

Ad Infinitum 541

Chapter 541: Unwanted Chance Encounter

Shang Jianyao looked at the helicopter in midair and smiled as he invited the city defense soldiers at the door in. “Why don’t you come in for a while? It will be relatively troublesome if the higher-ups see you leaving after asking a few questions at the door. It would also be easy to expose my and my companions’ secrets.”

The city defense soldiers found Shang Jianyao making sense and walked into Grimm Watch Shop with their standard assault rifles. As they habitually sized up the area, they saw Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen guarding the area that led to the back.

These two people were also wearing city defense uniforms, but they were equipped with military exoskeletons that made the soldiers’ eyelids twitch instinctively.

“They too?” The leader of the city guards turned to look at Shang Jianyao. His tone was still normal, but his actions had unconsciously assumed a defensive posture.

He was about the same height as Shang Jianyao. His face was rugged, and he had blond hair and blue eyes; he clearly had Yargai blood in him.

“Yes.” As Shang Jianyao nodded slightly, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen took out their identification documents.

The city guards took a few steps forward and saw the corresponding content and the most important steel seal. They then relaxed and retreated to the door one after another, afraid to see any secrets in the area guarded by their two colleagues.

This was the experience they had accumulated over the years. They shouldn’t see things they shouldn’t see or ask about things they shouldn’t ask.

Shang Jianyao completely violated such behavior. After receiving Jiang Baimian’s hint, he didn’t pretend and asked curiously, “What are you searching for?”

The Yargai city guard in the lead didn’t hide anything and frankly replied, “A Daoist priest. The Senate overrode General Phocas and issued a direct order.”

A Daoist priest? From the Eternal Time Church? In this First City chaos, the Kalendaria—Master Zhuang—lost his original influence? This series of thoughts immediately jumped into Jiang Baimian’s mind. She had seen very few Daoists, so she could only associate them with the Eternal Time Church for the time being.

“Daoist priest?” Shang Jianyao asked. “What does he look like? Let’s see if I’ve seen him before.”

The lead city guard took out a photo from his chest pocket and showed it to Shang Jianyao. In the photo was a man in his fifties. He wore a Daoist robe similar to Galoran’s and had his hair tied into a loose bun.

He looked like a pure Ashlandic. His sideburns were gray, and he had serious eye bags. He had a long beard, and his wrinkles were obvious.

“I’ve never seen him.” Shang Jianyao was very disappointed. He seemed to have perfectly taken on the role of an elite city guard soldier.

“We’ve never seen him before today either,” the city guard leader consoled Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao listened to the helicopter rotors not far away and asked, “Who’s in charge of the commandeering?”

“Not one of ours.” The city guard leader looked at the ceiling diagonally behind them. “Someone from the Senate.”

“What does he look like?” Shang Jianyao asked without hiding anything.

The city guard leader recalled and said, “He wore a black robe. His hair was messy, and his eyes were light blue. His face was very long, and his cheekbones were very high. He also had many wrinkles...”

“I don’t know him.” Shang Jianyao expressed his regret again. Upon receiving Jiang Baimian’s gaze, he organized a new round of questions. “Did he show any abilities?”

“No.” The city guards shook their heads in unison.

While Jiang Baimian was slightly disappointed, the Yargai leader added, “But the higher-ups tell us that with this person around, we can be at ease and be bolder when carrying out the mission today. We don’t have to worry about the danger and will definitely be fine.”

This... Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she instinctively believed that this sentence contained a lot of information. She quickly thought of an ability: Virtual World!

Only when this area was covered by the Virtual World could the soldiers on missions truly not worry about danger and definitely be fine.

The Virtual World owner who protects Marcus? The one whose price is claustrophobia? Jiang Baimian suddenly had a guess. She then fell into deep thought. The Kalendaria—Shattered Mirror—believed by the Mirror Church previously supported First City’s officials. Furthermore, it had deep ties with Oray...

They have now given up on the original Conservatives and turned to support the new consul, Gaius? The fact that Gaius is still willing to accept it means that Shattered Mirror isn’t in an irredeemable relationship with the supporters behind him. They can be at odds but also cooperate depending on the situation?

There was no loud commotion in Sikhara Temple’s direction, indicating that the Crystal Consciousness Church had yet to encounter a devastating blow... The Kalendaria, Subhuti, shares a similar position to Shattered Mirror? In this chaos, the ones who suffer the greatest losses seem to be the supporters of the Kalendaria, Master Zhuang...

Some of the Kalendarium are resisting the god that represents the entire year?

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao had a look of suspicion toward the city defense soldiers’ claim that there was no need to worry about danger as if he wanted to draw his pistol and verify it on the spot.

The Yargai leader replied with uncertainty, “Soldiers like us believe whatever the higher-ups say. However, we will still be careful when carrying out missions. It’s our life after all.”

With that said, he looked at the clock in the shop and estimated the time. “We should be leaving.”

“Be careful.” Shang Jianyao waved his right hand.

His left arm had been wrapped up again on the way to Antanna Street. He then got the doctor from the unlicensed clinic to help him with a few stitches.

After watching the city defense soldiers leave, Jiang Baimian quietly listened for a while and realized that the helicopter in midair had yet to leave the area and was still ‘hovering’ nearby.

She frowned slightly and suddenly cursed inwardly. If the Virtual World did cover Antanna Street, our ‘data’ definitely would’ve been uploaded at the same time. Three city defense soldiers hiding in an underground workshop, with two of them wearing military exoskeletons, will make them undoubtedly suspicious. Once the Virtual World’s owner reviews this portion of data, it’s very easy for him to discover the problem.

This wasn’t a big problem to begin with. After all, the Old Task Force had General Phocas’s credentials and documents, which were enough to muddle their way through.

But inside the helicopter was the Virtual World’s owner they had interacted with previously and were familiar with each other! When the time came, there was a high chance that the other party would recognize them!

Upon thinking of the worst possible outcome, Jiang Baimian immediately had the intention to get Bai Chen to take off her military exoskeleton with her.

In a flash, she thought for a moment and realized that this only served to reveal their intentions to hide something.

It was impossible for the exoskeleton that had been removed to disappear from the Virtual World! Furthermore, the Virtual World’s owner—who originally didn’t pay attention to this area—might cast his gaze over in advance due to such ‘data fluctuations.’

Nothing seemed to work, and Jiang Baimian found it difficult to make a decision.

She saw Shang Jianyao’s expression turn serious, and she believed that he had also noticed the problem.

...

In Early Spring Town in the North Shore wastelands.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Genava fired the anesthesia rounds into the bomb shelter. To be safe, he even searched for nearby ventilation outlets and fired a few rounds in.

After waiting for a while, Genava—who was closely monitoring the target area—turned his head to Zeng Duo and said, “The people guarding the entrance are no longer in the right state. I’ll rush in first, and you’ll follow behind.”

“Alright.” Zeng Duo switched the exoskeleton’s visor to anti-poison mode.

Han Wanghuo opened his mouth but didn’t say a word.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Genava jumped and ran, leaping crazily and repeatedly until he reached the permanent fortifications.

It was only at this moment that gunshots sounded from inside along with a flying shell.

Boom!

Genava dodged the shell and tanked the gunshots. He then rushed into the bomb shelter and fired with a submachine gun in his hand.

Amidst the gunfire, many First City soldiers fell to the ground. The rest were either unconscious or had curled up to temporarily hide.

Zeng Duo quickly jumped over the fortifications and used the grenade launcher to cause damage.

After clearing away the enemies in this area, she and Genava entered the bomb shelter.

Han Wanghuo waited for the anesthetic gas to spread for a while and have its effects minimized before wearing a mask and following them. Along the way, he observed the enemies—who were dead or alive—and frowned slightly.

The garrison's equipment was worse than he imagined. Of course, them being 'worse' was compared to their usual standards.

Although most of them have been transferred away, it's unlikely that only one tank, two armored vehicles, a bionic artificial intelligence armor, and two Awakened are left... There aren't even any military exoskeletons? Han Wanghuo prayed for such good luck as he raised his guard.

There were many rooms in the deep and wide bomb shelter.

Zeng Duo swept her gaze around and suddenly saw a familiar face; it was Uncle Li Ji, her neighbor.

At this moment, Li Ji—whose lips had degenerated, exposing his teeth—had his face so tightly pressed against the glass window in a certain room that it was almost deformed.

Chapter 542: Saving for a Rainy Day

Zeng Duo quickly approached the room, but what she saw through the glass window was an abnormally bloody scene.

Beneath Li Ji's head was his completely naked body. All the blood vessels visible to the naked eye had exploded. His body and the ground were frozen red.

In such a state, no human could survive. It was the same for Subhumans.

The only difference from normal situations was that Li Ji's body seemed to secrete a sticky liquid that made him stick to the wall, his face pressed against the glass window.

Is this the outcome of an experiment? Zeng Duo's heart tightened as she ran deeper into the bomb shelter.

In the rooms on both sides of the corridor, some were dark with seemingly nobody inside. Hair and meat strips hung from the cracks of some doors and windows, making anyone who saw this tremble.

Zeng Duo ran to one of the glass windows and looked with the help of the light. She saw the town's teacher, Ning Xin.

This lady in her thirties had a relatively normal appearance in Early Spring Town. Her abnormality was in her organs—she had two.

Her eyes were completely protruded. On her side were dense and abnormally hideous capillaries. There was also a hole in her chest, allowing one to see her heart and stomach directly.

The former no longer throbbed.

Zeng Duo had never hated genetic experiments as much as she did now.

Badump! Badump! Badump!

Her heart raced. She was afraid that she would be too late—that all the men and women in town had become sacrificial victims of First City's genetic experiments.

Without bothering to look at the rooms on both sides, she followed Genava and ran deep into the bomb shelter.

Before long, they came to a wide area. This place had been made into a large prison by First City's garrison.

Behind the iron grills were familiar faces—Early Spring Town's townsfolk! They were either huddled in a corner, waiting for the gunshots and explosions to subside, or they were gathered by the iron fence, hoping to see what had happened and find an opportunity to escape.

Fortunately... Thankfully... Zeng Duo was overjoyed when she saw this. Although there were fewer townsfolk than she remembered, and many of them had definitely died in evil experiments or were better off dead, about two-thirds of them remained.

That was the silver lining.

At a glance, Zeng Duo discovered the mayor—whose legs began atrophying since he was born—her cousin who had developed acute hearing but had his eyes rolled back the entire time, and a female classmate with three pairs of breasts...

Most of the mutated Subhumans didn't become better-looking. Instead, they became uglier—like monsters.

Upon seeing them look at her blankly, Zeng Duo suddenly thought of something. She quickly lifted the military exoskeleton's visor and shouted, "It's me!"

