

Ad Infinitum 561

Chapter 561: “Secret Manual”

Jiang Baimian received a call in the afternoon. She held the receiver in one hand and shouted at Shang Jianyao, “They want you to make a trip to Room 21.”

Shang Jianyao—who was selecting documents from the pile of information in the Old Task Force’s office—straightened his body and asked with a frown, “Is someone going to assassinate me with such a sudden phone call?”

“...” Jiang Baimian wasn’t the only one speechless; Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were equally speechless.

Such a Shang Jianyao was rarely seen. He actually had a persecution complex!

Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she asked in enlightenment, “Were you the one guarding the golden elevator?”

Shang Jianyao remained silent and didn’t answer.

Jiang Baimian chuckled and consoled him. “They want you over to collect some confidential information.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao’s expression gradually changed, and he looked like a completely different person. He then left the room and walked along the corridor to Room 21.

Shang Jianyao politely knocked on the door.

“Please come in.” Su Yu’s voice sounded from inside.

Shang Jianyao pushed open the door and saw Director Su Yu sitting opposite the long table. He asked in surprise, “Aren’t you busy?”

This was a meeting room.

Su Yu was still wearing the Security Department's gray combat uniform. There were no management-level guards around him; he was alone.

He smiled and explained, "I'm visiting the employees on sentry duty just outside the entrance today. I happened to pass by the Security Department, so I might as well give you the information regarding the Mind Corridor."

An explanation is just a cover... The honest and frank Shang Jianyao wanted to respond in this way, but he was pressed down by his peers in the Mind Room.

Shang Jianyao glanced at the thin stack of information in Su Yu's hand and asked excitedly, "Then, can I go on today's Newspoint? Director Su Yu met the D7 employee—Shang Jianyao—in Room 21 on the 647th floor. The two parties had a friendly exchange regarding the Mind Corridor."

As he spoke, he pulled out a chair and sat opposite Director Su Yu.

Su Yu knew that this fellow had mental problems and casually replied, "Such matters are confidential. They won't go on Newspoint."

"Oh..." Shang Jianyao was clearly very disappointed.

Su Yu ignored his antics and handed over the information in his hand. "You can only read it here; you can't take it away. If you are afraid of forgetting the details, you can materialize some of the content in the form of a document and fix it in your Mind Room. Although the amount of information that can be contained this way is limited, it's enough to register the most important things."

"You can do that?" Shang Jianyao expressed his deep enlightenment.

Su Yu smiled. "Consider this a small trick I'm teaching you."

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything else because he had already taken the information and cast his gaze over.

"Although there's only one Mind Corridor, different Awakened seem to be located in various parts of its projections. Under normal circumstances, we don't have to worry about directly encountering

each other. However, there are also special exceptions. There are a few negative examples that can't be explained for the time being...

"You will meet another person if they happen to open the door around the same time as you..."

"Different rooms have different tempering effects on your mind due to the psychological trauma, inner fears, and dreams. The differences in the way you choose to deal with the same situation in the same room will also result in different tempering effects. However, remember that there are often only two to three high-quality solutions for a particular scene in a particular room or even fewer. Once it's activated in the wrong manner, it might bring about relatively serious consequences..."

"It's not recommended that you mentally exhaust yourself during each exploration because you can't predict if an accident will happen on the way back. The simplest and most extreme example is that the room owner is also exploring a certain dangerous place while you are exploring a certain room. For example, their mind will definitely show abnormalities if they encounter an accident in other rooms. This will reflect back into their room and bring about major changes... These are unpredictable, and a prepared response is impossible. You can only adapt to the situation. Therefore, you need to leave sufficient mental capacity..."

"If you have nightmares for days and feel exhausted every time you wake up, it means that someone has entered your Mind Room and has explored it to a rather deep extent. You have to think of a way to lock onto the other party and give them a warning. If they refuse, prepare for battle..."

"The corresponding lock-on method is..."

"Exploring the Mind Corridor's depths refers to a complete exploration of at least five rooms or incomplete exploration of ten rooms..."

"..."

After the list of precautions were a large number of room numbers. Behind the different room numbers were different comments.

101: It currently belongs to an Awakened in the Subhuti domain. It's suspected that they have already explored the Mind Corridor's depths... The most common encounter upon entry is a psychological trauma that happens in a mental hospital. It often changes, and this might very well be related to the room owner's mental state... The key point of clearing the room is to find the only

doctor in the mental hospital and kill him... This is the best solution according to our current explorations...

“102: Extremely dangerous room that rarely appears. The situation we know is that at least two Awakened have entered and never come out. One is in a slumber in reality, and the other has completely gone crazy...

“ ...

“205: Suspected to be a certain Kalendaria’s dream. The danger of exploration is extremely high, but the benefits will also be very great. It’s not recommended for Awakened that have yet to reach the Mind Corridor’s depths to attempt it... Dreams often change, and they are different every time. It’s impossible to summarize the key points of the explorations...

“ ...

“503: Rarely appears. According to the intelligence, the people who enter might very well end up infected with the Heartless disease...

“ ...

“506: The room’s owner is an Awakened in the Monitor domain. All of their psychological trauma has a common solution—the courage to face danger... After grasping the key point, this room is relatively safe. It can be used as a ‘base’ for rookies to temper their minds. Therefore, it’s not recommended to explore to a relatively deep extent to prevent affecting the room owner. If you happen to encounter a situation where there are fluctuations in the room owner’s mental state, it’s best to provide them with some help. Don’t kill the goose that lays golden eggs...

“ ...”

On several pages of paper were more than a hundred room numbers. They were also written with different comments, allowing Shang Jianyao to know which rooms were extremely dangerous, which rooms were relatively safe, the trick to clearing certain rooms with psychological traumas, and the risks that required avoiding.

If the first few pieces of general knowledge relating to the Mind Corridor were precious, the latter pieces were priceless to most Mind Corridor-level Awakened!

This was clearly a summary of the exploration experience of powerhouses in Pangu Biology. It was a manifestation of the precious information gathered by the intelligence system. It was the extraction of certain secrets that many outfield employees had chanced upon.

For example, the comments regarding Room 503 clearly came from Shang Jianyao and the Old Task Force's gains in Tarnan.

This information fully revealed why large factions were called large factions. An unaffiliated Mind Corridor-level Awakened might take two to three years to explore a room bit by bit, but a large faction's Mind Corridor-level Awakened might be able to complete it in two to three months with the support of such information. The former might accidentally find themselves in a certain scene and leave behind serious problems. The latter would step on the shoulders of their predecessors and know which rooms they could enter and which they couldn't. They could avoid many risks in advance...

"This is..." Shang Jianyao was 'greatly shocked.' "This is a game strategy guide!"

Su Yu took a few seconds to understand what a game strategy guide meant and replied with a smile, "Yes. This can also be considered a martial arts manual at the Mind Corridor level."

"You've also watched the Old World's entertainment?" Shang Jianyao's focus was always wrong.

Su Yu frankly replied, "Occasionally."

He had no interest in discussing this matter and said, "This is one of the main reasons why Mind Corridor-level Awakened are willing to be restrained and choose to band together."

Su Yu then changed the topic. "But this is more of a reference—you can't blindly follow it. The human heart is prone to changes. It's possible that traps will appear in the corresponding room at any moment."

As he spoke, Su Yu's expression became rather serious.

"That makes it more interesting." Shang Jianyao excitedly went through the room numbers again.

In his Mind Room, several Shang Jianyaos were busy materializing the key content into documents.

After flipping through them for a while, Shang Jianyao realized that there were no 1215 or 522 in these room numbers.

The former was the room that had mysteriously disappeared after entering once, and the latter was the one he was exploring now.

“What does it mean by rarely appearing?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Su Yu had expected this and simply explained, “Everyone often walks through the Mind Corridor. Everyone has seen many rooms, but some door numbers are only chanced upon by a few people.

“Just like 503—we’ve never encountered it before. If not for the intelligence you provided us, nobody would know that it’s very likely for us to contract the Heartless disease after entering it.”

“Why?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Su Yu shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Shang Jianyao then flipped to the last page of the information. On it were also some room numbers—about ten or so—but there were no comments.

“These are?” Shang Jianyao took the initiative to ask.

Su Yu laughed. “These are the door numbers of some of the company’s Mind Corridor Awakened. We tell you in hopes that you don’t explore it if you encounter them. We shouldn’t be disturbing our own.”

“What about the rest?” Shang Jianyao was eager to give it a try.

Su Yu tersely acknowledged his words. “They don’t want a newly advanced rookie to know their door number. They will be at a grave disadvantage if anything happens to you.”

At this point, Su Yu looked at Shang Jianyao and said seriously, “According to the rules, it’s time for you to report your door number to the company. Then, you can choose to inform your other ‘colleagues’ to prevent them from disturbing you.”

Every Mind Corridor-level Awakened’s door number was rather important. If others learned of it, it might very well bring about danger. Therefore, requesting him to report such information was Pangu Biology’s form of management.

Shang Jianyao didn’t hesitate.

“131.”

He then carefully looked at his colleagues’ door numbers again as if he were wondering when he should visit them.

There was still no 1215 or 522 on the list.

After Shang Jianyao returned the information, Su Yu slowly stood up and prepared to leave.

Suddenly, he spoke casually. “You were already an Awakened when you discovered Yama Tiger. Did you make any attempts?”

Chapter 562: Hesitation

Upon hearing Su Yu’s question, Shang Jianyao had a ‘you are someone with ideas’ expression. “I came into contact with his subconsciousness.”

Su Yu burst out into laughter and shook his head. “As expected, the ignorant are fearless. Then?”

Shang Jianyao frankly replied, “He shouted: ‘save me.’”

Su Yu fell silent for a moment before saying, “Any other questions? If not, you may leave.”

Shang Jianyao thought about it seriously and replied, “The Crystal Consciousness Church’s Chief abandoned his body when he entered the New World, but the Buddha’s Nirmanakaya still retains his

body. Many Awakened at the New World level are the same. Who's right, and who's wrong in these two choices?"

Su Yu fell silent again. After a while, he said, "There's no conclusion at the moment. Some of the New World powerhouses who chose to preserve their bodies were very regretful when they occasionally woke up, while others felt very lucky. As for the reason, they didn't mention it."

Shang Jianyao dragged out a long affirmation before bidding farewell without hesitation and left Room 21.

The moment he returned to the Old Task Force, Jiang Baimian stood up, looked at the door, and asked curiously, "Is the information they gave you valuable?"

"A top-three martial arts manual in all of the pugilistic world." The current Shang Jianyao clearly admired Director Su's analogy very much by embellishing it with all kinds of qualifiers.

While Long Yuehong was a little stunned, Jiang Baimian said in enlightenment, "A priceless treasure... Experience from generations of the company's Mind Corridor-level Awakened?"

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded.

"What exactly was included?" Jiang Baimian knew that she had guessed right.

