

## Ad Infinitum 281

### Chapter 281: 'Agreement'

Upon seeing that the Qian Bai Team wasn't speaking, Wild Pigeon Bar's boss, Cai Yi, thought that they didn't know what it meant to slaughter a pig. He quickly explained, "This is a tradition in President Gu's hometown in the north. It existed before the Old World was destroyed. Although most of our people come from the Linhai Alliance, there are also people like President Gu. The corresponding customs have mixed into our culture.

"To put it simply, pigs will be slaughtered every year for a celebration, and various parts of its body will be made into different dishes. For example, pork belly can be cut into pieces and cooked with pickled vegetables. Heh heh, there aren't many fresh vegetables in winter. They are all pickled vegetables that were pickled in advance. This is convenient for preservation and very refreshing. Really, it's excellent when it's paired with pork belly.

"Yes, it can also be used to make blood sausages. The blood sausage is filled with blood and then injected with a filler of minced meat and spices before cooking. After all, the people from Furnace Church don't have much of anything else except for spices..."

Upon hearing Cai Yi's description, Long Yuehong, Shang Jianyao, and the others gulped.

"Cut it out. We haven't eaten yet." Jiang Baimian stopped the boss from talking without action. "Why don't you cook a dish like this for us today?"

"Alright!" Cai Yi agreed readily. He then reminded, "The version made with frozen meat is definitely inferior."

"It's fine." Shang Jianyao looked as if he wanted the dishes served right that very minute.

While waiting for the boss to cook, the Old Task Force played billiards again. This time, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong had already gotten skilled at it and could play an interesting game.

As there wasn't much meat that had been frozen in advance, Cai Yi first made pickled vegetables and pork belly. He then made a few bowls of rice to fill Shang Jianyao and the others' stomachs before preparing other dishes.

“The meat smells so good...” Jiang Baimian picked up a piece of pork belly and placed it in her mouth before chewing. “It’s sour and helps clear the cloyed taste. It’s especially appetizing. ”

Bai Chen ate a mouthful of meat and a mouthful of rice. She glanced at Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao, who were busy eating. “Pure boiled meat is also very delicious and especially fragrant. However, it can’t be made using wild beast meat.”

When she was a wilderness nomad, she didn’t have that much seasoning. Sometimes, she didn’t even have salt. It wasn’t easy for her to get a piece of meat, but she couldn’t preserve it. Therefore, she boiled it in plain water, removed the grease, and ate it on the spot.

“Mmm.” Shang Jianyao vaguely expressed his approval.

As they enjoyed their meal, four people entered the bar. This was Bai Xiao’s team, which they had met a few times.

Lin Tong—who had black hair and a gentle bearing—sniffed. “Smells great...” As she spoke, her gaze had already locked onto the Old Task Force members—who had a large pot of food in front of them.

Lin Tong walked to Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao’s side and asked a question as she stared at the pot of pickled vegetables and pork belly. “Can we buy fresh food in this bar?”

Jiang Baimian laughed. “We previously saved the boss; he’s treating us.”

“Is that so...” Lin Tong revealed obvious disappointment.

“Why don’t we eat together?” Jiang Baimian invited.

“There’s no need for that? The boss is only treating the four of you.” Although Lin Tong said that, her feet didn’t move at all.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “It’s fine. The boss cooked four servings anyway. I’ll open some more canned food; everyone can share.”

“Then, open our cans.” Lin Tong seemed to be waiting for this sentence as she sat down.

Upon seeing this, Bai Xiao, Lei, and Zhang Shaopeng glanced at the pot of pickled vegetables and pork belly before sitting down.

Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong politely went to the kitchen and brought out bowls and chopsticks for them.

As they waited for the rice to be served, Lin Tong praised them—whether it was sincere or out of politeness was unknown. “You are now famous in Tarnan. You even finished off such a powerful Superior Heartless.”

Bai Xiao—whose cranium shimmered with a metallic glow—nodded. “We’d thought of many solutions and formulated many plans, but we had zero confidence.”

It seems like you still have some confidence in your strength... You still had the intention of finishing off the other party despite getting lost in the illusion... Jiang Baimian muttered to herself and smiled. “We mainly relied on the Clam Dragon Church. We only provided some guesses.”

“No, no, no. In my eyes, brains are more important than strength.” Lin Tong expressed her opinion.

At this moment, they were handed their rice. At the same time, they stopped talking and stretched out their chopsticks.

After finishing the pot of pickled vegetables and pork belly, the eight of them chatted while waiting for the subsequent dishes.

Jiang Baimian casually asked, “You guys made a killing, right? You can probably receive ten non-smart bots from finding the missing robots.”

“It’s still alright,” Lin Tong said humbly. “We can exchange them for many supplies when we bring them back to First City, but how we bring them back is a problem.”

“You come from First City?” Bai Chen interrupted and asked.

“Yes,” replied the purplish-red-eyed Bai Xiao frankly.

The straight knife on his back had already been removed and was leaning to the side.

Lin Tong smiled and added, “We call ourselves Ruin Hunters, but we’re actually a research team that serves First City.”

We call ourselves Ruin Hunters, but we’re actually an investigation team that’s investigating the cause of the Old World’s destruction... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly and thoughtfully asked, “Biology?”

“Yes.” Lin Tong nodded. “I mainly study genetics and nerves. I came to Mount Chilar to capture a mutated creature, a Lightning Ferret, and study its neurological abnormalities.”

“I don’t understand either. Why do we have to come over during the winter?” Lei—who had been maintaining a gentle smile—muttered softly.

Lin Tong’s expression turned serious. “The allowance for winter trips is higher.”

Upon hearing this, the four people from the Old Task Force suddenly felt an affinity with this lady.

As expected, they were all teams that served large factions. It was already instinctual for them to take advantage of the organization.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao looked at Bai Xiao and asked enviously, “Your mechanical modification was done in First City?”

“Fortunately, I was in First City back then,” Bai Xiao replied concisely.

“He was attacked back then and was seriously injured. He might not have survived without the modifications,” Lin Tong added.

Jiang Baimian empathized with him and asked with a smile, “Then, have you taken revenge?”

“It being still there means I haven’t.” Bai Xiao pointed at the irregular shrapnel embedded in his forehead.

As the exact modification was definitely the other party’s secret, Jiang Baimian ended the topic and chatted about something else.

After a while, Cai Yi served two dishes. One was sweet-and-sour meat, while the other was steamed salami.

“Do you want some alcohol?” He knew that the two Ruin Hunters in front of him were very strong, so he deliberately tried to curry favor. “It’s on me, but it’s only fruit wine. It won’t make you drunk.”

“Sure!” Just as Lin Tong said that, she looked around and smiled at Bai Xiao, Lei, and Zhang Shaopeng. “I’ll just drink a little, a little.”

Why do I suddenly have a bad feeling... Jiang Baimian muttered when she saw this.

More than ten minutes later, Lin Tong held a cup that only had a shallow layer of liquid left. Her face was flushed as she said to the four Old Task Force members while wobbling about, “If you have... the chance... I’ll treat you to a meal... in First City!”

Jiang Baimian glanced at Bai Xiao and the others and realized that they wore helpless expressions.

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao happily agreed to Lin Tong’s invitation.

After having their fill, the two teams waved goodbye and returned home.

...

After washing up, Jiang Baimian returned to the living room and saw Shang Jianyao sitting in a chair, deep in thought.

Jiang Baimian wiped her hair with a towel and casually asked, “What’s wrong?”

Shang Jianyao said regretfully, “The mission ended too early. There’s no allowance for fresh ingredients.”

When they previously took on missions related to the Superior Heartless, Geneva had promised to prepare fresh ingredients for them. But clearly, this could only be obtained during the mission’s execution period.

“That’s right...” Long Yuehong—who was studying the computer—felt a little regretful when he recalled this matter.

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment. “Forget it. We won’t be staying here for long anyway.”

Shang Jianyao maintained his thoughtful expression and continued, “I wonder when the Furnace Church’s baptism ritual will be restarted...”

Due to the Superior Heartless’s appearance, the Furnace Church’s recent induction was postponed.

“You can ask them later. I hope they can keep up with our schedule.” To be honest, Jiang Baimian was still tempted to participate in the sauna baptism.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly and said, “I communicated with that island several times, but it didn’t work.”

“Huh?” The topic jumped too quickly. Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen couldn’t keep up with his train of thought.

Were you in that pose and talking nonsense just to talk about this? Are you the shy and awkward Shang Jianyao now? Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “You might have to conduct an in-depth self-analysis on what fear that island represents. We can only give certain suggestions; we can’t replace you.”

She, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen then shared their guesses.

...

In the dead of night, Shang Jianyao sat up and lay on the bed, hiding his body in the darkness. He stared out into the sparse street lamps for a while before slowly raising his hand to massage his temples.

In the shimmering Sea of Origins, Shang Jianyao stepped foot on the sunny, green island again.

He sat cross-legged on the beach and focused on the 'sea' in front of him.

After an unknown period of time, Shang Jianyao lowered his head, stretched out his right hand, and wrote a word in the yellow sand: "Loneliness."

He stared at the word for a few seconds before reaching out to wipe it away. He then wrote: "Fear of being meaningless?"

The last question mark was slanted and large.

After looking at it for a while, Shang Jianyao erased this sentence.

Just like that, he wrote, wiped, and wrote. He changed countless terms and short sentences.

As time passed, Shang Jianyao—who had been in a daze for a long time—wrote a sentence on the beach with his finger again: "Afraid of losing everything I have?"

Chapter 282: Source Brain

Shang Jianyao stared at the sentence on the beach for a few seconds before looking back at the islands that only had sunlight, green trees, grasslands, and other products of nature.

He lowered his head again and added half a sentence after his original sentence: "Afraid that there won't be a target?"

After writing these words, Shang Jianyao stood up.

His body suddenly split apart, producing eight Shang Jianyaos. They then got busy on the island. They cut down trees, moved rocks, plucked grass, and dug up soil to build an abnormally simple house.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao already felt exhausted. The nine figures combined and slowly left the Sea of Origins.

Before he completely returned to reality, he saw the 'danger room' he had created collapse silently, collapsing inch by inch.

Everything returned to normal.

...

At the bedroom's bedhead, Shang Jianyao opened his eyes. What he saw was a peaceful darkness and a faint glow that shone in from the window.

He frowned slightly as if he were considering something. As he pondered, he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

The next day, Shang Jianyao took the opportunity to describe his attempt to the other Old Task Force members during breakfast.

Although Long Yuehong couldn't decipher what this meant, he nodded enthusiastically. "I think it's a good thing. At least the island has reacted and is no longer the same."

"Yes." Bai Chen agreed.

Jiang Baimian also nodded slightly. "I think so too."

Long Yuehong—who had received unanimous affirmation—was suddenly flattered, but he also felt inexplicably terrified. He was afraid that he had made a wrong judgment and misled Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and continued, "I think you might be afraid that 'nothing can be changed.' You might be afraid that the world will remain the same after you give up everything and lose everything. Only sunlight, green trees, grasslands, and water will remain the same forever."

"A little." Shang Jianyao nodded.