"Duo Duo?"

"Little Duo?"

"Zeng Duo?" Shouts of surprise sounded from the prisons facing her as if they couldn't believe their eyes.

Zeng Duo's first reaction was joy. Her second reaction was that the nicknames 'Duo Duo' and 'Little Duo' broke the mood...

She shook her head, shaking off this baffling thought. After that, she looked around and said, "I'll open the door for you."

She couldn't be bothered to find the guard with the prison key and planned on forcefully opening the lock. She lowered her visor again just in case, worried that a hidden enemy would release toxic gases.

At this moment, Han Wanghuo came in. He looked around and planned on helping.

The mayor looked at Zeng Duo—who was running toward him—and asked calmly, "A person you got?"

“Where did you get the exoskeleton?” asked the other townsfolk curiously as they waited for the prison door to open.

They had actually looked forward to Zeng Duo—who was out and had yet to be captured—returning to Early Spring Town and coming up with a way to save them. However, they rationally knew that such a ‘mission’ was too difficult for an ordinary Ruin Hunter. Even if she gathered a team of wilderness nomads or Ruin Hunters that numbered in the hundreds, it was almost a dream for her to put up a good fight against First City’s army.

After they were locked up in the renovated prison in the bomb shelter, they realized that First City attached extraordinary importance to the experiments here. They sent terrifying powerhouses and used many powerful weapons and equipment. They also snuffed out the corresponding thoughts and only hoped that Zeng Duo could leave Early Spring Town and live well.

Unexpectedly, the guards’ panic last night wasn’t an interlude but a prelude. Zeng Duo actually obtained a military exoskeleton and led a robot and a human companion into the heavily guarded bomb shelter, causing the guards to suffer heavy casualties and scatter.

This was beyond their imaginations. Of course, this didn’t stop them from being pleasantly surprised and excited. Nobody could remain calm upon seeing hope when on the brink of death.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Zeng Duo relied on the auxiliary aiming system and used her own assault rifle to hit several of the prisons’ locks, directly cracking or opening them.

Meanwhile, Han Wanghuo also swapped his magazine and did something similar. His shooting accuracy wasn’t inferior to Zeng Duo and Genava.

As many iron gated doors were pushed open, Zeng Duo quickly answered the mayor’s question. “This is the helper I hired. We’ve already defeated the garrison outside. Everyone, quickly leave and search for vehicles and supplies. Try to evacuate this place in 15 minutes.”

“Just the two of you?” The mayor was very surprised.

“Three,” Zeng Duo emphasized and explained. “Most of the guards have been transferred back to First City. The defense here is very weak, but it won’t be long before they return.”

“Alright! Everyone, quickly head out and find cars and food!” The mayor waved his hand and shouted. He was being carried by his son, a muscular man with a brain problem—leaving him only with the intelligence of a seven-year-old.

Genava seized the opportunity and asked, “Where’s the laboratory?”

As a smart bot, how could he forget Big White’s instructions and ignore the precious information in the laboratory?

The mayor—who was unaccustomed to robots being so proactive—was stunned for a second. “The innermost area.”

Genava moved his metal neck and said to Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo, “Take the townsfolk from Early Spring Town out and prepare for the migration. Also, don’t forget that bionic smart armor. Although it’s damaged and unusable, it can definitely be repaired. Big White and the others are good at this.”

Jiang Baimian and the others weren’t the ones good at it but Pangu Biology.

With that said, Genava—who was wearing a dark-green military uniform—turned around and ran deep into the bomb shelter.

Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo looked at each other and didn’t force themselves to follow.

...

First City, Grimm Watch Shop.

As Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced, she thought of a feasible escape plan. She prayed that her guess had been wrong. The city defense soldiers’ words didn’t necessarily mean that this area was enveloped by the Virtual World. Or even if it was the Virtual World, it might not be the person who had protected Marcus and interacted with the Old Task Force but another powerhouse from the Mirror Church.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

Not only did the sound of the helicopter's rotors not gradually fade away into the distance, but it also came closer and closer. It was so loud that it was almost noise.

Conversations had to be done by shouting.

Bai Chen sensed Jiang Baimian's nervousness and Shang Jianyao's seriousness. She opened her mouth, wanting to ask if there was anything wrong. However, she rationally gave up on this plan the next moment, worried that she might worsen the situation.

Shang Jianyao looked at the ceiling by the door as if he could already see a helicopter hovering above them. He saw the Mind Corridor-level Awakened—who had been fooled by the Old Task Force—cast a puzzled gaze over.

This is a huge disturbance for Little Red's surgery... He muttered silently and raised his hand to pinch his temples. Just like that, he leaned against the counter with many mechanical watches and fell asleep.

In the Sea of Origins, on the island with the golden elevator.

Shang Jianyao's figure appeared and quickly split into nine to watch the other him blocking the entrance.

One of them had a hand in his pocket and took a step forward. He then said firmly, "It's time to make a decision!"

Shang Jianyao—who was blocking the golden elevator's door—immediately retorted, "Can you not go crazy? We aren't sure if there's danger. Even so, there are other solutions."

This time, he didn't use the portable recording device as an intermediary conduit as if he had sensed something.

Another Shang Jianyao shook his head. "Little Red can do a companion-saving deed without fear of sacrificing himself. How can we be weaker than him?"

“That’s right, that’s right.” The Shang Jianyao—who was holding the small speaker—nodded in agreement.

Shang Jianyao—who was stroking his chin—muttered, “When something bad has the possibility of happening, it will happen no matter how unlikely it is. In that case, it’s better to save for a rainy day.”

Shang Jianyao—who was spinning the Six Senses Beads—hesitated for two seconds and said, “Buddha is merciful.”

Shang Jianyao—who was holding the Life Angel necklace—said, “There will naturally be others to take over my mantle!”

The nine Shang Jianyaos quickly ignored the opinion of the Shang Jianyao blocking the elevator door and came to an agreement with the reason that they couldn’t be left in the dust by Little Red when it came to courage.

The next second, they looked up into the air and at the gap that seemed to be roiling with sunlight.

In the real world, Jiang Baimian saw Shang Jianyao open his eyes, turn around, and look at her and Bai Chen.

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled—a sunny smile.

This smile stunned Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen.

Without waiting for them to react, Shang Jianyao turned around and walked to the watch shop door.

In the Sea of Origins, the crack was torn apart by the nine Shang Jianyaos from different directions. Intense sunlight then stabbed into the world like sharp arrows.

Chapter 543: Fusion

As sunlight flooded into the Sea of Origin that represented Shang Jianyao, the expression of the Shang Jianyao blocking the golden elevator changed. Although he didn’t know what the outcome

would be if an Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor's depths located his mind world and attempted to invade it, anyone with normal intelligence knew that it wouldn't be a good thing.

In fact, when the nine Shang Jianyaos came to a unanimous agreement, this Shang Jianyao's expression was already rather ugly. He wanted to stop them, but there were nine of them. Furthermore, they knew each other well. No matter what, it would only be a draw.

The result of a draw meant that he wouldn't be able to affect the other areas if the other party failed to enter the golden elevator. He could only 'watch' the nine of them tear open the sunlight-filled gap and 'invite' the Awakened opposite in as a 'guest.'

"Are all of you sick of living?" The Shang Jianyao roared into the air.

The Shang Jianyao that was first to suggest the plan to perish together laughed. "We wish to live, but isn't that up to you?"

Another Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. "I remember that you are the representative of our inner cowardliness. You avoid anything that causes you pain and suffering. You would rather become emotionless, cold, and rather selfish because of this. So, will you be cold to yourself?"

The Shang Jianyao holding the small speaker nodded repeatedly. "That's right, that's right."

The Shang Jianyao spinning the Six Senses Beads sighed and said, "Patron, let go of your obsession, and you'll be able to meet Gautama Buddha."

The Shang Jianyao holding the silver angel necklace laughed. "Selfish bastard, it's time for you to make a decision for your survival. Everyone will die together if you refuse to take a step back, or will you choose reconciliation and make way? The former spells definite death, and there's still a chance of survival for the latter!"

Another Shang Jianyao smiled. "You have no other choice but to join us! Hurry up; stop wasting time. Do you want to die?"

Upon hearing the nine of them respond one after another, the blood vessels on the forehead of the Shang Jianyao by the golden elevator door throbbed. He wished he could deny these fellows and watch them die. Look at them! Those looks on their faces? Although they are me as well, they all look disgusting!

After taking two deep breaths, the Shang Jianyao at the golden elevator door slowly stood up with a livid expression. He reluctantly raised his right hand and stretched it into the air.

He was indeed selfish, weak, cold, and ruthless, but he really didn't want to die.

Upon seeing this, the nine Shang Jianyaos in midair stopped their attempts to widen the rift and laughed.

At this moment, the sunlight that shone into their Sea of Origins gathered as if it were condensing into the outline of a body. On the other side of the rift, it was deep and dark like the antithesis of light.

“I knew it!”

“It's only effective when your life is at stake!”

“A selfish person's weakness can only be himself!”

“That's right, that's right.”

“Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Since he has already repented, he deserves to become Buddha.”

“Seriously, if you knew this would happen, why were you in our way for so long? Isn't this wasting everyone's time?”

...

As the mockery entered his ears, the expression of the Shang Jianyao by the golden elevator door darkened again. He wished he could turn around and sit down again, not giving these bastards a chance! If we die, we die together!

Unfortunately, he couldn't do it. He could only forcefully control himself and watch the nine Shang Jianyaos fly back. They each stretched out their right hands and touched him.

The ten palms immediately fused together amidst an overlapping.

The ten Shang Jianyaos were the same. They had clearly become one again, but they seemed to have ten illusory figures as they walked.

He came to the golden elevator and pressed the 'up' button.

The golden door opened.

Shang Jianyao ignored the changes in the rift behind him and walked in.

There was only one button in the elevator. Beside it was a label in Ashlandic and Red River language: Mind Corridor.

Shang Jianyao stretched out his hand again and pressed it.

The golden door closed, and the elevator rose at a speed that made him feel weightless.

Shang Jianyao's entire body became ethereal, and so did his thoughts. At this moment, he saw balls of light appear around him. Different balls of light had words he could understand.

They were: Temporary Loss of Intelligence, Chaotic Thoughts, Thought Implantation, Extreme Impulsiveness, Mathematical Idiot, Dyscalculia, Traitor, Stupid Halo, Subconscious Thought, Thought Extraction, Intent Wavering, Vague Motives, Weak Heart, Literary Hipster, Corny Person, Coward, Source of Pain, Fear, Mutism, Legs Immobility, Fifth Limb Mobility, Head Immobility...

Among them, some balls of light were very close, very clear, and very easy to catch. Some were relatively far away—rather blurry and difficult to reach.