Shang Jianyao didn't elaborate. "Certain things to take note of, as well as the danger level, the trauma situation, and the solutions to clearing the obstacles."

After all, that was indeed too much information.

"What a priceless treasure. With such information, you might be able to explore the Mind Corridor's depths in a year." Jiang Baimian looked at the door again. "We'll talk about this later."

She meant that they could chat about the knowledge related to the Mind Corridor when they headed back to the surface. It could be a training session to familiarize themselves with the bionic artificial intelligence armor or a new mission.

With that said, Jiang Baimian pointed at a folder on the table. “This is the Life Angel necklace; you can take it back now. You can only get the Six Senses Beads through an application the next time we head out.”

It was just like the three military exoskeletons.

The reason for returning the Life Angel necklace to Shang Jianyao was very simple—this was protection for his previous ‘rashness.’ It was used to balance the chaotic auras in his Sea of Origins. Therefore, be it inside Pangu Biology or the Ashlands surface, this item had to be placed in a place he could quickly retrieve. He couldn’t afford to be delayed.

It had to be known that the ‘descent’ of those auras might happen directly in his mind world. It wasn’t something Shang Jianyao could avoid by hiding in the company and not going out.

In that case, it was only right for him to carry the Life Angel necklace at all times. After all, as a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, he was a killing machine. The higher-ups didn’t care much about him having an additional item.

Shang Jianyao immediately walked to his team leader’s desk and grumbled, “Since the company has dealt with it, I wonder if the corresponding negative effects have changed.”

“I think so.” Jiang Baimian pointed at the folder and said, “Minister Xenny told me not to touch it directly.”

“It’s toxic?” Shang Jianyao’s train of thought was always strange. He then picked up the folder and opened it.

Inside was a tightly wrapped plastic bag in layers. It was very difficult to tear apart.

“That won’t do. How can I retrieve it in time at critical moments...” Shang Jianyao evaluated as he turned his head and said to Long Yuehong, “Quick, lend me a hand!”

“How?” Long Yuehong asked cautiously.

“By using your mechanical arm, of course. This isn’t harder than opening canned food.” Shang Jianyao always spoke as though it was a matter of fact.

With Long Yuehong’s help, he quickly removed the layers of plastic and exposed the paper jewelry box inside.

The silver Life Angel necklace lay quietly inside.

Shang Jianyao didn’t mind. He picked it up, weighed it in his hand, and sighed with emotion. “What a pity. It can’t help me fall asleep faster anymore.”

He meant that the original negative effect of drowsiness was gone.

“Do you now feel unwell in any way?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Shang Jianyao sensed for a while before walking to the side. His right leg seemed to have lost its strength; he could only drag it along, appearing abnormally cumbersome. This made him limp.

Shang Jianyao then placed the Life Angel necklace on the table, and his actions returned to normal.

After he used his left palm to pick up the item again, his left arm suddenly sank, almost dropping the necklace to the ground along with his arm.

Thud!

The five fingers on his left hand lost their strength as he allowed the item to fall.

Shang Jianyao was in no rush to pick it up as he stroked his chin. “It seems to paralyze some of my limbs, and it’s random. The results are different every time I pick it up.”

Jiang Baimian analyzed the situation in detail. “In other words, the Awakened’s corresponding price is partial limb paralysis. It can’t be avoided, thus fixing the price in an immutable manner that’s non-random. This is proven by the item created by their aura.”

As she spoke, she began to recall who at the management level had a mobility problem with one of their limbs disabled. Gradually, she locked onto four targets.

There were definitely normal people sitting in wheelchairs due to ailments among them, so Jiang Baimian couldn’t narrow the scope any further.

As for the Life Angel necklace’s effect, it was still Cardiac Arrest.

Shang Jianyao placed the item back into the jewelry box and filled it with paper. He then tried to pick up the jewelry box and place it in his pocket.

Shang Jianyao took it in and said truthfully, “Such isolation is about enough.”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “It won’t be a problem for you, but it likely won’t work for ordinary people. At least two to three more layers of separation are needed.”

This was because Shang Jianyao had already entered the Mind Corridor. His tolerance for the negative effects of various items had clearly increased.

After discussing this matter, Shang Jianyao glanced at Bai Chen. “Have you guys narrowed down the genetic modifications?”

“We haven’t completely decided.” Bai Chen didn’t hide the truth.

Jiang Baimian explained, “I suggest choosing a biological prosthetic limb first before matching based on its functions. We should try to create synergy among ourselves. However, the general principle is to use something with the lowest risk, not the one with the best effects.”

“Yes, yes. Don’t take risks,” Long Yuehong interrupted.

Upon hearing him speak, Jiang Baimian glanced at him and asked with a smile, “Have you finished writing your transfer application?”

Long Yuehong stammered, “N-Not yet.”

Shang Jianyao immediately laughed, leaned over, and patted his shoulder. “It seems like he can’t bear to part with us!”

Long Yuehong’s face flushed red, and he was speechless.

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen looked at him with rather soft gazes. One smiled obviously, while the other only had a faint smile.

They had been through life and death for more than a year, and they had deep camaraderie. It was normal for them to be unwilling to part with each other, so there was no reason to mock him over this.

After Long Yuehong composed himself, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “In short, consider it carefully. There’s no rush to make a decision. We should still be on break for a long time. After all, Little White needs to recover for a period of time after the surgery.

“As you know, our subsequent missions will become more and more dangerous. It’s very likely that we will enter Wasteland Ruin 13 again. The life everyone wants to have is different. We fully respect your choice.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong nodded.

Shang Jianyao quickly started a new topic and recounted what he had experienced in the ruins last night. He emphasized the Iron Mountain Daily and Renwu Magazine.

Jiang Baimian’s expression gradually turned solemn. “Iron Mountain City was a very famous ruin in the Chaotic Era. Many large factions gained a lot from there, but that doesn’t include us. Besides, you should still remember that one of the Crystal Consciousness Church’s Five Great Holy Lands is in Iron Mountain City.”

Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company!

Long Yuehong couldn't help but sigh with emotion. "Room 522 is very valuable."

The room owner had clearly been to the Iron Mountain City ruins in the middle and late Chaotic Era. The existence of numerous Heartless was proof of this.

This also meant that the room owner wasn't young—they were at least in their seventies.

"There's also the genius scientist, Lin Sui. She's worth paying attention to," Jiang Baimian said as she sat down.

She got on the intranet and searched for information related to the Old World. After a while, she looked up and said to Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong, "There's no such person."

At the very least, Pangu Biology had nothing on this piece of Old World information.

"That's interesting." Shang Jianyao stroked his chin.

Jiang Baimian quickly reminded him, "Rest for two nights first and rest up before going."

Shang Jianyao had been injured during his first exploration of Room 522. Although it wasn't serious, there were still some effects that required time to recover.

"Alright." Shang Jianyao didn't put on a brave front.

Chapter 563: A Difficult Decision

When it was almost time to knock off, the Old Task Force members finally packed their items and prepared to leave.

When Long Yuehong—who was holding his laptop—passed by Jiang Baimian, he opened his mouth but didn't say a word.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Baimian sensed his abnormality.

Long Yuehong hesitated for a moment and said, “Team Leader, you’ve always insisted on investigating the reason for the Old World’s destruction and the Heartless disease’s origins. This is definitely fraught with danger. Aren’t you—aren’t you afraid of dying?”

Not far away, Shang Jianyao smiled and shouted, “There will naturally be others to take over the mantle!”

Jiang Baimian glared at him and looked at Long Yuehong with a smile. “Of course, I am.”

She paused and added seriously, “But there are always things that need to be done. In the Ashlands, it’s not that you won’t die if you don’t take risks because you are afraid of death. Nobody knows when the Heartless disease will befall them. Compared to dying in a muddled state, I’d rather collapse while searching for hope.”

“Will it give more oomph by saying ‘seek out the light?’” Shang Jianyao asked in a questioning tone.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “Did you use Literary Hipster on yourself?”

She then smiled at Long Yuehong. “Besides, it’s not like we’ll necessarily die. There’s still a chance of success.”

At this moment, Bai Chen interrupted. “I at least want to continue staying in the team while I’m still able to keep up. The danger our team faces will only increase in the future. When I’m unable to improve myself any further, I’ll take the initiative to quit and not burden everyone.”

“What burden?” Jiang Baimian said in exasperation and amusement. “However, that’s a pretty good idea. In short, do what’s within your means. It’s the same for you and me. If the danger ahead is really too great to deal with, I definitely won’t foolishly rush over. As long as there’s life, there’s hope. If our generation can’t complete the investigation regarding the cause of the Old World’s destruction, I’ll focus my efforts on nurturing the next generation.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “In any case, don’t be in a rush to make a decision. Little Red, don’t give up on the opportunity out of impulsiveness. You might regret it in a few days. Little White, the same goes for you. No matter what, there are certain risks with genetic modification. You can consider it for a while longer and see if there are any changes in the situation. Nobody knows which will come first—tomorrow or an accident.”

As for Hey, she had long given up on providing him treatment!

Upon seeing that their team leader was being more formal, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong nodded in agreement.

On the way back to the 495th floor, Long Yuehong remained silent while Shang Jianyao argued with himself.

He didn't persuade him or cheer him on. He waved his hand and coolly walked home.

After returning home, Long Yuehong began to busy himself. He would occasionally go to the 'kitchen' to help Gu Hong or go to the room to tutor his sister, Long Aihong, in her homework.

The family had dinner, cleaned up the dishes, and slipped out twice. The two younger family members then took turns playing on the computer while the older three chatted as they listened to the radio.

"Good evening, everyone. I'm Newpoint broadcaster, Hou Yi. It's 8 p.m. now..."

"Today, Director Su Yu went to the surface to visit the employees guarding the surrounding sentry posts. He praised them for their persistence in harsh environments..."

Upon hearing this, Gu Hong turned her head and looked at her eldest son. "Is the environment on the surface really that bad? That's not what you previously said."

"It depends on the area," Long Yuehong explained simply. "Many areas have been seriously damaged during the Old World's destruction. Extremely nasty weather often happens even today. The weather might still be sunny in the morning to the point people might get a heat stroke from the sun, but then snow heavily in the afternoon—a meter-thick snowfall."

"The people on sentry duty and the Security Department's outfield employees sure don't have it easy..." Gu Hong sighed with emotion.

Long Dayong immediately echoed, “That’s right. If not for their sacrifice, how could we live such a peaceful and stable life?”

Even if supplies were a little lacking, it was still much better than Moat Town or Redstone Collection.

Long Yuehong quietly listened and habitually raised his right hand to touch his cheek.

The cold touch jolted him awake.

...

In the middle of the night, Long Yuehong’s body twitched as he opened his eyes.

He had a nightmare. In his dream, his parents, brother, and sister all contracted the Heartless disease.

He wanted to save them, but he was blasted to pieces by a missile.

