

Ad Infinitum 311

Chapter 311: New Rules

Amidst the drizzle, the jeep—which had been given a military-green camouflage coat—slowed down and drove toward Pangu Biology’s entrance.

Long Yuehong and the others couldn’t help but feel excited when they saw the entrance—which they had only seen a few times but were extremely familiar with.

After wandering outside for months, they were finally back home.

Shang Jianyao even raised his hand and wiped the corners of his mouth.

After they left Redstone Collection, their destination was Pangu Biology. They didn’t stop anywhere along the way and only went to one relatively large settlement for food resupplies.

Furthermore, compared to when they first came out, the team’s strength had increased significantly because they no longer had to worry about any ambush from Life Ritual. Therefore, they didn’t take any detours. They only avoided places that allowed for easy ambushes out of precaution.

This effectively reduced the time it took for them to return.

As the silver-white door to Pangu Biology opened, Jiang Baimian immediately realized that the layout was very different from before.

In addition to the Security Department employees—who originally numbered 20—there were now 30. There were also two new security cameras.

Jiang Baimian rolled down the window, stuck her head out, and asked without hiding her confusion, “What’s wrong?”

Liu Chengkun—who was in charge of the entrance area—walked over with a smile when he saw an acquaintance. “Yo, isn’t this Mianmian?”

This Security Department D8-rank captain was in his thirties. His skin was bronze, and he had distinct edges and corners to his face.

“...” Jiang Baimian was momentarily at a loss for words when faced with a nickname she had long become unfamiliar with.

Almost at the same time, she heard a ‘low’ chuckle coming from the backseat.

Shang Jianyao then ‘suppressed’ his voice and said to Bai Chen in the passenger seat, “A nickname like Mianmian is nothing like Big White.”

Bai Chen pursed her lips and didn’t answer, but the muscles on her face seemed to tremble slightly.

Jiang Baimian took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. She pulled the hand brake and pushed open the door to get out of the car.

She looked at Liu Chengkun and smiled. “Captain Liu, what’s wrong? Why the increase in security all of a sudden?”

Sigh, blame it on my luck. This fellow in front of me is my brother’s good friend!

Liu Chengkun glanced at Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen—who had alighted from the car—and smiled. “It’s all because someone caused trouble. A team that went out for fieldwork returned before the new year. When they handed over their spoils, a rash young man hid two things without giving them to his team leader. In the end, one of the items apparently had some latent problem, causing small-scale chaos. Fortunately, it was quickly resolved.

“The board of directors held the minister accountable for this matter. The minister was also very angry. After the new year, he changed the rules and requested for additional search and registration posts at the entrance. He wanted teams that returned to the company to hand over all the items right here and would only return them after review.”

Pangu Biology had previously been less strict with personal items. They were allowed in after a preliminary inspection at the door. The corresponding teams’ team leaders and platoon commanders would then be in charge of supervising the members during the handover of items that they brought back.

Jiang Baimian frowned and sighed. “Seriously, isn’t this giving everyone trouble?”

The reason she said that was that she happened to have an item she wanted to hide. She didn't want to hand over the green night pearl that had condensed DiMarco's aura.

"That's right. That unlucky b*stard was demoted three ranks." Liu Chengkun shook his head and smiled. "Alright, please cooperate."

"Okay." Jiang Baimian didn't object. She called out to Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Shang Jianyao and opened the jeep's trunk.

During this process, she signaled to Shang Jianyao with her eyes.

Shang Jianyao had already stuffed his left hand into his pocket. He stood there and watched his team leader and Long Yuehong move the two wooden crates down without helping.

"What's this?" Liu Chengkun and the Security Department employees he had gathered for inspection asked curiously.

According to their experience, the items brought back by employees during fieldwork were usually random trinkets. Most of them were cardboard boxes filled with canned food. Even if there were large items, they wouldn't specially get a wooden crate to store them.

Jiang Baimian deliberately smiled. "Open it yourselves."

Liu Chengkun didn't stand on ceremony. After all, this was his job. He bent down and lifted one of the wooden crates' lids.

"This..." Liu Chengkun was immediately shocked by the items that came into view. This... This is actually a f*cking military exoskeleton!

The next second, he heard gasps.

His subordinate opened another wooden crate. Inside was also a military exoskeleton, and it looked like a newer model!

While the inspectors' gazes were attracted, Jiang Baimian turned her head to glance at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao took out his left hand and nodded with a smile.

Phew. Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief.

A few seconds later, Liu Chengkun finally returned to his senses and pointed at the two military exoskeletons. "W-where did you get this?"

The company didn't have many of such high-quality mechanical electronics and military killing machines. They were a rare sight when it came to allocations, but Jiang Baimian's four-man team actually had two!

"One was exchanged from completing a Hunter's mission, and the other was seized," Jiang Baimian explained simply.

Liu Chengkun and the Security Department employees beside him felt like they were listening to Greek. Their minds were filled with the words: 'I don't believe you.'

They had all been out in the field, and some of them even had Ruin Hunter identities. However, they had never found a Hunter mission that allowed for the exchange of a military exoskeleton!

As for seizing one, they could still comprehend the possibility. After all, Jiang Baimian's team already had a military exoskeleton and had the corresponding strength.

Liu Chengkun fell silent for a few seconds before opening his mouth. "You guys sure had an eventful experience while outfield."

He gave up on asking about the details because the person Jiang Baimian needed to report to was not him but Deputy Minister Xenny.

"We're just short of saving all of humanity," Shang Jianyao replied with a smile.

Liu Chengkun laughed involuntarily and said to his subordinates, “Alright, don’t just look. Check them one by one, classify them, and register them.”

With the two military exoskeletons in front of them, the batch of portable computers that the Old Task Force later produced naturally didn’t surprise everyone. The computers were cleared in the preliminary search without any trouble and were placed to the side to await review.

During this process, Jiang Baimian and the others also took out the items on them.

Liu Chengkun and the others returned the Old Task Force’s previously registered and reviewed items to them on the spot according to the network data.

One of the Security Department employees picked up an ordinary glass ball and casually asked Shang Jianyao, “Aren’t things like this everywhere? What’s the point of bringing it back?”

Such items were indeed rare in Pangu Biology’s underground building, but in the Ashlands, such items—which couldn’t be eaten, worn, or used—could only be given to children as toys. Almost nobody deliberately gathered them.

There were plenty of similar glass spheres among the numerous city ruins. Most of them were better-looking than Shang Jianyao’s.

Shang Jianyao sincerely replied, “It’s a keepsake.”

“Heh heh, which lady gave it to you?” joked the Security Department employee and put down the glass sphere. After the preliminary inspection, he signaled for Shang Jianyao to walk through the scanner.

After easily completing the process, Jiang Baimian drove the empty jeep to its original parking lot and led the team back to their office on the 647th floor.

After showering, they changed into clean clothes and walked to the elevator again.

According to the telegram’s instructions, they needed to meet the Old Task Force’s deputy minister—Xenny—before dinner.

Upon seeing the elevator approaching, Jiang Baimian looked at Long Yuehong thoughtfully. “Ask actively if you don’t understand anything later.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Long Yuehong almost patted his chest and promised.

On their way back, they had already discussed the things to take note of when meeting their boss. One of them was: It was better to ask the deputy minister questions than to be asked by her!

For the Old Task Force—which had its own tiny secrets such as hiding the matter of saving Geneva and the taking down of DiMarco—reducing the number of questions Deputy Minister Xenny could ask would effectively reduce the risk of exposure.

“Can I ask?” Shang Jianyao actively wanted to participate.

“For you... forget it.” Jiang Baimian’s frown relaxed again. She was afraid of exposing the fact that Shang Jianyao’s ‘condition’ was worse than the doctor’s report.

At the same time, she was also afraid that Xenny would embarrass herself due to her exasperation with Shang Jianyao. If that happened, she might end up in trouble in the future.

Before long, the Old Task Force arrived on the 646th floor and knocked on Deputy Minister Xenny’s door. Then, they sat on the long sofa side by side according to the instructions.

Xenny—who was well-dressed, had chestnut hair, and a gentle smile—walked to the armchair with a sky-blue porcelain teacup. As she sat down, she smiled. “I heard you guys brought back two military exoskeletons? Very impressive.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t immediately answer the question and smiled in anticipation. “Minister, you previously said that if we obtained a military exoskeleton ourselves, you can make the decision to leave it with our team.”

Xenny touched her forehead and smiled. “I didn’t expect you to get two of them in one go. Sigh, many people now know about it and want to get one for their team. Just now, a brigade commander called me to talk about this. You guys have placed me at a disadvantage.”

“I can help you persuade them.” Shang Jianyao volunteered.

Xenny could understand the Old Task Force’s anxiety and asked with a smile, “How do we plan on persuading them? Using your muscles?”

He’s a professional in this regard... Jiang Baimian replied inwardly.

Without giving them a chance to speak, Xenny nodded. “Fortunately, I can still withstand this bit of pressure. When there are no problems with the review, the two military exoskeletons will be part of your inventory. You can use them for missions outside. Did you guys modify that jeep as well? It’ll be your exclusive vehicle in the future.”

“Yes! Thank you, Minister!” Jiang Baimian didn’t hide her joy. At the same time, she secretly pinched Shang Jianyao’s forearm with her right hand to stop him from saying anything excessive such as: “Thank you for not breaking us up.”

With this conversation, the atmosphere became much more harmonious.

Xenny looked around and said, “Give me a verbal report of this mission first.”

Chapter 312: A Feast

Jiang Baimian followed the predetermined explanation. She started with Moat Town, selectively picking the key points to talk about until their return to Redstone Collection.

She hid two matters—the establishment of the Shang Jianyao Brotherhood Weed City branch and the ‘abduction’ of the smart bot, Geneva. At the same time, she described the Vigilance Church as the dominant force when dealing with DiMarco. The Old Task Force had joined their ranks as mercenaries because of the payment and their slight sense of justice. In any case, it didn’t seem dangerous. There was someone to grab the wheel from them if anything went wrong.

In fact, there was nothing wrong with this. Just as Viel had said, fate often ran behind coincidences.

Xenny first picked up the sky-blue porcelain teacup and took a sip. She then shook her head with a smile and sighed with emotion. “The things you encountered on this trip are more dangerous than ten or twenty missions carried out by others. It’s unbelievable.

“It was the same previously. You were only sent to deliver a filter chip, yet a bunch of things happened.”

Halfway through her sentence, Shang Jianyao had already cast his gaze at Long Yuehong. Jiang Baimian forcefully held back and didn't do so. Bai Chen had a calm expression as if the one plagued by bad luck wasn't the Old Task Force.

Long Yuehong couldn't retort in front of the deputy minister. He could only sit up straight and pretend not to sense Shang Jianyao's gaze.

“What's wrong?” After Xenny said that, she asked about the anomaly in front of her.

Jiang Baimian smiled and explained, “We also noticed that we'd encountered too many dangerous matters. Hence, we suspect that one of our team members has been unlucky recently. In any case, it's just a guess, and fingers are being pointed around. We're used to using this to soothe the mood.”

Xenny laughed. “You can joke, but don't take it seriously. Superstition is a very bad thing.”

