

Ad Infinitum 291

Chapter 291: Good Days

The guards hiding at Redstone Collection's entrance recognized the jeep almost at the same time they saw the mask.

Their bodies stiffened for two seconds before they followed the Vigilance Church's dogma—they retracted their weapons and hid themselves better. They had no intention of making a sound or greeting him.

Shang Jianyao didn't mind at all; he got into the car again and introduced Genava. "This is the folklore here. Do you want a mask as well?"

Genava couldn't analyze the pros and cons of the situation and could only answer vaguely, "I'll consider it."

"He only needs to wear sunglasses." As Jiang Baimian drove the jeep into Redstone Collection, she provided her opinion. "He also needs to change his clothes."

Genava was still wearing the dark-green military uniform. This was a signature of Tarnan's robot guards.

"Do they sell clothes here?" As Shang Jianyao and the others were wearing masks, Genava didn't feel that changing clothes was a form of discrimination toward him.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "There's no need to be so particular. Just take off your coat and wear the shirt inside. We'll buy a few more sets when we have the chance later."

Just as she said that, she suddenly had a strange thought: Will Genava ask if he needs to wear pants?

Fortunately, Genava wasn't puzzled over this question. He moved his metal neck and said, "Alright."

As he spoke, he took off his coat.

Yes, there are still differences between smart bots and ordinary robots. They won't ask about everything and require everything to be explained... As Jiang Baimian muttered to herself, she found a familiar parking spot and parked the jeep.

After entering Redstone Collection, Shang Jianyao rushed to an advertising panel from the Old World and knocked on it before Genava could scan the layout and structure.

As the sound echoed, the panel door opened, revealing the town guard holding a submachine gun inside. His mask was raised to the top of his head—a typical Ashlandic.

“You weren't careful enough,” Shang Jianyao pointed out. He acted like they knew each other well.

The town guard replied aggrievedly, “I can't breathe if I hide inside here and wear a mask.”

“That's true.” Shang Jianyao expressed his understanding. He then asked, “Where can I get more high-performance batteries?”

The town guard secretly heaved a sigh of relief. “Mr. DiMarco's butler, Ulrich, is in charge of the Visa Trading Company's energy-related matters. Also, Anhebus has channels; he might even have stock.”

High-performance batteries were classified under 'energy' in the smuggling business. Although Anhebus had 'contributed' a batch of firearms to Shang Jianyao and the others, he was actually closer to an energy merchant. He sold weapons to mountain monsters for the coal business.

“Very good!” Shang Jianyao smiled. He then raised a new question. “Who's the sheriff and town guard captain now?”

“Captain Tan Jie,” replied the town guard truthfully.

“Oh, him.” Shang Jianyao nodded happily. “I like how he curses without an expression.”

This... Long Yuehong suddenly felt that Shang Jianyao's performance today was more exaggerated than before. He couldn't help but mutter, “What's wrong with him today?”

Jiang Baimian touched her ear and solemnly said, “Maybe it’s the performer, Shang Jianyao, now.”

“Uh...” Long Yuehong was first stunned before he came to a realization. This is all the fault of the Old World drama serials!

“I feel like he’s back home,” Genava commented.

“They’re all his brothers,” Jiang Baimian explained without head or tail.

Bai Chen whispered, “The effects of the Old World’s entertainment...”

At this moment, Shang Jianyao had already changed the topic. For example, did anyone from Mechanical Paradise come over recently?

He finally asked, “Who’s the new bishop?”

The town guard replied, “Bishop Antonella; he looks very strong.”

Jiang Baimian took a few steps forward and asked, “Did he come alone?”

“No.” The town guard shook his head. “There’s also the Terror Bishop—His Excellency Saint Sigmund—and other clergymen. However, they left after they went to Lake Heart Island—the island you’ve been to.”

“Did they retrieve anything? Did anything happen to Lake Heart Island?” This was what Jiang Baimian wanted to ask.

“I don’t know.” The town guard thought for a moment and indicated that he didn’t know. “In any case, we are forbidden from approaching that island in any way or form. What’s there to forbid? With the merfolk around, how would we dare go to Lake Heart Island?”

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian asked about something else and roughly grasped Redstone Collection’s current situation.

Apart from the new bishop's appointment, the most obvious change was that Helvig's widow—Mrs. Theresa—had already become a figure with a certain status here.

The previous arms dealer, Lehman, had already left. It was said that his face was ashen when he left.

After the exchange, the Old Task Force went to Kesha Hotel and booked three rooms with canned food, energy bars, and compressed biscuits.

This was much more expensive than the last time they checked in. The hotel owner's explanation was: "You definitely need to recharge often with that robot of yours. This is the prepayment charge for the electricity."

This sentence hit the Old Task Force's sore spot. They had many high-performance batteries awaiting replenishment!

Genava only had one spare battery to use at the moment. The military exoskeleton hadn't been worn ever since Long Yuehong took it off last time.

...

In the hotel camp.

Jiang Baimian distributed the electronic cards. "I'll share a room with Shang Jianyao, while Little White and Little Red will share a room. Old Ge, you'll have a room to yourself."

Long Yuehong and the others were already accustomed to this plan and didn't object. Only Genava hesitated and asked, "Are you two couples?"

"Cough..." Long Yuehong choked on his saliva and coughed.

Jiang Baimian looked at Genava and laughed. "Why do you think so?"

“Why would the opposite sex stay in the same room if they aren’t a couple?” Geneva raised his doubts.

Shang Jianyao smiled as he patted Geneva on the shoulder. “Old Ge, your point of view is too pedantic. There are many combinations among humans; it’s not only men and women who can be called couples. There are also woman-woman couples, man-man couples, androgynous couples, and transgender couples...”

Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao as he started to veer off track.

“In addition,” Shang Jianyao changed the topic. “How we share our rooms for our Old Task Force depends on pragmatic requirements. Think about it; which of the two of them can restrain me? They might not even notice that I slipped out in the middle of the night and did something bad.”

Whoa, you’re pretty arrogant? Jiang Baimian was exasperated and amused.

Geneva thought for a moment. “I understand that.”

He then asked, “Why do you have to sneak out in the middle of the night to do bad things?”

Shang Jianyao thought for a few seconds and solemnly replied, “A brain spasm.”

Without waiting for Geneva to ask what this meant, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “Old Ge, it’s very rude of you to ask directly if we are couples. Look, you made the two of them so uncomfortable.”

Clearly, only Long Yuehong felt uncomfortable. Bai Chen had a calm expression and didn’t take it seriously.

Geneva’s slightly synthetic voice revealed a hint of sincerity. “Actually, I know that this isn’t too polite, but didn’t you say that companions don’t have to care so much? I also want to improve my understanding of human society and you carbon-based humans as soon as possible. I want to build a good foundation for my future personal survival and solo operations. You also taught me this—observe more, ask more, listen more, and experience more.”

Jiang Baimian smiled. "That's right, but you can use a more polite method. For example, ask me in private and don't do it in front of them."

"Is that so..." Genava replied in a tone of having learned something again.

They then returned to their rooms and rested for a moment before gathering to prepare dinner.

Among them, Genava's 'food' was a high-performance battery that was charging.

At this moment, they felt a commotion on the other side of the hotel camp.

"What happened?" Long Yuehong cast his gaze out the door in confusion.

Shang Jianyao even put down the things in his hand and walked out.

Under the setting sun's illumination, they saw a group of people gathered in the distance. It was unknown what they were doing.

"I'll go take a look." Shang Jianyao notified his companions and curiously approached.

Jiang Baimian, Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava looked at each other, closed the doors, and walked over.

After shortening the distance, they saw the situation opposite them clearly.

There were 40 to 50 young men and women over there. Their faces were relatively clean, and their clothes were tattered.

Long Yuehong looked over and even saw old cotton shoes with toes sticking out, as well as down jackets with several large holes.

These men and women ranged in age from 15 to 24. Around them stood seven to eight people with guns and better attires in comparison.

The man suspected to be the leader of the gunmen said loudly, "I know that you guys have suffered a lot in the past. Otherwise, you wouldn't have been sold to me and become slaves. But now, your good days are coming!"

The 40 to 50 young men and women listened numbly, but they also seemed to be looking forward to it.

The slave merchant continued, "Think about it. If I didn't find a good place for you, would I have let you stay in a hotel? Redstone Collection is filled with abandoned houses. Can't I stuff you somewhere?"

"Heh heh, in two to three days, you will be able to enter the Underground Ark. Even the lowest-ranking servants there will be able to eat their fill. There will be free clothes, and you can sleep for at least six hours a day. There will also be doctors to treat you if you are sick.

"Although you will always live in the underground castle, you don't have to worry about the plague. You don't have to worry about bandits, troops, or other nomads. You also don't have to be afraid of being attacked by beasts. If you perform well, you might even become a steward and be sent to the ground to do things... In short, you have to undergo training well and strive to become Lord DiMarco's servant..."

Upon hearing his explanation, the faces of the 40 to 50 men and women gradually lit up. Some kind of glow seemed to flicker in their black and white eyes.

The toes protruding out of their cotton shoes and their swollen fingers subconsciously twitched.

At this moment, only one sentence echoed in Long Yuehong's mind: "DiMarco is a very violent person."

Chapter 292: Honest Robot

After the group of people dispersed, the Old Task Force returned to their rooms.

Genava took off the sunglasses on his nose and looked around. "You don't seem to be in a good mood? Did the slave merchant's lecture bring up unpleasant memories? I remember that slaves and servants are very common in the Ashlands. They shouldn't have any impact on you."

He asked very directly and didn't use a euphemistic method. Or rather, he didn't know what a euphemism was.

The last person he looked at was Bai Chen.

He remembered the slave merchant's lecture. When the dozens of reserved servants revealed looks of hope, the lady with the fake name 'Qian Bai,' secretly clenched her fists.

Before Bai Chen could speak, Long Yuehong replied on her behalf. "Because the person they will serve isn't too nice."

He paused and explained in detail, "DiMarco is a very violent person..."

Long Yuehong roughly described the information they had obtained on DiMarco from Redstone Collection and said, "I feel a little uncomfortable when I see them feel that their fate is about to change for the better when it's actually not the case."

"Yes." Jiang Baimian nodded in agreement with Long Yuehong.

Genava thought for two seconds and asked, "Then, why don't you try to save them?"

He asked whenever he didn't understand anything.

The room became extremely quiet. Apart from Shang Jianyao—who was thinking about something—nobody else seemed to expect Genava to raise such a question so directly.

This was a question that left them embarrassed. It was like an arrow that pierced through their facade of nonchalance.

After more than ten seconds, Bai Chen said, "There are too many people in the Ashlands that need saving. It's impossible for us to provide help every time we see an instance. This exceeds our abilities and the resources we have. We have to ensure our survival first before we can consider anything else."

She paused for two seconds and added, "I've always felt that it's considered noble to not harm innocent people in the Ashlands."

Don't expect help from outsiders.

Little White, you rarely say so much... Jiang Baimian quietly listened and was in no rush to speak.

Long Yuehong immediately echoed, "That's right. On the one hand, the Underground Ark faction isn't small. Just the few of us will definitely not be able to deal with them. It's even a question if we can fight our way in. On the other hand, there are so many of them. It's a very realistic question as to how we should settle them down after saving them. We still have to wait a month or two for farming to begin, and any harvests will be even further into the future. Our food is very limited. When the time comes, it's unknown how many of them will starve or freeze to death. The outcome might not be as good as entering the Underground Ark."