Long Yuehong subconsciously raised his hand and touched his forehead—it was cold.

He had habitually used his right palm again.

After switching to his left hand, he realized that his forehead was covered in sweat.

Long Yuehong took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. He then decided to use the bathroom to relieve himself and wipe his face.

Just as he arrived at the door to the small bathroom at home, he saw a dim light shining through the door.

“Who’s inside?” Long Yuehong asked.

“Me.” Long Aihong’s voice sounded.

Long Yuehong asked, “Still awake?”

Long Aihong laughed awkwardly. “Bro, don’t tell Mom and Dad. I-I’ve been on the computer until now.”

“Don’t you have school tomorrow?” Long Yuehong was peeved and amused.

“No,” Long Aihong replied confidently. “It’s the weekend tomorrow.”

I forgot about that... Long Yuehong thought for a moment and said, “Even if I don’t say anything, you won’t be able to hide it from them. Our energy allocation is limited. How can Mom and Dad not discover that you’ve used so much?”

“I-I happened to discover that there was a lot more energy allocation at home when I came back today. I just squandered it a little, and it’s almost the end of the month. It would be a waste if I didn’t use it.” Long Aihong asked in confusion, “Bro, do you know what’s going on?”

Long Yuehong hesitated for a moment and said, “It’s probably the energy allocation corresponding to my promotion.”

“Y-you’ve been promoted again?” Long Aihong was surprised and delighted. “D6?”

Long Yuehong said in embarrassment but yet a little smugness, “It was just confirmed. D7.”

He had yet to tell his parents about this, and Shang Jianyao didn’t publicize it today.

“Wow!” Long Aihong praised sincerely. “Brother, you’re amazing! Seriously, do you want to consider my classmates? Several of them idolize you.”

She had clearly learned a lot from the Old World’s entertainment.

Long Yuehong cleared his throat. “How much longer will you take?”

Long Aihong did some estimation. “Wait a little longer—five minutes. I need to get in the zone again after chatting with you.”

Long Yuehong thought for a moment and said, “Forget it, forget it. I’ll do it outside.”

Five minutes was more than enough.

He wrapped himself in a thick cotton coat and left the house with a flashlight before walking to the nearest public bathroom.

After relieving himself in comfort, Long Yuehong shrank his body and illuminated the road ahead as he walked back step by step.

He was long accustomed to the cold after lights out. He knew that most of the precious geothermal energy was directed to the Production Zone with the help of certain technology. The daily necessities provided by the Energy Zone naturally needed conservation at night.

As Long Yuehong walked, a black figure suddenly jumped out from the side and pounced at him.

This... Long Yuehong could be considered experienced in combat. Upon seeing that he couldn’t dodge in time, he quickly raised his right arm and blocked it in front of him.

Almost at the same time, his arm sank as the black figure pressed down on him.

Long Yuehong saw the attacker clearly with the flashlight’s help. It was a slightly familiar face—probably one of the neighbors nearby.

At this moment, his expression was warped, and his eyes were turbid and bloodshot.

Heartless disease... Someone has contracted the Heartless disease again... Long Yuehong’s heart tightened as his right palm suddenly turned red.

This was his subconscious reaction, but he quickly controlled his instincts and gave up on using the laser launcher. This could penetrate walls or floors, easily injuring others accidentally!

As his thoughts raced, Long Yuehong's steel-like right arm trembled and threw the Heartless out. He then stomped his feet, pounced forward, clenched his steel hand into a fist, and swung it out.

Thud!

The Heartless's head caved in, producing an exaggerated wound.

Long Yuehong was a little shocked by the mechanical arm's strength as he watched the enemy slowly collapse. He—who had just recovered from his serious injuries—had actually finished off a Heartless so easily...

The strength of this fist wasn't much weaker than his team leader's biological prosthetic limb. Its hardness definitely exceeded hers by leaps and bounds!

After being in a daze for more than ten seconds, Long Yuehong turned to the Order Supervisory Department.

...

The next morning, in Room 14 on the 647th floor, in the Old Task Force's office.

Bai Chen finished her work and prepared to go to the training room as she asked, "There was a Heartless occurrence again last night?"

She had heard about this from the morning broadcast, so she asked the well-informed native employees—Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong.

Shang Jianyao looked at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong tersely acknowledged it. "I encountered him."

"Are you alright?" Bai Chen asked.

“I’m fine.” Long Yuehong smiled. “It was resolved relatively easily.”

Bai Chen changed the topic and asked, “Has the company’s Heartless disease outbreak frequency increased this year?”

“We don’t know.” Shang Jianyao shook his head. “We have to get Big White to investigate.”

At the mention of Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong realized that their team leader had yet to arrive. She was 20 minutes late for work.

Chapter 564: Price

Basement Three, Project C-14.

Jiang Baimian carried her tactical backpack and met Mei Shou’an.

“Hi there, Mianmian.” Mei Shou’an smiled kindly. “The team and the corresponding equipment needed for your biological cochlear implant are already prepared. We’ll try our best to finish it in one go so that you won’t have to go through any additional suffering.”

According to the procedure, Jiang Baimian would undergo anesthesia at the last step of the Awakening experiment and fall asleep. Mei Shou’an planned on splitting this into two parts. He would leave the first half for her Awakening and the second half for her cochlear implant.

This was completely feasible given the amount of time.

“Thank you, Uncle Mei.” Jiang Baimian thanked him sincerely.

Jiang Baimian was afraid of being anesthetized, losing her consciousness, and falling into the darkness—unable to control herself again. Therefore, she would definitely agree wholeheartedly if she could be done and over with it in one shot.

Mei Shou’an nodded, and his expression gradually turned serious. “I need to tell you certain things before we officially begin. You should already know that Project C-14 is extremely low risk, but this doesn’t mean that there isn’t any danger at all. There’s a 0.5% chance that the subject will never wake up again. 20% of them experience all kinds of problems, including anxiety, mania, short-term

memory loss, and allergies for a period of time. Most of them show clear improvement after treatment and are expected to recover in the foreseeable future.

“As for the success rate of the experiments, which is to say, the probability of Awakening is very unstable. Sometimes, there will be two to three in a batch. At other times, there will be three to four consecutive batches without any Awakening. In addition, the probability of problems arising from repeated experiments rises exponentially. It’s almost equivalent to suicide.

“Think about it again now. There’s still a chance of turning back.” After explaining the risks, Mei Shou’an sighed and said, “You’re already a D9, and it’s only a matter of time before you enter management. If you were my daughter, I definitely wouldn’t want you to take such a risk.”

The meaning behind his words was: Mianmian, you have to consider your parents’ feelings.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “Uncle Mei, as you know, the missions I’m in charge of are a little dangerous if I keep spending time outside. The probability of death is probably more than 0.5%.”

Although that was the case, she had never discussed it with Madam Xue—her mother. She had dragged Old Jiang into helping her in carrying out the deed before informing her mother.

Mei Shou’an tersely acknowledged her words. “Since you’ve already thought it through, I won’t say anything else. Let’s begin.”

He called for a female researcher and got her to lead Jiang Baimian elsewhere to change her clothes. After all, she had to undergo surgery later.

Jiang Baimian followed her instructions with an attitude of learning and research. She changed her clothes, put down her backpack, and underwent a test. When the results were out, she was injected with a drug.

She then took three X-rays one after another and stayed in the room that was dark and silent for nearly 15 minutes.

This was different from the process Shang Jianyao had previously described. It was obvious that the Project C-14 team had made many improvements in the past year or so.

At the end of the experiment, Jiang Baimian entered a room made of silver-white metal. Plenty of medical personnel and equipment were waiting nearby.

“Lie on the bed.” Mei Shou’an pointed at the mobile operating bed fixed in the middle of the room.

Jiang Baimian nodded, walked over, sat down, and lay down.

“Next is the anesthetic injection,” Mei Shou’an said simply.

At the same time, two researchers had already entered the room with medical boxes.

“Wait!” Jiang Baimian suddenly raised her hand and sat up.

“What’s wrong?” Mei Shou’an asked warmly.

Jiang Baimian grunted and stammered, “Can—can you play some music?”

The thought of falling into uncontrollable darkness made her nervous.

Mei Shou’an frowned slightly. “Music?”

Jiang Baimian smiled obsequiously. “Uncle Mei, play a song to relax my mind. After the anesthetic is injected, you can turn it off. The song is on my computer, and the computer is in my backpack. Please get someone to bring it over for me.”

Mei Shou’an—who had always strictly followed the procedures for the experiments—wanted to voice his doubts about it affecting the final outcome. However, he choked back the corresponding words when he heard Jiang Baimian say that he could stop the music after injecting the anesthetic.

That’s not a problem. We’re all conversing now, so there’s no difference if we play an additional song... Mei Shou’an thought for a moment and nodded slightly. “Alright.”

A researcher quickly took a key from Jiang Baimian and brought her backpack over.

According to Mei Shou'an's careful instructions, the laptop wasn't brought into the silver-white metal room and was instead placed at the entrance.

Jiang Baimian only gave a few instructions before the researchers—who were familiar with computers—successfully launched the music player.

“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[1]...”

A melodious song echoed.

Jiang Baimian took two deep breaths, lay down, and closed her eyes. After a few seconds, she secretly squinted her eyes.

Jiang Baimian sat up again, pointed at the syringe, and blurted out, “Why is it so thick?”

“Your physique far exceeds that of ordinary people. The amount of anesthetic you need will definitely be different,” explained the researcher in charge of the anesthesia.

Jiang Baimian instinctively retorted, “It's not like I'm an elephant!”

“It's just a little more than normal,” consoled the researcher in charge of the anesthesia.

Jiang Baimian opened her mouth and hesitated for a few seconds. She suddenly closed her eyes and plopped back down on the operating table. What you don't see can't hurt you!

“Do you remember the dreams of your youth?”

“Like a flower in eternal bloom...”

The song on loop lingered in her mind, making her force herself not to sit up again.

After a little prick, she knew that the coma and darkness would inevitably come.

...

Amidst her fugue, light appeared in front of Jiang Baimian.

She slowly opened her eyes and realized that she had come to an unfamiliar place.

This was an abnormally wide and empty hall. The walls around her were cast from black metal that shimmered with an icy glow.

The hall was dark like the night sky.

The ‘sky’ was densely filled with countless resplendent stars. They slowly swirled, interweaving into 13 dreamy rivers.

Infinite starlight scattered, condensing into a blurry figure in the middle of the hall.

The figure’s hands were spread out with strict symmetry. It looked like he was hugging the world, but it also seemed like he was simulating a scale.

His loud but hollow voice echoed in the hall. “Three bestowments for one price.”

“Three bestowments for one price...”

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian roughly understood where she was—Star Cluster Hall!

This was identical to the Star Cluster Hall Shang Jianyao had described!

I've Awakened... The experiment succeeded... Jiang Baimian was first delighted before she felt intense confusion.

