

## Ad Infinitum 421

### Chapter 421: Different Methods

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian's answer, Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze regretfully.

Fortunately, he didn't insist on going at it alone this time... Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief when he saw this. In fact, he also knew that Shang Jianyao was mostly obedient and obeyed orders.

At this moment, Wang Fugui saw that Jiang Baimian was still staring at the rotten corpses that were either a mangled mess or dismembered. He couldn't help but raise his hand to his nose and say, "Will there be clues on them?"

"Can't be sure," Jiang Baimian casually replied. "We don't have a camera now, so we can't take photos. I'll have to memorize all kinds of details and analyze them later."

At this moment, the conditions didn't give her the luxury of time to conduct an in-depth autopsy.

Jiang Baimian then put on her gloves and quickly checked the corpses and the items they carried with them to see if they could find any valuable information.

Shang Jianyao watched Wang Fugui and the others while Long Yuehong guarded their surroundings to prevent any attacks. During this process, Long Yuehong sniffed the corpses' disgusting stench and inexplicably felt like he had entered a ghost story.

After the Ruin Hunters were 'charmed' by the white wolf and brought to the city ruin on the other side of the cave, they actually jumped off the building one after another to their deaths!

This was bizarre, mysterious, and terrifying.

And this is only a portion of the people brought here by the white wolf... Where are the others? How are they now? Long Yuehong glanced around warily. He felt that something unknown seemed to be brewing in the desolate, quiet, and verdant city square.

The unknown often represented horror.

Jiang Baimian didn't waste too much time and quickly completed the preliminary autopsy. As she took off her gloves and placed them in a special plastic bag, she said, "From the looks of it, they did fall to their deaths. However, it's unknown if anything happened to their minds or bodies before they jumped off the building. Sigh, there's no way to conduct an in-depth autopsy here."

She actually knows how to conduct an autopsy... Wang Fugui was stunned. To him, even the term 'autopsy' was learned through the Old World books he found when exploring other ruins.

Of course, as Ruin Hunters, they would also come into contact with corpses during their daily adventures. They would check for clues to determine the cause of death, but these checks were very superficial and didn't form a systematic science.

They relied solely on experience, so they could only determine if a target had died from a gun, a sharp weapon, or a beast. They could also determine if the target had died from an intense battle or had been ambushed from behind.

As for the items found on the corpses, Jiang Baimian put them away and prepared to study them carefully when she returned.

Waite and the others didn't stop her, nor did they attempt to take a share of the loot. After all, most of the missing Ruin Hunters and wilderness nomads had led tough lives. Apart from weapons, the only valuable items on them were their organs.

"Their guns are missing." Wang Fugui stated the obvious.

"The White Wolf disarmed them before entering the city ruin? Or did they leave their weapons somewhere before they committed suicide?" Jiang Baimian looked up at the towering black building. She then slowly exhaled and said, "Let's not go in. We'll walk around instead to see if there are any clues."

"Alright." Waite was the first to respond. He—who only wanted to take the opportunity to make a killing—responded to Jiang Baimian faster than the other three Old Task Force members, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen.

This made Long Yuehong feel like they were in sync with each other.

Gray and Fars didn't have any intention of delving into the Old World's secrets either, so they expressed their support after some thought. To them, discovering the Old World's secrets was for money and the supplies they needed. Now that they had other methods and other means to obtain valuable items, there was no need to take the risk.

Apart from a small number of people, most humans chose whatever was easy and safe. Of course, the premise was that the wealth obtained by those choices was within the confines of their knowledge.

"Alright." Wang Fugui retracted his gaze from the black building.

The two teams immediately circled around and walked to the side.

"Caw! Caw! Caw!" A crow flew across the sky, triggering many caws.

"It seems like there are creatures here." Shang Jianyao had a look of disappointment.

But in such an environment, the cawing is more terrifying than nothing... Long Yuehong retorted inwardly.

As they walked, Jiang Baimian suddenly stopped.

Bai Chen followed her gaze and saw a crude leather shoe.

There was a lot of dirt on this shoe, and its surface had dried rainwater spots. Compared to the shoes on the nearby corpses' feet, it appeared very 'new.'

Long Yuehong slowly looked up at the sky above the leather shoes. He then saw a highly decomposed corpse—with its extended tongue sticking out—swaying slightly in the breeze.

One of the corpse's feet was bare, and the other was wearing a leather shoe. This leather shoe was the same as the one on the ground.

Wang Fugui's expression froze slightly as he said in a deep voice, "The leather used for these shoes is from a mutated creature. It definitely didn't exist before the Old World's destruction."

He meant that the corpse hanging from the tree belonged to a Ruin Hunter or wilderness nomad who had previously disappeared.

Over there, they committed suicide by jumping off a building. Over here, they committed suicide by hanging themselves? Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine.

Jiang Baimian slowly nodded, indicating that it didn't seem wrong.

Shang Jianyao curiously asked, "Which mutated creature?"

"I don't know what the various large factions call it, but it's a mutated electric eel. Its hide is closer to that of a snake, and it resembles a python. At the same time, it retains the ability to release high-voltage electric currents. It thrives in environments like lakes and rivers. Many Ashlandic nomads call it the Dragon King. There are even people who offer sacrifices to them and offer them tributes." Wang Fugui gave a simple introduction. "The smaller ones among them aren't that difficult to kill."

As he spoke, he didn't associate this mutated creature with Jiang Baimian's special abilities at all. In his mind, it was likely a hidden and special discharge device.

After Shang Jianyao obtained the answer, he looked up at the tree. "Shall we bring it down?"

"We can give it a try." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

Shang Jianyao put on gloves and volunteered. Wang Fugui's team of four Hunters and Long Yuehong looked vigilant as if they were afraid that it would spring to life or something terrifying would happen.

The corpse was quickly placed on the ground, and Jiang Baimian did a simple inspection.

Waite and the others took the opportunity to search the surrounding vehicles and skeletons for valuable items.

“He died from hanging.” Before long, Jiang Baimian stood up.

Upon seeing this, Shang Jianyao dragged a piece of Old World plastic used for tent sheds on the street and covered the corpse.

“You’re... pretty...” Wang Fugui was momentarily at a loss for words.

“Normal?” Shang Jianyao gave a self-evaluation.

“...” Wang Fugui couldn’t answer him.

After collecting some supplies, the two teams turned into a residential area beside them. This was the residential area closest to the black building.

“I wonder if anyone working in that building lives here...” Jiang Baimian muttered to her team members.

Shang Jianyao shook his head with a heavy expression. “According to the situation presented by the various pieces of entertainment information in the Old World, housing prices in a city’s core area is something ordinary employees can’t afford.”

“Those who can afford it are the higher-ups. That’s more valuable.” Jiang Baimian nodded.  
“There’s also the possibility of renting a place. It’s very convenient to live near a workplace.”

As they conversed, they held their weapons and carefully entered the residential area. Although they had yet to encounter any danger, the strangeness here had already made the mood tense.

Just as they passed through the entrance, the eight of them cast their gazes at the scenic pond ahead.

There was a corpse floating there. It was swollen, rotten, and had turned pale from soaking in the water.

“One of the people that the white wolf brought here?” Long Yuehong made a guess based on his previous experience. This person drowned himself in the scenic pond? The people the white wolf

brought into Wasteland Ruin 13 committed suicide in various ways in different parts of the city ruin?

Hiss...

Long Yuehong heard Waite gasp. Frankly speaking, he almost did the same, but he was just a tad bit slower.

The strangeness of this matter almost exceeded the limits his psyche could take.

Wang Fugui stared at it for a moment and said, "I'm really afraid that I'd commit suicide without any warning like them if I stay here for too long..."

"That's a possibility," Jiang Baimian replied seriously.

Waite's pupils slightly dilated as he anxiously said, "Why don't we head back? We can gather some supplies and books along the way."

He had already obtained quite a number of items and had no motivation to persist.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen and deliberated before saying, "Alright."

The bizarreness of the matter exceeded her imagination. She felt that it was better to err on the side of caution.

Apart from Shang Jianyao's slight regret, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen agreed.

Upon seeing this, Gray and Fars clearly heaved sighs of relief. In such a situation, normal humans were unwilling to stay any longer, much less experienced humans like them.

As the Ashlandic proverb said: the older and more experienced one was, the more timid they became.

At this moment, a voice sounded from somewhere hundreds of meters away. “Howl!”

This was a standard wolf howl—it wasn’t as terrifying as the monster howl from Swamp Ruin 1.

“That white wolf?” Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Wang Fugui fell silent for a few seconds. “Should we capture it while we’re at it?”

This was an extremely lucrative mission. It was also the reason why lone Hunters like Wang Fugui and the Old Task Force had come to the North Shore Mountains.

Before Jiang Baimian could respond, Shang Jianyao said with a troubled expression, “I’m afraid that will anger its owner.”

Owner... Yes, the white wolf brought so many people here. If they aren’t for itself, it should be serving an existence... Long Yuehong’s heart palpitated as he instantly made the connection.

Based on what was known, there was only one person who could be the white wolf’s owner in Wasteland Ruin 13: Wu Meng.

Chapter 422: Sluggish

Not only did Long Yuehong think of this, but the others also had similar guesses. After all, everyone only knew this much about Wasteland Ruin 13, and Wu Meng was the only person they knew that resided within.

Wang Fugui looked at the spot where the wolf howl came from and recalled. “That place is in the opposite direction of the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station...”

The last time they entered, Genova had roughly detected where the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station was. Therefore, the two teams had unanimously chosen a route away from the area during today’s exploration.

Although they believed that Wu Meng could only directly affect all kinds of electrical appliances and use them to deal with humans from either the information they obtained or through ‘self-analysis,’ there was a premise—distance.

After subsequent inspection, the metal door at the entrance they had used was determined to be electrically controlled. This was foreseeable since it was abnormally heavy after all. It was very inconvenient to open and close it using manpower every day. Back then, Genava, Jiang Baimian, and Shang Jianyao chose to push it themselves because they believed that there was definitely no electricity. At the same time, they were more confident in their strength.

Nobody knew what would happen once the two teams and Wu Meng were within a kilometer of the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station or even closer. Apart from those who had personally experienced it and survived, nobody knew.

Wang Fugui meant that even if Wu Meng was really the white wolf's owner, the influence he could exert in that direction was limited.

"Maybe the white wolf has a few electrical appliances by its side..." Jiang Baimian said faintly.

Wang Fugui laughed involuntarily and mocked himself. "That's true. It's better not to act rashly when you don't know the situation well enough. Nobody stipulates that he has to remain in the radio station."