In addition to them, there were two other balls of light hanging above Shang Jianyao's head. One was Quantity Multiplication, and the other was Increased Range.

Shang Jianyao was just about to think when his brain spasmed. He directly stretched out his right hand, split off ten shadows, and grabbed at ten targets.

If not for the lack of Shang Jianyaos, he would've wanted all of them.

Ten balls of light were touched at the same time, but only three fused into Shang Jianyao's body through his palm.

The first was Thought Implantation, the second was Literary Hipster, and the third was Legs Immobility.

They flew toward Shang Jianyao's original three. Thought Implantation fused with Inference Clowning and became Thought Guidance. Literary Hipster fused with Corny Person and became Literary Youth-Corny Person. Legs Immobility fused with Hands Immobility and became Limbs Immobility.

Just as he completed the fusion, the golden elevator stopped.

The door opened. What appeared in front of Shang Jianyao was an empty room.

Opposite the room was a vermilion door with a brass handle.

Shang Jianyao had just walked into the room when the golden elevator behind him disappeared, leaving behind a dense gas.

In the gas was a shimmering sea, islands, and a large rift that shone sunlight in.

Sea of Origins!

At this moment, the Sea of Origins was like a large, three-dimensional drawing to Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao immediately turned around and stretched his hand into the gas, touching the gap where the sunlight was about to condense into a figure. He suddenly shouted, "Use Blind if you dare!"

Corny Person at the Mind Corridor level.

The person opposite the gap fell 'silent' for a moment before the entire Sea of Origins suddenly turned dark. No, it wasn't that the Sea of Origins had darkened, but that Shang Jianyao couldn't see.

However, he could sense that the aura that had created this Blind effect was still surging in.

In the real world.

Shang Jianyao removed the flashlight from his belt with his right hand.

The flashlight's smooth and transparent glass suddenly turned pitch-black as if it were dyed with ink.

Shang Jianyao raised the flashlight, flicked the switch, and released the borrowed aura without reservation.

What the flashlight shot out wasn't light but darkness. This darkness was like the nemesis of Virtual World, allowing reality to return.

Right on the heels of that, it penetrated the ceiling and fused with dusk, silently enveloping the helicopter in midair.

Amidst the whirring rotors, an extremely terrified scream sounded from the helicopter.

The price of that person was claustrophobia!

After a few seconds, the helicopter door opened, and a figure jumped down in a panic.

A thud sounded from the distance, making one's scalp tingle.

At such a height, even an Awakened that was capable of Matter Interference would be seriously injured from the fall, much less a person in the Shattered Mirror domain.

Shang Jianyao quickly turned his head and smiled at the stunned Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen again. "It's been resolved."

During this process, the other him in the mind room used Corny Person again at the gigantic rift in the Sea of Origins. "Give me a few minutes if you dare!"

In the real world, Shang Jianyao added without waiting for Jiang Baimian's response, "You need to stuff your ears now."

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen chose to believe him and 'covered' their ears like clockwork.

Shang Jianyao did the same. He then took out the portable recording device and turned it to the lowest volume before setting Wu Meng's recording to 'play on loop.'

After the music repeated over and over again, the mysterious power in Wu Meng's recording completely disappeared.

Shang Jianyao estimated the time and 'recovered' his hearing to confirm that the corresponding situation was fine. The next second, he held the portable recording device and transferred the remnants of Xiaochong's mysterious power to his mind room.

At this moment, the sunlight at the rift had escaped Corny Person's influence and condensed into a figure in preparation to invade.

Shang Jianyao didn't hesitate to throw Xiaochong's whistling into his Sea of Origins.

"Shh, shh, shh."

The figure formed by the sunlight paused. After a while, it quickly burrowed back into the rift as if it had recalled something and closed the rift behind it!

After a while, the whistling sound weakened and completely disappeared. However, new rifts appeared in the Sea of Origins.

On another side, a faint glow flickered as countless shadows overlapped.

Shang Jianyao shouted happily at the crack, “Xiaochong! Xiaochong!”

Nobody replied.

“It seems like he’s not here...” Shang Jianyao sighed and returned to the real world. He was in a rush to relieve himself.

In the real world, Jiang Baimian watched Shang Jianyao’s series of actions and roughly understood his thought process. Therefore, she lowered her hands and probed, “You’ve entered the Mind Corridor?”

That easily?

Shang Jianyao nodded. “Yes.”

As Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen’s expressions changed, the fellow anxiously asked, “Where’s the bathroom?”

Chapter 544: Migration

North Shore Wastelands, Early Spring Town, bomb shelter.

Genava ventured deeper and finally saw the silver metal door. According to his judgment, the laboratory established by First City was behind the door.

On both sides of the door were soldiers wearing military exoskeletons. They held heavy machine guns and stood motionless.

The two soldiers reacted just as Genava approached. One of them fired, and the other used the grenade launcher on his left arm to fire at Genava.

Genava wasn’t surprised at all. The results of his analysis were that First City’s people needed to provide advance notice if they wanted to enter the laboratory and wear the correct sensors. Anyone who approached without advance notice or was unmarked would definitely be mercilessly attacked.

They’d rather make a mistake killing the wrong person than let them pass!

If it were any ordinary human, they definitely wouldn't have been able to dodge such an attack in a timely fashion. Geneva had been scanning the area ahead and reacted immediately.

Amidst the loud explosion, not only did he avoid the blast zone, but he also counterattacked with his electromagnetic weapon.

The two soldiers wearing military exoskeletons fully utilized the comprehensive warning system and exchanged blows with Geneva.

What surprised Geneva the most was that the other party wasn't surprised, flustered, or uneasy by the fact that the enemy had reached the laboratory entrance. They were calm as if they were carrying out something they had practiced hundreds or thousands of times.

Ta! Ta! Ta! Boom! Boom! Bang! Bang! Bang! Smack! Smack! Smack!

Geneva and the two soldiers wearing military exoskeletons kept firing at each other amidst the explosions and stray bullets. For a moment, neither party gained the upper hand. The bomb shelter was relatively sturdy, and there were no signs of collapse.

Geneva was temporarily at a disadvantage because he was facing two.

With an electric spark, he relied on the fact that his processor was truly multi-core and could work in parallel. During the intense battle, he broadcasted his voice loudly. "Abandon your fantasies, drop your weapons, and surrender! There are no reinforcements waiting for you. All the garrison troops are either dead, seriously injured, or deserted. Otherwise, it's impossible for me to make it here. The bulk of our troops are still outside. They'll be here soon! Surrender, and you'll be spared! We will exchange captives with First City!"

Geneva simulated Jiang Baimian's thoughts in an attempt to break down the two enemies' fighting spirit. Otherwise, he probably wouldn't see the dawn of victory in less than 20 minutes if they continued fighting.

All his words weren't lies. Compared to a smart bot like him, Zeng Duo and Han Wanghuo were two. In terms of numbers, they undoubtedly made up the bulk of the troops.

In such an environment, Genova felt that his chances of clinching victory were probably when the two soldiers opposite him gradually ran out of power as time passed. Furthermore, he carried more than ten high-performance batteries with him.

The two soldiers wearing military exoskeletons didn't waver at all despite hearing his sincere shout. They maintained their previous cadence and used fierce firepower to stop Genova from approaching.

Their faces were covered by masks, so Genova couldn't observe any changes in their expressions. He could only determine that they weren't affected according to the surveillance of other biophysical signals.

After waiting for a while, just as Genova gave up on the psychological strategy, the two soldiers wearing military exoskeletons forced him out into a safe distance. They suddenly turned around at the same time and returned to the laboratory through the silver metal door.

With a beep, the door slowly opened to the side.

The two soldiers ran in one after another.

Genava was just about to take the opportunity to barge in when his sensors detected problems. He abruptly turned around and jumped into the distance without holding back.

Genava had just landed when a dull boom sounded from behind.

Rumble!

The explosion increased in size and quickly filled the laboratory, causing the entire bomb shelter to shake violently.

Self-destruct mechanism!

The two soldiers activated the laboratory's self-destruct mechanism!

Worried that the area would collapse, Geneva ran toward the exit. He had seen many people and watched plenty of Old World entertainment, but he had never encountered humans who were willing to die so magnanimously.

Once the self-destruct mechanism was activated, the two soldiers wearing military exoskeletons would definitely die!

Is this the spirit of human sacrifice? Did they not have any fear or regret when they activated the self-destruct device? Questions surfaced in Geneva's core module one after another.

When he rushed out of the bomb shelter and returned to the surface, the surviving townsfolk of Early Spring Town had obtained their vehicles in groups of three to five or had jump-started the cars left behind by the garrison. They were using them to search and load supplies.

Without needing Zeng Duo's persuasion, they—who had plenty of survival experience living in the Ashlands—knew that it wasn't wise to stay here for long. They didn't carry grand hopes of being able to continue living here. In a while, First City's troops would rush over!

Han Wanghuo had long felt the ground tremble. Upon seeing this, he quickly asked Geneva loudly, "How was it?"

Geneva moved his metal neck from side to side. "The laboratory was destroyed."

"Then..." Zeng Duo didn't know if October Xue had anything else for Geneva.

Geneva looked around and said, "We have to set off in ten minutes."

"Alright." Zeng Duo quickly used the speaker on the military exoskeleton to inform her townsfolk.

...

First City, Grimm Watch Shop.

After the person in the helicopter suddenly jumped down from midair, the city defense forces' search stopped.

Given the concealment of the Awakened's ability, nobody would know where the attack came from or who it originated from before he woke up—if he could even wake up.

Before the other powerhouses from First City rushed over, the blond-bearded Grimm walked out of the workshop area. As he wiped his hands, he said to Jiang Baimian and the others, “The transplant is done, but the injured hasn't woken up. I'm not a doctor, so I can't determine when he will wake up.”

“This...” Jiang Baimian smiled. “How much is the transplant fee?”

Grimm thought for a moment and said, “I heard from Conley that you have a very effective first-aid needle. If you don't mind, give me two syringes to offset the transplant fee. It can save lives at critical moments.”

The Old Task Force still had four FECAs left.

Isn't that too cheap? That was Jiang Baimian's first reaction. She then came to a realization.

FECA was cheap because they considered it from the perspective of Pangu Biology employees. They felt that such emergency needles—which they could apply for in large quantities—were no different from other equipment. But for most people in the Ashlands, such needles could really save lives when used well.

Just like Long Yuehong today. If he hadn't been given three shots of FECA, he definitely wouldn't have been able to survive until the surgery's completion.

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief. It feels good not to have to worry about money.