She had never felt that her luck far exceeded others. She had long been mentally prepared to fail in her Awakening, but things went smoother than she imagined.

Could it be that I have some conditions that coincide with the requirements for Awakening, or was some additional 'blessing' given due to our deeper involvement in the investigation of the cause of the Old World's destruction? Jiang Baimian had always been smart, and smart people always liked to read too much into things and end up overly suspicious.

She composed herself and forced herself to focus on the figure in the middle of the hall. Since she had already come this far, she could only continue regardless of the reason.

Jiang Baimian—who liked to make all kinds of plans—had long thought of which domain she would Awaken.

She was more inclined to think that the six domains—Master Zhuang, Subhuti, Dawn, Last Man, Shattered Mirror, and Arbiter of Fate—could complement her other characteristics and the team's exact situation.

As there was already an Awakened in the Master Zhuang domain in the team and he was very strong, Jiang Baimian eliminated this option when listing them down.

The price she knew of in the Dawn domain was an intermittent coma, schizophrenia, and abnormalities in the five senses. She couldn't accept the first two at all and didn't plan on choosing them. For the last price, losing the sense of taste was the best outcome. But if that happened, she felt that she would lose a lot of the fun she had as a human.

Life was already bitter enough. If she couldn't even have a good meal to comfort her, she would get depressed sooner or later.

The Last Man domain's prices that Jiang Baimian knew of were memory loss, sleep disorders, and lack of self-discipline in certain aspects. These were all problems that she felt affected her usual state. Therefore, this was the second domain she gave up.

In the Subhuti domain, Jiang Baimian didn't want to suffer from mental disorders or have abnormal senses. Likewise, she didn't want the inability to lie. It was prone to causing major problems at critical moments. As for the enhanced desires, she felt that she couldn't bring herself to harm her team members.

Jiang Baimian didn't even consider limb paralysis and drowsiness as prices for the Arbiter of Fate domain. The former would directly reduce her combat strength, and the latter would clearly affect her thinking. She felt that an eyeball abnormality was acceptable, but it was relatively ugly. Hence, she gave it a lower priority.

The Shattered Mirror domain's fear of light, water, and mirrors affected one's daily life too much. Furthermore, it was easy to be discovered. Jiang Baimian gave up immediately.

It was the same for claustrophobia. The death of the Virtual World's owner remained fresh in her mind. Of the remaining prosopagnosia and being directionally challenged, the former easily led to her being unable to distinguish between friend or foe and was too dangerous. The latter could be considered...

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian quickly went through the options—abnormal sense of taste, fixed eyeballs, and being directionally challenged.

Ten seconds later, she made a decision—a directionally challenged person!

This was one of the prices she could counter using the auxiliary chip in her biological prosthetic limb. Although this would most likely reduce her ability to observe and remember her surroundings at the same time, she could 'remember' them as she looked around during important situations. She wasn't afraid of forgetting, which might cause problems.

In addition, being in a team could also effectively allow her to avoid problems.

Phew... Jiang Baimian exhaled and walked in front of the figure. She looked up and said loudly, "I'll exchange my sense of direction for my abilities."

Just as she said that, three stars rapidly fell from the sky. They transformed into different blobs of light that were cast at Jiang Baimian's body.

These blobs of light had some words in them. They were: Spatial Hallucination, Item Agnosia, and Stimulation Disorder.

Chapter 565: 'Adaptation'

Jiang Baimian felt a slight change when the three blobs of light fused into her body, but she couldn't pinpoint the change.

Is this the Awakening experience? She habitually looked down at her hands and didn't discover any differences.

The astral figure in the middle of the square suddenly seemed to come to life. He retreated to the edge and distanced himself from Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian didn't panic and quietly watched this scene as if she had expected this. She had just tried to use the black metal wall's mirror effect to use Spatial Hallucination on herself.

Jiang Baimian was in no rush to return to reality because there was a high chance that she was undergoing a cochlear transplant at that very moment. This ability will interfere with the target's perception of space, making them lose their bearings. It also seems like a certain level of severance and reconstruction can be done, creating the desired environment... Further investigation will require entry into the Sea of Origins, after the clearing of two islands...

She then tried Item Agnosia and Stimulation Disorder.

It was unknown if the mirror as a medium failed to produce effects or if Star Cluster Hall lacked substance and stimulation, but Jiang Baimian ultimately failed.

She could only make a preliminary guess from their names: Item Agnosia should also be a type of illusion that makes the target mistake the items they want. For example, they might want to fire with a gun, but they might pick up an umbrella and go pew pew pew. For example, they might treat a poisoned dagger as a delicious cream cake and lick it a few times...

Stimulation Disorder sounds like the correct reaction can't be produced when receiving the corresponding stimulation... One will fail to close their eyes when a flashlight's beam is aimed at them? They will fail to dodge when sensing danger?

As she constantly speculated and analyzed the situation, Jiang Baimian gradually felt exhausted.

Her figure slowly faded and disappeared from Star Cluster Hall.

...

After an unknown period of time, Jiang Baimian suddenly opened her eyes;

Mei Shou'an—who had been closely observing her—heaved a sigh of relief. He approached and asked with a smile, "How was it?"

According to his experience, things were fine as long as the experimental subject could wake up. Any side effects could be treated.

Uh, Uncle Mei is too agitated. His voice is a little loud? It doesn't seem like it... Jiang Baimian subconsciously raised her hand and touched her ear. Unlike before, there was no metallic texture this time.

Finally, Jiang Baimian came to a realization.

The biological cochlear implant surgery was successful!

Her hearing had returned to normal!

There was a thick layer of 'skin' in her ears, but it wasn't completely blocked. At a glance, there was almost nothing abnormal there.

Jiang Baimian relaxed. As she adapted to her current state, she sat up and smiled at Mei Shou'an's question. "Pretty good. Right, I've Awakened."

Mei Shou'an was stunned for a second before subconsciously asking, "It worked?"

Jiang Baimian nodded seriously.

Mei Shou'an nudged his gold-rimmed glasses, scratched the side of his head, and muttered to himself in confusion, "Could it be that adding music prior to the final segment boosts the chances of Awakening? What's the principle behind this?"

Shang Jianyao would like your guess... Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly and probed, "Can I go now?"

Although the cochlear transplant wasn't considered major surgery, it wasn't under outpatient treatment. Mei Shou'an couldn't help but praise Jiang Baimian when he saw her jump off the operating bed without suffering any obvious effects. "Your physique is indeed outstanding. The effects of your genetic modification are excellent. However, I suggest you rest and be under observation for another half an hour to prevent any accidents."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian moved her head, feeling a slight sense of vertigo.

Mei Shou'an then asked, "Which domain did you choose?"

"Shattered Mirror." Jiang Baimian didn't hide the truth, but she didn't say what her abilities and price were.

For an Awakened, this was something that needed to be kept confidential.

Mei Shou'an fully understood this and didn't ask further. He then said, "I'll give you the relevant information later and try to let you enter the Sea of Origins as soon as possible."

As he spoke, Mei Shou'an couldn't help but add, "Make sure you aren't as rash as your team's Shang Jianyao."

Is this something you can learn just because you want to? Without years of mental problems, I won't be able to come up with his antics at all! Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly and nodded obediently. "Okay."

After waiting for half an hour and confirming that there was nothing wrong with her, Jiang Baimian politely said to Mei Shou'an, "Uncle Mei, I should go."

“Come back in three days for a review.” Mei Shou’an nodded slightly, and he sent Jiang Baimian to Project C-14’s entrance.

During this process, Jiang Baimian recalled the price she had paid and quickly added a message into the biological prosthetic limb auxiliary chip: “I’m returning to Room 14 on the 647th floor next.”

This way, she wouldn’t get the floor and room wrong despite being ‘directionally challenged.’

Mei Shou’an watched Jiang Baimian leave as he stood at the door and thought about today’s experimental process, hoping to conclude a beneficial experience from it. He had always been like this—deep in thought regardless of the time and occasion.

He was a research fanatic.

As he recalled, Mei Shou’an suddenly saw Jiang Baimian walk back.

“What’s wrong?” he asked in concern as an elder.

Jiang Baimian’s eyes seemed a little blank, but she quickly returned to normal. She opened her mouth and waved her hand. “Ah... Uncle Mei, I have another question for you.”

“What is it?” Mei Shou’an asked.

Jiang Baimian’s eyes darted around slightly. “One can participate in the experiments with Project C-14 simply via application, right? It can be done by any employee at any rank, and it can also be done by foreigners?”

“Of course.” Mei Shou’an smiled. “We’ve always been most worried about not having enough volunteers.”

“Oh...” Jiang Baimian pointed in a direction. “I’ll be leaving then.”

“Why are you going there?” Mei Shou’an looked confused.

Jiang Baimian laughed. "I was just casually pointing."

She then walked in the opposite direction.

...

647th floor.

Shang Jianyao and the others entered the training room after waiting for some time, only to realize that their team leader wasn't coming. They then began their training for the day.

At the end of the training, Shang Jianyao finished the water in his cup, wiped his sweat, and went back to the office.

He saw Jiang Baimian walking toward him after taking a few steps.

"You're late!" Shang Jianyao pointed out.

Jiang Baimian replied disdainfully, "I applied for leave. I went for a biological cochlear implant surgery today."

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up, and he lowered his voice as if he were whispering. "Are. The. Effects. Good?"

"Very good!" Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded.

Jiang Baimian looked at the steam rising from his body and couldn't be bothered to continue snapping at him. She nodded and said, "Continue training."

She then passed Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything. He kept walking forward and returned to his office to get a cup of warm water.

Soon, the morning training ended. Bai Chen and the others took a shower and entered Room 14.

"Team Leader isn't here yet..." Long Yuehong glanced over and was confused.

Shang Jianyao replied honestly, "I bumped into her in the corridor a while ago."

"Maybe she went to deliver a report," guessed Bai Chen.

Just as she said that, Jiang Baimian appeared at the door.

Jiang Baimian looked at the three people in the room, wiped her forehead, and smiled. "All of you sure are disciplined when it comes to training."

"Team Leader, you went to submit a report?" Long Yuehong asked curiously.

Jiang Baimian walked back into the room, and her smile became even more obvious. "I underwent a biological cochlear implant surgery and an Awakening experiment as well."

"And you've Awakened?" Shang Jianyao immediately grasped the crux of the matter.

Jiang Baimian nodded reservedly. "That's right."

"What are the abilities and price?" Shang Jianyao didn't treat himself as an outsider at all.

Jiang Baimian turned her head to look at the door. "We'll talk about it when we head out next time."

She didn't want to hide her abilities and price from her team members. Only then could they produce effective teamwork and reduce the negative effects. However, it wasn't suitable to tell them now.

Bai Chen quietly listened and said, "Then, I'll apply for a biological prosthetic limb transplant and genetic modification surgery today."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian nodded.