To say that... Long Yuehong felt his blood run cold again. This was because it meant that Wu Meng could appear around them at any moment.

"Maybe he really can't leave the radio station. Otherwise, he would've come for us a long time ago..." Shang Jianyao spoke in a tone as though he was retelling a ghost story.

"Let's go in the other direction then," suggested Waite immediately.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen. "Alright."

Gray and Fars had no objections either.

The eight of them didn't return the way they came because they would approach the spot where the white wolf had howled. Similarly, they avoided the area where the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station was.



As they had chosen a relatively unfamiliar path, the two teams couldn't advance quickly. They constantly had to be on guard against any possible attacks.

Along the way, they would still pick up relatively valuable items when they encountered them. In any case, it was only a matter of convenience.

The principle of distribution was: finders keepers.

Under the premise that there were sufficient supplies and that nobody returned empty-handed, this didn't lead to internal strife.

Shang Jianyao was wearing a gray camouflage uniform today. He had rolled down the sleeves, covering his wrists in the rather hot weather. On his left wrist, the Ring of Blindness—woven from black hair—lit up with a fiery glow every once in a while, helping him expand his perception range.

Of course, this couldn't be maintained forever. This would quickly deplete the item's energy, so it could only be used every few minutes.

Cars were parked haphazardly. On the streets that were partially invaded by vegetation, the two teams each took a side and were separated by seven to eight meters.

Shang Jianyao held the Berserker assault rifle and walked between the electric poles and the trees paving the sidewalk.

Two minutes ago, he had just finished sensing the surroundings. There were no other human consciousnesses or mutated biological consciousnesses within a hundred-meter radius.

Suddenly, Jiang Baimian turned her head and looked to the side where Wang Fugui and the others were. She looked at a narrow alley.

"A sit... uation..." She was just about to give a reminder and fire with the Short Neck submachine gun when her train of thought suddenly slowed down. It was as if she had been attacked by the cold, and a portion of her thoughts had been frozen. Or rather, she had transformed into a computer that had been out of repair for years. Although she could barely be turned on, it would always hang and lag. Things that could be completed in a second might take three to four seconds.

Almost at the same time, she saw Gray—who was tightly wrapped in a leather coat and seemingly suffering from the cold—look at them.

The slightly rugged face was filled with zeal, and the light in his blue eyes froze.

He... has been... bewitched by... the white wolf... Jiang Baimian had this thought ‘flash’ in her mind.

Shang Jianyao and Bai Chen also experienced abnormalities. Their every move was advancing at one-third of their normal speeds or even slower.

Long Yuehong wasn't affected, and he noticed that something was amiss with his team leader and the others. He immediately took a step forward and tried to get into an advantageous position to fire at Wang Fugui and the others to suppress them.

But the moment his right foot took a step, he felt his muscles contract and distort. He also felt intense pain.

He had cramps—at such a critical moment, his legs were cramping up!

As his body involuntarily tilted, Long Yuehong saw the relatively tall Fars with blond hair and blue eyes.

This Ruin Hunter also had a fanatical expression as if he were risking his life for someone. At this moment, he clenched his fists tightly, and his eyes were deep.

Meanwhile, Waite—who was in Long Yuehong's line of sight—disappeared. He vanished into thin air!

As he fell to the ground, Long Yuehong saw his team leader raise her left arm faster than her right as if it weren't affected.

Among the lone Hunters, Wang Fugui had the strangest reaction. He didn't show any fanaticism, admiration, or submission; instead, he had a look of hatred as if he had encountered an enemy he had an irreconcilable grudge with. He then shouted at Gray, Fars, and the spot where Waite was originally standing, “Hatred!”

The fanaticism and adoration on Gray and Fars's faces instantly vanished, twisting into extreme hatred for a particular target. They quickly turned around and looked deep into the alley.

They were fast, but Jiang Baimian was faster. She had already aimed at that spot and pulled the trigger.

When Gray turned around, Jiang Baimian's frozen—or sluggish—thoughts were dispelled. Her left hand had long raised the weapon to its designated height.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

A large number of bullets swept toward a utility pole.

Shang Jianyao put down the assault rifle and let it hang from his body. He then unslung the Tyrant grenade launcher and aimed it at the target area.

A grenade flew over.

Boom!

Amidst the explosion, a white wolf figure jumped back and into the alley's corner.

The fur on its tail was slightly charred and twisted. On its head was a dark-black item that resembled a headset.

In the blink of an eye, the white wolf disappeared in front of everyone.

“Shall we give chase?” Shang Jianyao looked at Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, “There's no need.”

She then said to Wang Fugui, “You actually weren't bewitched by the white wolf.”

The hatred on Wang Fugui's face vanished as he smiled and said, "If not for the confidence I had, why would they be willing to come with me?"

He was referring to Gray, Fars, and the reappearing Waite.

The three Ruin Hunters looked at Wang Fugui with admiration.

"Sigh, the white wolf actually didn't choose to bewitch us..." Shang Jianyao muttered regretfully.

If that happened, they would let it know what a surprise was.

"..." Long Yuehong didn't criticize him this time because he thought the same.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. "From the looks of it, although the white wolf can only bewitch a limited number of people, it can select its targets."

This was essentially different from Qiao Chu.

"But how did it accurately grasp the intervals of my sensing and enter the range where my abilities are effective?" Shang Jianyao was rather puzzled by this and had already switched to his inference mode.

Fortunately, the Old Task Force had always opted for double insurance and had Jiang Baimian's sensing of bioelectric signals.

Jiang Baimian was also perplexed. She looked around and thought of something. "Could they be the ones?"

Following her gaze, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, Wang Fugui, and the others saw the surveillance cameras on the street lamps.

Jiang Baimian said in a deep voice, "We didn't bring any electronic products, but that doesn't mean that there aren't any in this city ruin."

“Then, they are equivalent to Wu Meng’s ‘eyes?’” Long Yuehong blurted out.

Wang Fugui frowned and said, “But they should be out of electricity after so many years.”

Could it be that Wu Meng can generate electricity for things without power?

Bai Chen—who had experienced Swamp Ruin 1—asked, “We’ve never tried using them, so how do we know that there’s no electricity here?”

That was a place that was regularly powered.

Jiang Baimian then looked at a shop by the street and deliberated before suggesting, “Let’s go in and give it a try to see if the lights can still be switched on.”

They weren’t in a rush to evacuate this area because it was more important to figure out the problem. If they didn’t take note of certain matters and ignored them, they might greatly suffer subsequently.

“Alright.” Wang Fugui, Gray, and the others looked at each other.

Shang Jianyao quickly walked into the shop by the roadside and pressed the switch with the muzzle.

The lights in the shop didn’t change.

“Maybe the lights went out long ago...” Long Yuehong guessed at the possibility.

Just as he said that, the light tube suddenly emitted a sizzling sound and lit up with a white glow.

The light alternated between bright and dark, giving them a feeling that the voltage was very unstable. The light and darkness alternated without a pattern.

“This...” Waite exclaimed in surprise. From his point of view, this didn’t seem like the city ruin originally had electricity. Instead, someone had deliberately turned on the electricity here after they switched on the lights. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have taken some time to light up.

“As expected.” Wang Fugui sighed.

There was indeed electricity here—electricity in a certain way.

Long Yuehong immediately said, “Let’s evacuate as soon as possible then.”

This time, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn’t respond to his suggestion. They looked at the blinking light tube as if they were studying a major topic.

“What’s wrong?” Bai Chen asked.

Jiang Baimian pursed her lips and said, “These light bulb flashes resemble Morse code...”

“Huh?” Waite, Fars, and the others were a little confused. This was part of their knowledge blindspot.

As Jiang Baimian quickly translated the information using the records in the auxiliary chip, she slowly said, “The translation is: The Dao is in the circuit, circuit boards, and electrical appliances...”

Chapter 423: Reckless?

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian’s translation, Long Yuehong, Waite, and the others felt their scalps tingle again. This was like the radio station’s owner—Wu Meng—had specially sent them a greeting.

Long Yuehong’s mouth gaped open, wanting to say something, but he ultimately chose to shut his mouth.

Shang Jianyao seemed to sense something and turned to look at him. “Don’t speak. I’ll help you.”

He then sighed and said, “Sigh. Thankfully, the electronic products here aren’t aggressive, nor can they produce any sound.”

If that happened, the danger level would rise exponentially.

“...” Long Yuehong wanted to retort Shang Jianyao and say that this wasn't on his mind, but he ultimately felt a little guilty and gave up on arguing.

“Let's go.” Waite repeated Long Yuehong's 'evacuate as soon as possible.'

This time, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao didn't remain silent and cast their gazes at the street outside.

The eight of them took their places and left the roadside shop in an orderly fashion. As they left, the blinking light tube inside went off, returning to the state prior to the two teams' approach.

“How hospitable,” Shang Jianyao praised.

Nobody answered him as they carefully walked forward. Compared to before, they were even more nervous as they paid attention to the various electric appliances around them.

Although most of them should've been damaged and couldn't be operated even if there was electricity or a signal, there were always exceptions. With a large number of cases, it was inevitable that some could still be used, just like the lamps and wires in that shop.

Once these things were 'taken over' by Wu Meng, something terrifying might happen.

Upon seeing that nobody was paying attention to him, Shang Jianyao held his assault rifle and maintained the tactical formation with his team members as he smiled. “If that white wolf were human, it would definitely be very reckless.”

“What do you mean?” The person asking this time was Wang Fugui—who didn't know Shang Jianyao well enough. He inexplicably felt that this fellow should have some deep theory.

“It dared to attack such a large group of us just because we didn't bring a robot,” Shang Jianyao replied with a smile.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “Maybe it thinks it can really finish off the eight of us. After all, its ability that’s similar to Bewitchment can directly give it helpers and seriously weaken us. However, it’s indeed reckless. It might still be an animal in essence, and its intelligence can’t exceed those natural limits. It won’t figure out that since we dared to make a second attempt to explore the area and hunt it a second time, there must be a way for us to prevent or weaken the effects of Bewitchment.”

Upon hearing this, Wang Fugui, Waite, and the others looked at the Old Task Force. They could sense the meaning behind Jiang Baimian’s words.

Not only did Wang Fugui have a way to resist Bewitchment, but so did this team that seemed to rely on advanced technology! The reason they didn’t show it was that the white wolf had chosen the lone Hunter team back then.

If one thought deeper, the underlying reason might be that the white wolf found them harder to deal with.

As Shang Jianyao bent his back slightly and walked forward, he moved the muzzle to guard against his surroundings and shook his head. “The white wolf might not know that, but how can Wu Meng not know that? I noticed the white wolf wearing a headset, so it should be receiving orders.”

