

## Ad Infinitum 581

### Chapter 581: Difference

The thing suspected to be long black hair was inside the brown floor's gap. If one didn't approach it, it would be very difficult to identify it even with Jiang Baimian's vision.

Apart from this, there was nothing special about the living room. The valuable furniture was gone, leaving only the corresponding stains as proof of their existence.

All of this meant that Ruin Hunters had been to Building 4's Room 302. Not only had they been here, but they had also plundered and returned with a bountiful harvest.

It was logical to infer that there was nothing strange here. However, the Old Task Force had experienced the matter regarding Jiang Xiaoyue and the Crystal Consciousness Church. Shang Jianyao had also used the information in the steelworks factory ruins' medical record to create an abnormality that exceeded logic in someone's psychological trauma. They had long treated Zone 2, Building 4, Room 302 as a tiger's den. They naturally wouldn't be 'convinced' so easily.

There weren't that many coincidences in this world!

Jiang Baimian didn't rashly enter Room 302 and recalled. "I remember that there were no rumors of ghosts in the steelworks factory ruins, nor did any Ruin Hunters point out any special dangers in Zone 2..."

Shang Jianyao's tone suddenly turned creepy. "Maybe the Ruin Hunters who plundered this room didn't have any problems on the surface. After they returned and went their separate ways, they quietly died one after another. Scattered across the land, nobody connected the cause of their death to Building 4, Room 302 in the steelworks factory ruins..."

"..." Jiang Baimian laughed involuntarily. "There's no need to tell me a ghost story. I'm not Little Red; it's not like I'll be afraid."

With that said, she tersely acknowledged Shang Jianyao's recount. "It's not impossible. Therefore, we can't be rash."

"We've already restrained the rash one." Shang Jianyao wore a smug look.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and picked up the walkie-talkie. “Little White, Little Red, circle to the back of Building 4 and climb to the third-floor balcony. Look around from the outside, but don’t go in.”

“Alright,” Bai Chen quickly replied.

She carried the military exoskeleton on her back and passed through a freshly grown patch of green grass with Long Yuehong, arriving behind Building 4.

“Let me do it.” Long Yuehong identified Room 302 and volunteered.

Bai Chen didn’t object and only exhorted, “Be careful.”

“Okay, okay.” Long Yuehong became braver and walked to the outer wall of Building 4. He originally planned on using water pipes, gas pipes, and other protrusions to climb up, but he realized that these had been taken away by the desperately ‘poor’ Ruin Hunters.

Most of them were metal!

Left with no choice, Long Yuehong could only extend his right palm—his T1 mechanical arm had suction cups.

After the iron-black metal in the corresponding spot spun and sank in, a special suction cup appeared between the mechanical hand’s five fingers.

With them and his left hand gripping the crevices and different protrusions on the facade, Long Yuehong ‘swam’ upward like a gecko.

He soon arrived outside Room 302’s balcony.

Even in the Old World, the buildings in the steelworks factory ruins were of some age. Therefore, the residential balconies here were completely sealed and had their own protective grills installed.

Of course, only small sections of the metal grills remained connected to the concrete. The rest had been sawed off by Ruin Hunters and moved out of the ruins.

In a sense, this was like a swarm of locusts sweeping across the land.

Long Yuehong looked inside through the shattered glass.

The living room with a brown floor was only covered in dust, stains, and trash. There were no items worth paying attention to.

If not for the fact that it was inconvenient to pry open the floorboards and that the only usage was to start a fire, the Ruin Hunters might not have missed out on such trivial items.

Long Yuehong had always been careful, and this was reflected in his meticulous but slow actions.

After not discovering any problems at a glance, he continued examining the area several times before picking up the walkie-talkie and reporting, “Team Leader, there’s nothing in the living room.”

Jiang Baimian habitually asked another question. She only issued a new order after she understood the types of trash there were. “Move to the side and take a look at the bedroom.”

She knew very well what functions Long Yuehong’s T1 mechanical arm had.

Long Yuehong slowly crawled to the windowsill attached to the master bedroom.

He prioritized caution, so he didn’t stand on the narrow ledge. Instead, he sneakily stuck his head into the sorry-looking glass windows.

Under the barrage of the elements, the glass windows in the master bedroom were downright dirty. Looking through them was akin to looking through a thick, gray veil—it was impossible to see anything clearly.

Fortunately, Ruin Hunters had been here before, and the glass was already riddled with holes. Long Yuehong made some adjustments before throwing his gaze into the room with the help of a sizable hole.

The first thing he saw was a 1.8-meter-long double bed.

The bed linen was red in color and had a dragon and phoenix symbol embroidered on them. Some areas had their colors washed out.

The Hunters didn't take away the blanket? Long Yuehong was surprised.

In the Ashlands and the wilderness, blankets were also a form of currency. How could they be spared by the 'locusts?'

Long Yuehong frowned and adjusted his position in confusion so that he could see the bedhead.

Suddenly, his body wobbled, and he almost lost his balance.

He saw two white skulls!

The two skulls were each leaning against a pillow. The body supposedly connected to the cervical spine was covered by a large red blanket, and it was unknown if the body was even there!

If the bodies existed, there would be two corpses sleeping in Room 302's master bedroom.

Long Yuehong composed himself and quickly reported his observations to Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian held the walkie-talkie and turned to look at Shang Jianyao. She muttered to herself, "There are still bedsheets and blankets left in the master bedroom. There are also two corpses lying on the bed..."

"Were the Ruin Hunters that came here previously blind?" Shang Jianyao had a 'shocked' expression.

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him. “What do you think?”

Shang Jianyao immediately changed his tune. “Could it be that they all believe in Shattered Mirror?”

As he spoke, Shang Jianyao spread his arms, raised his body slightly, and looked into the air. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

“It seems like Room 302 is really strange.” Jiang Baimian gave up on discussing it with Shang Jianyao. She thought for a moment and said, “It’s not a solution to keep staying outside. Return the medical record to me, and I’ll try to see if I can enter the master bedroom. Stay at the entrance and watch my back in case anything happens.”

Shang Jianyao didn’t volunteer. He took out the folded original medical record.

Jiang Baimian took it and strode forward.

At this moment, someone patted her shoulder.

Jiang Baimian’s body tensed up as she prepared to turn around at any moment. She then realized that it was Shang Jianyao.

Without waiting for her to ask, Shang Jianyao pointed diagonally ahead and suppressed his voice. “You. Took. The. Wrong. Direction...”

“...” Jiang Baimian realized that she had almost rushed into Room 301.

She held down her emotions, not wanting to become an ostrich. She only slowly exhaled.

“Let me go in. Otherwise, I’m afraid you won’t be able to find the master bedroom in a short time.” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and stretched out his other hand.

Jiang Baimian’s rationality told her that such a predicament was indeed possible, so she quickly composed herself and nodded casually. “Alright. I’ll watch your back.”

Shang Jianyao didn't immediately advance; instead, he took off his tactical backpack and wore the Six Senses Beads on his left wrist. He then threw the Life Angel necklace to Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian didn't ask why. She knew that he was augmenting his reinforcement and leaving an escape route.

Her left arm suddenly sank the moment she caught the silver pendant, having lost all feeling to it.

"As expected, the price is a cognitive problem. Despite being a biological prosthetic limb, it's still paralyzed..." As Jiang Baimian muttered, she threw the Life Angel necklace into the air and caught it again.

The price changed to a paralyzed right hand.

This was acceptable to Jiang Baimian.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing the Six Senses Beads and holding the original medical record—strode forward.

Before entering, he politely knocked on the door. Of course, as there was no door, he could only pretend that there was a door there.

After entering the living room, the situation Shang Jianyao saw was identical to Long Yuehong's description.

After a brief inspection, he walked to the master bedroom.

The master bedroom also had no door, with only the tenacious door frame hanging there.

Shang Jianyao suddenly raised his left palm—which the Six Senses Beads wrapped around—and whispered, "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti."

After chanting the Buddhist proclamation, he straightened his body, approached the door, and cast his gaze in.

The calm and rational Shang Jianyao was a little stunned.

There was indeed a derelict bed in the master bedroom, but it was only covered by a plastic film filled with holes. There were no red bedsheets or blankets. There was no dragon and phoenix embroidering or two skulls!

Shang Jianyao picked up the walkie-talkie and informed Jiang Baimian and the others of his discovery.

Long Yuehong couldn't believe it because he could still see the red bed.

#### Chapter 582: Reckless

Long Yuehong resisted the urge to punch himself with his mechanical arm to see if he could wake up because it was what he was using to cling onto the wall. Of course, with his physique, reaction speed, and ability to adjust, it might not be a problem for him to fall from the third floor. However, one could never be too careful.

“Team Leader, I see them from my side.” Long Yuehong carefully observed for about ten seconds and realized that every detail matched.

Upon hearing his report, Jiang Baimian—who was standing at Room 302's door—frowned slightly.

She couldn't enter according to the plan because it was to prevent the two of them from being trapped inside without being able to inform and warn Bai Chen and Long Yuehong about the situation. However, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but tip-toe and try her best to peek into Room 302.

Standing there with a distorted stance thanks to her powerful balance, she saw Shang Jianyao standing at the master bedroom's entrance.

As an Awakened with illusory abilities in the Shattered Mirror domain, she didn't sense anything abnormal..

Having the ability to create illusions didn't mean that they wouldn't be affected by such effects. It was just that they would be more sensitive to such situations and found it easier to discover something amiss compared to other Awakened and ordinary people.

After hesitating for a moment, Jiang Baimian maintained her current posture and said to Shang Jianyao, "Go in and take a look."

Shang Jianyao was waiting for that. He first pulled off the Six Senses Beads from his wrist and spun the prayer beads in his hand one by one before entering the master bedroom through the empty door frame.

He sniffed and looked around. "I still can't see the red blanket or the human skulls, but there's indeed a problem here. The smell of dust isn't strong, and there are no traces of rainwater entering and dried water stains."

The glass windows had long shattered, and the remaining parts had become dirty from the elements. They were gray and turbid.

In comparison, the area by the window appeared too clean.

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's description, Jiang Baimian deliberated for a few seconds. "Go to the bed and try to touch the plastic film. Touch it only once. Little Red, see if there are any changes."

Shang Jianyao—who had been replaced by an unknown Shang Jianyao—was delighted when he heard that. He quickly came to the derelict bed and then blew at his right hand—which was holding the original medical record.

After completing the preliminary ritual, Shang Jianyao bent his back at lightning speed, stretched out his palm, and touched the plastic film covered in holes on the bed.

Long Yuehong—who was leaning against the window outside—saw: Shang Jianyao pressing down on the red blanket with the dragon and phoenix embroidering! Apart from that, there was no problem.

