

## Ad Infinitum 601

### Chapter 601: Restored Data

The magazine in Bai Chen's hand no longer had a cover or several pages in front, and it looked tattered. She only managed to see the title from the page header.

"The periodical that Hey discovered in that psychological trauma." Bai Chen handed the magazine to Jiang Baimian.

This magazine used rather high-quality paper—it didn't turn completely yellow and brittle with age even after decades. It still felt pliable and smooth.

"Lin Sui?" Jiang Baimian didn't hide her surprise. She took the Renwu magazine and quickly browsed through the remaining interview snippet.

The young woman—who was deemed a genius scientist—mainly talked about her outlook on life, worldview, and values. She didn't mention what she was studying or where she worked.

After flipping through it simply, Jiang Baimian found her a very normal Old World scientist. There was nothing worth paying attention to.

It had to be known that before the Old World was destroyed, the big countries had advanced technology. Even if there weren't 100 who could be labeled young scientists, there were definitely more than 50. Not everyone would join the nine research institutes' projects.

Jiang Baimian composed herself and decided to read the interview from beginning to end to make confirmation. In any case, only half of this interview was left. All the words added up didn't exceed 6,000 characters.

As she read each word, Jiang Baimian's expression gradually turned serious. She realized that Lin Sui had mentioned something when discussing her worldview: "Many sci-fi works have stories about uploading human consciousness and memories to computers and virtual networks. I think of it as a prophecy..."

“Future humans might exist in the form of consciousness lifeforms. As long as we prepare a backup copy, it won’t be the end of everything even in death. However, this requires us to establish the philosophy revolving around this matter and resolve the question of what makes me me. From the beginning, we should embrace the ethical conflict of the main body and the backup copy...”

These words that seemed to be fantasizing about the future made a term flash across Jiang Baimian’s mind: The Eternal project!

Could it be that Lin Sui is one of the creators of the Eternal project and an important scientist of a particular research institute? Jiang Baimian held in her excitement and finished reading the interview sentence by sentence before pointing out the corresponding content to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen.

Long Yuehong—who had a deep impression of mechanical monks and the Eternals—easily understood what his team leader wanted to express. He sighed regretfully. “This magazine is seriously damaged. There’s no character introduction; otherwise, we would know where Lin Sui is from, what school she attended, and what organization she worked at...”

The information Long Yuehong mentioned might or might not be useful, but it might also involve very key secrets. It made one’s blood run cold and one’s body be covered in sweat just by reading it. For example, what if Lin Sui was an Iron Mountain City local and had immediate family working in the Second Food Company? Or what if she had once studied at Icefield’s Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School?

If she—who was suspected to be one of the Eternal project’s leads—was related to a Buddhist Holy Land, the matter would be truly intriguing.

Most Eternals had currently converted to Buddhism and believed in Subhuti or Master Zhuang. They also called the research base back then the Glazed Pure Lands!

“First, we can eliminate the possibility that Lin Sui is the vegetable.” The person who spoke was Shang Jianyao, who had woken up at some point in time.

This conclusion was obvious because this periodical was released a week before the Old World was destroyed.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “She doesn’t seem to have anything to do with Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong from the steelworks factory ruins. I’m wondering if there are any clues regarding her in the Monks Conclave’s Glazed Pure Lands...”

Shang Jianyao was also excited. “If there’s a chance in the future, I can attempt to join the Monks Conclave and sneak into their Glazed Pure Lands.”

He seemed to want Zen Master Redemption to live up to his name.

After conversing for a while, the Old Task Force members continued flipping through other books, newspapers, and magazines.

It was almost evening when they completed the screening without finding any more clues.

When leaving the camp on the cliff, Shang Jianyao perked up and forced himself to use words to remove the Thought Guidance effect from before, preventing the mountain monsters here from being too enthusiastic and hospitable—which could attract people with ill intentions.

All the Old Task Force members had to admit that vigilance was the best choice in such a place and environment.

...

After returning to the Ark, Bai Chen and the others happily realized that Genava had already arrived.

The smart bot was cleaning himself from the dirt he had accrued during his journey here.

“You didn’t drive?” Long Yuehong was rather surprised.

Genava replied in a slightly synthetic male voice, “Driving an electric vehicle requires both me and the car to consume electricity. It’s better to carry a solar charger on my own. This way, I can conserve energy while still being fast enough. If I drive a gasoline vehicle, I’ll have to take a large detour and spend more time to ensure the gasoline supply.”

After comprehensive and careful calculations, he concluded that ‘walking’ was the most energy-conserving method.

“Old Ge, you can’t do that!” Shang Jianyao felt pained.

“Why?” Geneva expressed his confusion.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “As a human, you have to learn how to slack off and enjoy yourself. This is the motivation for technological advancement. I know you don’t feel any exhaustion, but you have to pretend. Otherwise, you won’t fit in!”

Bang!?

Geneva clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “I understand! A flaw can make you more human-like.”

“You are a human to begin with,” Bai Chen interrupted.

In order to prevent Geneva from going astray, Jiang Baimian decided to interrupt Shang Jianyao’s useless train of thought. She cleared her throat and asked, “Old Ge, is the equipment ready?”

“I can restore and extract data now.” Geneva pointed at the tactical backpack behind him.

Jiang Baimian then took out the two phones from the steelworks factory ruins and handed them to Geneva. “Let’s begin now.”

Geneva immediately got to work.

The next morning, he held the printed document and announced his harvest. “These two phones began storing data two years before the Old World was destroyed, but it had some old imported photos. Only a few of those photos have been restored, and they are all photos of a family of three. Only a few repeated words were extracted from the rest of the data. They are: Renhui Hospital, Harbour Homeland, rent, progress...”

Renhui Hospital... The place where Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong's vegetable son participated in the experimental treatment as a volunteer?

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully asked, "Any mention of the exact location? There are hospitals and residential estates with similar names in many cities in the Old World."

"It cannot be recovered due to the physical damage." Genova expressed his regret.

Bai Chen grasped another detail. "Did the two phones start storing data at the same time?"