I used to believe in science too... At this moment, Long Yuehong seemed to hear Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen's thoughts.

Xenny took another sip of tea and asked, “In the process of dealing with the Underground Ark, did you observe the battle between the Vigilance Church and DiMarco?”

“No.” Jiang Baimian shook her head without hesitation.

“No,” Shang Jianyao echoed sincerely.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong gave similar answers using body language.

This was definitely not a lie; the Vigilance Church didn't fight DiMarco at all, so they naturally didn't manage to see a thing.

Xenny nodded and said, “What a pity; otherwise, you would've obtained a lot of important information regarding Awakened and the Mind Corridor.”

She then restrained the gentle smile on her face and said seriously, “You are going to First City next. There are all kinds of hidden experts there, and it’s unknown how many Awakened at the Mind Corridor level are there. Compared to formidable firepower, large numbers of troops, and all kinds of advanced equipment, these people are more dangerous and terrifying. This doesn’t mean that they can use their bodies to block missiles, but in a city with many people, their abilities and coverage range are enough to make any who go unprepared die without even knowing why.

“Fortunately, you have experience from resisting that Superior Heartless. It’s not like you don’t know anything.”

Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to say, “Minister, I was just about to raise this matter. I wonder if we can apply for all the information the company has gathered regarding the Awakened domain? It’s best if we have the powers and domains that correspond to the different Kalendarium, as well as a rough idea of the price they paid. This way, we can effectively take precautions when we encounter believers of the different Kalendarium.

“We can’t always wait until we encounter them before asking the company via telegram. It’s not like nothing happens every time, allowing us to calmly return to our residence and take out the radio.”

Xenny listened in silence and nodded slightly. “Your worries are indeed reasonable. I’ll try to apply for it. Actually, you are already qualified to obtain more information at this point in your investigations.”

At this point, she laughed. “Although you’ve encountered many things, you’ve also gained a lot. Just learning about the nine research institutes and figuring out the identity of First City’s former number one citizen is a great contribution. After the review, all of you will definitely be promoted again. The corresponding clearance will also increase.

“However, don’t blindly believe in the information provided by the company. It’s not that complete, and there might be mistakes. Also, there’s no definite connection between the belief in a Kalendarium and the abilities one awakens. It can only be said that the probability of it happening in the corresponding domain is higher, but there are also many exceptions that can’t be generalized.”

If one made a mistake judging the enemy’s abilities, it could be fatal.

Jiang Baimian and the others also knew this.

Shang Jianyao once had a portion of his memories wiped away by an Awakened from the Life Ritual parish. This was clearly an ability in Last Man's domain, but the other party believed in the Arbiter of Fate.

At this moment, Long Yuehong mustered his courage and quickly asked, "Minister, I have a question. We—Uh, most of us have undergone genetic enhancement. Won't we be very eye-catching in First City? Won't it be very easy for people to suspect that we are from Pangu Biology?"

Furthermore, the company's reputation in the Ashlands didn't seem too good. First City was also the largest faction closest to it, so there was definitely intense competition between the two parties.

Xenny looked at Long Yuehong and smiled. "There's no need to worry. When you reach First City, you will discover that although I wouldn't say that tall and good-looking people are everywhere, at least they aren't that rare."

She paused and explained with a smile, "Who do you think the company deals with every year by exporting so much genetic enhancement liquid in exchange for supplies?"

"Is that so..." Long Yuehong pretended to come to a realization. When he had nothing to do on the way, he also flipped through the copy of 'An Actor Prepares' that Shang Jianyao had exchanged for.

Xenny looked at the wall clock and deliberated before saying, "Let's call it a day. You guys should get some rest as well; you can send a report whenever you decide to set off again."

Her expression became serious again. "I have to remind you that investigating the reason for the Old World's destruction is definitely a dangerous matter. Apart from us, many large factions have also made similar attempts. However, the teams sent out have disappeared, died, or become lunatics at a certain point in the investigation. There have been almost no exceptions.

"In addition, there are many powerhouses hiding in First City. You have to be careful on your next trip and maintain contact with the company at all times."

"Yes, Minister!" Shang Jianyao replied with gusto.

“...” Xenny was stunned for a moment. “There’s no need to be so formal; I’m just reminding you. Alright, you can go back now.”

As Jiang Baimian stood up, she curiously asked, “Minister, what exactly happened that made us have to hand in our harvests as soon as we arrived at the door? I heard Captain Liu mention the general situation, but I don’t know what item that fellow hid.”

Xenny sighed softly. “A recording pen with the promotional information of a secret religion.”

“What religion?” Shang Jianyao was immediately excited.

“Naturalism Church,” Xenny said simply. “We don’t have much information on it for the time being.”

Naturalism Church... Jiang Baimian repeated this name inwardly.

Taking this opportunity, Bai Chen—whose bones had yet to heal fully—pursed her lips and asked, “Minister, will I be able to undergo genetic modification or have a biomechanical limb transplant when the rewards come in?”

In fact, she wasn’t that eager after obtaining the new exoskeleton.

Xenny looked at Bai Chen and said seriously, “If you insist. Yes, the premise is that you already know the corresponding risks well.”

Bai Chen nodded and didn’t say anything else.

Shang Jianyao and the others then bade the deputy minister farewell and returned to Room 14 on the 647th floor.

It was only 5:30 p.m., and there was still a while before the cafeteria opened.

Jiang Baimian threw herself onto the high-back chair behind her desk, stretched her body, and sighed with emotion. “Home’s the best...”

Before she could finish her sentence, she saw Shang Jianyao walk to the sofa and lie down.

“Hey, be more reserved!” Jiang Baimian realized that she was still not carefree enough.

“Home’s the best.” Shang Jianyao repeated her words.

Long Yuehong sat in the armchair beside him, and Bai Chen returned to her seat.

“I’ll treat you to a feast later!” Jiang Baimian couldn’t be bothered to move and decided to let Shang Jianyao off. A great person rarely stoops to pettiness!

The four of them each occupied a spot and chatted in extreme relaxation.

As they chatted, the voices in the room gradually disappeared.

After an unknown period of time, Jiang Baimian suddenly opened her eyes; her stomach’s protest had woken her up.

“Why did we fall asleep... What time is it?” Jiang Baimian muttered silently as she flipped her wrist to look at her electronic watch.

It showed that it was 8:05 p.m. This meant that all the cafeterias had closed!

Jiang Baimian opened her mouth, stood up, and slapped the table twice. “Wake up, wake up!”

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen woke up in a daze.

“Is the cafeteria open?” Shang Jianyao entered a very spirited state the moment he woke up.

“They’re closed!” Jiang Baimian snapped. “Why did we sleep until now?”

She was mainly angry at herself.

Bai Chen looked at her watch and calmly said, "It's mainly because we relaxed ourselves."

Outside the company, even if they had someone on duty, they couldn't sleep well. Their minds were constantly tense.

It was fine in the short term. Over the past few months, even a Chosen One had accumulated a lot of fatigue.

"Indeed." Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and smiled. "Wait here; I'll get something to eat."

"Need help?" Shang Jianyao asked with bright eyes.

Jiang Baimian spat. "What are you thinking? I'll go home and see what ingredients there are."

After about 15 minutes, Jiang Baimian returned to Room 14 on the 647th floor. She carried a bowl of noodles, cabbage, tomatoes, eggs, a few cans of meat, and an induction stove.

She put down the things, looked around, and smiled brightly. "We'll cook a feast ourselves!"

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao had already rushed over.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen looked at each other and saw the smile on each other's faces.

He found it rather interesting.

Chapter 313: Growth

On the 647th floor, Room 14.

Long Yuehong held a lunch box and slurped down the tomato omelet noodles that were drenched with braised beef sauce.

"When it's eaten like this... canned food isn't that disgusting anymore..." He expressed his thoughts. With that said, he picked a piece of cabbage that had been soaked in stock.

He found it refreshing and sweet, effectively removing the cloyed taste brought about by the canned meat.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao had already finished his last mouthful of soup and looked at Long Yuehong's lunch box with bright eyes. "You can give me whatever you can't finish."

Long Yuehong immediately fell silent and focused on the noodles.

Jiang Baimian smiled and asked Shang Jianyao, "Still hungry? Shall I get some more food?"

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "There's only enough room for food snatched from others."

"Whoa!" Jiang Baimian ignored him and lowered her head to take a small bite of the fried egg that had been infused with the stock's alluring fragrance.

Bai Chen's appetite couldn't compare to the three of them. Like Shang Jianyao, she had already finished eating and was peeling the remaining tomatoes as an after-meal fruit.

Since it was a feast, it had to look like a feast.

Before long, Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong finished their dinner. They leaned back in their chairs and slumped, unwilling to move further.

"The company is the best after all..." Long Yuehong sighed with emotion.

This was the feeling of home.

"That's right." Jiang Baimian smiled. "I hope you won't be bored after staying at home for too long."

"No, I don't think so..." Long Yuehong's answer became less firm when he recalled his experiences on the surface in the past few months. It wasn't because he felt that the company's entertainment programs were monotonous. Compared to most settlements in the Ashlands, the leisure activities of Pangu Biology's employees were considered varied. However, all of them were very sterile.

Long Yuehong only felt that although he liked to stay at home and only interact with people he was familiar with, he might feel a little stifled and uncomfortable if he couldn't see the blue sky and experience open surroundings. He felt like a bird locked in a cage.

Shang Jianyao added, "As long as he has enough Old World entertainment, he won't be bored. He won't even want to find a girlfriend."

"No way..." Long Yuehong protested weakly. He didn't continue because he was afraid that his team leader and Bai Chen would think that he only wanted to find a girlfriend and that his mind was filled with marriage and children.

Jiang Baimian laughed. "If you can't get more of the Old World's entertainment, it will get boring sooner or later. Sigh, didn't I say? I'm the kind of person who wants to come back after being out for long but will want to go out when I'm back for long. I hope you won't become like me..."

As they jested, the four of them split up to wash the dishes and clean the office. This made Long Yuehong feel calm in both body and mind. Amidst the calmness, an indescribable joy slowly grew and echoed.

I wish I could be like this forever... He silently prayed.

...

After the meal, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong returned to the 495th floor together.

Just as they stepped out of the elevator, they saw their good friend—Yang Zhenyuan—walking over under the sun lamps.

"Ah, are you here to welcome us?" Shang Jianyao was 'shocked.'

Yang Zhenyuan was also surprised. "You guys are finally back!"

There were very few outfield missions inside Pangu Biology that required months. Of course, it might take two years or even longer if they were deployed to certain places to do certain jobs. However, all of these had their excuses.

The Old Task Force was unlike any other; nobody in the neighborhood knew what they did outside.

As Long Yuehong denigrated Shang Jianyao's exaggerated act, he smiled at the tall, muscular, and fair Yang Zhenyuan. "That's right; we're dead beat. We should be able to have a long vacation."

He then asked, "Back to visit your old folks? Where's your wife?"

He still had a deep impression of Zhou Qi, a woman who was ten years older than Yang Zhenyuan. She had come knocking on the door to visit her future husband.

He remembered that they were always together after their marriage. Apart from work situations, it was rare to see only one or the other being absent.