He quickly shared what he had seen with Jiang Baimian and the others.



The scene seen from the outside is very different from what is seen in the room, but it also has certain commonalities... Jiang Baimian was thinking about the subsequent plan when the rash and bold Shang Jianyao suddenly escaped the others' restraints and 'decisively' took new actions.

He used his right hand—which was holding the medical record—to lift the plastic film!

Long Yuehong's eyes almost popped out when he saw this.

It had been less than half a year since Shang Jianyao's advancement. The other three Old Task Force members had long figured out which ten personalities this fellow had. Therefore, it wasn't difficult for Long Yuehong to guess that the one in control of the body was the rash and bold one.

Isn't this too rash and bold? If our team really encounters danger in the future, this fellow's recklessness will definitely be one of the main factors! As these thoughts raced through his mind, Long Yuehong didn't forget to observe the situation in the master bedroom.

The scene he saw was: Shang Jianyao pulling away the red blanket with the dragon and phoenix embroidering!

Just as he had expected, there were two skeletons under the blanket.

The two skeletons were lustrous. One wore a green down jacket, and the other wore a black cotton jacket. Their legs were covered in thick dark pants, and their soles were bare. They had no shoes or socks.

From a cursory glance, one couldn't find any imprints of time, nor were they stained with any signs of flesh decay.

Long Yuehong scanned the area with full attention twice and suddenly felt light flash from one skeleton as the clouds in the sky moved.

He focused his gaze and realized that a jade pendant hung from the green down jacket-wearing skeleton's chest.

The jade pendant was a faint lake-green in color and very transparent. It was carved into a fat Buddha.

Buddha! Long Yuehong's pupils dilated rapidly. He immediately picked up the walkie-talkie and told Jiang Baimian and the others what he had observed in detail.

Small jade Buddha... Something related to Buddhism has appeared... What Little Red sees shouldn't be an illusion. Without anyone presiding over the situation, it's impossible for an illusion to be played out in real-time while producing such details... Yes, it's possible that someone is presiding over the area... Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds and asked Bai Chen, "Little White, is there anything abnormal about Little Red to you?"

"No," Bai Chen replied calmly.

At this moment, she was standing behind Building 4 and looking up at Long Yuehong—who was clinging to Room 302's outer wall.

Jiang Baimian confirmed with Shang Jianyao that there was nothing in front of him and that there was only a derelict bed and a plastic film covered in holes.

After some thought, Jiang Baimian ordered, "Little Red, tell Hey the exact location of the small jade Buddha and guide him to the right place. This might be a switch. Also, be vigilant and guard against any accidents."

Long Yuehong took a deep breath. Through the window, he used the bed's four corners and the red blanket's current position as a reference. He 'directed' Shang Jianyao to narrow the scope bit by bit.

The Shang Jianyao currently in control of the body didn't resist at all. According to Long Yuehong's description, he made his palm—which was holding the medical record—move up, down, left, and right at times.

Finally, Long Yuehong saw Shang Jianyao's finger touch the small jade Buddha.

"How's it? Do you feel anything?" he asked anxiously.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "There's nothing but air."

“Could it be that I’m really hallucinating...” Long Yuehong muttered.

Before Jiang Baimian could issue a new order, Shang Jianyao’s eyes flickered slightly as he revealed an eager expression.

The Six Senses Beads in his other hand suddenly emitted a green glow. He didn’t use any abilities and only activated the item’s aura.

As the green light landed on the bed, Shang Jianyao’s right hand gently moved a few times. He touched something hard!

Long Yuehong saw Shang Jianyao suddenly grab the small jade Buddha with his right hand.

Suddenly, the scene in front of Shang Jianyao became completely different.

On the derelict bed were red bedsheets, and on the surface lay two skeletons in different clothes. A small, green jade Buddha of lake-green color appeared in Shang Jianyao’s hand.

“Impressive!” He sighed with emotion.

“What happened?” Jiang Baimian immediately asked through the walkie-talkie.

The Shang Jianyaos and Long Yuehong recounted what had happened.

“After triggering the Six Senses Beads’ aura, one can touch the small jade Buddha. By holding the small jade Buddha, one can remove the illusion...” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself as she extracted the crux of the matter. “Yes, the Six Senses Beads’ current aura has fused some of the abnormality hidden in Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company.”

That was one of Buddhism’s Holy Lands!

They were currently in one of Buddhism’s Holy Lands as well!

Jiang Baimian—who had come to a realization—immediately said, “Don’t be in a rush to take away the small jade Buddha. Search the two skeletons’ clothes and see if there are any clues. We’ll take the small jade Buddha away after we confirm that we are evacuating.”

Shang Jianyao didn’t act rashly this time. He touched the two skeletons’ pockets with his left hand that was holding the Six Senses Beads.

After a while, he completed the search and only found a few things: Two cell phones produced by the Old World, some bills that were neither old nor new, a wallet, and two identification documents.

Shang Jianyao looked at the front and back of the identity cards and said regretfully, “Fan Wensi, Li Jinlong. The target should’ve died not long after the Old World was destroyed.”

“It seems like it...” Long Yuehong echoed from outside the window.

From the current situation, one could infer that the corpse in the long green down jacket belonged to the Old Task Force’s target, Fan Wensi.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before saying, “Then, don’t disturb their slumber. Only take away the small jade Buddha and the two phones.”

She wanted to try extracting and restoring the data in the phones.

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao removed the small jade Buddha and stuffed it and the two phones into the pocket of his gray camouflage clothes.

After doing this, he became an Arbiter of Fate believer and covered the two skeletons with the large red blanket again.

One bow; two bows; three bows...

After the ritual, Shang Jianyao had just walked out of the master bedroom when he suddenly felt the entire building shake.

“Retreat!” Jiang Baimian also realized that something was amiss.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Shang Jianyao ran while Jiang Baimian stood at the door without retreating first. On the one hand, she was worried that Shang Jianyao would encounter an accident while leaving Room 302. By staying where she was, she could provide him with timely help. On the other hand, she was afraid that with nobody to lead the way while she ran, she would only get herself lost in a more dangerous place.

Outside Room 302's master bedroom window, Long Yuehong exerted strength with his palm and jumped out, landing on the edge of the second-floor balcony.

He jumped back to the ground and ran toward the front of Building 4 with Bai Chen.

Almost at the same time, Shang Jianyao didn't encounter any abnormalities and ran out of Room 302.

Jiang Baimian—who had her right hand 'paralyzed'—heaved a sigh of relief. She followed Shang Jianyao downstairs amidst the building's increasingly obvious shaking and the constantly falling dust.

The four of them returned to the jeep one after another and nimbly got into the car.

As the car drove, Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen saw Building 4 collapse bit by bit.

This collapse was very strange. It did so at an abnormally slow speed and didn't cause a huge commotion.

After the jeep rushed out of Residential Zone 2, the Old Task Force members looked back. Only then did the building collapse completely.

Piece after piece of concrete was quietly piled there like a large tomb.

Room 302 was buried inside.

## Chapter 583: Omen

Bai Chen slowed down her driving, allowing Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao on the other side to continue observing Building 4.

The area had completely collapsed, but it didn't affect the surroundings at all. There wasn't even much of a dust cloud.

It was as if an invisible hand was restraining all of this, creating a phenomenon that violated the laws of physics.

Jiang Baimian observed for a while before saying, "Building 4 collapsed because we took away the small jade Buddha?"

Shang Jianyao didn't stick his face to the window this time and stroked his chin with his left hand. "In theory, yes. It can't be a problem with the two phones, right?"

"Besides, this is one of Buddhism's Holy Lands," added Bai Chen.

The small jade Buddha's relationship with Buddhism was clearly closer and more direct than other things.

As the car turned, Long Yuehong saw Building 4's situation and hesitantly said, "But isn't this collapse too strange? Shouldn't it crumble and cause an earthquake after losing the ability to maintain itself?"

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, "Maybe this is the original state of Building 4. The small jade Buddha maintained it for more than 60 years in violation of the norm. It's only returning to its original state, so it's not collapsing and there's not much of a stir..."

"This is one explanation. Another explanation is that the person using the small jade Buddha to maintain Room 302's uniqueness is still watching Building 4. In order to prevent the corpses from being damaged and the situation turning into a sorry state, he chose to exert his force remotely, making the collapse orderly and quiet. It's like building a large tomb."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped.

Long Yuehong thought for a moment and found the latter explanation more acceptable. After all, the concepts of ‘past state,’ ‘current state,’ and ‘return’ were too advanced. Even if the Awakened had very special powers, it didn’t seem possible.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Long Yuehong saw Shang Jianyao reach into his pocket and take out the small jade Buddha.

“Wait! Wait!” His eyes widened, and he almost stammered. It’s better to take out a strange item obtained from a strange place after leaving the steelworks factory ruins! Otherwise, who knows what accidents will occur!

“It doesn’t contain any aura or power.” Shang Jianyao didn’t mind Long Yuehong’s fear at all and waved the small, lake-green jade Buddha that acted as a pendant.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and made a guess. “Its aura or power dissipated the moment you held it? This resulted in the collapse of Building 4?”

“Even earlier.” Shang Jianyao recalled the various details. “It was already an ordinary jade accessory when I touched it.”

Long Yuehong looked it up and down and heaved a sigh of relief when he didn’t discover anything abnormal. He then joined the discussion.

He looked at Shang Jianyao and said, “The corresponding power probably began depleting the moment you activated the Six Senses Beads’ aura and resolved the anomaly in the master bedroom.”

Upon hearing this, Bai Chen raised a question in confusion. “Was Room 302’s master bedroom blanketed in an illusion?”

“No, it didn’t seem so,” replied Long Yuehong. He quickly explained, “I clearly saw Shang Jianyao touch the small jade Buddha, but he didn’t feel anything. If it’s an illusion, it can’t erase the existence of matter, right?”

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “A particularly powerful illusion should be able to affect touch.”

“Won’t that be too terrifying?” Long Yuehong thought for a moment and found such a matter abnormally terrifying. “Think about it. If what we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch are all affected by illusions, we won’t be able to distinguish reality from illusion!”

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao had already spread his hands and raised his body slightly. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

Jiang Baimian laughed as well. “The various religions in the Shattered Mirror domain probably have similar beliefs—it’s difficult to determine what’s real. Sigh, let’s not discuss this problem. We have too little knowledge and information, so thinking about it now will only give us a headache. It’s better to live seriously and live in the moment.”

After ending the philosophical discussion, she asked Shang Jianyao, “Do you think it’s an illusion?”

Shang Jianyao’s expression turned solemn. He raised his left palm and solemnly said, “It should be the legendary Alaya-vijnana—storehouse consciousness?”