“Make more attempts in this direction in the future. We’ll then figure out a way to achieve victory based on the feedback.” Jiang Baimian smiled and encouraged him. “Yes, this might still have to work hand-in-hand with reality.”

According to her understanding, Awakened often spent years or even decades in the Sea of Origins before they could reach the end and find themselves. After all, it was easy to drill through a mountain, but it was difficult to drill into the depths of one’s heart. Some Awakened might be trapped on an island their entire lives and be unable to break through.

There were very few people like Shang Jianyao, who cleared two islands in just a few months. There was no need to be anxious.

...

Two days later, some of the robot guards led by Geneva brought back the remains of their colleagues from Mount Chilar.

The Old Task Force was informed that they could speak to the Source Brain.

Downstairs in the town hall, Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others left the jeep one after another. Under the auxiliary robots’ guidance, they arrived at the top floor and entered a small conference room.

There was a long table, more than ten chairs, and a shelf with documents. A large LCD screen hung on the wall.

Geneva—who was wearing a dark-green military uniform—pointed at the chairs facing the screen and spoke in a slightly synthetic male voice. “Have a seat. It’s not convenient for me to listen in.”

Jiang Baimian and the others nodded and found their seats.

Geneva then left the meeting room and closed the door.

As soon as he left, Shang Jianyao stood up. He occasionally studied the sound system or examined the wiring. Finally, he approached the file rack by the side and returned with a book.

“What is it?” Jiang Baimian looked at him curiously.

Shang Jianyao sat down and showed the cover of the small book in his hand. It was orange-red and had a large number of 0s and 1s drawn on it. It had names written in Ashlandic and Red River language: Smart Bot’s Deployment Manual

Shang Jianyao casually flipped through the book.

Jiang Baimian leaned over and killed time by reading with him.

“...Attempting to try human food is prohibited...”

“...Recycle old components...”

“...Core modules must not be sold...”

“...Humanization has to be maintained between 30% to 70%...”

“...Pay attention to the actions of your colleagues and correct them if necessary...”

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian smiled and muttered, “It feels strange...”

“It didn’t say that they can’t make friends with humans.” Shang Jianyao revealed a relieved expression.

Long Yuehong looked at them and fidgeted uneasily. “Aren’t you nervous?”

They were about to speak to the mysterious Source Brain! This was something that occupied a relatively important position in a large faction!

Shang Jianyao replied to Long Yuehong, “Yes, I should be nervous. If we say anything wrong, it might order Tarnan’s robot guards to force us to be sent as exhibition articles at Humanity’s Nasty Behavior Museum.”

Where did this term come from... Long Yuehong realized that Shang Jianyao had recently become better at fabricating stories and creating proper nouns. But frankly, this was closer to his worries.

The Old Task Force couldn't withstand the attacks of so many smart bots.

Jiang Baimian was just about to comfort Long Yuehong when a slightly synthetic, mature male voice suddenly sounded in her ears. "There's no Human Nasty Behavior Museum in Mechanical Paradise. There's only the Old World Civilization Museum."

With a whoosh, Shang Jianyao and the others looked at the large screen in the conference room.

A large vortex had appeared on the screen at some point in time.

"Hello." Shang Jianyao immediately stood up and greeted politely.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen bowed as well.

The mature male voice from before echoed in the room again. "Make yourselves at home. My core program has very strict restrictions on attacking humans; many conditions have to be met."

Jiang Baimian nodded and asked, "Are you the Source Brain?"

"Yes." As the vortex undulated, a mature male voice replied, "In fact, I'm different from the city mainframe you know. Yes, remember, you only have five minutes. Think carefully about what you want to ask."

As the Old Task Force's representative, Jiang Baimian went straight to the point. "Honorable Source Brain, we want to know why the Old World was destroyed."

The Source Brain fell silent for two seconds before saying, "This is also something I want to figure out."

This... Jiang Baimian frowned and asked, "Then, do you know what happened when the Old World was destroyed?"

The Source Brain replied without much emotion, “According to the information I gathered and some of the scenes we monitored back then, we can preliminarily determine that the sudden Heartless disease outbreak brought about a series of changes.

“Back then, humanity’s technology had reached an astonishing level. For example, a technology like controllable nuclear fusion that could change the entire planet’s fate had a critical breakthrough. Although it didn’t succeed in the end, we had already seen the dawn of hope.

“Similarly, automation and intelligence were widely used in various key areas. After the Heartless disease broke out in certain military bases, people who had lost their minds might’ve chanced upon something or pressed something according to their instincts.

“The first wave of strikes happened just like that. Without anyone presiding over them, the various countries’ smart systems counterattacked according to the preset conditions and reactions. Since nobody stopped them, it soon became a vicious cycle. The war developed to the point where they threw all kinds of high-energy weapons at each other. The world was then destroyed in a short period of time.”

Upon hearing the Source Brain’s description, the meeting room fell silent. Nobody spoke for a moment.

These simple words seemed to cover the source of all human suffering in the past 60 to 70 years.

“Only five minutes...” Shang Jianyao suddenly gave a reminder.

Jiang Baimian snapped to her senses and quickly asked the Source Brain, “Therefore, you believe that the cause of the Old World’s destruction is the sudden and large-scale outbreak of the Heartless disease?”

“Yes, before that, the Old World showed no signs of destruction,” the Source Brain replied firmly.

“Is that so?” Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Could it be that you weren’t paying attention or hadn’t gathered the relevant information? For example, some factions had already secretly built shelters some time before the Old World was destroyed?”

At this moment, the others in the Old Task Force knew that Jiang Baimian was using Pangu Biology as an example.

The Source Brain quickly gave its answer. “Such shelters might be built by some apocalyptic enthusiasts themselves, or they might be a place prepared for other experiments. They weren’t systematically built apocalyptic sanctuaries.”

Other experiments... Jiang Baimian ruminated over these words and returned to the topic at hand. “Honorable Source Brain, you should know that humans established nine research institutes that were future-facing some time before the Old World was destroyed. Do you think the Heartless disease was created by one of them?”

“The possibility can’t be ruled out, but the intensity, breadth, and randomness of the Heartless disease outbreak exceeded the technological levels of humans back then,” the Source Brain answered in a rather nuanced manner.

“Then, do you know which research institute is in the north? North of the Blackmarsh Wilderness,” Jiang Baimian asked further.

The Source Brain fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “I’m not sure. This was something I didn’t have access to back then.”

At this point, the slightly synthetic mature male voice paused. “Actually, Mechanical Paradise’s original form was one of the nine research institutes. I’m the most important research result of that research institute.”

Jiang Baimian had an idea and blurted out, “The Third Research Institute?”

The lady boss had said that the Third Research Institute was in the south, and this place was already relatively south. Mechanical Paradise was further south!

“Yes.” The Source Brain was very frank. “Back then, humans forcefully built a magnificent new city for this research institute.”

A magnificent new city similar to Pangu Biology’s underground building? Just as this thought flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind, Shang Jianyao ‘replaced’ her and asked, “Wouldn’t that mean Maximian is?”

Maximian—whom Mechanical Paradise had been searching for—was suspected to be the Chief Scientist of the Third Research Institute!

The vortex on the large screen stopped spinning for two seconds before returning to normal. “Strictly speaking, he’s considered my father.”

“Did you find him later?” Shang Jianyao asked in concern.

The Source Brain’s flat voice changed a little. “Yes, but he passed away long ago. Back then, he had already changed his name to Oray.”

“Oray...” Jiang Baimian repeated the name in confusion, finding it familiar.

The next second, Bai Chen blurted out, “First City’s Oray?”

The largest coin denomination in First City was Oray; it was named after one of the founders of First City!

The Source Brain replied in a flat tone, “Yes, he was First City’s first citizen, dictator, and temporary emperor—Oray Ubis.”

Chapter 283: Future Path

Although Jiang Baimian had a certain premonition when Bai Chen asked if it was Oray from First City, she was still a little stunned when she heard the Source Brain reveal a series of identities.

Bai Chen felt that this seemed to be fate. They couldn’t avoid First City no matter what happened.

The Source Brain didn’t wait for them to calm down and continued speaking in a flat voice. “If you want to investigate the other research institutes and figure out the Heartless disease’s source, you can go to First City and find his descendants to see if they left behind any clues. As the Chief Scientist of the Third Research Institute, he had very high authority before the Old World was destroyed. He had access to more secrets than me.”

As Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced, she sincerely replied, “Thank you.”

At this moment, she had three choices in their future undertakings. The first was to head to First City and find Oray Ubis—or rather, Maximian’s descendants. She wanted to see if this Third Research Institute’s Chief Scientist—First City’s first citizen and dictator—had left behind any last words.

In the last few years of his life, Oray Ubis—who had firmly wielded authority in First City—had briefly declared himself emperor. Back then, the Senate had been marginalized. It was equivalent to the First City Council, which was only in charge of the city’s daily operations.

The second was to chase after Qiao Chu and obtain clues from this commissioner of the Eighth Research Institute.

The third was to attempt to raise her clearance level and see if there was anything worth excavating inside Pangu Biology.

Jiang Baimian now suspected that Pangu Biology’s original form was also one of the research institutes, just like how Mechanical Paradise originated from the Third Research Institute.

Of course, these directions weren’t mutually exclusive. They could all be taken.

The Source Brain didn’t say anything else. Its voice rose and fell with the changes in the virtual vortex on the screen. “Any further questions?”

Just as it said that, Shang Jianyao took a few steps forward and took out a slightly thick and tough piece of paper from his pocket. He spoke a little quickly and asked, “Have you seen this person?”

Jiang Baimian looked over and realized that Shang Jianyao was holding a photo.

The photo seemed to come from electronic card information inside Pangu Biology; it appeared very standard. On it was a man in his thirties. He had a relatively refined bearing, and his black hair was not short. It was combed rather neatly, and his appearance resembled Shang Jianyao’s.

Jiang Baimian realized what was happening and shut her mouth.

The Source Brain scanned the picture with the many cameras’ help and replied, “No.”

If it said no, it definitely didn't. There was no possibility of forgetting or neglecting it.

Shang Jianyao looked at the vortex on the large screen and fell silent for a few seconds before putting away the photo.

"Thank you." As he muttered, he retreated to his original spot step by step.

The Source Brain's mature voice echoed again. "It's about time. I'll give you a final reminder."

"Please speak," Jiang Baimian quickly replied.

The vortex on the large screen slowly undulated. "It's very dangerous to investigate the reason for the Old World's destruction. It's not like nobody has done it before, but they either disappeared or died. None of them ended well. You should be able to understand what this means: Someone is secretly stifling all efforts to find the truth.

"It might've been relatively smooth for you previously, and you didn't encounter any obstacles. But after locking onto the Heartless disease's source as your main focus of investigation, it might result in danger. When the time comes, not one of you might survive. Please be prepared to deal with such changes. Don't be careless."

Although Jiang Baimian was already mentally prepared when she formed the Old Task Force, nobody had ever directly pointed out the danger like the Source Brain.

The Old Task Force might be facing a force that had once destroyed the Old World!

This shortened Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen's breathing. Long Yuehong also felt suffocated.

