

## **Ad Infinitum 411**

Chapter 411: Tacit Understanding in Private

If he had said this to anyone else, Jiang Baimian would definitely criticize Shang Jianyao for asking a stupid question. But since the question was directed at Wang Fugui, she only smiled and watched without stopping him.

Would such a lone hunter—who could survive anywhere—lack clothes and food?

Wang Fugui was stunned for a second before smiling awkwardly. “I have three sets of the same clothes and pants.”

Shang Jianyao looked like he was about to give a round of applause as he praised, “Your hobby is really special.”

Is this a hobby? This is a habit! You make it sound like something... Wang Fugui couldn't help but mutter inwardly.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian smiled and answered his initial question. “It's best if you can exchange those items for Oray. We definitely won't cut out your commission. If not, it's fine. We have our own channels in First City.”

The batch of items they had obtained this time came from the deceased Ruin Hunters. They were mainly firearms and ammunition.

Firearms had always been a form of currency in the Ashlands. The Blackshirts would definitely welcome such items as payment.

Although this wasn't much, every bit helped in repaying the debt for the Old Task Force. The only inconvenient thing was that they occupied more space. The Old Task Force carried quite a lot of things themselves.

Wang Fugui nodded. “Every bit counts. I'll try to help deal with it.”

He looked around and maintained his smile. “I heard from the surviving hunters that the white wolf escaped into a cave. That cave is very large, and there’s a large amount of human food stored inside. Also, there are many exits.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t respond directly and only added, “One of the exits has already collapsed from an explosion. Many areas in the cave should’ve been buried.”

Seemingly playing a role, Shang Jianyao then looked at Wang Fugui and said, “Let’s not beat around the bush. What are you trying to say?”

This time, he switched to Ashlandic to enhance his delivery of an Old World meme.

Wang Fugui smiled. “You can definitely tell that there might be considerable secrets hidden in that cave; it might also lead to some unknown base. Once you find it, it will be a bountiful harvest. It might even exceed the value of the white wolf itself. Heh heh, this can also allow me to experience the mutated creature’s strange charm. My friends and I plan on exploring in a few days. Do you want to join us?”

He exuded enough kindness to indicate that he was willing to cooperate with the Old Task Force.

“We had this plan to begin with, but there’s no need for everyone to go together.” Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said, “We don’t want much; we mainly want the various pieces of possible information. You can also get a copy.”

As she spoke, she laughed. “There’s definitely plenty of supplies and information there. I believe it should satisfy everyone.”

She had no intention of cooperating with Wang Fugui and the others, but she also expressed the Old Task Force’s openness and drew the bottom line that was unlikely to cause any conflict.

Wang Fugui nodded with a smile. “That’s right. Such ruins can’t be emptied without a year or two.”

The two parties had a certain level of tacit understanding on this matter.

Wang Fugui looked back at the castle's main building and curiously said, "You actually didn't restrain those survivors and forbid them from telling others about their experiences. With the strength you show, it's very likely that they will obey."

Jiang Baimian smiled and exclaimed, "I was too flustered back then and forgot about this matter."

Wang Fugui looked at her deeply and smiled. "I've already helped you with the matter. Otherwise, the garrison in the camp would also learn of it and attract First City's involvement. Their elite team won't be weaker than yours."

"Thank you." Jiang Baimian's smile was abnormally sincere.

Wang Fugui didn't say anything else. After exchanging a few pleasantries, he turned around and walked back to the castle's main building.

Long Yuehong watched Wang Fugui leave and asked curiously, "Team Leader, why didn't you warn the survivors back then?"

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and smiled leisurely. "Who knows what secrets and dangers there are in such a place? Isn't it good to have these powerful lone rangers and First City's elite team help us to scout ahead? It's hard for a large number of troops to enter the mountains. Before the target location's shocking secret is exposed, nobody should be able to stop us from exploring. Sigh, it's a pity that Wang Fugui doesn't think the same way..."

Upon seeing his team leader's charming smile, Long Yuehong felt like she had grown horns, spread her wings, and raised her tail.

This time, Shang Jianyao didn't clap for Jiang Baimian. His attention was focused on Coss Bar and other places. At the same time, he touched his stomach with one hand as a hint.

"It's almost time for dinner..." Jiang Baimian understood immediately and looked up at the sky.

At this moment, another figure walked to their parking spot. It was Waite, who had confirmed that he had lost all his companions.

This Ruin Hunter had already shaved his beard clean. His brownish-yellow hair had clearly been combed, and he looked much smarter than before.

He bowed solemnly toward Jiang Baimian and the others. “Thank you.”

Jiang Baimian raised her eyebrows. “Two of your companions died at our hands.”

Waite sighed and said, “In the beginning, I also hated you a little for not holding back. However, I calmed down and thought about it. I felt that if it were me, I wouldn’t have been able to take such matters into consideration in that situation. I would’ve chosen to prioritize my safety. Wang is right. The one who really killed them was the white wolf, not you. If I want revenge, I have to figure out who my real enemy is.”

Shang Jianyao held his stomach and helped explain, “There is a common saying in the Ashlands: Every injustice has its perpetrator, and every debt has its debtor.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “I hope the others can be as rational as you.”

Waite didn’t continue the topic and said, “I thank you because you agreed that I could take back what they left behind and have them retained as spoils of war. I thank you on behalf of myself and their families.”

When cleaning up the battlefield, Jiang Baimian had the deceased’s companions collect the remains. If there was indeed no one to claim the remains, they were designated to the Old Task Force as spoils of war.

Under those circumstances, nobody dared to pretend to be the deceased’s companions in front of them.

Long Yuehong couldn’t help but interject: “I hope those items can be returned to their relatives.”

Waite nodded. “I’ll leave this place early in the morning and bring the items back before returning to explore the cave with Wang and the others.”

“Good luck.” Jiang Baimian wasn’t stingy with her blessings.

After sending Waite off, the Old Task Force went to Coss Bar and enjoyed a barbecue meal.

The meat that remained in the advance base camp wasn't too good, but the tastes of the plants obtained from the mountains effectively masked the abnormal smells. Shang Jianyao and the others still ate with relish.

"It's too dry." Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion.

After leaving the bar and returning to the parking lot, Jiang Baimian deliberately fell behind a few steps and walked alongside Long Yuehong. She casually asked, "After finishing off that group of Ruin Hunters, I noticed that your condition wasn't right. Did something happen?"

Long Yuehong fell silent for a few seconds before talking about Bob. He mentioned his family situation, his ideals, and 'aspirations.' Finally, he said, "In the end, he died under my gun..."

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "Killing people you know and them being okay people is definitely different from killing strangers or bad people. I can understand your feelings, but I can only tell you that there was nothing wrong with your final choice in that situation."

At this point, Jiang Baimian chuckled. "Are you sad for Bob's parents, brother, and sister? But why don't you think about how your father, mother, brother, and sister would react if you hesitated and died under his gun?"

Long Yuehong's expression immediately changed.

Jiang Baimian continued, "Therefore, you have to work hard to survive for them and be ruthless when facing anything."

Long Yuehong fell silent again. After more than ten seconds, he said, "Team Leader, I roughly understand. I'll quickly gather myself."

"That's good." Jiang Baimian didn't say anything else. She smiled and quickened her pace to catch up to Bai Chen.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao deliberately slowed down and walked alongside Long Yuehong.

“What do you want?” Long Yuehong wore a suspicious look. Could it be that this fellow wants to counsel me?

With a beaming smile, Shang Jianyao replied, “To mock you.”

He then looked at Long Yuehong and said, “Haha. Haha. Haha.”

After three laughs, Shang Jianyao immediately distanced himself from Long Yuehong.

“...” Long Yuehong gritted his teeth and resisted the urge to curse.

After this matter, he realized that his condition had inexplicably improved.

...

At noon the next day, the Old Task Force quintet entered Coss Bar again. At a glance, they saw Wang Fugui again.

Wang Fugui was sitting with a few Ruin Hunters, discussing something.

After discovering the Old Task Force, Wang Fugui smiled and greeted them. “Why didn’t you leave anyone to guard the car? You have so many supplies, and some people might take the risk. The alarm and surveillance cameras can’t stop them.”

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, “I can give them a 50-meter head start.”

Chapter 412: Late Night

Shang Jianyao’s answer wasn’t at all what Wang Fugui had expected. He was momentarily at a loss for words.

Fortunately, Shang Jianyao had already ignored him. He glanced at the Ruin Hunters beside him and retracted his gaze.

At the same time, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen also took the opportunity to openly size up the people sitting with Wang Fugui while they conversed.

Among them, the one that left the deepest impression on Long Yuehong was a man with long limbs.

He had brown hair and blue eyes. He looked rather muscular and wore a black leather coat that he zipped high up. He was bundled up tightly, but he still appeared to be suffering from extreme cold.

It had to be known that it was already midsummer. Even if the temperature in the mountains was lower than in other places, a normal human wearing a long T-shirt was sufficient.

He's too weak? He's previously injured? Long Yuehong muttered to himself.

The other three Ruin Hunters didn't have any obvious characteristics, but their clothes and expressions were much better than most of the people in the advance base camp. It was obvious that they were doing well.

The other lone rangers that Wang Fugui had mentioned? Jiang Baimian nodded at them, retracted her gaze, and sat at the bar counter.

They came to Coss Bar to settle lunch. This time, they hadn't brought much food with them.

After Long Yuehong sat down, he suppressed his voice and asked, "Do you think Wang Fugui is an Awakened?"

It was obvious that Wang Fugui had never done any genetic enhancement or attempted any mechanical or electronic modifications. For him to be able to do well as a lone Hunter and be evaluated by Waite as terrifyingly powerful, he should more or less exceed ordinary people.

After eliminating the first two possibilities, there were only two answers—mutation and Awakening. But based on external appearances, the probability of Wang Fugui being a Subhuman wasn't high.

“If so, what price did he pay?” Bai Chen asked in a whisper.

Wang Fugui’s words and actions were no different from a normal person’s, so it was impossible to tell what price he had paid.

“It might be a price that’s relatively more hidden.” Jiang Baimian offered her thoughts.

Shang Jianyao immediately echoed, “Maybe it’s a sexual deviancy—he likes animals.”

He had a serious expression.

This was clearly inspired by an Awakened from the Rootless caravan. It underwent some changes after considering their current situation of chasing the white wolf.

“No.” Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen shook their heads at the same time.

This was a woman’s intuition. They could sense that Wang Fugui admired and yearned for the opposite sex. However, this lone Hunter was very restrained and polite, which made him less detestable.

As they casually discussed, the four Old Task Force members ate their lunch today.

A certain wild plant’s roots—which were filled with starch—were roasted to a fragrant and sticky state. Many palm-sized fish from a stream were fried until they were crisp and alluring. The oil used came from prey with inferior meat quality. Some relatively common wild vegetables were washed and placed there...

After lunch, Jiang Baimian and the others stood up one after another. They got Geneva—who had charged up—and went to the third floor of the castle’s main building.