Yang Zhenyuan smiled. "S-she's pregnant. I came back precisely to consult my mother for some experience."

"Congratulations!" Long Yuehong was sincerely happy for his friend.

Shang Jianyao was the same. He even recommended himself. "You can consult me."

"Huh?" Yang Zhenyuan was confused. These are words from a fellow without a spouse?

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, "I have solid theoretical knowledge." This was the confidence stemming from a Life Ritual parishioner.

Upon seeing that Yang Zhenyuan was still a little confused, Long Yuehong laughed and helped Shang Jianyao smooth things over. "He has read Old World books on childbirth."

"Is that so? Do you still have the books?" Yang Zhenyuan came to a realization.

"No, we didn't bring them back." Long Yuehong could already bullshit under his team leader's influence.

Yang Zhenyuan sighed regretfully and smiled at Shang Jianyao. “Then, I’ll consult you in the future.”

“No problem!” Shang Jianyao smiled brightly and stretched out his hands.

Yang Zhenyuan looked at him in confusion and also stretched out his hands uncertainly.

Shang Jianyao clasped both his hands and shook them heavily.

Only then did Yang Zhenyuan realize that Shang Jianyao had changed quite a bit compared to before. It was a little strange.

Maybe it’s because he has encountered too much on the surface... Ever since Yang Zhenyuan graduated and got married, the chances of him interacting with Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong could be counted on one hand. Thus, he didn’t think there was any major problem.

The three of them stood in the corridor and chatted for a while.

As he bade farewell, Yang Zhenyuan sized up Long Yuehong. “You’re much more mature than before.”

“Really?” Long Yuehong was a little delighted.

Yang Zhenyuan nodded seriously. “Much more confident, really.”

“Haha, it might be my tan.” Long Yuehong couldn’t help saying this humbly, but the smile on his face betrayed him.

Beside him, Shang Jianyao didn’t use words to undermine the situation. He only placed his hands by his mouth and forced the corners of his mouth up. This created an exaggerated and comical smile that made Long Yuehong feel a little guilty.

After watching Yang Zhenyuan get into the elevator, the two of them—who no longer needed to wave to express their friendship—turned around and returned home.

...

Zone B, No. 196.

Before the lights were switched off, Shang Jianyao cleaned the cramped room and lay on the wooden bed. He placed the pillow filled with grains vertically against the wall and leaned against it. He then raised his hand and massaged his temples.

In the Sea of Origins, on the island with mountains, rivers, and sunlight.

A pond had already appeared here, and it was surrounded by several acres of farmland with rice and wheat.

At this moment, the wheat was golden yellow, and the rice ears were heavy. It was a scene of harvest.

Above the island floated a green night pearl the size of a fish eye; it emitted specks of light.

Previously, when he passed the security check at the entrance, Shang Jianyao had directly transferred DiMarco's aura—which had solidified in the glass sphere—into his mind world.

In any case, DiMarco was already dead. He didn't have to worry about anyone using this opportunity to 'invade.'

Shang Jianyao first created nine recliners before splitting into eight more of himself.

After they took their seats, the original Shang Jianyao raised his right hand and summoned the green night pearl.

After the pearl flew into his palm and emitted a brighter light than before, the Sea of Origins around the island immediately produced splashing sounds, stirring up a huge wave that was more than ten meters tall.

Within those waves, countless glimmers swelled and expanded, reflecting the different scenes Shang Jianyao had previously experienced.

Destiny Connection—seeing the past of all living beings! This was the ability that DiMarco's residual aura could currently exert.

It could allow Shang Jianyao to recall his various memories in the mind world. After it was fixed to reality, it could allow Shang Jianyao's consciousness to temporarily leave his body and take on the legendary 'ghost' form. It was the state DiMarco had been in back then.

However, there was a time limit and distance restriction.

Without his body's protection, Shang Jianyao's consciousness would be exposed to the natural environment. He would be affected by all kinds of nasty elements. He couldn't last more than three seconds, or he would collapse uncontrollably.

Once the collapse happened, Jiang Baimian guessed that Shang Jianyao would become very weak after his consciousness returned to his body. If it were any worse, he might even become a vegetable.

After his consciousness left his body, Shang Jianyao could directly invade another person's mind world like DiMarco and see their past. This required the target to be within 30 meters of him because his consciousness couldn't exceed this distance from his body.

It was obvious that this was much weaker than DiMarco's usage. This was the case, be it the duration as a consciousness lifeform or the ability's effective range. In addition, Shang Jianyao couldn't use the night pearl to assimilate the target's consciousness and occupy their body.

After the scenes in the gigantic wave appeared, the nine Shang Jianyaos began their work. They were each in charge of an area as they quickly browsed through the corresponding memories.

Soon, they found the target scene after repeatedly narrowing the range.

In the scene, Shang Jianyao dazedly stood in front of his door. A man wearing a dark cap, old leather shoes, a blue top, and black pants was bending down to pick up a metal pipe and a small dart from the ground.

This was the scene where Shang Jianyao was attacked by the Life Ritual parish's Awakened.

Shang Jianyao rewound the memory and realized that a portion was indeed missing.

The corresponding memories had really been deleted. Even Destiny Connection couldn't replicate it.

Shang Jianyao wasn't discouraged. He began to examine the suspect's side profile and back seriously, attempting to find characteristics.

After a while, in order not to waste the green night pearl's power, they took the initiative to end this attempt and fuse back into one.

Shang Jianyao looked back at the harvest scene—an island that was completely different from the past. He smiled brightly and jumped into the Sea of Origins, attempting to swim into the distance again.

Chapter 314: Breakthrough

495th floor, Zone C, Room 11—this was the 'large room' that Long Yuehong had switched his parents to.

Compared to the previous ones, there were two additional small bedrooms here, allowing Long Yuehong's younger brother and sister to finally have their own space.

Long Yuehong had just pushed open the door when he saw his mother—Gu Hong—knitting a sweater with a knitting needle while listening to the radio. His father, Long Dayong, sat beside her and gently clapped along with the music that echoed in the room.

The current radio program's music was of the relaxing genre before lights out.

After Long Dayong and Gu Hong sensed the rotation of the lock, they cast their gazes at the door at the same time. One prepared to curse, and the other prepared to cooperate.

When they saw that it was Long Yuehong at the door, the two of them immediately stood up.

Gu Hong put down the knitting needle in her hand and couldn't help but smile. "You're back? This trip has been really long. For the past few months, I've been afraid that the Security Department would come looking for me. One never visits unless there's something..."

As she spoke, Gu Hong fell silent, and her eyes reddened.

She was a fair and clean middle-aged woman. She had previously permed her hair for the new year and looked rather western.

Long Dayong quickly said, "What are you talking about? Isn't he back safe and sound?" He was about 1.7 meters tall and was considered relatively muscular.

Gu Hong quickly composed herself and walked to the cabinet as she said, "I exchanged for some yarn during the Lunar New Year and knitted a shirt for you. Try it and see if it fits."

Long Yuehong closed his eyes and smiled. "It's already spring."

"It's thin; it can be worn even in spring. Besides, how can we distinguish spring, summer, autumn, and winter in our company?" Gu Hong rambled as she opened the cabinet's door.

Long Yuehong pulled a chair over and sat down. He looked around and said, "Where are they?"

He was asking about his brother and sister.

"At this age, they no longer love their home now that their wings have hardened. You won't be able to see any of them until lights out!" Gu Hong grumbled.

Long Yuehong had nothing to say about this because he didn't like staying at home at that age either. He would rather squat in a corner of the street with Shang Jianyao, Yang Zhenyuan, and the others to listen to a radio program and randomly talk about topics.

He smiled and said, "That's a good thing; they might end up in a relationship."

Gu Hong—who had just taken out the new sweater—was stunned for a moment before hesitantly saying, “Ah, right. The Zhangs’ daughter used to like you. She kept asking when you would return before the New Year, but your father and I couldn’t say for sure. It seems she has a partner.”

Although Long Yuehong was already mentally prepared, he couldn’t help but sigh.

He smiled and sighed. “Let nature take its course when it comes to such matters.”

He was now very certain that the Old Task Force’s missions were very dangerous. He felt that he was bringing the girl harm if he dated her before he completely quit. However, he felt indignant when he thought about how he could accidentally die during a mission while still not having had a first love.

“Let nature take its course...” Gu Hong repeated this phrase and sized up Long Yuehong suspiciously. “Did you suffer a blow outside?”

Long Yuehong fell silent and raised his hand to show the muscles on his arm. “This is called being mature after experiencing plenty.”

Gu Hong glanced at him and threw the thin sweater at him. “You’re better at rhetoric than before...”

Long Yuehong didn’t retort. He took off his coat with a smile and tried on the sweater under his parents’ gazes.

...

In the Sea of Origins, Shang Jianyao swam for a long time. There was still nothing but an ocean ahead.

Not only was he not disappointed, but he also smiled. This meant that he had finally cleared the third island.

Previously, he would return to the original island after swimming for a distance. Now, he had already left its corresponding range.

With a thought, the green night pearl appeared above Shang Jianyao's head. At the same time, he split into nine again and produced loudspeakers and other items to test the changes in his abilities directly.

Through the relentless efforts of the nine Shang Jianyaos as experimental subjects, they came to a preliminary conclusion: Inference Clowning's range had expanded to eight to ten meters. The number of targets that could be affected simultaneously had increased to nine. However, due to the large differences in the targets, the effects wouldn't be ideal if one chose to extract certain collective conditions without targeting them and formulating an explanation in a one-on-one or one-on-two scenario.

Likewise, after using a loudspeaker to enhance his effective range, he could also affect nine targets. However, the targets had to be concentrated in an area with a three-meter radius. The corresponding effects would also decrease sharply beyond that.

The effective range of Corny Person was almost 15 meters. Other than also being able to target nine people at the same time, there weren't many changes.

The range for Hands Immobility increased to 30 meters. Furthermore, it could make different targets lose the ability to complete different actions without any need for uniformity.

These were the results of Shang Jianyao's test in the mind world; it was definitely different from the situation in the real world. After all, he could achieve whatever he wanted here, but the fundamentals wouldn't change.

After finishing this matter, Shang Jianyao felt exhausted, so he left the Sea of Origins.

...

After opening his eyes, Shang Jianyao saw that the corridor lamps outside the room were still lit and hadn't been extinguished.

He picked up a brass key and left Room 196 amidst the soft music coming from the radio. He placed his hands in his pockets and slowly walked to Zone C's Rec Center.

At this moment, it wasn't long before lights out. There weren't that many employees in the Rec Center; there were only two tables of people playing cards while teenagers gathered in the corner to chat.

Shang Jianyao found an empty spot, pulled out a chair, and sat down. He quietly watched everything.

Debates and laughter sounded in his ears. What he saw were faces with different expressions and clothes of similar styles.

Everything was so lively.

Shang Jianyao watched silently. His expression didn't change at all; it was calm and gentle.

After a minute or two, the Rec Center's supervisor—Chen Xianyu—discovered his existence and hobbled over.

"I thought you guys died outside," teased the grizzled old man.

Shang Jianyao glanced at him and smiled. "I saw Chen Xufeng."