"Yes." Genova gave an affirmative answer.

"Why did Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong change their phones so suddenly?" What Bai Chen wanted to express was whether there was a hidden reason behind this.

This might be a clue.

"Isn't it normal to buy yourself a gift when buying a gift for your spouse?" Shang Jianyao—who valued relationships—felt that it was understandable.

The honest him then retorted, "They clearly received a large sum of compensation after their son became a vegetable from the accident."

"The timing doesn't match. There was at least a year's difference." Long Yuehong shook his head in denial.

Although they had no way of determining when Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong's son had an accident, resulting in him becoming a vegetable, they determined that it had to be three or more years before the Old World's destruction from the terms 'a few years.' Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong had switched phones two years before the Old World was destroyed.

The honest Shang Jianyao gave his reason. "In the first two years after receiving the compensation, they didn't dare to spend money. They scrimped and saved, spending all their money on their son's recovery. It was only when they realized that he really couldn't wake up and had no choice but to attempt the free experimental treatment that they recalled that their phones were almost completely broken."

This was a very reasonable explanation, so reasonable that Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen fell silent.

Genava looked around and decided to stay silent.

After a while, Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled. “If Renhui Hospital is the place where Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong’s son underwent experimental treatment, there’s a high chance that Harbour Homeland is their rented estate. This can be indirectly confirmed from the term ‘rent.’ Think about it. Your son—uh, you don’t have a son yet. In short, after a family member is sent to a hospital for experimental treatment, will you rent a room nearby and visit them regularly?”

“Yes!” Although he didn’t have a son, Genava had a daughter, so he replied firmly.

Long Yuehong imagined such a scene. “But why did Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong return to the steelworks factory?”

Just as he said that, Long Yuehong thought of an explanation. After discovering that the experimental treatment didn’t seem effective, their hopes were completely dashed...

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “The Old World was destroyed shortly before the Lunar New Year. It’s very normal for Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong to return to their hometowns to visit their relatives.”

“Indeed.” As an Ashlandic, Long Yuehong understood very well.

After chatting for a while, Jiang Baimian instructed Genava to put away the two phones and said, “Since there’s no information regarding Iron Mountain City Ruin here, we won’t bother about it for the time being. Now, let’s visit the team suspected to be from the Salvation Army.”

“Why?” Long Yuehong asked curiously.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “An investigation of the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the Five Great Holy Lands of Buddhism isn’t a privilege exclusive to a team or faction. Why can’t we chat with them and exchange information? This won’t bring any harm to the company anyways.”

Jiang Baimian further explained upon seeing Long Yuehong’s and Bai Chen’s confusion. “This is just like the Old World’s theoretical physics research—the results belong to all of humanity.. The

value underlying it can't compare to the communication, discussion, debate, and competition between each other."

#### Chapter 602: Meeting of the Strong

Long Yuehong weakly raised his steel right hand after hearing Jiang Baimian's explanation. "Team Leader, I mean: how do you know that those people are investigating the reason for the Old World's destruction and the Five Great Holy Lands of Buddhism?"

Weren't they just asking the mountain monsters for information on Iron Mountain City's ruins?

Jiang Baimian grunted. "All the valuable items in Iron Mountain City's ruins have long been emptied. There probably aren't many secrets left after so many years. The only thing worth the Salvation Army sending people over to investigate is probably the Second Food Company, a Buddhist holy land."

As one of the city ruins that had been 'excavated' early on, the Iron Mountain City ruins had been plundered over and over again. Apart from the 'anomaly' that was buried deep as well as the Second Food Company which involved one of the two Kalendarium, there was no reason for it to fool batch after batch of large faction members and Ruin Hunters.

"One most likely has the goal of figuring out very high-level secrets that aren't solely targeting Buddhism when investigating Buddhism's Holy Lands." Jiang Baimian left an out for herself. "This is the most logical inference, but there might also be exceptions. When the time comes, we can probe those people after making contact with them."

Long Yuehong remained a little worried. "Team Leader, aren't you afraid that they are secretly working with the Eighth Research Institute despite being members of the Salvation Army? If we share our gains obtained from investigating the cause of the Old World's destruction and the Heartless disease's origins with them, we might attract a fatal disaster."

Even if that group of people wasn't Eighth Research Institute commissioners, there was a possibility of the Old Task Force's information being leaked. This would make the Eighth Research Institute value them more and send more powerhouses to wipe out the clues.

Jiang Baimian laughed. "Don't worry. I'm not a fool who will have a heart-to-heart talk with them the moment I meet them. This naturally has to be probed slowly. I'll decide what I can and can't say according to the situation. Let's go; time to set off!"

She waved her hand and led the way out of basement two's reception room before turning in a certain direction.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong hesitated and didn't speak. A smile appeared on Shang Jianyao's face.

The honest Genava quickly shouted, "That's the wrong way. The elevator is over there!"

"..." Jiang Baimian wore the elegant monk mask in passing.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao came to Genava's side and 'whispered' to him, "Big White has become an Awakened, and the price she paid is being directionally challenged."

Do you have to be so loud??Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth.

After Shang Jianyao said that, he immediately put on the monkey mask with the furry face and protruding mouth and fled toward the elevator.

He had mostly recovered from the mental damage, and he was in especially good shape in the morning.

Jiang Baimian calmed down and followed behind. She had slowly realized a problem over the past two days: one or several of Shang Jianyaos had a strong interest in acting. After returning to Redstone Collection and taking out his monkey mask again, they became increasingly 'lively...'

"The price of being directionally challenged corresponds to the Shattered Mirror domain?" Genava couldn't keep up with Shang Jianyao's 'rhythm,' so he could only discuss it with Long Yuehong.

Don't say it out once you know it. Didn't you notice that Big White is speeding up??Long Yuehong muttered inwardly, expecting better from Genava. Worried that Genava would harp on the topic, he helplessly nodded in the most perfunctory manner and simply replied, "Yes."

Bai Chen walked beside the two of them and smiled at some point in time.