Not bad. You can already clearly explain the matter... Jiang Baimian then concluded with words she had long organized. "Besides, our main mission is to investigate the reason for the Old World's destruction. If we were to care about this and that, it will only tax our operations and increase unnecessary burden.

"If the difficulty wasn't high and the risk wasn't high, we would just do it in passing. But in such a situation, we can't muddle our primary and secondary objectives and risk our team members' lives. Everyone has a limit to their abilities. It's impossible to have a hand in everything; it's most important to do your best in one's individual matters."

Genava thought for a moment and nodded in understanding. "I see. I previously thought that 'saving all of humanity' was one of your goals."

That bites... Jiang Baimian's expression was slightly dazed as a term she had just learned flashed across her mind. She forced a smile and said, "Investigating the reason for the Old World's destruction and figuring out the Heartless disease's source is our efforts toward saving all of humanity."

Genava thought for a moment and asked, "If the primary mission is also filled with risks, will you bet the team members' lives?"

"..." Jiang Baimian felt a headache coming on. She deliberated and said, "I'll analyze the situation and weigh the risks before making a decision. If we can complete it by taking a little risk, we should attempt it. After all, I'll definitely be the one taking the lead. If the risk is high, I'll consider changing methods and finding other clues. In short, there's no need to make unnecessary sacrifices. As long as there's life, there's hope."

Genava moved his metal neck and asked in confusion, “Then, why isn’t it the same when it comes to dealing with the Underground Ark and saving those servants? Why didn’t you consider if there was a good solution or another way to resolve it? Why did you give up immediately?”

You’re such an honest robot... I’ll have to teach you what you can ask and what matters you should just understand and accept... Jiang Baimian felt a little desperate for help as if she were facing another Shang Jianyao.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao—who had been in deep thought—clapped. Then, he looked at Genava and praised with a smile, “I’m very gratified.”

These words that didn’t make head or tail confused Genava. He analyzed it carefully and said, “Do you think the questions I raised are good?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao nodded solemnly.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian felt like she was about to face N Shang Jianyaos. She began to regret her greed for the smart bot’s defensive and offensive abilities.

Phew... Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled and said, “The reason is that I’ve already considered and analyzed it in my heart.”

In order to indicate that this wasn’t a tactical deception, she said in detail, “The Ark is underground, and it has strict control over all entrances and exits. It’s not something that can be barged into just because one wants to. Furthermore, one might encounter a situation where the path is blocked, and one might be trapped to death on the spot...

“There are many guards inside, and their weapons are very good...

“DiMarco has at least two new military exoskeletons under him. There can only be more old models, not less...

“There are also Awakened working for him. There’s more than one...”

“In addition, the Ark has plenty of supplies and weapons. It won’t be a problem for it to be besieged for a year or so...”

“Besides...” At this point, Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “DiMarco is not a simple man. On the one hand, he’s very brutal. On the other hand, he has shown all kinds of strange things. For example, he paid a lot of attention to Lake Heart Island and Yama Tiger’s matter. This doesn’t seem like something an ordinary person would do. For example, he dared to meet us in a room alone. Therefore, I suspect that he also has relatively high strength.”

After giving her analysis, Jiang Baimian concluded, “In summary, I don’t think we can save the servants in the Ark. Even if all of us are sacrificed, the possibility isn’t great. Yes, it’s easy to save the ones from before, but the focus will be on the resettlement later. We don’t have that many supplies.”

Genava agreed with Jiang Baimian’s analysis and asked, “Have you considered how to gather food?”

“A slow remedy cannot meet an urgency,” Jiang Baimian replied helplessly.

At this moment, she saw from the corner of her eye that Shang Jianyao seemed a little eager. Therefore, she weakly said, “What do you have to say?”

After dealing with a fake Shang Jianyao, she had to face the real Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao stood up, looked around, and smiled. “I’ll only state a few facts.”

A few... Long Yuehong suddenly felt his liver tremble.

Shang Jianyao didn’t seem to notice his abnormality and continued, “First, the Underground Ark definitely has a lot of supplies stored. It can feed many people for a long time.

“Second, DiMarco occupies the largest share of Redstone Collection’s smuggling market, no matter which industry it is. Therefore, the Underground Ark definitely has many high-performance batteries.

“Third, as long as we control the channels and have sufficient military strength, anyone who can do these businesses will enjoy great benefits.”

Jiang Baimian didn't object blindly. She thought for a moment and said, “You mean that as long as we kill DiMarco and occupy the Underground Ark, we can resolve our needs, save those servants, and provide for them? We can kill multiple birds with one stone?”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped. “With such a faction that we support and will be influenced by us, we can use it to slowly change Redstone Collection's situation and promote the peaceful coexistence of the Ashlanders, Red River people, merfolk, and mountain monsters here.”

Jiang Baimian felt that it was indeed the case, but she was also a little dumbfounded. “Did you go around in circles just to achieve this goal at the end of the day?”

How persistent!

Shang Jianyao didn't answer and seriously raised the thorn in his words. “You can't say things like killing DiMarco and occupying the Underground Ark. This will make us look like bandits.”

“Then, what should I say?” Jiang Baimian asked in exasperation and amusement.

Shang Jianyao's expression turned solemn. “Justice on behalf of the heavens!”

“...” At this moment, Jiang Baimian only had one word in her heart—Regret.

It was now regret.

Why did she agree to let this fellow watch the Old World drama serials back then?

Long Yuehong's expression was about the same. He felt that the current Shang Jianyao was like a tiger that had grown wings.

Bai Chen didn't say a word; she neither agreed nor objected.

Jiang Baimian calmed down and looked at Shang Jianyao before responding in a serious manner. "If you can come up with a plan that is considerably feasible, I can consider it. If it doesn't work, just pretend that nothing happened."

Chapter 293: Notorious

On the other side of the hotel camp, in the slave merchant—Huo Zhi's room.

He looked at the glass window and muttered to himself, "The team that approached us just now actually has a robot. I can't underestimate their strength..."

After pondering for a few seconds, Huo Zhi said to his subordinate, "Ah Qiang, go and find out about this team before it's completely dark. It's better to be safe than sorry."

Ah Qiang was relatively short and looked rather muscular. He said awkwardly, "Boss, I know you're being careful. You're afraid that they didn't come over to check us out for no reason, but Redstone Collection is closed at this time. Where can I find people? The people here hide so much that even ghosts can't find them."

Huo Zhi knew that this wasn't Ah Qiang giving excuses. He thought for a moment and said, "Go to the Vigilance Cathedral and ask the guards we are familiar with."

They often needed to send the slaves outside the Underground Ark. They would definitely pass by the Vigilance Cathedral during this period.

"Yes, Boss." Ah Qiang didn't say anything else. He went out and found a car before heading north of the city ruin.

Huo Zhi sat down and patiently waited for his trusted aide to return.

After the sun completely set and darkness enveloped the land, Ah Qiang's car finally appeared at the hotel camp's entrance.

He alighted from the car with a solemn expression and entered Huo Zhi's room. Then, he looked around and suppressed his voice. "Boss, that team has a tremendous background!"

"What do you mean?" Huo Zhi stood up.

Ah Qiang gulped and said, "A guard in the cathedral told me that the team had previously finished off a very powerful Awakened and saved the entire Redstone Collection from the Subhuman Alliance. If you insist on making a comparison, it will be that they can destroy the Redstone Collection that's without the Vigilance Church. And back then, they didn't have a robot!"

"This..." Huo Zhi forgot to blink when he heard that. As far as he knew, although Redstone Collection had many internal conflicts, their firepower was sufficiently strong even without the Vigilance Church's protection. They were definitely ranked first in the Lake of Wrath and could easily crush countless caravans like his.

A four-person team could actually be compared to such a large settlement?

After a moment of silence, Huo Zhi asked in confirmation, "Does this include the Underground Ark's power?"

"Probably not," Ah Qiang replied truthfully. "The cathedral's people aren't too sure about the Underground Ark's true strength."

Huo Zhi slowly nodded and hissed. "Regardless of whether the cathedral guards are bragging, the team opposite us isn't simple. It should be the kind that can destroy a settlement with four to five people. Maybe all of them have reached the Senior Hunter level. They aren't much worse than the unbelievable Ruin Hunter teams we know of."

At this point, Huo Zhi exhaled. "Fortunately, a team of this caliber definitely wouldn't eye what we have. There are only dozens of slaves. Even if Mr. DiMarco offers a high price, it won't be something that can be exchanged for supplies that they're interested in. They probably sensed the disturbance and habitually came over to take a look to confirm the situation."

Ah Qiang was convinced by his boss and asked worriedly, "Then, are we still going to get everyone out for a lecture tomorrow morning?"

“There’s no need.” Huo Zhi shook his head without hesitation. “I’ll go into their room myself and tell them off one by one. I mustn’t disturb the team.”

As he spoke, he subconsciously lowered his voice a little.

Upon seeing that Ah Qiang still seemed a little worried, Huo Zhi smiled and said, “How can such a team deal with us just for dozens of slaves? With their status, would they lack slaves?”

Ah Qiang tersely acknowledged it. “I’ll arrange for the night patrols.”

...

In the middle of the night, Jiang Baimian woke up in a daze. She flipped over and grabbed the waterskin on the bedside table.

At this moment, she saw a figure sitting quietly on the bed opposite her.

Jiang Baimian instantly snapped out of her reverie. She looked over and realized that it was indeed Shang Jianyao.

“Why aren’t you sleeping yet?” Jiang Baimian asked in surprise and amusement.

Shang Jianyao propped himself up with both hands on the bed and forcefully turned his body around. Under the faint moonlight shining in from the window, he replied with bright eyes, “I’m thinking of a feasible plan.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t know what comment to give and casually said, “How serious...”

She then asked, “Any ideas?”

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “Not yet.”

“Oh...” Jiang Baimian felt relieved.

Before she could finish speaking, Shang Jianyao added, “There’s too much inspiration.”

“...” The smile on Jiang Baimian’s face became a little forced.

Shang Jianyao continued, “I’m now considering this matter together with the clearing of the third island. Didn’t we say that it’s about being afraid that nothing can be changed despite me giving up everything? Then, I should do something difficult in reality in a bid to change some unbearable cruelty. Saving all of humanity naturally starts with saving small groups and initiating small changes. When the time comes, I hope I’ll gain something that can be fed back to the mind world.”

Jiang Baimian quietly listened. She hugged her blanket and adjusted her posture to lie down more comfortably.

“That’s... not a bad idea,” she said truthfully. “The key to defeating the third island might really be to connect with reality and break the doubts in your heart through realistic affirmation.”

At this point, she changed the topic. “However, there’s no need to pick such a difficult matter from the beginning, right?”

Shang Jianyao smiled, his face hazy in the moonlight. “It’s not like I’m considering a feasible plan just to defeat the third island. This is only something in passing.”

At this moment, Jiang Baimian inexplicably felt that his smile was like a child’s. It was very clean and pure.

Jiang Baimian opened her mouth and closed it again. After a long time, she grumbled, “You can wait until morning to think about it. It’s already so late; quickly go to sleep and rest well so that you can come up with a good solution.”