This was where the survivors previously received treatment.

Fortunately, the white wolf didn’t have any need for coins or food supplies. It didn’t deprive them of their items, allowing them to afford medical help and not be chased out.



At a glance, Jiang Baimian found Roen.

The Ruin Hunter immediately jogged over and asked obsequiously, “Do you need anything from me?”

As his ribs were injured, his running posture was a little strange.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Have you seen a Hunter named Ferrington?”

This was one of the Old Task Force’s targets—the Ruin Hunter who knew the Mirror Church’s situation.

After Shang Jianyao finished describing Ferrington’s appearance, Roen shook his head. “I saw him before I was controlled by the white wolf. He was also looking for the white wolf, but I never encountered him again.”

Does this mean that Ferrington wasn’t ‘charmed’ by the white wolf and didn’t become an attendant? Jiang Baimian looked around and signaled Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Shang Jianyao to interrogate the other survivors.

After some inquiries, Long Yuehong walked to the antepenultimate target.

It was a Ruin Hunter who had barely survived a gunshot to his abdomen. He lay there, his lips slightly pale. He wasn’t in a good state of mind.

“Have you seen such a hunter? He has gray hair, dark-brown eyes, and likes to use shotguns...” Long Yuehong described Ferrington’s situation in a methodological manner.

The eyes of the Ruin Hunter on the bed flickered slightly. “Yes.”

“When?” Long Yuehong perked up.

The Ruin Hunter subconsciously wanted to say that he needed to pay for the information, but he then recalled the other party's strength and his situation. Therefore, he corrected himself. "When I was controlled by the white wolf."

He didn't want his injuries to worsen and be too injured to be saved.

"Huh?" Long Yuehong was surprised and delighted.

Jiang Baimian and Geneva approached.

The Ruin Hunter paused and continued, "The white wolf made us guards to watch the different areas. I remember I was guarding the cave that night. At an intersection, I saw this person trying to enter secretly. I-I fired at him and tried to kill him. He was so scared that he ran into another path. He didn't appear again after that."

Jiang Baimian quietly listened and asked, "In other words, he was never controlled by the white wolf?"

"Yes." The Ruin Hunter gave a very definite answer.

Jiang Baimian then asked, "How did you see him in the cave?"

"There were fire torches," replied the Ruin Hunter. "We used flashlights in the beginning, but the battery ran out."

At this moment, Shang Jianyao got an answer from a survivor which described a similar situation.

He had been guarding another intersection.

Combining the duo's descriptions, Jiang Baimian preliminarily judged that Ferrington had entered the cave from another entrance. He was then discovered by the 'guards' and rushed into a fork in a panic.

Nobody knew where the fork led.

After returning to the parking lot, Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion. “It seems like we have to make a trip into the cave after all.”

She deliberated for a few seconds before looking at Geneva. “On the one hand, we want lone Hunters like Wang Fugui to ‘help’ scout the way. On the other hand, we have to make some preparations. For example, we can first reconnoiter using homemade, simplified drones and remote control vehicles before exploring deeper. This way, we can better prevent the collapse caused by the previous explosion.”

“Yes, I’ll try my best to gather the electronic components and attempt to do something with the equipment I have.” Geneva spread out his right hand. “But you have to give me enough Oray.”

As a law-abiding smart bot, was he to rob a person without paying for it?

“I’ll help.” Shang Jianyao was very interested in this and looked eager.

...

Night fell again, and a bright moon appeared in the sky.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who were on duty—patrolled one side each. They saw many vehicles shaking under the street lamps’ light, and they heard faint or hoarse moans coming from all directions.

A phrase suddenly surfaced in Jiang Baimian’s mind: “Carpe diem.”

At this moment, she saw Shang Jianyao stop and look at the moon in the sky before opening his mouth.

Don’t tell me he wants to imitate these people? Isn’t that too embarrassing? Jiang Baimian thought in confusion and amusement.

The next second, Shang Jianyao cried out, “Howl!”

This howl traveled very far in the forest pregnant with silence as if the white wolf had already infiltrated the advance base camp.

In an instant, all the moaning stopped. All the shaking subsided, leaving only the damped oscillations.

The atmosphere suddenly became tense. To the people in the advance base camp who had yet to sleep, the wolf howl now was completely different from the previous howl. It was clearly close and required vigilance.

“...” Jiang Baimian was speechless. She wanted to turn her head away and pretend not to know the fellow.

Unfortunately, after the battle with the white wolf, the Old Task Force had already made a name for themselves in this advance base camp. Everyone knew that they had four members and a robot and that they were very strong.

“You’ll get beaten up for that!” Jiang Baimian quickly stopped Shang Jianyao from letting out a second howl.

Although Shang Jianyao was unwilling, he still chose to obey orders.

Flashlight beams appeared and shone everywhere, but they didn’t discover any dangerous wildlife. After this, the moans and shaking vehicles reduced in number.

After the alert was completely removed, Jiang Baimian suppressed her voice and asked Shang Jianyao, “Why did you suddenly howl like a wolf?”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “I’m mimicking the white wolf’s howl to see if I can seduce the Nightmare Horse over.”

Seduce... Jiang Baimian’s expression froze, and the corners of her mouth twitched unconsciously.

“Do you have Bewitchment abilities?” she asked in exasperation and amusement.

“No,” Shang Jianyao replied honestly.

“Then, isn’t that the end of it?” Jiang Baimian ended the conversation without hesitation.

The moon gradually rose as time passed, and all kinds of commotion slowly disappeared.

Jiang Baimian looked around and finally felt the extreme serenity of the night.

Serenity... She suddenly frowned.

In the advance base camp, Ruin Hunters would leave people on night duty. The First City troops stationed here would also send soldiers to patrol the area and prevent dangerous creatures from entering. Therefore, it was impossible for extreme serenity to exist.

Something happened? But I didn’t sense anything... Could it be that something happened to me? Th-this is a dream? The Nightmare Horse really came? No, the Nightmare Horse can only make the dream realistic and prevent people from sleeping! Could it be Slumber Cat? The Nightmare Horse’s companion, Slumber Cat, is also here? Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she began considering how to wake herself up.

At this moment, she felt the ground tremble visibly, and the entire mountain range shook violently.

At this moment, it was as if doomsday had arrived.

As she swayed, Jiang Baimian heard the commotion around her and saw Shang Jianyao’s face.

He grabbed Jiang Baimian’s shoulders and excitedly said, “Nightmare Horse and Ghost Cat are here!”

Chapter 413: Strange Discovery

Jiang Baimian quickly calmed down and asked, “Can you sense where they are?”

In the mountains, there were too many creatures emitting electric signals, including those that had reached a certain size. Therefore, she couldn’t tell which two corresponded to the Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat.

Just as she said that, Jiang Baimian regretted it. This was because the Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat were mutated creatures and not humans. Shang Jianyao might not be able to sense their consciousness.

The next second, Shang Jianyao retracted his hands and wore the Ring of Blindness on his left wrist. He then took off his tactical backpack and took out a blue and white loudspeaker.

Right on the heels of that, he switched on the loudspeaker and brought it to his mouth as he made the accessory weave from black hair light up like fire.

Jiang Baimian didn't stop him and watched the development with anticipation.

Time seemed to stop at this moment. After a few seconds, Shang Jianyao's voice sounded in a certain area outside the camp and echoed around. "Both of you should know that: I'm Xiaochong's friend. I want to play games with Xiaochong. So..."

Using Inference Clowning... He can now sense Nightmare Horse's and Slumber Cat's consciousness? As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, she realized that many people in the camp had been woken up or interrupted from what they were doing.

This included Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava.

On the fourth floor of the castle's main building, Wang Fugui—who was staying in the hotel's guest room—listened for a while. He frowned and walked to the window before casting his gaze at the Old Task Force.

With the help of the street lamps, he saw Shang Jianyao and the loudspeaker in Shang Jianyao's hands, and his expression became increasingly confused.

He had no idea who this fellow was talking to, what the meaning of those words was, or who Xiaochong was.

Tracing the direction where Shang Jianyao was facing, Wang Fugui looked out of the camp from a vantage point.

Under the moonlight, the darkness was hazy as if there was nothing.

Shang Jianyao waited for a while and repeated his words twice before finally putting down the loudspeaker in his hand. He said regretfully, “Their intelligence might still be a little problematic. They might not understand what I mean.”

Hoping that they can understand you only proves that there’s something more wrong with your brain... You aren’t Xiaochong... As Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly, she looked at Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava—who had opened the car doors. She then asked Shang Jianyao, “You can sense their consciousness?”

“Normally not.” Shang Jianyao raised his left hand and showed the Ring of Blindness on his wrist. “I can use it to sense about 30 meters in that direction. There are two consciousnesses that don’t belong to humans but are relatively close. They are different from other creatures because other creatures don’t emit a clear consciousness that can be sensed.”

Thirty meters was within the range of Shang Jianyao’s Hands Immobility. However, he couldn’t discover the target without the Ring of Blindness.

One can sense the consciousness of mutated creatures at the Mind Corridor level? Jiang Baimian nodded in enlightenment.

Back when they ambushed the white wolf, she had Shang Jianyao use the Ring of Blindness to sense the situation far away. It wasn’t because she had confirmed this but because she wanted to prevent any accidents.

Humans were often the cause of accidents. Of course, she also had the intention of testing if the Ring of Blindness could sense the consciousness of mutated creatures.

“What about now? Are they still there?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “When I shouted for the second time, they retreated beyond 30 meters. Sigh, they might not even be able to differentiate between which are their hands and which are their feet. Hands Immobility didn’t have any effect.”

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?” Jiang Baimian wanted to say, “Why didn’t you chase after them?” However, she felt that it was safer for Old Ge to do it.

Shang Jianyao replied truthfully, “I thought they were going to inform Xiaochong, but it doesn’t seem to be the case.”

Xiaochong might still be playing games in the city... Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled and said, “Little Red, Little White, take out the two exoskeletons. Hey, Old Ge, and I will chase after them and take a look. I hope we can intercept them in time.”

In the mountains, it was almost impossible to catch up to two mutated creatures without an exoskeleton at this distance.

“Then, I’ll go over first,” Geneva said without hesitation.

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian had the same thoughts.

After hearing Shang Jianyao’s description of the location, Geneva immediately rushed to the castle wall, pressed his hand, and leaped into the air. Under the patrol soldier’s dumbfounded gaze, he jumped out and ran to the target destination.

At this moment, the door to the advance base camp was closed.

On the fourth floor of the castle’s main building, Wang Fugui was also stunned for a few seconds when he saw this.

“It’s good to have a robot...” He sighed with envy.

Under the moonlight, he observed Geneva’s whereabouts and realized that it had stopped dozens of meters away, searching for something. After a while, Wang Fugui—who had gained nothing—turned his gaze back and looked at the area where the Old Task Force had parked their cars.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian had just put on their military exoskeletons and were stretching their limbs to familiarize themselves with their augmented states.