Isn’t this a little ridiculous? Long Yuehong recalled the scene and actually felt it was possible that the white wolf was wearing a headset. With Wu Meng’s influence on electrical appliances, it was very easy for him to give orders to the white wolf through the headset.

“Maybe it was a test?” Bai Chen said after some deliberation.

“Maybe.” Jiang Baimian nodded.

At this moment, Wang Fugui thoughtfully said, “There’s also another explanation. When a general is far away on the battlefield, they don’t have to obey all of the emperor’s orders.”

He said this to the Old Task Force, ignoring whether Waite, Gray, or Fars understood him. Of course, he still spoke in the Red River language in order not to arouse suspicion.

Jiang Baimian recalled Xiaochong, the Nightmare Horse, and the Superior Heartless who worked for Xiaochong’s expenses, and she retorted Wang Fugui, “Wu Meng should have pretty good control over his ‘subordinates.’”



After what had just happened, she could preliminarily determine that the white wolf fully obeyed Wu Meng.

“It might not be that it deliberately disobeys, but it might be a flaw in personality.” Wang Fugui said meaningfully, “Since mutated creatures can obtain abilities similar to Awakened, they might have also paid a corresponding price.”

“The price is recklessness or arrogance?” Jiang Baimian felt enlightened.

Wang Fugui didn’t give an affirmative answer.

At this moment, Gray—who was wrapped in a leather coat—shrank his body and laughed. “You guys sure have fortitude. You can discuss and share your views in such a situation and environment.”

If it were any other team, they would definitely be tense to the point of silence at this moment. They would overreact without so much as a breeze.

“We didn’t stop, nor did we relax our guard against our surroundings. What’s wrong with talking?” Jiang Baimian smiled. “The earlier we discuss certain matters, the more useful it will be for us to take precautions against any accidents.”

“Won’t that distract you?” Waite couldn’t help but ask. “I can’t be that focused just by listening to your conversation.”

He was even more careful than before. He no longer casually opened the doors of the abandoned vehicles on the road to search for valuable items. Every time he planned on doing so, he would first carry out an appraisal and avoid pure electric vehicles since those might be affected by Wu Meng.

Shang Jianyao smiled and answered Waite’s question. “Not at all. We have the numbers.”

“...” Waite, Fars, and the others couldn’t understand.

After they were done discussing the white wolf, they slowly walked toward the park. Apart from the crows cawing from time to time, nothing else happened along the way.

All of this was stifling.

Finally, they returned to the park, circled around the artificial lake, and arrived at the cave entrance. But at this moment, the heavy metal door closed.

“He can’t bear for us to leave.” Shang Jianyao was rather gratified.

“What do we do?” Waite blurted out a question.

Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief because he wanted to ask the same question.

“Force it open.” Jiang Baimian didn’t hesitate and walked over. She checked the door, removed a button that seemed to be a switch, and inserted her left hand. This time, she didn’t attempt to invade or crack the program because it might be reverse-influenced by Wu Meng.

Her method of choice was violent destruction.

Spark!

Bright light flickered in the hole as violent electric currents surged in.

After the door opening procedure was destroyed, Jiang Baimian returned to the door, stretched out her hands, and pressed it.

Shang Jianyao took a few steps forward and mimicked her actions to provide help.

Amidst the zapping sounds, the heavy metal door slowly opened.

This made Wang Fugui, Gray, Fars, and Waite’s eyes widen as their foreheads twitched. They had previously believed that it was due to the robot that the Old Task Force could push open such a heavy metal door. But from the looks of it, these two humans were monstrously strong!

They might not get the door to budge even if the four of them pushed together!

“Why didn’t you use any strength?” Jiang Baimian asked Shang Jianyao with her eyes.

Shang Jianyao suppressed his voice and said, “I’m just covering for you so as not to scare them.”

“...” Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth. “Thanks a lot.”

After entering the cave and returning to Geneva, most of the two teams’ members heaved a sigh of relief. They realized that a layer of cold sweat had soaked their backs at some point in time.

Compared to the danger, they had plenty of harvests. It was equivalent to a year or even several years of work.

...

In the advance base camp, a corner of the parking lot.

Long Yuehong—who had eaten his fill—sighed with emotion. “As expected of Wasteland Ruin 13.”

Jiang Baimian nodded and sighed. “I only hope that Ferrington didn’t escape into the city ruin in his haste and left via another exit.”

Ferrington was the Ruin Hunter they were looking for to learn more about the Mirror Church. If he entered Wasteland Ruin 13, there was a high chance that he would end up like the missing people.

Shang Jianyao said in a rare serious tone, “Not all of the missing people have been found. There might still be survivors.”

“I hope so.” Jiang Baimian exhaled.

After a brief silence, Long Yuehong sighed with emotion again. “Are there abnormally terrifying existences in such city ruins?”

He had thought of Swamp Ruin 1. There was Xiaochong—who was suspected to be the King of the Heartless—there, and Wasteland Ruin 13 had Wu Meng.

“From the appearance of mutated creatures, such city ruins might also be related to the nine research institutes,” Geneva added.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “But it shouldn’t be a highly correlated relationship. Isn’t Mechanical Paradise the original Third Research Institute? Doesn’t it not have...”

Jiang Baimian suddenly stopped as she spoke, and her eyes seemed to widen.

Bai Chen and the others could vaguely guess what she had thought of. If Mechanical Paradise had an abnormally terrifying existence like the city ruins, it could only be the Source Brain!

Chapter 424: Wang Fugui’s Intelligence

Geneva clearly understood what Jiang Baimian had thought of. His slightly synthetic male voice sounded. “But we don’t have mutated creatures there.”

“Haha, this is only a guess. Make bold assumptions and verify them carefully.” Jiang Baimian didn’t continue the topic and instead asked Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen, “Are we still exploring Wasteland Ruin 13 in a few days?”

“It’s too dangerous.” This time, Long Yuehong beat Shang Jianyao to it.

Bai Chen agreed to a certain extent. “That Wu Meng isn’t someone we can deal with now. Most of our strength is in high-tech products, and these items often can’t be separated from circuits and circuit boards. When we encounter Wu Meng, it’s equivalent to fighting him with our hands and feet tied.”

The Old Task Force only had one Awakened—Shang Jianyao—in the non-advanced technology domain.

Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “From the looks of it, Wu Meng can’t leave the area where the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station is.”

Shang Jianyao laughed. "It reminds me of DiMarco."

DiMarco was 'sealed' in the Underground Ark and couldn't leave.

"DiMarco doesn't give off the feeling that he's far stronger than Wu Meng." Long Yuehong expressed his thoughts truthfully. "Besides, their area of expertise is also different."

"That's true." Jiang Baimian nodded. She then said, "From the situation today, as long as we don't approach the radio station or carry any electric appliances with us, we won't be affected by Wu Meng. We just have to guard against his subordinates, his pet, and his electronic 'puppets.' These are things we can deal with.

"Yes, we can't rule out the possibility that there are other powerful creatures in the city ruin. However, we probably won't encounter them if we don't venture too deep. After all, such creatures have territorial awareness. Wu Meng's existence can intimidate them and prevent them from entering the corresponding area."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded Jiang Baimian's analysis.

"I'm not done!" Jiang Baimian scolded in frustration. She paused and said, "Therefore, we have to change our target if we want to carry out a third exploration. We're no longer searching for the ruin's secret. Instead, we're gathering supplies to pay off our debt. We can also find Ferrington along the way. It will naturally be best if we can discover some useful clues and capture the white wolf along the way. If not, we won't force it. This way, we can avoid danger to the greatest extent."

Long Yuehong recalled his previous experience and slowly said, "If it's just to gather supplies, it doesn't seem like there's a problem if we don't go too far..."

Only then did he realize that apart from the white wolf's attack, they had been scaring themselves during the previous adventure. In fact, there was no danger.

"That's right." This time, Shang Jianyao actually agreed with Long Yuehong. He smiled and said, "If you really want to visit Wu Meng, you might have to get Teacher Du Heng or Xiaochong."

At least you still are in the right state of mind... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Upon seeing Bai Chen nod, Jiang Baimian smiled. “Then, it’s decided. Yes—before that, report today’s operation to the company and see what opinions the higher-ups can give.”

...

In the evening, not long after the Old Task Force finished sending the telegram, Wang Fugui came to visit them again.

“Not all of you are here?” Wang Fugui scanned the area and didn’t find Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “They went to the bathroom.”

With so many Ruin Hunters coming and going every day in the advance base camp, there were definitely enough public bathrooms built. However, they were lacking in cleaning and weren’t that hygienic.

Fortunately, the wilderness nomads from the surrounding settlements would come over to pick feces and fertilize the wastelands they developed in the mountains. At the same time, they would also take on the task of toilet cleaning issued by some relatively well-to-do hunters.

The bathrooms’ stench affected not only ordinary Ruin Hunters who used public bathrooms but also those who stayed in the hotel. Who could avoid the smell in such a small camp that was modified from an ancient castle?

In addition, in a place with poor public security and order, it was best to go to the public bathroom together unless one was confident in their strength. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be easy to counterattack when you were squatting there and focusing on taking a dump when someone suddenly kicked open the partition, kicked you down, and mugged you.

Wang Fugui nodded indiscernibly and said to the two women, “The few of us discussed and want to go to Wasteland Ruin 13 again. What about you?”

“You still want to go?” Jiang Baimian asked deliberately.

Bai Chen cooperatively sighed with emotion. “Such a dangerous place.”

Wang Fugui smiled. “After we returned and calmed down, we thought about it carefully and realized that it wasn’t that dangerous most of the time. Apart from the white wolf, we didn’t encounter any real attacks. Everyone gained a lot today. If we don’t go again, we will be letting down such a good opportunity.”

“Humans die for wealth, and birds die for food.” Jiang Baimian teased Wang Fugui with the same words he had previously said. She then said, “We’re also prepared to go again, and we are also changing targets.”

She roughly recounted the previous team discussion.

Wang Fugui nodded in admiration. “Such a plan is the safest. How about we settle on the day after tomorrow then? It will be more troublesome if we delay.”

“Why?” Jiang Baimian acutely sensed the meaning behind Wang Fugui’s words.

Wang Fugui looked back at the castle’s main building. “I received news that the garrison here reported the white wolf’s latest situation to the higher-ups. First City plans on sending an elite team to deal with this dangerous creature to prevent any major damage. On the surface, it seems like the noble who commissioned the white wolf mission can’t wait any longer and plans on using his connections in the army to achieve his goal. In fact, I think they are beginning to think that there might be a considerable secret behind the white wolf.”