Chen Xufeng was planted in Weed City as an intelligence agent by Pangu Biology, and he was also Chen Xianyu's youngest son.

Chen Xianyu's eyes suddenly widened. "Huh? That darn kid is still alive, right?"

Shang Jianyao's expression turned serious as he slowly shook his head.

Chen Xianyu's eyes immediately lost their luster.

"Gotcha." Shang Jianyao smiled again.

"..." Chen Xianyu was first stunned before he grunted. "I knew it. Wouldn't the Security Department inform me if he were to die outside?"

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to speak, he pretended to ask casually, “How’s he now?”

His question was very vague because he knew that his youngest son’s mission was confidential. There were many details that the other party couldn’t reveal even if he wanted to.

“Pretty good. He’s about to be promoted again.” Shang Jianyao also gave an ambiguous answer.

Chen Xianyu clearly relaxed a lot and sat beside Shang Jianyao with a smile. “It seems like you’ve been to many places all these months out there.”

Shang Jianyao looked at the group of card-playing employees and smiled. “They are all very interesting places.”

Chen Xianyu glanced at the teenagers in the corner and chuckled. “Is that so? The nomad settlements I went to back then were each worse than the last.”

Shang Jianyao sincerely replied, “You have to have a pair of eyes that are good at discovering beauty.”

“Where... Where did you learn that from?” Chen Xianyu was peeved and amused.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “My superior, Madam Jiang Baimian.”

The two of them chatted for a while before the card game came to an end. The employees took advantage of the fact that the corridor lamps remained lit and rushed home or to the different public bathrooms amidst laughter.

The entire Rec Center soon became empty and quiet like the coming night.

Shang Jianyao slowly stood up, waved goodbye to Old Chen, and returned to Zone B.

Upon seeing Room 196 approaching, he suddenly looked up at the surveillance camera on the ceiling.

There was no movement there except for the iconic red light.

Shang Jianyao then made a face at it.

Chapter 315: Researcher

Underground building, 349th floor.

Unlike most floors, there were still sporadic street lamps lit up along the corridors even after 9 p.m. It wasn't completely dark and appeared a little dim—it didn't affect the residents' rest.

After Jiang Baimian entered her home in Zone C, Unit 12, she realized that her parents had yet to return. Therefore, she first went to the study and used her father's computer and account to browse all kinds of news from the past few months.

Apart from the matter regarding the Naturalism Church, there's nothing worth paying attention to... There's also no subsequent investigation of the Life Ritual parish... Was it not released online because of confidentiality, or is Old Jiang's authority insufficient? As Jiang Baimian spun the mouse's middle wheel and scrolled down the web page, she sensed three weak electric signals approaching the door from outside.

Three? Jiang Baimian stood up in confusion and walked out of the study.

Just as she opened the door, she saw her father and her mother—Jiang Wenfeng and Xue Sumei. In addition, there was a middle-aged man she wasn't familiar with.

The other party had thick black hair, but it was slightly messy. It was obvious that he was the kind of person who didn't pay attention to his appearance. He also wore a pair of gold-rimmed glasses and had a refined bearing.

“Dad, Mom.” After exchanging greetings, Jiang Baimian cast her gaze at the stranger.

Jiang Wenfeng—whose black hair had some silver strands mixed in—understood what his daughter was alluding to and explained with a smile, “Call him Uncle Mei.”

“Hello, Uncle Mei.” Jiang Baimian had always been obedient in front of her elders.

The middle-aged man smiled and nodded. “It’s Mianmian, right?”

I don’t like being called by my childhood nickname... Jiang Baimian tried her best to maintain her smile and replied in a terse manner.

“She looks great. She seems to be a D7, right?” As the middle-aged man spoke, he cast his gaze at Jiang Wenfeng and Xue Sumei. “If it weren’t for the fact that my child is young and in his teens, I would really want your Mianmian to be my daughter-in-law.”

Jiang Baimian had heard such forms of praise many times, so she was no longer embarrassed.

Xue Sumei was just about to say something polite when the middle-aged Mei suddenly burped. It was as if a lot of gas was surging in his stomach.

He then explained with a bitter smile, “Heh heh, it’s an old problem with my stomach.”

After exchanging a few more pleasantries, the middle-aged Mei waved goodbye to the Jiang family of three and walked to the other end of Zone C.

Jiang Baimian watched his back disappear around the corner and curiously asked, “Dad, why haven’t I seen this Uncle Mei before?”

“It’s strange if you’ve seen him. He’s a recently promoted M1, the deputy director of Vast Obscurity Institute,” Jiang Wenfeng said as he walked into the living room.

M represented management, and M1 was the lowest rank that covered the deputy positions of the various departments and the person-in-charge of important research projects.

Xenny—the Security Department’s deputy minister—and Jiang Baimian’s father, Jiang Wenfeng, were among those ranks.

“Oh, oh, he just moved here.” Jiang Baimian immediately came to a realization. In order not to be nagged by Xue Sumei, she asked, “Where did you guys go? Why are you only back now?”

Jiang Wenfeng—who was in his fifties—glanced at his younger daughter. “Not only are your ears failing, but your memory seems to be failing as well. Have you forgotten that it’s Elder Huang’s birthday today? Every year at this time, we will visit him with you.”

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before she yelped. “I lost track of time.”

Elder Huang’s full name was Huang Renhui. He was a board member of Pangu Biology, the Chief Scientist, and M3 management.

Upon hearing this, Xue Sumei immediately glared at Jiang Baimian. “Look at you. You’re always so muddle-headed. How can you be the team leader of the Investigation Unit for the Cause of the Old World’s Destruction? Aren’t you afraid of harming those team members? It’s better to get a transfer and stay in the company. You’re not young anymore...”

The blood vessels on Jiang Baimian’s forehead throbbed when she heard that. She looked at Jiang Wenfeng pleadingly and shouted softly, “Dad...”

“Ah, what did you say? I didn’t hear you?” Jiang Wenfeng raised his hand and touched his ear. He mimicked Jiang Baimian’s usual behavior perfectly.

Jiang Baimian was peeved and amused. Her mind raced as she asked, “Was that Uncle Mei also a guest at Elder Huang’s? Where’s his wife?”

She knew that this topic was definitely something her mother was interested in.

Xue Sumei fell for it as expected and looked out the window. “I heard that she passed away before the Lunar New Year. Seriously, she couldn’t even wait for Mei Shou’an to be promoted to M1...”

“What does Uncle Mei study?” Jiang Baimian changed the topic to a topic that her father would converse in.

As Jiang Wenfeng sat in the recliner by the window, he smiled and said, “Actually, you met him a few times when you were young. However, it’s been too long, so you definitely don’t remember him. He used to be in botanical science, but he later switched to researching the secrets of the human body. He’s mainly in charge of this at the Vast Obscurity Institute.

“If you go through all kinds of reports, documents, and news, any project that starts with C—followed by numbers—is more or less related to him.”

“No wonder he knows my childhood nickname...” Jiang Baimian came to a realization.

Just as she said that, she suddenly froze.

She recalled something: the experiment that Shang Jianyao participated in as a volunteer was called C-14!

Research on the mysteries of the human body... C-14... Shang Jianyao became an Awakened... Uncle Mei was recently promoted to M1 management... Jiang Baimian combined this information and revealed a thoughtful expression.

Jiang Wenfeng glanced at her and asked, “What’s on your mind?”

“Ah, what did you say?” Jiang Baimian habitually touched her cochlear implant.

Jiang Wenfeng repeated himself angrily.

“I’m wondering if I’ve seen a project that starts with C,” Jiang Baimian replied half-heartedly.

Jiang Wenfeng sighed. “It’s better to find time to implant a cochlear implant into your ear. If you’re really afraid, get a psychiatrist to treat you first.”

Xue Sumei also nagged about this matter.

Jiang Baimian forced a smile and went in circles with her parents. With her EQ and eloquence, she finally passed this hurdle.

...

The next day, Jiang Baimian woke up on time, washed up, and went out. She then took the elevator to the 647th floor.

She didn't relax just because she was on leave. After all, she had nothing to do at home.

After changing into a fitting combat uniform and taking a clean towel, Jiang Baimian turned into the training room that the team often used.

As soon as she walked in, she saw Shang Jianyao standing inverted.

Inverted...

"What's the use of practicing this?" Jiang Baimian asked with a slightly complicated expression. There were more and better ways to train one's balance.

Shang Jianyao lowered his legs, exerted strength with his waist, and stood up. He seriously said, "I'm preparing for the day I encounter an Awakened of the same type. When I can't do anything with my hands, I still have my feet."

Although Jiang Baimian found it indescribably strange, she had to admit that Shang Jianyao's logic was self-consistent.

She deliberated and said, "The better way is to get some weapons with auxiliary chips, like certain modules in Geneva."

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up. "That's right! If I modify one hand into a machine, I won't have to worry about Hands Immobility."

Jiang Baimian instinctively believed that the topic would develop in a very dangerous direction, so she quickly asked about something else. "Didn't you say that you were about to break through the third island?"

She had already confirmed that there were no surveillance cameras or hidden wires in the training room.

"I've already broken through," Shang Jianyao replied in a tone like he was talking about what he had eaten for breakfast.

“What are the changes?” Jiang Baimian asked in pleasant surprise.

Shang Jianyao roughly described his experiment results and said, “The exact numbers can only be determined when Tester Little Red arrives, but they should be within the range I mentioned.”

“Why do you keep bullying Little Red?” Jiang Baimian laughed. “Come, I’ll volunteer.”

“Repeated trials are needed,” Shang Jianyao emphasized.

At this moment, Long Yuehong—who had changed into his training clothes—walked in and asked with a smile, “Why are you guys chatting so happily?”

Just as he said that, he saw Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian cast their gazes at him at the same time.

“W-what do you want?” Long Yuehong took a step back in fright and almost bumped into Bai Chen—who was about to enter.

After a while, the Old Task Force’s team activity ended.

Jiang Baimian nodded and said, “It increased by about 50%.”

Inference Clowning’s exact range was nine meters.

“I wonder what Shang Jianyao’s next island will be like...” Long Yuehong muttered to himself curiously.

Shang Jianyao thought about it seriously and replied, “I think the islands are the ones I should be afraid of.”

“How confident!” Jiang Baimian laughed. “Come, exercise your body and prepare for training!”

This didn't include Bai Chen; the fracture in her shoulder hadn't completely healed. The main reason she came to the training room was to maintain her physical condition.

At the end of the training, Jiang Baimian recalled Uncle Mei she had met last night and turned to look at Shang Jianyao. "Do you still remember who presided over the C-14 project you participated in? Have you met a person by the name 'Mei Shou'an'?"

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, "There was only a bed when I entered. A nurse wearing a mask injected me with anesthetic before I fell asleep and entered Star Cluster Hall. When I woke up, I was questioned and examined by different researchers. However, I don't know what Mei Shou'an looks like."

Why didn't you say so earlier? Jiang Baimian immediately described Mei Shou'an's appearance.

At this moment, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were looking at Shang Jianyao, waiting for his answer. They were rather interested in the research project Shang Jianyao had participated in.

Shang Jianyao quickly said with certainty, "I just flipped through my memories last night. There's no such person."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian didn't press on.