She had previously said that she didn't know which would come first—tomorrow or an accident—because she wasn't sure if she could definitely wake up from the Awakening experiment. Once she became a vegetable, Bai Chen needed to reconsider whether she would stay in the Old Task Force. If she didn't, there was no need to take the risk of genetic modification.

The accident didn't happen.

Upon hearing their conversation, Long Yuehong opened his mouth but didn't make a sound.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and smiled. "There's no rush. Think about it for a few more days. You can decide after Little White's surgery results are out."

Without waiting for Long Yuehong's response, she asked, "Someone on your floor was infected with the Heartless disease again?"

"I bumped into him." Long Yuehong exhaled.

"I wonder if it was man-made or natural..." Jiang Baimian clearly recalled the matter regarding the Life Ritual parish.

After discussing this for a while, she flipped her wrist to look at the time and smiled. "We'll talk in the afternoon. Let's eat first—my treat. Let's celebrate!"

With that said, she led the way out of Room 14 and turned to the other side.

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong asked, “Team Leader, are we trying out the food at canteens in the other zones?”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and seriously thought for a moment.

“Forget it.” She shook her head and turned around. At the same time, she urged Shang Jianyao, “Hey, take point. You’ll be in charge of serving the dishes later.”

Chapter 566: Fate

In the evening, Jiang Baimian—who was typing away on the keyboard—glanced at the door from the corner of her eye and realized that Shang Jianyao and the others had already left the office.

She let out a long sigh of relief and stopped what she was doing. Following that, she took out a piece of paper, picked up a pen, and wrote according to her memories. “Go out, turn right, walk to the end, and take the elevator...

“Press button 349...

“After getting off the elevator and entering the square, turn left after seeing the flowers. Zone C, Room 12...”

Jiang Baimian quickly drew the map needed for her ‘battle back home.’ After repeatedly confirming that there were no errors, she packed up, picked up the map, and walked to the office door.

Jiang Baimian turned left when she stepped out the door.

She had just taken a step when she stopped and looked down at the map in her hand and the notations on it. Her gaze froze as the corners of her mouth twitched slightly. She had turned in the wrong direction! She had done so without realizing it!

The price of being directionally challenged is still quite terrifying... As Jiang Baimian’s eyes darted around, she took out the fountain pen in her pocket and added a sentence to the map: “Every time I turn a corner, it’s better to be slow than to rush it. Stop and think more for confirmation.”

She then chose the right direction and walked on according to the map.

...

495th floor, Zone C, Room 11.

After Long Yuehong got home, he realized that his mother, father, younger brother, and younger sister—Gu Hong, Long Dayong, Long Zhigu, and Long Aihong—each occupied a spot and were silent.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

Gu Hong sighed and asked, “In the past year or two, have there been a little too many people contracting the Heartless disease on our floor?”

This had happened several times with several succumbing to it!

“It’s still alright,” Long Yuehong consoled her.

Long Dayong looked at the door. “I heard many people say that it’s because we haven’t found the Poison Source on our floor that people are infected again and again.”

“It’s also possible that someone did something bad and brought bad luck to our floor.” Gu Hong mentioned a guess the middle-aged women had come up with during their chat.

Upon hearing this, Long Aihong blurted out, “Some people are suspecting that Bro and Brother Yao are the Poison Source and are contaminated. Ah...”

She suddenly realized that she had let her tongue slip. She quickly raised her hands and covered her mouth.

Long Yuehong was stunned. “What else?”

Long Aihong looked at her mother and then at her father. After that, she carefully said, “Some say that you are the source of bad luck. In any case, they mean that the rate of Heartless disease on our floor has clearly increased since you guys went out on missions. You definitely encountered something bad outside and brought it back to the company.”

This might be the Heartless virus or a corporealization of bad luck.

Upon seeing that he had already made his point, Long Zhigu clearly added indignantly, “They also gave an example. They said that Uncle Shen and Auntie Ren contracted the Heartless disease after your first mission. This time, it was Uncle Zhang after your return.”

Long Yuehong finally couldn’t help but retort, “But nobody contracted the Heartless disease when we returned from our second mission. We weren’t in the company when the Heartless disease erupted either.”

As he spoke, he actually felt a little guilty because Shen Du and Ren Jie’s Heartless disease was clearly related to Shang Jianyao to a certain extent. It was closer to someone silencing them.

“That’s right!” Long Aihong’s face lit up. “I’ll use this to refute them tomorrow!”

At this moment, Long Dayong glanced at the indignant Gu Hong and consoled his eldest son. “Don’t take it to heart. The main reason is that the Heartless disease has never disappeared. Over the generations, everyone can only pretend to ignore it. It’s very terrifying when it happens, so it’s inevitable that people will come up with all kinds of conspiracies. When new cases don’t appear in the future, they will quickly forget these matters.”

“I understand.” Long Yuehong tried his best to sit down. He then pretended to be cheerful and said, “We didn’t encounter just one or two Heartless on the surface. I didn’t see anyone infected either.”

Just as he said that, he suddenly realized that his parents, brother, and sister’s expressions had become a little strange.

Uh... It’s best not to mention that we had more contact with Heartless outside at a time like this to prevent everyone from thinking astray... Long Yuehong quickly understood what was wrong with his explanation.

...

622nd floor, Zone B, Room 59.

Bai Chen placed the laptop she had just received on the table by the window and switched it on.

For a D6 like her, she usually ate in the canteen. After lights out, she slept on time. The energy allocation was enough for her to be on the computer for two to three hours a day.

After drinking a mouthful of cold water, Bai Chen played a comedic show. Although she didn't know many of the Old World's jokes and wasn't able to laugh sincerely, she felt very calm and relaxed just from hearing the laughter and the canned laughter. She felt indescribably happy.

Laughter echoed in the otherwise quiet room as Bai Chen stared at the computer screen without focus.

She stretched out her right hand after some time, pulled open the desk drawer, and took out a cracked, heavy component.

Bai Chen looked down at the component and gradually smiled as she muttered to herself, "I'll listen to you this time and bravely forge forward. I won't be held back by the past anymore..."

...

495th floor, Zone B, Room 196.

The Shang Jianyaos—who felt that they had mostly recovered from the mental trauma—entered the Mind Corridor again and came to Room 522.

With the previous two experiences, he familiarly took the safest route to a certain spot in the ruins. Along the way, apart from the few inevitable battles, there was only calmness.

Even the room owner—who wasn't an Awakened back then—could deal with those battles and escape before the other Heartless rushed over. Shang Jianyao naturally dealt with them easily and didn't even cause much of a commotion.

This also brought about a problem. Shang Jianyao realized that a large number of Heartless hadn't gathered from all directions due to the lack of sound from one of the battles—unlike what the owner experienced. This resulted in several Heartless loitering along the originally safe route in a place where he shouldn't encounter Heartless.

Is this a butterfly effect? By quickly finishing the fights, I end up keeping the Heartless—who should've moved over—in their places? Shang Jianyao muttered to himself.

He quickly came up with another question. “Since this scene is a manifestation of the room owner’s psychological trauma, how did he—who didn’t encounter a Heartless here—know that such a change would happen if he were careful?”

Shang Jianyao laughed. “It’s very simple. The rotten limbs of humans here imply that the Heartless were here not long ago. When the room owner saw this, he definitely thought that if it weren’t for the considerable commotion caused by the previous battle, there would definitely be another fierce battle now. This guess was memorized by his subconscious and became a hidden rule of this psychological trauma.”

Shang Jianyao—who had convinced himself not to stay any longer—continued along the room owner’s route.

Strangely enough, according to the previous pattern, the number of Heartless the room owner encountered decreased, but the quality increased. Toward the end, there were even Superior Heartless. However, Shang Jianyao didn’t encounter any powerful enemies after going past the limits of his previous exploration by shaking off the Superior Heartless.

He didn’t even see any ordinary Heartless again.

“Doesn’t this mean that there are more dangerous creatures in this area that prevent the Heartless from entering?” Shang Jianyao split into ten. The one who spoke was the timid but very careful one.

The Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat with a pipe in his mouth nodded. “It might not be a creature.”

He indirectly agreed with the timid Shang Jianyao’s guess.

“What should we do now?” asked the Shang Jianyao wearing the caricature version of his childhood clothes.

The eager Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation, “Naturally, it’s to continue! Even the room owner survived while not being an Awakened, much less us.”

“Then, how do you know that the room owner didn’t encounter anything during this exploration and left behind terrifying latent dangers?” asked the timid Shang Jianyao in response.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Another Shang Jianyao echoed.

At this moment, the Shang Jianyao holding the small speaker asked curiously, “I’m wondering what will happen if one of us dies here after we split up. Will there be nine left in the end, with our personalities no longer intact, or will we still be able to recover to ten? However, everyone will suffer relatively serious mental problems? Do you want to give it a try?”

His suggestion only received one vote of approval; the other Shang Jianyaos objected.

After some discussion, the Shang Jianyaos returned to one. They carefully followed the room owner’s route and entered deep into the area.

As he walked, a seven-story building appeared in front of him.

This building looked a little old, and large patches of green plants draped the walls.

Shang Jianyao focused and realized that there was a signboard above the lobby entrance on the first floor. On it were the words: Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company.

Chapter 567: Gaze

Upon seeing the ‘Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company’ signboard, Shang Jianyao exclaimed.

His clothes changed as he wore a yellow monk robe and a red kasaya. His face also turned iron-black as if it were cast from metal. The red light in his eyes lit up, illuminating the area ahead as though a bloody veil had draped over it.

This was one of the Five Great Holy Lands in Buddhism, so he naturally had to treat it with respect!

After changing his ‘identity,’ Shang Jianyao placed one hand in front of his chest and spun the Six Senses Beads with the other. He sighed with emotion and said in a deep voice. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Fate brought us here.”

The Six Senses Beads in his hand were only an accessory. It was useless because the actual item wasn’t with him—it was kept by a special organization under the Security Department.

After chanting the Buddhist proclamation, Shang Jianyao strode forward and walked to Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company.

The entrance to the first floor was a revolving door, but it had long lost its ability to move and was static.

Shang Jianyao chose the small door by the side instead of forcing the use of the revolving door.

The room owner had clearly done the same back then. This resulted in the various details and abnormalities along the way being surprisingly complete.

After entering the lobby, Shang Jianyao saw transparent plastic boxes on the ground or on the table. He also saw wrappers scattered everywhere.

It wasn’t difficult for him to guess that the first floor had been turned into a retail store by the Second Food Company based on his experience with Old World entertainment. This could be seen from the relatively neat rows of counters.

He slowly walked forward, sweeping his gaze across the packaging on the ground. The corresponding names—tangerine peel candy, fruit gummy candy, Sachima, cream melon seeds, soda biscuits, sandwich biscuits, steamed cakes—were reflected in the eyes of the cyborg monk Shang Jianyao.

His face suddenly returned to normal as he subconsciously raised his left hand and wiped the corners of his mouth.

Gulp.