She originally wanted to pull out a pillow and throw it at Shang Jianyao to raise the strength of her words, but she gave up on the idea after considering that there was only one pillow.

“Okay.” Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and nodded.

Thud!

He fell straight down and stretched his legs.

Jiang Baimian wrapped the blanket tightly around her and changed her posture to have her back face the bed opposite her.

In the quiet night, she suddenly whispered, “Sometimes, I really envy your purity...”

Shang Jianyao replied in a serious tone, “This was exchanged with a doctor’s certificate.”

“...” Jiang Baimian chose to close her eyes.

...

The next morning, the Old Task Force had a simple breakfast. Under the gazes of the Redstone town residents—who were repairing the hotel camp’s faulty circuits—they drove the jeep toward the underground mall in the park.

This was their original plan—to visit the Visa Trading Company and discuss the matter regarding high-performance batteries.

The person on duty at the Visa Trading Company was still the lady wearing the green ghost mask yet was as timid as a rabbit.

“G-good morning.” Clearly, the lady recognized the former Redstone Collection hegemon.

Jiang Baimian smiled and asked, “Which butler is here today?”

“Butler Ulrich,” the lady in charge of the reception replied honestly.

The person in question... As Jiang Baimian sighed wistfully at her good luck, she pressed down on the elegant monk mask on her face. “Please pass on the message. We want to visit Mr. Ulrich.”

“Alright.” The lady hurriedly took out her walkie-talkie and avoided Shang Jianyao and the others. It was unknown who she spoke to.

Genava—who was wearing sunglasses—looked at her figure that was mostly blocked by the wall and asked Jiang Baimian and the others, “Do you need me to repeat their conversation?”

“You can hear them?” Shang Jianyao asked with a curious face. Unfortunately, this was covered by the monkey mask.

Genava nodded. “This distance and this volume are within my monitoring range.”

As Jiang Baimian sighed in amusement that the Old Task Force’s average hearing had improved, she thoughtfully asked, “Do you usually take the initiative to monitor your surroundings?”

“Not in a safe environment. We will when carrying out missions or when in similar situations,” Genava replied in a concise manner. “The main reason why we don’t activate it is to conserve electricity and protect the batteries. The endurance and life cycle of high-performance batteries are still one of the key factors that restrict the number of smart bots and societal development. Therefore, the Source Brain has been searching for information regarding the Old World in the field of nuclear power miniaturization, ultra-high-efficiency battery technology, and controllable nuclear fusion research. It hopes to turn this into reality.”

As expected of a smart bot. He can repeat almost every word he heard before... It’s impressive to have a large database and advanced search algorithm... Long Yuehong deeply admired Genava’s ‘memory.’

At this moment, the lady in charge of reception at the Visa Trading Company walked back. Her body trembled as if she were facing her nemesis. “Butler Ulrich has invited you to the meeting room.”

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others followed the directions and found a conference room, where a long table, ten-plus chairs, and an LCD screen were set up here.

The lady in charge of reception switched on the LCD screen. After adjusting the settings, she left the room and closed the door.

Genava then said, “This is a product of our Mechanical Paradise...”

Before he could finish speaking, he saw Shang Jianyao raise his index finger to his mouth and shushed him.

Genava immediately stopped talking.

Two to three seconds later, a serious man in his forties—wearing a black suit and a black bow tie—appeared on the LCD screen. He was none other than one of DiMarco’s butlers, Ulrich.

“Mr. Butler, aren’t you in the company?” Jiang Baimian asked in amusement.

Ulrich calmly replied, “There are Awakened among you, and you have shown great aggression.”

Back when Shang Jianyao restrained DiMarco’s guards, he had exposed his Hands Immobility. As for aggression, it undoubtedly referred to Shang Jianyao’s terrifying act of throwing a grenade.

At this point, Ulrich clasped his hands and placed them on his chest. He then took a step back. “Distance is our friend.”

Chapter 294: Social Engineering

These familiar words of ‘distance is our friend’ made Jiang Baimian and the others suddenly feel like they had truly returned to Redstone Collection.

This was a settlement that had all its members believing in the Vigilance Church. Everyone was overly vigilant and always emphasized hiding themselves and maintaining distance.

For the few people that the Old Task Force encountered yesterday, they either didn’t have any conversation at all and only had a weak interaction with each other, or they acted very humbly due to their hegemonic reputation in Redstone Collection. They didn’t show their local characteristics or religious habits.

As her thoughts raced, Jiang Baimian turned her head to glance at Shang Jianyao and vaguely gloated. She meant: See, to vent your anger, you revealed your secret and allowed others to know that you are an Awakened. With sufficient preparation, there’s no way to close the distance with them now and rely on Inference Clowning to make key friends for the infiltration of the Underground Ark.

This also meant that at least one-third of the feasible plans that Shang Jianyao was drafting was dead in the water, and this one-third was the plans with a relatively higher chance of success.

This was a good thing for Jiang Baimian—who was wavering inwardly while preferring not to be a busybody.

She smiled and replied to Ulrich, “I can understand your vigilance.”

It’s already very polite of him not to leave them out in the cold after what happened last time.

Ulrich clearly had no intention of exchanging pleasantries. He asked, “What’s the matter?”

Jiang Baimian pointed at Geneva—who was wearing sunglasses. “As you can see, we recently obtained a robot, and we don’t have enough high-performance batteries. We want to trade a batch with you.”

As she said this, Shang Jianyao looked at Geneva and spoke like he did to ordinary robots. “Come, play a song for Mr. Butler.”

Geneva analyzed the situation and felt that it was necessary to disguise himself. Therefore, he loaded the play module, and a three-dimensional voice sounded from his mouth. “Only...”

He had just sung a word when Jiang Baimian stopped him. “There’s no need. Mr. Butler can understand.”

Ulrich had a certain level of understanding of this Ruin Hunter team. He ignored this interlude and said with an unchanged expression, “It’s still winter. The goods stored at the end of the year have already been sent out. As for the smugglers from Future Intelligence, they might only arrive in a month or two.”

What he meant was that the Visa Trading Company didn’t have much stock now. It would still be a long time before the new smuggled batteries arrived.

Long Yuehong’s conclusion was: The landlords don’t have any surplus food either!

He now quite understood Bai Chen's fear of the Old World's entertainment. If not for his team leader, the mission restrictions, and the pursuit of Mechanical Paradise, he suspected that he would've been obsessed with it.

The people of the Old World sure enjoyed themselves!

Jiang Baimian remained unmoved and smiled. "The Underground Ark also consumes a large portion of high-performance batteries. You definitely kept a portion for backup. I wonder if you can carve out some. The price is negotiable?"

"New goods will arrive in a month or two. Maybe Future Intelligence will have another breakthrough in battery technology. The new model will have much greater capacity than the old batteries. We can help you clean up your inventory."

Ulrich thought of the Ruin Hunter team's performance in Redstone Collection and the fact that his master didn't fly into a rage despite the previous shock. He pondered for a few seconds and inquired, "How many do you need? If it's not that many, I'll see if we can squeeze out a few."

Jiang Baimian smiled. "Fifty."

Ulrich suddenly coughed, unable to maintain a serious and professional attitude.

Twenty to thirty seconds later, he finally collected himself. "That many?"

Are they forming a robot guard?

This could be used to support ten robots—as long as they didn't use high-energy modules like laser weapons or often needed to fight.

"How many pieces can you provide at most?" Jiang Baimian asked in response.

Ulrich thought for a moment and said, "Five."

"That's too little," Shang Jianyao commented on Jiang Baimian's behalf.

“There’s nothing more.” Ulrich’s attitude was rather firm.

I’ll get Shang Jianyao to storm into the Ark and turn your warehouse upside down! said Jiang Baimian inwardly in an angry fit and deliberated before saying, “Reserve these five high-performance batteries for us for three days. We’ll ask elsewhere.”

She didn’t plan on letting the team stay in Redstone Collection for too long. After all, this place had a very close trade connection with Mechanical Paradise. Furthermore, they had also revealed that they had passed by Redstone Collection in Tarnan. Therefore, there was a high chance that Mechanical Paradise’s pursuit team would chase after them.

Although Jiang Baimian already had different thoughts about this, she still felt that she had to be careful.

“No problem.” Ulrich didn’t harp on the issue. From his point of view, it was definitely worth it to use five high-performance batteries to send this Ruin Hunter team away. It wasn’t like the other party wasn’t exchanging for them with other supplies.

...

After leaving the underground mall, the Old Task Force drove straight to the lake and arrived at the lakeside villa where Anhebus often lived.

Outside the corresponding underground parking lot, just as Bai Chen stepped on the brakes, Jiang Baimian looked at the entrance and said in confusion, “There’s no one inside...”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao and Genava gave affirmative answers respectively.

Jiang Baimian then turned around and looked at Genava. “Do you have a mine sweeper?”

“Yes.” Genava pointed outside and said, “Do you need me to do a sweep?”

“Of course.” Jiang Baimian smiled.

After watching Genava alight, Shang Jianyao said regretfully, “I thought he had Minesweeper installed.” He seemed to envy such matters.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Then, it should be unified in the entertainment module. Uh, why is an artificial intelligence like him playing Minesweeper? His computational ability is much better than ours.”

As they chatted, Genava confirmed that there were no landmines or explosives at the underground parking lot’s entrance. It was very safe.

Jiang Baimian then got Bai Chen to drive the jeep in.

After a more detailed search, they discovered traces of human life, which were rather fresh.

“Did they leave in the morning, or did they leave in the middle of the night yesterday?” Jiang Baimian made a preliminary judgment in a questioning manner.

She suspected that Anhebus and his subordinates were still here last night.

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “Maybe he received news of our return to Redstone Collection and left overnight.”

“Isn’t this reaction a little too excessive? It’s not like we’ll do anything to him!” Jiang Baimian said in exasperation and amusement. Of course, she also admitted that the possibility was very high.

It wasn’t strange at all for this to happen to Eidolon Nun’s believers. Besides, it wasn’t like Anhebus had never been screwed over by the Old Task Force.

...

In the hotel camp, Shang Jianyao and the others returned to their rooms.

It wasn’t even noon.

They had gone to Redstone Collection to ask the town guards—Anhebus had indeed left with a portion of his trusted aides in the middle of the night yesterday. He said that he was going to United Industries to discuss a business deal.

At this point, Jiang Baimian was certain that this fellow had been scared away by the news of the Old Task Force's return.

“Are we that terrifying?” Jiang Baimian asked while in the car.

No one answered her.

After sending a telegram to the company and informing them of their schedule, Jiang Baimian walked out of the room and saw Shang Jianyao standing outside the door, looking at the other side of the hotel camp while deep in thought.

“What's on your mind?” Jiang Baimian asked warily.

Shang Jianyao didn't move his gaze and muttered to himself, “I'm wondering if I can use Inference Clowning to mix in with those servants and enter the Underground Ark...”

“It's not feasible.” Jiang Baimian directly rejected Shang Jianyao's idea. “Those servants will undergo training in the Vigilance Cathedral's basement for a period of time; they can only enter the Underground Ark after they qualify. Do you think you can disguise yourself for so long under surveillance? It's not like DiMarco and his stewards don't know you.”

Shang Jianyao was just about to say something when the silver-black smart bot—Genava—approached and asked in a slightly synthetic voice, “Are you trying to infiltrate the Underground Ark?”

“Him, not me.” Jiang Baimian ‘distanced’ herself.