“Why?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen quietly pricked up their ears.

“Nothing.” Shang Jianyao insisted in a manner as though he was right. “Intuition.”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian and the others to speak, he added, “From my point of view, Room 302’s situation is like two overlapping worlds that have a certain level of connection with each other. However, they don’t affect each other in the eyes of those who haven’t opened up the door to Alaya-vijnana.”

“Have you watched too much Old World entertainment?” Long Yuehong couldn’t help but criticize.

“Advice from others may help one overcome their shortcomings.” Shang Jianyao didn’t deny it and even smiled.



As they spoke, the jeep had already returned to the road leading to the steelworks factory ruins.

Jiang Baimian didn't interject. After a while, she slowly said, "The state that Hey described reminds me of something."

"What is it?" Bai Chen—who was driving—asked curiously. Unlike in the previous missions, there was clearly more expression in her face and emotions in her words.

Jiang Baimian replied in a deep voice, "New World."

There was a sudden silence in the jeep.

"Team Leader, you mean that the New World actually overlaps with the Ashlands and has a certain connection but that most people can't see it?" Long Yuehong knew what Jiang Baimian wanted to say, but he subconsciously sought confirmation.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "Perhaps only people who have explored the Mind Corridor to a certain extent can sense it. Therefore, a door to the New World will appear in the corresponding room."

"Then, what's with the door that leads to the New World in reality? It exists, right?" Bai Chen raised a new question.

"I don't know." Jiang Baimian shook her head. "At least Teacher Du Heng and many others believe it exists."

In the Ashlands, almost everyone believed that there was a door leading to the New World deep in a ruin. This allowed them to escape the threat of the Heartless disease, famine, mutation, and monsters.

Every Ruin Hunter had similar hopes of finding it when entering ruins—it wasn't solely to gather resources.

"Maybe that's a node?" Shang Jianyao expressed his opinion.

Nobody agreed with him, nor did they refute him because they couldn't prove its veracity for the time being.

Upon seeing that the steelworks factory ruins' exit was at hand, Jiang Baimian decided to end the topic. "Hey, put away the small jade Buddha. We'll study it carefully later. Yes... Make a four-layer package with tin foil, plastic, paper, and rubber bags."

After Shang Jianyao finished dealing with the small jade Buddha, Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said, "Let's head to Redstone Collection now. On the way, send a telegram to Old Ge and get him to buy tools to recover the damaged phones' data. He will rendezvous with us there. Before entering Iron Mountain City's ruins, I hope to find some useful information or clues from those two phones to reduce the risk of our subsequent operations."

"Alright." Long Yuehong and Bai Chen had no objections.

Shang Jianyao took out his small speaker and wondered what song to listen to next.

...

Three days after the Old Task Force left the steelworks factory ruins, a team of strange-looking people arrived.

Six to seven of them wore gray, patched clothes. Their hair was shaved very short, leaving only a thin layer. From a distance, they looked almost bald.

These people prostrated themselves every seven steps. They faced the blast furnaces in the steelworks factory ruins and kowtowed with abnormally pious expressions.

They entered the steelworks factory ruins and circled the factory area in such a manner, walking and kowtowing just like the outside.

After a while, these people came to Residential Zone 2 and arrived not far from Building 4.

The leader was not young. There weren't many wrinkles on his face, but they were obvious. The thin hair on his head was white.

He was a Red Coaster, and his expression was staid.

Red Coasters were a branch of Ashlandics that had migrated to the Red River Zone. Their skin was browner, and their hair had natural curls.

Looking at the collapsed Building 4, these people stopped walking and stared blankly without moving for a long time.

After an unknown period of time, the elder in the lead let out a long sigh. "The omen has appeared. A great calamity is imminent..."

He spoke in Ashlandic with a dialect.

...

It kept pouring in the evening, making it so dark that it seemed like it was already midnight.

Bai Chen looked at the moving rain and suggested, "I remember a small city ruin nearby. We can camp there."

"Alright." Jiang Baimian expressed her absolute trust. She then lowered her head and continued studying the two maps in her hand.

They were maps of Redstone Collection and the Iron Mountain City ruins. Jiang Baimian wanted to memorize them through repeated perusal to reduce the possibility of getting lost during an operation.

The jeep drove for a while before black figures finally appeared in the rainy night ahead.

Bai Chen was just about to navigate and search for a relatively sturdy building to get shelter from the rain when Shang Jianyao—who was in the back row—suddenly said, "There are people over there. Nearly 20."

## Chapter 584: So 'You' Are Here Too

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's reminder, Long Yuehong subconsciously suggested, "Should we circle elsewhere?"

This ruin wasn't large, but that was relative to Iron Mountain City, Swamp Ruin 1, and Wasteland Ruin 13. In fact, it could accommodate 300,000 to 400,000 people in the Old World.

In such a large place, the two teams could each keep to their side and not interfere with each other. They might not even know of each other's existence.

With the Old Task Force's current strength, Long Yuehong wasn't afraid of conflict. He just didn't like meaningless battles.

In the Ashlands, everyone lived an exhausting life. There was no need to gather together since everyone would be on edge and not speak sincerely.

If it were in the Old World, it would be fine if these two teams encountered each other. They might even be able to hold a party in accordance with Shang Jianyao's wishes. But in the Ashlands today, order only existed in the major factions' main settlements. Being weak was a sin during encounters in the wilderness.

There were countless greedy people because those who weren't greedy were usually just short of starving to death in a few days.

Bai Chen—who was driving—glanced to the side. "We can wait a while. We'll circle to other buildings when we're closer to those people."

Uh, why... Long Yuehong's thoughts raced as he pondered over Little White's words, and he quickly figured out the exact reason.

It seemed safe to turn around or take a detour, but it would reveal certain problems.

It was fine if the nearly 20-person team didn't have Mind Corridor-level Awakened, but if they did, they would discover that the intruder had changed directions 100 meters away. This made it very

easy for them to come to a conclusion: There's a high chance that there are Mind Corridor-level Awakened among them, and their perception range is about 150 meters!

This was equivalent to them figuring out one-third of the Old Task Force's strength and grasping Shang Jianyao's maximum range before the two parties made contact.

By following Bai Chen's suggestion, the Old Task Force would appear more like a strong team that wasn't excessively strong. It would make the other party believe that there were indeed Awakened among them but that they were still in the Sea of Origins. They only sensed the other party when they were 30 to 40 meters apart.

The maximum range of Shang Jianyao's abilities was therefore concealed, and the Old Task Force's strength would also be greatly underestimated. The outcome was obvious once the other team attempted to target them.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped for Bai Chen's plan and said in a scholarly manner, "A game of deception I see!"

At this moment, the jeep was circling around a few buildings along a roundabout. The straight-line distance between them and the team Shang Jianyao had sensed didn't change much.

Why use such a vulgar term? It makes Little White appear sinister and cunning... Long Yuehong criticized Shang Jianyao inwardly. It can clearly be described with better words!

Jiang Baimian suddenly laughed. "Actually, there's no need. Little White, weren't you more accustomed to displaying your strength from afar to intimidate the other party and avoid unnecessary conflict? If we position ourselves as a relatively strong team with an ordinary Awakened, and they happen to have Mind Corridor-level Awakened, won't it incite their greed? They might take the initiative to start a relatively dangerous battle that might be fruitless. Why bother?"

As Bai Chen drove, she defended herself. "But this will expose the maximum range of Shang Jianyao's abilities. This is one of the most important secrets of an Awakened."

Jiang Baimian nodded and smiled. “Therefore, we just need to make a turn at a range of 70 to 90 meters. This exceeds the Sea of Origins’ limits while implying the bottom feeders of the Mind Corridor. This allows the other party to easily guess that there are Mind Corridor-level Awakened among us, but the range of our abilities is definitely more than that. Let them use their imaginations for the exact extent. The unknown is the most intimidating.”

“Alright.” Bai Chen changed her mind after some thought.

That’s for the best. There won’t be any conflict... Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that.

Without knowing how strong the Old Task Force’s Awakened were, the team definitely didn’t have much confidence in gaining victory unless they had a powerhouse at the New World level. They could only choose to keep a respectful distance.

A powerhouse at the New World level has either left the Ashlands or is in a prolonged slumber. How could it be easy to encounter them...

“Stop! Stop your brain. Stop thinking!” Shang Jianyao suddenly felt terrified and turned to look at Long Yuehong.

“...” Long Yuehong held in his anger. “I didn’t think of anything.”

“Gosh, that won’t do. The brain will rust if it’s not used.” An unknown Shang Jianyao shook his head.

Long Yuehong chose to remain silent.

Bai Chen followed the plan that the four of them had come to an agreement on. After entering a 90-meter radius from the target’s location, she turned the steering wheel to another side of the city ruin.

Nothing abnormal happened along the way.

Shang Jianyao began to think about a question and raised it. “What if that team doesn’t have Mind Corridor-level Awakened and is a relatively common Hunter team or bandit gang?”

“...” Long Yuehong replied sullenly, “Then, what we just did was flirt with the blind.”

“There’s no need to mind.” Jiang Baimian—who was in the passenger seat—was rather open-minded. “As the saying goes, it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Before long, the Old Task Force found a relatively sturdy and intact building a few kilometers away to get shelter from the rain.

After a simple dinner with the electric kettle, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian fell asleep—one sitting in the back row and the other leaning against the passenger seat.

They had made considerable gains in their mind worlds recently.

Jiang Baimian had long grasped the application of several abilities. She left Star Cluster Hall, entered the Sea of Origins, and set foot on the first island of fear.

This island’s effect was that she fainted the moment she set foot on it. After being unconscious for a long time, she would automatically leave the Sea of Origins.

She still couldn’t find a way to overcome this fear after nearly two months.

After Shang Jianyao cleared the psychological trauma that included Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company, he was originally facing a second psychological trauma and was thinking of a way to board a cruise ship that had long been abandoned. The room owner, however, seemed to have sensed his exploration and warned him by changing the environment to a certain extent.

Although this didn’t match the general outcome of the owner detecting the intrusion stemming from the repeated nightmares due to the clearing of multiple psychological traumas and deep exploration of their consciousness, the polite Shang Jianyao still chose to leave.

From that point in time until before the Old Task Force set off, he followed the ‘strategy guide’ provided by Pangu Biology, found two nearby rooms, and cleared three psychological traumas each. It was considered an incomplete exploration.

The 'strategy guide' didn't recommend delving deeper because the risks were too high and the harvests might not keep up.

Even so, Shang Jianyao's Awakened abilities had clearly improved.

The range of Thought Guidance was still limited to the other party's ability to hear the corresponding sounds clearly, but the effects of transmitting them into the distance via electric waves were much stronger.