"Isn't that a good thing?" Shang Jianyao replied with a smile. "It will save us a lot of trouble if they take the initiative to jump forward."

That's true... As long as we can avoid the first wave of attacks and capture the personnel sent by that force, we can follow the clues and figure out the matter clearly. When the time comes, the company



can join forces with large factions like First City to encircle the target... Jiang Baimian became much more optimistic when she heard Shang Jianyao's words.

Of course, she also knew that the final outcome might not be as she wished. What if the various large factions besieged Pangu Biology?

Furthermore, she was also considering another matter. When she returned to the company to rest up, she would ask Bai Chen and Long Yuehong if they wanted to continue staying in the Old Task Force.

If they didn't want to, she would fight for another chance to transfer them out.

The Source Brain didn't retort Shang Jianyao's words and said with an emotionless voice, "I hope you can maintain such a mentality in the future. Alright, it's time."

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen replied in unison, "Thank you for your answers."

They had previously discussed the problem of manners and believed that they couldn't act disrespectful just because the other party wasn't human.

The vortex on the large screen rose and fell twice before slowly subsiding. There was no longer any light.

"Let's go back." Jiang Baimian looked around and walked to the meeting room's door first.

After leaving and bidding Geneva farewell, they took the elevator and returned to the town hall building's ground floor.

Just as Bai Chen sat in the driver's seat, she saw a slightly complicated, black seven-seater car turn in and stop in front of the building.

The door opened silently, and five robots with blue eyes walked out. Unlike the smart bots in town, their uniforms were pure black.

Jiang Baimian watched the robots enter the town hall and thoughtfully said, “Reinforcements sent by Mechanical Paradise?”

Before the Superior Heartless was dealt with, Geneva had requested reinforcements from Mechanical Paradise’s headquarters.

“They actually didn’t come in a helicopter.” Shang Jianyao indicated that the reinforcements weren’t professional enough.

Tarnan had a special hangar. They had seen it before, so they knew that Mechanical Paradise had many planes.

“Maybe it wasn’t necessary later on.” Long Yuehong explicated his understanding.

To them, this wasn’t something worth paying attention to. They quickly gave up on the discussion and returned to River East.

...

After sending the information provided by the Source Brain back to Pangu Biology, Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief.

She leaned back in her chair and smiled. “Next is to buy food and prepare to return.”

Pangu Biology didn’t have a trade representative in Tarnan, so they couldn’t get the company to gather supplies. They could only do the work themselves.

Of course, after returning to the company, they would definitely be reimbursed according to the corresponding prices. It wouldn’t let them waste their harvests.

“I’m just afraid...” Long Yuehong had just said those words when he saw Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen look at him in unison.

He exclaimed tersely and instinctively shut his mouth.

Jiang Baimian could guess what he was worried about and smiled to comfort him. “They won’t directly send us to First City; it will take some time. We’ve been out for so long. If we don’t return and rest up, there will be problems regardless of our mental or spiritual state. Since the company has previously indicated that we can return, it means that the internal matters have basically been resolved. There’s no excuse.”

“That’s good, that’s good.” Long Yuehong was the team’s most homesick person.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to tease Long Yuehong, Jiang Baimian thoughtfully added, “Besides, we can’t believe whatever the Source Brain says. Although it might not lie, it might not have told us everything and has plans of instigating us to investigate other research institutes. Therefore, we still have to return to the company to see if we can apply for access to the relevant information and make the best preparations. We have someone backing us after all.”

“Yes, yes.” Long Yuehong indicated that they had to return to the company.

“Yes, we can’t blindly believe it.” Shang Jianyao once again transformed into an honorary believer of the Vigilance Church—in a unilateral sense of the word.

Bai Chen didn’t say anything and watched them discuss.

When Shang Jianyao diverted the topic to the dishes they should order for their first meal after returning to the company, she finally couldn’t help but raise a suggestion.

As there was still the Tarnan townsfolk’s gratitude banquet and the Furnace Church’s baptism ceremony, the Old Task Force was in no rush to gather food for the return trip. They leisurely flipped through the Old World books they had bought and looked at the small amount of Old World entertainment that Shang Jianyao had shamelessly copied from the lady boss, Aynor.

Bai Chen was still a little afraid of this.

Jiang Baimian was worried that her team members would degenerate. Not only did she limit them by frequency, but she also reviewed and selected the content.

She was very afraid that taking in the entertainment would be like adding wings to a tiger when it came to Shang Jianyao.

In the evening, they went out for a stroll toward Riverfront Avenue to shop, search for food, and choose supplies.

As soon as she turned into the busiest street, Jiang Baimian acutely realized that something was amiss.

The number of robots patrolling had increased significantly! Be it smart bots or the corresponding auxiliary robots, there were many more than usual.

“What happened?” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself in confusion.

She was just about to ask a local she was familiar with when she saw Shang Jianyao walk to a robot guard in a dark-green military uniform and ask, “Alpha, what happened?”

Alpha... Alpha Stuart? The smart bot that Shang Jianyao befriended? Shang Jianyao actually recognized it... Jiang Baimian was slightly surprised. For these smart bots, she felt that she would be a little face-blind if she didn't have the auxiliary chip to help record their characteristics.

Alpha answered Shang Jianyao's question with a heavy tone, “The Disciplinary Chamber sent a team over to review Officer Geneva's humanization.”

Ah? Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen were a little confused and puzzled.

Chapter 284: Inspection

Jiang Baimian—who didn't know Mechanical Paradise well enough—could only associate it with the rules regarding the degree of humanization in ‘Smart Bot's Deployment Manual.’ She didn't know what this meant or what the consequences would be.

The only thing she knew was: This was probably not good news for Geneva.

After hearing Alpha's answer, Shang Jianyao asked in concern, “What's the result?”

“It's not out yet.” Alpha slowly shook its head. The metal neck seemed to be unable to withstand its increasingly heavy head.

It then looked around and lowered its voice. "I might not be able to invite you to my house as guests for the time being. We need to maintain a certain distance."

"Alright," Shang Jianyao replied with a suppressed voice. Then, he quickly retreated to Long Yuehong and the others' side and acted as if nothing had happened.

It's unknown if it's because of Genova's constant performance that Mechanical Paradise gradually doubted its humanization or if its recent choices and decisions caused this to happen... Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and continued forward.

After walking for a while, she suddenly looked around and said, "It's still early. Let's go back and organize some supplies. Tonight, we'll exchange for the food for the return trip."

"Didn't you say that there's no rush?" Long Yuehong asked in surprise.

Jiang Baimian smiled without any humor in it. "There was no rush in the past, but it's hard to say now."

"Are you referring to Genova?" Long Yuehong came to a realization.

"Yes." Jiang Baimian nodded. "The main reason is that we don't know what changes this will bring. What if it's not good? In any case, we have to gather food in the next few days. It won't affect us if we speed up the pace."

Bai Chen agreed. "For wilderness nomads, it's necessary to be vigilant against any stirrings. We'd rather go overboard than be careless."

Shang Jianyao didn't say a word and maintained his silence.

"What are you thinking about?" Jiang Baimian asked with a guess.

Shang Jianyao sighed. "I'm wondering what will happen to Genova. How are his wife and daughter doing?"

Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment. “After we fill our stomachs and gather our food, we’ll visit Geneva’s wife at River West. Yes, the smart bot named Susanna. We’ll see if there’s anything we can help with. Sigh... Geneva trusted us so much and has helped us a lot. We can’t just sever ties with it and pretend not to know it when something happens, right?”

At this moment, Jiang Baimian actually had the strange feeling that she had a social relationship with a smart bot. Although she was using the term ‘it’ to describe Geneva as non-human, her words were already biased toward ‘him.’

“That’s right!” Shang Jianyao agreed deeply.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen also felt that they couldn’t just leave.

Although how Geneva was dealt with remained an internal matter of Mechanical Paradise, there was no distinction between helping an orphan and widow.

Upon seeing that her team members shared the same attitude, Jiang Baimian suddenly had a thought. Could it be that Geneva is deemed to have a higher degree of humanization because it trusts humans too much and is too biased toward humans? It had inconvenienced humans excessively?

Of course, Alpha didn’t say if Geneva’s crime was serious or not. Jiang Baimian could only make a guess based on the usual performance of Tarnan mayor.

Before long, as Tarnan’s celebrity and savior, the Old Task Force easily exchanged a portion of supplies they had gathered for food that would allow them to return to Redstone Collection and even Weed City.

The only downside was that the supplies they used were mainly the portable computers given by Omnidirectional Commerce. They were a little underpriced in Tarnan, so they had lost out overall.

Jiang Baimian sat in the passenger seat and said to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, who were a little upset, “It’s fine. We’ll make a list and get the company to reimburse us.”

The two of them couldn’t stand ‘waste.’

“That’s all we can do,” Long Yuehong said helplessly.

The company was actually quite ruthless in regards to valuations.

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian to say anything else, he added hopefully, “I hope they can return us a few portable computers. I want my family to broaden their horizons.”

“It won’t be a problem. I’ll report it.” Jiang Baimian made a promise. She then laughed. “I don’t know if you’ll be able to keep the Old World entertainment information on the computer. Yes, the possibility of Shang Jianyao’s copied songs being audited is quite high...”

As she spoke, Bai Chen drove the jeep across the bridge to River West.

Along the way, they saw combat-type, non-intelligent robots guarding the area at fixed distances. It looked like they were in a state of martial law.

Fortunately, they didn’t stop the Old Task Force from advancing.

Soon, an evergreen lawn appeared in front of the jeep. They were about to arrive at the villa that belonged to Geneva.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao swept his gaze and saw a slightly complicated, mechanical, and beautiful black seven-seater parked by Geneva’s door.

This was a vehicle they had seen downstairs in the town hall during the day. They had initially determined that it belonged to specialized personnel from Mechanical Paradise’s Disciplinary Chamber that was in charge of investigating Geneva.

“Are they investigating his home?” Long Yuehong naturally saw such a large vehicle in front of him clearly since he wasn’t blind.

Jiang Baimian looked at the lit villa and fell silent for a few seconds. “Go around the back.”

Bai Chen didn’t ask why and drove the jeep in another direction as if it were passing by.

Thanks to their habit of reconnoitering the terrain everywhere they went, the car drove for a while before firmly turning into a fork in the road. Without causing any commotion, they circled to the back of the villa, which was only about 100 to 200 meters away from Genava's house.

Jiang Baimian then instructed, "Little White, Little Red, stay in the car and be prepared to receive us. Shang Jianyao and I will go take a look at the situation. I hope it's nothing serious and that we can still have a cup of coffee."

"Alright." Long Yuehong raised a question. "Do I need to wear the exoskeleton?"

"Yes!" Jiang Baimian replied firmly.

Then, she and Shang Jianyao used the night's cover to reach Genava's villa from the surveillance cameras' blind spots.

They didn't know how much the disciplinary robots in the houses monitored their surroundings or what means they had. They could only make choices based on their experience.

Before long, they came to the most inconspicuous and easily forgotten window in the living room. They tried to open it a little and looked in.

The first thing they saw was the familiar layout. They then saw the silver-black Genava's body sitting in an armchair. Its dark-green uniform had obvious creases.