The four of them then separated and headed to the small bathhouse.

After washing themselves and changing their clothes, they met up in the corridor before returning to Room 14 together.

At the door, Jiang Baimian casually checked the mailbox. There was a letter lying inside.

She took it out and saw that the recipient was Shang Jianyao.

"Yours." Jiang Baimian threw the letter to Shang Jianyao as she entered the room. She didn't find this too strange because the Old Task Force's room was Shang Jianyao's 'office.' It was very normal for a letter to be sent here.

Shang Jianyao quickly opened it and glanced at it before calmly saying, “The C-14 project wants me to do a test. This is part of a six-month follow-up observation.”

He had gone to the surface at the half-year mark, so the letter arrived the moment he returned.

Chapter 316: Hypothesis

Underground building, third floor, the place where Shang Jianyao had previously met the psychiatrist.

This time, he didn't turn right along the corridor outside the door. Instead, he entered the true research area through the metal door after being examined by the four security guards in bionic lizard armor.

He soon came to a small room with white walls. There was only a table, four chairs, and a machine that shimmered with a strange red-green glow.

A man sat opposite the table. He looked to be in his thirties and wore heavy black-framed glasses; he looked rather stern.

He pointed opposite him and said, “Sit.”

With that said, he simply introduced himself. “Liu Shiyan.”

“Good morning.” Others could be rude, but Shang Jianyao couldn't.

After he sat down, Liu Shiyan pointed at the many data cables and the various sensors that extended from the instrument on the table. “This is a lie detector. Wear them properly, and we shall begin.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao's eyes instantly lit up, and he excitedly fiddled with the lie detector.

Liu Shiyan did not stop him. He observed Shang Jianyao's actions and occasionally took notes.

Finally, Shang Jianyao put the different sensor devices on the correct spots.

Liu Shiyan looked at him and asked according to procedure, "Have your mental problems worsened recently? In layman's terms, have your brain spasms gotten worse?"

Shang Jianyao stared at the polygraph and truthfully replied, "It's about the same as before. Nothing worse or better."

The lie detector didn't react.

Liu Shiyan didn't completely rely on the detector and asked, "Are you sure?"

"We've already chatted for a while, but did you notice anything abnormal?" Shang Jianyao continued staring at the lie detector.

Liu Shiyan frowned slightly. "Why are you looking at it and not my eyes?"

Shang Jianyao glanced at Liu Shiyan as if he were mentally ill. "It's not like you're the lie detector."

Liu Shiyan opened his mouth and realized that he didn't know how to retort. He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Apart from this, have you sensed anything different about yourself from others?"

"Yes," Shang Jianyao replied frankly. He then stood up and began unbuckling his belt.

"What are you doing?" Liu Shiyan was shocked.

"I'll show you something different from others," Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness. "You can also take off your pants and compete with me."

Liu Shiyan felt a surge of blood rush to his head. He resisted the urge to roar with anger with great difficulty.

He calmed down and said, "I mean: do you have something that others don't or if others have something you don't."

Shang Jianyao regretfully buckled his belt and sat down again. “Clearly, I haven’t exhibited any abnormalities.”

Liu Shiyan looked at the lie detector and saw that it had no reaction. He then lowered his head and recorded this.

“Then, what changes have you felt in the past few months?” he continued asking.

Shang Jianyao began to recall. “My weight has increased by about five kilograms, and I mainly grew muscles...”

“My skin has become more tanned, and my strength has increased...”

“I eat about one-third more than before, and I shit more...”

The blood vessels on Liu Shiyan’s forehead throbbed, but he didn’t interrupt Shang Jianyao’s recount. He dutifully observed the lie detector’s reaction and data and made detailed notes.

“I’ve already happily accepted my current state. When I’m calm, my thinking abilities seem to have improved. When I’m impulsive, my courage is clearly enhanced...” Shang Jianyao spoke seriously about his changes. “To put it simply, I’m stronger.”

Who would be indecisive and cowardly when they are impulsive? That wouldn’t be called being impulsive! Who wouldn’t be able to analyze the pros and cons and search for patterns when they are calm? Liu Shiyan felt that Shang Jianyao was mostly speaking nonsense.

And this nonsense was undoubtedly true.

After a few seconds of silence, Liu Shiyan asked, “Do you have any abnormal abilities that exceed normal humans?”

“This depends on your definition of human.” Shang Jianyao began to debate with the other party. “If you treat mutated humans and smart bots as humans, what I have is within reasonable limits.”

Liu Shiyan felt a headache coming on. “Only ordinary humans.”

“Yes,” Shang Jianyao replied abnormally firmly. “In the field of combat, I can solo two of you or even more.”

Liu Shiyan felt like he couldn't suppress the fire in his heart. He could only pick up the cup in front of him and gulp it down. “I'm referring to superpowers that ordinary humans don't have.”

“No,” Shang Jianyao replied briskly as he looked at the lie detector.

The lie detector didn't change.

Upon seeing this, Liu Shiyan asked about something else.

About ten minutes later, he put down the fountain pen in his hand and said to Shang Jianyao, “The Q&A part ends here. Next is a physical examination.”

As Shang Jianyao took off the various sensors he wore, he asked in anticipation, “Is my condition very stable? Do I still have to seek Dr. Lin for follow-up checks regularly in the future?”

Upon hearing these two questions, Liu Shiyan wanted to say that if Shang Jianyao could maintain his current state in the future, he could cancel the regular mental evaluation and have it done once a year.

However, he suddenly recalled a certain record in the information and probed, “Why did you apply to carry out missions on the surface?”

“To find my missing father,” Shang Jianyao replied frankly.

He's normal... Liu Shiyan heaved a sigh of relief and casually asked, “What else?”

Shang Jianyao's expression immediately turned serious, and his voice deepened. “To save all of humanity!”

“...” Liu Shiyan looked at him and didn't say anything for a long time.

After a while, he raised his hand and pinched his temples. “I suggest you have regular follow-ups. At least once a month.”

“Alright...” Shang Jianyao was rather disappointed.

He then stood up and shook Liu Shiyan’s hand in farewell. Under the guidance of a researcher in a white coat, he entered an abnormally spacious room.

There was the Old World’s latest CT machine here.

In the other nearby rooms was a series of inspection equipment, including but not limited to things like an MRI machine. Shang Jianyao didn’t recognize most of them.

He did the body check-ups according to procedure.

...

On the third floor of the underground building, in a room which could see Shang Jianyao’s check-up.

Mei Shou’an—who was wearing gold-rimmed glasses and had a refined bearing—scratched the black hair on the side of his head and shouted at the door, “Please come in.”

Liu Shiyan then pushed open the door with a stack of documents. He said respectfully, “Director Mei, these are the notes during the interrogation and observations. There’s also the previous records of Volunteer 32.”

In the C-14 project, Shang Jianyao’s number was 32.

“Leave it.” Mei Shou’an looked at the inspection data and the corresponding images on the screen. He thought for a moment and said, “Organize the details regarding Volunteer 32’s past six months and print them out as documents for me.”

“Alright, Director Mei.” Liu Shiyao switched on a nearby computer and got busy. It didn’t take long for him to download the missions and rewards Shang Jianyao had completed and obtained after joining the Old Task Force.

Mei Shou’an took the pile of information and seriously flipped through it for a while. After an unknown period of time, he chuckled and muttered to himself, “What he encountered is quite overboard, huh? There shouldn’t be any type of Awakening ability that can control luck... Whether luck itself exists or not remains to be verified...”

“To be able to survive after encountering so many things and obtain sufficient harvests means that their team is very strong. It’s so strong that it exceeds the model’s predictions...”

As he muttered to himself, Mei Shou’an wrote a sentence on the surface of the information docket: “It’s reasonable to suspect that there are Awakened in this team. The most likely possibility is Volunteer 32.”

He then flipped through Shang Jianyao’s experiment records and the subsequent situation. After all the tests were over, he deliberated and wrote: “Volunteer 32’s logic is intermittent and chaotic, and his thoughts appear jumpy. If we assume that this is a price paid and is related to his Awakening abilities, there’s a high chance that he’s in Master Zhuang’s domain.”

Chapter 317: Chatting Genius

After completing all the checks, Shang Jianyao waited in the lounge for a while and saw the researcher named Liu Shiyao push open the door and enter.

“Our Director Mei wants to have a chat with you.” Liu Shiyao paused for a moment and said, “It’s almost over once you’re done with the chat.”

“That fast?” Shang Jianyao was surprised.

What do you mean by fast? Don’t all the subjects want to leave as soon as possible? Liu Shiyao couldn’t keep up with Shang Jianyao’s train of thought and could only look at him in confusion.

As Shang Jianyao stood up, he said regretfully, “I thought you guys would take care of lunch. I haven’t eaten at your research institute’s cafeteria; I wonder how it is.”

“...” Liu Shiyao finally decided not to respond.

Shang Jianyao looked around and said, "I'll go to the bathroom first."

The lounge had one.

This was a normal request, and it wouldn't take too much time.

Liu Shiyan tersely acknowledged it and said, "I'll wait for you at the door."

Shang Jianyao soon came out of the bathroom and walked to Liu Shiyan's side.

Liu Shiyan led him through the tightly shut doors and arrived at a brightly lit office that had warm hues.

In the office sat a middle-aged man wearing gold-rimmed glasses. His thick, black hair was slightly messy, and he wore a white coat in the same fashion sense as the researchers here.

"Sit." The middle-aged man pointed at the chair opposite the table. "I'm Mei Shou'an, the person-in-charge of the C-14 project."

"Hello," Shang Jianyao replied politely.

After he sat down, Mei Shou'an propped his elbows on the edge of the table and clasped his hands. "Let me give a simple introduction: the C-14 project is mainly related to Awakened. You've experienced so much on the surface, so you should know what an Awakened is."

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao only smile at him without shaking his head or nodding, Mei Shou'an continued, "We believe that an Awakening is actually a special mutation in the human body. It will definitely cause a certain degree of change in a certain part of the body, and this should be discoverable through scientific means. Do you understand what I mean?"

Shang Jianyao smiled and looked at him without any intention of flinching, but he still didn't say anything.

Mei Shou'an maintained his posture and smiled. "Don't feel pressured. The company's attitude toward mutation and Awakening is positive and tolerant. It's not like many factions in many places that believe that this violates nature and is a remnant of the apocalypse that needs to be completely eliminated to welcome the New World's arrival.

"For Awakened, the company has always given them better treatment and arranged better and more important jobs. They are simply required to cooperate with us on a regular basis for some experiments. These experiments are meticulously designed so that the Awakened won't feel insulted or hurt."

After he finished speaking, Shang Jianyao frowned. "I don't quite understand what you're saying. What's the point of telling me this?"

Mei Shou'an's dark-brown eyes behind his glasses quietly looked at Shang Jianyao and stared at him for nearly ten seconds. Finally, he smiled and said, "That's all for today's follow-up, but there will be another one in six months."

Shang Jianyao pointed at himself. "Then, can I leave?"

"Yes." Mei Shou'an nodded.

Shang Jianyao stood up and waved his hand with a smile. "Goodbye."