Shang Jianyao gulped. He then hurriedly retracted his gaze, turning his face iron-black again and his eyes red.

In the blink of an eye, Shang Jianyao had the bearing of an accomplished monk once again. He then muttered to himself, “The food here has either been moved away or only has packaging left. The Heartless don’t seem to dare to enter this area. So...”

This wasn’t Inference Clowning, but Shang Jianyao replied to himself: “So, this was man-made. After the Old World was destroyed, the survivors of Iron Mountain City did it.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded himself.

“Food companies are indeed very suitable as a survivor base in the apocalypse,” he emphasized.

He then retorted himself, “Not necessarily. I can only say that the survivor base will be built around it to facilitate the acquisition of food.”

“We’ll know if it’s true by looking around.” Another Shang Jianyao stopped this meaningless argument.

The cyborg monk Shang Jianyao took a few more steps forward and raised a very serious question. “As a monk, what’s my Dharma name?”

A certain Shang Jianyao immediately suggested, “Redemption, redeem all living beings.”

“Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. From today onward, I’m Zen Master Redemption.” The cyborg monk Shang Jianyao raised his palm vertically again and chanted a Buddhist proclamation.

He walked around the first floor of the Second Food Company at an adequate speed and confirmed that the lobby was a retail store. There was a warehouse behind and on both sides.

Apart from the trash on the ground, there were no creatures here. There were no insects either.

Shang Jianyao nodded slightly and said to himself, “It seems like the room owner also examined the first floor carefully.”

If not for this, there was a high chance that mosquitoes, cockroaches, and other bugs would appear in places he had yet to examine due to the extraction of details from other experiences.

The fruitless Shang Jianyao took the stairs that led to the second floor.

It was already late. A dim light shone through the cramped glass around the corner, preventing the area from being pitch-black.

But even so, Shang Jianyao had no choice but to produce a flashlight. Otherwise, he could barely see the stairs under his feet.

As he walked, he—as a cyborg monk—suddenly stopped and looked around. He kept having the feeling that someone was watching him in the darkness around him.

As the flashlight beam swept across the area, the situation around him was reflected in his eyes.

The weathered mottled walls, the rusted iron railings, and the ceiling with lamps but no power were all clear in Shang Jianyao’s mind.

Almost nobody could hide in such an environment. Therefore, the gaze either came from beneath the stairs or from the second floor.

Shang Jianyao didn’t cower in fear. He swung the flashlight and walked up to the second floor of the building step by step.

There was a dark corridor and rooms here—it seemed to be the Second Food Company’s office.

Shang Jianyao slowed down a little as he swept the flashlight across the door number of the room beside him. “203”

Above the 203 door number was a label with the words: “Sales Department.”

Shang Jianyao was just about to continue forward when he suddenly turned around and aimed the flashlight at Room 203.

He felt that gaze again—a silent gaze that was hidden in the darkness!

The yellowish beam of light illuminated many messy tables and the chairs on the ground. It also illuminated the dust-covered desk computers and the corresponding LCD screens, but it didn't illuminate any humans or other creatures.

“Was this how the room owner felt back then?” Shang Jianyao stroked his steel chin.

The red light in his eyes flickered violently a few times. “That's not right...”

“Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti, what's wrong?” asked Zen Master Redemption.

As Shang Jianyao felt the different texture of the steel chin, he smiled and said, “There are no human corpses or large amounts of feces here. It doesn't look like people have gathered here en masse.”

Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, “Didn't we already come up with an explanation? The survivors' base is nearby, not here. They will only do regular supply runs to replenish their food supplies. Besides, even if this really is a survivor base, they can bury their companions' corpses elsewhere and head far away to relieve themselves in groups.”

Shang Jianyao stroked his steel chin. “That's not the point. The point is that there are no traces of humans living here.”

“Therefore, it's the first explanation.” The honest Shang Jianyao shrugged.

Just as he said that, he suddenly felt something and shone the flashlight at the end of the corridor.

Amidst the beam of light that didn't diffuse, a figure appeared in the darkness.

She was a woman in a white shirt with a blue suit jacket. She looked like an Old World employee elite.

She was about 20 years old and had short black hair that reached her ears. She also had delicate facial features, a straight nose, and lips that were neither thick nor thin.

She looked pretty good.

After this first impression, Shang Jianyao quickly discovered more details. This lady's shirt and suit had many stains—it was unknown how long it had been since they were cleaned. Her wrinkles, facial muscles, the corners of her eyes, and her neck didn't match a woman in her twenties. She looked at least in her late thirties.

In addition, her eyes were bloodshot, but they didn't appear turbid.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao, fear appeared in the woman's eyes, and her expression was rather vivid.

She ran and rolled, disappearing at the end of the corridor.

“There's someone...” Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion. He then turned around and walked back to the stairwell.

At this point, he had already exhausted most of his mental energy. He had to leave some energy for his return journey.

As for the strange woman who appeared in one of the Crystal Consciousness Church's Five Great Holy Lands, it wouldn't be excessive to treat the matter with caution.

Shang Jianyao planned on continuing his exploration in a better mental state in the future.

Nothing unexpected happened on the way back.

...

The next morning, Room 14 on the 647th floor.

Shang Jianyao was just about to tell Jiang Baimian about last night's experience when the phone in the office rang.

Jiang Baimian picked it up and shouted with a smile, "Little White, the higher-ups want you to go to Room 9 on the 648th floor to choose a biological prosthetic limb and the genetic modification you want to do."

Only after the selection could they schedule a specific time.

Bai Chen pursed her lips, stood up, and said, "Alright."

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian smiled and asked, "Do you want me to follow and help provide you advice?"

Bai Chen fell silent for a moment before saying, "Alright."

"I'll go too!" Shang Jianyao said eagerly.

Long Yuehong secretly exhaled. "Then, I'll go too."

Jiang Baimian was peeved and amused. "Seriously, do you think Little White is a child? Why does she need so many people to send her there?"

Although she said that, she didn't stop Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong from following.

When they arrived at Room 9 on the 648th floor, the four of them saw a middle-aged lady inside—who also saw them.

"Why did so many people come?" The lady was very surprised. "I remember that only one person is to choose."

"Can't we have a visiting team?" Shang Jianyao said confidently.

“That’s right, that’s right!” Long Yuehong quickly echoed.

Jiang Baimian smiled and helped explain, “Two heads are better than one.”

The lady in charge curled her lips. “Even if you want to provide advice, there’s no need for there to be so many people.”

Bai Chen couldn’t help but lower her head and look at her toes when she heard this.

Chapter 568: Settled

The middle-aged woman in charge was only nagging—she didn’t really care if there were more people or fewer people.

She turned the LCD screen on the table to Bai Chen and pushed out a mouse. “Pick one yourself; let me know when you’re done filling up the application form. Among them are biological prosthetics. Those without labels can be transplanted for free, while the yellow ones require additional contribution points. The exact amount is written at the back. Although the red ones are free, the risk is high. You have to sign a waiver.

“Genetic modification is a reward for you—it’s free. The different colors represent different risks; you can read through them yourself.”

Bai Chen nodded politely. “Thank you.”

Shang Jianyao immediately pointed at the chair opposite the display screen. “Have a seat.”

Bai Chen didn’t want to bend down to read through the options either—that would be too tiring and troublesome. She sat down, moved the mouse wheel, and pulled up the biological prosthetic limb list before looking at the options available.

Many of these were things Jiang Baimian had previously mentioned and analyzed for her, including the Viper, Dragon, Feline, Mutated Bat, Blackrat, and Phoenix models...

The name of the biological prosthetic limb might not necessarily correspond to a real creature. The way they were named was done through a comprehensive evaluation based on the original form and final functions. If one leaned toward the latter, they would often be named after fantasy or mythical creatures.

As Bai Chen flipped through the pages, Shang Jianyao didn't treat himself as an outsider at all. He leaned over and gave his suggestions, while Jiang Baimian took her other side.

Only Long Yuehong wasn't in a good position to take a gander. He had to support himself with the back of the chair and read from above.

The few of them discussed for a while. Bai Chen—who had some prior ideas—quickly made up her mind. She chose the Merfolk biological prosthetic limb.

This biological prosthetic limb's technology was stable, so the risk wasn't high. An additional large sum of contribution points was needed, but Bai Chen had done her accounts. Her savings—combined with the additional outfield allowance that was about to be distributed—was about enough. Jiang Baimian had also promised her an interest-free loan, but Bai Chen felt that it was best if she didn't need to use credit.

The cost was one aspect, but the Merfolk biomechanical limb's functions were another deciding factor in Bai Chen's final choice. It had the ability to draw oxygen from water, which was achieved through a special skin layer and the corresponding internal structure.

This could effectively make up for the Old Task Force's lack of underwater combat abilities. According to the description, humans who were transplanted with such a biological prosthetic limb could survive underwater for nearly 24 hours. They could last for about two hours even amidst constant vigorous exercises.

In addition, the Merfolk biomechanical limb had two other functions.

The first was Flamethrower. This biological prosthetic limb had active cells. Not only could it produce oil itself, but it could also absorb fat from Bai Chen's body and store it. This fuel could be compressed into the artificial limb's palm at critical moments, producing an effect similar to that of a flamethrower.

Of course, this replenishment was slow—it might not fully recover after days. The architect had considered this and had used the special skin layer to enhance the ability to absorb oil. In other words, Bai Chen could replenish the expended fuel by inserting her arm into a gasoline tank.

The second was Subsonic Attack. This was the main offensive attack the merfolk biological prosthetics had underwater; it was also very useful in other environments.

As a biological prosthetic limb, the intensity of its produced subsonic waves wasn't too strong. It was divided into several frequencies that mainly targeted humans. It could make the target experience dizziness, nausea, and depression—it could knock the enemy out in the best-case scenario.

“This isn't bad.” Jiang Baimian agreed with Bai Chen's choice.

Shang Jianyao had an envious expression. “You can set off fireworks yourself! You can also dive for extended periods...”

He seemed eager to get himself such a biological prosthetic limb.

“That's right.” Long Yuehong echoed his team leader's words.

Bai Chen didn't hesitate to mark the item. After she was done, she began to combine the biological prosthetic limb's characteristics, her combat habits, and the modification risk for the specific targets she wanted to modify during surgery.

As he flipped through the pages, Long Yuehong carefully suggested, “You are good at sniping, so you can enhance your 'talent' in this regard.”

He had just seen that the risk of modification regarding Firearms Talent was very low.

Bai Chen nodded slightly and said, “That's one of the choices.”

Genetic modification had a limit of three characteristics, and there were relatively many attributes corresponding to firearms talent which could also be improved. The risk-benefit ratio was very good.

Firearms Talent included improvements in vision, reaction, judgment, perception, and coordination.