Since they were without debt, they lost the excuse of mortgaging Long Yuehong at the workshop. Furthermore, it was foreseeable that this area would suffer a stricter and more careful search. It was rather dangerous to leave Long Yuehong here alone.

Bai Chen and Shang Jianyao brought the simple stretcher over and carried the charred-black Long Yuehong back to the jeep's backseat.

Bai Chen started the jeep and asked Jiang Baimian, “Where are we going next? Shall we get General Phocas to help us arrange a place suitable for recuperation?”

Most importantly, they had to give Little Red another infusion as soon as possible to ensure the surgery’s success.

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “We aren’t going to General Phocas.”

“Huh?” Bai Chen was a little surprised.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “It’s too much of a coincidence that we bumped into Asus and Christina. From their conversation, we can tell that Christina lives in that apartment. At least, she often lives there.”

There seemed to be no necessary connection between her two sentences, but Bai Chen immediately understood what she wanted to say. “Team Leader, are you saying that General Phocas arranged for this?”

“It might not be an arrangement.” Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “He discovered that one of the commissioner’s safe houses shared the same apartment building with Christina’s apartment. He might’ve sent us over with the idea that it would be best if we were finished off but not a loss if nothing happened. Yes, he should’ve long known about the relationship between Asus and Christina and the Church of Paragon Desire. He hoped to get lucky and bury a nail.”

“How nasty!” Shang Jianyao—who was watching Long Yuehong in the backseat—voiced his opinion. “He still owes us a celebratory feast!”

Jiang Baimian didn’t respond and said to Bai Chen, “Go to the Red Wolf Zone and use our last safe house. Then, we will steal some medicine from the nearby hospitals under the night’s cover. We’ll give Little Red an infusion ourselves. Also, we have to report the situation to the company.”

“Alright.” Bai Chen turned the car into a spot outside Antanna Street.

As they had identification, documents, and uniforms, and the scene was relatively chaotic, the Old Task Force easily left this dangerous place.

As Bai Chen drove, Shang Jianyao suddenly looked out the window and shouted happily, “Teacher Du Heng!”

Chapter 545: Letter

Following Shang Jianyao’s gaze, Jiang Baimian saw Du Heng—who was wearing a black robe—sitting in an alley. His back was leaning against the electric pole that had spiderwebs over it, and his head was slightly tilted back as if he was sleeping. He looked very pleased.

At this moment, the sun had already set below the horizon, and darkness had enveloped the world. If not for Shang Jianyao’s sharp eyes and the few lights in the houses on both sides, Jiang Baimian most likely would’ve missed out on Du Heng—whose clothes were almost blending with the night.

Upon hearing the name of the big shot that could scare away even Xiaochong, Bai Chen stepped on the brakes and made the jeep slide to a rolling stop by the roadside.

Shang Jianyao pushed open the door, walked over, and sat beside Du Heng.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian hesitated for a moment before following him. She mimicked Shang Jianyao and sat beside him.

Bai Chen was in charge of guarding the jeep and watching Long Yuehong—who was undergoing fluid infusion—in the backseat.

Du Heng turned his head and opened his eyes. He glanced at Shang Jianyao and returned to his previous posture.

“Oh, it’s you.” His tone revealed a rare hint of fatigue.

“That’s right,” Shang Jianyao replied to the statement literally.

Du Heng maintained his original state. “So I’m brought here because you entered the Mind Corridor. What a coincidence...”

Teacher Du Heng, why are you saying that like a Daoist priest... Jiang Baimian resisted the urge to interject.

Shang Jianyao didn't hide his surprise. "Am I that obvious?"

"It just so happens that I can tell," Du Heng replied simply. He then said without opening his eyes, "Don't be in a rush to change the mind room's state, nor should you rush out into the corridor. Do so after a month or two when your mental state has mostly stabilized. This can effectively reduce the worsening of the price you'll pay."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao didn't retort that the price was exacted on 'y'all.'

Du Heng then said, "You can leave now. Don't disturb my sleep."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao had always been a polite, young man.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Du Heng suspiciously, stood up, patted her pants, and walked back to the jeep parked by the side of the alley.

...

In the North Shore wastelands, a large convoy drove toward the mountains; these were the people who had fled Early Spring Town. In order to escape First City's pursuit, they took the risk and drove for nearly four hours in the night.

Of course, there was no moon tonight, and even stars were few. They didn't dare to keep traveling. After arriving at a small city ruin that had long been cleared out, they chose to camp and rest to avoid any risks.

Han Wanghuo, Zeng Duo, and Genava's dark SUV was situated at the rear of the convoy. They were in charge of cleaning up the corresponding traces. When they arrived, more than ten bonfires had already been lit between the buildings that nobody outside could see.

Most of the townsfolk in Early Spring Town were abnormal. In the words of outsiders, they were of all shapes and sizes.

They surrounded different bonfires, seized the opportunity to rest, patrolled their surroundings, or filled their stomachs. They didn't say much as they did so. Coupled with their appearances, they looked rather dreary.

Zeng Duo scanned the area and explained to Han Wanghuo and Genava, “Everyone is usually very friendly and enthusiastic. Perhaps it’s because there are outsiders, and they’ve been locked up for months. Maybe this is why they can’t let their hair down.”

“It’s fine,” Han Wanghuo replied simply.

This was even less of a problem for Genava.

At this moment, the mayor—whose legs had atrophied—came over while riding his mentally challenged son. He discussed the destination they had previously discussed in detail with Zeng Duo.

After figuring out the exact situation, he returned to the bonfire and clapped twice.

All the townsfolk that weren’t asleep cast their gazes over.

The mayor cleared his throat and said loudly, “I know that everyone is very afraid. It’s not easy to abandon the town we’ve lived in for so many years and the fields we’ve cultivated ourselves. However, we have no choice but to do so. I believe all of you have seen the outcome of being experimental subjects; we also know how large First City is. It isn’t something we can resist. We might emerge victorious once, but we can’t do so repeatedly. As long as we lose once, there’s no way for us to turn things around.”

This was said from the bottom of his heart, and it was an obvious fact. The townsfolk nodded in response.

The mayor continued, “Nomadry is actually the survival state of most humans in the Ashlands. Every few years or even shorter, they will migrate for various reasons. Compared to them, we are actually much better. At the very least, we still had a chance of escaping and surviving after we were captured by First City!”

This sentence slowly released the panic and unease accumulated in many townsfolk’s hearts. They finally felt like they had escaped death.

The mayor looked around and raised his voice a little. “Zeng Duo told me that she has found a place suitable for settlement. There is sufficient water to drink, abandoned farmlands that can be

cultivated, and abandoned ruins to be modified. It's summer now, so we still have plenty of time to busy ourselves. As long as we obtain our first harvest, a new Early Spring Town can be established! Also..."

At this point, the mayor suddenly became a little excited. "There's no pollution there, no pollution at all! Our descendants will slowly become normal, and we will no longer suffer the pain of mutation!"

Just as he said that, the townsfolk of Early Spring Town broke into an uproar. They looked around and whispered to each other, wanting to confirm if the mayor's words were true.

"It's real!" Zeng Duo cupped her hands together around her mouth and amplified her voice. "I promise!"

She had shown extraordinary abilities today and had very powerful companions that saved everyone from First City's garrison. Unknowingly, she had become someone that the townsfolk relied on and believed in. Therefore, her promise was sufficiently effective and trustworthy.

After a brief silence, the strange townsfolk made all kinds of sounds. "Banzai!"

"Huzzah!"

"The Heavens have shown their favor!"

...

They overflowed with excitement, waking up the sleeping townsfolk.

Zeng Duo was a little dazed when she saw the changes in the familiar faces and heard them shout without reservation. She seemed to have already led everyone to the col, cleared the weeds with everyone, made the farmlands arable, and built ditches with her neighbors leading to a clean water source. She harvested wheat with her relatives and friends. After busying themselves, they sat around the dining table and used water as wine to enjoy themselves...

The images were beautiful. Zeng Duo couldn't help but extend her hand, wanting to touch them, but she didn't catch anything.

After the scene calmed down, Han Wanghuo—who was standing at the periphery—turned his head and glanced at her. “Are you starting to miss this world and can’t bear to die?”

Zeng Duo replied honestly, “A little, but don’t worry. I’ll fulfill my promise. I won’t live long anyway.”

Han Wanghuo didn’t comment and looked ahead. “Can’t you learn to be a little selfish? Love yourself before loving others.”

Zeng Duo scratched her short hair. “I want to, but…”

She looked at Han Wanghuo in confusion. “Aren’t you afraid that I’ll go back on my word and risk my life to live on by saying this? You don’t love yourself anymore and aren’t selfish anymore?”

Han Wanghuo remained silent and didn’t answer.

Genava patrolled the surroundings and didn’t participate in their conversation.

...

First City, Red Wolf Zone, under a relatively high-end apartment.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who had taken the opportunity of the night to get the necessary drugs and equipment—walked in.

Jiang Baimian looked at the mailbox in the lobby and walked over. She found the door number of the room they rented and checked if there were any of today’s newspapers inside, wanting to know more about First City’s situation.

She remembered that when she rented it, the landlord had specially mentioned that he had subscribed to a year of First City Daily.

Perhaps it was because of the chaos today that the newspapers weren’t printed or sent over—the mailbox was empty. There was only an unsigned letter lying there.

A letter? Jiang Baimian took out the letter in confusion. She checked it before opening it on the spot.

Inside the envelope were two thin sheets of paper that corresponded to two medical reports. The report said that the patient wouldn't live long unless he had a heart and bone marrow transplant.

At the same time, the report also mentioned the administration of a combination of some drugs and rest allowed the patient to live for at least six months while the other could live for about three months.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao looked at each other and muttered to themselves, "Old Han and Zeng Duo's medical report? Master Zennaga sent it over? He didn't blame us for escaping in advance? Prophecy is really magical..."

Shang Jianyao nodded. "Master Zennaga is really a good person."

Jiang Baimian strongly agreed with this.

Master Zennaga was truly compassionate.

...

First City, on the street outside Sikhara Temple.

Superintendent Alexander looked at the brightly lit seven-story Buddhist temple and listened to the faint echoing sutras. He sighed at his daughter, Galoran, and said, "Master Zennaga has passed away..."

Chapter 546: Separation

In the North Shore Mountains, in a place where an abandoned road led.

Upon seeing a small stream meandering through the farmland that had fallowed, the water was clean, so clear that the bottom could be seen. The surviving townfolk of Early Spring Town revealed excited expressions as if they had excavated a huge treasure.

Several children ran to the stream and lay down. They scooped up the water with their hands and fed it to their mouths.

Some had already prostrated on the ground, kissing the soil with their lips.

“Are they not testing the water before drinking?” Genava asked Zeng Duo.