After watching him leave, Mei Shou'an wrote at the end of a document: "Recommended to be transferred to the secret observation list."

After writing the comment, Mei Shou'an switched on his computer and logged into the corresponding account. He was prepared to submit this file. After all, he needed the other departments' cooperation in the future.

At this moment, he realized that there was an email in his inbox. This came from a figure of authority that he didn't dare slight.

Mei Shou'an opened the email and realized that there was only one simple sentence: "Stop tracking Project C-14's Volunteer 32 in every form."

This... Mei Shou'an frowned and cast his gaze at the document beside him in confusion.

...

After leaving the underground building's research area on the third floor, Shang Jianyao raised his hands and dug his ears. Before long, he took out a lump of cotton from both sides.

"Unfortunately, I don't know lip-reading. I don't even know what he said..." Shang Jianyao muttered to himself and walked into the elevator.

He stuffed the two cotton balls back into his pocket.

The elevator went up for a while before finally arriving at the 647th floor. Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen were waiting in Room 14 as they flipped through some files.

"How was it? Which tests were done, and what questions were asked?" Jiang Baimian—who was slumped in the chair—exerted strength in her waist and jumped up.

As Shang Jianyao closed the Old Task Force's door, he described his experience.

After getting an idea of his and Liu Shiyan's conversation, Jiang Baimian laughed involuntarily. "You'll get beaten up like this!"

"He can't beat me." Shang Jianyao's answer didn't make sense, but he felt empowered to say it.

Jiang Baimian spat. "Besides, how do you know that yours is different from others? Do you have someone as a reference?"

As a Security Department employee who had been outfield many times, she had long become thick-skinned despite her lack of experience in this regard. She was the type of person who could joke around with the old, lewd soldiers.

Of course, when she encountered the experienced Bai Chen, she often didn't know how to respond to the other party's words or be hit in her soft spot. She would have no choice but to change the topic.

Just as she said the words ‘reference,’ Jiang Baimian’s heart suddenly palpitated.

As expected, Shang Jianyao cast his gaze at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong didn’t know whether to retort or be angry.

Fortunately, Jiang Baimian stopped Shang Jianyao’s subsequent words in time. “You saw Mei Shou’an?”

“Yes, I chatted with him after the inspection.” Shang Jianyao nodded.

“What did you talk about?” Jiang Baimian asked.

“I don’t know.” Shang Jianyao shook his head frankly.

?

This answer confused Long Yuehong and Bai Chen.

Jiang Baimian asked in exasperation and amusement, “Didn’t you say that you chatted for a while?”

Shang Jianyao took out the two cotton balls. “Before I went to see him, I found an opportunity to block my ears. I didn’t hear what he said at all.”

Long Yuehong was speechless and curiously asked, “W-why did you block your ears?”

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “Since he’s a scientist who studies the mysteries of the human body and presides over the C-14 project, I can reasonably suspect that he’s also an Awakened. If I block my ears, I won’t have to be afraid of Inference Cloning. I won’t simply become friends with him and tell him everything.”

Jiang Baimian slowly nodded. “That’s true.”

She had to admit that although Shang Jianyao's actions were a little strange, they really had a certain meaning to them.

At this moment, Bai Chen was a little curious. "How did you communicate with him when your ears were blocked? Didn't he notice?"

Shang Jianyao revealed a bright smile. "Most of the time, I only listened and didn't say anything. When I felt that he had come to an end, I would say, 'I don't know what you mean by telling me this.' When he showed an expression that was about right, I would ask, 'Can I leave?'"

Jiang Baimian imagined the scene back then and inexplicably found it funny. "You really are a chatting genius!"

The Old World's entertainment and the relevant documents regarding Jiang Xiaoyue had enriched her vocabulary.

Long Yuehong laughed.

"Weren't you afraid of missing key information? Maybe he would've said something valuable if you continued conversing."

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, "I don't think he will make such a mistake as a scientist presiding over the C-14 project."

That's right... You know how to talk properly this time... Jiang Baimian had just sighed with emotion when she heard Shang Jianyao add, "You can't always judge others by your own standards."

He said this to Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong felt insulted. He then saw Shang Jianyao eagerly ask, "Are you trying to say that you can insult my character, but you can't insult my intelligence? Let's go and have a one-on-one fight?"

Long Yuehong weighed the pros and cons and decided to keep his mouth shut.

Jiang Baimian's eyes darted around as she paced back and forth. "I think it's very likely that the company has already suspected that you're an Awakened. After all, we've done too many things that exceed the standards of a normal four-person team. Furthermore, you've also shown mental problems that match the characteristic of paying a price. They might very well observe you in secret later. You have to be careful.

"However, I think you can completely take this opportunity to expose your identity as an Awakened to the company. You've experienced so much outside, so you should know very well that the various large factions raise Awakened both openly and covertly. The company won't treat you as an experimental subject. Yes, just pay attention to keeping certain things a secret."

"We'll see when the time comes." Shang Jianyao clearly didn't care if the company learned of his identity as an Awakened.

He returned to his seat and flipped through the information he hadn't finished reading.

When it was almost noon, Jiang Baimian switched on her computer and habitually checked her email. She then exclaimed, "Deputy Minister Xenny sent us an email."

Just as she said that, Jiang Baimian clicked open the email and read it. "We are allowed to understand a portion of the information regarding Awakened based on our current clearance."

Upon hearing this, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen stood up. They ran behind Jiang Baimian and looked at her computer screen together.

The content displayed was: "According to all the information we have gathered, Awakened can be roughly divided into four levels: The first is Star Cluster Hall, the second is the Sea of Origins, the third is the Mind Corridor, and the fourth is the New World..."

"The New World level is only our reasonable guess. At present, nobody has truly seen an Awakened who has entered the New World. However, experts at the Mind Corridor level believe that there is a door in the Mind Corridor that leads to the New World. Many religions claim that their leaders have entered the New World and are serving the corresponding Kalendaria..."

Chapter 318: 13 Major Domains

“Above the Mind Corridor is the New World...” Jiang Baimian muttered. She turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao and the others. “Have you thought of anything?”

Shang Jianyao replied with a look of pity, “Poor Yama Tiger.”

Upon hearing the name ‘Yama Tiger,’ Long Yuehong immediately recalled the exploration gains his team leader and Shang Jianyao had shared.

In the forbidden temple on Lake of Wrath’s Lake Heart Island, Yama Tiger—who was sleeping in a coffin—had used his nails to carve out the words ‘A brand new world.’

“So Yama Tiger is saying that he’s trapped in the New World? He has already transcended a Mind Corridor Awakened?” Long Yuehong tried to make a guess.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “It’s quite likely. Do you still remember the piece of paper left behind by Yama Tiger? On it were different numbers and the corresponding symbols. Back then, we speculated that this should be Yama Tiger’s exploration record of the different rooms in the Mind Corridor. The ones with ticks indicate that he had already been there and that there were no major problems, nor were there any significant yields.

“The last is the number 102. It’s the only one without a tick. Back then, we believed that Yama Tiger might’ve obtained something related to the New World while exploring Room 102, which resulted in the fatal accident. Now that I think about it, our guess wasn’t bold enough. Yama Tiger might’ve already found the New World’s door in Room 102 and broken through the Mind Corridor’s restrictions. In the end, he encountered an extremely terrifying matter inside and was trapped somewhere. He couldn’t return, nor could he leave.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian added with a solemn expression, “I even suspect that Yama Tiger’s four words—which he used all his strength to leave behind—are a reminder to the future generations that there’s a problem with the New World and that it’s not trivial. This can be confirmed with this sentence.”

She was referring to a paragraph on the screen.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen looked over and saw a simple sentence: “At present, nobody has really seen an Awakened who has entered the New World.”

Shang Jianyao laughed. “Didn’t many Church leaders also go to the New World to serve the corresponding Kalendaria?”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and asked, “You mean that their current state might be similar to Yama Tiger’s?”

“That depends on whether Yama Tiger is loyal to any Kalendaria,” Shang Jianyao said in a pitying tone again.

Long Yuehong could understand what he meant this time.

In the New World, the treatment might very well be worlds apart if one didn’t come under the auspices of a Kalendaria. Therefore, the various Church leaders should be in a much better state than Yama Tiger.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. “There’s really a huge problem with the New World in the mind domain... I wonder what the problem is...”

She lacked sufficient information to make a guess, so she could only rationally stop the topic and sigh. “From the looks of it, Yama Tiger was much stronger than DiMarco back then.”

“Not necessarily.” Bai Chen shook her head. “DiMarco should’ve been suppressed by Eidolon Nun. Although we don’t know how he was suppressed, we can imagine that his strength and condition were definitely far inferior to his former state.”

Long Yuehong agreed. “Ever since DiMarco was suppressed by Eidolon Nun, the gap between him and Yama Tiger should’ve rapidly widened.”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment. “Indeed. This can be indirect evidence that neither the Underground Ark nor the Lake Heart Island had the upper hand in the Chaotic Era.”

After DiMarco displayed Destiny Connection—which exceeded common sense—the Old Task Force suspected that in the area where Redstone Collection was located before the New Calendar, Lake Heart Island and the Underground Ark weren’t strangers who had nothing to do with each other. The premise of non-aggression was that the two parties had already exchanged blows.

After chatting about this, Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and looked at the computer screen.
“Alright, let’s continue reading.”

As her mouse scrolled down, new content appeared. “An Awakened’s abilities are suspected to be related to the 13 Kalendarium’s domains...

“The thirteen Kalendarium are: Subhuti, who controls January; Dawn, who controls February; Last Man, who controls March; Shadow of Distortion, who controls April; Monitor, who controls May; Golden Scale, who controls June; Double Sun, who controls July; Door of Scorching, who controls August; Mandara, who controls September; Eidolon Nun, who controls October; Shattered Mirror, who controls November; Arbiter of Fate, who controls December; and Master Zhuang, who controls the entire year or Leap Month.

“Among them, the Awakened abilities in the Subhuti domain are roughly distributed in the senses and consciousness. The price paid is related to the mental state, desires, and sensory matters. At the same time, there are Awakened in this domain who can’t lie...

“Awakened in the Dawn domain are related to consciousness and dreams. The known price is abnormalities in the five senses, intermittent comas, and schizophrenia...

“Awakened in the Last Man domain mainly affect memories. They are highly dangerous. At the same time, they also show characteristics that cause problems in one’s body. The current known prices are a lack of self-discipline, memory loss, and sleep disorders...

“Awakened in the Shadow of Distortion domain often make people lose their balance, have problems with their muscles, or carry out strange actions. The price they pay is a language problem and a strong desire to fight. The rest is unknown...

“Awakened in the Monitor domain can control a target’s hobbies and awaken their instincts. The price paid also seems related. For example, permanent changes in one’s sense of aesthetics and hobbies, a lack of fear, or uncontrollable charm...

“Awakened in the Golden Scale domain mainly affect bodies, including paralyzing them. The price they pay is often that their bodies show imbalances, such as a limp or a reduced lung function...

“Awakened in the Double Sun domain mainly interfere with vision and physical abilities. There are also cases where they induce strange reactions in people. The price paid is highly related to sex fetishes, forgetfulness, hair loss, blindness, fear of light, degeneration...