Upon seeing that she had finalized the first target for modification, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, "I suggest Enhanced Self Recovery for the second choice. The reason for choosing it is that you will be underwater for extended periods. Even if you don't lack oxygen, your body will still suffer a lot of environmental pressure. Over time, there will be all kinds of problems, such as rheumatism. On the other hand, the principle of a Subsonic Attack is the special oscillations of certain cells in the biological prosthetic limb. This will also have a certain impact on your body."

The risk of modification related to this was higher than Firearms Talent. However, both Bai Chen and Long Yuehong felt that it was necessary to add this after hearing Jiang Baimian's words.

Only the honest Shang Jianyao muttered, "That's not a big problem. When it becomes a big problem, who knows if she'll still be alive..."

He was glared at by Jiang Baimian before he could finish speaking.

During this process, Long Yuehong even glared at him angrily.

After Bai Chen placed Enhanced Self Recovery into the list of surgical targets, Jiang Baimian chuckled. "Are you worried that the modification risks in this regard are relatively high? Don't worry. I have a solution. Recent research has shown that when carrying out Enhanced Self Recovery modifications, adding Enhanced Immunity can form a balance in post-op side-effects and effectively reduce the probability of a genetic breakdown. The combination of these two can also allow you to adapt to environments with relatively serious pollution."

Bai Chen quietly listened and fell silent for a moment. "Alright."

She showed sufficient trust in Jiang Baimian's suggestions.

Shang Jianyao sighed when he heard that. "These three characteristics aren't as interesting as the Merfolk biological prosthetic limb."

"Then, which one do you want?" Jiang Baimian glared at him.

Shang Jianyao pointed at one of the rows of words and said, "This."

He chose Damage Reduction.

After the corresponding modifications, one's skin and muscles would undergo major changes. It could effectively reduce the damage brought about by guns and bombs.

“Don't even think about it.” Jiang Baimian chuckled. “This is considered a large-scale and high-risk modification. It's only recommended for fertilized eggs. For an adult like you, there's a 100% chance of genetic breakdown.”

Shang Jianyao was gravely disappointed.

As the two of them conversed, Bai Chen finished filling up the application form, handed over the mouse, and turned the display back to its original spot.

The middle-aged woman pointed at the card reader beside her. “Swipe your electronic card and make a 50% deposit. You'll pay for the rest when the surgery is successful.”

After Bai Chen paid the fee, the woman nodded. “I'll officially help you make an appointment now.”

“How long will it take?” Bai Chen asked.

The middle-aged woman checked and said, “There's a ready-made Merfolk biological prosthetic limb—there's no need to wait. Therefore, I'll inform you in three days to a week.”

...

On the 647th floor, Room 14.

“Are you nervous?” It was unknown which Shang Jianyao was 'interviewing' Bai Chen.

“I'm alright.” Bai Chen originally only planned on responding calmly, but for some reason, she added, “Back when I followed you to storm the Underground Ark, I wasn't that nervous.”

The risks involving these two matters were actually about the same.

Shang Jianyao had a 'shocked' expression. "Y-you actually have such a side! You can even mock Big White and me for being rash!"

Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and helped Bai Chen resolve the awkwardness. "Hey, how's your mental trauma recovery? Are you going to explore Room 522 tonight?"

Shang Jianyao's attention was indeed diverted. "It completely recovered last night, so I did some exploration. We discovered Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company."

"Huh?" Long Yuehong was surprised and confused. One of Buddhism's Five Great Holy Lands? Isn't this too much of a coincidence?

Jiang Baimian frowned slightly. "Isn't this too much of a coincidence? Could it be that someone wants you to know something and discover something, so they specially switched Room 522 to your vicinity?"

"That's possible. Are they enemies of Subhuti or Master Zhuang?" Shang Jianyao had clearly considered this question.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and asked, "How's the situation inside?"

The Shang Jianyaos rushed to recount last night's experience and concluded, "From time to time, I felt a strange gaze on me. That woman's reaction was also very strange. She was actually afraid of me; she should be some final boss..."

In a place where Heartless couldn't enter and there were no other survivors, there was clearly a huge problem with the woman who had lived there for seven to eight years or even more than a decade.

"You've only searched two floors, but you can't be sure if there are other 'people.'" Jiang Baimian picked out a logical fallacy.

She deliberated for a moment and said, "Don't explore any further for the time being. I'll arrange for a field training session when Little White's surgery time is confirmed. We can head out after your application for the Six Senses Beads is successful."

That way, Shang Jianyao would have the Six Senses Beads and the Life Angel necklace—two relatively powerful items—to ensure his safety.

Shang Jianyao didn't respond directly. Instead, he thought about another question. "How will the negative effects appear if I carry the corresponding items in the Mind Corridor?"

He looked eager as if he couldn't wait to use the Life Angel necklace for an experiment.

Jiang Baimian gave her theory. "Maybe... the type that affects the body will lose its effects, but those that target the mind will remain effective."

An Awakened's body in the Mind Corridor was only a manifestation of their mind.

Chapter 569: Spirit of Experimentation

Shang Jianyao's answer to Jiang Baimian's guess was very simple: "I'll give it a try later."

The Life Angel necklace's negative effects affected the body, while the Six Senses Beads targeted the mind. Both situations were covered.

As it wouldn't be dangerous to transfer the items' aura to the Mind Corridor or other people's psychological traumas, Jiang Baimian didn't object to Shang Jianyao's suggestion and only reminded him, "Take it easy."

After returning to their seats, Long Yuehong looked at Bai Chen and sighed with emotion. "Your Merfolk biological prosthetic limb is really strong..."

"That's right, that's right." The one who replied wasn't Bai Chen but Shang Jianyao. He further suggested, "Why don't you amputate your other arm and replace it with a biological prosthetic limb? That way, you will truly be Superman!"

Long Yuehong retorted angrily, "Why aren't you doing the switch?"

"Huh?" Shang Jianyao said seriously, "Can't you see me filling up an application?"

Most of the Shang Jianyaos were very proactive.

Words failed Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian facepalmed, but she didn't stop him.

...

After returning to the 495th floor, Long Yuehong turned his head and asked Shang Jianyao, "Heading to the Rec Center?"

"I'm busy with my gaming." Shang Jianyao waved his hand, slung his tactical backpack, and walked toward Zone B.

Long Yuehong stared at his back, unsure if he was going home to play a real game or if he was treating the exploration of the Mind Corridor as a game.

With Long Yuehong's understanding of Shang Jianyao, he felt that it was most likely the latter. This was because his friend spent half of the afternoon reading information regarding Iron Mountain City's ruins and half the time watching Old World entertainment on his laptop—he didn't game at all.

To put it simply, there were no signs.

Long Yuehong retracted his gaze and strolled toward the Rec Center.

It was the peak hour after everyone had dinner. He saw many familiar faces from just walking a short distance.

Long Yuehong was just about to raise his left hand to greet them and make some small talk when he realized that his acquaintances had awkwardly turned their gazes away and quietly took a few steps away from him as if they didn't see him coming.

His left palm froze in midair and slowly fell.

After a few seconds, Long Yuehong exhaled silently. He lowered his head slightly and quickened his pace toward home.

Zone B, No. 196.

As soon as Shang Jianyao returned to the room, he hung his tactical backpack on the wall. He then took out the jewelry box with the Life Angel necklace from his pocket and slapped down on the bed with his body as though in free-fall.

Bang!

He wasn't fat at all, but he was tall and very muscular, so he naturally wasn't too light. His smash down on the bed made it shake a few times, almost causing it to fall apart.

The honest Shang Jianyao said to the Shang Jianyao that was wearing the caricature version of his childhood clothes, "You're no longer a child. You have to be careful."

The duo didn't argue—their attention was focused on the Life Angel necklace in their hands.

This time, his paralyzed limb was his right leg, so it didn't stop his hands from moving.

Shang Jianyao massaged his temples and entered the Mind Corridor.

After leaving Room 131, the cautious him transferred the Awakened aura in the Life Angel necklace over.

An old silver pendant with an angel carved on it immediately appeared in his left palm.

Shang Jianyao held it and strode forward. He then realized that his right leg was still weak and paralyzed.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and muttered to himself, "Big White's guess seems wrong. Is this considered a cognitive disability? The essence of the price is to affect one's self-awareness?"

The other Shang Jianyaos didn't answer him because there were too few data points. They couldn't conclude a pattern.

Shang Jianyao then split into ten and made the second attempt.

Only the Shang Jianyao who wore a deer-hunting hat with a pipe in his mouth held the Life Angel necklace in his hand. The others were either empty-handed or held small speakers and other items.

The nine Shang Jianyaos took steps in different directions. They dragged their right legs behind them as they limped and hobbled.

"This influence doesn't seem to change because of a split personality," concluded the Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat.

"Then, how should we operate in the future? There's no actual substance in the Mind Corridor that can be used to separate us from this necklace," asked the weak Shang Jianyao.

He could conjure a jewelry box or paper ball, but this was essentially his mind. They couldn't isolate him from the Awakened aura in the Life Angel necklace that represented an Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor's depths.

"Isn't that simple?" The honest Shang Jianyao laughed. "Bring the aura back to reality and transfer it over when required."

"Will it be too late?" The weak Shang Jianyao didn't like this plan.

It was obvious that transferring required time, and a personality was needed to be split off to carry out the operation.

At this moment, the Shang Jianyao wearing a deer-hunting hat laughed. "I have an idea. Let's gather and give it a try."

"Why should I?" The honest but stubborn Shang Jianyao expressed his unhappiness about deferring to him.

After an argument and a vote, they combined into one again. Shang Jianyao then moved his right leg behind his butt, allowing another leg to grow out where the leg originally was.

In any case, it was only a spiritual body or consciousness. He could change his body structure however he wanted.

Shang Jianyao—who had three legs—tried walking again. He realized that he didn't feel much discomfort and could walk normally if he ignored the leg behind his butt.

He paced back and forth a few times as he clicked his tongue.

As expected, the corresponding problem wasn't too difficult to resolve. However, one needed to get used to the balance required in such a state.

How big of a deal was that?

...

Three days later, in Room 14 on the 647th floor.

Bai Chen was informed by phone that she would undergo surgery in the afternoon, and Shang Jianyao also received feedback from the higher-ups regarding his application. "As a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, it's not recommended for you to modify the body and transplant a prosthetic limb unless absolutely necessary."

"On what basis?" Shang Jianyao voiced his displeasure.

Big White was clearly a genetically modified person with a biological prosthetic limb and also an Awakened!

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before subconsciously looking around. "Do you still remember what the teacher said? As he seeks to enter the New World through the Mind Corridor mentally, his body also needs to enter the New World through reality. Will the latter require a relatively pure body?"

“That’s true...” Shang Jianyao stopped protesting. After some deliberation, he looked at Jiang Baimian and said, “Then, you...”

Big White had undergone genetic modification and had an electric eel biomechanical limb. Her body was already somewhat different from normal people and couldn’t be considered pure.