This didn’t conform to the wilderness survival rules. Some water only looked clean.

Zeng Duo shook her head. “In any case, it won’t be worse than the water we had.”

The townsfolk of Early Spring Town had drunk water that was seriously polluted, which caused abnormalities for decades.

Genava silently added a new human behavior pattern to his database.

Han Wanghuo looked around and saw a small city ruin in the distance. Many of the Old World’s steel-framed mud buildings remained standing, but most of their bodies were drowned by greenery.

He then said to Zeng Duo, “We should return to First City and exchange for new drugs.”

Zeng Duo tersely acknowledged his words. “We can also get Big White and the others to arrange for the surgeon and the surgery location to prevent any accidents.”

Han Wanghuo opened his mouth and silently walked to the black SUV parked on the side of the abandoned road. He then filled the tank with gasoline from an oil barrel.

Zeng Duo took the opportunity to inform the mayor and a few relatives of her condition. Finally, she said, “I’m going to First City to receive treatment now. I might or might not be able to return.”

The mayor sighed and said, “You were originally the healthiest child in town, but you still suffered a mutation. This might be the fate of Early Spring Town.”

“This damn Ashlands! This damn world!” Zeng Duo’s cousin couldn’t help but curse.

Zeng Duo lowered her head and smiled. “There might still be hope that it can be treated.”

“That’s right.” The mayor looked back. “There’s indeed no pollution here. Our fate will change bit by bit, and so will yours. We are all waiting for your return.”

Zeng Duo suddenly turned her head and looked at the black SUV not far away. “Alright. I should make a move; they’re waiting.”

Without giving the mayor and her relatives a chance to respond, she waved her hand and jogged into the black SUV’s passenger seat.

The car sped along the road again, making many turns before leaving the mountains and returning to the North Shore wastelands.

Just like that, Han Wanghuo, Geneva, and Zeng Duo took turns driving and rushed to the Red River Bridge as quickly as possible during the day. On the way, they encountered extreme weather and almost had their windscreen smashed by hail. They had no choice but to find a place to rest.

The Red River Bridge was already in sight by noon the next day. Just like normal times, there were city defense checkpoints and slow-moving convoy passes.

“We have to disguise ourselves and prepare the money to bribe the soldiers,” Geneva reminded the two in front.

“Alright.” Han Wanghuo nodded.

He slowed down and searched for a hidden parking spot. During this process, he looked at the road ahead and casually said, “If the new treatment plan is effective and can indeed allow me to live for another six months, I want to try something else first. A good mechanical heart is much better than yours.”

With that said, Han Wanghuo didn’t receive any response.

He turned his head and realized that Zeng Duo had shrunk into the passenger seat at some point in time. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks were red, and her lips were dry. She trembled from time to time.

“...” Han Wanghuo stretched out his right hand and tried nudging her. “Zeng Duo?”

Genava’s head popped out from the backseat, and he examined her carefully. “She’s unconscious. Her condition is rapidly worsening.”

Perhaps it was because Zeng Duo had expended too much energy during the intense battle in Early Spring Town, or perhaps it was because her wish had been fulfilled—allowing her to completely relax—the illness in her body had suddenly developed in seriousness.

Han Wanghuo fell silent for a few seconds before finding a relatively obscure spot and parking the car.

“Quick, disguise yourself and enter the city as soon as possible,” he said to Genava expressionlessly while also urging himself.

Before long, Han Wanghuo successfully drove the black SUV with Genava—who was hiding in the trunk like another military exoskeleton—onto the Red River Bridge using the excuse that his Hunter companion was suffering from an acute illness, as well as a bribe.

At some point in time, Zeng Duo woke up.

She opened her eyes and looked at Han Wanghuo beside her. Then, she smiled weakly and said, “It looks like we made it. I didn’t break my promise, although I did want to.”

Han Wanghuo said with a normal expression, “When we reach the clinic Big White and the others found for us, get some fluids first and reduce your fever before considering a new treatment plan.”

Zeng Duo forced a smile. “I’m afraid I can’t make it.”

She panted and said, “You’re a softie who always talks tough. Don’t be like this in the future. It’s not like everyone can guess what you r-really want to say...”

Han Wanghuo fell silent and sped up.

Genava—who was in the backseat—opened his mouth, but he ultimately controlled his loudspeaker.

Zeng Duo's gaze gradually wandered as she muttered to herself, "Didn't you ask if I... could not bear to die? Would I be a little more selfish? I can answer you now: I r-really do feel a little like that. I really want to explore, farm, and hunt with everyone. I want to persuade you not to hide everything that's in your mind... I even thought that if we were all cured, could we... could we continue staying together like we are now? The two of us—the two of us in the mud pit—the two of us with nothing. We would support each other and slowly inch forward..."

Han Wanghuo's body trembled as he turned his head again.

Zeng Duo slowly stretched out her left hand and touched Han Wanghuo's right palm, which had released the steering wheel.

She laughed. "H-Han Wanghuo, don't keep saying that you're selfish. You're n-not such a person. In the future, you have to live on in my stead. Love more people in my stead... Apart from loving yourself, you also have to learn to love others. This way, your life will be complete. This way, you will be a r-real human..."

"Let's do it together." Han Wanghuo tightly gripped Zeng Duo's left palm and sped on. As he drove, he felt the hand in his palm gradually lose its strength and gradually turn cold.

He stiffened his neck and continued looking ahead without turning his head.

...

Around 8 p.m., in an unlicensed clinic on Antanna Street.

The Old Task Force—which was waiting for Han Wanghuo's heart transplant—received a reply from Pangu Biology at the scheduled time.

After Jiang Baimian translated, the corresponding meaning was clearly conveyed to Shang Jianyao and Geneva. “Return to the company and get some rest. We’ll consider the Holm Fertility Center and the secret laboratory later.”

Bai Chen was in the safe house taking care of Long Yuehong—who was temporarily unsuitable for moving around.

Jiang Baimian then looked at Geneva. “Old Ge, what do you plan on doing next?”

Geneva already knew that Oray—the Father of Artificial Intelligence Robots—believed that he and his companions could produce consciousness similar to humans. He had been excitedly pacing back and forth in the clinic.

At this moment, he did some calculations when he heard Jiang Baimian’s question. “I plan on staying in First City to wait for your return and see if I have a chance to explore the secret laboratory and obtain the information Oray left behind. It’s more convenient to recharge here.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian didn’t object. She had yet to inform Geneva of her suspicion of the Source Brain. As the Old Task Force was drained, their tolerance for accidents was no longer that high.

Jiang Baimian planned on returning to First City with her team regardless of whether Pangu Biology handed the mission of exploring the Holm Fertility Center and the secret laboratory to her team in the future. When the time came, she would discuss this problem with Geneva after she was prepared.

“Be careful. Robots aren’t safe here!” Shang Jianyao reminded sincerely.

...

A few days later, Jiang Baimian asked Han Wanghuo—who was on the bed, “Old Han, what are your plans next?”

Han Wanghuo—who already knew that they were from Pangu Biology—fell silent for a moment before saying, “I plan on going to Early Spring Town for a period of time to help them rebuild their homes.”

He tactfully rejected the suggestion of joining Pangu Biology.

Don't you discriminate against Subhumans? Bai Chen said inwardly.

Most of Early Spring Town's residents were Subhumans.

At this moment, Han Wanghuo added, "In the future, you can come to Early Spring Town to find me at any time if you need help."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian didn't force the issue.

Shang Jianyao felt very regretful.

...

After Long Yuehong could barely walk, the Old Task Force drove their original jeep—with 'Garibaldi' Giuseppe and two other intelligence agents, who were to return to the company for a report on board. They left First City and drove northwest into the Blackmarsh Wilderness.

Chapter 547: Ending (End of Volume)

As the autumn temperatures dropped, the Old Task Force and the three intelligence agents—who had returned to report their duties—arrived at Pangu Biology underground building's entrance. Like before, they had to undergo strict security checks.

Although his right hand was iron-black machinery, Long Yuehong—who was now ambulant—took out the items on him and placed them in the wooden basket as he turned his head to glance at Shang Jianyao.

He almost cried out from what he saw.

Shang Jianyao had actually taken out the Six Senses Beads and the Life Angel Necklace. Furthermore, he had clearly not diverted the aura left behind by the Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor's depths.

The two items' surfaces appeared moist and lustrous as if a lump of plasma had been rolled out, reflecting a certain amount of light.

Didn't we agree to hide it somewhere outside and not let the company know? Long Yuehong had questions, but he didn't dare to speak at this moment.

Shang Jianyao seemed to hear his thoughts and smiled at him. "The me today is no longer the me from yesterday. The me from yesterday is also no longer the me from the day before yesterday. I'm the honest Shang Jianyao now."

"..." Long Yuehong's mouth fell open, and he almost forgot to close it. After a while, a word flashed across his mind: Idiot!

Jiang Baimian resisted the urge to cover her face.

She was tired and didn't think it mattered. In any case, it wasn't a big deal for the current Old Task Force. After all, they had completed many missions on this trip, some of which were very difficult. Their contributions were definitely very high, so they weren't afraid of having the items confiscated. Furthermore, Kanna knew that they had captured the Eighth Research Institute's commissioner. Who knew if she had reported to the company what items Khal was suspected of having.

Bai Chen quickly calculated how many contribution points she might have left after the deductions. This concerned her future choices.

After passing through the security check and parking the car, the Old Task Force, 'Garibaldi' Giuseppe, and the three entered the elevator.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "You should be going to the 649th floor."

"Yes." Giuseppe nodded. "They just said so."

Jiang Baimian helped them press the button for the 649th floor before choosing the 647th floor where her team was allocated.

After the elevator descended for a while, the three intelligence agents waved goodbye and disappeared from their sight.

After the door closed, Long Yuehong suddenly sighed.

“What’s wrong?” Bai Chen asked.

Long Yuehong replied emotively, “We encountered many people along the way and traveled with many people, but only the four of us are left now.”

Before Bai Chen could respond, Shang Jianyao looked at Long Yuehong suspiciously. “I don’t remember using the ability ‘Literary Hipster’ on you.”

At this moment, the elevator stopped on the 647th floor.

Jiang Baimian didn’t give Shang Jianyao a chance to divert the topic and took the lead to step forward. “Let’s go.”

They walked all the way back to Room 14. The decorations here were slightly different from before they set off, but they were mostly the same because people came to wipe the dust at regular intervals.

“Phew...” Jiang Baimian threw her body into the chair that represented her role as team leader and leaned back comfortably. She then sighed with satisfaction. “Home’s the best!”

If it weren’t for the fact that her team members were watching and that the bed she had slept on since she was young wasn’t here, she would’ve wanted to roll around to fully express her feelings.