The range of Literary Hipster-Corny Person increased to 110 meters. Limbs Immobility was 150 meters, and so was electromagnetic interference. Matter Interference was 60 meters.

The improvement of these abilities wasn't completely the same because the tempering effects of different psychological trauma in the different rooms corresponded to different abilities.

As for the number of people that could be affected, it reached 70. From this, it was obvious how effective the psychological trauma involving Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company was.

After leaving Room 131, the Shang Jianyaos came to the corridor covered in a dark-yellow carpet.

One of them looked around and said to himself in a heavy tone, "We can't always go to rooms in the strategy guide. That would be boring. Let's find something that's not recorded in the strategy guide this time. How about that?"

"Heh, why don't you go to rooms like 101 and 205? Although they are in the strategy guide, excitement is guaranteed! The timid Shang Jianyao scoffed.

The most common scene in 101 was a mental hospital, and it was very dangerous. 205 was a dream of Dawn or Master Zhuang. It was grotesque and varied, and it was extremely dangerous.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately replied, "First, 205 is too dangerous and not suitable for the current us. Second, the others aren't nearby. We don't know when we can find them."

"Third, I'm really willing to visit 101 if it's possible," added the Shang Jianyao who sought novelty.



After an argument, the Shang Jianyaos finally came to a consensus: They would search for a room that wasn't written in the strategy guide.

With a casual sweep, Shang Jianyao's gaze landed on the room with the door number '912.'

It wasn't in the strategy guide.

"It's fate for us to meet." The cyborg monk, Zen Master Redemption, spun the Six Senses Beads.

The Shang Jianyaos combined into one and came to 912's door. He turned the handle and pushed it open.

As soon as he entered, a dark sea and a cruise ship covered in barnacles appeared in front of Shang Jianyao.

He laughed after a few seconds. "Interesting..."

This psychological trauma looked identical to the second psychological trauma in Room 522!

Chapter 585: On the Cruise Ship

Most Shang Jianyaos were delighted and overturned the resistance from the few as they decided to explore the psychological trauma.

Splash!

His first attempt was to transform into a flying fish, stretch his body, and jump into the sea.

The dark sea didn't ebb at all as if it had frozen—this suited the gloomy and dilapidated cruise ship well.

Shang Jianyao didn't mind at all. He assumed a posture and began to advance.

Thanks to his experience in the Sea of Origins, he was abnormally skilled at swimming. Be it butterfly-style, frog-style, backstroke, freestyle, doggy paddle, or random flailing, they all looked legit and were in no way slow.

He soon swam to the cruise ship anchored near the coast.

It was only then that Shang Jianyao realized a problem: he couldn't board the cruise ship!

The cruise ship's gangway wasn't lowered, and the cargo door at the bow wasn't opened!

The rash Shang Jianyao received his peers' contemptuous stares and had no choice but to retreat to the depths of his consciousness and pass the initiative to the calm and rational one.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. "How did the room owner and 522 board this cruise ship back then?"

It was obvious that these two weren't on the cruise in the beginning.

The honest Shang Jianyao scoffed. "Isn't that simple? They must've taken a small boat somewhere at the dock and was later hoisted up. We should've looked around the dock just now instead of jumping into the water and swimming over."

He treated his rash peer with disdain and even mocked the ones who had been infected by his rashness without putting a stop to him.

"Now isn't the time to discuss who's right and who's wrong. The important thing is to find a solution." The cyborg monk, Zen Master Redemption, spun the Six Senses Beads.

In the Shang Jianyao Democratic Association, he had always been calm and benevolent, the one in charge of reconciliation.

The calm and rational Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged his intervention. "It's too draining on the mind to swim back. Let's see if there's any other solution first."

The cheerful Shang Jianyao laughed. "We can blast a large hole in the ship and burrow in!"

“Sure, sure!” It wasn’t the obedient one but Zen Master Redemption. This cyborg monk had always been an enthusiast of superior firepower.

“What if the ship sinks?” the honest Shang Jianyao asked.

At this moment, the Shang Jianyaos’ states were: their lower bodies overlapped, and their upper bodies were separated, forming a circle to facilitate communication.

The cheerful Shang Jianyao quickly explained, “I’m joking; it’s just a joke. What I really mean is that we can conjure all kinds of tools, such as helicopters or military exoskeletons to help us reach the deck.”

The rash Shang Jianyao ended his repentance and made an attempt without hesitation. After a few seconds, he asked, “In order to make the conjured items useful, do we have to use the Matter Interference ability and inject sufficient psyche?”

“What do you think?” The timid Shang Jianyao despised the rash one the most.

“I think so. Besides, helicopters and military exoskeletons are large objects. The amount of psyche needed to be injected isn’t less than swimming back. It might even be more!” The person who replied on behalf of the rash Shang Jianyao was the honest him.

The Shang Jianyaos fell silent for a moment before considering other plans.

“I have an idea.” The calm and rational Shang Jianyao looked up.

“What is it?” several Shang Jianyaos asked in unison.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “Let’s build a human ladder! In any case, we have a total of ten people.”

“Alright!” The rash Shang Jianyao immediately replied.

“Is ten people enough?” The Shang Jianyao wearing a caricature version of his childhood clothes estimated the height of the lowest deck.

The calm Shang Jianyao laughed. “That’s simple. We’ll talk about it midway.”

Therefore, the ten Shang Jianyaos separated. The rash Shang Jianyao hugged the ship and gripped the barnacles that clung to the surface.

The Shang Jianyao that liked novelty used him as a step and climbed onto his shoulder.

One after another, the ten Shang Jianyaos stacked up layer by layer.

As this was the consciousness world and Shang Jianyao’s balance was very strong, the human ladder didn’t collapse despite looking shaky.

Glancing at the deck—which was still far away—the calm Shang Jianyao at the top drew a dagger and injected a small amount of psyche into it before inserting it into the steel ship’s welded seam. He then roared, “Merge with me as the center.”

With a whoosh, the other Shang Jianyaos surged into his body.

A Shang Jianyao was immediately separated, and he climbed over the calm Shang Jianyao by stepping onto the latter’s shoulders.

One after another, the Shang Jianyaos completed the human ladder again.

Just like that, they didn’t spend much effort and successfully arrived at the lowest deck’s edge.

The ten Shang Jianyaos combined and jumped up, firmly landing on his heels. At this moment, he suddenly had the feeling that time had begun to pass and that the entire world had come to life.

Sounds of splashing and talking sounded without warning. On the deck, a sea breeze blew, bringing with it a humid and fishy smell. The seawater below turned turbulent, producing small waves.

Shang Jianyao looked up and saw humans in different clothes.

The men and women were mostly young and healthy. They gathered in groups of three to five in different areas on the deck and conversed.

These people's words and expressions were vivid and abnormally realistic.

Shang Jianyao swept his gaze around and walked to the cabin entrance.

Three men stood there. One of them had a wrinkled cigarette that had been in his mouth for an unknown period of time as though he couldn't bear to light it.

Beside him were two other people in their thirties. Their clothes were old and had traces of sewing.

Shang Jianyao stopped not far away and listened to their conversation.

The clean, short-haired man with a cigarette in his mouth sighed with emotion. "When we reach the island, we won't have to be afraid of the Heartless anymore!"

His bulging waist was clearly hiding a weapon.

"How is that possible? Even if there are no Heartless on the island originally, a new Heartless will appear sooner or later after such a large shipful of people heads there." It wasn't his two companions who retorted the man but Shang Jianyao—it was as though they were familiar with each other.

The man's expression changed slightly. He looked at Shang Jianyao's body and calmed down as he muttered, "At the very least, we don't have to face swarms of Heartless in the thousands! Besides, people who previously went to the island say that the land there is fertile and has plenty of sunlight and rain. It's very suitable for farming."

"There's little pollution too," added the man's companion hopefully. His most obvious characteristic was a black mole at the end of his right eyebrow.

"You can actually answer questions..." Shang Jianyao was 'shocked.'

“What do you mean?” The man with the cigarette frowned.

Shang Jianyao ‘restrained’ his expression and said seriously, “I thought you wouldn’t answer me.”

Logically speaking, the figures in the psychological trauma were constructed by the room owner and moved according to their corresponding memories. To put it simply, they were equivalent to NPCs that could only answer stipulated questions. Therefore, it was either someone had voiced Shang Jianyao’s doubts back then, or the figures in this psychological trauma could perform ‘real-time calculations.’ It was rather special.

“Why can’t we answer? I love reasoning.” The man with the cigarette took out the cigarette from his mouth and held it between his fingers.

Shang Jianyao opened his mouth and suddenly made a face at them.

Bleah! Bleah! Bleah!

The three men were first stunned for a few seconds, clearly surprised, before they flew into a rage.

Shang Jianyao had turned around and ran into the cabin by then.

His expression instantly returned to normal upon hearing the sound of the pursuit as he muttered to himself, “In the environment where one was seeking refuge back then, the atmosphere was definitely more oppressive and depressing. Nobody would suddenly make a face, yet they actually reacted to this... This psychological trauma is indeed a little strange...”

“That’s not right. What if there was a mentally ill person back then?” Shang Jianyao retorted himself.

Amidst the ‘argument,’ he slowed down, opened the door along one side of the corridor, and hid inside.

In the room, a couple that was tussling with each other was stunned. They looked back at him in confusion.

“Sorry, please continue.” Shang Jianyao quickly left the room and closed the door again.

How rude!

At this moment, the footsteps of the pursuers approached.

Rumbling sounds suddenly came from beyond the heavens. They were deep and drawn out.

Shang Jianyao’s body inexplicably swayed, and the world in front of him gradually turned illusory and transparent.

When he opened his eyes, he realized that Jiang Baimian had woken up at some point in time. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had surrounded him.

“That’s not right! How can I be kicked out without suffering any damage?” Shang Jianyao muttered to himself.

Normally speaking, one had to return to the starting point and retreat back into the Mind Corridor if they wanted to leave a psychological trauma. If they weren’t afraid of suffering mental damage, the Awakened could choose to be shaken awake. Of course, the premise was that the Awakened had yet to be unconscious or trapped in the Mind Room.

Jiang Baimian turned her head to glance at Shang Jianyao without inquiring.

Long Yuehong pointed outside the building. “There’s an explosion over there—the place where the previous team set up camp.”

Chapter 586: ‘Wealthy’

Just as Long Yuehong said that, another boom sounded from the direction he was pointing in as if to verify his words. Right on the heels of that was the sound of gunfire that penetrated the rain.

“It seems like there’s a gunfight over there.” Shang Jianyao’s attention was instantly diverted as he guessed with interest, “Did someone attack them, or did they attack someone else?”