“This...” Wang Fugui’s eyes nearly popped out. He knew that this team had a background, was strong, and had plenty of equipment. However, he didn’t expect them to have so much equipment and be so strong.



Those aren't ancient models... What kind of people are they... Wang Fugui watched Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao run to the castle wall. They also pressed their hands down and jumped up, flying over the four-meter wall.

The patrolling soldiers watched blankly and didn't dare to stop them. They felt that this was the most humiliating day for the castle walls.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao quickly arrived beside Geneva.

"There are hoofprints, but they disappeared into the forest." Geneva pointed at the dense forest.

It was overgrown with weeds and had a complicated environment. It was very difficult to find any clues.

"Forget it." Jiang Baimian exhaled.

With Geneva around, there was still a chance of tracking them down. However, it would take an unknown amount of time.

It was impossible for the Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat to remain motionless. Given the time, they would've long escaped the tracking range.

Jiang Baimian then glanced around before looking at Shang Jianyao. "Don't tell me the Nightmare Horse was really tricked by the white wolf howl you imitated?"

There was still a certain difference between a human's wolf howl and a wolf's howl. If the Nightmare Horse really fell for it, it would be a disgrace to the world of mutated creatures.

"There's no other possibility." Shang Jianyao had a proud expression.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it and muttered to herself in confusion, "But why did it let the Slumber Cat deal with me and not you?"

The quack—no, the neigh was clearly Shang Jianyao!

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said in all seriousness, “Maybe you’re more charming.”

“Huh?” No matter how smart Jiang Baimian was, she couldn’t understand what this fellow meant.

Genava couldn’t figure it out either.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “The Nightmare Horse heard the white wolf’s howl and rushed over, but it didn’t discover the target. And in the place where the sound came from, you were the most charming. It believed that you had abducted the white wolf and prevented it from having sexy times with it, so it began targeting you. You probably can guess; it’s not very smart. After all, it’s only a horse.”

“...” On the one hand, Jiang Baimian found this explanation ridiculous. On the other hand, she inexplicably suspected that this might be the truth.

After a few seconds, she exhaled and said, “Go back. I hope they can understand that you’re Xiaochong’s friend.”

The three of them returned to the castle wall that served as the advance base camp’s defense again. They pressed their hands down and easily jumped in.

The patrolling soldiers pretended not to see anything.

After discussing the situation with Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao took off their exoskeletons and continued their night duty.

After switching a few rounds, a faint glow lit up the sky.

After breakfast, the Old Task Force members separately questioned everyone in the advance base camp to see if they had seen creatures similar to the Nightmare Horse.

This time, everyone was polite and respectful to them.

“Have you seen a horse? It’s black and not as tall as me. The color of its mane and tail seem to look like coagulated blood. Its eyes are about the same...” After asking around, Shang Jianyao found the hotel owner.

They had never actually seen the Nightmare Horse. They got the descriptions of the Nightmare Horse’s appearance from Qiao Chu.

The hotel owner was also not young—his sideburns were already white. He asked in confusion, “Yes, did you lose it?”

“Where did you see it?” Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Jiang Baimian also perked up.

The boss recalled and said, “It looks relatively special, so it left a deep impression on me. There was a period of time when we were lacking livestock to transport supplies to the mountains. We got the nomads from the surrounding settlements to help, and someone led such a horse over. It worked pretty hard, and I wanted to buy it. However, that person refused.”

It was difficult for cars to traverse the mountains, so they could only rely on livestock to transport supplies or have humans carry them.

“It was led away when the job was done,” the boss continued. “I paid a total of 15 Oray coins.”

Jiang Baimian was abnormally confused and wondered if her boss had mistaken her for a horse. The Nightmare Horse actually came to the advance base camp to do manual labor and transport supplies? That’s a rather powerful mutated creature!

After Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao repeatedly made confirmations, the boss was certain that it was that horse.

“I understand!” Shang Jianyao suddenly clenched his right fist and punched his left palm.

“What?” Jiang Baimian subconsciously asked.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “It was working to earn money.”

“Huh? Why?” Jiang Baimian was completely confused.

With a gratified expression, Shang Jianyao said, “To pay for Xiaochong’s rent, electricity, and water.”

He seemed to think that bringing up a pet to this extent was already enviable.

“...” Although this was very strange, it didn’t seem impossible for it to happen to strange creatures. However, the mighty king of the Heartless also had to pay rent, water, and electricity?

At this moment, the hotel owner looked at them in confusion. “Is the Xiaochong you’re talking about the person who led it here?”

Chapter 414: Situation

Jiang Baimian instinctively believed that the person who had sent the Nightmare Horse over wasn’t Xiaochong. Her reason was that a fellow like Xiaochong—who was too lazy to go out and only wanted to game—wouldn’t personally busy himself with such matters apart from the occasional need to relax and get some exercise.

Shang Jianyao clearly felt the same.

“What does that person look like?” Jiang Baimian asked.

The hotel owner recalled and said, “He’s about the same height as me. His hair was black, knotted, and greasy... He looked very muscular. He wore a white singlet inside and a thin black coat outside... His beard was thick and dense, and the hair on the back of his hand was very long. He wore a pair of sunglasses that covered his eyes...”

“He’s very introverted, reticent, and very quiet. Uh, I don’t think he spoke much. I offered 10 Oray, but he directly shook his head. I offered 15 Oray, and he nodded and left the horse behind. Then, he came over and took the horse away according to the date I gave him...”

The more Jiang Baimian listened, the more she felt that something was amiss. Relying on the auxiliary chip in the biological prosthetic limb, she quickly recalled a person with a similar image.

It wasn't a normal human, but a Heartless!

In the basement of Swamp Ruin 1's City Intelligence Network Control Center, near the room where Xiaochong was playing games, the Old Task Force had once encountered a woman—a Superior Heartless—giving birth. The male Heartless guarding her was rather similar to the hotel owner's description, be it in terms of appearance or clothes.

Could it be that the hotel owner completed the transaction with a Superior Heartless? Although that person can't speak or understand overly complicated sentences, he seems to understand prices... Was this knowledge specially instilled in him by Xiaochong? Jiang Baimian's eyes flickered as she felt that this matter was extremely ridiculous and terrifying.

What happened around Xiaochong was always incredulous.

After some thought, Jiang Baimian decided not to tell the boss the truth. First, there was no need. Second, she might scare him.

Normal humans couldn't accept the fact that they had made a deal with a Heartless face-to-face.

She deliberated for a moment and said, "That's not Xiaochong. Xiaochong is a child."

The hotel owner revealed a look of enlightenment. "Did that person rent out the horse to pay for the child's rent, electricity, water, and food?"

Although that's true, it's much more complicated than you imagine... Jiang Baimian muttered and nodded. "We'll ask other Hunters to see if anyone has seen the person and the horse."

The hotel owner was stunned for a moment before saying, "He's missing? Could it be that white wolf?"

He imagined that Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were searching for friends who had yet to return home.

"Something like that," Jiang Baimian replied perfunctorily before walking out of the hotel.

In the following period of time, the Old Task Force got similar answers from the Ruin Hunters and camp personnel.

Some people had seen a creature like the Nightmare Horse carrying supplies and walking on the mountain roads.

Someone had seen it eat grass in the castle's main building where livestock were reared. It maintained a certain distance from other oxen and horses.

Someone had encountered the man in a white singlet and black sunglasses. He was in a rush, and it was unknown where he was heading...

Although Long Yuehong had already corroborated this indirectly and felt that it should be the case, he still wore an incredulous expression. "A powerful mutated creature actually works for money by moving supplies to the camp..."

If all the mutated creatures, Superior Heartless, and even the powerful Awakened and genetically modified could be so down-to-earth and obedient, the situation in the Ashlands would be many times better.

At that time, the dawn of the New World should appear.

Yes, Long Yuehong still believed that the New World was a fable—a symbol. It represented the point when humans completely walked out of the shadows of the Old World's destruction, established order and civilization, and had a new home.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, "If it wasn't happening to Xiaochong's pet, I would've thought that someone was joking."

When she was still a wilderness nomad and Ruin Hunter, she had also seen some mutated creatures. They were rather terrifying and aggressive. They were completely incompatible with human society and would never work to earn a living.

Back when she encountered the Nightmare Horse for the first time and heard Qiao Chu mention the corresponding matter, Bai Chen also felt that this mutated creature was abnormally dangerous. It was the kind that she had to hide from as far as possible and not antagonize it for no reason.

Today, the Nightmare Horse's mysterious and terrifying image had mostly collapsed in her heart.

Shang Jianyao nodded in relief. "This means that Xiaochong is a law-abiding person. He just doesn't like to go out and only likes to play games."

You really treat Xiaochong as a friend... Don't forget that the Heartless disease epidemic in First City might be related to Xiaochong... Jiang Baimian didn't finish her sentence and tersely acknowledged it. "15 Oray won't last long in First City. Could Nightmare Horse and the Superior Heartless be working in some settlements and advance base camps in the mountains?"

The Slumber Cat's image was too terrifying and unsuitable for human contact.

"Maybe." Long Yuehong couldn't deny this guess.

Bai Chen recalled and said, "We'll expand the scope of our inquiries then."

In any case, the Old Task Force would have to search for other cave entrances in the future. It was very likely that they would pass by other wilderness nomad settlements that led to the advance base camp.

"Yes." Jiang Baimian nodded. "Actually, there's another train of thought."

"What?" Genava tried his best to gather data in an attempt to establish Jiang Baimian's analysis pattern.

Jiang Baimian said, "From the looks of it, apart from Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat, a batch of Superior Heartless followed Xiaochong when he left Swamp Ruin 1. Where do you think these Superior Heartless are?"

"Working for money!" Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation. Without waiting for Jiang Baimian to glare at him, he continued, "From the situation back then, a portion of the Superior Heartless will

stay by Xiaochong's side to guard and protect him. The other portion will go out to search for food and control the ordinary Heartless in the city ruin."

"Yes." Jiang Baimian exhaled. "Therefore, there should be a few Superior Heartless around Xiaochong now. Although they have a certain level of intelligence, their level of intelligence is clearly not high. Most of the time, they will still be controlled by instinct. When we return to First City, we can attempt to use this point to fish them out and find Xiaochong."

This... Team Leader even wants to deceive Superior Heartless... Long Yuehong was secretly speechless, but he felt that this plan was very feasible.

Shang Jianyao then smiled. "Maybe there's no need to go through so much trouble. Maybe Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat will tell Xiaochong that I'm looking for him, and then he will come to see me personally."

"I hope so," Jiang Baimian replied perfunctorily. She then revealed a thoughtful expression. "From last night's situation, the range of Slumber Cat's abilities isn't much larger than Shang Jianyao's. The Nightmare Horse's abilities aren't as terrifying as we imagined..."

After discussing this topic for a while, Genava and Shang Jianyao continued studying the various electronic components they could currently gather.

This was something they had exchanged for with their previous war spoils.

Long Yuehong busied himself for a while before standing up in boredom. He had always said that his results were ordinary—it was the truth.