The five Old Task Force members had just taken the elevator and arrived at the cathedral hall when they saw Chu Ge and a few others complete their bowing to Eidolon Nun. They planned on finding the Vigilance Church members hiding and befriending them.

“Bai Chen!” Chu Ge spotted their group. He enthusiastically approached with a fast cadence.

Mu Chi with the thick makeup and the man in the floral shirt, Shao Liang, followed closely behind.

After arriving in front of Bai Chen, Chu Ge looked around and suddenly fixed his gaze on Genava.

This smart bot—who was 1.9 meters tall and had silver-black metal bones—wore a dark-green military uniform. His eyes emitted a red glow as he followed the local customs and wore a horse mask on his face.

Chu Ge was surprised. The first thought that flashed through his mind was: “Smart bots can also grow and increase in size?”

He remembered that Bai Chen’s previous smart bot was only about her height. Furthermore, its ‘skin color’ wasn’t silver-black.

An instant later, Chu Ge’s common sense told him that this was impossible. He began to suspect that the reason Bai Chen had a new companion and was willing to leave the area she was familiar with was that her original robot had been destroyed.

It could still be repaired if it was damaged.

“Good morning.” Bai Chen nodded at Chu Ge politely but distantly.

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong’s heart rate returned to normal.

The unmasked Chu Ge laughed and said in a familiar manner, “I never expected you guys to be the honorary presidents of the Underground Ark Management Committee.”

At this moment, the Friendly Hand archbishop, Delro, walked to their side.

Upon seeing him, Shang Jianyao suddenly took two steps forward. His gaze shot out from behind the monkey mask and met Delro's gaze.

Spark!

The wall lamps in the cathedral hall lit up at the same time before quickly dimming.

Sizzle! Sizzle!

The wall lamps flickered, and everyone heard the sound of clear electric currents.

The Vigilance Church members hiding in the dark subconsciously shrank deeper to give themselves a deeper sense of security.

Mind Corridor-level Awakened...? Chu Ge, Mu Chi, Shao Liang, and the others felt a chill run down their spines. Their expressions changed slightly as they instinctively took two steps back.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian walked to Shang Jianyao's side and asked in a slightly deep voice, "What happened?"

"I didn't do anything." Delro spread his hands, turned around, and faced his back to the Old Task Force.

Shang Jianyao nodded in agreement and smiled. "Shouldn't a similar scene happen when two powerhouses meet to build up the mood?"

Did you just orchestrate and act out that scene yourself? Great, you aren't allowed to spend more than two hours a day watching the Old World's entertainment in the future! Extract the essence and discard the dross! Jiang Baimian felt pained.

What kind of Old World entertainment was it? Look at how 'poisoned' this fellow has become.

"How do you know I'm a powerhouse?" Delro turned around and smiled kindly.

“Your hair tells me that.” The sincerity on Shang Jianyao’s face was obscured by the mask.

“Huh?” Delro stroked the little of his remaining hair in confusion.

Jiang Baimian silently took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. After that, she took a step forward and shielded half of Shang Jianyao behind her. “He means that Chu Ge and the others’ attitude toward you and your age means that you have a high status, so you definitely are very strong.”

“You have very sharp observation skills.” Delro resolved his doubts. He didn’t hide his curiosity and kindly asked, “I heard that you overthrew the rule of the Underground Ark’s former owner, DiMarco?”

“Yes.” Everyone in Redstone Collection knew this, so Jiang Baimian didn’t think there was any need to hide.

“You don’t seem to be around most of the time, nor did you take away a large number of resources from here. Why did you do it?” Delro asked again.

Shang Jianyao raised his right hand and pressed it to his left chest. He replied loudly and seriously, “To save all of humanity!”

Delro and the others were clearly stunned.

A few seconds later, Chu Ge came to a realization. “Are you guys from the Salvation Army? Apart from those elders, there aren’t many Salvation Army members who still insist on this ideal.”

“No.” In order not to let Shang Jianyao spout nonsense and mislead her former friend, Bai Chen took the initiative to deny it.

Jiang Baimian flipped her wrist and looked at her watch. “Sorry, we still have something on. Talk to you later.”

“Alright.” The Friendly Hand parishioners were always friendly.

After watching the Old Task Force walk out of the Vigilance Cathedral and get into the jeep they had driven here from Iron Mountain's entrance last night, Chu Ge sighed with emotion. "They are indeed very strong. There really is a Mind Corridor-level Awakened."

Delro nodded slightly. "Besides, he's not the leader of this team."

The tall woman was clearly the leader.

Upon hearing this, Chu Ge, Mu Chi, and Shao Liang fell silent again.

...

After nearly a year, the Old Task Force entered Redstone Collection again. Just like before, there were no obvious changes. Most of the personnel were sufficiently vigilant and hid themselves to ensure their safety.

The only exceptions were the local Hunter's Guild and the Visa Trading Company that belonged to the Ark.

"Why didn't we encounter Viel?" Long Yuehong casually asked.

Jiang Baimian smiled and replied, "After that matter, he probably doesn't want us to appear in front of him again."

Since Viel couldn't stop the Old Task Force from going anywhere, he could only avoid them.

As they spoke, Jiang Baimian and the others arrived at the Public Security Department at the bottom of the underground mall.

The current town guard captain and sheriff, Tan Jie, sat behind his desk and looked at this group of acquaintances expressionlessly.

He mimicked Han Wanghuo and didn't wear a mask to gain the trust of all the townsfolk.

“I heard that you are entertaining a group of Salvation Army personnel?” The honest Shang Jianyao was ever so direct.

The black-haired, brown-eyed, and baby-faced Tan Jie replied simply, “They want to buy a batch of military exoskeletons from United Industries. They also plan on making a trip to Iron Mountain City’s ruins.”

### Chapter 603: The Same Ideal

Tan Jie didn’t hide the truth about the guests because Redstone Collection’s current arms business was mainly in the hands of the Red Rivers and the Underground Ark. If he wanted to help the Salvation Army gather a batch of military exoskeletons, he had to do so through Mrs. Theresa or the Ark Management Committee.