“Who knows?” Jiang Baimian wasn’t a deity; she couldn’t reenact the situation over there out of thin air.

She then teased Shang Jianyao. “What, do you want to go over and uphold justice?”

“What if it becomes a dogfight?” The honest Shang Jianyao was always direct. He then sighed and explained emotionally, “If I’m sure that there’s an innocent party being attacked, I’m willing to provide some help. Otherwise, why did I go through so much trouble to enter the Mind Corridor? But since we can’t figure out the situation over there right now, we might as well choose to watch from the sidelines to prevent making further mistakes. After all, such things happen more than once a day every day in the Ashlands.”

“You rarely say so much.” The one sighing with emotion wasn’t anyone else but another Shang Jianyao.

The honest Shang Jianyao said disdainfully, “You’ve raised both sides of the argument. In short, you’ll be right no matter what. Am I right?”

Upon seeing that the Shang Jianyaos were about to argue, Jiang Baimian took a deep breath and said, “Stop!”

She felt a throbbing headache. Ever since Shang Jianyao entered the Mind Corridor, she felt as though she was commandeering a company despite only having three team members. It was mentally exhausting.

The quarrels from ten Shang Jianyaos were as noisy as a hundred people!

Jiang Baimian calmed down and instructed Long Yuehong and the others, “Everyone, pack up and be prepared. Don’t be caught in the crossfire.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Shang Jianyao was still the one who replied loudly.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen didn’t hesitate to open the jeep’s trunk and carry out a box each. One of them contained the Chameleon series’ latest artificial intelligence armor, and the other was a relatively new M-45 military exoskeleton.



As part of the military exoskeleton's functions overlapped with Long Yuehong's T1 mechanical arm, he mostly wore the bionic artificial intelligence armor to maximize his strength.

Before the Old Task Force went out on this mission, they had switched the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor they had seized for the latest model. They had also applied for a new Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor.

In other words, the Old Task Force currently had a total of three military exoskeletons and two sets of bionic artificial intelligence armor despite being a team with four carbon-based members.

Such excessive allocation was considered extravagant in the Ashlands.

If it weren't for the fact that the Old Task Force had applied to modify the jeep and expand the trunk during their break, their items wouldn't have been able to fit two boxes even though the bionic artificial intelligence armor didn't occupy much space.

Due to the team's equipment, Shang Jianyao even fantasized about testing the effects of a smart bot wearing bionic artificial intelligence armor.

After Bai Chen and Long Yuehong completed their combat preparations and began patrolling their surroundings, Jiang Baimian picked up the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor while Shang Jianyao took out the AC-45 military exoskeleton.

Jiang Baimian's current ability range was only 15 meters. Therefore, she preferred the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor—which could completely wrap around her and had excellent bulletproof capabilities. This way, she could hide her consciousness and risk a rain of bullets to get close to the enemy.

The range of illusions in the Shattered Mirror domain was naturally greater than that in the Master Zhuang domain.

Shang Jianyao—who wore the military exoskeleton—could use a grenade launcher, a laser device, and an electromagnetic weapon to suppress the enemy from a distance of more than 100 meters while casting Limbs Immobility and Literary Hipster-Corny Person.

After buckling the last strap, Shang Jianyao looked up at Jiang Baimian and Long Yuehong and said, "Hahaha! You guys look funny wearing that!"

Although the bionic artificial intelligence armor was named after its functions—therefore, Jiang Baimian didn't have a snake's head, nor did Long Yuehong look like a large chameleon—Pangu Biology's architects always seemed to hope that the armor would visually have the characteristics that matched the armors' name. Therefore, the different smart armor had different styles.

Among them, the most exaggerated was the Lizard smart armor. Pangu Biology employees wearing them looked like humanoid lizards.

Chameleon and Blackmarsh Iron Snake were relatively fine, but the visor of the former was clearly protruded. The latter dragged a rather long tail that was said to be used to maintain balance during high-speed action.

“We've. Been. Through. This. Many. Times!” Jiang Baimian 'reminded' Shang Jianyao as she enunciated each word. However, she couldn't be angry because she had already mocked Shang Jianyao when he used it previously.

The four of them guarded the jeep and watched the rain outside gradually thin until the gunshots and explosions subsided.

After a while, Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief after confirming that the night had returned to silence. “From the looks of it, no matter which side wins, they have no intention of causing further trouble.”

“The second group most likely doesn't know of our existence, so they can't do anything even if they want to,” the honest Shang Jianyao said.

Long Yuehong was momentarily speechless and resisted the urge to scratch the back of his head.

In order to maximize the T1 mechanical arm's usage, the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor's right palm had undergone special modification. A gap could be pulled open to allow him to extend his hand.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian asked Shang Jianyao, “What were you on about exiting without suffering any damage?”

Shang Jianyao immediately recounted how he had given up on the ‘strategy guide’ and chosen Room 912, only to encounter the cruise ship again.

“You sure have a rich desire of courting death.” Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion. There is clearly a ‘strategy guide’ available for reference, but they had to take risks in unfamiliar rooms!

That’s right, that’s right... Long Yuehong echoed in his heart, and Bai Chen nodded indiscernibly.

Shang Jianyao felt that this was a compliment. “Of course! If we keep following the strategy guide, it will be very difficult to gain anything additional. It will be difficult to discover the reason for the Old World’s destruction, the source of the Heartless disease, and the essence of the Mind Corridor. Just like before—if it weren’t for the fact that we didn’t follow the rules and made Little Red crawl to the window to look into the master bedroom, how could we have discovered Room 302’s abnormality?”

“...” Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment. She actually felt like she had almost been convinced by this fellow.

She quickly found her logic. “Having a strategy guide doesn’t mean that there can’t be any additional gains, just like 101 and 205.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian suddenly laughed. “If Little Red isn’t special, nor if the Six Senses Beads doesn’t cause an effect the moment it enters the room, it means that anyone who looks at Room 302’s master bedroom from the window can discover the corpses and red blanket. If we continue on this inference, could we see the New World somewhere with something in between?”

“The door to the New World.” Bai Chen voiced her thoughts. “The window to Room 302’s master bedroom should be similar to it.”

Jiang Baimian let out a long grunt and turned her head to Shang Jianyao. “Don’t make any attempts for the time being to prevent any accidents. We’ll find a time tomorrow to see if there’s anything special.”

The rash Shang Jianyao finally chose to obey. “Alright.”

...

The rain and wind stopped, and the night passed uneventfully.

When the Old Task Force left the city ruin, the sun shone through the clouds and scattered its glow.

The team from last night had long left.

The Old Task Force's jeep drove toward the Lake of Wrath for a few hours before entering a wide, desolate plain.

Jiang Baimian and the others were just about to head to a relatively less polluted river nearby to replenish their water supplies when they suddenly saw a convoy drawing water and cooking 200 meters away.

They had a total of six cars, mainly SUVs and mountain cars. They had nearly 20 people.

"The group of people from last night?" Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao in the backseat.

"The numbers are right." The current Shang Jianyao was serious and rational.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, "Let's get water from afar then."

In such a situation, they had to maintain a distance of at least 300 meters to prevent themselves from being unknowingly affected by the other party's abilities.

After the Old Task Force found a spot by the river, a dark mountain car suddenly turned around and drove toward them.

When there were only about 100 meters between the two parties, someone in the mountain car stuck their head out and shouted, "We wish to know something!"

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and nodded at Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao immediately took out a blue and white loudspeaker and replied, "It'll cost you!"

The other party fell silent for a moment before saying, "Alright!"

The mountain car approached. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen retreated to the trunk in preparation for any attacks.

The dark car stopped ten meters away. The two of them then pushed open the doors and got out.

They were all Ashlandic men in ordinary black clothes. One was in his late thirties, and he had a square face and thick eyebrows. The other looked a little younger. His eyebrows were like swords, and his nose was sharp.

The two of them walked with straight-backed postures and almost identical footsteps.

"How should I address you?" the older man asked calmly.

Jiang Baimian didn't answer and instead asked, "What do you want to know?"

The older man nodded slightly and said, "How long does it take to get to Redstone Collection?"

#### Chapter 587: Origins

Jiang Baimian didn't expect the other party to ask such a simple question. After some thought, she replied, "It's two to three days away if you take the normal route. If the Lake of Wrath floods, requiring you to take a detour, it might take more than a week."

It doesn't sound like this group of people has ever been to Redstone Collection... Why are they going there? Purchasing various smuggled goods? Long Yuehong—who was listening—extracted the key points of the conversation.

Without waiting for the other party's response, Jiang Baimian joked, "Didn't you guys get a guide?"

"We had one." The younger man's expression changed slightly. "He's an ass..."

The older square-faced man glanced at his companion and stopped him from continuing. Then, he chuckled and said, “We aren’t familiar with this area, and the guide we found wasn’t that reliable. He almost got us lost.”

He was honest about his team’s unfamiliarity with the area because others could easily come to the same conclusion from their inquiry about Redstone Collection.

The guide is an ass? Jiang Baimian repeated the young man’s words inwardly. This made her come up with a guess: Could the attack last night be caused by the guide? After he was hired by this team, he took advantage of them being foreigners and colluded with bandits. He left marks and planned on working with outsiders from the inside to make a windfall?

“You aren’t lost.” The honest Shang Jianyao pointed out the flaws in the other party’s words. “You are on the right path now.”

The older man glanced at Shang Jianyao and explained with a smile, “I said almost. In fact, we don’t know which direction we should go in next, so we could only come over to consult you.”

Shang Jianyao quickly pointed in the direction he had come from. “Eliminate that first.”

Any ordinary human will know without you saying that... Uh, except for people like the directionally challenged Team Leader... Long Yuehong criticized inwardly, but he didn’t dare to say it out loud.

In order not to let Shang Jianyao continue embarrassing himself, Jiang Baimian raised her right hand and planned on giving directions.

Wait! Team Leader, don’t you have any self-awareness? Long Yuehong tried to stop her, but he didn’t voice it out. How is this different from the blind leading the blind?

As Shang Jianyao’s face revealed ‘horror,’ Bai Chen spoke before Jiang Baimian could. “Keep going in that direction until you see the Lake of Wrath. Then, head south along the lake, and you’ll find a large city ruin.”

The route she provided was clear with obvious landmarks. There were no twists and turns in the middle, so it was easy to understand. It didn’t sound problematic.

The older man outlined a map in his mind and asked, “Are there no other city ruins along the way?”

Redstone Collection was difficult to find because the Lake of Wrath and its surrounding area had a large number of cities in the Old World.

“There will be a few before reaching the Lake of Wrath, but there won’t be any once you head south,” Bai Chen explained simply.

These were all confirmed by the Old Task Force.