“That’s right.” Long Yuehong also sat in his seat.

Shang Jianyao threw down his tactical backpack and touched his stomach.

Rumble! Rumble!

The sound came as expected.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian laughed. “Let’s first get disinfected, shower, and get a change of clothes before heading to the canteen for a meal. My treat!”

“Long live Team Leader!” Shang Jianyao shouted without any shame.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen looked at each other in anticipation.

Shang Jianyao then made a request. “I want braised pork.”

“I want potato roasted beef brisket.” Long Yuehong couldn’t help but gulp.

Bai Chen hesitated for a moment and said, “I want tripe.”

Jiang Baimian cursed in exasperation and amusement. “What we eat doesn’t depend on what we want—it depends on what’s available at the canteen!”

With that said, she waved her hand in disdain. “How can I give you special treatment before I reach management level? Even if there’s special treatment, it depends on what ingredients are available that day. Alright—quickly disinfect, shower, and change!”

In fact, they had undergone a round of disinfection and dust removal when they entered the underground building. They were just doing it to give themselves additional insurance.

...

After dinner, the four Old Task Force members held their bulging stomachs and were paralyzed in their spots.

After a while, Jiang Baimian straightened her body and said, “You can go back now. I’ll make the best use of my time to get a draft report out. We’ll edit it tomorrow.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong was the first to stand up, something he rarely did. After having a brush with death on this trip out, he missed his family dearly.

Jiang Baimian watched him, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen walk out of the room. She picked up the phone and hesitated for a long time before finally dialing a number.

“Dad, I’m back.” She gave a relaxed smile at the receiver.

Jiang Wenfeng was pleasantly surprised. “You’re finally back! I heard that you guys did a great job in First City?”

“We’re just nobodies...” Jiang Baimian wheedled and complained. “I’ll tell you the details when the confidentiality level is confirmed.”

She moved her gaze away from the telephone and looked at the wall opposite her. After a moment of silence, she said, “Dad, I want to go through with the cochlear implant surgery.”

“Huh?” Jiang Wenfeng felt that the sun had definitely risen from the west today.

Jiang Baimian muttered, “There are too many dangers outside; I don’t think I can let this weakness continue. I can’t let my fear affect the entire team’s safety. Come on—I’m going to beat a retreat if you don’t agree. Quick, stop this idea of mine!”

“Alright, I’ll make the arrangements now.” Jiang Wenfeng felt a sense of urgency.

Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth and unconsciously softened her voice. “Also, I want to participate in the Awakening experiments.”

Jiang Wenfeng fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “Are you sure? There’s a considerable risk.”

Jiang Baimian looked at the wall opposite her and exhaled. “Yes.”

Without giving Jiang Wenfeng a chance to speak, she smiled and said, “Dad, do you still remember my childhood dream?”

Jiang Wenfeng recalled and smiled bitterly. “I remember... Back then, you were only a little over ten years old. You listened to me talk about the Old World’s destruction, the Heartless disease’s horror, the Ashlands’ tragic past, and the current state. You clamored to investigate the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the source of the Heartless disease’s outbreak. You kept this up until you graduated and entered the laboratory. I felt relieved back then. Who knew that you would still embark on this path after all the twists and turns?”

The smile on Jiang Baimian’s face became increasingly obvious. “You said you would support my dreams.”

Jiang Wenfeng fell silent for a moment before saying, “Alright.”

Jiang Baimian hung up. She then launched a music player on the computer and found a song that matched her current mood—one of the songs she had copied from Shang Jianyao.

A beautiful song quickly sounded. “Do you remember the dreams of your youth?”

“Like a flower in eternal bloom;

“Accompanying me through the wind and rain;

“Watching the impermanence of the world;

“Watching the vicissitudes of life.

“The price you paid for love1...”

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian frowned. After some back and forth, she made the song only play the first five lines and made them play on loop.

“Do you remember the dreams of your youth?”

“Like a flower in eternal bloom;

“Accompanying me through the wind and rain;

“Watching the impermanence of the world;

“Watching the vicissitudes of life...”

...

Somewhere on the 647th-floor corridor, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen walked side by side.

At the corner, Bai Chen pointed to the other side and said, “I’m going home.”

She lived on the 622nd floor, and it was in a different area from the elevator Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong used.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong’s response, Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, “When the rewards are distributed, I plan on applying for a biological prosthetic limb transplant and genetic modification.”

“That’s very dangerous.” Long Yuehong frowned. He was mainly referring to genetic modification.

Bai Chen calmly said, “I’ve already decided.”

I don’t want to give up on my companions and leave by myself... she added inwardly.

“Alright.” Long Yuehong never felt that he could persuade Bai Chen. He only hoped that his team leader could succeed.

After their petite companion walked out of their line of sight, Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao headed to another area and entered the correct elevator.

He looked at his reflection in the metal wall and asked uneasily, “Do I look okay?”

Such a serious injury naturally couldn't be completely healed in a few days or weeks. Long Yuehong had only recently been alleviated from all kinds of repercussions and had completely recovered. However, his body was still relatively weak, so he needed some physiotherapy.

He was mainly worried that his family would discover that he had been seriously injured and be sad for no reason. As for the unconcealable mechanical arm, he had already thought of an excuse. Shang Jianyao had helped him think of one: "This is too cool and too strong. Men can't resist its temptation!"

Shang Jianyao sized up Long Yuehong. "As long as you don't fight, nobody can tell."

"I'm not stupid," Long Yuehong muttered. With my current physical condition, how can I fight? Besides, I've always abided by all kinds of rules over the years and never violated them!

Shang Jianyao added seriously, "I mean that people will be able to tell how strong this mechanical arm is."

"..." Long Yuehong slowly exhaled.

The elevator soon arrived at the 495th floor. Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong waved their hands at each other in disdain and walked back to their respective homes.

Shang Jianyao swung the brass key and slowly walked down the 'street.' From time to time, he would greet the neighbors passing by.

They were all very interested in the young man who had returned from field duty. However, they could tell that he had just returned and didn't think it was right to disturb him.

Before long, Shang Jianyao returned to Room 196, where he lived. He pushed open the door and entered, his eyes reflecting the cramped room.

The bed in the deepest part, the red-painted wooden table on the left, the recliner, and the stove and sink on the right were squeezed into a space of only six square meters.

Shang Jianyao didn't pack immediately. He entered the room and closed the door; then, he walked to the bed and lay down.

The room was abnormally quiet, and he was alone again.

Shang Jianyao then raised his right hand and massaged his temples.

He came to the empty Mind Room and sat cross-legged on the ground. He then split into three and began to modify the area with his mind.

He separated two rooms—one large and one small. He also made a very cramped bathroom. After that, he conjured the red-painted wooden table and the furniture in his memories one by one, including the clothes he could no longer wear.

At the end of the modification, Shang Jianyao fixed the cluster of dense fog representing the Sea of Origins on one of the walls in the small room, turning it into an LCD television.

After finishing all of this, he sat down and silently looked at the room.

Chapter 548: Mind Corridor

495th floor, Zone C, Room 11.

Dinner had just ended when Long Yuehong arrived home. Long Zhigu and Long Aihong—his siblings—were clearing the dining table and washing the dishes under the supervision of their mother, Gu Hong.

Their father, Long Dayong, naturally wasn't idle either. He skillfully cleaned the room.

Long Yuehong saw all of this through the ajar door, and he hesitated for a few seconds before walking in.

“Dad, Mom, I'm back.” He subconsciously wanted to scratch his hair with his right hand, but he saw five iron-black metal fingers.

Long Yuehong was stunned for a second. In order to hide the complicated emotions in him, he flicked a stainless steel comb out and seriously combed his thick, messy black hair.

Gu Hong immediately turned around and looked at the door upon hearing his voice.

“You’re finally back. It’s been months!” the middle-aged woman nagged in surprise, joy, and excitement.

She didn’t manage to voice the rest of her sentence because she saw Long Yuehong’s abnormal palm and wrist. It no longer felt like a body—it suffused a cold, metallic glow.

“What’s this?” Gu Hong asked hesitantly.

Her attitude affected Long Dayong, Long Zhigu, and Long Aihong, making their happy expressions carry some doubt.

Long Yuehong laughed and waved his right arm, twitching his five fingers. “Our mission was relatively dangerous. We happened to obtain such a mechanical arm, so I requested permission from Team Leader to carry out a transplant to enhance my strength. Look, didn’t I return safely thanks to it? Haha, such mechanical products are a man’s romance and a warrior’s dream lover. Very few people can tolerate it. If not for me decisively applying and seizing the opportunity, Shang Jianyao would definitely be the one lucking out!”

He spoke frankly and confidently.

Long Dayong was apathetic to his subsequent words, but Long Yuehong found agreement with Long Zhigu.

“Yeah, it looks cool!”

Heh, you’ve been watching quite a lot of Old World entertainment recently. You even know the word ‘cool’... As the eldest brother, Long Yuehong’s first reaction was to educate his brother.

Of course, this definitely wasn’t the time. Long Yuehong suppressed his thoughts and added with a smile to enhance his persuasiveness: “Not only does it look cool, but it’s even cooler when used!”

Long Zhigu curiously asked, “What are its features?”

Long Yuehong deliberated for a moment and said, “This is confidential. I can’t tell you the exact details and can only demonstrate some simple functions. For example, for example...”

Due to his guilt, he couldn’t think of something that was suitable for his family. He instinctively changed the shape of his finger and blurted out, “It can open canned food!”

Just as he said that, Long Yuehong’s face almost twitched. F*ck, it’s all Shang Jianyao’s fault for clamoring all day about using the mechanical arm to open canned food. It has almost made it into a conditioned reflex for me!

“It’s indeed very cool...” Long Zhigu didn’t know the twists and turns that were happening in his brother’s mind as he showed his yearning for fingers that could transform.

It gained greater praise from Long Dayong—who was in charge of opening canned food at home.

Gu Hong frowned and sized up Long Yuehong. “How are you going to go on blind dates like this? Other girls will find it terrifying.”

It was already late autumn. As the four Old Task Force members had yet to return from their excursion, they had missed the new year’s central assignment. Due to this, he still didn’t have a partner and would have to rely on blind dates.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Long Aihong mimicked his brother’s catchphrase. As a girl, she did find a mechanical arm strange and a little terrifying.

Long Yuehong was relatively open-minded about this and didn’t mind as much as before. “In any case, there’s no rush. I can wait for next year’s central assignment.”

He paused and hesitantly added, “By then, I might’ve already quit the Security Department and transferred to another job. It will be more stable.”

After waking up from the near-death experience, Long Yuehong became increasingly certain that he wasn’t a person who liked to take risks or seek thrills. He yearned for a stable life and didn’t want to risk his life for something illusory; he only hoped to live a down-to-earth life.