Not only were October Xue, Zhang Qubing, and the others the Ark Management Committee’s honorary presidents, but they had also helped Mrs. Theresa figure out the cause of her husband’s death, having found the missing firearms in time to help this lady establish strength and connections.

In addition, Tan Jie had also heard that they had a strong relationship with Lehman—who was a major United Industries smuggler that specialized in the arms trade.

“A batch of military exoskeletons?” Jiang Baimian raised her hand and pressed down on the elegant monk mask on her face. “This isn’t a simple matter. Redstone Collection has always had a good relationship with United Industries, right? Yet, you’ve only obtained three military exoskeletons after so many years. Even with the ones that the Underground Ark has gradually obtained via trade over the decades, they don’t number more than ten.”

If they wanted to obtain a batch of military exoskeletons in a short period of time, they had to carry out transactions with First City and United Industries in an official position.

Tan Jie had always been deadpan, so it was impossible to tell his emotions. “They requested we first establish a connection and complete the transaction for two to three exoskeletons. It will be none of our business after that.”

They plan to carry out official smuggling after using Redstone Collection’s channels to make preliminary contact and establish a certain level of mutual trust??Jiang Baimian thoughtfully changed the topic. “Captain Tan, please pass on the message. We wish to meet them. They can decide on the exact time and place.”

Even if the Salvation Army had the intention of officially cooperating with United Industries, the subsequent transactions had to be conducted via smuggling due to the existence of First City being between them.

If they chose to circle around First City, they had to first reach Orange Company and then Gold Coast before reaching United Industries.

Of course, this could be done by sea before the Old World was destroyed. They would only come into contact with Gold Coast or the Linhai Alliance—which had numerous small factions. But now, the large factions with ports couldn't even afford to rebuild other industries. They also lacked resources, making it natural that they couldn't afford to build ships.

The ships currently active at sea—the route from Gold Coast to Spirit Island—were all antediluvians in their seventies or eighties. It wasn't rare for them to be over 100 years old.

“To talk about the military exoskeletons?” Tan Jie asked calmly.

Jiang Baimian smiled under her mask. “No. You just have to tell them that we came to Redstone Collection for Iron Mountain City's ruins.”

In the current era, making a special visit to Iron Mountain City's ruins was a strange and puzzling matter.

Tan Jie didn't ask what this meant and nodded slightly. “I'll pass it on. I'll get someone to tell you the exact outcome through the Ark Management Committee.”

After the pleasant exchange, Tan Jie stood up to send October Xue and the others out of the Public Security Department. He looked at Shang Jianyao—who didn't act up today on a rare occurrence—and casually said, “You're not as active as before.”

The monkey-masked Shang Jianyao sighed. “In order to showcase my status as a powerhouse, I exerted too much strength and expended too much energy. I'm feeling a little dizzy again.”

He didn't say why.

“Status as a powerhouse?” Tan Jie didn’t inquire about his secrets.

Shang Jianyao nodded. “Mind Corridor-level Awakened should be considered powerhouses, right?”

Tan Jie was speechless. He would definitely think that the other male was deliberately showing off if he hadn’t known that this fellow had always been abnormal.

Ever since Redstone Collection was established, apart from the Terror Bishop—who occasionally came to deal with matters—there had never been an Awakened at the Mind Corridor level!

Tan Jie had previously heard that the Underground Ark’s DiMarco was suspected to be a powerhouse at this level, but the other party had already been killed by October Xue and the others. There was no way to verify it.

“Tsk.” Jiang Baimian couldn’t stand it and teased Shang Jianyao. “Are you showing off?”

The honest Shang Jianyao frankly replied, “Don’t you find it leaving an impact?”

Thanks to his price, Tan Jie’s face remained expressionless no matter what.

Long Yuehong muttered inwardly, “You exposed your strength in order to show off. Won’t this make the enemy wary and prevent us from taking them by surprise? It simply wasn’t worth it!”

At this thought, Long Yuehong subconsciously stuffed his mechanical right hand into his pocket in an attempt to hide it.

Unfortunately, it was too obvious.

...

In the evening, the sun was still hanging over the horizon, making the clouds seem like they were on fire.

The Old Task Force met the group of people suspected to be from the Salvation Army in front of a high-rise building in Redstone Collection as agreed.

She suspected that the other party's Mind Corridor-level powerhouse had a friendly ability similar to that of the vulgar parrot owner, Kanna, making the mountain monsters involuntarily trust them and entertain them enthusiastically. Therefore, Jiang Baimian got Long Yuehong and Bai Chen to monitor the meeting spot at the top of an abandoned building with a straight-line distance of 300 meters. They were prepared to 'wake' her and Shang Jianyao up via sniping and bombardment at any moment.

Genava was arranged to be 600 meters away to prevent the other party's effective range from exceeding the Old Task Force's expectations.

The people suspected to be from the Salvation Army acted the same. Only the two people from before met Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao. The rest were scattered at the top of buildings and hidden spots in the ruins at different distances.

The square-faced man with thick eyebrows and hair—who looked to be in his late thirties—simply introduced himself. “Xu Datong.”

He then pointed at the young man beside him, who had sharp eyebrows and a Grecian nose. “Li Shouyi.”

Jiang Baimian nodded and gave their aliases.

After both parties completed the greeting, Shang Jianyao—who had specially slept for a while in the afternoon—asked excitedly, “Are you guys from the Salvation Army?”

It wasn't that Xu Datong had never encountered people who liked their faction so much, but most of them were over 40 years old.

In the mid to late Chaotic Era and more than ten years before the New Calendar, humans lived in darkness. They were plagued by the Heartless disease, mutation, famine, and war, suffocating from the layers of chaos.



Back then, the Salvation Army—which did their work under the banner of ‘for all of humanity’—was the dawn of hope for many people. They felt that their various measures were very necessary and could resolve many of the current problems.

Xu Datong looked at Shang Jianyao and deliberated before asking, “Are your parents or ancestors related to our Salvation Army?”