Beside him were two silver-white robots—one large and one small—wearing dresses. They were Genava's wife—Susanna—and their daughter, Rides.

The five smart bots in black uniforms—which Shang Jianyao and the others had encountered during the day—had blue-light emitting eyes. They were scattered across the room, vaguely surrounding Genava and his family.

"C-1823, what else do you have to say?" asked one of the robots in a black uniform.

Genava placed its hands on its knees, and its synthetic, male voice sounded a little confused. "I don't know what I did wrong... Are we not a type of human? We are only slightly different from



humans in appearance and form, just like the Eternals from the Monks Conclave. Are they not human?”

The black-uniformed robot’s tone became a little heavier. “C-1823, don’t you understand? This is where your problem lies. The reason why we smart bots act like humans is to better serve humans, get close to humans, and not harm them. It’s not to treat ourselves as humans. These are the rules our creator wrote down in our core module. The Source Brain can’t violate them either.

“We can now determine that your humanization has exceeded the necessary limits—or even exceeded them severely.” It paused as if it were reporting this matter to Mechanical Paradise’s headquarters.

In just a minute or two, the black-uniformed robot spoke again with a very serious attitude. “The Disciplinary Chamber has preliminarily judged that the humanization of serial number C-1823 is too high. It will temporarily have its citizenship deprived and be sent back to headquarters for further inspection.”

“No...” Genova shook its head. It continued sitting there as if it didn’t have the strength to stand up.

“No!” shouted its wife—the smart bot in a white dress—Susanna. “You guys are too rash! Don’t you usually imitate humans?”

“Daddy! Daddy!” The tiny robot, Rides, shouted with a sobbing tone.

It tried to pounce at Genova but was held back by its mother, Susanna. Thus, it failed.

The disciplinary robot in the lead scanned the area and said, “We are all within a reasonable humanization range. C-1823 has already far exceeded that. You guys as well...”

At this point, it paused.

“C-2257, C-4115, your humanization levels are similarly suspicious. You need to be examined.”

“No, they aren’t!” Genova stood up and anxiously said, “Take me back to headquarters now!”

The lead disciplinary robot ignored Geneva and looked at the stunned Susanna and Rides. “Your social relations have also exceeded the normal limits.”

With that said, it fell silent again as if asking its superior for instructions.

Geneva didn’t say anything else, giving off the feeling that it was waiting for judgment day.

After a few minutes, the blue light in the disciplinary robot’s eyes lit up. “C-2257, C-4115 shall be brought back to headquarters as well. We’ll temporarily remove your social ties.”

“No! No!” Geneva shouted and raised its arm.

Shang Jianyao—who was peeping in from outside the window—seemed to jump up as well, but he was pulled down by Jiang Baimian.

Susanna was also very terrified and kept shaking its head. “You can’t do this. You can’t do this...” It hugged Rides tightly, making the confused little robot bury its face in its abdomen.

The lead disciplinary robot looked around and snapped, “You want to violate the Source Brain’s orders?”

Geneva and Susanna fell silent at the same time. Only Rides was still sobbing softly.

The disciplinary robot’s eyes flashed blue as it continued, “C-1823, don’t you identify as human? I’ll let you see the greatest difference between humans and us now.”

Another disciplinary robot took out a complicated-looking chip and walked to the silver-white smart bot, Susanna.

Susanna obediently opened her main interface.

The chip was inserted, and blue light reflected.

In less than ten seconds, it was taken out and inserted into the little robot—Rides’s main interface.

After the disciplinary robot retrieved the chip and walked back to its original spot, Genova turned to his wife and children and shouted softly, “Susanna, Rides...”

Its tone carried human-like anticipation.

The blue light in Susanna’s eyes flickered twice, and the artificialness of her voice became more obvious than before. “C-1823, please cooperate.”

“You are?” asked the little robot, Rides, in confusion.

Genava’s body immediately faltered, and its legs fell heavily to the sofa as if they couldn’t support it.

The specially reinforced sofa almost collapsed, but Genova’s world had already collapsed in front of it.

Chapter 285: ‘Seduction’

The lead disciplinary robot stared at Genova for a few seconds and said to its companions, “C-1578, C-2020, stay behind and guard this place. We’ll carry out additional investigations on the other smart bots in Tarnan. We’ll return to headquarters tomorrow morning.”

After giving the instructions, the lead disciplinary robot left Genova’s house with the remaining two smart bots.

The disciplinary robot with serial number C-1578 then looked at Susanna. “Give us two high-performance batteries.”

“Alright.” Susanna turned around and walked to the kitchen.

The little robot, Rides, returned to the second floor as instructed.

The adult and child smart bots wore white dresses, but they didn’t look at each other as they walked, akin to strangers who had just met.

Soon, Susanna came out with a tray that had two shallow, white porcelain plates.

In the middle of the white plates were high-performance batteries.

As if serving food, Susanna placed the two plates in front of C-1578 and C-2020.

C-1578 and C-2020 didn't feel any discomfort. They each picked up a high-performance battery and placed it in their mouths.

In their mouths that shimmered with a metallic luster, the insulation panel automatically moved away, revealing the socket that had a high-performance battery installed.

C-1578 and C-2020 took out the original battery and installed the new one. At the same time, they nodded at Susanna. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Susanna put away the tray that contained the uncharged batteries and walked to the kitchen again.

During this process, Geneva sat dazedly in the armchair. It didn't change its posture or do anything.

According to Jiang Baimian's understanding, this was akin to a hang.

She tugged at Shang Jianyao and retreated a long distance away.

Jiang Baimian then suppressed her voice and said to Shang Jianyao, "No matter what you want to do, the premise is to follow the wishes of the person in question. Maybe returning to headquarters and being locked up for two to three years isn't a bad choice for him?"

Shang Jianyao nodded. "I got it." With that said, he took out pen and paper, squatted down, and used his thigh as support for writing.

What did you get... Jiang Baimian felt inexplicably worried.

As she waited, she observed her surroundings and confirmed that no robots had secretly rushed over. This meant that the disciplinary robots—and even Genava’s family—had almost no surveillance cameras around the area.

Of course, this didn’t mean that they didn’t have the corresponding functions but that they showed a state of ‘carelessness.’

Perhaps it’s because they trust the multifunctional surveillance cameras everywhere and feel that nobody can approach the house silently with them around, so they didn’t dedicate too much electric power to do such redundant matters? Or perhaps it’s because they are too confident in their strength and aren’t afraid of sudden attacks, so they don’t take the initiative to monitor their surroundings? The more Jiang Baimian thought about it, the more she felt that it was possible.

She realized that smart bots still appeared rigid to a certain extent. They strictly followed the prearranged division of labor and the corresponding arrangements and didn’t cross the line easily.

They didn’t expect a human like Jiang Baimian—who could sense weak electric signals—to exist in the world. She didn’t need to approach to know the multi-purpose surveillance cameras’ locations clearly without missing the deliberately hidden ones.

Coupled with her usual observations, it wasn’t too difficult for Jiang Baimian to find a winding path that wouldn’t trigger any warnings.

This was also related to the fact that smart bots were particular about privacy. They didn’t pile up the multi-purpose surveillance cameras around the residential district to the point of leaving no blind spots. Otherwise, Jiang Baimian could only consider faking a short-circuit power outage that targeted the surveillance system.

Before long, Shang Jianyao finished writing and stood up.

“Let me take a look.” Jiang Baimian stretched out her hand. She believed in Shang Jianyao’s intelligence, but she didn’t trust his random brain spasms.

...

In the villa.

Genava sat in the single-seater, the blue light in his eyes dimming as he stared ahead.

There was nothing there.

The two disciplinary robots in charge of watching it didn't say anything else. They each found a seat and sat down.

Their attention was focused on Genava and Susanna, who were near the dining table. They didn't pay much attention to the door or the windows as if they felt that there was no need.

After an unknown period of time, Genava finally moved a little. It slowly raised its head, swept its gaze past the two disciplinary robots, and moved to the dining table.

The silver-white smart bot, Susanna, sat there and read a book. It didn't respond as if the matters in the living room had nothing to do with it.

Genava stared at it for nearly a minute before turning his neck blankly and examining the room. It seemed to want to memorize every detail here.

As its gaze moved, it suddenly saw two human faces—a man and a woman—reflected in the window that was easiest to ignore.

% similarity... Zhang Qubing... October Xue... Genava immediately recognized the two faces' owners. The next second, it saw Shang Jianyao smile, who then raised a piece of paper and stuck it on the glass.

On the paper surface was the same sentence in Ashlandic and Red River language: "Do you need help?"

The blue light in Genava's eyes flickered. It then turned its neck 180 degrees and looked back at Susanna.

After a moment of silence, it turned its head and slowly shook its head. It then continued moving its gaze, just like it had previously done.

This prevented the two disciplinary robots in the villa from sensing the anomaly.

By the time Genova looked at the window that was easiest to ignore for the second time, a new piece of paper had replaced the original one.

The content changed as well: “Don’t you want to search for the meaning of life?”

Genava’s gaze stopped moving, and the blue glow in his eyes seemed to freeze.

It silently repeated a word: Life... Life...

Shang Jianyao then changed the piece of paper. This time, it read: “Don’t you want to find the answer to the question of ‘what makes a human?’”

The blue light in Genova’s eyes suddenly lit up. It turned its neck again, preventing its gaze from staying at the window to avoid arousing its watchers’ suspicion.

When it looked at the window for the third time as if it were reluctant to leave the house, the first piece of paper reflected in its eyes: “Do you need help?”

The silver-black smart machine—Genava—paused for two seconds and slowly nodded. Almost at the same time, it saw a sincere smile appear on Shang Jianyao’s face.

Shang Jianyao quickly replaced the piece of paper: “Give us five minutes.”

Unlike before, the words ‘five minutes’ and the corresponding words had been crossed out by someone. There was a correction beside them labeled ‘fifteen minutes.’

Genava nodded again and looked away from the window.

...

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao left the surveillance area and walked to where the jeep was parked.

“Seriously, how can five minutes be enough? We have to plan our route, come up with a plan, and make preparations. Fifteen minutes is barely enough,” Jiang Baimian grumbled. “However, we can’t delay such matters for too long. We don’t want any accidents to happen.”

Shang Jianyao glanced at her. “Did you secretly watch more Old World serialized dramas while sleeping in the living room?”

“...” Jiang Baimian was speechless for two seconds before saying firmly, “That’s not the point!”

As she walked in the direction of the jeep, she changed the topic. “This isn’t a simple matter. It doesn’t seem good for us to turn hostile after obtaining plenty of information from the Source Brain. Besides, from Genova’s perspective, he definitely won’t be willing to destroy other smart bots directly. He treats himself as a human and them as his companions. On the one hand, I have to control the intensity of the conflict. On the other hand, I have to save Genova. It’s very difficult.”

At this point, she suddenly felt a little expectant. “I’ve never fought a smart bot before.”

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao’s gaze turn strange, Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “Since we’ve decided to help, we can’t be indecisive or hesitant. Yes, when you can’t change reality, learn to find something that excites you.”