He had always been middle of the road in university, and he didn't like his major much. The reason he chose to apply for it was that it was relatively easier to be assigned a better job.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and smiled. "There's no need for so many people, and there's no point in you staying here. Why don't you go around the camp? Who knows, you might be able to obtain some information."

"Alright." Long Yuehong happened to be entertaining the idea of walking about, so he quickly agreed.



Due to the principle of not letting any of her team members be alone, she got Bai Chen to go with him.

When they entered the castle's main building, a young man with flaxen hair and eyes of the same color walked out and brushed past them.

At this moment, Long Yuehong seemed to sense a gaze filled with hatred. He subconsciously turned his head to look at the other party, who lowered his head and quickly left.

As Long Yuehong wore a confused expression, Bai Chen whispered, "I remember him. His companion died at our hands."

"Is that so..." Long Yuehong came to a realization.

Bai Chen looked back and calmly asked, "Should we find an opportunity to kill him?"

"Uh... No, there's no need." Long Yuehong quickly shook his head. He felt that the Old Task Force didn't need to be afraid of such a level of hatred. They had enough strength to protect themselves, so there was no need to engage in further slaughtering.

Bai Chen didn't say anything else and took the lead to enter the castle's main building.

...

When Waite returned from First City a few days later, Roen and the other survivors' injuries were almost healed. They split up and led the Old Task Force and the lone Hunters to search for other cave entrances in the forest.

In the afternoon, a deep cave appeared in front of them.

Waite immediately took out a remote-controlled car from his backpack and sent it into the cave.

"We purposely got him to get this from First City." Wang Fugui turned his head and smiled at Jiang Baimian and the others.

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao also took off his tactical backpack and took out a simple but industrial-looking black remote-controlled car.

“We made this ourselves.” Shang Jianyao looked at Wang Fugui and smiled.

“...” Wang Fugui opened his mouth but didn’t say a word.

Chapter 415: Exit

The two small remote-controlled cars carrying simple equipment drove into the cave one after another.

Wang Fugui, Waite, and the others immediately took out an old and barely usable portable computer. They received the transmitted images and seriously observed every detail.

After glancing at their screens, Jiang Baimian couldn’t help but take out the latest portable computer produced by Mechanical Paradise from her tactical backpack. She then connected the computer to Genava and shared her ‘footage.’

When Wang Fugui and the others saw this, their expressions became a little complicated.

“This passage isn’t purely natural; there are traces of artificial modification.” Jiang Baimian focused her attention on the computer screen.

In the scene, a deep path quietly stretched out in the darkness. There were obvious signs of reinforcement on both sides and above.

“But it’s not wide enough.” Long Yuehong voiced his thoughts.

In other words, cars couldn’t drive through the cave’s passage.

Bai Chen deliberated and said, “Maybe this is a backup passage that’s only catered for humans.”

“Yes, this is only one of the entrances.” Jiang Baimian nodded in agreement.

Regardless, she could already make a formal judgment. The cave where the white wolf usually lived originated from a particular human project.

As for whether it was built before the Old World was destroyed or secretly excavated by First City or some faction in recent years, Jiang Baimian couldn't give an affirmative answer for the time being.

Beside them, Shang Jianyao watched the computer screen as he excitedly controlled the remote-controlled car, not giving Geneva a chance to interfere.

After reaching the maximum range of their investigations and confirming that there were no buried explosives in that area and that there were no other problems, the two teams entered the cave one after another.

Their vehicles were left outside, hidden at places unknown to the other party.

The Old Task Force naturally wouldn't place valuables like the exoskeletons, radio transceiver, and other valuables in the car. If they were taken away, they might not have the time to chase after the perpetrator.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Geneva each carried a crate and different weapons as they followed Shang Jianyao.

This made Wang Fugui, Waite, and the others' eyelids twitch. Could it be that this team has three military exoskeletons?

They were sent to First City by a large faction to cause destruction?

This cave has always been their destination?

The two teams walked to the edge of the explored area. Therefore, they began a new round of reconnaissance.

After repeating the same process twice, the Old Task Force and Wang Fugui's team arrived at a fork in the road.

After using the flashlight beam to scan the area, Jiang Baimian turned her head and questioned the survivor, Roen. "Which path did you take previously?"

Roen recalled and said, "Left."

At this moment, Wang Fugui looked over with the flashlight and said, "How about we split up and explore? This will save time."

In order to express his sincerity, he said, "You guys can choose first."

Rather friendly... Long Yuehong muttered silently. At this moment, he felt rather cold because they were deep inside the cave. He was no longer basking in the midsummer heat.

This feeling made Long Yuehong subconsciously glance at a certain person in Wang Fugui's team.

The man in a black leather coat in the advance base camp was indeed trembling. With his long limbs and muscular body, he looked rather out of place.

He's really afraid of the cold... Long Yuehong retracted his gaze. After these days of contact and inquiries, he had already figured out that the man's name was Gray.

"Alright." Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and accepted Wang Fugui's suggestion.

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao volunteered. "I'll choose."

"Which side are you choosing?" Wang Fugui asked curiously and seriously.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "I'll leave it to the heavens and the Kalendaria to decide."

As he spoke, he had already taken out a 5-Cass copper coin from his pocket with his free hand.

Jiang Baimian controlled her expression and silently watched this fellow perform. Frankly speaking, she didn't understand what Shang Jianyao wanted to do.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were the same.

Genava inferred many outcomes, but he didn't find them Shang Jianyao's style.

Flipping a coin to decide on such an important matter? Wang Fugui, Waite, Gray, and the others looked at each other and found it very odd.

The next second, Shang Jianyao—who handed the remote control to Genava—tossed the coin.

With a ping, the coin tumbled down and was caught by Shang Jianyao in midair.

“Let me see what it is.” He looked around and smiled as he released his right hand that was covering the coin. Shang Jianyao then showed the coin and announced the final outcome: “Tails—left!”

With that said, he put away the coin and walked into the left corridor without looking back.

Jiang Baimian followed with a strange expression.

After the Old Task Force and Roen's flashlight beam disappeared from the area, Wang Fugui sighed with emotion. “He actually left it to the Kalendaria to decide... Are they some pious believers of a particular Kalendaria?”

Gray—who was very afraid of the cold—fell silent for a moment before he spoke through chattering teeth. “Shall we take the left as well?”

“Not for the time being.” Wang Fugui led the way to the right.

Waite, Gray, and the other two—as well as the guide—hesitated for two seconds before choosing to follow behind him.

In the left corridor, Jiang Baimian caught up to Shang Jianyao and glanced at him. “If it was heads, would you take the right?”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “The answer won’t change because I didn’t say what heads and tails represented before I threw the coin.”

I knew it... Jiang Baimian helplessly rolled her eyes. She had already noticed the problem: Shang Jianyao was purely teasing Wang Fugui and the others!

Long Yuehong—who was behind Jiang Baimian—was stunned for a second and couldn’t help but criticize inwardly. If you do that in front of pious Kalendaria believers, you will be tied up and burned at the stake... He clearly said that he would leave it to the Kalendaria to decide, but he had already set his mind on it. This is sacrilege against a deity and treating himself as a Kalendaria!

The survivor in the Old Task Force’s group—Roan—gradually felt that this group of people was abnormal. How dare he joke in such a serious and dangerous situation?

Jiang Baimian then ignored Shang Jianyao. She held the flashlight and led the team behind Genava as they continued deeper into the cave.

Before long, they arrived at the area where Roan described the pile of human food.

After careful inspection, Jiang Baimian confirmed that these were produced by the Old World from the date of production.

“It seems like it’s indeed related to the Old World.” Just as she said that, she sensed many bioelectric signals.

After a silent count, Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao.

“Wang Fugui and the others.” Shang Jianyao was rather certain. He determined it from the numbers.

Soon, Wang Fugui, Waite, Gray, and the others slowly walked out from another passage with flashlights. They weren’t surprised to see the Old Task Force at all.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, “Eh, one of you is missing.”

“...” Wang Fugui’s heart tightened as he quickly looked back at his teammates. He did a headcount several times and confirmed that nobody had disappeared.

Could it be that the missing person has already disappeared from my memories? Just as this thought flashed through Wang Fugui and the others’ minds, they heard Shang Jianyao laugh.

“I’m joking.”

At this moment, even someone as good-tempered as Wang Fugui couldn’t help but grind his teeth.

Jiang Baimian was just about to help Shang Jianyao smooth things over when the latter seriously explained, “I mainly want to remind you that you might encounter strange situations in the future and might forget something. It’s best if you keep the key information on you by writing it down now.”

He then added, “We’ve already discovered the feces of a canine creature here.”

This meant that they were getting closer and closer to the white wolf.

Wang Fugui nodded thoughtfully and said to Waite, Gray, and the others, “Make a simple record of the current situation and compare it regularly.”

The two teams set off again after the makeshift team was done with this matter. Sometimes they traveled side by side, and sometimes they split up.

Relying on the reconnaissance car and their chips, Jiang Baimian and Genova gradually drew the routes they had already taken in their minds.

After eliminating the repetitive paths, they entered a more spacious passage with Wang Fugui’s team that seemed conducive for driving.

The traces of human activity here were even more obvious. The ground was also made of concrete.

They occasionally discovered canine feces as they walked forward. After Genova analyzed and compared them, he confirmed that they came from the same creature.

There was a high chance that it was the white wolf.

“It eats a lot and shits a lot.” Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion.

This was a meaningful sentence. Several people in Wang Fugui’s team frowned when they heard this.

This passage was very long, and the two teams had to stop from time to time to use the remote-controlled cars to investigate the situation ahead. Therefore, they only saw the exit when it was nighttime.

Outside the exit was an Old World park overgrown with weeds. There was a man-made lake with relatively good scenery.

Starlight fell from the sky, illuminating the high-rise buildings that had ‘sunk’ in the darkness in front of Jiang Baimian and the others.

They came to a city that had been buried in history for countless years.

In a daze, Long Yuehong seemed to have returned to the past. It was as though he was seeing Swamp Ruin 1 after passing through the tunnel.

He still couldn’t forget the shock he received from the civilization of an old era.

When he subconsciously turned to look at his teammate, he realized that his team leader was frowning at the stars in the black night.

Jiang Baimian relied on the auxiliary chip to make a simple calculation and obtained a relatively vague location. She then instructed Geneva with a solemn expression, “Switch to radio mode.”

As Wang Fugui and the others looked over in confusion, Geneva completed the module switch as instructed.

Jiang Baimian then exhaled and said, “Tune to 119.2 MHz.”



This frequency corresponded to the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station.

Jiang Baimian suspected that they might've already entered Wasteland Ruin 13.

The Old World city in front of them might very well be Wasteland Ruin 13!

Chapter 416: The Dao Is in Electricity

Jiang Baimian's reaction surprised Wang Fugui, Waite, Gray, and the two survivors who acted as guides. They were completely confused.