“Awakened in the Door of Scorching domain often show characteristics that affect muscles and minds of others. They also have abilities that give people dementia. The prices paid include very strange situations that they can’t help but dance when they hear music, as well as relatively ordinary situations like muscle weakness, fear of the cold, drowsiness during winter, and unstable emotions. The rest are unknown...

“Awakened in the Mandara domain control desires; they have very strong instincts. The price is often related to two aspects, such as alcohol addiction, sexual addiction, obesity, loss of desires, and loss of feelings...

“The Awakened in Eidolon Nun’s domain mainly affect a target’s emotions. At the same time, they often show signs of being able to sense the other party’s hostility. The price they pay is facial paralysis, hormonal disorder, excessive sensitivity, and can infuriate others when they speak. This is because they are too vigilant. This is all that is known at the moment... (Note: Talking to infuriate others might also be an ability)

“Awakened in the Shattered Mirror domain are good at creating illusions; they can also cause cognitive abnormalities. The price paid is eisoptrophobia, photophobia, hydrophobia, prosopagnosia, and being directionally challenged... (Note: Prices have been revised based on the latest information obtained)

“Awakened in the Arbiter of Fate domain control hearts and breathing. They are highly dangerous. The known price is eye abnormalities and limb paralysis...

“Awakened in the Master Zhuang domain generally affect one’s thoughts and wills. Some can also interfere with the target’s actions. The common prices paid are abnormal thoughts, personality changes, mental problems, psychological diseases, and so on...

“The abilities and prices described above more or less overlap to a certain extent. It can’t be entirely used as a basis for judgment. For example, there are a small number of Awakened who have mental disorders like personality dissociation and bipolar disorder in the Subhuti domain and the Master Zhuang domain. Whether their origins are the same remains to be verified. Perhaps different prices might lead to the same outcome to a certain extent at deeper levels...”

After reading this part, Jiang Baimian turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao. “I now suspect that you are an Awakened in the Master Zhuang domain.”

Although there was more than one domain where Awakened could exhibit signs of jumpy thoughts or a split personality, the domain most compatible with Shang Jianyao's abilities was undoubtedly the Master Zhuang domain.

Shang Jianyao nodded, hugged his right fist with his left hand, and said loudly, "The Perfected Man has no self; the New World is before us."

Good heavens, he's already joined the Eternal Time Church... Jiang Baimian secretly scoffed.

She couldn't be bothered with such matters.

At this moment, they had already flipped to the end of the information provided by the brass.

Jiang Baimian retracted her hand that was holding the mouse and nodded slightly. "I'll print it out later. Everyone, read it a few more times and memorize it. This can save your lives at critical moments."

Although the corresponding abilities and prices in this information were relatively general, it was still very valuable.

After lunch, the four Old Task Force members spontaneously gave up on today's training. They hugged the information and huddled in their seats, reading, memorizing, and discussing it seriously.

They even worked overtime because of this and stayed on the 647th floor until almost 8 p.m. before returning home.

495th floor, Zone B, Room 196.

Shang Jianyao pushed open the door that couldn't be fully opened because of the blocking stove, allowing the street lamps' light to flow in.

He took off his coat and casually closed the door before lying on the bed that could barely allow him to straighten his legs.

As usual, he didn't turn on the lights and allowed himself to be hidden in the silent darkness that the street lamps couldn't illuminate.

In the darkness, he heard a slightly childlike voice. "Good evening, everyone. I'm Newspoint broadcaster, Hou Yi. It's 8 p.m. now..."

"At 10 a.m. this morning, the company's board of directors and vice-president—Ji Ze—inspected the Energy Zone and praised all the employees for their efforts in providing sufficient supplies during the Lunar New Year..."

"According to surface weather observations, the climate has stabilized this year..."

"At 9 a.m. this morning, the Water Conservation Committee announced that the development of the new generation of water filter chips has been completed. It will more effectively reduce all kinds of pollution in water sources..."

"At 6:46 p.m. today, a malignant assault happened on the 532nd floor. It's suspected to be related to a card game debt dispute. Order Supervisory Department Minister, Song Feilong, is urging all employees: Small amount of gambling is entertaining, but excessive gambling harms not only the body, but it also ruins families..."

"The Entertainment Department has begun the 47th Annual Reform Survey on radio programs. All employees are requested to enthusiastically fill out the forms..."

"The spring table tennis tournament is in full swing..."

A familiar voice echoed in the dark room, and Shang Jianyao's expression gradually relaxed.

Chapter 319: Naturalism Church

495th floor, Zone C, Room 11.

In the living room of Long Yuehong's residence—which also served as a master bedroom—the family of five sat in different spots. They listened to the radio and chatted with Long Yuehong about his experiences on the surface.

Of course, Long Yuehong also knew that the review wasn't over. It was still uncertain what could be said and couldn't be said. He could only choose the daily tidbits that he couldn't be faulted at all.

“Brother, have you learned how to cook hotpot?” Long Yuehong’s sister, Long Aihong, asked hopefully.

She was only 16 years old, and she was about 1.7 meters tall. Her long hair, together with her bangs, made her appear childlike. Compared to Long Yuehong, her facial features were clearly better; she was an out-and-out beauty.

Long Yuehong smiled. “We lack the necessary spices. The Supplies Allocation Market lacks most of them.”

Upon seeing his sister’s disappointed expression, Long Yuehong smiled and added, “But we can make a simple version. I’ll go to the market tomorrow to exchange for two large bones to make the soup...”

“Alright!” His younger brother, Long Zhigu, exclaimed excitedly.

Hotpot was something that couldn’t be eaten at the employee cafeteria, and the Long family didn’t know the concept of hotpot.

Long Zhigu was 18 this year and was at the critical stage of taking his university entrance exam. However, he was already three centimeters taller than his elder brother. Thanks to the effects of genetic enhancement, his looks were considered above average in Pangu Biology.

“Not bad, you’ve learned how to cook after a trip.” Gu Hong—who was knitting a sweater—smiled and sighed with emotion as she listened to the radio. “When you get to know other girls in the future, you can have a proper conversation.”

Long Dayong laughed in response. “That’s exactly what I was lacking back then. Your mother shunned me back then because of this. It was only later that I slowly learned how to cook.”

Most of the young, unmarried people in Pangu Biology didn’t know how to cook because they could eat at the employee cafeteria. It was convenient, and it wasn’t too expensive.

Long Yuehong chuckled and said, “The most important thing about hotpot is the stock and seasoning. Everything else is simple...”

He spoke tirelessly and described the few kinds of hotpot he had previously eaten.

Long Zhigu and Long Aihong couldn't help but gulp when they heard that. From time to time, they would take a bite from their malt candy, fluffy pastries, and other snacks.

Recently, they didn't go out after dinner, and it was definitely not because their brother had returned home with a pile of snacks and beverages. It was mainly because they wanted to hear their hero talk about his exciting life on the surface.

At the end of the conversation, Long Yuehong said, "We obtained quite a number of portable computers this time. I've already made a request with the company, hoping to keep one or two for myself. I just don't know if it will be approved."

Although Long Dayong, Gu Hong, and the others had never touched computers, they had seen them in their offices and at school. Hence, they could easily understand what a portable computer was.

"What can we use it for?" Gu Hong asked in confusion. From her point of view, computers were relegated to the office to facilitate work. There was no need for them at home.

Long Zhigu and Long Aihong weren't too excited either. To them, computers were an alien object. They didn't know what they could do with them.

Long Yuehong seemed to see his unworldly past self and smiled. "Zhigu can familiarize himself with computers in advance. It will be easier for him to choose the relevant majors when he enters university. Besides, it can also record radio programs so that you can listen to them repeatedly."

Long Yuehong didn't mention the Old World entertainment because he was worried that it would negatively affect his brother and sister's studies.

He decided to hide the Old World's entertainment information in a relatively obscure location on the computer. He would only let his siblings know about it when they started working in the future.

Upon hearing that they could record radio programs, Long Dayong muttered, "Does it consume a lot of electricity? Our quota isn't that much..."

Even now, they only had one small lamp switched on, mainly using the street lamps' light that shone through the windows.

Long Aihong was excited. "Brother, when can you get it?"

"That depends on the company." Long Yuehong sighed when this matter was mentioned. "Wasn't someone discovered to have secretly brought back a personal item to the company? The reviews will definitely be very strict for the next few months, so it won't be that fast."

"You also know about that matter?" Gu Hong looked up and unconsciously lowered her voice. "I heard from my office that it was an employee from the Security Department named Yan Qing who returned to the company with a recording pen containing cult information. Later, he had a gathering with some people and was caught red-handed during some ritual. Gosh, everyone in the room was naked back then..."

Th-this Naturalism Church believes in the Desire domain's Kalendaria, Mandara? Long Yuehong subconsciously looked around and realized that his sister had turned beet red while his brother was filled with curiosity.

As for Long Dayong, he had long known about it. His expression didn't change.

"Mom, are they really that wild?" Long Zhigu couldn't help but ask.

Gu Hong shot him a glance. "What are you thinking about? They didn't do anything but strip naked and chat in the room. They even prayed."

Why doesn't this sound convincing... Long Yuehong imagined the scene and felt that he didn't believe that those people were solely chatting while naked.

Even if the room was filled with only men or only women, he didn't think that things would be that simple.

Upon seeing her eldest son's disbelief, Gu Hong quickly explained, "In the beginning, I also felt that this was a bluff. However, they later told me that the cult required everyone to find their primitive nature and not be plagued by postnatal things. They believed that only by stripping themselves and returning to nature could they hear the gods' teachings and obtain redemption."

Gu Hong tried her best to recall what she had heard back then and didn't embellish it with her own opinions.

"A strange religion," Long Yuehong commented. This made him unable to determine which Kalendaria the Naturalism Church believed in.

"That's right; they're like lunatics. Aren't they ashamed to strip themselves naked?" Long Dayong quickly expressed his opinion.

Gu Hong glared at him. "Aren't you often half-naked?"

"How can it be the same?" Long Dayong shouted his grievance.

Long Yuehong smiled at his parents and didn't interrupt.

The family had a great time over food and drinks until the lights went out.

As there was a line to his small bathroom, Long Yuehong got a flashlight and walked out the door to head toward the nearest public bathroom.

This was located at the intersection of Zone C and Zone B.

At this moment, most of the employees had washed up and returned to their homes to sleep. Long Yuehong only encountered two to three people on the way.

In the dark corridor, the flashlight's yellowish beam flickered, illuminating the public bathroom's outline.

Long Yuehong was just about to turn right when a figure suddenly appeared in front of him.

The figure hung at the door of the men's bathroom and swayed gently.

If it were in the past, Long Yuehong definitely would've retreated in fear. He might even trip over something and fall to the ground, unable to shout even if he wanted to.

But after all he had experienced, he only felt his hair stand on end. He raised a hand to block in front of him.

Just as he was about to shout, the figure hanging by the men's bathroom door gently swayed and landed in front of him.

Long Yuehong's flashlight shone upward, illuminating a handsome face with sword-like eyebrows, bright eyes, deep facial contours, and masculine facial features.

"..." Long Yuehong was first stunned before he suppressed his anger and roared, "Why are you hanging on the door?"