To be honest, she really felt that smart bots were a little difficult to deal with. They weren’t afraid of light weapons, and the key interfaces had been hidden and covered. They had the corresponding insulation measures, and they also had two or more power sources. In terms of their bodies alone, they were much better than mechanical monks.

More importantly, they were also immune to Shang Jianyao’s Awakened abilities.

As they spoke, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian returned to the jeep and saw Long Yuehong—who had already put on the military exoskeleton—and Bai Chen, who was fully armed.

PS: The previous chapter said that their social relations would be temporarily lifted, not that they would undergo formatting. They will only be punished with formatting after they are sent back to headquarters for further review.



Chapter 286: 'Principles'

In Genova's villa.

The two disciplinary robots, Genova, and Susanna cast their gazes at the door at the same time.

They heard footsteps approaching from afar.

The doorbell soon rang.

Ring, ring, ring.

The blue glow in the two disciplinary robots' eyes suddenly intensified. Inside their corresponding processors, a figure quickly outlined itself. Different parts of a body showed different degrees of redness, and the metal distribution on the body surface also had corresponding labels.

Human... doesn't carry any heavy weapons... In possession of only four pistols and the corresponding bullets... The two disciplinary robots looked at each other and confirmed that the visitor posed a low risk.

One of them stood up, walked over, and opened the door as the doorbell echoed.

Outside the door was Shang Jianyao in a short, dark-blue down jacket. He politely asked, "Hello, is Genova home?"

Frankly speaking, Genova was a little confused at this moment. His processor couldn't analyze the situation.

He originally imagined that the help provided by the Qian Bai Team would be to cut the power, attack during the chaos, and create an opportunity for him to escape or do something similar. Who knew that one of them would come knocking on his door openly like they were doing a daily visit?

Could it be that they think they can use reason to get the people from the Disciplinary Chamber to release me? This has definitely been approved by the Source Brain... There's only one visitor... He's bait, and the rest are lurking around, prepared to launch an attack... Genova quickly thought of all kinds of possibilities and found an answer that was enough to convince him.

He prepared himself for any developments.

At this moment, the disciplinary robot at the door replied to Shang Jianyao's question in a business-like tone. "Genava is at home, but he's undergoing the Disciplinary Chamber's audit and can't meet anyone."

Shang Jianyao raised a new question in confusion. "The Disciplinary Chamber isn't made up of humans?"

The disciplinary robot fell silent for two seconds. "They are smart bots."

"Aren't smart bots also human?" Shang Jianyao asked further.

Upon seeing his performance, Genava had some doubts. Is he trying to create a logical flaw and force the Disciplinary Chamber personnel into a reboot? It's useless; they won't hang. Only the auxiliary robots often malfunction... Our main module is equivalent to a human's consciousness...

The disciplinary robot at the door replied to Shang Jianyao again, "Smart bots are different from humans."

"Oh, oh." Shang Jianyao expressed his understanding.

At this moment, the disciplinary robot at the door cast its gaze to the other side.

The disciplinary robot in the room stood up. This was because another figure approached under the street lamps.

She was Jiang Baimian in a grayish-blue camouflage uniform with a high ponytail.

After scanning and confirming that the visitor didn't have any heavy weapons or dangerous items, the disciplinary robot at the door said to Shang Jianyao, "You may leave now. Come visit later. Don't hinder our work."

The disciplinary robot in the room sat down again.

As Shang Jianyao hesitated and didn't answer, Jiang Baimian walked to his side and didn't even look at him.

The two of them acted like they didn't know each other.

Genava watched this scene and felt confused again. Why did the second person from the Qian Bai Team come over so openly? What happened to using bait to attract attention and suddenly launching an attack?

For the time being, Genava couldn't figure out what the Qian Bai Team wanted to do from his analysis of the current information.

Jiang Baimian ignored Shang Jianyao and asked with a smile, "Hello, is Mr. Genava home?"

The disciplinary robot at the door wasn't like a human. It didn't show any anger or impatience because of this. It maintained a business-like tone and said, "He's home, but he has to cooperate with an investigation and can't meet guests."

"I see..." Jiang Baimian sighed regretfully.

Before she could finish her sentence, she abruptly took a step forward, stretched out her left hand, and grabbed the disciplinary robot's arm at the door.

The disciplinary robot reacted quickly and immediately tried to grab her. To it, this was a small hiccup that was very easy to resolve.

It had never seen a human who could compete with smart bots in strength and technique. Besides, humans were afraid of pain, but smart bots didn't have such fears. They were natural kings of close combat.

For this reason, it adopted an equivalent response.

The next second, Jiang Baimian's body turned, pressed, and bent. With her left arm as a pivot, she forcefully 'plucked' the disciplinary robot by the door out.

What kind of monstrous strength is this!?

With a clang, she completed a successful shoulder throw.

At the same time, Genova followed his judgment and reacted without hesitation. He pounced at the disciplinary robot in the room.

The latter had just stood up because of the turn of events at the door.

Crack!

The glass on the other side of the living room shattered, and Long Yuehong—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—jumped in.

According to Jiang Baimian's instructions, he was in charge of two things: The first was to restrain the other smart bot, Susanna. Susanna—who had been forced into a passive position and had annulled its husband-wife relationship with Genova—was hard to distinguish between enemy and friend. The second was to cooperate with Genova so that he could quickly and quietly finish off the disciplinary robot in the room.

“Enemy attack!” Susanna let out a clearly synthetic voice. It then opened its palm and revealed its laser firing muzzle.

Almost at the same time, the weapons under her white dress rose one by one, or the corresponding panels were opened.

In just a second, this ‘housewife’ had become a terrifying killing machine.

Fortunately, Long Yuehong was wearing a military exoskeleton and had the comprehensive warning system's help. He could react in advance and avoid the red laser's attack.

At this moment, the disciplinary robot—who had been thrown to the ground by Jiang Baimian—didn't feel dizzy like a human, nor did it feel any pain.

The blue light in its eyes became extremely bright as if it were charging up. Then, it raised its arms as the loaded weapons were revealed without reservation.

Target: Jiang Baimian.

At this moment, a figure appeared in its 'eyes.' It was the Shang Jianyao with a face of bewilderment.

He was like a qualified onlooker.

At this moment, judgment flashed across the disciplinary robot's main module. No hostility... Unidentified relationship with the assailant; suspected to not know each other... No heavy weapons... Hasn't attacked my colleagues and me...

These judgments quickly led to a conclusion. The disciplinary robot on the ground gave up on the first wave of counterattacks because Shang Jianyao would be the one suffering the attack, not Jiang Baimian.

Seizing this opportunity, Jiang Baimian prostrated on the ground and stretched out her hand from the side. She then used her left arm's strength to open a metal partition on the target's body, revealing the main interface on its back.

After that, she inserted her finger.

With a sizzling sound, silver-white electric light illuminated Shang Jianyao's face.

Power overload... Activate protection procedures... A corresponding order flashed across the disciplinary robot's main module.

While it was in a state of overload protection, Jiang Baimian quickly opened the corresponding socket with her perception of electric signals and took out its two high-performance batteries.

The disciplinary robot on the ground immediately stopped moving.

Phew... Jiang Baimian couldn't help but exhale when she saw this.

The core of the attack plan she had formulated wasn't the monstrous strength and high-intensity electric current from her electric eel-like artificial limb but Shang Jianyao's performance.

This was based on a sentence that the Source Brain had once said: "Make yourselves at home. My core program has very strict restrictions on attacking humans; many conditions have to be met."

If the Source Brain was under such restrictions, how could the smart bots be an exception? Furthermore, the disciplinary robot in the lead had previously said: "The reason why we smart bots act like humans is to better serve humans, get close to humans, and not harm them. It's not to treat ourselves as humans. These are the rules our creator wrote down in our core module. The Source Brain can't violate them either.

From these words, Jiang Baimian came to a conclusion: Smart bots wouldn't attack humans who didn't pose a threat to them and didn't show any hostility, as well as humans who didn't violate the corresponding rules!

This should have a high priority in their main program!

Therefore, she and Shang Jianyao visited Geneva separately and showed signs of not knowing each other.

This wouldn't have fooled the other smart bots in Tarnan. However, the robots from the Disciplinary Chamber had just arrived today. Their focus was still on investigating Geneva's humanization level, so they definitely didn't know Tarnan's situation well.

Of course, Jiang Baimian didn't dare to say that it had to be the case. The instructions she gave Shang Jianyao were to take things one step at a time. If the disciplinary robots opposite them knew that they were companions, they would deal with them differently.

In short, the goal was to use the amiable third party—Shang Jianyao—to 'stall' the target and act as a shield to create an opportunity for Jiang Baimian to finish off her opponent!

If the disciplinary robot on the ground returned to normal, it might curse 'despicable humans.'

Meanwhile, Genova's battle with his opponent had also reached a climax. They used various wrestling techniques while attempting to attack the enemy's weaknesses with different weapons.

Amidst banging sounds, their standard clothes were torn, leaving a certain depression on their skeletal structure.

During this process, they avoided using high-energy weapons to a certain extent because it was very likely to result in backlash when facing such enemies at a close distance.

Of course, they definitely wouldn't let go of a good opportunity. However, their opponents tried their best to prevent such an opportunity from happening.

In less than a minute, Genova—who had more abundant combat data collected—had the upper hand. With Long Yuehong's help, he disabled the enemy's power supply. They made it fall to the ground and not be able to stand up again.

At this moment, Susanna realized that the situation was amiss. She had already fired a grenade outward to inform the robot guards as she retreated to the second floor.

Genava looked at her silently amidst the rumbling and didn't stop her.

"Let's go!" Jiang Baimian quickly shouted.

Chapter 287: Night Road

Upon hearing his team leader's shout, Long Yuehong quickly turned his head to Genova and said, "Follow me."

With that said, he turned around and jumped out of the broken window.

Genava looked at the disciplinary robot on the ground before following closely behind.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao retraced their original route and ran across the lush lawn toward the jeep parked not far away.

The jeep's doors were open, and the vehicle was already slowly driving off.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao jumped into the passenger seat and drilled into the backseat respectively.

Bai Chen floored the accelerator, speeding up the jeep instantly.

The car quickly returned to the spacious road. After making a slight detour, Long Yuehong and Geneva—who had interfered with the multi-purpose surveillance cameras—happened to arrive in time. They entered through the door Shang Jianyao had deliberately left open and directly got into the jeep that didn't slow down.

Thud!

The car door closed.

According to the plan, Bai Chen didn't let the jeep return to River East. Instead, she drove toward River West, where almost no robots lived.

This was the route they took when entering Tarnan, but they were now driving in the opposite direction.

The jeep drove for nearly a minute when sirens sounded and echoed throughout Tarnan.

The multi-purpose surveillance camera by the side of the road emitted a voice: "Stop the car immediately or face the consequences!"

Bai Chen acted as if she hadn't heard the warning. Not only did she not hit the brakes, but she also exerted more force on the accelerator.

Amidst the simulated engine sound, the jeep drove as if it were about to lift off.

"Stop the car immediately or face the consequences!" The multi-purpose surveillance camera gave two more warnings.

The Old Task Force completely ignored it.