It wasn't easy for them to traverse the passage and leave the cave to find a city ruin. At this moment, they weren't carefully investigating their surroundings; instead, they got a radio and tuned in to some broadcast?

Was this how a normal person would act?

Could it be that this team has OCD and has to listen to a certain radio station at this time? No, that radio station is run by the faction behind them. Listening to the radio is actually receiving orders? Or is this the price that October Xue paid? Wang Fugui could be considered knowledgeable and quickly found two reasonable explanations.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen had a deep impression of the 119.2 MHz frequency range. Although they didn't directly encounter the silent and terrifying influence, they still felt like they were listening to a ghost story when Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao recounted it later.

Furthermore, this was closely related to Wasteland Ruin 13, which was guarded by First City's army!

Don't tell me we're that unlucky... We clearly entered the mountain and didn't head northeast... Long Yuehong originally imagined they would find a secret base and dig up some valuable information and items. The former could be reported to the company and be exchanged for contribution points, while the latter could be used to pay off debts. Who knew that the ruins discovered by the team were indeed a secret, but they were so secretive that the danger level skyrocketed.

At this moment, Genova played the information he received through a speaker. “Everyone, today, we will mainly talk about the maintenance of refrigerators and the Yin-Yang changes in the Dao...”

A familiar magnetic voice echoed, making Jiang Baimian’s scalp tingle. She then said to Genova, “Change locations and monitor it again. Figure out the approximate distance between the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station and us.”

Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs... Wang Fugui and the others became more and more confused as they listened in on the conversation. They could understand every word, but they couldn’t figure out the meaning when strung together.

Due to this confusion, they cautiously stayed put and didn’t force their way out of the park to explore the city ruin.

Jiang Baimian’s rather solemn expression made them feel that things might not be that simple.

They had similar experiences in the past. It was better not to take the risk at a time like this.

After a while, Genova—who had switched positions—walked back and spoke in a standard male voice. “That radio station isn’t more than two kilometers away from us.”

This... Although Long Yuehong was a little prepared for this answer, his eyelids twitched, and his heart raced.

They had really entered Wasteland Ruin 13, and they were near the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station!

Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao—who wasn’t afraid but was filled with excitement and curiosity—and exhaled. “Evacuate. We’ll reconsider it at length.”

She meant that they should return to the advance base camp first and report the matter here to the company to see what the company knew about Wasteland Ruin 13 and what kind of feedback they would provide. They would then decide if they wanted to come again based on the feedback. If they were coming again, they had to be prepared and choose the day to carry out any subsequent explorations.

Of course, if the danger was too great, they would stop there and then and get the company to send someone else.

“Evacuate...” Wang Fugui muttered to himself as he acutely sensed the dangerous undercurrents in the air. He quickly asked the Old Task Force, “Is there a problem here?”

“I wonder if you’ve heard of Wasteland Ruin 13?” As Wang Fugui had always been very friendly, Jiang Baimian decided to warn them. This wouldn’t bring any harm to the Old Task Force.

Gray—who was standing beside Wang Fugui—was shocked when he heard Jiang Baimian’s question. “Is this Wasteland Ruin 13?”

As a lone Hunter who lived in the area around First City all year round, he knew a lot about the rumors regarding Wasteland Ruin 13.

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded solemnly. “From the looks of it, the white wolf probably ran out from here.”

This could explain why such a mutated creature with special abilities had suddenly appeared in the North Shore Mountains.

Upon hearing that the white wolf was related to Wasteland Ruin 13, Wang Fugui and the others nodded slightly, finding it very reasonable.

Nothing would appear without a reason.

At the same time, they recalled the distance and direction they walked in, and they increasingly felt that they were in Wasteland Ruin 13.

“I don’t think I need to say anything about how dangerous this place is, right? Even if you want to take a risk and take a gamble, I suggest you return first and come again after making preparations.” Jiang Baimian didn’t waste her breath and directly gave the Old Task Force’s opinion. She didn’t care if the lone Hunters took it to heart.

The Old Task Force had already done their best to offer such advice!

Wang Fugui pondered for a moment and said to Waite, Gray, and the others, “I don’t think we should be rash either. Let’s talk about it when we return. Such a large city ruin won’t run away on its own.”

Waite, Gray, and the others were a little hesitant. After all, there was a high chance that Wasteland Ruin 13 had abnormally rich supplies and astronomically priced information.

The ones that usually stopped Ruin Hunters from exploring this area weren’t the terrifying rumors. It was the First City army that had sealed off this area.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly smiled. “First City’s officers are so stupid. They actually didn’t send anyone to guard the area here.”

Upon hearing this, Waite and the others’ expressions changed.

If First City’s army controlled the city ruin, it was impossible for them not to send troops to guard such an entrance! Since there was none, it meant that their lockdown was only limited to the periphery. It meant that their exploration of Wasteland Ruin 13 wasn’t that deep.

Even First City’s army could only do so much, so it was obvious how dangerous Wasteland Ruin 13 was!

“Alright, let’s return first.” Waite immediately agreed with Wang Fugui’s suggestion.

Gray and the others also stopped hesitating.

The two teams turned around and walked toward the tunnel entrance. At this moment, they realized that there was a metal door that was originally open but had been opened by someone.

As they walked, Wang Fugui asked sincerely, “Is the radio station you were listening to related to this place?”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Yes, a very dangerous radio station. It’s located here.”

“It can affect everyone who hears the radio station’s content...” Shang Jianyao described the situation in a tone as though he was retelling a ghost tale.

Wang Fugui, Gray, and Waite’s eyes immediately widened.

Either they had never heard of such a matter, or they had only learned of it through some rumors. They had never encountered such a matter personally.

The radio station’s owner was mysterious and powerful. Just the thought of it made one tremble.

As the two teams silently advanced, a voice suddenly sounded from Shang Jianyao’s tactical backpack. “Hey, I really miss you...”

A moving and sad song quickly echoed.

Long Yuehong looked over in surprise and confusion and subconsciously asked Shang Jianyao, “Why are you suddenly playing the song?”

Is it really a good idea to do so in such an atmosphere?

Shang Jianyao—who was being stared at—wasn’t embarrassed. Instead, he was pleasantly surprised. “My small speaker is alive! It can play music by itself!”

As he spoke, he tried to take off his tactical backpack.

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian—who believed that Shang Jianyao wouldn’t lie about such matters—had a slight change in expression. She suddenly thought of something, and she quickly cast her gaze at Genava.

The red light in Genava’s eyes flickered as he came to a halt.

In the endless night with scattering starlight, in the desolate environment filled with weeds, he opened his mouth and emitted a voice that had a smiling tone. “The Dao is in circuits, circuit boards, and electrical appliances.”

This voice was completely different from Genova's original slightly synthetic male voice. It was magnetic, deep, and clearly emotional.

It seemed to be emitted directly through the radio.

Upon hearing this and seeing Genova like this, Long Yuehong's pupils rapidly dilated as a name flashed in his mind: Wu Meng!

The owner of the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station—Wu Meng!

Chapter 417: Mad Dash

Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine that very moment. It was as if he had fallen into a wintry cave from a warm summer night. He found the wind around him abnormally cold.

Wang Fugui and the others didn't understand what had happened, but they also sensed Genova's abnormality.

They walked one to two steps to the side almost at the same time, attempting to distance themselves from the Old Task Force and any possible latent dangers.

Bai Chen held the flashlight in one hand and raised the Ice Moss in her other hand, but she hesitated and didn't fire.

On the one hand, this was because pistol bullets could hardly harm Genova. On the other hand, Bai Chen instinctively believed that Genova's current situation was very likely due to Wu Meng's information invasion. It was just like how DiMarco had possessed humans back then.

This wasn't a problem that could be resolved with firearms.

At this moment, only Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian didn't daze, hesitate, or simply watch.

Shang Jianyao had used the excuse of checking his small speaker to take out the blue and white loudspeaker from his tactical backpack and use it to enhance Inference Clowning's range of influence.

Jiang Baimian raised her left hand and aimed her palm at Genova.

Genava opened and closed his metal mouth and let out a magnetic voice that belonged to Wu Meng again. “The more dangerous it is, the riskier it is—the more one should act in an antithetical manner as the saying goes...”

Before he could finish speaking, a large number of silver-white electric arcs spewed out of Jiang Baimian’s left palm.

These electric arcs rapidly expanded, enveloping Genava and weaving a bright and dangerous net of lightning.

This made Wang Fugui and the others widen their eyes. Their pupils were filled with remnant electric sparks.

At the same time, a mechanical voice sounded from Genava’s speaker. “Unknown intrusion detected. Unknown intrusion detected. Initiating quarantine procedures...”

With a sizzling sound, the electric currents released by Jiang Baimian crazily danced, forming an abnormally chaotic electromagnetic field in the surrounding area.

The red glow in Genava’s eyes stabilized.

Jiang Baimian immediately shouted, “Terminate radio station mode! Let’s go!”

With that said, she turned around and assumed a posture of running toward the cave entrance.

“Alright!” Genava returned to normal and rushed out of the silver-white net of lightning while the electric current dissipated.

Elsewhere, Shang Jianyao threw his tactical backpack on his back and widened his stride.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen didn’t slow down at all. They carried relatively heavy crates on their backs and ran toward the cave entrance.

Wang Fugui and the others were experienced Ruin Hunters. Although they couldn't figure out what had happened and were still shocked that Jiang Baimian had created a large electric net with her bare hand, they basically had all the necessary instinctive reactions.

Without bothering to ask, they suddenly turned around and followed behind the Old Task Force, running desperately.

Behind the two teams, starlight scattered the darkness. The artificial lake's surface gently rippled with the relatively hot evening breeze.

All of this was so serene that it appeared all so harmless. There wasn't even a single living creature.

The Old Task Force was already very close to the cave entrance. After a few steps, they passed through the open metal door.

Jiang Baimian slowed down and signaled to Genava and Shang Jianyao with her eyes.

They stopped and waited for the confused and vigilant Wang Fugui and the others to rush into the cave before they ran to the metal door's sides.

Genava took one side, while Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao took charge of the other. They pushed the doors and closed them with a clang.

After doing all of this, they turned around and accelerated, chasing after the people in front of them.

Upon seeing that October Xue's team had no intention of slowing down, Wang Fugui, Gray, Waite, and the others believed that the danger had yet to be resolved. They didn't dare to relax and continued charging forward.

As the flashlights flickered, they ran for an unknown distance and quickly approached the limits of human stamina.

Jiang Baimian's train of thought was abnormally clear. She immediately signaled for Long Yuehong and the others to stop.



Huff... Huff... Long Yuehong and Bai Chen panted heavily.

“Put on the military exoskeletons,” Jiang Baimian quickly instructed.

This was one of the evacuation plans they had prepared. Without needing her to explain anything, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen put down the cardboard boxes behind them and took out the two relatively new military exoskeletons inside.

With Shang Jianyao and Genava’s help, they quickly equipped the exoskeletons.

On the other side, Jiang Baimian equipped the team’s oldest AC-42 General exoskeleton by herself.