“Elite team...” Jiang Baimian thoughtfully repeated this short phrase.

Wang Fugui smiled and said, “The elite team in First City’s army won’t be weaker than you. They are also skilled in different areas. For example, there’s an exoskeleton armor section—there are about 12 people and at least six sets of equipment. For example, an Awakened team consisting of four to six people. Heh heh, they are all selected based on the situation, and their abilities can complement each other effectively. Therefore, their teamwork remains formidable even though there are no experts at the Mind Corridor level.”

“Is that so...” Jiang Baimian actually knew a little about this.

Wang Fugui continued, “It’s not a secret in the camp that you have military exoskeletons. I’m afraid that those self-important fellows will target you in a bid to make a windfall. Therefore, completing the exploration as soon as possible and leaving this place in advance is the best choice.”

“Alright, it’s settled—the day after tomorrow.” Jiang Baimian didn’t believe that strength could crush the locals, especially when the locals were strong themselves.

Upon seeing Wang Fugui turn to leave, Bai Chen suddenly asked, “Do you know who the noble that posted the white wolf mission is?”

“I think it’s...” Wang Fugui recalled and said, “Consul Beulis’s son. ”

“Oh, him.” Jiang Baimian recalled Asus’s face.

Bai Chen didn’t ask any further.

...

Late at night.

After waking up, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen replaced Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian and began night duty.

Shang Jianyao entered the jeep’s backseat, lay down, and quickly fell asleep. Amidst the haziness, he suddenly saw a meaty paw slap the window.

The paw’s flesh was skinless and hairless, but it was bloody.

Shang Jianyao sat up and opened the car door. In front of him was the Slumber Cat with a scorpion tail and a bone spike growing out of its shoulder.

“Meow.” Slumber Cat—whose blood-red muscles were exposed—actually let out a soft meow. It then turned around, raised its tail, and walked to the corner of the street ahead.



Shang Jianyao laughed. “Xiaochong asked you to bring me to him?”

The Slumber Cat replied with a meow.

After turning left at the intersection, Shang Jianyao saw a familiar street.

This was a place near the Golden Apple Zone in the Red Wolf Zone. The Old Task Force had once been here, but they didn’t spend time there.

Shang Jianyao followed the Slumber Cat through the streets and alleys and quickly arrived in front of a short building by the street. He then walked to the fifth floor and realized that a door on his right was ajar.

The Slumber Cat burrowed in.

“Xiaochong!” Shang Jianyao excitedly pushed open the door and shouted.

Behind the door, a child in yellow clothes was sitting there, playing a game. He turned his head—it was the seven-year-old, black-haired boy, Xiaochong.

Shang Jianyao woke up with a start. He opened his eyes and sat up.

Joy quickly surfaced on his face as he muttered to himself, “Xiaochong got Nightmare Horse to tell me his current residence in such a manner?”

Chapter 425: A ‘Sudden Change’ in Development

The next morning, Shang Jianyao shared the dream with the other Old Task Force members.

“Xiaochong lives there?” Jiang Baimian was rather surprised.

That street came under the Red Wolf Zone. It was near the Golden Apple Zone and was very far from the Green Olive Zone.

This didn't match Jiang Baimian's previous speculations. Of course, the premise of her guess was that the Heartless disease outbreak in the Green Olive Zone was related to Xiaochong. However, this was only a hypothesis.

"Maybe he just moved there recently." Bai Chen gave another possibility.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "We'll talk about it when the time comes."

She then smiled and said, "We've completed one of the three missions to the North Shore Mountains. We can already see hope for one of the remaining two."

She meant that the mission of finding the Nightmare Horse and figuring out Xiaochong's whereabouts was considered completed. For the mission of capturing the white wolf to pay off their debt, although they had failed to capture the white wolf, Wasteland Ruin 13—a 'rich mine'—allowed them to accumulate a lot of valuable supplies and books quickly. Their debt could be resolved via a second exploration. At most, they could use a portion of their company-approved funds to pay off the debt. Since they could pay off their debt, it didn't matter if they captured the white wolf or not.

In any case, such Hunter missions with no restrictions on the number of people taking on the mission wouldn't affect their credit even if they failed.

The only mission that didn't have any hope was to find Ferrington, the Ruin Hunter who knew about the Mirror Church. This could be combined into the third exploration of Wasteland Ruin 13 because Ferrington might've accidentally entered the city ruin.

In short, if everything went smoothly and they explored that place again, the Old Task Force would be able to return to First City and participate in the subsequent gladiator matches.

At night, Pangu Biology replied with a telegram: "The current plan is very safe. You just have to pay attention to one thing: Don't go within a kilometer of that radio station..."

"One kilometer?" Jiang Baimian couldn't help but grumble. "Seriously, it's like pulling teeth from the company to get things out of it. We only managed to squeeze a bit of new information from each exploration."

At this moment, Geneva found a contradiction. “If it’s just staying one kilometer away from the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station, First City’s army wouldn’t just guard the outside and not explore Wasteland Ruin 13.”

“Maybe they just didn’t explore the area we went to.” Bai Chen helped come up with a reason.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “I haven’t finished translating.”

“...” Bai Chen felt a rare moment of embarrassment.

This almost made Long Yuehong laugh. Fortunately, he held back, and Shang Jianyao didn’t applaud.

Jiang Baimian continued translating. “Don’t exceed the area designated by the exploration plan.”

After reading it, she smiled. “So...”

The answer was obvious: There were other dangers elsewhere in Wasteland Ruin 13.

...

The next day, eight humans from the two teams arrived at the metal door that swung open.

Looking at the overgrown park beyond the door, Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said, “Everyone should know of the things to take note of. I’ll only emphasize one thing: No matter what the harvest is or if there are still target areas that haven’t been explored, we have to return once we spend more than 90 minutes in the ruins. I believe everyone doesn’t want to commit suicide in all kinds of ways like the Ruin Hunters brought here by the white wolf, right?”

The 90-minute time limit was set because they had stayed for a total of 90 minutes during the last exploration without suffering any influence. Therefore, they could extend the time limit slightly for their return.

“Alright.” Waite immediately replied as if Jiang Baimian was the leader of their Hunter team and not Wang Fugui.

Gray, Fars, and Wang Fugui looked at each other and expressed that they shared the same thoughts.

The Old Task Force had naturally talked about this long ago, so they had no objections.

The two teams walked out the metal door and entered the park. They changed directions for this expedition.

Jiang Baimian and the others didn't ignore their surroundings as they searched for any traces of human activity. Those would likely belong to their target Hunter, Ferrington.

As the armed group walked, Jiang Baimian—who had the best eyesight—stopped. She pointed the muzzle to the side. “Someone has walked past there.”

Shang Jianyao and the others followed her gaze and saw the flattened weeds.

This continued forward, forming a ‘path.’ But due to the hot summer and the recent lack of rain, the soil was relatively dry. There were no obvious footprints on the ‘path.’

“I don't know when it was left behind... but it can't be too long.” Bai Chen made a judgment based on her experience.

Jiang Baimian nodded and looked at Wang Fugui and the others. “Shall we follow it and take a look? In any case, it's headed for a destination relatively close to our target area.”

At the same time, she prayed inwardly. I hope it's Ferrington.

Wang Fugui and the others had no objections and were willing to respect the Old Task Force's choice.

The two teams slightly changed directions and walked out of the park and onto the street along the flattened weeds.

The leaves here had rotted in a pile. Some places were covered, preventing them from being exposed to the sun. Therefore, the roads on both sides weren't that dry—they even looked soft and mushy.

This allowed Jiang Baimian and the others to find some footprints.

After comparing the footprints, Jiang Baimian did a simple calculation and gave a preliminary judgment. "The shoe soles have ordinary patterns... He's about 1.7 meters tall... He's relatively lightweight... These footprints should've been left here today..."

She was a little disappointed about this because it was unlikely to be Ferrington.

"It was only left behind today..." Wang Fugui frowned and said, "Does anyone else know that the cave leads here? I've warned Roen and Harrison not to leak the information. Normally speaking, they wouldn't dare to sell this information before we leave."

Roen was the Old Task Force's guide from before, and Harrison was from the lone Hunter team.

"Let's go take a look," Shang Jianyao suggested enthusiastically.

Just as he said that, Long Yuehong pointed somewhere not too far away. "There's smoke there."

The others looked over one after another and saw bluish-gray smoke curling up from a spot in front of them that was blocked by a few buildings. It wasn't dense and was rather sparse.

"About a kilometer from here." Jiang Baimian gave a rough estimate.

"Could it be a spontaneous combustion caused by the hot weather and dry air?" Lone Hunter Gray guessed.

The weather had been rather hot the past two days, and it comforted him greatly. Although he was still wrapped in a leather coat, he no longer trembled.

"It might also be from the person who came in today." Bai Chen looked at the footprints by the roadside.

“Let’s go take a look.” Shang Jianyao encouraged everyone again.

Nobody objected. To them, going there to take a look didn’t affect their search for supplies since there were plenty of things along the way.

As they searched, they turned into another street and circled around the buildings. Their eyes suddenly lit up.

In front of them was a small square with a pool. In the middle of the square stood a slender obelisk with a cross atop it—this was a relatively common Old World item in the Red River Zone.

Beside the obelisk, a large cluster of thick incense sticks was erected on the pool’s railing. The bluish-gray smoke was created by them.

Facing the incense was a woman in a grayish-blue Daoist robe. She had blonde hair and green eyes.

She was beautiful.

“Daoist Galoran!” Shang Jianyao shouted, having the excitement of meeting an old friend in a foreign land.

The woman was none other than Eternal Time Church’s Daoist Galoran, who the Old Task Force had encountered in the Blackmarsh Wilderness.

She was of Red River ethnicity and was born a noble in First City.

Galoran didn’t immediately respond and slowly bowed in a certain direction. She then calmly turned around and looked at Shang Jianyao and the others.

A faint smile appeared on her face as she hugged her right hand with her left hand and raised it to her eyebrows. As she bent down, she said, “The Celestial Worthy of Immeasurable for Blessings. We meet again. This is fate’s arrangement, and this is where the Dao lies.”

When chanting the title, she spoke Ashlandic. But because of the Red River people, she later switched to the Red River language.

Upon seeing that Wang Fugui and the others were a little stunned, Jiang Baimian took a few steps forward and smiled. “Daoist, why are you here?”

Galoran turned to the side and looked at a certain area. She didn’t feel that there was anything to hide. “My master’s master—the former Celestial Master—helped First City seal a powerful monster here. For this, he sacrificed himself. Every time I pass by, I’ll come in to pay my respects to him.”