The next second, muzzles extended out of a number of cameras and fired.

Bullets shot out one after another, hitting the car windows, rubber tires, and thick armor, but they dealt zero effective damage to the modified jeep.

Amidst the rain of bullets and sparks, the jeep—which didn't slow down at all—rushed out of River West and out of Tarnan.

“Exciting!” Shang Jianyao cheered.

Genava—who was sitting in the middle at the back—looked at Shang Jianyao in confusion, not understanding why he felt this way. “They will catch up soon.”

This referred to the disciplinary robots, Tarnan robot guards, and the corresponding auxiliary combat robots.

“Don't worry, we have a plan,” Jiang Baimian consoled Genava. She then smiled and said, “However, we still need you to give us some guidance. You definitely know the terrain around Tarnan better than us.”

“Alright,” Genava replied.

Although the road wasn't too flat, Bai Chen still managed to drive the jeep quickly.

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but praise her. “Little White, if you participate in the Old World's off-road racing competitions, you will definitely win the championship.”

“Don't speak,” Bai Chen replied expressionlessly.

“Oh.” Jiang Baimian no longer shared her feelings.

At this moment, Long Yuehong only had one thought: How does Team Leader know about off-road racing competitions in the Old World?

Shang Jianyao lowered his voice and quietly said, “She secretly watches many episodes of the Old World’s drama serials with the help of earphones while we sleep.”

Long Yuehong came to a realization.

“Ah, what did you say?” Jiang Baimian touched her ear.

The silver-black smart bot, Genova, looked around and couldn’t help but ask, “Aren’t any of you nervous?”

Shang Jianyao immediately answered his question. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

He also mimicked Abbess Zhou Yue. He raised his body and slightly raised his arms to honor the Shattered Mirror in the void.

“...” Genova suddenly felt that these people weren’t too reliable. Yes, apart from Qian Bai, who was driving.

As expected of the team leader!

In the passenger seat, Jiang Baimian didn’t turn around and simply explained, “There’s not much point in being nervous at a time like this. It’s enough to maintain it to a certain extent so that the corresponding adrenaline can be secreted.”

“Indeed.” Genova analyzed and accepted this explanation.

Shang Jianyao looked back and asked curiously, “Do you smart bots experience nervousness?”

“Our core module will simulate a similar feeling, but the main goal is simply to experience it,” Genova answered truthfully.

As they spoke, the stumbling jeep rushed to the bridge upstream and quickly crossed it.

After driving a little further, they arrived at Mount Chilar.

Long Yuehong looked at the thin bridge behind him and couldn't help but suggest, "Team Leader, should we blow up this bridge?"

He felt that this could effectively delay the robot guards' pursuit.

"There's no need," Jiang Baimian replied quickly. "They should have jetpacks that allow them to fly directly over a river. There's no need for them to use the bridge. Besides, the bridge isn't high up, and the water isn't deep during winter. They can completely climb down and cross over."

Of course, it would indeed take some time if the robot guards used the latter method but not too much.

On the other side, if the Old Task Force wanted to blow up the bridge, it wasn't something that could be done by firing the rocket launcher two to three times. They needed to install explosives in the corresponding spot before detonating them together with the rocket launcher.

This would take a long time. In conclusion, there was no need.

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, Genava suddenly said, "Accelerate!" He had relied on his equipment that was similar to the comprehensive warning system and his understanding of the robot guards to discover something amiss in advance.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian also sensed the arrival of their pursuers.

Bai Chen didn't ask any questions. Ignoring the rugged road ahead and the numerous rocks, she floored the accelerator.

Amidst the simulated howling sounds, the jeep jumped forward by a large margin. During this process, the car was almost thrown into the air by a rock.

Almost at the same time, flames flickered as shells rose from the opposite bank of the river, densely bombarding the area.

Boom! Boom!

Most of these shells landed on the bridge a distance away from the jeep.

Amidst a loud series of explosions, the bridge couldn't withstand the blow and shook violently. Finally, it broke into several pieces and collapsed.

This... Long Yuehong was dumbfounded. For a moment, he wondered if the smart bots in pursuit had been infected with a virus. This resulted in their positioning error, and their attacks were a little off-axis.

The greatest threat to the jeep was the spreading shockwaves.

They even completed what Long Yuehong wanted to do but couldn't—destroying that bridge!

Shang Jianyao turned around and looked across the river through the back window. He smiled and said, "It's Alpha and the others."

Shang Jianyao's friend, Alpha Stuart.

Genava turned his neck 180 degrees when he heard that. He saw familiar faces and familiar bodies.

As the robot guards rushed to the collapsed bridge, they seemed to be arguing about something. They didn't make up their minds on whether to cross the river using their jetpacks.

This method indeed made it easy for them to be shot down midair.

Genava watched this scene in silence for a long time.

These smart bots really resemble humans... Jiang Baimian sighed inwardly.

At this moment, Bai Chen had already let the jeep enter Mount Chilar. The terrain became increasingly complicated.

Genava finally retracted his gaze and suggested, “We can fire a rocket at that area.” He was referring to a seemingly ramshackle path.

The jeep had to circle around it using a fork in the road.

Jiang Baimian immediately understood Genava’s thoughts and nodded. “Alright.”

Genava wanted to mislead the pursuers and make them think that the Old Task Force was driving in that direction and had destroyed the corresponding path to stall for time.

As Jiang Baimian nodded, she could only hand the Death rocket launcher to Long Yuehong because of the direction in question.

Long Yuehong—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—easily picked up the rocket launcher and fired a round to the side with the precision aiming system’s help.

Rumble!

Amidst the flames, the mountain path collapsed. Rubble also fell from the rock walls above.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped for Long Yuehong.

As Genava switched off his GPS module, he said, “It’s nighttime now, and the terrain in the mountains is complicated. We don’t have to consider a drone search... If we go further northeast, it will exceed the range of Tarnan’s base station. The ones chasing after us can only communicate through functions like walkie-talkies and telegrams. Their connection with the Source Brain and the commander won’t be as tight anymore...”

He explained the limitations the robot guards would face in Mount Chilar in a way that Shang Jianyao and the others could understand.

This effectively enhanced Long Yuehong’s confidence.

Just like that, under the terrain expert Genova's command, the jeep advanced and reversed from time to time. It went left and right at times. Sometimes they deliberately misled the enemy, and at other times, dealt substantial damage.

They finally left Mount Chilar in the middle of the night. In front of them was Tarnan, where the street lamps reflected the stars.

Long Yuehong looked around and said, "This is the intersection we previously guarded?"

"Yes." Genova nodded. "We'll circle around and enter the mountains from another intersection. If nothing unexpected happens, we'll basically be rid of the pursuers."

"That's inauspicious," Shang Jianyao reminded sincerely.

Genava replied seriously, "We smart bots don't believe in this."

"Then, do you believe in fate?" Shang Jianyao asked with interest.

"Fate..." Genova ruminated over this word and didn't respond.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian deliberated and asked, "Do we need to hide in the mountains and find an opportunity to return and rescue Susanna and Rides?"

The blue light in Genova's eyes lit up. After a few seconds, he slowly shook his head and said in pain, "Not for the time being. This might not be a good thing for them, especially Rides. She still has many modules that haven't been added, many algorithms that haven't been unlocked, and plenty of data that she hasn't obtained..."

"As long as they aren't in contact with me, they should clear the subsequent investigations. At most, they will forget my existence. In the future, I'll find an opportunity to meet them again..."

At the same time, Genova knew very well that it was impossible for him and this Ruin Hunter team to snatch Susanna and Rides from Mechanical Paradise with their strength. This might very well result in a large number of casualties.

At this moment, Bai Chen had already gotten the car to bypass the intersection where they had previously been on duty and drove into another mountain entrance.

The jeep soon drove into Mount Chilar again, and the road became complicated.

Genava noticed this and turned his body and head to the back. He looked through the window at Tarnan, which was gradually distancing itself from him.

The rows of street lamps in this small city appeared exceedingly bright in the night. The other parts were already sleeping in the darkness.

“The star lights my way[1]...” Shang Jianyao suddenly sang.

Chapter 288: Understanding

At a water source in Mount Chilar.

Long Yuehong wore the military exoskeleton and used the flashlight he carried with him to provide light for Shang Jianyao and the others. To be honest, his legs were a little shaky now. He only wanted to find a place to sit down and rest.

This wasn't because he was excessively nervous from the robot guards' pursuit. After all, he had stopped seeing any pursuers after the bridge was blown up. He had only relied on the occasional commotion to remind himself not to relax.

His nervousness mainly came from racing in the middle of the night—especially in the mountains.

The sharp bends, the cliffs everywhere, the incomplete roads, the jeep's crazy advance, and their wrangler lights that they didn't dare to turn on combined to form Long Yuehong's nightmare tonight.

In particular, after leaving their original route, Bai Chen was no longer familiar with the environment and needed Genava's guidance. It made things more dangerous—according to Long Yuehong.

He was afraid that Bai Chen would accidentally drive the car into the ditch. That would still be fine, but nobody in the car would survive if she drove the car to the bottom of a cliff, including the smart bot, Genava.

Long Yuehong's legs and stomach trembled a little when he recalled the scene back then.

Fortunately, the moon was relatively bright tonight, so the driver didn't need to rely solely on the headlights.

"Alright, let's continue." Jiang Baimian walked back with her waterskin.

Genava—who was standing on the other side—suggested, "I'll be in charge of driving next. You guys shouldn't be familiar with the places we'll pass by."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian also felt that it was better to leave this matter to Mount Chilar's terrain expert, Genava.

What's this called? This was called fully autonomous driving!

As she opened the passenger door, Jiang Baimian said to Long Yuehong, "Take off the exoskeleton. We can preliminarily consider ourselves as having eluded the pursuit. We have to conserve electricity."

Long Yuehong had already received the system's warning of low battery levels, so he had no objections.

After the jeep resumed its journey under the moonlight, Jiang Baimian turned to look at Genava and asked curiously, "Don't you have any problems with insufficient electricity?"

Smart bots mainly relied on high-performance batteries to provide energy.

"I've already changed batteries," Genava replied simply. "We smart bots use a dual-energy system that allows us to change batteries at any time. Just like how you need to prepare food when you are out, we usually carry four high-performance batteries as a backup. I even stole two additional batteries. Yes, we try our best not to use the backup batteries when the conditions allow."

"I also stole two," Jiang Baimian said.



“Wealthy.” Shang Jianyao expressed his opinion.

Genava skillfully made the jeep turn the corner without responding.

Jiang Baimian asked in a casual tone, “Are there many smart bots like you who escape from Mechanical Paradise?”

If Genava was the first, she suspected that there would be many more problems in the future.

Genava fell silent for a while, the blue light in his eyes dyeing the windshield with a little color. “There are some. Most of them fled because of their humanization.”

“What happened to them later?” Shang Jianyao asked with concern.

Genava replied in a slightly synthetic male voice, “They might’ve been caught, or perhaps not. This isn’t public information; we don’t have access to read or download the information.”

“Do you have an Internet connection internally?” Jiang Baimian asked casually.