“In other words, Redstone Collection isn’t that far away... It’s no wonder you said that we could reach it in two to three days if we’re fast.” The older man smiled in relief. “You are regular visitors to Redstone Collection?”

Otherwise, they wouldn’t be so familiar with the road.

“We’ve been there twice.” Jiang Baimian couldn’t be any more honest. Of course, she didn’t mention that the Old Task Force had caused upheavals in Redstone Collection in just two visits, causing the factional power balance to undergo a tremendous change.

The older man nodded and didn’t ask any further. “What kind of payment do we need to pay?”

Jiang Baimian saw that Shang Jianyao had fallen into deep thought and didn’t know what request he would make. She quickly smiled and said, “Just a few cans will do.”

“Alright.” The older man turned his head and said to his companion beside him, “Go get eight cans of food from the car.”

His voice was deep and authoritative.

The young man immediately turned around and walked to the dark mountain car parked ten meters away.

Taking opportunity of the brief interlude, the older man continued asking, “Is there anything we need to pay attention to in Redstone Collection?”

“Learn how to play hide and seek.” Shang Jianyao’s expression was sincere and serious.

The older man fell silent for a few seconds before thoughtfully asking, “The people there mainly believe in Eidolon Nun?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao raised his hands and crossed them in front of his chest before taking a step back. “Distance is our friend!”

“You are a believer in Eidolon Nun as well?” the older man asked in interest.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “It depends.”

With your piousness, the Kalendarium definitely haven’t smote you with a bolt of lightning because they haven’t discussed who will do the honors... Jiang Baimian muttered silently. She then reminded the other party, “When you reach Redstone Collection, you need to find a townsfolk in the city ruins and get them to lead the way to your destination. This is their folklore. Those who have been there can’t tell others the exact location of Redstone Collection.”

The older man didn’t show a troubled expression and only nodded. “Thank you.”

At this moment, his companion walked back with eight cans.

Canned sardines, braised pork hock... Long Yuehong looked over and realized that the flavors were a little different from what he often ate.

The older man bade farewell after Jiang Baimian took the canned food. He returned to the car with his companions and drove toward the main bulk of the party.

They showed the basic precautions during the entire process, but they weren’t especially vigilant.

After watching the dark mountain car drive away, Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion. “They have a certain level of confidence in their strength...”



She looked down at the cans in her hands and suddenly smiled. “Make a guess as to where these people came from?”

Bai Chen recalled their conversation and unhurriedly said, “Although they were trying their best to control their accents, they still revealed some flaws. They likely come from the Ashlands’ northeastern area or often interact with the people there.”

Upon hearing that they came from the northeast and that the team was Ashlandic, Long Yuehong had a guess. “Salvation Army?”

East of First City and the White Knights belonged to the Salvation Army.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “In any case, the canned food seems to come from there. Besides, they are clean and tidy. They are orderly like soldiers, not bandits or hunters.”

The canned food in Jiang Baimian’s hands didn’t have any printing that revealed the production factory, perhaps for smuggling purposes.

Shang Jianyao instantly grew excited. He stretched out his right hand and pressed it to his left chest. Then, he straightened his body and bowed at the other team members. “For all of humanity!”

He looked like he wanted to head over to those people and ‘catch up!’

Jiang Baimian stopped him. “Let’s talk about it when we reach Redstone Collection. I wonder why they came to the Lake of Wrath...”

The Salvation Army was separated from the Lake of Wrath by First City. It made it impossible for their influence to penetrate this far, and they rarely had their people active here.

“To expand their smuggling channels?” Bai Chen guessed.

Jiang Baimian nodded and deliberated before saying, “After First City’s uprising, there was a tendency to divert the internal conflict outward, and the Salvation Army was the first to bear the brunt. It’s normal for them to come up with more plans and save up resources in that case.”

After returning to the dark mountain car, the young man in the driver's seat looked at his older companion beside him and said respectfully, "Commissioner Xu, the most active man in that team should be an Awakened, but we can't be sure if he's at the Mind Corridor level. There might be other Awakened among them."

The older man named Commissioner Xu nodded and said, "The price he paid seems to be a lack of self-control—that's the Last Man domain. However, there are still many prices that can produce such a performance. I can't be sure for the time being."

...

After the team suspected to be from the Salvation Army left the river and headed in the direction Bai Chen pointed out, the Old Task Force members calmly finished their lunch and got into the jeep.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao in the backseat. "You can take a nap and enter that psychological trauma again to see if there's anything abnormal."

Shang Jianyao was already eager to give it a try.

...

Mind Corridor, Room 912.

After Shang Jianyao entered, he imagined that he would appear at the dock—the starting point of this psychological trauma. However, he realized that he had arrived inside the cruise ship's cabin.

"Saving is supported in here?" Shang Jianyao had a look of surprise.

This way, he wouldn't have to return to the starting point every time and start all over again!

He looked around and stroked his chin. "This is another anomaly. It wasn't completely dark when we boarded the cruise ship, but the moon is high in the sky now."

A swath of dark clouds drifted over, blocking out the moon.

With the help of the wall lamps, Shang Jianyao pushed open a door to the side.

This was the room he had entered last time. He wanted to see how the people inside were doing.

The very next second, Shang Jianyao saw the couple that was tussling previously.

Now, one of them was standing by the bed, constantly propping his back up and striking the air. The other was hugging her chest and constantly circling around the door as if she had lost her way in such a cramped space.

#### Chapter 588: Chaos

“Sorry for disturbing.” Shang Jianyao apologized again, retreated, and closed the door. He was ever so polite that he even closed his eyes to indicate that he didn’t mean to intrude.

After gently closing the door, Shang Jianyao walked to the cabin exit, prepared to return to the first level’s deck to see if there was anything abnormal with the people there.

Just as he walked down the aisle, he saw three people standing at the cabin entrance thanks to the faint moonlight that scattered down from the sky and the yellow wall lamps on both sides.

These were the three people who had previously been angered by his taunt and tried to chase after him. Among them, the one with the wrinkled unlit cigarette in his mouth had a blank expression. He held the cigarette in his left hand, but his right index and middle fingers were placed together as he stretched them into his mouth and occasionally sucked.

Of the other two—the one with the black mole at the end of his eyebrows ran back and forth as if he were venting his excess energy. The other took off his clothes and stood in place with a silly smile.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and ultimately couldn’t think of a gesture. He could only make a face at the half-naked person and sincerely say, “There are no masks in front of Monitor!”

After bowing, he circled around the three people who ignored him and cast his gaze elsewhere on the deck.

There were much fewer people gathered here than before it turned dark, but there were still nearly 100 people. They were now either randomly waving their hands, not clearing up after defecating or urinating, staring at an empty spot with ferocious eyes, or doing all kinds of strange actions in a daze.

None of them were normal.

Such a scene was definitely more terrifying for ordinary people or most Awakened than encountering the same number of Heartless because it was terrifyingly bizarre. Unknown situations were mostly more terrifying than known perilous situations!

Shang Jianyao was in no rush to probe. He looked around as if he were searching for someone.

He was looking for the owner of Room 522!

Normally speaking, after entering a psychological trauma, the Awakened was acting as the room owner to a certain extent. Therefore, it was impossible for them to encounter the actual person.

But this was Room 912, and Shang Jianyao was now replacing its owner. From the two almost identical scenes, one could infer that the owner of Room 522 was very likely on this cruise ship back then and was also a person who experienced this bizarre incident.

As long as he could find him and follow him, Shang Jianyao would be able to clear this psychological trauma relatively smoothly. After all, the owner of Room 522 had definitely survived and later entered the Mind Corridor to have a chance of turning this scene into a psychological trauma.

Of course, Shang Jianyao's strategy might not be effective because this cruise ship might bring horror to others more than once—the two room owners might not be in the same batch of 'victims.' Therefore, he was both searching and seeking confirmation.

After watching for a few minutes, Shang Jianyao suddenly clenched his right fist and punched his left palm.

Bam!

He muttered to himself in frustration, “I don’t even know what Room 522’s owner looks like or what his name is...”

This was the Shang Jianyao that acted faster than he could think.

The timid one immediately scoffed. “Sometimes, I find it hard to admit that you’re one of us. Although we don’t know what the owner of Room 522 looks like or what his name is, we can first search for survivors or the ones that are normal in the current situation. There’s a high chance that he’s among them.”

Bam!

Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm again. He didn’t feel ashamed at all and said, “That’s right!

He saw several passengers that were carrying out odd and chaotic actions turn around and cast their gazes over because of his voice. They either had ruthless expressions or wore looks of mania.

“Yo, wanna fight?” asked the Shang Jianyao who liked to joke.

The Shang Jianyao who sought novelty shook his head. “No, I want to experience the feeling of sprinting.”

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “Don’t attack for the time being. Do you still remember the first psychological trauma in Room 522? Without figuring out the situation, the rash use of our abilities might bring about an anomaly.”

In the mind world, even firing with a gun was essentially using one’s ability—Matter Interference. Otherwise, the bullets wouldn’t have any effects.

As they spoke, the few cruise passengers had already run over. They either clenched their fists or drew their pistols in an aggressive manner.

“Run!” Shang Jianyao shouted. Following that, he turned around and ran into the cabin.

He ran to the stairwell and prepared to take a look at the floors above. Suddenly, he saw a few figures coming from the other end of the corridor.

The group consisted of men and women, and their expressions were warped or deranged. Some held daggers, some held bayonets, and some held submachine guns. They quickly passed the stairwell and ran toward Shang Jianyao.

Upon seeing that danger was everywhere, Shang Jianyao no longer hesitated. He quickly ran a few steps and slid down.

The men and women in front suddenly lost their mobility, but their bodies maintained strong inertia.

Thud! Thud!

They fell one after another, looking like they had been swept off their feet by Shang Jianyao.

Legs Immobility!

Shang Jianyao slid past them, propped himself up, and leaped. But in the blink of an eye, he paused as if he was dumbfounded.

Right on the heels of that, Shang Jianyao conjured a small speaker and played music. "Mountain top, let's do it together[1]..."

Shang Jianyao gyrated his body amid the upbeat melody as he danced. However, his actions appeared very clumsy and different from normal.

His expression was one of confusion and derangement.

Before long, Shang Jianyao shook uncontrollably before twitching. Then, his figure gradually faded.

He opened his eyes and saw electric sparks emitting from his body. Jiang Baimian hung her left palm over him with a worried expression.

Shang Jianyao suddenly sat up straight. He rolled down the window with a trembling hand and stuck his head out.

Eurgh! Eurgh!

He vomited all his lunch outside.

After he calmed down, Jiang Baimian asked in concern, “What happened?”