Uh... Despite Galoran speaking clearly, Long Yuehong found it ridiculous—wrecked by the sudden change in development.

This was just like how Nanke Convent’s Abbot Zhou Yue had previously used talisman water and the Eight Trigrams Mirror to deal with the Superior Heartless. What happened subsequently was essentially targeting the price paid by the Awakened.

Jiang Baimian raised her eyebrows and thoughtfully asked, “Wu Meng?”

#### Chapter 426: Meeting

Galoran calmly said, “I don’t know what the monster’s name is. If I rashly answer, I will only mislead you. The only thing I can say regarding this matter is to maintain a gentle and humble attitude and face it with a tolerant attitude. Don’t be rash or arrogant. Weakness marks the course of the Dao’s mighty deeds.”

Although she was using the Red River language and no longer spoke with articulation and a mellow, full tune, Gray, Waite, and Fars were stunned. They felt that the sentence made sense, but they also felt that it was no different from an ordinary person’s advice. It was only the packaging of some simple words.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao turned his head and looked at Long Yuehong. “Any questions you would like to ask?”

How do you know that I have questions? Wait, why should I be the one asking? Long Yuehong struggled inwardly for a moment before he finally couldn’t help but ask, “Daoist, don’t you think the matter you described is different from what’s happening now?”

In fact, he was no stranger to the concept of 'sealing.' DiMarco seemed to be trapped in the Underground Ark because of this, but it involved the Kalendaria. The principle was unknown, and nobody explained it in religious jargon, so it didn't sound that strange.

Galoran wasn't angry at all. She smiled and said, "Everyone's understanding of the world is different. Yours might not be wrong, and mine might not be right. Everyone has their own path, so there's nothing to argue about."

Your answer makes me feel like an idiot... Long Yuehong opened his mouth but muttered inwardly. This was because Galoran's words reminded him of a skit from the Old World's entertainment.

Someone asked a wise man: How do we persuade those idiots?

'There's no need to persuade them,' the wise man replied, 'nor is there any possibility of persuading them. It will only waste your time. I generally stop explaining and choose to echo them. I say to them, 'Yes, you're right.'

The other person objected. 'How can that do? You are escaping reality and not facing the problem head-on!'

The wise man replied, 'Yes, you're right.'

Galoran glanced at Long Yuehong and added, "All knowledge is only superficial. What we need to do is find the existence of the Dao from this knowledge, take it in, and comprehend it until we gain something..."

Upon seeing that Long Yuehong, Gray, and the others were confused, Galoran stopped explaining and smiled. "In the simplest words: we see the essence through phenomena."

Jiang Baimian stopped this unilateral discussion in time and smiled as she made small talk. "Daoist, do you plan on traveling around this city ruin after paying your respects, or are you prepared to leave?"

Galoran listened seriously and suddenly smiled. "I adapt myself to my circumstances and don't have a clear destination. But after hearing what you said, I suddenly recalled that First City is nearby. I've been away for many years. Since I'm passing by, I'll go back and take a look."



She didn't explain that this was another form of adaptation to the circumstances. In any case, she didn't care about what others thought of her.

At this point, Galoran turned around and bowed in a certain direction three times with the still-smoking incense.

Jiang Baimian and the others noticed that the direction basically overlapped with the area where the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station was.

"I'm done paying my respects. It's time to leave." Galoran looked at the incense sticks that had burned to the ends and smiled at the Old Task Force. She then bowed again. "The Perfected Man has no self; the New World is before us."

With that said, she slowly walked the way the two teams came. After walking nearly ten meters, she turned around and reminded them, "There are still many powerful monsters here. Although they aren't as powerful as that one, they aren't easily dealt with. It's best if you don't randomly wander around."

Daoist, you must've encountered many powerful monsters through your adaptation to the circumstances, right? Long Yuehong didn't think Galoran was very strong the last time they met. But after experiencing all kinds of things, he realized that this Daoist priestess—who could come and go as she pleased in extremely dangerous places like Swamp Ruin 1 and Wasteland Ruin 13—was definitely more extraordinary than he imagined.

Even if she was inferior to Du Heng, she was definitely one of the best in the Sea of Origins.

Also, that was the past Galoran—who didn't know about the Mind Corridor back then. Long Yuehong had no idea what level she had reached now.

"Understood," Jiang Baimian replied to Galoran with a smile.

After watching the blonde Galoran with her casually tied hair disappear around the street corner, Shang Jianyao suddenly sighed. "She is going to face herself."

"Huh?" Jiang Baimian was first stunned before she understood what Shang Jianyao was saying.

Galoran 'went with the flow' to the vicinity not only because of the machinations of fate but also because of her subconscious. She might've already reached the Sea of Origins's end and needed to face the person she least wanted to face.

She was clearly 'rooted' in First City. Since she couldn't escape, she would face it.

The reason Shang Jianyao sighed was that he had yet to make any progress in this regard. He was still unable to persuade the other him, defeat him, or accommodate him.

Wang Fugui and Gray's expressions changed slightly, but they didn't say anything. Waite and Fars were slightly confused.

At this moment, the incense sticks stuck to the railing using a lump of black mud had almost burned out, turning into grayish-white powder.

Wang Fugui retracted his gaze and asked, "From the Eternal Time Church?"

With such behavior and mannerisms, it was difficult for him not to make connections.

"You sure are knowledgeable," praised Shang Jianyao. Accompanying the praise was the never-missing applause.

Are you confirming my guess, or are you trying to evade the topic? Wang Fugui couldn't figure out the actual meaning of Shang Jianyao's praise.

"That's what she said. We don't know if it's true or not," Jiang Baimian added for Shang Jianyao.

At this moment, a terrified voice sounded from somewhere in the city ruin. "Help! Help!"

It was spoken in the Red River language, giving off a heart-wrenching feeling.

"Are we going?" Shang Jianyao turned his head and asked Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian looked at the source of the sound and deliberated before saying, “It’s several hundred meters away. If we continue in that direction, we will soon exceed the two-kilometer range.”

The two-kilometer range was the exploration limit that the two teams had agreed on. Once they exceeded it and encountered danger, they wouldn’t have the stamina to run back to the exit.

Phew, Team Leader is still considered rational... Besides, who knows if the person shouting for help is a human or a monster... Long Yuehong praised Jiang Baimian inwardly.

In fact, if someone really pleaded for help in front of him, he might not be able to steel his heart given his abilities. But since he didn’t see anyone and only heard voices, he wouldn’t be troubled or soft-hearted.

Shang Jianyao then exhaled and didn’t retort.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “But we can still walk in that direction—as long as we don’t exceed the limit and stay within two kilometers. If the person seeking help is lucky enough to encounter us, we can save them while we’re at it.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Don’t worry, Little Red is here!”

Hey! Long Yuehong expressed his displeasure inwardly.

“I have no objections.” Bai Chen agreed with this plan.

Gray and the others looked at each other and didn’t say anything in support, but they didn’t object. To them, it was fine as long as they had supplies to gather along the way. In any case, they felt that the chances of the rescuee encountering them were slim.

Besides, if anything were to happen, they didn’t plan on sharing the same fate as October Xue’s team.

Wang Fugui thought for a moment and nodded. “That works too.”

He then glanced at the four Old Task Force members and smiled. “You guys are kinder than I thought...”

In the Ashlands, this was a good quality but not a useful one.

Shang Jianyao smiled and replied, “Do you know what our real goal is?”

“What is it?” Wang Fugui asked curiously.

Shang Jianyao’s expression turned solemn. “Save all of humanity!”

“...” Wang Fugui, Gray, Waite, and Fars were stunned for two seconds before laughing. This joke is really good!

The two teams began to advance in the particular direction slowly. Along the way, they smashed car windows, rummaged through the skeletons, and gathered all kinds of valuable and portable items. These included but weren’t limited to gold, technical information, useful books, intact components that had yet to be unwrapped, and items that used special alloys.

After walking for about 300 to 400 meters, a figure suddenly appeared in Long Yuehong’s eyes.

The figure stumbled over and kept looking back as if they were being chased by something extremely terrifying. He was about the same height as Long Yuehong, and he wore a linen shirt with additional pockets sewn on it. His hair was gray, and his eyes were dark brown. He also held a shotgun in his hand.

Ferrington!

He was the Ruin Hunter—Ferrington—that the Old Task Force had been searching for.

Shang Jianyao picked up the Berserker assault rifle and asked loudly, “What happened?”

Ferrington turned his head and saw them. He hurriedly shouted, “Help! There’s a monster!”

“There’s nothing behind you,” Jiang Baimian reminded him before Shang Jianyao could scare him.

Ferrington panted and said, “It’ll catch up soon!”

There are no medium-sized creatures within dozens of meters... As Jiang Baimian muttered, she went with the flow. “Then, let’s retreat to the square from before.”

On the way back to the place Galoran paid her respects, Ferrington finally relaxed a little when he saw that no monsters were chasing after him. He was no longer as tense and terrified.

“What did you see?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Ferrington took a deep breath and said, “I hid from the white wolf’s puppets and entered this place. I wanted to find another way to leave while gathering supplies and expired food. In the end, I saw many corpses over the past few days—corpses that died recently. Some of them cut their arteries with glass shards. Some shot themselves. Some were splashed with gasoline and burned to death...”

The other suicides? Long Yuehong thought with a solemn expression.

Ferrington continued, “This scared the hell out of me. I didn’t dare to stay any longer and sped up my search for a way out. Just now, I saw—saw—on a street...”

The horror from before gradually surfaced on his face again. “I saw a living person.”

Chapter 427: That Person

“A living person?” Waite blurted out before Long Yuehong could.

In this city ruin, encountering living people that didn’t belong to their team or someone they didn’t know was much more terrifying than encountering dead people, Heartless, or mutated creatures.

Long Yuehong thought so too.

Ferrington held his shotgun and recalled. “That street was about the same as here. It’s dirty, messy, and smelly. It’s unknown how many years it’s been since it was cleaned. There’s a long bench by the roadside with a person sitting on it. He—he’s Ashlandic, and he’s wearing what the Old World

calls a formal suit; it's gray with black stripes. He didn't look a year over thirty. His hair was neatly combed back, and he wore round, petite glasses."

"That doesn't seem special..." Long Yuehong deliberated and said.

When encountering such a person, one shouldn't immediately treat him as a monster even in such a dangerous ruin. Perhaps they should try to approach him and talk to him to see if he was friendly or cooperative.