“No.” Shang Jianyao shook his head first before taking a step forward. He pressed his right hand against his left chest and said, “For all of humanity!”

Xu Datong was taken aback for a whole two seconds before returning the same salute. “For all of humanity!”

Upon seeing this, Li Shouyi reminded his commissioner, “He’s not one of us.”

Xu Datong laughed. “You shouldn’t have such serious prejudice. In the Chaotic Era, as long as one was willing to fight to save all of humanity and carry such an ideal, they would be our brothers and sisters whether they joined the Salvation Army or not.”

“That’s right, that’s right!” Shang Jianyao nodded crazily.

Jiang Baimian’s eyes darted around slightly as she probed, “You seem older than you look?”

“I’m in my fifties.” Xu Datong—who was estimated to be in his late thirties—smiled. “I was only a brat in the mid to late Chaotic Era.”

He didn’t talk much about this and got to the point. “Are you guys also very interested in Iron Mountain City’s ruins?”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “We visited the mountain monsters and heard about you.”

At this point, she decided to be ‘direct.’ “For that Buddhist Holy Land?”

Xu Datong wasn’t surprised. “You guys too...”

“We came into contact with the Five Great Holy Lands of Buddhism when we were investigating the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the Heartless disease’s origins. We suspected that there are clues hidden inside.” The one who exposed their intentions wasn’t Jiang Baimian but Shang Jianyao, who believed himself to be a member of the Salvation Army.

Jiang Baimian couldn’t stop him in time and could only let it be.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao’s open and honest attitude, Xu Datong felt that he had to say more. “We noticed the Buddhist Holy Lands because we captured several commissioners from the Eighth Research Institute. You should know of this organization, right?”

As expected of the Salvation Army. They captured so many commissioners...?Jiang Baimian asked instead of answering, “What has this got to do with the Buddhist Holy Lands?”

“The Eighth Research Institute has been preventing us from investigating the Heartless disease’s origins and some of the Old World’s secrets. This might very well involve the truth behind the great destruction,” Xu Datong explained further. “We realized that apart from destroying some of the Old World’s secret laboratories and killing the people who had the corresponding information, they are also deliberately trying to bury the Buddhist Holy Lands. Among them, the only one they know the exact location of is Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company.”

The Eighth Research Institute actually values the Buddhist Holy Lands so much??Jiang Baimian immediately felt that there was really a problem. She fell silent for a moment before pointing at Shang Jianyao. “This companion of mine once explored a psychological trauma that included Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company.”

Chapter 604: Exchange of Needed Goods

He once explored a psychological trauma that included Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company??Xu Datong gaped, but words failed him.

This was different from public information that didn’t involve personal interests. It was the priceless experience of a Mind Corridor-level Awakened. Therefore, Xu Datong chose to remain silent and hear what October Xue would say next.

Jiang Baimian had a plan in mind and said unhurriedly, “There’s something strange about Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company. Even the corresponding psychological trauma remains affected decades later. The two of you should understand what I mean, right?”

This matter involved many of the Old Task Force’s secrets, such as the Six Senses Beads and the small jade Buddha. It wasn’t right for Jiang Baimian to elaborate.

Xu Datong was experienced and quickly found the corresponding example. “Are you trying to say that the owner of the psychological trauma was unknowingly affected after entering Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company without noticing it? Even after decades, your companion still discovered abnormalities rooted in the psychological trauma from the exploration?”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded and added, “The room owner wasn’t an Awakened back then.”

The young Li Shouyi revealed a surprised expression, and Xu Datong unconsciously frowned.

The latter couldn’t help but ask, “You mean that not only did the room owner become an Awakened after being affected, but he also successfully crossed the Sea of Origins? The influence didn’t disappear after he entered the Mind Corridor?”

“It should’ve disappeared by now,” Shang Jianyao replied proudly.

Xu Datong thought for a moment and probed, “Destiny Connection?”

He made the connection regarding Destiny Connection from the fact that Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company was one of the Buddhist Holy Lands.

As expected of a Mind Corridor-level Awakened from a large faction. He is very knowledgeable...? Jiang Baimian didn’t hide anything and frankly replied, “That’s our guess as well.”

Xu Datong nodded slightly. “To achieve such an effect, it has at least got to be Destiny Connection at the New World level.”

This was his judgment.

As October Xue and Zhang Qubing were honest with him and provided him with such important information, Xu Datong wasn't stingy with his experience and knowledge.

“Could it be that there's a mummy which isn't dead buried there?” Shang Jianyao was ‘shocked.’ He was imagining Yama Tiger's situation.

Jiang Baimian didn't give him a chance to continue. She then talked about his experiences when exploring the psychological trauma. This included the professional woman—Liu Lu—who was in a different state every time she was encountered, the missing employee photo and the corresponding introduction, as well as how Shang Jianyao was sent back to the starting point several times.

Of course, Jiang Baimian didn't specify how Shang Jianyao cleared this psychological trauma in the end, nor did she mention the anomaly caused by Zen Master Redemption's recital of the medical record.

She knew very well what she could and couldn't say.

“As expected of one of Buddhism's Holy Lands...” Xu Datong clearly connected Shang Jianyao's encounters with different Subhuti domain abilities and sighed with emotion. After that, he looked at October Xue and Zhang Qubing and deliberated before saying, “You've shown sufficient sincerity, so I'll definitely be honest. Let me first confirm something. What level has your investigation of the Heartless disease's source reached?”

“The New World,” Jiang Baimian replied truthfully. “This is only our guess for the time being.”

Xu Datong instinctively looked around. “I wonder what you know about the powerhouses of the New World that have fallen asleep? I mean the kind that can't return independently. For example, Yama Tiger on Lake of Wrath's Lake Heart Island.”

He had heard about the murloc Oracle and Yama Tiger from Redstone Collection's Tan family.

Jiang Baimian explained the precautions provided by the company in a relatively vague manner. “Staying in Yama Tiger's vicinity past a certain critical period results in definite infection of the Heartless disease. The closer one is to Yama Tiger, the shorter the critical period.”