Genava held the sunglasses he had exchanged from Redstone Collection in one hand and spoke in a flat tone. “Our Mechanical Paradise was in charge of the Underground Ark's system modification.”

Oh right... Jiang Baimian instinctively asked, “Didn't they say that the corresponding data was destroyed? Didn't they say that only non-smart engineering robots could be sent in?”

“Could it be that you secretly made a copy or left behind a fatal loophole?” Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Genava shook his metal head. “We have professional ethics.”

He further voiced his thoughts. “As long as there’s a data network, there’s a possibility of invasion.”

“Do you have a solution?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Without a change in tone, Genava said, “In such a situation, I can’t do it myself. Someone has to cooperate internally. They need to tell me the general system structure; then, I’ll write a corresponding virus and install it in a flash drive. After that, they will bring it in and insert it into a node in the data network...”

Jiang Baimian could understand what Genava was saying, but she found it a little unrealistic.

She had never come into contact with such means of ‘warfare.’ Although she had once relied on the auxiliary chip to crack the Hunter’s Badge and had once tried to hack into the mechanical monk—Jingfa’s internal system, she had only read about methods of using data networks to open a faction’s ‘door’ in Old World books.

In the Ashlands, most places didn’t have computers, systems, or networks. Therefore, the fundamental requirements for such matters to happen were lacking.

Jiang Baimian naturally lacked the necessary experience, so it was difficult for her to directly relate the descriptions in the books to reality.

Upon seeing that Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian were looking at him and not saying a word, Genava added, “Writing a virus is very simple for smart bots. There are many templates for reference. The most important thing in this matter is to find the insiders who can provide help. This needs to be achieved through social engineering...”

Before he could finish speaking, he saw Shang Jianyao smile. “Leave this to me.”

Chapter 295: Plan

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao's smile and hearing his promise, Genova nodded. "Relying on the Awakened ability you mentioned?"

"Yes." Shang Jianyao was very calm.

Jiang Baimian regretted it once again and felt that she shouldn't have started the topic. However, she knew very well that escaping wouldn't solve the problem.

She could only perk up and quickly come up with something to say. "This plan is indeed feasible. As long as we can break through the Underground Ark's outer defense system and infiltrate, the problem will be much simpler."

Jiang Baimian continued in this direction and deduced the subsequent developments with an attitude that said, "I'm also participating." She wanted to enhance the persuasiveness that she would have later.

"We all know very well that the Underground Ark's organization structure is very simple. DiMarco—the owner—occupies the core position. He firmly holds power by setting up multiple butlers and multiple captain guards to treat the guards and servants separately.

"This makes DiMarco's rule seem relatively stable. We will be facing a large number of enemies and an unknown number of Awakened equipped with advanced weapons. But in fact, this organization structure has a fatal weakness. As long as we can grasp it, we might be able to make this fortress collapse in the shortest time at the smallest price."

Shang Jianyao didn't doubt Jiang Baimian's change in attitude at all and smiled. "That fatal weakness is DiMarco."

Upon hearing this, Genova automatically matched some of the Old World's cases and analyzed what Jiang Baimian wanted to say.

"The strategy of taking down the head?" he asked in confirmation. Genova enjoyed this discussion very much. He felt like he had truly become a human and was creating sparks of wisdom with his companions.

Jiang Baimian nodded and smiled. "Yes, as long as we can infiltrate the Underground Ark without causing any commotion, we can directly attack DiMarco's residence and try to defeat the defense

forces around him in a short period of time to control him. When the time comes, we can talk about our goal and express our lack of interest in the Underground Ark's transfer of power and the ownership of most of the property.

“We can allow the guards and servants to establish a brand new Ark, which they will share the rights with and take over the corresponding business channels. I believe that with the brutality and anger that DiMarco usually shows, everyone will side with us except a few foolishly loyal people or extremists who have helped him kill too many servants and are completely tied to him.

“Furthermore, due to the terrain restrictions, a lot of the heavy firepower can't be used in the Ark. The distance between us can't be widened either. Shang Jianyao's Hands Immobility can be used to the greatest extent.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped. “This plan is very feasible.”

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. “This plan also has a fatal flaw, and that is whether DiMarco is truly hiding a big secret.”

Her expression gradually turned serious. “Our Old Task Force should be able to resolve the defense forces around DiMarco's residence in a short period of time as long as nothing unexpected happens. They can at most maintain two to three military exoskeletons, one to two Awakened, and seven to eight ordinary guards at all times. This is within our abilities.

“But what about DiMarco himself? What gave him the confidence to dare meet us alone in the room?” Jiang Baimian's guess regarding the defense forces around DiMarco came from their last meeting.

When DiMarco walked out of the 'safe zone' in a clear situation of meeting outsiders, he only had two new military exoskeleton devices and six ordinary guards nearby. Therefore, when he was usually deep in the Underground Ark, the defenses around him would definitely be reduced.

After all, humans would get tired, and they needed shifts.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian also believed that there were no Awakened at the Mind Corridor level in the Underground Ark because such a figure's strength had already exceeded the norm. It wasn't something the guards around DiMarco could deal with.

In that case, why didn't he directly replace DiMarco and become the Underground Ark's owner? Why did he have to serve DiMarco?

At least from the looks of it, the Vigilance Church didn't care much about who ruled the Underground Ark as long as the Underground Ark's owner believed in Eidolon Nun.

Upon seeing that Shang Jianyao and Geneva didn't speak, Jiang Baimian raised the question again. "What if DiMarco is also a powerhouse? A mutated Subhuman, an Awakened of a certain level, etc. An extreme example: DiMarco's strength is close to Yama Tiger's. He's concerned about Yama Tiger's current state because he's trying to seek out a future path and the door to the New World."

In that case, the Old Task Force's Operation Beheading would be akin to throwing a meat bun at a dog—there would be no return.

Ever since Jiang Baimian saw DiMarco and heard about his strange behavior the last time, she had all kinds of doubts and deductions. At this moment, she only brought out a guess that she found most shocking, one that could deter Shang Jianyao the most.

Shang Jianyao responded to Jiang Baimian's gaze and smiled. "Up to now, the abilities brought about by mutated Subhumans can't compare to Awakened at the Mind Corridor level. Then, let's assume that DiMarco is a powerhouse who has explored the Mind Corridor's depths..."

As he spoke, he smiled brightly and patted Geneva's shoulder. "We have an Awakened nemesis. As long as DiMarco's abilities don't interfere with the environment, he won't be able to affect Geneva."

At this point, the corners of Shang Jianyao's mouth curled up even more. "If you're still worried, let's go to Lake Heart Island again. I don't think Yama Tiger can return with Geneva's mind world since he doesn't have such a thing. In other words, we can take away the tree branch bracelet—if it's still there."

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao's smile, Jiang Baimian suddenly came to a realization: It was the dangerous Shang Jianyao now, who was a little crazy.

The next second, Genova spoke. “Our internal information has mentioned something: When encountering powerful Awakened, one has to be sufficiently careful even if we are smart bots.”

“So, there won’t be any problems as long as you’re careful?” Shang Jianyao asked with a smile.

Jiang Baimian pondered over Genova’s words. “Some Awakened’s abilities can affect smart bots? This isn’t limited to illusions that distort environmental information?”

She found it a little difficult to understand the principle. After all, smart bots didn’t have human consciousness, so they couldn’t be targeted by Awakened abilities. She could only believe that many Awakened abilities directly affected the environment and interfered with reality. This was increasingly obvious at the Mind Corridor level.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and deliberated before saying, “This plan does have a certain level of feasibility, but it needs to be handled step by step. We can only proceed to the next step depending on the situation.”

After saying this, she inexplicably felt a little relieved. “I now approve your first attempt: Find a mole. What do you plan on doing when the butlers are sufficiently vigilant and won’t easily come into contact with you again?”

Shang Jianyao had long had an idea and happily said, “Head to Iron Mountain to wait for the body dumpers.”

This referred to the guards who would abandon and bury the servants’ corpses at the Underground Ark entrance near Iron Mountain.

Just as I expected... Yes, if nobody comes out to dump the corpse for the next three days, the plan will terminate on its own... If there is, there’s a high chance that DiMarco killed another servant and revealed his brutality. That will only exemplify the need to execute him ‘on behalf of the heavens.’ This might be fate... When the time comes, I’ll assign Little White and Little Red a relatively low-risk mission... Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled and said, “Before that, let’s go to the cathedral and inquire about the Vigilance Church’s attitude from Harbinger Song.”

This was a place that was being watched by the Kalendaria, Eidolon Nun!

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao eagerly agreed.

...

In the red and gold cathedral, the gigantic symbol of the female figure hidden behind the half-closed white door made Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others feel solemn and very dangerous.

Standing under Eidolon Nun’s Sacred Emblem was Redstone Collection’s new bishop, Antonella. He was more than 1.8 meters tall. Even in a black cloak, he looked relatively muscular.

Apart from his hairless head, his facial features were covered by an extremely simple mask. This mask seemed to be made of white cardboard with holes poked out that corresponded to the eyes, nose, and mouth.

“May your vigilance last forever.” Antonella stared at the Old Task Force, raised his hands, clasped them to his chest, and took a step back.

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others bowed slightly in response.

“Distance is our friend.” In the entire Old Task Force, only Shang Jianyao returned the greeting in the Vigilance Church’s manner.

Antonella swept his gaze across the masks on their faces and said with a smiling tone, “Thank you for providing assistance to the Church in Redstone Collection.”

He spoke in relatively rusty Ashlandic as if it hadn’t been many years since he grasped it.

“You recognize us?” Shang Jianyao asked in ‘shock.’

Antonella was stunned for a moment before saying, “The news of your return to Redstone Collection spread last night.”

As expected of a place that uses vigilance and hiding as folklore... Jiang Baimian sighed in amusement.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, she directly asked, “I wonder if Harbinger Song is around?”

Antonella turned around and pointed diagonally behind him. “I’ve already sent someone to invite him over. Is there anything?”

“We’re here to visit a friend,” Shang Jianyao replied briskly, happily, and sincerely.

Antonella smiled. “You can’t blindly believe in friends either.”

Jiang Baimian was just sighing with emotion that the bishop was really someone who preached at all times when Song He—who wasn’t wearing a mask—walked into the hall.

His face still didn’t have any wrinkles, and only his sideburns were a little white.

“You guys returned so quickly?” Song He first bowed at Antonella before questioning Jiang Baimian and the others.

“We completed our primary objective ahead of time,” Jiang Baimian explained simply.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao looked around and said, “Viel is hiding again?”

Song He’s thin eyebrows twitched slightly, and he fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “He hasn’t appeared for two days.”

Chapter 296: A Puzzling Attitude

Two days? Jiang Baimian recalled and said, “There were instances of Viel not appearing for several days in the past as well.”

It was during the Vigilance Church’s hiding Mass.

“Yes.” Song He didn’t mention Viel again and asked, “Are you here to gather food?”

From a normal person’s perspective, the Qian Bai Team had definitely returned to Redstone Collection to replenish their food stores for their return journey.

“No, we were able to exchange for many cans of different flavors in Tarnan,” Jiang Baimian said with a smile.

She glanced at the newly-appointed bishop, Antonella—who was about to leave the prayer hall without anyone noticing—and continued, “We’re mainly here to exchange for high-performance batteries. Harbinger Song, as you can tell, we obtained a new robot.”