He felt that with the Old Task Force's contribution and the fact that he had been seriously injured and lost his arm, he should be able to successfully leave the Old Task Force and stop being a field agent even if the service period wasn't up.

Long Yuehong didn't make it sound so certain because he was worried that this would raise the hopes of his parents. There were always all kinds of accidents in life.

Furthermore, he could tell that his team leader and Shang Jianyao would definitely continue. Little White also seemed to have such plans and actually wanted to take the risk to undergo genetic modification.

As a member of the team, Long Yuehong felt that it would be very embarrassing if he were to quit alone. It would be akin to being a deserter.

After risking their lives together for more than a year, he found it a little difficult to abandon the deep friendship between his companions. This left him ambivalent, and he didn't dare to make any promises to his parents.

"Alright." Gu Hong nodded. "You might even be a D6 by then—you might even be promoted when you leave the Security Department. How can a D7 team leader not make the mark in the dating scene?"

She became prouder as she spoke as if she no longer cared about the mechanical arm.

When the bonuses are distributed in the next few days, I might already be a D6... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Such a promotion speed was akin to skyrocketing in Pangu Biology.

After Long Dayong, Long Zhigu, and Long Aihong were done with their house chores, the few of them sat down and listened to Long Yuehong talk about his experiences on this mission. Although the results of the confidentiality review had yet to be released, and Long Yuehong didn't know if he could tell them or not, the things he could say were enough to make his brother and sister listen attentively as if this was the most attractive piece of Old World entertainment.

After lights out and then returning to their rooms, Gu Hong and Long Dayong lay on the bed and didn't speak for a long time as if the other party had already fallen asleep.

After an unknown period of time, Gu Hong looked at the ceiling in the darkness and said faintly, “He’s still the same as before. He likes to over-explain things whenever he lies.”

“That’s right...” Long Dayong let out a long sigh.

...

In the Mind Room.

Shang Jianyao took a long time silently observing his surroundings, allowing his split selves to be one again. He then stood up, walked to the vermilion door, and gripped the brass handle.

Without any hesitation, Shang Jianyao gently twisted and pulled the door in front of him open.

What appeared in his eyes was a deep corridor covered in thick, dark-yellow carpet. On both sides of the corridor were rooms.

These rooms had vermilion doors, old brass locks, and golden door numbers. At a glance, they were almost identical.

Between them was a wall lamp at regular intervals—a wall lamp with a dim, elegant design. However, they couldn’t illuminate the end of the corridor.

Mind Corridor.

This was the Mind Corridor.

With one hand in his pocket, Shang Jianyao turned around and looked at his room. He realized that the three golden numbers were: 1, 3, and 1.

131... Shang Jianyao shook his head, and he directly produced three new numbers in the room: 6, 4, 7

He quickly replaced 131 with 647. But just as he completed this job, he blinked, and the 647 changed back to 131.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and directly conjured a black cloth to cover the original 131. He then used a golden ballpoint pen to write the number '196.'

After that, he used his fingers to support his eyelids, preventing them from blinking.

The next second, the 196 he wrote and the black cloth he conjured dissipated silently.

It can't be changed... Finally, Shang Jianyao sighed regretfully.

He stopped fussing over it and cast his gaze around. At a glance, he saw rooms like 538, 205, and 912.

There's no 503 or 102... Shang Jianyao stroked his face, expressing his disappointment.

Room 503 was suspected of belonging to Jiang Xiaoyue. It had once infected the Clam Dragon Church's Dream Protector with the Heartless disease. Room 102 was the last Mind Corridor room that Yama Tiger had entered before he entered his slumber.

In his disappointment, Shang Jianyao strolled to one side of the corridor as if he wanted to find its end. After four to five steps, he came to the room with door number 1012.

Shang Jianyao hesitated for a few seconds before raising his arms and crossing them in front of his chest. He then said loudly, "Distance is our friend!"

A room that started with 10 was most likely Eidolon Nun's. They had to be treated with vigilance!

After moving forward for a while, Shang Jianyao suddenly stopped and cast his gaze at a room on the left. On the vermilion door was the golden door number: 1215.

In the Mind Corridor, the rooms that started with 12 were either Master Zhuang's or the Arbiter of Fate's.

Shang Jianyao looked at it seriously for a while before splitting into nine other selves, prepared to vote on whether he was to explore this room.

Chapter 549: First Exploration

Outside Room 1215, in the Mind Corridor.

Unlike in the past, not only were the items held by the ten Shang Jianyaos different—either his hands were full or empty—but there were also differences in their dressing, making them appear more distinct.

The Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat stroked his chin and looked around. “Everyone, let’s vote. We are a democratic team; the minority shall give into the majority.”

“This is the tyranny of the majority!” The Shang Jianyao that continued wearing the gray camouflage uniform said whatever he wanted.

He was honest and liked to retort; he never held back.

The Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat took out a pipe from somewhere and sniffed it. “Certain sacrifices are in order for efficiency.”

He then said, “Alright, those who agree to enter this room to explore, raise their hands.”

With a whoosh, five Shang Jianyaos raised their right hands.

This included the rashest and boldest one, the one who always habitually echoed ‘yeah, yeah,’ the one who liked to joke, the one who abhorred evil and couldn’t stand seeing injustice, and the one who sought novelty and loved singing and dancing.

“Five against five—we are at an impasse.” The Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat with a pipe in his mouth wore a troubled expression. “It’s better if there were only nine like before.”

He was the convener and host of the Shang Jianyao Democratic Association.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, “The others can forfeit, so even nine can also come to a tie.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” The Shang Jianyao that agreed had a mechanical arm installed for himself. The small speaker and portable recording device he used to hold now belonged to the one who loved to sing and dance.

“Patrons, stop arguing,” advised the Shang Jianyao that was spinning the Six Senses Beads. He wore a yellow monk robe and a red kasaya. His face was iron-black in color, and his eyes even emitted a red glow. He looked like a mechanical monk.

The weak Shang Jianyao—who was also wearing a gray camouflage—sneered. “Who knows what’s behind the door? It’s very dangerous to rashly explore. It wasn’t easy for us to advance to the Mind Corridor. We can now truly protect ourselves in the Ashlands, so how can we take such a risk?”

“No, that’s not right,” retorted the honest Shang Jianyao. “There might be danger behind every door. Are we never to explore and come to a standstill?”

With that said, he seemed to make up his mind and raised his right hand. “I’ve seriously considered it and agree.”

The Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat and a black coat let out a long sigh. “The results of the Shang Jianyao referendum are: Enter and explore!”

Just as he said that, the ten Shang Jianyaos returned to one—he wore a gray camouflage uniform.

After taking a few steps forward, Shang Jianyao gripped the door handle of 1215.

The rooms in the Mind Corridor couldn’t really be locked. He only exerted a little strength, twisted the knob, and pushed before the vermilion door opened.

It was dark inside, and there was only a faint light, preventing the people outside the door from seeing what was inside.

Shang Jianyao—who had already made a decision—walked in without hesitation. His eyes gradually adapted to the light here, and he saw that this was still a short corridor and not a meticulously arranged room that had some meaning.

Shang Jianyao wasn't surprised by this. With his current knowledge of the Mind Corridor, he could basically come to a conclusion: The corresponding 'room' for everyone seemed small, but it actually included an entire mind world, including the Sea of Origins.

Therefore, only the owner or a visitor who had obtained the owner's permission could see and make contact with the results of the Mind Room's modifications. Rushing in rashly was equivalent to directly landing in the other party's Sea of Origins.

There was a certain difference between entering via knowing the address and an invasion. If one compared everyone's mind world to a computer on a network, the former was equivalent to triggering a firewall and was about to undergo repeated tests. One could encounter danger at any moment and be eliminated by the corresponding powers subsequently. The latter almost bypassed all defense mechanisms and faced the core.

In other words, if Shang Jianyao did everything smoothly in Room 1215 and explored the deepest depths, it was equivalent to invading the room owner's Sea of Origins completely, just like what DiMarco had done.

From this, it was also obvious that Destiny Connection was very strong.

Shang Jianyao's exploration of Room 1215 definitely wouldn't go smoothly. Here, he would definitely experience the scenes created by the room owner's various fears and nightmares. Once he was trapped in them and couldn't escape, the outcome would range from mental damage due to psychological trauma—an additional weakness—to losing their self-awareness and suffering from different degrees of mental problems. The severe outcome would be having their consciousness collapse or be trapped in a 'certain place.' It would make the explorer become a vegetable in the real world or fall into a slumber like Yama Tiger. The worst outcome would undoubtedly result in them losing their lives.

As for contracting the Heartless disease like the Clam Dragon Church's Dream Protector, Jiang Baimian suspected that such an encounter might only happen if one broke into a few special rooms.

Of course, for Awakened, there was no need to explore the deepest depths of many rooms or face the other party's consciousness directly. After confirming that there was no door leading to the New World, they often chose to exit.

Shang Jianyao didn't know if the corridor in front of him belonged to the room owner's island of fear or one of their nightmares. He curiously removed the flashlight hanging from his waist and flicked it on.

A bright beam of light shot out, but it was swallowed by the surrounding darkness, preventing it from producing any effects.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and muttered to himself, “Without using an Awakened’s powers, it’s impossible to directly change the environment of another person’s mind world? That is, unless one has completely invaded?”

He was seriously taking note of these details.

After confirming that the flashlight he had conjured was useless, he gave up on such attempts. He used the faint light in the corridor to size up his surroundings.

The tiles here and the decorations on the walls on both sides were abnormally warped. Many of the details appeared messy as if they directly highlighted the fear of the person who originally experienced it.

Light came from the ceiling. Daylight lamps hung high in the sky, but they were dim as if they lacked electricity.

Shang Jianyao didn’t immediately advance; instead, he took two steps back. He left Room 1215 and returned to the Mind Corridor.

After confirming that there was only one way forward, Shang Jianyao didn’t waste any more time. He passed through the door and walked along the corridor, venturing deeper one step at a time.

Before long, a silver-white metal wall appeared in front of him. The wall blocked the way, preventing anyone from moving forward.

In the middle of it was a door that slid open to the side. There was an exquisite electronic device beside the door.

At this moment, the door slid open a little, revealing a wide gap.

On the other side of the gap were darkness and silence.

Standing not far from the door, Shang Jianyao directly felt intense fear. He was influenced by the environment here and the mind world of others. For no reason, he felt indescribable horror, terror, and unease.

Shang Jianyao then muttered to himself, “The room owner encountered something extremely terrifying behind such a door? Was this something they experienced before they became an Awakened or before they cleared the Sea of Origins, and it corresponds to a certain island of fear? Or did it happen after they entered the Mind Corridor, leaving them with a lingering nightmare?”