"There's indeed nothing special about him apart from the fact that he's still alive." Ferrington exhaled and said, "But there was a gigantic python coiled around a tree behind him. The python's eyes were large and round like two searchlights, and they were the color of blood... Its upper body was hanging down and resting on the back of the bench like it was that person's guard... That's not the most terrifying thing. I-I saw the white wolf. It—it was crouched beside that person!"

At this moment, a name suddenly surfaced in Jiang Baimian, Wang Fugui, and the others' minds: Wu Meng!

Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station's owner, Wu Meng!

Wasn't it said that we would be fine if we didn't bring any electronic products within a kilometer of the radio station? Wasn't he sealed? Why is he wandering the streets? That direction is completely opposite of the radio station's location. It's definitely more than two kilometers away... Long Yuehong experienced Ferrington's prior horror, and he felt it more deeply than the other party.

After all, Ferrington was unlikely to know anything about the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station. He didn't know how strange and terrifying Wu Meng was.

"That person was reading the newspaper and was very focused, but the white wolf and the python looked at me," Ferrington continued. "I was terrified, so I ran over as I shouted for help."

You already saw them. With Wu Meng's abilities, it should be very easy for him to control you. How could he let you escape? Jiang Baimian frowned and sensed that something was amiss.

There were two explanations for this. First, Ferrington had been deliberately released. He had actually been secretly influenced by Wu Meng and was just waiting to deliver a fatal misdirection to

the eight people here at the critical moment. The second was that it wasn't the real Wu Meng but a projection he had created with the help of an electronic product.

Combining the information provided by the company and Galoran's words, Jiang Baimian was more inclined to the latter. Otherwise, with Wu Meng's strength and level, there was no need to use such a complicated plan. He could've just come over directly.

Despite her inclination, Jiang Baimian didn't dare to be careless when it came to matters rooted in reality. She didn't talk about the strange person with Ferrington and instead solemnly asked, "Do you have any electronic products on you?"

"No, why are you asking?" Ferrington was stunned for a moment. Why the question?

"That's good." Jiang Baimian casually explained, "Electronic products are a dangerous medium here."

"Is that so?" Although Ferrington couldn't understand why, he had previously seen the white wolf control the group of Ruin Hunters. He was skeptical about it, but he didn't ask why after receiving an affirmative answer.

Compared to this, he was more concerned about something else. "Where is this place? You seem familiar? Are there any other exits?"

"Wasteland Ruin 13," Wang Fugui replied concisely.

"Huh?" Ferrington's pupils suddenly dilated.

Every Ruin Hunter that used First City as a stronghold had heard of Wasteland Ruin 13 and its related rumors unless they had just arrived and planned on taking up residence. Therefore, Ferrington was a little stunned.

Jiang Baimian didn't comfort him. She glanced in the direction that Ferrington had fled from and deliberated before saying, "Let's head back. We'll take a slight detour and continue gathering supplies on the way."

“Alright!” Waite answered ahead of Long Yuehong again. He had already reaped a bountiful harvest today, so there really was no need for him to explore further and take unnecessary risks.

The others had no objections.

From their conversation, Ferrington could tell that these people seemed to have a way out. Thus, he felt much more at ease.

As they walked back in a tactical formation, Jiang Baimian smiled at Ferrington. “As you can see, the white wolf can control humans and turn them into puppets. For everyone’s safety, I have to ask you a few questions to determine if you are the real you or if you are affected.”

“You know me?” Ferrington understood the meaning behind Jiang Baimian’s words and asked in surprise.

Jiang Baimian replied in a rather awkward manner, “I know a person who knows you. Yes, first question. What’s your name?”

“Ferrington,” Ferrington replied frankly.

“Second question: Do you know of a religion that worships mirrors?” Jiang Baimian got to the point.

Upon hearing this, Wang Fugui and Gray looked at Ferrington.

“Yes.” Ferrington came to a realization. “Are you Terrence’s friends?”

He remembered that he had only mentioned this to Terrence and a few others. Among these people, Terrence had the most friends.

“No, he’s our creditor.” Shang Jianyao had a heavy expression.

However, this creditor often trembles in fear of being killed by his debtor... Long Yuehong scoffed at Shang Jianyao’s excessive performance.



Ferrington didn't ask how much they owed. He thought for a moment and said, "I do know such a religion. Yes, I know a parishioner of theirs and am relatively familiar with him. He wanted to bring me into the faith some time ago."

Jiang Baimian slowly walked forward and warily observed her surroundings as she asked, "What's his name, and where does he live?"

"His name is Smith." Ferrington had no choice but to surrender to his circumstances. He had no intention of helping his friend hide anything. "He lives in Room 503 at 9 Haray Street in the Golden Grain Zone."

Shang Jianyao immediately asked, "Do you know what their Holy Communion is?"

Ferrington shook his head in confusion.

"It's no wonder you haven't joined them." Shang Jianyao had an expression that said: I understand you very well.

"Which Kalendaria does their religion worship?" Jiang Baimian asked.

Ferrington shook his head again. "They don't seem to worship a Kalendaria but the mirror. They always tell me that the New World is on the other side of the mirror, and they also say that the person you see in the mirror is also staring back at you. It makes me feel awkward and even a little scared every time I look in the mirror..."

Shang Jianyao listened with relish as if he had learned a new mantra.

After Ferrington finished speaking, Jiang Baimian signaled Shang Jianyao with her eyes and raised her right thumb and middle finger.

This represented a preset plan. It meant that he could 'make' friends or 'persuade' the other party to eliminate any latent dangers.

Although Ferrington had acted very normal until now and his words and actions were reasonable, he had already stayed in Wasteland Ruin 13 for too many days. Hence, Jiang Baimian didn't dare to let her guard down.

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled at Ferrington. “Don’t mind us asking so many questions. Look, this is Wasteland Ruin 13. Everyone has to be honest and united to eliminate distrust in order to ensure their safety to the greatest extent. So...”

These were all words that could withstand a test. Ferrington nodded as he listened, and Wang Fugui, Waite, and the others didn’t think there was anything hidden.

When the word ‘so’ was said, Ferrington’s expression suddenly warped as if a layer of haze covered him. His lips quivered a few times before he said in a deep voice, “The more dangerous it is, the more one should take risks—the more one should act in an antithetical manner as the saying goes...”

Chapter 428: Inclination

Ferrington’s voice echoed over the street, giving Long Yuehong goosebumps. He subconsciously wanted to aim the muzzle at the Ruin Hunter and fire to stop him from continuing.

He was fast, but Shang Jianyao was even faster. Shang Jianyao took a stride forward, raised his fist, and walloped the spot behind Ferrington’s ear.

Bam!

Ferrington’s eyes rolled back as he fell to the ground and fainted.

Jiang Baimian then turned her head and said to Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others, “Check your condition immediately to see if you have the intention to stay longer, gather supplies here for extended periods, or the urge to solve the radio station’s mystery.”

Long Yuehong’s heart tightened as he quickly did some self-reflection. Then, he quickly shook his head. “No.”

At this moment, he wished he could leave Wasteland Ruin 13 the very next second.

“No,” Bai Chen replied.

“Not only do I not want to adventure any further, but I also plan on evacuating.” Waite indicated that he had only suffered from shock.

Wang Fugui, Fars, and Gray didn’t dare to delay. They also examined themselves and shook their heads.

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and said to Shang Jianyao, “Phew, it seems like Wu Meng’s influence can’t be spread through an affected person’s words. Check Ferrington and see what he has on him.”

Shang Jianyao quickly crouched down and dug out a stack of notes, a pile of coins, a pistol, four to five loaded cartridges, a lighter, a small cloth bag containing shotgun ammunition, a few expired compressed biscuits, an Old World thermos with plenty of water, and a neatly folded newspaper.

“Newspaper?” Jiang Baimian swept her gaze across the items and felt that the newspaper—which was folded to the size of a piece of tofu—was the odd one out.

After all, Ferrington didn’t look like the kind of person who would read newspapers when in danger.

She reached out to take it and examined it carefully for a few seconds. She realized that the outermost page was the front page, and the section with the newspaper’s name was: Fakh Post.

The newspaper had turned yellow, but it wasn’t fragile enough to fall apart at the slightest touch.

Jiang Baimian quickly browsed through the news printed on the exterior and only confirmed that it was likely a remnant of the Old World. She didn’t discover anything worth paying attention to.

This isn’t a good time to study it seriously. She held the newspaper and said to Shang Jianyao, “Stuff the items back into his clothes and wake him up.”

Before long, Ferrington opened his eyes, which were blank. He didn’t seem to remember who had attacked him.

After he got to his feet, Jiang Baimian asked seriously, “Something abnormal happened to you just now.”

“Abnormal?” Ferrington asked in horror.

Jiang Baimian didn't answer and waved the newspaper in her hand. “Do you still remember this?”

Ferrington frowned and looked at it for a while. “I have a slight impression of it but nothing too deep. I should've seen it somewhere here.”

“We found it on you.” Shang Jianyao spoke the truth like he was telling a ghost story.

Ferrington's pupils suddenly dilated. “How can that be?”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and raised a new question. “How many days have you been here?”

“More than ten days...” Ferrington recalled.

Jiang Baimian stared into Ferrington's eyes and asked, “With more than ten days, it's enough for you to cover this city even on foot and leave in the opposite direction. However, why are you still so close to the cave entrance?”

Ferrington's body suddenly froze. After a few seconds, he said in a trembling voice, “I had the idea that such a city ruin definitely has many valuable supplies. It's a waste of this opportunity to leave just like that. The more dangerous it is, the more I should take risks...”

At this point, Ferrington stopped in horror.

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she asked another question. “It's true that you don't have any electronic products on you, but have you used any during this period of time?”

Ferrington suppressed his panic and fear and recalled. “When I was looking for expired food in a mall, I found a radio that looked like it could still be used. I then put in a common Old World battery I had on me—it fitted perfectly. I fiddled with it and found that it really could be used. I tuned into a radio station called Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs. The radio host said, “The more dangerous it is, the more one should take risks...”

As he spoke, Ferrington's expression changed continuously as if he had finally woken up from a dream.

"I-I actually stayed here for so long..." he muttered to himself hysterically. After taking a few seconds to calm down, Ferrington added, "I have an impression of that newspaper. I-I took the newspaper from a car while I was shouting for help and running. I don't know why I did it..."

The more Ferrington spoke, the more confused he became. He was terrified and perplexed.

"What does Wu Meng mean by getting him to take this newspaper?" Wang Fugui looked at Jiang Baimian's right hand.

"We'll go back and read it from beginning to end." Jiang Baimian placed the newspaper back into her tactical backpack.