The figure in front of him was none other than Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao had an earnest expression. "I saw you coming and wanted to greet you."

"Is that called a greeting?" Long Yuehong asked in exasperation.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, "I just find it boring to use the same method to greet others all the time. We have to develop something new. Besides, this can also train your courage and reaction speed."

"Thank you very much! If we were outside, I would've already drawn my gun, alright?" Long Yuehong calmed his nerves a little.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "You won't be able to fire."

Long Yuehong couldn't retort.

After a few seconds, he exhaled and pointed ahead. "Don't block the door."

Shang Jianyao immediately made way.

Long Yuehong originally wanted to walk straight into the bathroom, but he suddenly recalled the Naturalism Church matter that his mother had just shared with him. Therefore, he added, “I have something to tell you later.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao seemed to enter a serious state.

After peeing and washing his hands, Long Yuehong recounted the Naturalism Church’s general philosophy and the strange ritual at a spot not far from the public bathroom. He then asked, “Which Kalendaria do you think they believe in?”

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. “I’m not in the Jiang Baimian mode right now, so I can’t answer you.”

I’m really stupid. Seriously... I shouldn’t have talked to this fellow. I should’ve just gone to the office for a group discussion tomorrow... Long Yuehong slowly exhaled and waved his hand. “I’m going back to sleep.”

As he spoke, his flashlight shone at the corridor leading to Zone C.

Suddenly, a figure flashed past a distant intersection.

Under the weak light from the flashlight, Long Yuehong saw that the other party was stark naked.

It was a man.

“Uh...” Long Yuehong turned to look at Shang Jianyao. “Did you see that?”

Shang Jianyao had his eyes closed as he shook his head. “No, I’m afraid of getting a sty.”

Chapter 320: Like a Dream

Long Yuehong’s first reaction was to believe that Shang Jianyao really didn’t see it. His second reaction was to come to a realization: How do you know that what I saw will give you a sty if you didn’t see anything?

Therefore, he ignored Shang Jianyao's words, frowned, and muttered to himself, "Could this be a Naturalism Church parishioner who slipped through the net?"

"What a lack of civility," Shang Jianyao commented, nothing but whistling in the wind.

Long Yuehong shone the flashlight at the distant intersection and said with uncertainty, "Could it be a sudden mental illness?"

As a company with a large population, a few people in Pangu Biology would have mental problems every year. It was not strange for such people to do anything.

"It's also possible that all his clothes were stolen." Shang Jianyao raised another possibility.

Long Yuehong glanced at him. "Do you think we're outside?"

Vicious crimes in Pangu Biology were often crimes of passion. There had never been cases of snatching other people's clothes. If there was, there was also a premise—the criminal had a mental illness.

Shang Jianyao didn't answer Long Yuehong's question and smiled. "It's not too far from your house."

Huh? In the beginning, Long Yuehong didn't understand what Shang Jianyao meant. However, he soon figured out the main point Shang Jianyao wanted to express.

The person suspected to be a Naturalism Church parishioner had entered a room in Zone C, one that wasn't that far from his home.

Shang Jianyao could already sense all human consciousness within 30 meters.

Long Yuehong's heart immediately palpitated as his mind entered a highly tense state.

"Report to the Order Supervisory Department?" he asked in deliberation as he shone the flashlight down the dark corridor.

Shang Jianyao patted the flashlight in his right hand with his left palm. “Good idea.”

Long Yuehong exhaled. “Then, let’s go over now.”

The Order Supervisory Department on this floor was beside Zone C’s Rec Center.

Shang Jianyao nodded and thoughtfully said, “I recalled something.”

“What?” Long Yuehong subconsciously asked.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “Back then, Uncle Shen wanted to go to the Order Supervisory Department to report the Life Ritual parish. However, he immediately became a Heartless after entering...”

This caused Long Yuehong’s hair to stand on end. He felt like a shadow had descended from the sky and enveloped him. He reluctantly said, “It’s different this time, right? The Naturalism Church has already suffered a serious blow.”

He didn’t want to pretend that he didn’t see anything and return home as if nothing had happened because the place where the person lived was really too close to his home.

It was very easy to get caught in the crossfire.

“I’m just reminding you to be careful.” Shang Jianyao seemed to have returned to a normal state. With that said, he walked to the distant intersection with a flashlight.

Long Yuehong quickly followed. During this process, he subconsciously stretched his hand to his waist, but he realized that there was no familiar Ice Moss pistol or United 202.

In the heavy darkness, two flashlight beams illuminated the road ahead. The surroundings couldn’t be considered quiet, and the employees—who had just laid in bed and hadn’t fallen asleep—occasionally whispered.

As they walked, Long Yuehong suddenly felt that something was amiss. “This isn’t the way to the Order Supervisory Department...”

The paths in the underground building weren't complicated.

Shang Jianyao swung the flashlight and smiled. "Let's find that person first and talk to him."

"That person?" As Long Yuehong asked, he already understood who Shang Jianyao was referring to—the person suspected to be a Naturalism Church parishioner.

He thoughtfully asked, "You want to know why he joined the Naturalism Church and if there's any way to save him?"

It was only then that he could decide whether to report it to the Order Supervisory Department.

"I want to ask what the Naturalism Church's Holy Communion is." Shang Jianyao turned his head to glance at Long Yuehong as if his question was very strange.

As expected of you... Long Yuehong sighed, but he still felt that Shang Jianyao had shared some of his thoughts.

As they spoke, they arrived at a room.

The number plate on the door was 23.

495th floor, Zone C, Room 23.

The windows here were covered by thick curtains without any gaps.

"Here?" Long Yuehong suppressed his voice and asked.

Shang Jianyao nodded and stretched his body before saying to Long Yuehong, "Stay a distance away and provide support."

This time, his voice was so deep and solemn that it didn't allow for any protest.

“Uh, alright.” Long Yuehong took a few steps back.

After he stopped, Shang Jianyao bent his finger and knocked on Room 23’s door three times.

After a brief silence, a male voice sounded anxiously. “Who is it?”

“Shang Jianyao.” Shang Jianyao politely introduced himself.

“I-I don’t think I know you,” said the male voice behind the door in confusion.

“It’s fine. We’ll know each other from now on,” Shang Jianyao said with a smile.

The man behind the door fell silent for a few seconds. “What do you want? I’ll call for the Order Supervisors!”

Shang Jianyao patted the flashlight in his right hand with his left palm. “Sure, sure.”

The male voice behind the door trembled after a while before asking, “W-what do you want?”

“I saw you on the way and felt that you weren’t in the right state. I wanted to ask if you needed help.” Shang Jianyao assumed a warm demeanor.

The male voice behind the door suddenly became a little shrill. “No, I’m fine. You can go back now.”

“Really?” Shang Jianyao looked like he didn’t believe him.

The man behind the door seemed to be sobbing. “Really, I’m really fine. Go back quickly. Go back.”

As Shang Jianyao listened, the flashlight in his hand moved down and shone at the crack at the bottom of the door.

In the yellowish light, there was no black figure in the gap.

A few steps away, Long Yuehong quickly recalled who lived in this room as he listened to Shang Jianyao's conversation with the man behind the door.

As an old resident of Zone C, he wasn't too unfamiliar with this area even though his family didn't stay at this end of the corridor.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Long Yuehong's gaze suddenly froze as he blurted out, "Nobody lives in this room!"

He remembered that several rooms in this row hadn't been assigned!

After scaring himself, Long Yuehong quickly added, "It was like this before we left. I don't know now."

They had been out for months, so it was normal for the company's internal distribution of rooms to change.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly and knocked on Room 23's door with a smile. "I heard that nobody lives here?"

There was silence behind the door. Nobody replied.

Shang Jianyao didn't ask any further. He turned around and walked back to Long Yuehong's side. Then, he calmly said, "To the Order Supervisory Department."

"Alright," Long Yuehong replied reflexively.

After walking out of the corridor, he suddenly reacted and asked, "Why didn't you continue asking? Why didn't you just open the door and enter?"

As Shang Jianyao swung the flashlight and watched the yellow beam flick around, he calmly said, "The human consciousness inside has vanished."

“This...” Long Yuehong felt his blood run cold.

He didn’t ask any further and followed Shang Jianyao to the Order Supervisory Room beside the Rec Center.

As long-term residents of this floor, they knew the two Order Supervisors on night duty; they weren’t strangers at all.

After exchanging greetings, Shang Jianyao said, “When we were using the bathroom, we saw someone running naked along the corridor.”

After finishing the case recount, he added, “How vulgar!”

“Running naked?” One of the Order Supervisors seemed to recall something, and his expression became a little solemn. “Did you see which room he entered?”

Long Yuehong was just about to answer when Shang Jianyao shook his head. “No.”

“Then, I’ll contact the higher-ups to check the surveillance cameras.” The Order Supervisor from before nodded and said, “Go back first. Don’t worry, it’s nothing serious.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao immediately turned around and left without any hesitation.

Long Yuehong followed beside him and asked in confusion, “Why didn’t you say Room 23?”

Shang Jianyao’s expression was abnormally calm. “To send them to their deaths?”

“That’s true...” Long Yuehong came to a realization. “Let them report it and get the higher-ups to investigate.”

After separating from Shang Jianyao and returning to his home, Long Yuehong washed up and lay on the upper bunk while his younger brother took the bottom.

He listened to the street outside, wanting to wait for an outcome.

However, the night remained ever so peaceful.

Long Yuehong barely fell asleep after an unknown period of time.

...

The next morning, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong arrived at Room 14 on the 647th floor in an uneventful manner.

Jiang Baimian—who was staring at the computer screen—looked up at them and asked in confusion, “Why did the higher-ups suddenly send an email asking us to collectively do a mental status evaluation?”

Although this was a process that every field team and company would complete after they returned, under normal circumstances, nobody would rush them. The team leaders would schedule their team’s appointments.

Jiang Baimian originally planned on letting Long Yuehong and the others meet the psychiatrist after the review. Otherwise, she wouldn’t know what to say or what not to say. Who knew that she would suddenly receive such an email?

This made her feel like her team’s mental problems were serious and that the higher-ups knew about them.

Long Yuehong thought for a moment and spoke before Shang Jianyao could. “It might be related to our experience last night.”

He quickly recounted the matter regarding their encounter with the Naturalism Church last night.

“What has this got to do with evaluating our mental states?” Bai Chen felt that these two matters couldn’t be related.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged her words. “Maybe the higher-ups discovered that there was nobody running naked after checking the surveillance cameras. Shang Jianyao was talking to the wall back then...”

“Uh... Team Leader, don't scare me.” Long Yuehong couldn't help but tremble.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “What are you afraid of? It's not like you haven't experienced illusions before.”

At this point, she slowly exhaled. “Why are so many things happening after our return...”

Shang Jianyao cast his gaze at Long Yuehong.

Bai Chen resisted the urge to turn her neck.

Long Yuehong quickly defended himself. “It's not like I caused the problem with the Life Ritual Church.”

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao revealed a thoughtful expression.

“What are you thinking about?” Jiang Baimian probed.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly and replied seriously, “I'm considering a better new name for myself.”