Xu Datong smiled. “It seems like you do know a lot. Therefore, you determined that the New World is the source of the Heartless disease. A powerhouse whose mind entered the New World and whose body is left in the Ashlands is equivalent to a node, causing the Heartless disease to spread?”

“Something like that.” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and acted very seriously.

Xu Datong slowly exhaled. “This is also our Salvation Army’s guess. Although the seniors who entered the New World didn’t make it clear, they have given certain hints.”

Shang Jianyao became worked up as he asked angrily, “Why didn’t they make it clear? Where did their ‘for all of humanity’ spirit go?”

Is this the honest one, the one with strong sympathy, or the one who values relationships??Jiang Baimian guessed. Frankly speaking, she was a little afraid that the two Salvation Army members opposite her would fly into a rage out of humiliation and fight Shang Jianyao on the spot.

The young Li Shouyi was clearly a little angry.

Xu Datong—who claimed to be in his fifties—fell silent. After a few seconds, he laughed self-deprecatingly. “Apart from some of the older generation, the one I’ve seen most obsessed with the slogan ‘for all of humanity’ is actually an outsider like you.”

He quickly restrained the expression on his face and slowed down his speech. “Maybe they have some difficulties that can’t be expressed. Maybe they are still waiting for an opportunity. Maybe our guess is wrong to a certain extent. This mistake involves the reason why they don’t tell us the origins of the Heartless disease directly.”

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to respond, Xu Datong continued, “Heh heh, I almost had my train of thought interrupted by you. What I want to say is that since New World powerhouses in a problematic state like Yama Tiger will spread the Heartless disease to the surroundings, a very obvious and relatively important clue, why does the Eighth Research Institute—which is responsible for eliminating information regarding the cause of the Old World’s destruction—allow them to exist?”

“The Eighth Research Institute commissioners we captured included three Mind Corridor-level Awakened. They have never received a mission to kill New World powerhouses similar to Yama Tiger and erase the relevant traces. This isn’t because they aren’t aware of such Sleepers. They at

least know where some of them are, but the Eighth Research Institute's higher-ups instruct them to circle around those places and ignore them."

Captured three Mind Corridor-level commissioners?

Jiang Baimian was momentarily at a loss for words. Should I sigh with emotion at the Salvation Army's strength and how carefree they are or envy the Eighth Research Institute for grasping the secrets of Awakening? There are so many Mind Corridor-level Awakened that it wouldn't hurt to lose a few in a row.

After Xu Datong said that, Shang Jianyao—who had switched to an unknown personality—replied faintly, "Perhaps it's because they aren't their match..."

The highest-ranking commissioners were Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor's depths. Sleepers like Yama Tiger had already entered the New World.

Xu Datong shook his head. "If such Sleepers need to be eliminated, Little Li can do it without needing people like you and us. Be it short-range ballistic missiles or high-altitude bombardment, they can avoid the corresponding danger and directly destroy the Sleeper's body. Even if they have Matter Interference, they won't be able to complete it from a distance because the corresponding kinetic blast is too massive. By the time they can barely exert an influence, the distance will be short enough for the explosion to cover them."

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao clapped. It was Zen Master Redemption—who liked superior firepower.

"That's indeed a problem." Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said, "I don't have any specific ideas, but a big shot once said that people in the Eighth Research Institute had undergone a terrifying change and were reduced to traitors that hide in the darkness."

This came from First City's former emperor—Father of the Source Brain, Oray.

Xu Datong revealed a thoughtful expression. After almost a minute, he asked, "Will you guys be going to Iron Mountain City Ruin soon?"

"We plan on gathering some more information." Jiang Baimian asked bluntly, "Do you have any?"

Xu Datong nodded slightly. “I’ll prepare a copy for you and pass it to you through Redstone Collection’s Captain Tan. However, lower your expectations. Our Salvation Army is separated from Iron Mountain City Ruin by First City, so we have never set foot in this area before. All the information we have now was slowly gathered after we decided to explore the Second Food Company. It might not be as complete as yours.”

“It’s an exchange of needed goods.” The smile in Jiang Baimian’s tone was obvious. She then casually said, “Do you know about the Old World’s genius scientist, Lin Sui? She might have a certain relationship with Iron Mountain City, the Eternal project, and the Monks Conclave.”

Xu Datong recalled for a moment and said, “Personally, I’ve never heard of it. I’ll send a telegram back and get someone to investigate. If there’s anything, I’ll inform you when the time comes.”

“Alright,” Shang Jianyao replied happily.

The conversation between the two parties ended there. Xu Datong and Li Shouyi expressed their sincerity and turned around to leave the meeting spot.

After watching their backs disappear into the distance, Jiang Baimian sighed. “It’s said that the Salvation Army has degenerated. They don’t seem to have degenerated much...”

With that said, she strode forward.

“You want to follow them?” Shang Jianyao had a curious expression under the mask.

Jiang Baimian silently changed her direction.

## Chapter 605: New Island

On the way back to the Underground Ark, Long Yuehong looked at Genava—who had his arm around Shang Jianyao’s shoulder—and then at the passenger seat. “Team Leader, will we be setting off for Iron Mountain City’s ruins after the Salvation Army hands us the information?”

He wanted to stay in Redstone Collection for a few more days. Once they left and headed straight for Iron Mountain City’s ruins, they might not even have a tent, much less a room!

“There’s no rush.” Jiang Baimian’s answer relieved Long Yuehong. “We have to wait until Hey recovers. He’s our team’s strongest combatant.”

The praised Shang Jianyao immediately turned his head to Geneva and said, “I can now interfere with the electromagnetic signals you receive!”

In order to show flaws and be more human-like, Geneva didn’t sit up straight like he usually did. Instead, he mimicked Shang Jianyao and slouched back into the seat, propping his metal elbow over Shang Jianyao’s shoulder.

“That’s indeed a problem,” Geneva said in a deep voice. “Apart from improving my microphones, I also want to increase the proportion of bionic materials in me. This way, the effects of any influence I come in ‘contact’ with will be greatly reduced when facing Mind Corridor-level Awakened that can interfere with electromagnetic signals.”