On the one hand, she felt that it was a waste of time to read it and delay the evacuation. On the other hand, she was afraid that something bad would happen if she read the newspaper. She felt that it was safer to find a safe place to do this.

"Alright." Wang Fugui clearly thought so too.

The group of nine didn't stay or take any further detours. They walked toward the cave entrance back the way they came.

They had already obtained the supplies that were easier to obtain along the way. Waite and the others focused their attention on the shops lining both sides of the street.

They could either enter directly and take away the items they fancied or shatter the glass and reach out to take out their shiny targets. They wanted to end this all quickly and not delay their return.

As they walked, Jiang Baimian suddenly cast her gaze to the side.

Long Yuehong followed her gaze and saw a mall with a signboard on the ground.

“Something happened?” Bai Chen asked.

Jiang Baimian frowned. “There’s a loudspeaker at the mall entrance. There seemed to be some development just now...”

She didn’t say that she sensed an electric current flash by.

“Wu Meng wants to use the loudspeaker to tell us about Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs!” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched the Berserker assault rifle in his left hand as if he had already figured out the truth.

“Gasp...” Waite beat Long Yuehong to it again. “Leave quickly. Don’t listen to it!”

Ferrington’s encounter left a deep impression on him, and he felt uneasy.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Long Yuehong agreed.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and continued forward. After taking a few steps, she muttered to herself, “Back then, Wu Meng controlled Geneva. Yes, our robot also used a radio broadcast to say, ‘the more dangerous it is, the more one should take risks—the more one should act in an antithetical manner as the saying goes.’ Why aren’t we affected?”

Wang Fugui and the others were deep in thought when Shang Jianyao suddenly smiled. “When did you have the illusion that we weren’t affected? Is it normal to explore twice in such a short period of time?”

Long Yuehong and the others were shocked.

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?” Jiang Baimian turned her head and glared at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao smiled and replied, “Because I was also affected. This influence is too weak—it’s not like what Ferrington encountered. It only slightly strengthened our inclinations, so it’s very difficult to discover anything without any problems.”

You sure are proud... Long Yuehong couldn’t help but criticize inwardly.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and didn't show the weakness she had buried.

Wu Meng was really impossible to guard against!

"Wu Meng is really terrifying..." Wang Fugui sighed with emotion. "I actually wanted to figure out this city ruin's secret and figure out what kind of existence he is."

Just as he said that, Waite spoke like a startled bird. "I remember him saying that the Dao is in circuits, circuit boards, and electrical appliances twice. Will this affect us?"

"This sentence doesn't involve subjectivity, so there shouldn't be any problems." Jiang Baimian was relatively certain about this.

Gray—who was wrapped in a leather coat—voiced his doubts as he walked. "Why didn't Wu Meng seize those two chances and instead insist on saying such nonsense?"

Nobody had an explanation. Only Shang Jianyao smiled and replied, "Maybe he has OCD. He has to preach to the target before exerting any influence."

"That's... not impossible..." Wang Fugui thought for a few seconds and actually agreed.

As they conversed, they didn't slow down at all as though there was a monster behind them that wanted to devour them.

No, it wasn't 'as though' but the truth.

After circling around the building that might have a loudspeaker, the nine of them finally saw the park again.

...

As First City's elite team had yet to arrive, the Old Task Force returned to the advance base camp and prepared to rest for the night before heading down the mountain.

Under the evening sun, they, Wang Fugui, and the others looked at the newspaper that Ferrington had found.

This was a local newspaper. Its content was mainly about the various matters in the Fakh region, mixed with some international politics and entertainment gossip.

As she quickly browsed, Jiang Baimian saw a piece of news: “The 29th International Biotechnica Expo was held in Fakh. The Northern Company displayed the latest genetic research results...”

Chapter 429: Aftermath

Jiang Baimian’s gaze didn’t pause on it for long as she moved it to the next piece of news without it showing.

After the eight people in the teams and Ferrington had finished passing around the newspaper, she asked, “Anyone discovered anything worth paying attention to?”

As there were outsiders around, Genava could only act as an ordinary robot.

The blond, blue-eyed Fars shook his head. “They all look like very normal news.”

At this point, he laughed self-deprecatingly. “Actually, I’m a person who especially likes to flip through old newspapers from city ruins. This allows me to imagine what kind of life that era’s people led and how much better it was. Sometimes, they make me forget the current Ashlands and think that life isn’t that bad. Yes, this newspaper is no different from the newspapers I’ve read. It’s the same in form and content.”

Wang Fugui, Waite, and Gray also spoke one after another, saying that they hadn’t found any valuable news from the Fakh Post.

Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “But it doesn’t seem like Wu Meng is pulling our leg by getting Ferrington to take away this newspaper.”

Wang Fugui thought for a moment and said, “Maybe it’s because we aren’t knowledgeable enough. Can I copy the newspaper’s content? Heh heh, I can consult knowledgeable people in the future.”



“No problem,” Jiang Baimian agreed readily.

Shang Jianyao pointed at the backpack on Wang Fugui’s back. “Are you going to copy it by hand? I think it’s more convenient to borrow a camera and take photos of every page. It will be easier as an electronic document.”

Inside was an old computer model that lagged terribly.

“But nobody here has a camera.” Wang Fugui had a look that said: “Don’t I know it’s easier this way?”

Shang Jianyao smiled smugly and pointed at Geneva. “Multifunctional.”

Are you going one big round just to promote Old Ge? Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly.

With Geneva’s help, Wang Fugui and Gray obtained an electronic copy of the newspaper. Fars, Waite, and Ferrington didn’t have computers, nor did they think that there was any valuable information in the newspaper. They only wrote down the abstracts of a few articles by hand.

After watching them leave, Jiang Baimian looked around, raised the newspaper, and pointed at the International Biotechnica Expo. “Noticed anything?”

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled. “Northern Company.”

Shouldn’t the point be ‘genetic research results?’ Long Yuehong muttered but didn’t say anything.

Bai Chen nodded. “It reminds me of a certain place in the north, a certain hospital in the north...”

The former was where the vegetable in the Blackmarsh Wilderness’s steelworks factory underwent experimental treatment. The latter was a secret organization’s front company where Jiang Xiaoyue voluntarily participated in an experiment to escape her coma.

The two were suspected to be one.

“The common term is ‘northern?’” Genava tried to analyze Bai Chen’s train of thought.

“Yes,” Jiang Baimian affirmed. “I had the same thoughts. Unfortunately, this is only a general newspaper. It doesn’t have a detailed report on the International Biotechnica Expo, and it doesn’t explain what the Northern Company’s results are.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “That’s simple. I remember that every area has specialized scientific newspapers. The reports regarding the corresponding matters will definitely be more detailed. As long as we return to Wasteland Ruin 13 and search places like the library, we should be able to obtain something useful.”

“This...” Jiang Baimian hesitated and said, “Without knowing Wu Meng’s true goal, I think it’s better not to explore that place again for the time being.”

“That’s right, that’s right!” Long Yuehong quickly echoed. He believed that their previous two explorations of Wasteland Ruin 13 were a result of Wu Meng’s influence. Otherwise, why would he be so bold as to agree and join in on the expedition?

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “We’ll come up with a subsequent plan according to the situation after we visit Xiaochong.”

After hesitating for two seconds between seeing his friend and adventuring, Shang Jianyao couldn’t wait to leave this advance base camp and return to First City.

At this moment, Long Yuehong muttered, “Why aren’t we associating genetic research to the company?”

He was referring to the genetic research results showcased by the Northern Company, not the vegetable awakening technology.

When genetic research was mentioned, the first thought of the more knowledgeable people in the Ashlands was: Pangu Biology.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “The location isn’t right; the company is far in the northwest. If we really want to connect ‘northern’ and ‘genetic,’ the White Knights are more suspicious.”

“That’s true.” Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief.

At this point, they couldn’t continue because they lacked sufficient clues.

After the sky turned dark, the Old Task Force members—who had eaten dinner—left the castle’s main building and walked to the parking lot. As they advanced, they suddenly saw a figure descend from the sky and slam into the concrete ground.

Bang!

Blood quickly seeped out from beneath the man’s head. His body also convulsed a few times before he stopped moving.

“He committed suicide by jumping off a building, or was he thrown down?” Long Yuehong couldn’t see too clearly because of the distance.

Shang Jianyao took the lead and walked over, looking like he wanted to check if the other party could still be saved. Jiang Baimian, Geneva, and Bai Chen followed behind.

Long Yuehong was stunned for a second before he quickly chased after them.

“He jumped down from the hotel window.”

“It should be a suicide...” The Ruin Hunters watching the area discussed the situation they had seen and made judgment.

After passing them, Long Yuehong’s eyes suddenly widened.

The person lying on the ground had stopped breathing. His blue eyes were wide open, and his blond hair was dyed red with blood.

Fars!

This was Fars from the lone Hunter team! Fars—who had explored Wasteland Ruin 13 with the Old Task Force!

After the expedition ended and everyone returned safely, he actually chose to jump and fall to his death.

At this moment, Long Yuehong's mind was filled with the Hunters who had committed suicide in Wasteland Ruin 13.

Five of them committed suicide by jumping off a building.

It's Fars now. Who's next... Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine.

The next second, Jiang Baimian said in a deep voice, "Hey and I will find Wang Fugui. Old Ge, find Gray and Ferrington. Little White and Little Red will find Waite and confirm that they are fine. Also, keep an eye on each other along the way. Don't ignore any strange behavior."

Among them, they could only be certain that Genava—the smart bot who had yet to enter Wasteland Ruin 13—wasn't affected.

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao replied immediately.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

The Old Task Force quintet split into three groups and rushed into the castle's main building, heading for the camp hotel on the fourth floor.

...

Bang!

Shang Jianyao directly slammed Wang Fugui's door open.

Wang Fugui—who was facing the east and raising his hands like an eagle spreading its wings—jumped in fright and reflexively rolled to the side.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped and praised, “Very experienced.”

“What’s wrong?” Wang Fugui was surprised and confused. Although this fellow looked abnormal, it was still rather abnormal for him to be so abnormal.

“Fars committed suicide by jumping off a building,” Jiang Baimian said in a deep voice.

Wang Fugui’s eyelids twitched as his eyes suddenly widened.

“What about the others?” he blurted out.

“We haven’t made confirmations yet.” Jiang Baimian was waiting for Geneva, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong to report the situation through the walkie-talkies.

...

In the other room, Geneva mimicked Shang Jianyao and slammed open the wooden door.

Inside, Gray was dancing around a stove under the light on a hot summer night.