Genava—who was wearing sunglasses—was tall and ‘muscular.’ He had very special characteristics and was an existence that no one would ignore.

“You can go to DiMarco’s butler—Ulrich—or Anhebus for that.” Song He took the initiative to provide directions.

“That’s what we did.” Jiang Baimian described her encounter today and said, “Things seem a little troublesome. We can only hope that the Underground Ark can squeeze out more batteries.”

“Oh right.” Jiang Baimian seemed to make some connections because of this topic and asked casually, “Has Mr. DiMarco met Bishop Antonella after he took office?”

Dressed in a black cloak, Antonella—who had walked a distance to the side—subconsciously stopped.

Song He looked back at him and simply replied, “They had a video call.”

“Oh...” Shang Jianyao answered in a tone that was difficult to analyze.

At the very least, Genava’s database currently didn’t have the ability to analyze it.

This fellow can always come up with some new tricks... Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced. As if she didn’t realize that Bishop Antonella was still in the hall, she ‘helped’ him complain. “Even Church bishops can’t communicate with DiMarco face-to-face? Back then, he was actually willing to meet us to understand Lake Heart Island’s situation. It’s unbelievable.”

Team Leader, your acting isn’t bad either. Your coordination with Shang Jianyao’s ‘oh’ is flawless... Long Yuehong was speechless, but he found it funny. He suspected that his team leader had drawn on the wisdom from Old World drama serials.

Therefore, the Old World's entertainment isn't all bad... Long Yuehong subconsciously glanced at Bai Chen.

Bai Chen's expression was a little solemn as if she found Jiang Baimian even more difficult to deal with.

Antonella turned around and said in a loud voice, "All the previous bishops had a video chat with Mr. DiMarco. Furthermore, His Excellency Saint Sigmund entered the Ark and spoke to Mr. DiMarco in person at basement two."

Jiang Baimian was waiting for this opportunity to ask, "Did His Excellency Saint Sigmund say anything after his return?"

Upon hearing this question and recalling the previous conversation, Song He glanced at Jiang Baimian and the others and nodded indiscernibly as if he understood something.

As it wasn't anything confidential, Antonella didn't hide anything. He recalled and said, "His Excellency Saint Sigmund told us that as long as the Underground Ark's owner still believes in Eidolon Nun and hasn't truly rocked Redstone Collection's stability, we shouldn't interfere with the Underground Ark's internal affairs."

That sounds a little strange... With Jiang Baimian's sharp senses, she directly identified certain problems.

The Vigilance Church's Terror Bishop used the words 'Underground Ark's owner,' not 'DiMarco!'

There were two explanations: First, this was a long-term policy the Vigilance Church had with regards to the Underground Ark. It wouldn't change just because of a sudden change of owner.

Second, the Vigilance Church didn't care who the Underground Ark's owner was. Be it DiMarco, his child, or anyone else, it was only a symbol. As long as they could satisfy the requirements of having faith in Eidolon Nun and not rocking Redstone Collection's stability, it was fine.

The two explanations had a lot in common. The replacement of the Underground Ark's owner was an internal matter that wouldn't attract the Vigilance Church's interference. Of course, the premise

was that the new Ark owner believed in Eidolon Nun and wouldn't rock Redstone Collection's stability.

This was the attitude that Jiang Baimian wanted to obtain from the Vigilance Church. However, she was still a little confused about this. She felt that the Terror Bishop was being too direct and obvious.

Could it be that using the words 'Underground Ark's owner' to replace 'DiMarco' implies something else? Jiang Baimian couldn't momentarily figure out the reason for it, but this didn't stop her from taking the opportunity to give the target an eyeful.

She frowned and asked in confusion, "But DiMarco previously wanted to introduce merfolk and mountain monsters to purge Redstone Collection. Doesn't this rock Redstone Collection's stability?"

Antonella was momentarily speechless.

Song He smiled and said, "Let's not pursue the past. We have to cast our sights on the future."

Jiang Baimian knew when to stop and smiled. "This is your Church's matter. I was just feeling indignant and that it was unjust. Please don't take offense."

Team Leader's genteel tone is clearly influenced by the Old World dramas... Long Yuehong began to seriously consider a question—how much of the Old World's entertainment has Team Leader secretly watched behind our backs?

After chatting for a while, the Old Task Force bade farewell and got into the jeep.

Jiang Baimian looked ahead and instructed, "Go to Iron Mountain's Ark exit."

As Geneva had yet to gather a map of this area, Bai Chen was in charge of driving.

"Why are we going there?" Long Yuehong was a little surprised.

Shang Jianyao then sang, "Searching, finding, finding friends..."

“Find a mole,” Jiang Baimian explained.

Long Yuehong wasn't stupid. He immediately understood that they were up to something.

He said worriedly and nervously, “Team Leader, are we really going to deal with the Underground Ark?”

We are only a five-person team. How can we do something that even a company might not be able to do? Aren't you feeling too inflated? Team Leader, I've always believed that you're very reliable!

Jiang Baimian helplessly exhaled and smiled. “Shang Jianyao and Genava provided a feasible plan, so I have to keep my promise. Don't worry; we definitely have to take it one step at a time. Once there are any conditions that we can't satisfy in between, we will stop immediately. Yes, it's the same if we don't succeed in three days. We are still being pursued by Mechanical Paradise, so we can't stay in Redstone Collection for too long.”

The latter half of the sentence was directed at Shang Jianyao and Genava.

After a pause, Jiang Baimian turned to look at Bai Chen. “Little White, Little Red, do you have any objections? If you object, I'll consider it seriously. With me here, everyone has equal weight.”

To be honest, Jiang Baimian felt rather conflicted. She hoped that Bai Chen and Long Yuehong would object to the plan so that she could use this opportunity to dispel Shang Jianyao's thoughts, but she didn't hint to them of her bias.

She sighed at the thought of those hopeful eyes.

Bai Chen fell silent for a long time, so long that Jiang Baimian thought she didn't want to comment. Finally, she looked at the road ahead and calmly said, “If a reasonable termination condition is set up, we can give it a shot.”

Tsk, she doesn't look like the experienced wilderness nomad who always plays safe, Little White... She's doing this to maintain a sense of camaraderie? Jiang Baimian didn't comment and turned to look at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong suddenly felt the pressure and stammered, “I believe in your judgment.”

You say it like... Jiang Baimian suddenly felt the pressure on her shoulders increase.

Shang Jianyao clapped. “Four votes in favor, one forfeit. Pass!”

“When did I agree to it?” Jiang Baimian asked in amusement.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “In your heart.”

Jiang Baimian raised her left eyebrow and didn’t respond.

...

Iron Mountain, near the valley cave where the Underground Ark’s entrance was hidden.

The Old Task Force members monitored it the entire afternoon and didn’t discover anyone coming out.

Long Yuehong looked up at the setting sun and inhaled the cold mountain air. “It’s almost dark. It’s about time to head back, right?”

It was great that nothing happened.

Shang Jianyao turned his head to look at him and heaved a sigh of relief. “You finally said that.”

“What do you mean?” Long Yuehong felt insulted.

“There.” Shang Jianyao pointed at the cave entrance with his chin.

Two figures in olive-green clothes carried a very bloated sack and walked out with heavy footsteps.

“...” Long Yuehong was a little dumbfounded by this scene.

“They were walking out before you spoke.” Jiang Baimian consoled him when she saw this.

“That’s right...” Long Yuehong came to a realization.

With these two people’s speed, it would take at least two to three minutes to get from the Underground Ark’s exit to the cave entrance. Shang Jianyao must’ve sensed it long ago before he said that it was about time to head back.

Shang Jianyao didn’t deny it, and his tone became a little more ‘shocked.’ “In other words, your words affected what happened a few minutes ago? You can change the past now?”

Long Yuehong deeply understood why his team leader always ignored Shang Jianyao.

As the two Underground Ark guards moved toward the burial ground, Bai Chen whispered, “There’s more than one corpse in the sack.”

If it were just a single corpse, they wouldn’t have had such a hard time carrying it.

Jiang Baimian naturally could tell. She fell silent for two seconds before turning to Shang Jianyao. “Go.”

Shang Jianyao pressed down on the furry mask on his face and jumped down from above, landing in front of the two Underground Ark guards.

Thud!

The two guards reflexively released the sack in their hands and let it smash to the ground, producing a heavy thud.

They were just about to draw their guns when they realized that their wrists couldn’t complete the action.

At this moment, they froze in their spots in shock and panic.

As Shang Jianyao spun the Ice Moss, he smiled and said, “There’s no need to be nervous. I’m here to make friends.”

The two guards were just about to escape when they saw the spinning pistol in the enemy’s hand suddenly stop. The black muzzle was aimed at them.

Chapter 297: Saviors

The two Underground Ark guards in olive-green uniforms originally thought that the other party was only one person and one gun. Just as they were considering taking a gamble, additional people descended from the sky and aimed at them with various firearms.

As their gazes swept across the masks or the metal face with a pair of sunglasses, the two guards simultaneously raised their hands, placed them behind their heads, and slowly squatted down.

Discretion is the better part of valor!

Jiang Baimian looked at the sack on the ground and asked in the Red River language, “What’s inside?”

Of the two guards, one was Ashlandic, and the other was of Red River heritage. However, they both showed characteristics of being mixed-race.

Among them, the one with thick eyebrows, large eyes, and a square face rushed to answer, “Two dead people.”

“Did DiMarco do it?” Jiang Baimian asked as she signaled for Bai Chen and Long Yuehong to open the sack.

The other Red River guard nodded repeatedly. “Yes, it’s all Mr. DiMarco. No, DiMarco did it. It has nothing to do with us!”

He had slightly curled black hair, and his face was slightly chubby, dotted with many freckles.

Shang Jianyao took two steps forward and asked, “Why did DiMarco kill them?”

The square-faced man hesitated and said, “One’s a maid. There’s also h-her lover, the kind that’s about to get married; he’s also a servant. DiMarco took a fancy to her and wanted to drag her into his room. She was unwilling, and her resistance angered DiMarco. She was directly strangled to death. After DiMarco learned that she had a lover, he was worried that he would take revenge, so h-he found this valet and executed him with a gun...”

As the Ark guard recounted the matter, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen had already opened the sack and revealed the two corpses’ upper bodies.

They were a man and a woman. They didn’t seem old, and it was very likely that they weren’t even 20 years old. At this moment, the girl’s face was purple, and her eyes protruded. There was also a clear mark on her neck. The man’s skull was gaping open, and his chest was covered in blood. His expression was extremely hideous.

At that moment, Long Yuehong didn’t dare look them in the eye.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and sighed indiscernibly. She then signaled Shang Jianyao with her eyes.

Shang Jianyao looked at the two Ark guards and revealed an indescribable smile under his furry, mouth-protruding mask. “How should I address you?”

“Y-Yu Tian?” The square-faced man gave his name in the Red River language.

The slightly chubby-faced guard with freckles replied, “Bode.”

Shang Jianyao nodded, and his dark-brown eyes instantly turned deep. “We come from the Vigilance Cathedral. The guards and servants of the Underground Ark may rejoice. So...”

Yu Tian and Bode were confused at first, but they came to a realization and asked in surprise, joy, and fear, “The Church wants to overthrow DiMarco?”

“We don’t have to tolerate his brutality anymore?”