Wang Fugui, Gray, Waite, and the others had already expected such equipment from the Old Task Force, so they weren’t that surprised at this moment. Instead, they quietly distanced themselves and prepared for any counterattacks.

They were afraid that the other party would turn hostile after they were fully armed.

Thud!

A loud voice suddenly echoed in the passageway, drilling into Jiang Baimian and the others’ ears from the entrance.

At this moment, the same thought flashed across everyone’s minds without needing any explanation: The door to the previously closed entrance has been opened by an unknown enemy! It was opened with great force!

The three Old Task Force members had yet to fully equip their military exoskeletons.

The others—including their guide, Roen—looked at each other and didn’t say a word. They turned around and made a mad dash.

Since everyone was unrelated, they definitely wouldn’t stay behind to live and die with the Old Task Force.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian calmly said to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, “There’s no rush. More haste, less speed.”

She leaned against the wall and quickly and methodologically latched the metal latches in different spots.

“It’s useless even if they are anxious. Old Ge and I hold the initiative,” Shang Jianyao replied with a smile, not showing any anxiety.

Without his and Genova’s help, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen couldn’t equip the military exoskeletons themselves.

Although he often criticized this fellow, Long Yuehong still had to say, “He sure is calm.”

In less than a minute, Shang Jianyao and Genova helped Long Yuehong and Bai Chen put on the two military exoskeletons. Jiang Baimian was already moving her limbs.

“Let’s go!” Jiang Baimian quickly turned around and chased after the Ruin Hunters.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen followed closely behind.

Shang Jianyao pressed his palm and gently jumped up to sit on the squatting Genova’s left shoulder. Genova then quickly straightened his body and ran with large strides.

Compared to before, their speed was more than two to three times faster!

Augmented by the military exoskeletons, the Old Task Force didn’t have to expend much stamina before they saw Wang Fugui and the others.

They had been running for so long that they were approaching their limits. They didn’t seem like they could run anymore.

Upon seeing the Old Task Force members—who had rushed forward in a relaxed manner—and sensing the darkness and silence in the passage behind them, many of them revealed looks of despair. They could no longer think straight.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian shouted as she ran. “Don’t give up. We’ll help you!”

She wasn’t being kind to the point of stupidity by providing such a plan. Instead, she had other ideas.

This was the best solution she found after weighing the pros and cons. If the Old Task Force ignored them and directly ran past these people, they might very well do something irrational in their despair. For example, they might wish for everyone to die together. For example, they could snatch the military exoskeletons to facilitate their escape. For example, they could forcefully keep the Old Task Force here and create chaos to fish in troubled waters.

It was just like how drowning people tended to pull others into the water.

Most of these were lone Hunters with unknown abilities and great strength. Although the Old Task Force wasn’t afraid in their current situation, they didn’t dare to underestimate them.

Even if they didn’t suffer any losses when the time came, they might be delayed a few minutes—sufficient time for them to be caught by the unknown enemy.

And that enemy was very likely Wu Meng.

Internal strife was unwise! Therefore, while the Old Task Force still had strength, they could provide Wang Fugui and the others some help to stabilize their mental states. It would also help their subsequent escape.

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian’s words, Gray, Waite, and the others’ expressions softened.

Jiang Baimian then hung up her gun, swooped up their team’s guide—Roan—with one hand, and grabbed Waite with the other before continuing to run.

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong took charge of Gray and the taller lone Hunter. Bai Chen provided help to the guide of Wang Fugui’s team.

As for the thin and dark Wang Fugui, he was sandwiched under Genova’s armpit.

Why can he sit on the shoulder? Wang Fugui tried his best to look up and glanced at Shang Jianyao on the other side. This was a mutter in his heart, but he didn't dare to say it aloud.

Amidst the clanging sounds, the Old Task Force—which wasn't stingy with their power usage—completed the journey they had previously taken hours to complete in under 20 minutes.

Back then, they walked slowly, pausing and looking around occasionally.

During this process, nobody communicated or spoke. Long Yuehong inexplicably felt like he was running at the end of his rope.

Finally, he saw the familiar cave entrance and the hazy starlight outside.

The Old Task Force ran out in one go, but they didn't relax because of this. They left Wang Fugui and the others behind and went straight to the area where their team's vehicles were hidden.

Before long, the cars rendezvoused on the mountain road and returned to the advance base camp at a moderate speed.

Thud! Thud!

Long Yuehong's heart never slowed down. He felt that it wasn't time to relax yet.

Nearly two hours later, the advance base camp that was modified from a castle appeared in front of them.

Long Yuehong had never found it so endearing.

With Wang Fugui's help, the entrance to the advance base camp opened for them late at night.

After returning to the parking lot, the two teams didn't separate. They maintained vigilance until dawn.

When the sun's rays shone on them and the darkness was chased away, Wang Fugui finally heaved a sigh of relief. "Let's all have a rest."

Long Yuehong secretly exhaled when he heard that.

From the current situation, Wu Meng might not be able to leave Wasteland Ruin 13. Otherwise, First City's army around the city ruin would've long been affected.

After watching the Ruin Hunters leave, Jiang Baimian turned around and said in a deep voice, "Send a telegram to the company."

#### Chapter 418: Suggestion

As Long Yuehong took out the team's radio transceiver, Jiang Baimian wrote the report to the company on a piece of paper. She cleverly grafted her previous experience with the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station into this matter to explain why she wanted Geneva to switch modes to monitor the location.

She described Geneva as a collaborator. This would subconsciously make the company believe that the smart bot came from Wang Fugui's team.

After laying out the prelude using the survivors' experiences, she got into the main topic at hand. She talked about how the Old Task Force and Wang Fugui's team found the cave, how they methodologically ventured in, how they discovered Wasteland Ruin 13, how they confirmed that something was amiss, how they escaped Wu Meng's strange invasion, and how they ran away. She talked about the matter at detailed length, not missing a key point.

If Pangu Biology wanted to find the survivor Jiang Baimian mentioned to verify the matter regarding the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station, Jiang Baimian would tell them that the other party had unfortunately been infected during subsequent treatment, failed to hold through, and lost his life.

For this reason, the name she reported belonged to one of the Ruin Hunters that had encountered such a situation.

In short, the core was: The dead can't speak!

After translating the report into electronic text and sending it out, Pangu Biology confirmed receipt of the Old Task Force's report. This was only to confirm that they had received the Old Task Force's telegram. Any further instructions might take a day or two, or even longer.

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and said to the other team members, "Take turns resting and catching up on sleep."

The other meaning of 'rest' was to charge up the high-performance batteries quickly.

In the advance base camp, electricity cost much more than in First City. The Old Task Force's savings were decreasing at a discernible rate.

In the afternoon, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen—who were on patrol—walked back and forth with assault rifles in hand without any signs of slacking off.

Suddenly, they heard a thud coming from the team's jeep.

Long Yuehong subconsciously took a step forward and opened the corresponding rear door.

Bai Chen had already raised the muzzle and aimed, ready to fire at any moment.

They then saw that Jiang Baimian—who was sleeping in her seat—had flipped over at some point in time. Her left hand was propped against the floor mat, almost vertically upside-down.

"Team Leader, what's wrong?" Long Yuehong asked carefully.

Jiang Baimian straightened her back, bounced back to her seat, and laughed dryly. "I had a dream."

She then wore a solemn expression. "That dream made me discover a problem."

Her serious attitude and solemn expression naturally made Long Yuehong and Bai Chen ignore the fact that she had rolled off her seat from being 'frightened' by a nightmare.

After Shang Jianyao woke up in the other car and gathered over with Genava, Jiang Baimian solemnly said, “I dreamed of the Ruin Hunters who ‘followed’ the white wolf. They roamed the black wastelands like zombies in the city ruins. After I woke up, I sensed that something was amiss—the data doesn’t match.”

“What data?” Long Yuehong dutifully played the role of asking questions. Of course, he asked whenever he didn’t understand.

Jiang Baimian recalled and said, “In the past two months, even if the white wolf ate one person a day, it can only eat 61 people.”

Bai Chen reminded her team leader, “The survivors said that it doesn’t eat every day but regularly. It eats once every two to three days.”

“I’m giving a huge leeway in the estimate.” Jiang Baimian explained her thoughts and added, “The number of followers we killed and the surviving Ruin Hunters add up to 35. According to the guild’s statistics, almost 170 to 180 Ruin Hunters and wilderness nomads have disappeared from the North Shore Mountains in the past two months.”

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong understood his team leader’s meaning: The data doesn’t match up!

Some of the missing people had disappeared without a trace!

“Even if we subtract the people who went missing because of hunting, exploration, and other matters, there are probably about 120 to 130 people who were affected by the white wolf,” Jiang Baimian continued. “In other words, about 30 people weren’t by the white wolf’s side or weren’t eaten by it.”

After a pause, Jiang Baimian said seriously, “Then, where did they go?”

Bai Chen thought for a moment and added, “According to the survivors’ descriptions, only 24 to 25 people might’ve been eaten by the white wolf. More than 60 people—or even more—are unaccounted for. This is because this is a unilateral statistic calculated by the guild. There will definitely be some missing.”

As for the situation before the white wolf mission was issued, nobody in the North Shore Mountains did the statistics. There were no unified organizations here, nor were there any powerful factions.

“It means that nearly half of the humans affected by the white wolf in the past two months have gone missing?” Long Yuehong said in an uncertain tone.

Shang Jianyao revealed a look of enlightenment. “They’ve been stored?”

“Those by its side were also a form of reserve.” Jiang Baimian denied this guess. She immediately instructed, “We’ll split into two groups and ask the survivors to see who knows about this. Also, record the exact time they were affected by the white wolf. Sigh, I was in a rush back then. I might’ve missed some details.”

Nobody wasted their breaths. The Old Task Force formed teams with Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao in one and Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava forming the other to search for Roen and the other survivors.

About 40 minutes later, they met at the third floor of the castle’s main building, which was where the survivors received treatment.

“From our questioning, we still can’t be sure if the white wolf has any other nests or other followers,” Long Yuehong reported.

Bai Chen looked at the note in her hand and said solemnly, “But there’s a problem. These people were only affected by the white wolf in the past month.”

“Same here,” Jiang Baimian replied.

“Those affected for more than a month have passed their shelf life and were abandoned by the white wolf?” Shang Jianyao blurted out in surprise.

His words left Long Yuehong and the others speechless.

Only Genava honestly said, “There’s still so much expired food in the cave. It shouldn’t be a problem to feed those people.”



Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and deliberated. “There are two people we haven’t asked yet. The other survivors say that these two people were already following the white wolf when they were affected by the white wolf.”

One was Richard, and the other was Louis.

Richard’s injuries were relatively light. After treatment and rest, he could already walk freely. He then left this sad place and returned to First City, so the Old Task Force couldn’t find him for the time being.

On the other hand, Louis seemed to have some savings and booked a room in the camp hotel.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Long Yuehong knocked on Louis’s door.