The danger levels of these two situations clearly weren’t on the same level. If it were the former, Shang Jianyao had a high chance of successfully exploring it. If it were the latter, it was definitely not a simple matter if it was capable of scaring an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level.

As he looked at the silent darkness behind the door, Shang Jianyao split out his other nine selves and voted to determine if he was to venture deeper. This time, the cautious group won with an absolute advantage of eight to two.

Respecting the results of the vote, Shang Jianyao pressed his palms together and left Room 1215 before closing the vermilion door. He then assumed a 100-meter sprint posture.

The next second, Shang Jianyao rushed out and ran as if he wanted to determine where the end of the corridor was.

After running for an unknown period of time, he stopped, panting.

Most of the rooms around him no longer had golden door numbers. The old brass locks seemed to be blocked by something.

They were ordinary people and Awakened who hadn’t cleared the Sea of Origins. They couldn’t be opened from the corridor.

The end was still unknown and unseen.

After testing his limits, Shang Jianyao raised his hand to rub his temples and chose to retreat.

Having expended a lot of energy, he couldn't be bothered to listen to everyone's conversations at the Rec Center and fell asleep.

Early the next morning, Shang Jianyao went to the small canteen for breakfast and entered the Old Task Force's Room 14 on the 647th floor.

Jiang Baimian was in the office before him. She was already typing on the keyboard and rushing out a report.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao enter, she frowned and said, "Last night, I wrote about the sleeping Buddha's Nirmanakaya and how he occasionally wakes up when I thought of something."

"What is it?" Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, "According to the intelligence we previously obtained and the verification we obtained this time, we can preliminarily determine that Awakened who enter the New World have either abandoned their bodies or fallen asleep. They rarely wake up to deal with matters. If we were to transpose the latter situation onto the company, who would you associate it with?"

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin, and his expression gradually turned serious. "Big Boss."

Chapter 550: Ability Limits

If one wanted to find a figure with sufficient presence in Pangu Biology while rarely appearing in public, most employees only had one answer: Big Boss!

This true ruler of Pangu Biology almost never interfered with the company's daily operations. She handed it over to the Board of Directors and would only give speeches and blessings to her employees through the radio system during festive seasons.

If they considered her as an Awakened who had entered the New World and retained her physical body, all of this seemed explainable and very reasonable. Of course, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao still had a limited understanding of the company's higher-ups, especially the latter.

They only knew about the ones that often appeared in the news. Therefore, they couldn't rule out the possibility that Pangu Biology had many similar New World-level Awakened. However, these people weren't like Big Boss—they would occasionally appear and make their presence known.

Even if they woke up, they would at most meet members from their small circle and secretly deal with certain matters.

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's answer, Jiang Baimian subconsciously looked around and confirmed that there were no additional electronic products in the room. She said with a serious expression, "Watch your words and actions."

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to respond with 'weren't you the one asking,' Jiang Baimian laughed. "This is actually a good thing. It means that we have someone to rely on and that we aren't inferior to other factions. I've always wondered if Big Boss gets bored from staying at the bottom basement with her rarely coming out. Think about it—we've been in the company for so long that we yearn to go to the surface, much less a big shot like her who should've experienced the Old World's destruction. From the looks of it, there's indeed a reason."

Ignoring the promotion of the employees, Jiang Baimian—who came from a family in management—knew that ever since Pangu Biology was established or migrated into the underground building, Big Boss had always been the same person. She had never been replaced.

This made her occasionally wonder if they had secretly changed personnel so that most people didn't notice. After all, Pangu Biology was ahead of other large factions in cloning technology.

Otherwise, with Big Boss's age exceeding 90, the voice played from the radio shouldn't appear so magnetic and melodious. She sounded more like a mature woman in her thirties, like Jiang Baimian's immediate superior—the Security Department's deputy minister, Xenny.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately retorted Jiang Baimian. "Maybe she just likes to play games in her room, just like Xiaochong."

Jiang Baimian replied angrily, "Xiaochong also goes out for walks occasionally. He even rides a horse!"

At this point, she paused and hesitantly said, "There should be more than one powerhouse in the company that has entered the New World. Otherwise, there's no way for it to fend off large factions like First City. Big Boss should be the most special one among them, something like Xiaochong?"

Shang Jianyao revealed a thoughtful expression. "Then, what pets does she have..."

“I mean in terms of level, not identity.” Jiang Baimian sighed helplessly.

In her and Shang Jianyao’s hearts, Xiaochong’s identity was the King of the Heartless, a slave owner of mutated creatures, and a poisonous sore in the Ashlands.

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to divert the topic, Jiang Baimian asked, “You didn’t wait to modify your room the moment you returned, explore the Mind Corridor, and experiment with your abilities, right?”

Shang Jianyao revealed a terrified expression. “How do you know?”

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “I can guess it with my toes! It’s about time!”

She picked up her cup, drank a mouthful of warm water, and curiously asked, “Have you figured out the limits of those abilities?”

While waiting for Long Yuehong’s injuries to recover in First City and on the return trip to Pangu Biology, Shang Jianyao had been exploring his newly obtained abilities and the qualitative changes that occurred due to the advancement. But due to Du Heng’s exhortations, he didn’t do anything major to his room or the Mind Corridor. He ended up obtaining inaccurate feedback from the various details.

Shang Jianyao nodded, and his expression became serious. “Roughly. Thought Guidance can be done using the method of Thought Implantation or in the form of Inference Cloning. The premise is that both rely on words and that the target can hear them clearly.”

Jiang Baimian recalled Wu Meng’s bizarreness and asked with interest, “In other words, the target will be affected no matter where they are?”

“Yes, the limits of this ability are the intersection of my sound transmission range and the target’s hearing. It’s not fixed.” Shang Jianyao revealed a look of anticipation as he spoke. “If we want to use electronic products to enhance the range of influence, I need to inject power in them. I’m still inferior to Wu Meng now, and the broadcasting effects will be much worse.”

“That’s very normal. You’ve just advanced, so how can you compare to Wu Meng? Even Wu Meng—who has been sealed for many years—isn’t someone the current you can compare to.” Jiang Baimian laughed. “It seems like the telecom fraud we previously imagined has some basis to be

realized. It's just that the various facilities in the Ashlands are backward. Ignoring the telephone, only a few people can listen to the radio. If it were the Old World, you would definitely be like a fish in water."

"That's right, that's right." At some point in time, the one in control of the body had become the obsequious Shang Jianyao.

He then became rash and bold. "If I use the team's landline to call the board members, can I easily 'persuade' them?"

"The premise is that they don't know about this ability and that they aren't powerful Awakened themselves." Jiang Baimian decided to stop the increasingly dangerous discussion and asked, "What about the other abilities?"

Shang Jianyao directly said without needing to recall anything, "The qualitative change that Literary Hipster-Corny Person underwent is its range reaching 80 meters. These two abilities are actually very similar in many aspects, which is the reason for the fusion. However, there are still certain differences. Literary Hipster is more inclined to make the other party empathetic or have self-pity. Corny Person makes the target irrational while liking to do the opposite."

As if afraid that Jiang Baimian wouldn't understand, he gave an example. "If I'm injured by the target and am on the ground, unable to move, Literary Hipster can make the other party recall the injuries they've suffered or similar instances that they've seen or heard. From there, they will develop empathy and shed tears, deciding to let me live. As for Corny Person, it's more likely that they will become arrogant and decide to humiliate me. They won't be in a rush to finish me off, and I'll end up having a chance to escape as a result."

"I feel like the word 'empathy' is about to be corrupted by you." Jiang Baimian couldn't help but laugh. "What about self-pity?"

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, "When I hurt the target, they won't attempt to counterattack. Instead, they will sigh with emotion and say, 'I'm sorry for being born human,' or they will sing some sad songs that touch them. If there is liquor, they might very well choose to get themselves drunk."

"S-seriously..." Jiang Baimian couldn't find the words to describe it. "What about the range and number of people that can be affected with Limbs Immobility?"

“120 meters.” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and sighed. “If I chose Increased Distance, the range would definitely exceed 200 meters.”

In Awakened battles, the distance was sometimes more important than abilities.

“Accept what you’ve chosen. It’s useless to regret it anyway,” Jiang Baimian consoled him.

Shang Jianyao continued, “The number of people that can be affected by the three abilities is currently 20. The range of Electromagnetic Interference is 120 meters. Based on the ability with the furthest range, Matter Interference is relatively weak with a range of only 50 meters.”

“It’s already amazing. As expected of an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level,” Jiang Baimian praised him as a team leader. She then revealed a thoughtful expression. “Awakened who have explored the Mind Corridor’s depths seem to have an intrinsic difference from ordinary Mind Corridor-level Awakened. The former’s aura can be separated and left in a room in the Mind Corridor, or it can be combined with an item in reality and be fixed, becoming a magical item. The latter can’t do that.

“Therefore, apart from obtaining some useful items, will it also have the effect of tempering oneself during the exploration of those mind rooms? Otherwise, there wouldn’t be a difference in intrinsic strength when one explores deeper...”

“I haven’t tried it yet.” Shang Jianyao smiled. “In any case, I didn’t hide it from the company this time. I should receive some guidance in the future.”

“You didn’t try?” Jiang Baimian was surprised. “With your personality, how can you hold back?”

“People are different; every one has their own thoughts. Sometimes, we have to respect the results of the vote,” Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness.

Jiang Baimian was speechless.

At this moment, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong entered the office one after another.

After sharing their previous discussion, Jiang Baimian said to her three team members, “Hit the gym and get some training to stay in tip-top condition. Also, remember to cut your hair later. It’s better to look tidy.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Shang Jianyao’s response was the same as always, without a hint of change.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen replied in unison.

After entering the training room, Shang Jianyao glanced at Long Yuehong and did a single-hand push-up. “Let’s compete.”

Long Yuehong swung his right arm in exasperation and amusement. “Are you sure?”

He could now stand upside down with one finger. Of course, it had to be done using his right hand’s finger.

Shang Jianyao smiled and replied, “How am I to steel our determination to get another mechanical arm in the future without competing?”

What a strong obsession... Long Yuehong couldn’t help but mutter.

At this moment, Bai Chen interrupted. “Actually, we should be qualified to apply for bionic artificial intelligence armor. It doesn’t have to be a mechanical arm.”

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong’s eyes darted around as he deliberated and asked, “Little White, you seem eager to carry out missions on the surface? Isn’t it nice to live peacefully in the company?”

Bai Chen glanced at him and pursed her lips. “This stability is too fragile. Maybe I’ll contract the Heartless disease next month.”