Upon sensing the commotion, he suddenly stopped and looked up at the door. At the same time, he assumed a dodging posture.

He didn’t sense human consciousness, so he wasn’t prepared to counterattack. He then saw the robot with red eyes twitch its limbs and dance.

“...” Gray was dumbfounded.

Genava finished dancing and explained, “Hey said that politeness means equality.”

“W-what’s wrong?” Gray was confused.

Genava replied in a slightly synthetic male voice, “Fars committed suicide by jumping off a building.”

“What?” Gray was abnormally horrified.

...

At the door of Waite’s room.

During Long Yuehong’s moment of hesitation, Bai Chen had already raised her right foot and kicked the lock.

With a bang, the door flew open.

What Long Yuehong saw was a patch of red.

Waite was lying in a pool of blood, and his face was abnormally pale. He was already on his deathbed.

There was a dagger in his chest. From the slanted angle, it was likely driven into his chest using his right hand.

He had also committed suicide.

Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine, but he instinctively rushed over and habitually checked Waite’s injuries. Bai Chen looked around and picked up the walkie-talkie.

At this moment, Waite seemed to see Long Yuehong. He opened his mouth, but he couldn’t make a sound. With unfocused eyes, he moved his right hand and pointed to the side.

On the hotel's provided table was a piece of paper pressed down with a ballpoint pen.

Chapter 430: Guess

Long Yuehong picked up the piece of paper and quickly scanned it. "Bag 1 for Johnny's wife.

"Bag 2 for Donovan's parents.

"Bag 3 for Johann Liss's son.

"Bag 4 for Eamon's family."

It was a simple allocation plan.

Long Yuehong held the piece of paper, walked back to Waite, and squatted down.

Bai Chen—who had already reported the situation to Jiang Baimian—shook her head at him. "He's a goner."

Even if they injected Waite with the FECA biological agent now, it would only allow him to last another two to three minutes longer without providing him a blood transfusion given his great blood loss. It was meaningless.

The FECA that the Old Task Force carried with them was limited to begin with. Bai Chen naturally didn't want to waste them if she could.

Long Yuehong recalled Waite's timid and cautious appearance in the ruins and felt a little sad. He quickly said to Waite, "You want us to help you send this harvest to your companions' family?"

Upon hearing this, Waite—whose eyes had already glazed over—lit up slightly. He nodded with great difficulty, and a barely audible sound came from his throat.

Long Yuehong lowered his head and leaned over, finally hearing Waite's words.

"Th-thank you..." Waite's voice came to a halt as his head drooped and tilted to the side.

Long Yuehong stared at him for a few seconds before letting out a long sigh. He then slowly stood up and checked the room with Bai Chen.

He found five small cloth bags inside Waite's carry-on bag. Four of them were labeled from one to four.

Each cloth bag contained many gold accessories, special alloys, and folded information on technology. Apart from the one without a label, the amount was about the same.

The one without a label had the fewest items.

"He probably sorted this out after returning." Long Yuehong sighed. "Back then, he didn't expect himself to 'commit suicide.'"

Bai Chen looked around and didn't respond to her companion's sigh. She simply said, "There aren't any clues."

Long Yuehong looked back at Waite's corpse and the large pool of blood before sighing again.

...

At the Old Task Force's parking spot, the surviving Wang Fugui, Gray, Jiang Baimian, and the others gathered.

Ferrington had also committed suicide—he had hanged himself with his belt.

"Why are we fine when only Waite, Fars, and Ferrington 'committed suicide?'" Long Yuehong was confused. If it weren't for the fact that nothing had happened to the Old Task Force, he would've suspected that Wang Fugui or Gray were behind it.

The next second, Shang Jianyao replied to Long Yuehong's question. "What makes you think we're fine?"

Long Yuehong was shocked. He looked around and realized that everyone had solemn expressions—except Genava.



He was expressionless.

Is this because it hasn't reached our turn? B-but when were we affected? There are no signs at all... Long Yuehong exhaled to calm the tumultuous upheavals in his heart.

After a long while, Jiang Baimian sighed. "As expected of Wasteland Ruin 13..."

For everything—apart from the slight influence at the beginning that caused them to carry out two subsequent explorations—Jiang Baimian believed that she had done well enough. She didn't leave any loopholes and had avoided all the risks that she could think of. But even so, they had unknowingly walked toward 'death.'

If it weren't for Waite, Fars, and Ferrington's deaths, nobody knew what would've happened to them.

"We didn't go within a kilometer of the radio station." Bai Chen was equally confused.

The company had given a very precise number.

Wang Fugui and Gray looked at each other and slowly shook their heads, indicating that they hadn't realized when they had been affected by Wu Meng. After all, they didn't hear any hints that would result in them committing suicide.

Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. "I get it!"

Wang Fugui and Gray suddenly looked at him with subconscious anticipation.

Jiang Baimian was also looking forward to seeing what extraordinary reason this fellow could come up with since it might give her inspiration.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, "All usable electronic products within a certain range are Wu Meng's avatars. He was always by our side during our exploration—never a step away from us."

Jiang Baimian was a little surprised. "Maybe..."

She remembered that she had sensed an electric current from a loudspeaker coming from a roadside mall.

“He secretly influenced us through those electronic products, and there’s no need to use words to induce those effects?” Gray didn’t believe it.

From Wu Meng’s previous performance, apart from speaking about the ‘Dao’ at the beginning, he needed to rely on words to obtain final control.

Wang Fugui deliberated and said, “It’s not impossible. That method is more concealed, so the effects won’t be that obvious. It just takes time to achieve Wu Meng’s goal.”

Jiang Baimian immediately added, “That’s why he used words to induce us into entering the ruins again and again.”

“This...” Long Yuehong suddenly felt like sequences of events were chaining together.

Bai Chen looked at the tactical backpack behind Jiang Baimian and spoke as if she understood something. “That newspaper was a clue he deliberately left for us so that we would head to the ruins again? A large number of us haven’t been sufficiently influenced to the point of suicide, so he still needs to enhance the effect?”

“This explanation is very reasonable.” The more Long Yuehong thought about it, the more he found it likely.

As there were outsiders around, Geneva remained silent and didn’t participate in the discussion.

After Wang Fugui heard that, he thought for a moment and said, “Actually, I have another guess regarding the reason why we’re fine.”

“What is it?” Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Wang Fugui looked around, and his expression gradually turned solemn. “I’m a member of a religious organization, and it seems to be the case for Gray as well. We were all blessed by different

Kalendarium, so we didn't commit suicide. You should also be a pious believer of a particular Kalendaria. I could tell on our first entry into the cave—Waite and Fars are only considered Ruin Hunters. They believe in everything and also don't believe in anything.”

He didn't know much about Ferrington and didn't comment on him. But given the other party's relationship with the Mirror Church, he believed that this person wasn't a pious believer of a Kalendaria.

While Jiang Baimian found it amusing, Shang Jianyao took out the Blessings from all Kalendarium pictures. “Are you asking if we believe in Eidolon Nun, Arbiter of Fate, Last Man, Double Sun, Shattered Mirror, Subhuti, Golden Scale, or the Door of Scorching?”

Wang Fugui and Gray's expressions instantly became strange and complicated as if they had never encountered a person like this.

Shang Jianyao put away the paper and sincerely asked, “What's your respective Holy Communion?”

Wang Fugui subconsciously replied, “Bile and spinach cooked in various ways.”

Shang Jianyao stopped asking what religion they had or which Kalendaria they believed in. He looked directly at Gray, making Wang Fugui inexplicably feel insulted.

Gray hesitated and said, “It isn't convenient to make it known.”

“You won't be able to recruit believers like this,” Shang Jianyao said sincerely.

He successfully diverted the topic, and almost nobody paid any attention to Wu Meng's influence.

Gray tightened his clothes and stopped responding to Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian quickly mediated. “There's another possibility. The three people who died only recorded the newspaper's content and didn't take any photos.”

She was searching for commonalities and differences.

“But I also wrote down some of the content when I returned to make it easier to read normally...” Wang Fugui didn’t quite agree with this. “It’s understandable if you say it’s the difference between people who read or did not read the newspaper. However, both the photography equipment and location are in-camp, far away from Wu Meng. It’s unlikely that they would’ve been affected.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Indeed. In short, you have to be careful in the future. It’s best if you have someone to accompany you for a period of time. Yes, at least for half a month.”

As for the Old Task Force, this mission was definitely handed to Geneva.

Wang Fugui and Gray didn’t dare to dismiss this advice. They expressed their agreement one after another.

After watching them leave, Jiang Baimian looked at Long Yuehong. “You want to help Waite deliver those harvests to the corresponding people?”

Fars’s belongings were handled by Wang Fugui and Gray—who were relatively familiar with him. Ferrington’s items were handed to a friend he had in-camp.

“Yes.” Long Yuehong nodded slightly and didn’t explain why he wanted to do so. He then raised a difficulty. “But Waite didn’t write down the addresses of those people and their families. I couldn’t find any useful clues from the items he left behind, so I have no idea where to find them.”

“Waite has a First City accent, and his companions are most likely the same.” Jiang Baimian recalled and said, “We can issue a mission at First City’s guild. There should be many Ruin Hunters who know them and are familiar with them.”

After discussing this matter, Jiang Baimian said to Geneva, “Pay attention to our subconscious actions for the time being. We’ll decide if we want to continue after visiting Xiaochong.”

“Alright,” Geneva agreed.

Jiang Baimian then said to the other team members, “Take turns resting. Old Ge, we’ll have to get you to work a little harder. We’ll leave tomorrow morning.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong walked to the jeep with lingering unease. The others similarly had no objections.

...

Early the next morning, with nothing abnormal happening to the Old Task Force quintet, they got into their cars and drove to the camp’s entrance.

Suddenly, a figure jumped out and blocked their car. The figure had white sideburns and was no longer young—he was the camp hotel’s boss.

Jiang Baimian rolled down the window and asked solemnly, “Did something happen?”

Could something have happened to Wang Fugui and Gray?

The hotel owner sighed. “You damaged four doors, so you have to pay for them, right? You can’t just leave like that.”

He had lived for many years. The fact that he dared to run a hotel in the advance base camp meant that apart from having some abilities, he also wasn’t too afraid of death.

“...” The four Old Task Force humans were momentarily stunned.

Shang Jianyao came to a realization and took out the coins on him guiltily.

After this episode, the two cars drove down the mountain and returned to First City.

About 15 minutes later, Wang Fugui—who had finished his morning exercises—was stopped by the hotel owner the moment he returned to his room. He was asked for the repair fees.