The flaxen-haired Louis quickly opened the wooden door.

Upon seeing the Old Task Force quintet, the color in his face immediately drained. He subconsciously took two steps back. “W-what are you trying to do?”

“I have some questions to ask you.” Shang Jianyao smiled kindly.

Louis’s gaze froze as he broke down, and he shouted hysterically, “I don’t want revenge! I don’t want revenge!”

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong suddenly recalled that this was the survivor who had previously looked at him with hatred.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian raise her eyebrows and Shang Jianyao laugh, Louis became even more nervous. As he retreated, he pleaded. “I-I’ve thought of it, but I don’t have the ability. I-I don’t have the ability!”

After shouting this, he fell to the ground, covered his face, and sobbed. “I’ve already given up. I’ve really given up. I-I’m useless—I’ve let them down! I’ve let them down...”

A voice filled with despair, horror, and sorrow echoed in the room, making Long Yuehong sigh.

After Louis calmed down a little, Jiang Baimian deliberately lowered her voice and said, “You have two choices now. The first is to be killed by us. The second is to answer one of our questions and then leave this place and never return. Do not let us see you again.”

Louis fell silent for two seconds before releasing his palms and anxiously asked, “What question?”

His face was covered in tears.

“When you ‘followed’ the white wolf, there should’ve been dozens of people by its side. Where did they go?” Jiang Baimian asked the question she had long thought of.

Louis’s expression changed. “Th-they followed the white wolf deep into the cave and never returned...”

His eyes were filled with fear. This matter seemed to have become a nightmare that he couldn’t shake off.

They entered the cave’s depths? They were sent to Wasteland Ruin 13? This thought instinctively flashed across Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and the others’ minds.

After ‘exorcising’ Louis, they discussed this matter for a while before coming to a uniform understanding: The missing people were most likely related to Wasteland Ruin 13.

As for why the white wolf sent those humans into Wasteland Ruin 13, Jiang Baimian and the others lacked sufficient clues. They couldn’t even make a guess.

Instead, Shang Jianyao raised a terrifying story-like possibility: “Experimental subjects.”

...

The Old Task Force received a telegram from Pangu Biology the next day at the specific time meant for establishing communications with the company.

“Your situation is understood... Wu Meng can remotely exert influence without using words and is possibly able to do so through all kinds of electrical appliances, including smart bots. If you want to explore Wasteland Ruin 13, please eliminate the latent dangers in this area in advance...”

“The company is inclined to let us do some exploration...” Jiang Baimian said thoughtfully.

Genava immediately said, “That means I can only provide support.”

He simulated 30% frustration and 30% disappointment.

Just as the Old Task Force put away the radio transceiver and discussed this matter, Wang Fugui walked over under the street lamps' light. He looked at Jiang Baimian and the others and sincerely said, “I've thought about it. Wu Meng's 'Dao' should be in appliances and electronic products. If we don't bring those along, we might be able to bypass his influence.”

This... Long Yuehong's eyes widened slightly.

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen were rather surprised.

Wang Fugui's words were almost identical to the company's suggestion!

Chapter 419: The Company's Reply

Wang Fugui has had similar experiences, or does he have a backer? Jiang Baimian's eyes darted about as she deliberately showed that she was considering the other party's words.

Upon seeing this, Wang Fugui smiled and said, “I know that you definitely can't make up your mind in a short period of time. It's fine; you can come to me when you've thought it through.”

“Should we inform you if we decide not to take the risk?” Shang Jianyao asked very sincerely.

However, his question left Wang Fugui stifled.

“That’s up to you.” Wang Fugui maintained his smile.

Before Jiang Baimian could speak, Shang Jianyao asked in confusion, “But if we don’t inform you that we are prepared to give up on this risky venture, won’t you have to keep waiting? You might have to wait until autumn or even next year?”

Without waiting for Wang Fugui’s response, he added, “You were the one who said that we could go to you when we’ve decided.”

Jiang Baimian easily understood what Shang Jianyao meant with his addition: It’s not that I’m deliberately finding fault, but you didn’t make yourself clear and left a loophole.

By the side, Long Yuehong almost laughed out loud. He felt like he was finally not the only one being ‘faulted’ by Shang Jianyao.

He turned his head to glance at Bai Chen and realized that his companion also wore a faint smile.

Wang Fugui opened his mouth and slowly exhaled. He then said, “I didn’t consider this problem. Three days—if you don’t give us an answer in three days, we’ll set off on our own.”

“Waite and the others have also agreed to continue exploring Wasteland Ruin 13?” Jiang Baimian asked in surprise.

Wang Fugui smiled and sighed. “Humans die for wealth, and birds die for food. Waite wants to earn some ‘compensation’ for his dead companions and is willing to take a risk. As for the other two, they are lone Hunters. They are quite capable and have some confidence in themselves. Yes, Waite also has a certain level of strength. He might not be inferior to the others.”

He had switched to speaking in Ashlandic.

Bai Chen wanted to interject, but she didn’t say anything in the end.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, “I’ll give you an answer tomorrow at the latest.”

“I’m looking forward to the good news.” Wang Fugui smiled and said, “With you guys around, we will feel much more at ease.”

At this point, he paused and said, “However, you can’t bring your robot or military exoskeletons.”

These were essentially electric appliances, and they were precision tools with their core components related to circuits.

As for the equipment that October Xue used to release a high-voltage electric current, he wasn’t sure if it counted.

“Understood,” Jiang Baimian replied concisely.

After watching Wang Fugui leave, she turned to look at the other team members. “What do you think?”

Long Yuehong was just about to say, “There’s no need to take the risk. Even if we want to take the risk, we have to request backup from the company.”

However, Shang Jianyao beat him to it. “This is not only a Ruin Hunter mission; it might also be related to our primary target. We also have important information needed to avoid danger, so why not?”

The Ruin Hunter mission referred to the capture of the white wolf—dead or alive.

Jiang Baimian looked at Bai Chen.

Bai Chen fell silent for two seconds before saying, “Before joining the company and encountering such matters, my answer was ‘there’s no need to take risks when there’s no need.’ But now, with a large organization like the company backing us, it seems like we can be a little bolder.”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “The company’s power isn’t projected here.”

She then asked Long Yuehong, “What’s your opinion?”

With already two people in favor of it, you seem very tempted, Team Leader. Won't I appear very timid if I object? Long Yuehong muttered and deliberated before saying, "I think we can send another telegram to the company and see if we can request any help."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian immediately agreed and finally asked Genava, "What's your opinion?"

Genava immediately felt that as a smart bot, he had already integrated into the team and obtained respect. He nodded in satisfaction. "I'll provide support from the periphery, so there won't be any danger. The choice is mainly up to you guys."

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "After we preliminarily confirm that we are heading in, I'll send the company another telegram."

Pangu Biology's reply came quickly: "Be careful."

"..." Apart from Shang Jianyao and Genava, the Old Task Force members were momentarily speechless. Isn't the company too petty?

Phew. Jiang Baimian exhaled and smiled in self-consolation. "It seems like the company really wants us to go. They didn't stop us at all."

Would you have listened if they dissuaded us? Long Yuehong muttered inwardly. However, he felt that there was a high chance that his team leader would comply but not necessarily Shang Jianyao.

After a brief silence, Jiang Baimian continued, "Let's make some preliminary arrangements. Old Ge, stay in the cave when the time comes to guard our equipment and provide support. Little White, Little Red..."

Before she could finish speaking, Bai Chen interrupted her. "I'll go with you. Wang Fugui and the others have four people. If they encounter something sufficiently tempting and choose to turn hostile, you will be lacking in numbers."

Furthermore, it was Wasteland Ruin 13, which was filled with danger.

Upon seeing Bai Chen's attitude, Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it and looked at Long Yuehong. "Do you want to stay with Old Ge?"

Long Yuehong's thoughts raced as he braced himself and said, "Old Ge doesn't need to be taken care of. I'll follow the main team."

Jiang Baimian fell silent for two seconds before saying, "That works too."

Bai Chen then asked, "Do you need to do something to the auxiliary chip in your biological prosthetic limb?"

This was to prevent Wu Meng from exerting his influence on her.

"There's no need for that. It's directly connected to the nerves and has a special mechanism that doesn't allow passthrough via conventional circuits," Jiang Baimian replied firmly. "Most importantly, it has a tissue structure that stores bioelectricity around it. It can effectively screen foreign signals."

The next day, the Old Task Force informed Wang Fugui of their decision.

The two parties agreed to spend two more days for preparations before setting off at dawn the day after tomorrow.

...

The appointed time arrived in the blink of an eye. The five Old Task Force members had already sorted out their personal matters before dawn.

Upon seeing that there was still about an hour to go, Jiang Baimian smiled at Bai Chen and said, "Let's drive the car near the entrance first, lest we need to line up when the time comes."

At dawn, Ruin Hunters would busily enter and exit. As traffic was a little bad, the Old Task Force chose to circle in the opposite direction and slowly use the back of the castle.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao pointed at a corner to the east and smiled. "Wang Fugui."

Jiang Baimian looked up and saw the thin, dark Wang Fugui—who always wore the same clothes—standing there. His face was facing the slightly red horizon, and it was unknown what he was doing.

Actually, Wang Fugui couldn't directly see where the sun was rising because the castle walls blocked his line of sight.

Suddenly, Wang Fugui raised his hands and made a gesture that looked like he was spreading his wings. Right on the heels of that, he moved his hands and feet from time to time. With a strange rhythm, he made all kinds of baffling poses.

“He's dancing...” Shang Jianyao's face revealed admiration.

“It doesn't look like dancing...” Jiang Baimian frowned and said, “It's closer to a séance dance. Or is it some kind of religious ritual?”

After waiting for a few minutes, Wang Fugui completed the set of actions and turned to walk to the side door of the castle's main building.

“You guys are early?” He saw Jiang Baimian and the others.

Shang Jianyao rolled down the window and stuck his head out. Instead of answering, he asked, “Were you dancing just now?”

He looked excited.

Wang Fugui was stunned for a moment before shaking his head and smiling. “No, it's a set of exercises. I found a few sets in an Old World city ruin. They are called embryonic eagles take off and the summoning of an era... Well, the names might not be correct. Many poses have been lost, so I added them myself. I use them to train my body, and the effects aren't bad.”

“...” Jiang Baimian—who was well-read—held her laughter in: they were exercise routines students did in school back in the Old World. She then looked at Shang Jianyao and realized that not only was this fellow not disappointed, but he was also eager to give it a try.

“Ahem.” After glaring at Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian said to Wang Fugui, “See you at the entrance.”



“Alright.” Wang Fugui didn’t waste any time and quickly entered the main building.

...

At dawn, two teams—consisting of eight humans and a smart bot in total—drove away from the advance base camp and arrived at the cave from before. Although they weren’t as careful as last time—where they used remote-controlled vehicles to scout the area ahead—they still followed their old path.

They weren’t rash.

At about 10 a.m., they saw the open metal door from afar.

