded a metallic sheen.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian said to Han Wanghuo, “Didn’t you say that we would have to wait another two days?”

The maskless Han Wanghuo revealed a rare smile. “Since you came to rush them, they didn’t dare delay.”

The town guards who wielded authority had agreed unanimously.

Jiang Baimian laughed involuntarily. “Are we that terrifying?”

“Yes,” a town guard member—who had just moved a box of food over—replied softly.

Fortunately, Jiang Baimian didn’t hear him clearly.

Shang Jianyao hummed a song. “The young monk went down the mountain to beg for alms...”

The latter half of his lyrics was cut short because of Jiang Baimian’s glare.

Upon seeing this, Han Wanghuo said with emotion, “There are many powerful Ruin Hunters in the Ashlands; they can destroy a large settlement by themselves. In the eyes of many townsfolk in Redstone Collection, you are such a Ruin Hunter team.”

How terrifying the Awakened murloc was that night and how deep the trauma he had left in the hearts of Redstone Town's residents was how exaggerated their reverence and fear for the Qian Bai Team.

The praised Jiang Baimian humbly said, "A large settlement with the blessings of a Kalendaria like Redstone Collection isn't something that a Ruin Hunter team can destroy, including us."

Just as she said that, she saw the town guards look over at the same time. Their eyes seemed to say, "You really did consider destroying Redstone Collection."

Aren't you guys too vigilant? It's not a good thing to be overly sensitive... Jiang Baimian felt her pulse rise.

Long Yuehong soon put on the very simple black exoskeleton with Shang Jianyao's help. After attempting to move his body, he once again felt the strength of such equipment.

After a round of experiments, Long Yuehong happily replied, "No problem!"

At this moment, Bai Chen had also checked the boxes of food and confirmed that the amount was just right.

Jiang Baimian then said to Han Wanghuo, "The transaction is officially completed."

Han Wanghuo heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Didn't you request to have information regarding Mechanical Paradise gathered in a week?"

"It's done?" Jiang Baimian asked in surprise.

Han Wanghuo shook his head. "Not yet, but I can tell a problem from the information we've found."

"What is it?" Shang Jianyao came over with interest.

Han Wanghuo pondered for a moment and said, "Nobody has ever seen a human from Mechanical Paradise. Any dealings are done with smart robots."

“Is that so...” Jiang Baimian wasn’t surprised. Weed City’s Castellan, Xu Liyan, had also mentioned such a situation.

After discussing this matter, Han Wanghuo saw that the town guards were a certain distance away and were in a state of constantly finding a place to hide. He suppressed his voice and said, “I have something to ask you.”

“What is it?” Jiang Baimian asked in confusion.

Han Wanghuo organized his words and said, “Who else other than you knew about Bishop Renato’s urgent recall to the Vigilance Church’s headquarters?”

Upon seeing that the Qian Bai Team didn’t have an immediate answer, he simply explained, “We exchanged captives with the merfolk and mountain monsters this morning. The Gaudi you know was released. He said that he heard some of the merfolk’s discussions after he was captured. They originally wanted to prepare for a month before launching an attack after they finished their reconnaissance. However, they suddenly received news that Bishop Renato had left and that the new bishop had yet to arrive. In order to seize this opportunity, they pushed forward the operation.

“Because their operation failed and had even lost their Oracle, they grumbled at each other and revealed this information.”

Jiang Baimian understood what Han Wanghuo meant. “Someone sold this critical information to the Subhumans?”

“I think so.” Han Wanghuo didn’t hide his thoughts.

The news the Subhumans received was that Bishop Renato had been recalled to the headquarters? That’s interesting... Jiang Baimian thoughtfully said, “The cathedral’s Harbinger and guards were there that night. Baz, Viel...”

What these people knew was that Bishop Renato had contracted the Heartless disease!

Han Wanghuo quietly listened and nodded. “I’ll rule them out one by one.”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “We seem to be suspects as well.”

Han Wanghuo was speechless. “If you had sold this information, the only reason would be that you wanted to lure the Awakened murloc out and use our exoskeleton to finish him off.”

“Good explanation!” Shang Jianyao clapped, deeply inspired.

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In the afternoon, the prepared Old Task Force entered the lake area and borrowed the town guard’s speedboat.

With Han Wanghuo’s help, they had already planned a route that circled around the merfolk’s enclave.