He hoped to use ‘skin’ to measure the environment’s temperature, humidity, and other conditions like humans.

His core components were protected by insulation.

“I’ll see if the company has the relevant research results later.” Jiang Baimian felt that there was nothing wrong with Geneva’s train of thought. However, this was most likely useless against an Awakened in the Shattered Mirror domain who could distort environmental information.

Shang Jianyao had clearly thought of this as well. He spread his hands and raised his head slightly. “Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?”

At this moment, Bai Chen—who was driving—thought of a question. “I wonder how the relationship between Eidolon Nun and Shattered Mirror is?”

“We’ll ask when we pass by the Vigilance Cathedral later.” Jiang Baimian turned around and smiled at Shang Jianyao. “If the two Kalendarium have a bad relationship, you will be beaten for saying such words in Redstone Collection!”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “They will have to be able to beat me first.”



“Ignoring the Mind Corridor-level Awakened who can rush over because of the parish council, even the Vigilance Cathedral itself isn’t something you can deal with. Eidolon Nun watches this place from time to time. Do you want to be suppressed in the Underground Ark like DiMarco and never be able to leave?” Jiang Baimian struck at Shang Jianyao’s inflated confidence.

As they chatted, the Old Task Force returned to the Vigilance Cathedral.

Apart from Bai Chen—who didn’t benefit much from genetic enhancement while her genetic modification didn’t involve muscles or strength—the other four members each carried a crate.

Frankly speaking, with Shang Jianyao’s perception range, he could completely control this electric vehicle from basement two and immediately give a warning upon discovering anyone’s approach. However, Jiang Baimian felt that there was no need to affect Shang Jianyao’s rest because of this. After all, having the military exoskeleton and bionic artificial intelligence armor beside them at all times—allowing them to use said items at any time—was the best choice.

After entering the cathedral that was painted red and gold, Jiang Baimian saw a man without a mask pressed against the wall and moving timidly as if he were afraid of being suddenly attacked from behind.

A person jumped down from a ventilation duct and yelped in midair.

The man clinging tightly against the wall was clearly shocked. He rolled to the side as he tried to draw his gun.

As soon as the person who scared him landed, he took the opportunity to jump forward, pounce out the side door, and disappear into the hall.

“What’s going on?” Long Yuehong was confused.

Shang Jianyao thought for two seconds before clenching his right fist and punching his left palm. “This is an evolved version of hide and seek—a horror game! Not only do the players have to hide and not be discovered, but they also have to seize the opportunity to scare the other.”

Although he wore a monkey mask, preventing others from seeing his expression, his body language told Jiang Baimian that he was eager to play.

“That’s not how it is.” A deliberately suppressed voice sounded from the vent above them.

Bai Chen looked up and realized that a cathedral guard in a white mask was hiding there.

The cathedral guard leaned out slightly and quickly said, “This is a ritual of the Terror heretics. The goal is to make the believers maintain their fear through the possible shocks that can happen at any place and any time.”

“What if they are frightened to death?” The benevolent Zen Master Redemption replaced the Shang Jianyao that liked to play, joke, and seek novelty.

The cathedral guard replied in a disdainful tone, “Therefore, they are heretics.”

If someone really suffered a heart attack from the shock, they would naturally be meeting the Kalendaria, Eidolon Nun.

“I see... Then, what’s their large-scale Mass like?” Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

The Vigilance Church played hide and seek.

The cathedral guard at the vent recalled and said, “It seems like everyone will be gathered in a sealed building. They will disguise themselves and pretend to be different monsters to scare each other to their heart’s content.”

This guard was Ashlandic.

“Oh...” Shang Jianyao’s tone indicated that he found it very intriguing.

Jiang Baimian didn’t plan on giving him a chance. She thanked the cathedral guard and led the way out.

“Do you want to check if the jeep is damaged?” Geneva reminded tactfully.

Such a question didn't mean that his EQ had improved, but from his analysis, telling her that she had gone in the wrong direction would only expose her price.

The corners of Jiang Baimian's mouth curled up sharply under her mask. “That's right.”

She looked up at the ventilation duct again. “Have you heard of Shattered Mirror?”

“A Kalendaria,” replied the cathedral guard hiding inside. His attitude was neither amiable nor hateful.

...

After an hour of recreation time, the Old Task Force members returned to their rooms.

Jiang Baimian lay on the bed and looked at the sleeping Shang Jianyao opposite her. Then, she covered her mouth and yawned.

She had been taking the time to travel the Sea of Origins for the past few days, hoping to encounter the second island of fear as soon as possible.

After a while, a desolate island appeared at the intersection of the shimmering sea and sky.

Jiang Baimian immediately felt a little excited and increased the frequency of her strokes. She didn't attempt to materialize a transportation tool to help herself because it would consume more of her mental energy.

Finally, Jiang Baimian arrived at a barren destination with withered trees. She agilely somersaulted onto the ground.

Nothing abnormal happened.

She circled around and realized that there was a large cave in the island's wilderness.

Jiang Baimian carefully walked in and suddenly found the flat square in the cave familiar.

She quickly looked around and gradually understood where the familiarity came from. This was identical to Pangu Biology's underground parking lot, but there were no cars apart from pillars.

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she walked toward the elevator that led to the underground building in her memories. She then got lost.

This was different from the situation outside the cave. Back then, she could see the various landmarks with her naked eye. She could just walk toward a corresponding spot without losing her bearings.

Jiang Baimian had no choice but to spend a certain amount of time figuring out her bearings and drawing the correct route.

Relying on the map, she spent a lot of effort before finally arriving at the elevator.

She pressed the button for the 647th floor. As the corresponding elevator descended, she felt as though she had returned to Pangu Biology.

By the time she found Room 14 that belonged to the Old Task Force and pushed open the door, she realized that it was empty. Apart from tables and chairs, there was nobody.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before heading to the right elevator and going down.

349th floor, Zone C.