Jiang Baimian smiled broadly. “How can so many people be qualified to enter the New World? When the time comes, I’ll enter purely through my consciousness if I have to go and if there’s a chance. In any case, I’ll take it one step at a time.”

After they finished discussing this question, Long Yuehong looked at Bai Chen and helped her complain. “Isn’t this surgery schedule too unreasonable? They only inform you in the morning, and the surgery will be carried out in the afternoon. They don’t even give you time to get prepared.”

“That’s right, that’s right,” Shang Jianyao echoed.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and smiled. “It’s actually not that bad. This means I won’t have time to be afraid or regretful.”

Jiang Baimian smiled and nodded. “A fighting spirit is aroused by the first roll of drums, depleted by the second, and exhausted by the third.”

She continued, “I’ll accompany you there in the afternoon.”

“There’s no need...” Bai Chen wasn’t too firm.

“It’s mandatory.” Jiang Baimian smiled. “You will feel much more at ease with someone accompanying you before the surgery. After the surgery, you probably won’t be able to move any time soon. Someone has to run around and help with the chores.”

Bai Chen accepted this explanation. “Alright.”

“Then, I’ll go too,” Long Yuehong blurted out.

When he realized what he had said, embarrassment rose in his heart.

Fortunately, Shang Jianyao also said, “Me too!”

“You guys...” Jiang Baimian chuckled. “What’s the use of you going? Can you help Little White wipe her body?”

“We can cheer her on!” Shang Jianyao had a serious expression.

“Alright, alright.” Jiang Baimian couldn’t be bothered to argue with him—no, them.

This was one reason, and the other was that she was afraid of getting lost.

At 2:30 p.m., in a research institute on the 12th floor of the underground building.

Bai Chen was escorted here by her three companions. After a series of inspections, she changed into her scrubs.

She pointed at the prep room with a glass wall and said to Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong, “I’m heading in.”

“Go on.” The three of them nodded at the same time.

Bai Chen turned around and walked in.

The researcher in charge of the genetic modification said to her, “I’ve already told you all the things that need to be told. I’ll emphasize it one last time. Although you chose an option with a lower risk, it’s only relative. For ordinary people, this isn’t safer than undergoing all kinds of difficult surgery. There’s a high chance that you will have a genetic breakdown and die from the pain. You still have a chance to back out now. Please consider it seriously.”

Bai Chen listened silently and didn’t interject.

At this moment, another voice suddenly echoed in her ears, making her subconsciously turn around and look at the glass wall that isolated her from the outside world.

Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and Long Yuehong were squeezed there. The former's face was tightly pressed against the glass, making him look a little strange. The latter two were relatively reserved and had obvious, encouraging smiles.

They waved their fists and shouted, "All the best!"

"We're waiting for you!"

"It'll be fine!"

Bai Chen couldn't help but close her eyes and turn her head.

She paused and looked at the researcher in charge of the surgery before quietly saying, "I'm ready."

Chapter 570: Items

In the waiting area of the research institute.

Shang Jianyao paced back and forth and grumbled from time to time, "Why isn't she out yet?"

Being rash and bold often meant being impatient.

Jiang Baimian sat on one end of the bench against the wall and couldn't help but say, "Stop pacing about. You're making me dizzy."

Doesn't this fellow know that emotions are infectious in such situations? I wasn't nervous at first, but seeing you walking around and grumbling makes me nervous as well.

"That's right—be patient. Such surgery will definitely take a long time." Long Yuehong agreed with his team leader.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, "Who said so? It's not like you've done it before!"

"I did," Jiang Baimian subconsciously replied for Long Yuehong.

Shang Jianyao quickly asked, “How long did it take?”

Uh... Jiang Baimian was a little stumped.

She was unconscious back then, so how could she know how long it had taken? Neither did she delve into the details after the surgery.

“In short...” She forced an answer. “It takes quite a while.”

In order to divert his attention, she criticized Shang Jianyao. “Look at you; it’s only been a few hours. How can you already lose your patience? Look at Little Red. He has been quietly sitting all this while. His expression won’t even change even if the sky falls.”

“He goes to the bathroom almost every hour,” Shang Jianyao pointed out. “The frequency of urination is a sign of nervousness.”

Hey, don’t drag me into your quarrel... Long Yuehong wanted to say that, but he felt his mouth parched and found it difficult to voice it out.

He didn’t remember how many times he had gone to the bathroom. He only knew that three hours and 17 minutes had passed since the surgery began.

Jiang Baimian had no interest in chatting and decided to ignore Shang Jianyao.

At this moment, the operating theater’s door suddenly opened. A hospital bed was then pushed out, and the person on it was wrapped in a strange thin film. There were many tubes inserted into the body, all connected to different instruments and medicine vials.

Long Yuehong stood up, but his legs felt a little limp. His body wobbled a little, and he could only watch helplessly as his team leader and Shang Jianyao rushed over.

“How is she?” Jiang Baimian asked.

The researcher in charge of the genetic modification nodded. “It’s considered rather successful at the moment. We’ll have to see if she can survive the post-op reactions.”

As he replied, he signaled for his assistants to push Bai Chen toward the ICU.

“How long will it take?” Shang Jianyao asked.

The researcher deliberated over his words and said, “About three hours. The situation will stabilize after that. Following that, there will be a month of ordinary treatment. It’s mainly to accelerate physical recovery. The exact process includes regular entry into high-pressured oxygen chambers...”

Three hours... Long Yuehong finally sauntered over. He couldn’t help but look at Bai Chen—who was lying on the hospital bed and being pushed into the ICU. He realized that her face was pale and that there was obvious pain.

As Jiang Baimian paid attention to the corresponding situation, she forced herself to calm down and asked about the subsequent matters. “When the time comes, do you need us to leave someone to take care of her?”

The researcher shook his head without hesitation. “Not for the first few days. None of you underwent professional training, so it’s very easy for you to bring in certain viruses and bacteria. After that period, the patient will regain a certain level of mobility again. You have two visiting hours a day. You can come often and keep the patient in a good mood; this can help her body repair itself.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian had always respected the opinions of professionals. She settled the matter before Shang Jianyao could say a word.

After watching Bai Chen enter the ICU, they went to the adjacent room and looked inside through the glass window.

After a while, Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist and looked at her watch. “Hey, go back to the office, get our lunch boxes, and grab some food from the canteen.”

“Skip mine. I’m not that hungry.” Long Yuehong had no appetite at all.

Jiang Baimian turned her head to glance at him.

Before she could speak, Shang Jianyao said seriously, "If we enjoy our meal outside, Little White should be able to sense it. She will then think of waking up quickly and joining us."

Which Shang Jianyao is this? Why is he a little childish... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly and didn't retort.

Long Yuehong thought for a moment. "Alright."

At this moment, even if Shang Jianyao said, "you have to take a step with your left foot when entering the bathroom to augment Little White with blessings," he would still give it a try.

...

An indescribable pain and impenetrable darkness made Bai Chen's consciousness blurry and throbbing. She struggled with all her might, but she couldn't regain her clarity of mind.

She only had one thought lingering in her mind: I've finally escaped the restraints of the past. I have to take a good look at the future.

Time passed minute by minute as she drifted.

After an unknown period of time, Bai Chen felt like light seemed to penetrate the dark border bit by bit.

She subconsciously headed for the spot, and the light became brighter and brighter and redder.

Finally, Bai Chen sensed her body. She blinked and slowly opened her eyes.

What she saw was a white and monotonous ceiling and a strange large lamp she didn't know the name of.

The smell of disinfectant drilled into her nose. There was silence devoid of human activity.

Bai Chen slowly turned her head to the side as she stared blankly at this scene. She then saw the transparent glass window and the three faces stuck to it.

They belonged to two men and a woman.

Upon seeing Bai Chen look over, they smiled at the same time and waved their fists.

Bai Chen couldn't help but blink.

...

The next morning, Room 14 on the 647th floor.

Jiang Baimian leaned against her desk and said to Shang Jianyao, "Since Little White went for surgery so quickly, we can only delay the scheduled surface training. It seems like you won't be able to apply for the Six Senses Beads for the time being."

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. "Then, I'll try applying and say that it's useful for my exploration of the Mind Corridor. Can the Six Senses Beads be as dangerous as the Life Angel necklace?"

"Yes..." Jiang Baimian nodded. "You're a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, so you should have this privilege."

Most items weren't as dangerous as Mind Corridor-level Awakened.

She continued, "Before that, you can explore other rooms. For example, that 506. It feels quite safe and suits the current you."

Over the past few days, Shang Jianyao had shared some information regarding the different rooms in the Mind Corridor with her from time to time, making it easier for her to help plan for the future.

"No." Shang Jianyao shook his head. "Most of us have OCD. We won't go to the next room until we finish exploring this room."

Jiang Baimian was amused. “Your mental problems are a little complicated.”

She didn’t mention it again and thought for a moment. “Since we have nothing to do during this period of time, let’s split up and go through the company’s internal information regarding Iron Mountain City’s ruins to see if we can find any clues. We’ll ask Old Han and Old Ge on our next mission.”

Han Wanghuo had been in Redstone Collection for several years, and Iron Mountain City was a ruin just a mountain away. The information on the Old World that Geneva had downloaded from Mechanical Paradise’s intranet might be less detailed than that of Pangu Biology in certain areas but better in others.

In addition, Jiang Baimian also wanted Geneva to investigate the genius scientist—Lin Sui—and figure out what she was mainly studying before the Old World was destroyed.

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao had been doing such work recently.

After giving the instructions, Jiang Baimian realized a problem, and she looked to the other side. “Little Red, what’s wrong? Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“Huh?” Long Yuehong snapped out of his fugue. “I’m thinking about something.”

“Are you considering quitting the team?” Jiang Baimian expressed her understanding. “There’s no rush. Think carefully before making a decision.”

She then clapped her hands. “Alright, let’s go to the training room.”

At this moment, Shang Jianyao ‘hesitated’ and said, “I want to apply for two more items.”

“Which two?” Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she guessed the answer.

Shang Jianyao replied truthfully, “The first is the medical record that Little Red and I found in the steelworks factory ruins. That place shares the same status as Iron Mountain City’s Second Food

Company—one of Buddhism’s five Great Holy Lands. I want to see if the medical record found there will bring about a certain change in the Food Company.”

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, “That’s a good idea, but it’s not the time.”

She quickly explained, “In Room 522, Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company is only a manifestation of the room owner’s memories. The medical record shouldn’t exist inside, so there won’t be any changes. However, that medical record might come in handy when we go to Iron Mountain City’s ruins in the future.”

Shang Jianyao said indifferently, “It’s just an attempt in any case.”

“What about the second item?” Jiang Baimian had no intention of arguing.

Shang Jianyao laughed. “The owner of Room 522 is most likely in the Monitor domain. The heretical Naturalism Church—which had previously spread within the company secretly—believes in Monitor. Therefore, I want to apply for the recording pen that caused the Naturalism Church evangelism.”