“Leave the electrical appliances behind,” instructed Wang Fugui.

“Let Geneva watch over them,” Jiang Baimian suggested.

The electrical appliances carried by the lone Hunter team were nothing more than walkie-talkies. They weren’t too worried and handed them to Geneva directly.

Only Shang Jianyao reluctantly took out the small speaker and held Geneva’s hand. “You have to take good care of it! Don’t let it bump into anything.”

“...No problem,” Geneva replied after a moment of silence.

After removing the electrical appliances on them, the four Old Task Force humans quickly armed themselves.

Jiang Baimian carried ‘Death,’ the single-person rocket launcher. She also had a United 202 and an Ice Moss at her waist, and a Short Neck submachine gun. Behind Shang Jianyao was the Tyrant grenade launcher, and in his hand was the Berserker assault rifle. His waist had the same equipment as Jiang Baimian’s.

Bai Chen carried her usual Orange rifle and Short Neck submachine gun. Long Yuehong had the Berserker assault rifle in his hand and a flamethrower behind him. As for pistols, they were standard issue.

The two Short Necks and crude flamethrower were things the Old Task Force had obtained during their two-day preparation time. They had exchanged them with some of their war spoils.

The four people on Wang Fugui's side were about the same—they were all fully armed.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian also knew the remaining Ruin Hunter's name.

His name was Fars; he had blond hair and blue eyes. He was considered pretty tall among Ruin Hunters and was about the same height as Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian looked around and said, "Let's set off."

The eight of them immediately followed the passage and slowly walked toward the metal door that led to Wasteland Ruin 13.

The sun was shining brightly outside, and a large patch of weeds—which was clearer than at night—greeted their eyes.

Chapter 420: Criterion

Looking at the artificial lake in front of her, Jiang Baimian stopped and said to Wang Fugui and the others, "Since we're going to move together, there are some ground rules that we have to discuss in advance."

"What are they?" Wang Fugui asked warily.

Gray, Waite, and Fars had similar reactions.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, "There has to be a guiding principle for the operation. There has to be a goal and a plan—we have to make sure that we know what we are doing. We can't swarm forward in a mess. That will only drag each other down. Our team has a constant principle in such explorations. In layman's terms, 'Do not lavishly hope of getting fat in one sitting.'"

“W-what about getting fat?” Gray—who was wrapped in a leather coat and trembling slightly—clearly didn’t understand the Ashlandic maxim even though Jiang Baimian had already translated it into the Red River language relatively accurately.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment. “In other words: First City wasn’t built in a day.”

Upon seeing the three Ruin Hunters—apart from Wang Fugui—reveal enlightened expressions, Jiang Baimian continued, “We can’t lavishly hope to get to the bottom of this city ruin’s secrets with just one exploration and that we can earn riches that can last us several lifetimes—it’s completely unrealistic.

“We’ll split the exploration into a few rounds. Every time we harvest a little, we will gain a deeper understanding of this place. We will advance step by step until we achieve our main goal—that might be more feasible. During this process, we will let the situation determine if we should give up on the subsequent explorations at all times.”

Although the Old Task Force’s suggestion was a form of torture for impatient people, Wang Fugui and the others understood that this was the safest and most reliable plan after some thought.

Taking a year to explore such a large city ruin wouldn’t even appear extravagant, much less having it done over several times.

It had to be known that this place was filled with danger. Blindly taking action required one to pay with their lives. Even First City’s army didn’t dare to venture deep.

Among them, only Waite muttered, “I just want to get some valuable supplies.”

For a city ruin that had yet to be ‘developed,’ this was a small goal. It was a mission that could be easily completed in a single exploration.

Jiang Baimian looked around and described the plan that the Old Task Force had previously discussed. “I suggest that this exploration is limited to a range of two kilometers from the exit. It’s mainly to gather supplies and search for clues.”

Why two kilometers? Long Yuehong muttered inwardly. He knew the answer, but he felt that the group of lone Hunters would probably ask the same question. After all, he had raised such a question during the team discussion and was then mocked by Shang Jianyao.

Wang Fugui and the others exchanged looks and nodded. “A safe plan.”

When going on foot without vehicles, running two kilometers was close to the limits of their stamina. After all, they had never undergone genetic enhancement or enhanced the corresponding qualities.

They wouldn’t run a five-kilometer cross-country for no reason. Furthermore, there was a huge difference between a mad dash and a cross-country race.

With Chosen One physiques, it was no problem for Shang Jianyao and the others to go further. However, they had to consider Bai Chen.

Upon seeing that the lone Hunters didn’t ask why, Long Yuehong felt a little depressed.

Jiang Baimian didn’t harp on the topic and smiled. “Let’s begin then.”

With that said, she held the Short Neck submachine gun and led the way to the man-made lake with flattened weeds.

They first explored the park. Apart from finding something suspected to be the white wolf’s feces, they didn’t discover anything else.

During the process, they were abnormally careful. They were afraid that the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station’s owner—Wu Meng—would exert a negative influence on them in other ways. Fortunately, no anomalies happened.

After leaving the park, the two teams flanked the sides of the street and entered the city.

Just as they turned into this area, piles of bones suddenly appeared in Long Yuehong’s vision.

Unlike Swamp Ruin 1, the streets here were clearly not regularly cleaned by the Heartless. On both sides of the street was rotten and black silt. On the road were parked cars in haphazard positions. Some of them had crashed into each other, maintaining that state for countless years as if they had frozen the moment the Old World was destroyed.

Amidst such objects were countless human bones. They could be seen everywhere—either covered by a few rags or completely ‘naked.’

This was Long Yuehong’s first time seeing so many corpses; he felt like he had entered a mass grave. At this moment, he actually felt a little cold under the summer sun.

Wang Fugui and the others were clearly shocked by this scene as well. They didn’t take a step for a long time.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “The work needed to bury them is too much. It’s almost impossible to do so.”

Jiang Baimian then said, “There should be similar situations in many undiscovered city ruins.”

From the fact that there were no traces of explosions, the corpses were either killed in a gunfight or killed by the Heartless. They had become their food, leaving behind bones only.

“The Heartless didn’t even drag these corpses to their lairs and store them. They left them on the street and ate them on the spot every day? They like outdoor parties?” Shang Jianyao expressed his confusion.

His focus was always wrong.

“When humans first contracted the Heartless disease, they had yet to adapt to their bestial instincts. Thus, they would always do such contradictory actions,” Jiang Baimian replied using her research results. “This area should be the core area of the Heartless disease outbreak. There were too many of them, so they quickly finished eating the remaining humans. It might not be the case in the other streets.”

Upon hearing October Xue and Zhang Qubing discuss this matter, Wang Fugui and the others inexplicably found it ridiculous. What does the past Heartless have to do with the present us?

Jiang Baimian instructed Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, “Form a team of two. Search this place a little and see if there are any clues.”

This time, she led Long Yuehong, while Shang Jianyao was teamed up with Bai Chen. She hoped that neither team had any weaknesses.

Upon seeing this, Waite and the others also began searching for valuable supplies in this area.

As they couldn't drive in and out and had to conserve sufficient stamina, they didn't choose any large items. They only chose items that were convenient to carry and relatively valuable. For example, the golden accessories on the corpses.

After an hour of simple searching, the Old Task Force didn't discover any useful clues. They could only roughly replicate the scene back then. More than two-thirds of the people on the street had suddenly gone crazy and attacked normal humans, biting and gnawing at them.

During the search, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen didn't forget to pick up gold jewelry, technical books, and other items. They had never forgotten that they were still shouldering a huge debt.

After leaving the street, the area before Jiang Baimian's eyes opened up.

In front of them was a city square. On the other side of the square was a black building dozens of stories tall.

The building's walls were already shattered, and many places were covered in green vegetation.

As Jiang Baimian had expected, there were relatively few corpses here compared to the previous area.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao pointed at the ground in front of the black building and said, "Their style seems different."

Bai Chen, Wang Fugui, and the others traced his finger and looked over, only to realize that there were four to five corpses there.

Unlike the others, they were highly decomposed but had yet to turn to bone.

“They died recently?” Jiang Baimian deliberated and said. Her choice of word—‘recently’—was relative to the skeletons.

“Let’s go take a look.” This time, Wang Fugui took the initiative to suggest.

As this place was spacious and had a clear view of the surroundings, it didn’t appear dangerous. Gray, Waite, and Fars agreed with him.

The Old Task Force was more focused on such matters and similarly wouldn’t miss the opportunity either.

Just as they approached the four to five corpses, Wang Fugui’s eyelids suddenly twitched. He pointed at one of the corpses and said, “The shirt he’s wearing is the cheap shirt produced in First City’s factory district.”

It wasn’t considered old, and its style also had characteristics of the current era. It had more hidden pockets that made it easier to store things.

Long Yuehong looked over and saw the corpse clearly.

He almost fainted at the sight. Only then did he realize that the highly decomposed and tragic corpse was countless times more disgusting than the white skeletons.

An indescribable stench drilled into his olfactory senses, almost making him vomit on the spot.

Jiang Baimian raised her hand to her nose, took a few steps forward, squatted down, and examined it carefully. “The shirt has no signs of mending. It was probably bought in the past year or two.”

As for the shirt being torn, it should’ve been caused during his death.

She then made a judgment and said in a deep voice, “Are these the missing Ruin Hunters who were brought deep into the cave by the white wolf?”

“Probably.” Bai Chen held her breath and expressed her agreement.

Wang Fugui and the others were stunned. “Weren’t the missing Ruin Hunters either eaten or rescued?”

The rest had been killed by the Old Task Force. Of course, they couldn’t say that out loud.

Long Yuehong took the opportunity to retract his gaze and explained to the lone Hunters that there was something wrong with the numbers. He then revealed the information that a large number of missing people had been brought into the cave by the white wolf.

Waite hissed. “They entered, came all the way here, and died without being eaten?”

This sounded a little strange.

“What’s the cause of death?” Wang Fugui asked anxiously.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and looked up at the black building to his side. He then spoke before Jiang Baimian could. “Judging from the damage on the corpses, they should’ve jumped down from somewhere in the building and died.”

Suicide by jumping off a building? Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others were alarmed. The batch of Ruin Hunters was brought deep into the cave by the white wolf and entered Wasteland Ruin 13. In the end, a group of them jumped off the building and committed suicide?

“That’s my judgment as well.” Jiang Baimian echoed Shang Jianyao’s words, unable to hide the confusion on her face. What did this handful of Ruin Hunters encounter, and what did the white wolf want?

Jiang Baimian paused and said, “We can’t rule out the possibility that they were pushed down by someone. We have to inspect further and survey the scene of the jump.”

This might be more terrifying... Who pushed them? Why were they pushed? Long Yuehong subconsciously wanted to take a deep breath, but he shut his mouth because of the smell.

“Wanna go in?” Shang Jianyao pointed at the towering black building.



Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “Not this time. Remember our preset criterion. Yes, just search the surroundings.”

The criterion was: don't rashly enter and lay the foundation for a second exploration.