Most of the people in the Underground Ark were believers of the Vigilance Church, but they weren't that pious. Furthermore, due to the rules, they didn't have the habit of wearing masks.

DiMarco and his ancestors didn't allow the people around them to wear masks to prevent any problems. For example, someone might sneak into the Ark without anyone noticing and rely on the mask's concealment to openly approach the master's bedroom.

Genava couldn't understand the two guards' responses. No matter which algorithm or module he used, he couldn't draw a similar conclusion from Shang Jianyao's two sentences.

After some analysis, he believed that this was an Awakened ability that directly changed the target's perception.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing his furry, mouth-protruding mask—smiled. “Yeah. We're here to save you. Do you want to live in DiMarco's shadow for the rest of your lives, with the possibility of dying from his brutality and anger at any moment?”

Yu Tian subconsciously replied, “Guards are rarely killed...” He stopped before he could finish speaking because he recalled DiMarco's most crazy and brutal period.

Back then, the guards lived every day in fear. People were often killed for trivial matters.

“Don't worry. With us as your backers, you don't have to be afraid of DiMarco's counterattack.” Shang Jianyao used specious words to enhance the effects of Inference Clowning.

Bode's body trembled slightly. “With the Church and the Church's support, w-we definitely aren't afraid.”

At this moment, Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a graceful monk mask—approached and smiled. “There's no need to be afraid. There are very, very few things you need to do, and it won't be too dangerous. If we fail, we will give you a few shots at relatively unimportant positions so that you can avoid the subsequent investigations. If we win, we will definitely need to find some new owners for the Ark. Heh heh, none of us want to live permanently underground and deal with all kinds of complicated matters.”

She didn't mention the Vigilance Church at all, but every word made Yu Tian and Bode feel like Eidolon Nun was with them.

After hearing this, Yu Tian looked at Bode, gritted his teeth, and exhaled. “What can we do?”

“First, tell us the general situation inside the Ark. Focus on the surveillance system and the isolation system.” Jiang Baimian asked about the corresponding matters according to the plan.

Bode quickly said, “We aren’t guards in charge of surveillance, so we don’t know much...”

He explained what he knew in detail.

The guards in charge of surveillance were selected from the various guard teams and took turns on duty. They would never be assigned the task of burying the corpses outside and guarding the exits and ventilation ducts. They would definitely be isolated from the outside world. DiMarco also had a small surveillance room in his bedroom. He liked to stare at the screen when he had nothing to do...

According to Bode and Yu Tian’s descriptions, Geneva drew a general layout in his ‘mind,’ including the location of the surveillance cameras, the route, the engine room, etc.

He quickly opened a panel in front of his chest and projected the map onto the ground.

“Is there anything you need to correct?” Geneva asked in a slightly synthetic male voice.

Yu Tian and Bode were a little dumbfounded. They only came to their senses after a few seconds and examined it carefully. “N-No.”

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian could only sigh inwardly. Technology changes lives... This is too convenient!

After Yu Tian and Bode confirmed the map’s situation, Shang Jianyao asked, “Can you contact the guards in charge of surveillance?”

“Sure,” Yu Tian quickly replied.

Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought.

Could it be that this fellow is considering how to achieve the spreading of Inference Clowning? There are no signs that his Awakened abilities can achieve this. It's too lacking... Jiang Baimian guessed Shang Jianyao's thoughts and was actually a little shocked.

She deliberated for a moment and asked according to her train of thought, "Do you have a chance to ask those people about the system's exact situation?"

"They are very tight-lipped. If DiMarco learns of it, they will definitely be beaten to death." Bode first gave a rather pessimistic answer before changing the topic. "But over the years, everyone apart from a few has been very dissatisfied with DiMarco's brutality. However, we were previously isolated and helpless without the Church's support. We didn't dare to resist. Now, I can try to persuade the few most easily swayed among them to obtain the corresponding information."

He was much more confident than before because he believed that the Vigilance Church was backing them up. They were powerhouses who had obtained the protection of the Kalendaria, Eidolon Nun.

This... From a certain perspective, this can be considered the spreading of Inference Clowning. However, it doesn't rely on superpowers but on the subtleties of the human heart... Just as Jiang Baimian sighed, Bode raised a question.

"But how can we hand the information to you after we obtain it?"

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and inquired, "Will your belongings be checked when you return?"

"Yes, there are anti-explosive tests and checks for electronic items. It's very strict." Yu Tian's answer caused Jiang Baimian's plan to die in the womb.

Genava, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen thought of ways to transmit information.

Jiang Baimian then asked, "Do you know your mission schedule for the next three days?"

"Yes, the two of us are in the same team." Yu Tian nodded. "After today, we will be on duty at an inspection point at Iron Mountain's entrance and the cathedral's ventilation duct at basement two..."

We will rest for a day every seven days. After we start work again, we will receive the schedule for the next six days. If there are no accidents, this won't change. Uh, we don't know what missions others will be assigned."

Yes, if they arrange for the guards to do things randomly every day, it will definitely cause a great deal of chaos. It's impossible without a powerful and smart central command... After Jiang Baimian heard Yu Tian and Bode's answer, she vaguely had a new plan in mind.

"When will you guys guard the cathedral's vent at basement two?" she asked further.

Bode replied without hesitation, "11 p.m. to 5 a.m., the day after tomorrow."

Within the time limit... Jiang Baimian didn't know if she was disappointed or relieved. "Will you two be the only ones?"

"No, there will be three groups. A total of six," Bode said.

Jiang Baimian turned her gaze to the map projected by Geneva and seriously examined it. "There are three surveillance cameras at every vent?"

"Yes." Yu Tian wanted to argue that it was something he had just emphasized, but he didn't dare.

As Jiang Baimian pondered, Shang Jianyao had already turned to smile at Geneva. "Why don't we enter the Ark first and then invade the system while analyzing the network from inside?"

"It's feasible, but there's a risk of exposure." Geneva gave a professional answer.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. "Maybe... We can give it a try."

She asked for many more details and exhorted Yu Tian and Bode of certain matters before letting them go.

As he watched the two people begin to bury the corpses, Long Yuehong caught up to the team and asked Shang Jianyao in confusion, "Why didn't you make friends with them and instead chose to mislead them about our identities and goals?"

It was clearly more reliable to make friends with them!

Chapter 298: If One Can Influence the Heart of the Opponent, One Will Avoid War

It wasn't Shang Jianyao who replied to Long Yuehong but Jiang Baimian. "Making friends is indeed more reliable in the short term, but it won't take long for Shang Jianyao's Inference Clowning to lose its effects without the suitable environment.

"Think about it. Most people in the Underground Ark won't help Yu Tian and Bode testify that they are friends with Shang Jianyao. Once they return, they will quickly discover that they were deceived. In contrast, making them misunderstand our identities and think that we are envoys from the Vigilance Church who want to help them overthrow DiMarco's rule is in line with their inner desires. It might even be a manifestation of their hidden desires guided by Inference Clowning.

"People will always believe what they are willing to believe. This way, when they return, they will cooperate with Inference Clowning to deceive themselves, hypnotize themselves, and actively help us do things even if they sense something amiss.

"If one can do this very well, they will join in on resisting DiMarco even without Inference Clowning. They will spontaneously rope in others and make the group snowball. Shang Jianyao's goal this time is to save time and energy by using Inference Clowning to skip the relatively troublesome steps in the middle so that we don't have to consider more provocative statements or provide more convincing proof..."

Long Yuehong listened carefully and gradually came to a realization. The first thought that flashed across his mind was: Inference Clowning is most invincible when combined with one's grasp of the human psyche...

He then had a second thought: Fortunately, Team Leader doesn't have Awakened abilities.

A third thought popped into Long Yuehong's mind: Wait a minute. Shang Jianyao and Team Leader have never discussed how to deal with the guards and create spies. He had already figured this out himself. He gave up on making friends and switched to misleading them with our identities...

At this moment, Long Yuehong sadly realized that Shang Jianyao's intelligence was really higher than his. Although he usually looked like a mental patient and had all kinds of strange ideas that rendered people speechless, not many people could compare to him when it came to brains—at least among the people Long Yuehong knew.

Such intelligence, coupled with a mental patient's abnormal thinking, made it even more unfathomable.

Long Yuehong recalled something as a result—Shang Jianyao had once said that he didn't need Inference Clowning to mislead me; all he needed was his brain. This might, probably, perhaps be the truth...

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian's analysis, a corresponding scene appeared in Geneva's corresponding processor: Jiang Baimian said to Yu Tian and Bode, "There's no need to be afraid. There are very, very few things you need to do, and it won't be too dangerous..."

This was to lay the groundwork for subsequent self-delusion and self-hypnosis... Geneva finally figured out the goal of such words and looked at Jiang Baimian with his sunglasses on. "Are you also an Awakened?"

Before Jiang Baimian could answer, Shang Jianyao nodded with a sigh. "Her abilities are to 'play with people's hearts,' 'tactical deception,' and 'intimidate others...'"

Jiang Baimian raised her left hand, wanting to stop Shang Jianyao's nonsense.

"I used my brain!" she emphasized; then, she answered Geneva's question. "I'm not an Awakened, but I've modified my genes."

At this point, she had a burst of inspiration and asked, "Do you know of any way to make a person an Awakened?"

She felt that there might be some clues in Mechanical Paradise's large database.

This sentence also diverted Bai Chen's attention.

Geneva shook his head. "We don't need to Awaken, nor can we Awaken. The Source Brain didn't study such matters. According to our data analysis on the intranet, the number and ratio of Awakened in the various religions in the Ashlands are clearly higher than that of other factions. The number of Awakened in a large faction like First City is also clearly higher than that of ordinary factions. A large portion of the reason for this phenomenon is that large factions are more attractive to Awakened, but we can't rule out the possibility that they can artificially create Awakened..."

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and sighed. “We left Tarnan in a rush and didn’t have the time to participate in the Furnace Church’s baptism...”

Although she also knew that an Awakening brought about by baptism was definitely unlikely and that her chances were even slimmer as an impious believer, it was at least not zero.

Shang Jianyao sighed deeply when he heard that. “There was also the pork dish.”

This was something that pained the entire Old Task Force—apart from Geneva.

After a few seconds of silence, Long Yuehong asked, “What should we do next?”

“Let’s go to Lake Heart Island again and see if we can get something good back. We’ll increase our chances of success and reduce the corresponding risks.” Jiang Baimian smiled. “Now that we have Geneva, we don’t have to worry about Yama Tiger invading our minds.”

...

The next day, Redstone Collection, Public Security Department.

The Old Task Force met the current sheriff and town guard captain, Tan Jie. He was 1.68 meters tall and had a baby face, but he was expressionless. His skin was weathered by the elements.

“Do you want to borrow a speedboat to go to Lake Heart Island?” Tan Jie asked in a flat tone as if he were asking about what they had eaten this morning.

“And three bicycles,” Shang Jianyao added.

Tan Jie looked at Dr. Weiler—who was admiring the ladies’ beautiful figures—and directly said, “His Excellency Saint Sigmund forbids us from approaching Lake Heart Island in any form.”

“What has his ban on you got to do with us?” Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a graceful monk mask—laughed. “It’s not like we need to listen to him. Uh, to you, it’s just lending friends a speedboat and bicycles. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Tan Jie was not moved by such an explanation. He looked at the Old Task Force and the others expressionlessly. "It's not a good habit to play word games."