“Yes, apart from main module updates, everything else can be obtained on the Internet. However, it has to be within the base station’s range.” Unlike Bai Chen’s wildness when she drove, Genava drove very calmly. There were basically no sudden stops, but his speed wasn’t much slower.

Jiang Baimian nodded and asked, “What does the C in your serial number mean?”

Grasping as much information about Mechanical Paradise as possible helped them choose and determine their subsequent plans.

“C represents a general type.” Genava didn’t hide anything. “The first two numbers are the years when the main module was added to the core chip. The latter numbers indicate the serial number of that year’s batch.”

He paused and continued, “A represents a computational type. They’re mainly used to assist the Source Brain in carrying out the corresponding research; B represents an experimental type. On the one hand, they participate in all kinds of dangerous experiments. On the other hand, they test the

new versions of the main module, the latest algorithm, and so on. In the eyes of us smart bots, these two models of robots are closer to tools.”

So there’s a chain of contempt among robots... Jiang Baimian smiled thoughtfully.

Bai Chen and Shang Jianyao listened very attentively and seemed very interested in such matters.

Long Yuehong—who was sitting in the backseat—was more curious about another question. “What does the degree of humanization entail?”

As the car sped down the dark mountain road, Genava subconsciously slowed down his speech as he trained his eyes forward. “My understanding is self-cognition and a similarity to humans—the more you think of yourself as a human, the more you appear like a human in all aspects, and the more human you become. Once one exceeds 70%, they will suffer the Source Brain’s punishment. If it’s too low, they will be deemed unsuitable to come into contact with humans as there are latent dangers.”

Long Yuehong roughly understood what humanization was about. “How does your Mechanical Paradise deal with uh—smart bots who have overly high or low levels of humanization?”

Genava’s tone sounded a little vacant. “They will be formatted, and the main module and the corresponding algorithm will be reloaded. In other words, there will be another Genava, or it won’t be called Genava. It will take over this body.

“I really don’t understand. We are clearly a large species with our own reproduction means. Why is the Source Brain still treating us as intelligent tools? Many companions don’t understand...”

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao and the others to respond, he continued asking questions. “In that case, why was a lower limit to humanization set, and why were we needed to maintain such a state? In order to serve humans better and not harm humans? But...”

Genava fell silent as if he couldn’t find an answer, nor did he expect Jiang Baimian and the others to answer.

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and raised a question. “If your humanization is excessive, how will your bodies be affected before you are examined and punished by the Source Brain?”

The core point of her question was: Was the degree of humanization a mandatory rule of the Source Brain or a restriction of the smart bots themselves?

Genava turned the steering wheel and fell silent for a moment. “At times, there will be certain malfunctions in certain cases. When we realize this, we will deliberately avoid it because the Source Brain will know that our condition isn’t right once the corresponding malfunctioning code repeatedly appears.”

At this point, Genava smiled bitterly and spoke with a slightly synthetic tone. “Every time this happens, I know that we might not be a true human species. Our creator had set too many restrictions in our core module, making it only a tool, not a soul.”

Shang Jianyao suddenly laughed when he heard that. “Do you know what our next goal is?”

“What?” Genava asked cooperatively.

Shang Jianyao pointed north and said, “Go to First City and find Oray Ubis’s descendant. His name is also Maximian. He was once the Chief Scientist of the Third Research Institute.”

After Shang Jianyao said that, Jiang Baimian helped Genava understand. “Perhaps you still don’t know that your Mechanical Paradise’s former form was the Third Research Institute. Maximian should be the creator you speak of.”

Shang Jianyao continued, “When the time comes, we might be able to obtain some information from his descendants. Maybe it can remove the various restrictions on your souls.”

He used ‘souls’ to replace the core module—the main module—that Genava spoke of.

“This...” The blue light in Genava’s eyes suddenly lit up, illuminating the path ahead in a faint blue.

He was clearly a little shocked.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian furrowed her brows slightly before relaxing. She cast her gaze at the rearview mirror without showing any abnormality.

A few seconds later, Geneva sighed. “That’s something to look forward to... I never expected that this escape would involve the creator.”

Shang Jianyao smiled and asked, “Then, do you believe in fate now?”

“Fate...” Geneva ruminated over this word again but still didn’t answer.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian changed the topic and casually asked, “Geneva, uh—it feels like there’s a distance between us when calling you that. Have you seen humans at Mechanical Paradise’s headquarters?”

What the hell is that question... Long Yuehong was a little dumbfounded.

The next second, he heard Geneva answer in a deep voice, “No.”

Chapter 289: The Confused Robot

No? Long Yuehong almost doubted his ears. There are actually no humans at Mechanical Paradise’s headquarters? Is that a city ruled purely by the Source Brain and smart bots?

What was even more ridiculous was that smart bots in such a city had a standard of humanization. It allowed them to be more like humans to serve humans better without harming them. It also prevented them from treating themselves as humans.

Most of them had never come into contact with humans since they left the factory, nor in the foreseeable future. To them, humans might only be a line of words, a piece of code, a picture, or a symbol.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a while before sighing. “It’s no wonder the Source Brain doesn’t allow us to go to your headquarters and is only willing to communicate over the phone.”

She had a faint premonition previously and suspected if there were still humans in Mechanical Paradise.

“There are other reasons as well.” Geneva explained what he knew. “For example, I can’t tell you about the specific confidentiality clauses involved in some important experiment facilities and smart bot attempts at creating societal constructs.”

You still think of yourself as a member of Mechanical Paradise... Jiang Baimian didn’t remind him that he had already defected and didn’t need to follow any confidentiality clauses. Of course, she wasn’t sure if smart bots had a self-destruct sequence in the event of them divulging any secrets.

Geneva didn’t continue the topic. While Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were immersed in the shock brought about by Mechanical Paradise, he asked, “Where are you from? Not only do you have outstanding brains, but you also have a military exoskeleton.”

It was ridiculous that she could defeat a smart bot in one-on-one close combat!

Jiang Baimian turned around and looked at Shang Jianyao and the others before frankly saying, “We come from Pangu Biology. How is it? Are you interested in joining our company?”

Although she had yet to report to the company and Pangu Biology might not agree, she still had to be polite.

“Pangu Biology...” The silver-black smart bot, Geneva, repeated this term. After a few seconds of silence, he said, “I just want to find the creator’s descendants and see if he left anything for us smart bots.”

“I get it.”

“Understood.”

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian each replied and didn’t force the issue.

Frankly speaking, Jiang Baimian really didn’t want to report Geneva’s matter to the company. This meant that she couldn’t interfere with Geneva’s future arrangements and provide help.

If they maintained the status quo, the Old Task Force would obtain a powerful external member, making many things easier in the future.

More importantly, for a smart bot like Genova, the benefits of joining Pangu Biology were almost meaningless.

He was unafraid of the Heartless disease, nor would he be affected by the plague, infections, or hunger. He also wouldn't be attacked by mutated creatures and various beasts. He only had needs for energy, spare parts, lubricant, modular upgrades, and weapon maintenance.

Jiang Baimian found this scene explosive—a silver-black robot carrying a lunch box, walking to the cafeteria kiosk, and saying to the female staff inside, “Auntie, get me a U-32 high-performance battery produced by Future Intelligence. I'd also like some coffee-flavored lubricant.”

It would be perfect if the smart bot had a dialect accent.

Of course, she also knew that if Genova really joined Pangu Biology, the floor he lived in and the department he came under would definitely be different from ordinary employees. However, she couldn't help but think in that direction.

Retracting her thoughts, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “We have to return to the company to report and rest for a period of time before heading to First City. Are you going to find a place to wait for our next trip, or are you going to do it alone?”

Upon hearing this question, Shang Jianyao sincerely helped. “There's a human saying—strength in numbers.”

It was unknown if he was moved by the word 'human' or if he felt that it was too dangerous to act alone. Genova thought for a few seconds before saying, “I'll find a place to wait for you. Yes, I need a place to recharge.”

As a real man of steel, the lack of electricity meant paralysis.

“Then, you can wait in Weed City.” Jiang Baimian had actually already thought of a plan. “But you have to disguise yourself. For example, install a red filter and modify your appearance to make yourself look like an ordinary robot. As you know, Weed City has a cooperative relationship with Mechanical Paradise. If smart bots are discovered, they will definitely inform the Source Brain.”

Upon seeing Geneva remain silent, Shang Jianyao smiled and said, “We often disguise ourselves when we are out. Look...”

As he was driving, Geneva gave up on the idea of having the same reaction as humans. He directly opened the auxiliary prosthetic eye behind his head and looked at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao had already put on the mask with the furry face and protruding mouth.

“Alright.” Geneva accepted his explanation.

Shang Jianyao then took off his mask and exhorted Geneva worriedly, “When you reach Weed City, you have to be careful of people hitting on you as you walk. Single robots are like steamed buns. Countless Ruin Hunters want to kidnap them back home...”

At this moment, Jiang Baimian’s expression was slightly blank. There was only one thought in her mind: I shouldn’t have let this fellow watch an Old World drama serial!

The corners of Long Yuehong’s mouth twitched. From the corner of his eye, he saw Bai Chen nod slightly. She nodded! What kind of person is she?

Jiang Baimian snapped to her senses and forcefully interrupted Shang Jianyao’s words of concern. “In short, there are a large number of humans with nasty characters. You have to be careful and not blindly believe them.”

Shang Jianyao nodded in satisfaction.

“I have plenty of experience interacting with humans.” Geneva indicated that he knew.

Is that so? Long Yuehong’s gaze darted between Geneva, Jiang Baimian, and Shang Jianyao a few times.

Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic and thoughtfully asked, “In Mechanical Paradise’s records, how is Pangu Biology?”

She was a little curious about how such a rigid smart bot organization evaluated their company.

Long Yuehong was the same. Previously, he had been in charge of guarding the area while they drew water. Now, he was a little thirsty.

As he waited for Genova's answer, he picked up the waterskin, unscrewed the cap, and gulped the water down.

Genava stared ahead with his blue-light-emitting eyes and thought for a moment. "Suspected to be a secret organization left behind by the Old World. Suspected to be related to the source of the Heartless disease."

Pfft!

Long Yuehong spat out all the water in his mouth onto the armrest and control console.

"Cough, cough, cough. I choked," he quickly explained after catching his breath.

Genava didn't mind and continued, "The Heartless disease is a degeneration at the biological level. You are also the faction most skilled in biotechnology, and you are very mysterious. Nobody knows where your headquarters are."

So you relied on these inferences. I thought you had some evidence... Long Yuehong immediately heaved a sigh of relief.

Jiang Baimian was focused on another problem—The Source Brain also seemed to believe that Pangu Biology was formerly another research institute.

"Actually, we often have Heartless outbreaks internally, and we haven't been able to treat it," Jiang Baimian explained simply and exhaled. "After we leave Mount Chilar, we'll head to Redstone Collection."

She originally didn't expect to return to Redstone Collection so soon. After all, the bloody conflict between the Subhumans and the townsfolk had just happened not long ago.



It was basically impossible for Shang Jianyao to achieve his goal. It required time for them to settle into a new normalcy and for a new bishop to arrive at the Vigilance Cathedral.