“I suffered relatively heavy psyche damage. My head is spinning,” Shang Jianyao replied calmly. “Fortunately, you reacted in time. Otherwise, I might’ve been trapped in there.”

Just as he said that, he felt another round of vertigo and stuck his head out. Even his bile gushed out this time.

Jiang Baimian had only planned for Shang Jianyao to take a short nap when she instructed him to take a nap and explore the psychological trauma again.

This wasn’t an act of mistreatment but a plan formulated for an accident. If Shang Jianyao didn’t encounter anything in the cruise ship trauma in 15 minutes, forcefully shaking him awake wouldn’t cause any mental damage after he left Room 912. This inference was based on their previous experience and the uniqueness of this psychological trauma.

If Shang Jianyao really encountered an accident and was in danger, making it impossible for him to escape independently, then 15 minutes wasn’t enough to completely traumatize him and turn him into a vegetable in reality. Therefore, forcefully shaking him awake was equivalent to replacing the more serious consequences with a short period of controlled mental damage.

As a result, Jiang Baimian immediately got Long Yuehong—who was in the backseat—to shake Shang Jianyao with his mechanical arm as soon as the 15 minutes were up.

After realizing that the shaking wasn’t effective, she made an executive decision by electrocuting him.

After vomiting, the usually energetic Shang Jianyao leaned back weakly and slowly said, “I was directly on the cruise ship when I entered...”

He took a break from time to time as he slowly described his encounter. Finally, he said, “From the looks of it, using one’s abilities in that chaotic state which envelops the cruise ship will infect oneself and turn one into a ‘patient’ with consciousness obstructions and chaotic behavior.”

At this point, Shang Jianyao sniffed and laughed. “My meat smells pretty good when roasted...”

Before he could finish speaking, he stuck his head out again and vomited.

“You were asking for it...” Jiang Baimian curled her lips and deliberated before saying, “Could it be that you can’t use your abilities the entire time?”

“Or can it only be used when everyone is normal?” Bai Chen—who was driving—interrupted.

“It’s normal during the day and chaotic at night?” Long Yuehong guessed.

Shang Jianyao weakly replied, “I don’t know. I’ll try again in the future. The best point of breakthrough is to find the owner of Room 522.”

“Yes, it’s a good thing that you can forcefully withdraw from this room without suffering serious mental damage. You can treat it as a way out.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and sighed with emotion. “On the other hand, I don’t see any hope with my island. Comparisons only lead to frustration!”

“Nothing coming to you yet?” Bai Chen asked.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged her words. “Not really. I’ve been trying out a new direction recently. I mainly used psychological cues and other methods to prepare the corresponding conditions in advance before facing the coma. Furthermore, when I’m awake, I often force myself to recall the fear I felt during my two unconscious bouts and face the trauma in my heart. However, it’s useless, and this is a little contradictory to the victory over a psychological trauma that I know. I don’t think I’m that afraid anymore.



“I plan on attacking it with my abilities—this is the inspiration Shang Jianyao gave me. Back in the Sea of Origins, he used his abilities and the price he paid to effectively match his courage and defeat his fear.”

“What was the result?” Long Yuehong asked curiously.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “I’ve only tried twice. It has some effect, but I’m still far from success.”

She further explained, “I’m mainly using Stimulation Disorder to change my reaction to the fainting stimulus. I can now last more than ten seconds before I faint after setting foot onto the island.”

Without waiting for Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Shang Jianyao to give suggestions, Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “My next plan is to condense the mental fortifications I previously made in those ten seconds to see if there are any positive changes after I’m unconscious.”

Shang Jianyao suddenly perked up. “Just do it!”

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him. “How is it? How long do you think it will take for you to recover?”

“At least a week.” Shang Jianyao wasn’t too sure.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “I’ll take a nap then.”

With that said, she covered her mouth as if she wanted to yawn.

#### Chapter 589: Ideas Are Very Important

Jiang Baimian surfaced from the shimmering water surface in the Sea of Origins and once again saw the island that had stopped her in her tracks.

This island was like a mountain submerged in the sea. Rocks protruded from its surface, mixed with holes that led deep down.

Over the past few days, Jiang Baimian would faint irresistibly as long as she stepped foot on the island—even before she entered the caves.

After staring at it for a moment, she began to recall her two unconscious encounters in reality. She constantly told herself that most of the corresponding fear she felt during her Awakening experiment had been eliminated.

She then conjured an item—it was a doll wearing grayish-green camouflage. Its face was different from normal. It had no facial features, and a mirror was embedded in it, reflecting Jiang Baimian's face.

Jiang Baimian focused on the doll in her hand, and her eyes suddenly lit up like the stars in the night sky or shattered mirrors illuminated by moonlight.

She used Stimulation Disorder on herself the next second and modified her fainting reaction to the stimulus.

This only lasted for a minute at present, but it was enough for Jiang Baimian—who would fall unconscious for up to ten seconds after she stepped foot on the island.

After her attempt to use a mirror to cast the two abilities—Stimulation Disorder and Item Agnosia—on herself failed, Jiang Baimian tried many different methods but still failed. She later considered the fact that her domain was called Shattered Mirror and included the mirror back into the plan.

She had obtained inspiration from the True Self Church's idols and teachings. She specially created a doll that resembled her and used a mirror to act as its face. Therefore, Jiang Bohemian would have the strange feeling of seeing her true self every time she took out this doll and looked at its head.

She finally completed the step of influencing herself with Stimulation Disorder and Item Agnosia by relying on this feeling. She then pushed open the door that led to the Sea of Origins from Star Cluster Hall.

This also made her increasingly certain of the effects of the psychological cues while digging into her Awakening abilities. She believed that she would no longer rely on the specially-created doll through training, allowing her to directly use a mirror to affect herself.

There was a high chance that she wouldn't even need mirrors after she entered the Mind Corridor.

Once she completed the ‘modification,’ Jiang Baimian didn’t delay any further and swam toward the island like a fish.

She reached out with her left hand, propped herself up, and silently leaped out of the water. Following this, Jiang Baimian quickly sat down in front of a cracked, greenish-black boulder and conjured a laptop.

She wanted to reenact the scene from the Awakening experiment.

A song soon echoed. “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]...”

Jiang Baimian listened to the familiar melody and lyrics, leaned back against the greenish-black boulder, composed herself, and waited for her coma to arrive.

Darkness occupied her vision before long, and silence ruled her mind.

She unconsciously fainted.

In the boundless darkness, specks of light surfaced in the distance, dyeing the area red and awakening Jiang Baimian’s consciousness.

Her eyelashes twitched a few times before she slowly opened her eyes.

Unlike the previous few times, she didn’t see the company’s ceiling or the top of the jeep after she woke up. She also didn’t see a blue sky dotted with white clouds or a starry night sky.

In front of her was a sky above the Sea of Origins that was shrouded in thick fog.

It worked... Jiang Baimian was delighted. She immediately straightened her back and remained sitting in her spot.

As she was previously unconscious and no longer had the consciousness to maintain the items she had conjured, the laptop had long disappeared. The song had also stopped at some point in time.

Jiang Baimian laughed self-deprecatingly. “Listening to music is still useful after all. It is deserving of Hey’s dedication to it...”

To her, the song’s role was more of a form of motivation—a form of psychological cue—than to wake her up directly.

Jiang Baimian didn’t return to the real world immediately. She stayed and checked the area to observe the island’s complete appearance.

“Why are there so many caves?” she muttered to herself in confusion. She then had a guess: “It represents the Seven-Aperture Heart from the Investiture of the Gods?”

Just as she said that, she mocked herself. “Isn’t this a little narcissistic? Uh... I can’t say that I’m petty, right? Pui! This island’s appearance is definitely a manifestation of my inner fears. It’s a form of distortion!”

After muttering for a while, Jiang Baimian returned to the real world.

Upon seeing her open her eyes, Bai Chen casually asked, “How was it? Any obvious effects?”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “It worked.”

“That fast?” Long Yuehong—who was in the back row—exclaimed.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

The weak and dizzy Shang Jianyao still insisted on clapping.

Jiang Baimian snorted. “You call that fast? I’ve been on this island for almost three months!”

“I mean, you succeeded so quickly just after a change of plan,” Long Yuehong quickly explained.

Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion. “Therefore, it’s sometimes purely a problem with the train of thought. If we change our train of thought, a difficulty might not be difficult.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao strongly agreed.

After ‘educating’ her team members, Jiang Baimian looked at Long Yuehong and smiled charmingly. “I can’t wait to experiment to see how much stronger my abilities have become.”

Long Yuehong hesitated and said, “Me?”

“Do you think Hey is up to it? He’s half-dead now.” Jiang Baimian explained methodically and patiently. “We can’t have Little White do it, right? She has to drive.”

Bai Chen immediately interrupted. “It’s about time to switch to Little Red.”

“Let me do it.” Long Yuehong instantly made a decision. “It’s not a big deal anyway.”

Bai Chen pursed her lips and didn’t say anything in the end.

She found a relatively open area and got the jeep to stop.

In the next few minutes, Jiang Baimian tested the changes in her three abilities. The final outcome was: originally, Spatial Hallucination could only affect one person at a maximum range of 15 meters. Now, it could affect four people at a range of 20 meters. The ability was the type that had its effects disappear once stopped.

Item Agnosia’s range had increased from 10 meters to 13 meters, but it could still only affect one target. Furthermore, the target would only misrecognize one item at a time. For example, Long

Yuehong only treated the canned food Jiang Baimian threw as a bomb and subconsciously rolled to dodge. It lasted for a minute at present.

Stimulation Disorder was still the modification of one related reaction to a target at a time. For example, Long Yuehong chose to close his eyes when he heard the sound. The duration increased from one minute to one minute and 20 seconds. The maximum range was ten meters.

Overall, Jiang Baimian's abilities had improved by about 30% after clearing this island of fear. There were also slight differences between her abilities.

...

The soil gradually became moist when they came close to the Lake of Wrath, and the vegetation became increasingly lush.

After every winter, the paths that were opened up had to be 'developed' again.

The Old Task Force suffered a round of attacks—a mutated atavist bird. It had a large body and astonishing flying speed. It knew how to pick up rocks and throw them at people like a helicopter with relatively unadvanced equipment.

However, there was no need for Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao to do anything. The team also didn't use the exoskeleton or bionic artificial intelligence armor. Long Yuehong only needed to play bait for a short while before Bai Chen found an opportunity to shoot it in the head.

After her genetic modification, her marksmanship had improved to a terrifying level.

"How do we eat this?" Shang Jianyao stood beside the gigantic avian monster and raised a question that left one deep in thought.

Once on shore, one prays no more; he looked forward to some game meat not long after his dizziness subsided.

Before Jiang Baimian could answer, Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. "I've decided—stew it entirely in soup!"