Whoa, why do I feel like I've been provoked? Jiang Baimian had a plan in mind and calmly said, "His Excellency Saint Sigmund can only forbid you and not the merfolk. Maybe the merfolk will head to Lake Heart Island again after some time and find some items there to nurture new Oracles."

"Don't worry; we won't destroy the island's layout. We still value our lives. At most, we'll take away the items we need. This can help you eliminate the latent dangers, and at least they won't fall into the merfolk's hands."

Tan Jie listened without any change in expression. He turned his head and said to Weiler in the Red River language, "I have no objections if they want to borrow a speedboat to catch fish in the Lake of Wrath."

"Me neither." Weiler smiled.

...

Lake of Wrath, Lake Heart Island.

Compared to the last time, the Old Task Force's voyage was much smoother. The merfolk seemed to have given up on monitoring the island.

Jiang Baimian said to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, who was wearing a military exoskeleton, "You guys will still be the ones guarding the speedboat. This concerns our wealth and lives. If it's stolen or destroyed, we'll be trapped on the island."

"Yes, Team Leader!" Long Yuehong replied very loudly while Bai Chen said 'okay.'

After informing them of the things to take note of, Jiang Baimian turned to Shang Jianyao and Genava. "Let's go."

Fully armed, she then mounted the bicycle and cycled. Shang Jianyao didn't fall behind at all.

Genava looked at the bicycle in front of him and laughed in a synthetic manner. "I've always wanted to try this mode of transportation."

The Old Task Force had borrowed three bicycles from Tan Jie because of Genava's firm request.

Jiang Baimian's original idea was for her and Shang Jianyao to ride their bicycles while Genava jogged behind them. After all, he didn't suffer from fatigue, and an advance at such speeds wouldn't waste much of his electricity.

Creak, creak...

After Genava sat on it, the bicycle emitted a sound like it couldn't bear the load, making one have the illusion that it would fall apart at any moment.

Jiang Baimian glanced at the bicycle under Genava and evaluated it for a few seconds. "Let's go."

She only had one thought: This bicycle's quality is really good!

The journey was uneventful. The three bicycles traversed the road along the lake, and they arrived at the Old World town with white walls and black eaves.

Jiang Baimian stopped the bicycle and turned to ask Shang Jianyao, "Do you still remember what to take note of?"

Shang Jianyao replied concisely, "Fifteen minutes, half an hour, three days."

This meant that they couldn't stay in the temple for more than 15 minutes and that they couldn't stay in the temple's vicinity for more than half an hour. They also couldn't stay on this island for more than three days.

"Reduce all of it by 10%," Jiang Baimian emphasized.

With that said, she looked at Genava. "If anything abnormal happens to us, knock us out, drag us back, and evacuate us out of the island."

“No problem,” Geneva promised solemnly.

They soon traversed the streets and alleys and arrived at their destination. They saw a black temple with a white paper lantern hanging on each side.

“Yama Hall.” Geneva—who had parked his bicycle—read out the name on the signboard.

Jiang Baimian—who had never imagined that she would come again—sized it up. She stretched out her left hand—which was wearing latex gloves—and gently pushed open the black door.

The indescribable silence and fear surfaced in her heart again.

After passing through the impluvium and raising a white curtain, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Geneva walked behind the offering table and stopped beside the pitch-black coffin.

The coffin’s lid was slid to the side, revealing the sleeping deity in the white linen shirt with long black hair.

“How rude.” Shang Jianyao criticized. The last time he left, he had helped Yama Tiger close the coffin lid.

This situation was clearly caused by the Vigilance Church’s Terror Bishop, Sigmund.

Jiang Baimian ignored this and cast her gaze at the mummy’s right wrist.

The tree branch bracelet was already gone.

“As expected...” Jiang Baimian exhaled and turned to Geneva. “Search his body.”

This was something neither she nor Shang Jianyao could do, and Geneva was theoretically unaffected.

Genava didn't hesitate. He took two steps forward and stretched out his silver-black palm—which shimmered with a metallic luster—toward the corpse that had been dried for many years.

Chapter 299: Piece of Paper

When Genava touched the mummy-like Yama Tiger, Jiang Baimian gave maximum focus. She also used the auxiliary chip in her left arm.

She paid close attention to Yama Tiger's weak electric signals. As soon as she discovered any changes happening to the sleeping deity, she would stop Genava.

Shang Jianyao stood beside Genava and assumed a posture as if he would push him away at any moment.

Genava's finger quickly touched Yama Tiger's dry skin.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian sensed a faint change in the bioelectric signal and felt that something was about to grow out of the void.

She was just about to get Genava to retract his palm when the change vanished as if it had never happened.

Everything returned to its original silence.

As the target is a smart bot and not a human, the anomaly wasn't able to proceed on? I wonder if the latex gloves will result in the same effect... Jiang Baimian closed her mouth and continued observing.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao sighed regretfully and said to Genava, "I thought I could save the beauty in distress."

He seemed to sense Yama Tiger's remaining consciousness acting up for a second.

"Beauty? The gender set by my main module is male." Genava used his silver-black metal palm to search the sleeping deity's body for something valuable while pointing out Shang Jianyao's error in his choice of words.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “The beauty here refers to beauties. There’s no differentiation between men and women when it comes to beauties. It doesn’t matter if they are purebred humans, mutated humans, or smart bots.”

He used the term ‘mutated humans’ as a substitute for ‘Subhumans.’

“It can even be a car,” Jiang Baimian subconsciously added. Just as she said that, she began to condemn herself. Why did I join in on such a random topic at such a serious time?

Genava was very satisfied with Shang Jianyao’s explanation. He didn’t retort and did his best in the task entrusted to him.

Frankly speaking, Jiang Baimian felt that Yama Tiger was more terrifying than a real corpse when she saw his dry skin, protruding bones, and skull-like head. It was more nightmare material.

She knew that she had to mentally prepare herself for dozens of seconds before she dared to examine the terrifying body of this sleeping deity. Furthermore, she would always feel a little disgusted.

Genava didn’t feel any discomfort at all as if it were an ordinary item made up of 0s and 1s like other items.

After a careful search, Genava concluded, “The target only has a yellowing pair of underwear and a white linen shirt. There are no other items, nor are there any clues.”

“...” Jiang Baimian felt that this description was a little strange.

Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “These clothes and underwear might also be mystical items. It’s a set with the tree branch laurel and tree branch bracelet.”

The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth twitched as she analyzed the situation seriously. “I don’t think so. They are located in obvious spots. If they were taken out from the Mind Corridor or were items condensed by Yama Tiger himself, the Terror Bishop from the Vigilance Church would definitely have taken them away.”

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “I know the reason—because I won’t take them either.”

“Why?” Jiang Baimian wanted to hear his unusual train of thought.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “That’s rude. Like a pervert.”

Jiang Baimian ignored him and said to Genava, “Touch Yama Tiger’s body again and see if there’s anything under him.”

Genava followed her suggestion and stretched out his silver-black metal palm again, inserting it between Yama Tiger’s body and the bottom of the coffin.

After some searching, he shook his metal head. “Nothing.”

“Nothing...” Although Jiang Baimian didn’t find this answer surprising, she felt that something was amiss.

“Those believers are too insincere. They actually didn’t pad the bed for the deity they believe in. It’s so uncomfortable lying on such a hard wooden plank,” Shang Jianyao expressed his opinion.

“Maybe it’s the folklore or religious habits here.” Genava tried to analyze the reason why the believers did so.

Jiang Baimian’s eyes suddenly lit up when she heard their conversation. She thoughtfully asked, “Do you think Yama Tiger took the initiative to lie in this coffin when he sensed that he was about to fall asleep, or did his believers carry him into this coffin after they discovered that he had fallen asleep?”

“Without sufficient data, it’s impossible to reenact the situation back then. It’s suggested that we use hypothetical analysis,” Genava replied frankly.

Shang Jianyao smiled and said, “He definitely didn’t lie in here himself. If it were me, I would definitely pad it with a blanket since I know that I’m about to enter a slumber. Otherwise, I wouldn’t feel comfortable lying down for so long.”

“That’s true in theory. Yama Tiger wasn’t sufficiently prepared. This also reflects the fact that it took decades for the murloc Oracle to arrive and take away the laurel.” Jiang Baimian left some leeway for her hypothesis. “Yes... It’s also possible that the situation was sudden and urgent and that Yama Tiger didn’t have the time to do anything else.”

She continued, “Let’s first analyze the situation of the believers carrying Yama Tiger into this coffin. They should’ve completed the arrangement according to Yama Hall’s religious habits or Yama Tiger’s usual instructions. There are many things that can be inferred, but let’s put them aside for now because there’s a very serious and important problem. That is: where they carried Yama Tiger into this coffin from.”

Genava directly deduced the answer. “There are two possibilities. The first is where Yama Tiger suddenly fell unconscious, and the second is his room. He unknowingly fell into a predicament while sleeping.”

“Yes, it’s very likely that he was lying in bed when his consciousness entered the Mind Corridor to explore it and search for the New World’s door. In the end, he obtained something but also encountered a problem.” Jiang Baimian speculated based on Shang Jianyao’s usual performance as an Awakened and Yama Tiger’s words, which he had carved with his nails.

Yama Tiger left some bloody scratches on the inside of the coffin, forming the words ‘A brand new world.’

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to ask strange questions that might derail the topic, Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist and looked at the electronic watch. She smiled and said, “Then, where’s Yama Tiger’s room? It’s unlikely he uses this coffin as a bed usually. There’s nothing to pad it, so it’ll definitely be uncomfortable sleeping here. No matter how much Yama Tiger doesn’t like enjoyment, there’s no need to torture himself like this unless he has such a hobby or has paid the corresponding price.”

Shang Jianyao nodded heavily, indicating that it was indeed so.

Awakened weren’t ascetics. There was no need to strain oneself like that.

“From a religious perspective, since Yama Tiger is a living deity, the place he lives in can only be this temple. Or rather, a portion of the space where he lives will definitely transform into a temple.” Genava analyzed the past similar data and gave his conclusion.

Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “But we’ve already searched this place last time; we didn’t find a place where people can stay...”

As she spoke, she suddenly turned around and cast her gaze at a spot.

Shang Jianyao smiled at the same time. “We didn’t search somewhere.”

He pointed at the coffin.

A more accurate description was the stone slab under the coffin.

Genava analyzed the situation and understood what the two of them meant. He immediately activated the corresponding inspection module.

In just a few seconds, he pointed below the coffin and said, “There’s a large hole underground... Preliminary analysis results show that it’s a small room.”

Jiang Baimian smiled under the elegant monk mask. She had just analyzed a bunch of things and only made bold assumptions. Now, she had finally obtained proof!

“Please push this coffin away,” Jiang Baimian said to Genava. “Be careful. I might call for you to stop at any moment.”

Just like before, she raised her focus and used the auxiliary chip. Shang Jianyao also readied himself, prepared to ‘save the beauty in distress.’

Genava pressed his hands on the edge of the coffin and pushed forward with controlled force.

During this process, Yama Tiger’s bioelectric signals didn’t change.

As the coffin was removed, a black hole appeared at the corresponding stone slab. It was very narrow and small, allowing only a slender person to pass normally. Below was a staircase that could be vaguely seen. People like Genava had to turn sideways to enter.

Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist to look at the time and allowed Genava, the all-rounded robot, to ventilate the space below the cave entrance.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a monkey mask—watched enviously as if he felt that it was very cool to have so many devices and modules on him.

Genava quickly completed the handling of the environment and checked the situation inside in passing. “There’s no toxic gas, bombs, radiation, or dangerous creatures. The building structure is also very stable.”

Shang Jianyao switched on his flashlight the next second and walked underground using the stairs.

Jiang Baimian and Genava followed closely behind.

The flight of stairs only had seven to eight steps. It didn’t take long for Shang Jianyao to reach solid ground.

This was a small room with only one bed, one table, one wardrobe, and one chair.

It wasn’t completely devoid of light. On the old desk was a bead that emitted a yellowish-green glow.

It was very small, only the size of a normal fish’s eyes.

“A night pearl...” As Jiang Baimian muttered, she stopped Shang Jianyao from going forward to search and got Genava to do the corresponding procedures.

As time waited for no one, Genava completed his tasks as quickly as possible.

The cabinet was empty, and the clothes seemed to have been taken away. There was only a mattress, a pillow, and a thin blanket on the bed. The chair was nothing special, but it appeared very clean due to the temple’s environment. On the table was the small night pearl, and there was a piece of paper in the drawer.

“Paper...” Jiang Baimian followed the light from Shang Jianyao’s flashlight and looked at the yellowish piece of paper.

On it were some numbers and symbols: “1210,√

“757, √

“935, √

“314, √

“329, √

“102”

If she hadn’t been to Tarnan, Jiang Baimian would definitely be left at a loss by these numbers. But with the matter regarding the Superior Heartless, the number ‘503,’ and Abbess Zhou Yue’s explanation, she naturally had a guess.

“These are the Mind Corridor rooms that Yama Tiger once entered? The tick indicates that the exploration was completed? Finally, he obtained something in Room 102. It’s suspected to be related to the New World, but he also encountered an accident?”

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Shang Jianyao hit the side of the flashlight with one hand as a form of clapping.

The silver-black smart bot, Genava, was stunned for a moment. In order to fit in, he also clapped.

Chapter 300: Coward

Jiang Baimian felt a double sense of exasperation, but it didn’t affect her condition. She only sighed slightly; her heart and mind had already been tempered sufficiently.

She then instructed Genava, “We can take this piece of paper and do further research when we return.”

With that said, she looked down at her watch. “There’s not much time left. We have to hurry.” Jiang Baimian meant that she had to quickly check if any of the few items in the room were worth taking the risk to bring away.

Genava didn’t delay. He shook the thin blanket, knocked on the pillow, and lifted the blanket, but he didn’t find anything else.

During this process, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao sensed with all their might, but they didn’t discover any abnormalities.

After Genava put away the piece of paper and stretched his silver-black metal palm toward the small luminous pearl that emitted a yellowish-green glow, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, “It moved, it moved. The fetus moved.”

“...” Jiang Baimian realized that her heart and mind weren’t resilient enough.

She couldn’t help but sigh inwardly.

The Life Ritual parish was indeed the first religious organization Shang Jianyao had joined. It had left a clear mark on him.

Of course, Jiang Baimian also knew why Shang Jianyao said that. Just as Genava’s finger touched the luminescent pearl the size of a fish eye, the item’s yellow-green glow flickered weakly. Furthermore, an extremely difficult-to-detect bioelectric signal flashed and disappeared.

Shang Jianyao continued, “A very weak human consciousness was fluctuating within. It’s gone now.”

This is the product of combining the auras left behind by powerhouses that have explored the Mind Corridor’s depths with real items? This might come from Yama Tiger himself, or it might also come from his gains from a room in the Mind Corridor... Jiang Baimian kept track of the time and didn’t say anything else. “Put it away first; we’ll study it when we get back. We should leave.”

Genava took out the rubber gloves he had long prepared, stuffed the yellowish-green luminous pearl in, and wrapped it up.

The three of them quickly and calmly left the room and switched off the flashlight.

After Geneva pushed the coffin back to its original spot and blocked the basement entrance, Shang Jianyao raised the coffin lid again and closed it tightly.

“I think Yama Tiger might not like you doing this.” Jiang Baimian kept track of the time as she watched Shang Jianyao busy himself.

Shang Jianyao raised his hands slightly, half-raised his body, and looked into the void. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

Jiang Baimian wanted to retort, but time didn’t allow for it. She could only take the lead and leave the temple named Yama Hall.

...

In the hotel camp, in a room with a dim, yellow light bulb.

All the Old Task Force members were gathered around the coffee table that served as a dining table, staring at the yellowish-green night pearl.

Jiang Baimian broke the silence and said, “We have to test what effects this can produce.”

Her gaze turned to Geneva.

After dinner, they had already studied the piece of paper and didn’t discover anything special.

Geneva stretched out his silver-black metal palm, picked up the night pearl the size of a fish eye, and rotated it a few times. “How?”

When he picked up the night pearl, Jiang Baimian sensed the faint electric signal again. But apart from this, there was nothing.

“Try to imbue your spiritual...” Jiang Baimian shut her mouth before she could finish speaking. It was obvious that smart bots didn’t have spiritual traits. It was still unknown if humans had them!

She deliberated for a few seconds and said, “Use an electric current to stimulate it?”

She was a woman of action, so she immediately said to Genava, “Hold it. I’ll give it a try.”

Long Yuehong subconsciously shrank back and tried to distance himself, but when he saw Bai Chen and Shang Jianyao—who remained motionless—he felt that he had been too timid. Therefore, he forcefully returned to his original posture.

Looking at the yellowish-green night pearl in Genava’s palm, Jiang Baimian raised her left hand and pressed down.

A silver-white electric arc sparked out, crossed a relatively short distance, and struck the target’s surface.

The yellowish-green light emitted by the night pearl clearly trembled. The weak electric signals hidden inside surfaced again, becoming messy.

However, everything quickly returned to normal. Nothing happened.

“It didn’t work...” Long Yuehong said in disappointment or relief. He didn’t think he was affected by any abilities.

Jiang Baimian nodded indiscernibly and thought about a new plan.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao said, “Let me give it a try.”

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, “Be careful. Yes, put on the gloves first.”

She then said to Genava, “Watch him. If anything goes wrong, separate him from the night pearl.”

“Don’t! It’s true love between us!” Shang Jianyao replied in a tone that others couldn’t tell if he was joking or not.

He then picked up the glove made of latex and wore it on his left palm. After that, he stretched out his hand and pinched the yellowish-green night pearl in Genava’s palm.

Just like before, Jiang Baimian sensed a weak electric signal flash.

Shang Jianyao looked at the night pearl in his hand and seriously reasoned with it. “You should’ve heard of a term that goes: ‘pearls covered in dust.’ As a night pearl, you have been in the basement for decades. Nobody appreciates or praises you. Don’t you feel lonely? Now, you have a chance to bloom with your own brilliance...”

Long Yuehong found Shang Jianyao’s drivel funny and terrifying. The funny thing was that this fellow really seemed to think that he could communicate with a night pearl. He was terrified that this fellow would actually succeed in communicating with the night pearl.

Bai Chen—who had been quietly watching—was also shocked by Shang Jianyao’s actions. This reminded her of the mentally deranged wilderness nomads she had encountered in the past.

Of course, Shang Jianyao was no different from them. He only had an additional doctor’s certificate.

After communicating for more than a minute, Shang Jianyao sighed helplessly. “It refuses to speak.”

It can’t speak... Jiang Baimian had just finished criticizing when she saw Shang Jianyao hand the yellowish-green night pearl to his right hand.

That hand didn’t wear any latex gloves.

Jiang Baimian opened her mouth but didn’t stop him in the end. She only signaled Genava to be prepared with her eyes.

Genava took more than two seconds to figure out what the look meant.

Shang Jianyao gripped the yellowish-green night pearl with his right hand, and his dark-brown eyes suddenly turned deep.

Jiang Baimian sensed the weak electric signal inside the night pearl the very next second. It spread and grew, becoming very complicated as if it was bearing the descent of a certain thought.

Long Yuehong stood up with a whoosh and rushed out of the room, trembling. He rushed to the room next door, lay on the bed, wrapped himself in the blanket, and curled up.

“This...” Jiang Baimian was a little confused at first before she came to a realization—the night pearl had taken effect!

Shang Jianyao lowered his head slightly and looked at the night pearl in his palm. He smiled and said, “It seems to make others timid; let’s call it Coward. It can target only one person or affect all humans in a range, but the effects will be much worse.”

Jiang Baimian’s eyes lit up. “This ability is very strong, and it’s very suitable for this operation.”

The greatest fear for Operation Beheading was that it would be intercepted midway or that they would be unable to find the person in question. With this night pearl, the defenses around DiMarco would be useless as long as they attacked first. Even DiMarco himself would be affected.

Shang Jianyao continued, “The maximum distance is about 120 meters. It can now affect the underground mall on the other side of the camp and Redstone Collection.”

“Yes, this definitely can’t compare to a real Mind Corridor powerhouse, but it should be able to affect them.” Jiang Baimian made an inference based on the information she currently knew.

At this moment, she acutely discovered a problem. “Has the night pearl’s glow dimmed a little?”

“Yes.” Geneva compared the two sets of data and gave an affirmative reply.

Shang Jianyao nodded. “This is the same as eating candy. It’s a little less every time you use it; there’s no way to restore it. You can also instantly release all its strength, and the effects will be stronger.”

As they discussed, Long Yuehong—who was next door—finally came to his senses. He got off the bed in frustration and walked back.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and smiled. “Not bad. You can recover so quickly despite being affected by an item at the Mind Corridor level.”

“He’s not timid enough to suffer from incontinence,” added Bai Chen. She originally wanted to use the term ‘peeing his pants,’ but she realized that it meant prodding at Long Yuehong’s scab. Therefore, she changed the term to be more literary.

Long Yuehong’s heart was immediately comforted. He sat down and asked about the night pearl’s abilities.

After Jiang Baimian finished speaking, Long Yuehong looked at Shang Jianyao’s right hand curiously. “Can ordinary people like us, who aren’t Awakened, use it?”

“Truth comes from practice.” Shang Jianyao laughed.

Long Yuehong recalled his previous cowardly side and mustered his courage. “Then, I’ll give it a try.”

Shang Jianyao then handed over the yellowish-green night pearl.

Jiang Baimian also wanted to know the answer to this question, so she quickly said to Genava, “Be careful of any accidents.”

“No problem.” Genava’s blue-light-emitting eyes locked onto Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong took the night pearl and found that it wasn’t as cold as he imagined. Instead, it was closer to body temperature.

He tried to focus and gather his spiritual energy, but he failed to trigger the Coward effect despite trying many different methods.

“No luck...” Finally, he shook his head in disappointment.

At this moment, a wind blew in the hotel camp, producing howling sounds.

Long Yuehong’s ears twitched, and his body trembled. He suddenly threw down the night pearl and hid behind the sofa—behind Bai Chen and Jiang Baimian.

After a few seconds, he exhaled and stood up.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao and the others look at him at the same time, Long Yuehong’s face flushed red. “I-I don’t know what happened either. I suddenly felt very scared and felt that there was something wrong with the wind...”

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. “Not only are non-Awakened unable to use such a mystical item, but they will also be slightly affected.”