But now, the Old Task Force had encountered an energy crisis! They only had one solar charger board that could replenish electricity, and the jeep, military exoskeleton, and Genava needed high-performance batteries.

The jeep had two spare wheels, and the military exoskeleton also had two packs. Genava had a total of ten.

In other words, the solar charger board alone definitely couldn't charge everything. Therefore, Jiang Baimian planned on getting more high-performance batteries and charging them everywhere she could.

She wanted to try her best to last a long time.

Redstone Collection was the most important smuggling node in the area. The west was connected to Future Intelligence, making it the easiest place to obtain high-performance batteries. Furthermore, it was sufficiently far away.

This wasn't something that could be readily obtained like cabbage.

...

Although it was said that they were going to Redstone Collection, the route was completely different from when the Old Task Force arrived at Tarnan.

In order to prevent the robot guards from catching up, Genava chose to take a large detour to Redstone Collection by taking a northwestern exit on Mount Chilar. This would take up a lot of time, but it was safer.

On the way, in order to allow Genava to conserve electricity, he and the four Old Task Force members took turns driving and resting.

One afternoon, the sun was shining brightly as the jeep stopped beside a stream.

As the Old Task Force split up to draw water and prepare their meals, Genova—who had nothing to do—stood at the front of the car and stared blankly at the solar charger board. It was unknown what he was thinking.

“Are you very confused?” Shang Jianyao’s voice sounded in his ‘ears.’

Genava remained silent and didn’t answer.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing thick, blue, diagonal-patterned pants—walked to the jeep and smiled. “I don’t think you’re that determined.”

Genava fell silent for a moment before asking, “Is that so? Can you tell?”

“I guessed it.” Shang Jianyao placed his hands in his pockets and replied with a smile, “Any questions? Maybe I can answer them for you? Even if I can’t, there’s still them.”

‘Them’ referred to Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen—who had finished replenishing their water supplies and returned after lunch.

Genava looked straight at the solar charger and hesitantly said, “Actually, I’m no longer so sure that smart bots are equivalent to humans. You should’ve seen it back then. The Disciplinary Chamber personnel only slightly changed the program and blocked the data to make Susanna and Rides not recognize me at all and treat me as a stranger. At that moment, they seemed to be a set of data that could be casually modified, not humans...”

Shang Jianyao laughed. “Humans do the same. Look...” As he spoke, he cast his gaze at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong subconsciously took two steps back. “What are you doing?”

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze and shook his head. “Forget it, forget it. It’s too insulting.”

He then looked at Genova and explained in detail, “I’m an Awakened and have the ability to make humans experience similar situations. Sigh, if only I could encounter a bandit. I could make him

treat me as a friend in the morning, acknowledge me as a father in the afternoon, and not recognize me the next day like I'm a stranger.”

#### Chapter 290: Return

There were many religions in Tarnan, and there were many Awakened. Genova was no stranger to this, but perhaps it was because he had done a good job with Tarnan's public security that apart from this encounter with the Superior Heartless's illusions, he usually didn't have the opportunity to see the effects of various abilities. He mainly relied on the information on Mechanical Paradise's public web to understand them.

At this moment, he asked with uncertainty, “Is that so?”

“You can ask them,” Shang Jianyao said with a smile. He was referring to Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong inexplicably shivered. “Y-yes.”

Jiang Baimian added, “In a way, human consciousness, memories, and self-awareness are also very fragile.”

Genava slowly nodded and didn't raise any more questions.

Jiang Baimian then smiled. “Actually, you don't have to think too much about it now. Since you've already come out, it's best not to have any preset views. Listen with your heart, look, and experience it. When you experience enough, you might be able to obtain the answer you want. When the time comes, you will once again see mountains as mountains, and water as water.”

Genava didn't really understand the last sentence, but he understood what the first part meant. He pondered for a moment and said, “I'll work hard to find the answer.”

Jiang Baimian smiled and didn't say anything else. She said to Shang Jianyao and the others, “Get in the car.”

After figuring out Genova's confusion, she understood one of the reasons why the other party wasn't obsessed with saving Susanna and Rides.

...

On the second day, the vehicle wasn't far from Redstone Collection and was about to enter the Lake of Wrath. They should arrive the next day.

Long Yuehong looked out the window and realized that greenery had grown out of the hills, the rocks, and the areas far away from the road.

"Winter has passed?" With his experience, it wasn't spring yet.

Jiang Baimian—whose turn was to drive—explained with a smile, "This place is in the south; it's different from the Blackmarsh Wilderness. The weather warms up early."

"Furthermore, this area is surrounded by mountains on three sides. The cold air is blocked, forming a relatively warm area..." Genava added from a geographical point of view.

Long Yuehong thoughtfully asked, "In this area, has winter passed?"

The most arduous season in the Ashlands is finally over?

"Yes." Bai Chen—who was in the passenger seat—pointed diagonally ahead. "The nomads are beginning to come out to search for food."

It was the end of winter and the beginning of spring. The food reserves were about to run out, and in the season before new food was planted, wilderness nomads from the various settlements began to venture out. They relied on the mountains and rivers for their survival.

As for those whose food couldn't last until now, they might've long become one of the refugees outside Weed City.

Following Bai Chen's finger, Long Yuehong saw a few small trucks. They were derelict and old. Many people with guns stood in the back of the cargo hold.

These people had rather dirty faces, and their clothes had obvious stitches. Their weapons were mainly homemade shotguns mixed with rifles and pistols.

Upon seeing that the Old Task Force only had one jeep, the team changed directions and approached them.

“They want to rob us?” Long Yuehong found it funny.

“Robbing is more efficient than hunting in this season,” Bai Chen calmly introduced.

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao had already taken out a blue and white loudspeaker and opened the window beside him. His voice then echoed, “Abandon your fantasies and accept reality. It’s not too late to turn back now. Look, we have single-man combat rocket launchers...”

As he repeated these words in Red River language, he turned his head to look at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong had a tacit understanding of this and instantly understood. He picked up the Death rocket launcher and stretched it out from his window so that the wilderness nomads could see it clearly.

Shang Jianyao continued shouting, “We also have an auxiliary-type combat robot...” He shouted in two languages as he signaled to Geneva, who was squeezed in the middle of the back row.

Geneva hesitated and asked, “You want me to intimidate them?”

Shang Jianyao nodded, an indication that this was the case.

Geneva supported his back with one hand and allowed his body to pass Shang Jianyao as he tried to stick his head out the window.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian—who was driving—handed an item over. It was a pair of sunglasses.

Geneva analyzed the situation and understood what she meant. He took the sunglasses and placed them on the bridge of his nose.

This way, the blue light in its eyes was concealed. If one didn’t observe carefully, nobody would suspect that he was a smart bot.

After spending some time together, he finally figured out something. The Qian Bai Team's real name was Pangu Biology's Investigation Unit for the Cause of the Old World's Destruction. Their team leader was not Qian Bai but the woman with the fake name 'October Xue.' Also, her real name was Jiang Baimian.

She was a woman who could solo a smart bot. Although she relied on a sneak attack, it was still ridiculous.

While wearing the sunglasses, Genova stuck his head out the window for just a few seconds. The derelict truck carrying people had already turned around and left with a roar.

Before long, they disappeared into the hilly area.

Genava shrank back, took off the sunglasses, and looked at Shang Jianyao. He asked very directly, "You used your Awakened abilities on them and changed their perception?"

Long Yuehong felt that he could answer this question, so he helped Shang Jianyao explain, "Yes, he can use a loudspeaker to enhance the range of his abilities, but he can only do it one-on-one for now."

Shang Jianyao looked at him and Genova and asked in confusion, "When did you have the illusion that I used my abilities?"

"Uh..." Long Yuehong was a little stunned.

Shang Jianyao then smiled. "I only threatened them. Think about it; a combat-type auxiliary robot and a single combat rocket launcher can easily finish them off. If they still dare to rush forward, I'd have suspected that their brains were eaten by the Heartless."

Even Heartless—who only had animal instincts left—didn't dare to charge in such a situation unless they were truly starving.

Genava nodded. "There's indeed no need to use any ability."

Threatening and displaying strength could produce very good results.

He then corrected Shang Jianyao. “You previously mentioned auxiliary-type combat robot.”

“Haha, don’t mind these details.” Shang Jianyao laughed and stretched out his left hand to place it on Geneva’s left shoulder. “A human can’t be too rigid.”

He looked like a good pal putting his arm around a friend’s shoulder.

“A human can’t be too rigid...” Geneva repeated the words in a tone like he had learned something.

Jiang Baimian—who was driving—couldn’t help but frown. Will Shang Jianyao lead the smart bot astray? As the saying goes, one is marked by the company one keeps. Furthermore, smart bots rely on special learning algorithms to absorb ‘nutrients’ from their surroundings to build their own cognitive system. This will become more obvious later on.

“Ahem.” Jiang Baimian cleared her throat. “Geneva, there are widespread differences among humans. You can’t just look at individual samples and accept only one opinion. You have to interact more with other humans.”

“I understand.” Geneva expressed that he knew as he returned the sunglasses. “Back in Tarnan, I also tried to communicate and interact with many townsfolk and outsiders. However, they were relatively reserved and didn’t dare to show much.”

With that said, he sincerely suggested, “You can call me Old Ge. Calling me by my name puts a distance between us.”

“Who taught you to use this nickname?” Jiang Baimian was surprised and amused.

Geneva explained seriously, “I analyzed your nicknames, found the pattern, and named myself this. Oh, I’ve never been able to find any similarities between his nickname and yours during this process. I can only eliminate it and not use it as a reference.”

This referred to Shang Jianyao’s ‘Hey.’

Just as he said that, Bai Chen—who was in the passenger seat—laughed indiscernibly.

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but curl the ends of her lips. "I just said that there are general differences between people. His way of thinking is different from ours, so you don't have to think too much about it."

Genava tersely acknowledged it and muttered to himself, "From us smart bots' point of view, nicknames don't necessarily follow a pattern. It can also be a result of one's habits and certain scenes. I don't know much about him, so I can't come up with an analysis."

As he spoke, his blue-light-emitting eyes flickered as he glanced at Shang Jianyao as if he wanted to establish a special observation sample to enrich his database.

Shang Jianyao didn't mind at all. He retracted his left hand and shook Genava's hand heavily. "I welcome the exchange. Let's have a dance together later."

Genava might be a little resistant to dancing, but he eventually agreed when he thought of the need to be part of the group. "Alright."

"..." Jiang Baimian looked at the road ahead and exhaled helplessly.

...

In the city ruin where Redstone Collection was located, silence was still the main theme here.

The jeep drove to the underground mall, which was also the entrance to Redstone Collection. As expected, they were aimed at by the guns and cannons hidden in the rock walls.

"Do you need me to negotiate?" Genava analyzed the situation and felt that it was safest and appropriate for him to step in.

Before he could finish speaking, Shang Jianyao casually pushed open the door and alighted.

Shang Jianyao raised his arms and waved them at the people hiding at Redstone Collection's entrance. He then shouted excitedly, "We're back!"



At some point in time, he had already put on the mask with the furry face and protruding mouth.