“Where are you going to find such a large pot?” Jiang Baimian scoffed. “It might not even fit a grill.”

As they discussed, Bai Chen suddenly said, “Two cars are approaching.”

The terrain was open, so she could discover them a few hundred meters away.

Shang Jianyao was immediately ‘terrified.’ “Could this be their pet?”

Jiang Baimian couldn’t be bothered with him and said to Bai Chen, “If they insist on entering a 150-meter range, ensure some distance between us by issuing a warning with a warning shot.”

The reason she limited it to 150 meters was that Shang Jianyao could exert his influence once they were in that range.

The two cars that had come had been modified to the point that it was almost unknown what kind of cars they were originally. Machine guns were mounted atop them, and flags fluttered on both sides. Although their frames were gray, they were spray-painted with pictures of blood, organs, and half-naked humans.

This reminded Long Yuehong of the modified vehicles and motorcycles in the North Shore Mountains’ advance base camp. They had unique, varied personalities—a sight to behold.

In an extremely oppressive environment, humans definitely needed a way to vent their feelings.

The two cars also seemed to discover their presence and began to turn to the side, prepared to circle around the Old Task Force.

At this moment, someone in the car ahead shouted in surprise, “Bai Chen?”

Chapter 590: Chu Ge

“Bai Chen?”

Long Yuehong was almost stunned when he heard the loud shout. Little White’s acquaintance?

Bai Chen—who had originally given up on firing a warning shot because the other party was prepared to circle around her team—frowned slightly as if she were recalling who was opposite her.

“It’s me!” A head popped out from the modified passenger seat.

He was an Ashlandic man in his thirties. His beard was shaved rather cleanly, a rarity among Ruin Hunters.

The next second, he seemed to realize that it was very easy for others to snipe him if he rashly stuck his head out like this. Hence, he quickly retracted his head.

“He has a comical bearing...” Shang Jianyao evaluated truthfully. He originally wanted to use words he had learned from the Old World’s entertainment, but he still wasn’t in the right state of mind. He couldn’t be bothered to expend brainpower on this.

With this ‘fleeting glance,’ Bai Chen recognized the person. She turned her head to glance at Long Yuehong and Jiang Baimian and simply explained, “A Ruin Hunter named Chu Ge who teamed up with me to explore a few city ruins in the past.”

“Since you are acquaintances, let them come over and catch up.” Jiang Baimian didn’t mind.

Bai Chen nodded slightly and waved her Merfolk biological prosthetic limb at Chu Ge’s car.

She had replaced her left arm.

As the two cars slowly approached, Long Yuehong opened his mouth as if he had something to ask.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and smiled at Bai Chen. “Why didn’t you continue on as a team?”



Bai Chen calmly replied, “He’s an ambitious person, and he wanted to try his luck with the factions east of First City. I had my own smart bot back then and didn’t plan on leaving the place I was familiar with. He then left with a few companions.”

Jiang Baimian looked at the two cars. “He’s doing pretty well.”

Ordinary Ruin Hunters couldn’t get their hands on heavy machine guns, much less two.

The modifications to the two vehicles made them more combat suitable. Without resources and connections, it was impossible to manage such modifications.

As Jiang Baimian spoke, the two cars with flamboyant banners flying on the sides widened the distance between each other.

The one in front accelerated and approached the Old Task Force, while the one behind slowed down and stopped relatively far away.

Although their banners were ostentatious, it was obvious that they weren’t religious in nature, nor did they belong to any faction. They looked more like haphazardly pieced together textiles from the Old World. For example, gorgeous scarves or exaggerated carpets from some brands.

These weaved together, causing the four flags to look different. They also reflected a wanton and ostentatious bearing that was at odds with the oppressive atmosphere.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped.

Artists always admired artists.

This clapping stunned Chu Ge, who had pushed open the door and alighted. He didn’t know how to react.

He had a square head and couldn’t be considered good-looking, but he gave off a friendly feeling.

Chu Ge composed himself, sized up Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and the grayish-green jeep, and smiled at Bai Chen. “You’re doing pretty well now.”

As he spoke, two people—a man and a woman—alighted from the backseat of the modified vehicle.

The man was about the same height as Jiang Baimian. He wore a floral shirt and a golden necklace, and he exuded similar vibes as the flags attached to the sides of the car.

The woman was less than 1.7 meters tall. Although it was early spring and the weather was very cool, she was already wearing shorts and boots.

She had applied eyeshadow using expired makeup that she found in some city ruin. She also wore blush and looked like she had been through a tussle. Her facial features were rather beautiful.

The woman sized up Bai Chen warily before her gaze swept past Jiang Baimian. She was stunned for a few seconds.

“You’re doing pretty well too,” Bai Chen replied. She had no intention of introducing Jiang Baimian and the others.

Chu Ge didn’t mind and continued smiling amiably. “This is Shao Liang, and this is Mu Chi. Why are you here? Didn’t you say that you aren’t leaving the Blackmarsh Wilderness or the area around First City?”

Bai Chen replied concisely, “Times are different.”

Before Chu Ge spoke, Jiang Baimian added for Bai Chen, “When leaving a familiar environment and heading to a foreign place, one is either forced by the circumstances or had some advance understanding, made connections, and was sufficiently prepared. Which one do you think it is?”

The smoky-eyed Mu Chi was just about to speak when Chu Ge smiled and replied, “From the looks of it, it’s definitely the latter.”

“Who said so?” the honest Shang Jianyao retorted weakly. “Do I look fine?”

“...” Chu Ge was momentarily speechless.

Shao Liang—who was wearing a floral shirt and a golden necklace—had the bearing of an artist. Upon seeing this, he played with a dagger and said, “Sometimes, I’m in a worse state than you, but this can’t prove anything.”

“You like staying up too?” Shang Jianyao didn’t realize that the other party’s words were slightly barbed.

Shao Liang raised his eyebrows and smiled. “Of course. The night is hot and warm; it’s the time when we witness the trust between people. It can also be calm, empty, and filled with inspiration.”

This is the first time I’ve heard someone describe such a matter as mutual trust between adults... This is more excessive than the Church of Paragon Desire and the Church of Spiritual Transcendence... Long Yuehong criticized inwardly.

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to lead the conversation astray, Bai Chen asked Chu Ge, “Didn’t you say that you were going east of First City? Where are the others?”

The Lake of Wrath was south of First City, separated by the vast Iron Mountain.

‘The others’ referred to the Ruin Hunters who had followed Chu Ge to the factions east of First City in search of opportunities.

Chu Ge’s smile didn’t change, and he still looked rather cheerful. “Some of them settled down and became employees of the Orange Company. Some got themselves a piece of unpolluted land and organized a group of people to establish armed farms. As for me, I came to the Lake of Wrath for something.”

Bai Chen didn’t probe, but Chu Ge continued, “We’re going to Redstone Collection to participate in a meet.”

A meet? Long Yuehong was surprised.

Apart from large factions, it was rare to have meets elsewhere.

With order limited to large settlements, who could organize a meet with many participants from afar?

“Meet?” Jiang Baimian didn’t hide her curiosity.

Chu Ge smiled and said, “A parish assembly.”

Uh... Long Yuehong didn’t understand.

Jiang Baimian had seen similar terms in some of the Old World’s academic books. She guessed that it was a meeting used by religions to resolve religious disputes and important matters. It was also called an ecumenical council or general council.

But this fellow isn’t vigilant at all. He doesn’t seem to be from the Vigilance Church... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

Redstone Collection was the Vigilance Church’s territory!

Bai Chen didn’t ask what the parish assembly was. She only reminded them on account of being acquaintances. “If you are heading for Redstone Collection, you’re currently going in the wrong direction.”

“We know.” Chu Ge smiled and said, “We just want to rendezvous with someone elsewhere first. What about you guys? Why are you here?”

“We are making a trip to Iron Mountain City’s ruins.” Jiang Baimian didn’t want to make things difficult for Bai Chen.

“Iron Mountain City’s ruins? You can just head southeast from Weed City. Why circle to the Lake of Wrath?” Chu Ge looked at Bai Chen in confusion. From his point of view, it was impossible for this person not to know the route, even if she had never really taken it.

Iron Mountain City's ruins were one of the most famous ruins in the Chaotic Era. Although it had fallen into the doldrums for nearly 20 years, Ruin Hunters were still very familiar with its relevant situation.

Bai Chen nodded. "We are heading to Redstone Collection first to meet up with a teammate."

"I see..." Chu Ge sighed thoughtfully. "Your teammate must be very strong..."

From Bai Chen's words, he could tell that the other party's friend had come to rendezvous with them alone.

Those who dared to travel the Ashlands alone were either in dire straits with no other way out or had considerable confidence in their strength.

"That's right." Shang Jianyao firmly believed in Genova's strength.

Chu Ge and the others immediately felt choked.

Fortunately, Chu Ge was a social expert and quickly changed the topic by looking at Bai Chen and asking, "Since you guys are also going to Redstone Collection, let's catch up later? Oh right, are you a Senior Hunter now?"

Bai Chen shook her head. "Just a little short."

This was because the Old Task Force wasn't that enthusiastic about completing the Hunter's Guild's commissions.

For example, they had never played the roles of Ruin Hunters seriously after completing the white wolf mission in First City. Therefore, Bai Chen was still an Intermediate Hunter.

Chu Ge politely didn't ask any further. After exchanging a few pleasantries, he pointed in a certain direction. "We are in a rush. Talk to you later."

"Goodbye." Bai Chen waved her hand swiftly.

After watching Chu Ge and the others drive away, Jiang Baimian suddenly looked at Bai Chen and chuckled. “Little White, did he pursue you in the past?”

Eh? Long Yuehong immediately focused.

Bai Chen nodded. “When Ruin Hunters form teams to complete missions, single women have no lack of suitors.”

“Especially those who look good,” Jiang Baimian added with a smile.

Bai Chen continued, “However, such pursuits are mainly to have a few romps. If you really encounter danger or if the resulting gains are sufficiently moving, most of them will abandon you without hesitation or stab you in the back. Similarly, male Ruin Hunters don’t expect any woman they bed to value them more than supplies or that they won’t shoot you in the back. Only a few who withstand the test of time eventually become companions.”

Jiang Baimian laughed and mimicked some men she had met in the past. She reached out to hug Bai Chen’s shoulder. “Therefore, we are companions!”

Bai Chen struggled, but only for a moment.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

As Shang Jianyao clapped, Long Yuehong secretly heaved a sigh of relief.

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The Old Task Force arrived at Iron Mountain when it was almost evening the next day. There was an entrance here that led to the Underground Ark.

As the honorary presidents of the Underground Ark Management Committee, they naturally had to take a look underground.