Jiang Baimian followed the map and walked to Room 12, which represented her home.

Through the window, she saw that there was nobody inside. The coffee table seemed to be covered in dust.

The entire floor was terrifyingly quiet as if it had been abandoned for a long time.

Jiang Baimian opened the door, walked in, and sat in her favorite spot.

After sitting for a while, she felt like she was on the brink of mental exhaustion. Her figure quickly turned transparent.

After returning to reality, Jiang Baimian opened her eyes and stared at the dark ceiling. She heard Shang Jianyao's long breathing and sensed two consciousnesses and bioelectric signals representing humans next door.

Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled, and her body and brain slowly relaxed.

She unconsciously fell asleep.

...

The next morning, the Old Task Force had just finished breakfast and recharged batteries when they saw Ulrich—the Ark Management Committee's interim president—appear on this floor.

“The town guard captain, Tan Jie, got me to send some information over.” Ulrich bowed with the etiquette of a butler instead of the Vigilance Church's.

“Intelligence gathered by the Salvation Army?” Jiang Baimian was a little surprised. “It's only been one night.”

It had to be known that the sky was almost dark when Xu Datong and Li Shouyi bade them farewell. Due to power shortages, most people slept early at night.

Sometimes, it wasn't that they didn't want to work late but that they didn't have the conditions to do so.

“As expected of the Salvation Army.” Shang Jianyao sighed with admiration. “They do what they say and work very hard!”

Ulrich didn't answer because he didn't know the situation or how to answer. He only handed the information in his hand to Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian casually flipped through it and realized that it was mainly information regarding Iron Mountain City's ruins that she had already grasped.

She soon flipped to the last page.

There was only a simple sentence on this page: "Lin Sui is suspected to be related to the Eighth Research Institute."

This...?Jiang Baimian's gaze suddenly froze.

Chapter 606: Parish Assembly

Upon noticing Jiang Baimian's abnormality, the honest Shang Jianyao asked, "What's wrong?"

The honest Genova immediately interrupted him. "This isn't a good time to discuss it."

As he spoke, the red light in his eyes swept across the face of the Ark Management Committee's interim president, Ulrich.

Uh, Old Ge, there's no need to be so direct. Be tactful, be tactful...?Long Yuehong couldn't stop grumbling.

Fortunately, Ulrich's observation skills were definitely top-notch. Otherwise, he wouldn't have become the tyrannical DiMarco's butler.

He calmly asked, "President Xue, do you need me to provide Captain Tan feedback? If not, I have to deal with the management committee's daily matters."

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, "Not at the moment."

After Ulrich left this floor, she showed the last page of the information in her hand to Shang Jianyao and the others.

“Suspected to be related to the Eighth Research Institute... In other words, it’s unlikely that Lin Sui is one of the Eternal project’s leads.” Bai Chen quickly interpreted the key meaning of this information. Although she didn’t know which research institute was in charge of the Eternal project back then, she was certain that it wasn’t the Eighth Research Institute in the north.

The Monks Conclave’s Glazed Pure Lands was in the Monk Wastelands, and it wasn’t considered in the vicinity of the north. The Glazed Pure Lands was suspected to be the research institute’s headquarters.

The honest Shang Jianyao that enjoyed rebutting others shook his head. “Not necessarily. What if Lin Sui is from the Eighth Research Institute while also participating in the Eternal project? Who stipulated that the large research institutes can’t share talents?”

Bai Chen couldn’t deny it, but Long Yuehong stubbornly said, “You can’t discount such a probability, but it’s definitely very low. In terms of confidentiality, there should be an information block out between the nine research institutes. As the Third Research Institute’s Chief Scientist, Oray had a relatively limited understanding of the other research institutes.”

“You’re so serious.” Shang Jianyao—who had switched to another, unknown personality—glanced at Long Yuehong and surfaced a teasing smile on his face.

Long Yuehong’s face flushed red as he defended himself. “I’m having a serious discussion!”

Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and interrupted their conversation. “Before any opposing information appears, I chose to temporarily trust the Salvation Army’s judgment. Therefore, could Lin Sui either be Vice President, Charlie, Professor Li, or Doctor? Or did she die when the Old World was destroyed?”

Vice President, Charlie, Professor Li, and Doctor were the few surviving Old World members of the Eighth Research Institute. They had already entered the New World and slept all year round other than the occasional movement.

This was information obtained by the Old Task Force from the Eighth Research Institute’s commissioner, Khal. Shang Jianyao privately called them the Eighth Research Institute’s four giants.

“First, we can eliminate Professor Li because Lin Sui’s surname is Lin.” Shang Jianyao was the first to comment.

Long Yuehong immediately retorted, “Professor Li is only a code name. It doesn’t mean that the person’s surname is Li.”

After blurting out this sentence, Long Yuehong felt the pleasure of exacting revenge.

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao surprisingly agreed. “Just like how Gu Zhiyong might not be surnamed Gu and might even be surnamed Long. Sigh, he’s only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement. He’s not handsome, and his grades are ordinary...”

Long Yuehong’s face flushed red and white. He didn’t expect Shang Jianyao to change his lines.

Yes, he still didn’t grow tall after the three genetic modifications—Enhanced Self Recovery, Increased Immunity, and Increased Reaction Speed.

Now, Long Yuehong sadly realized that Increased Reaction Speed didn’t seem to include thinking.

For a moment, he didn’t know how to retort Shang Jianyao.

“The four of them might be Lin Sui. They clearly want to hide something by using codenames and not their real names.” Bai Chen steered the topic back on track.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “This is also a direction for future investigations.”

...

Shang Jianyao completely recovered from his mental damage a few days later.

The night before the Old Task Force set off, they happened to encounter the parish assembly held by the three religions under Eidolon Nun.



Jiang Baimian—who was interested in such matters—suggested that everyone attend the assembly in the Vigilance Cathedral and help maintain order.

Shang Jianyao raised his hands and feet in agreement. He did so by jumping up and raising his hands and feet.

Upon seeing this, the honest Geneva specially reminded him, “Hey, your condition is getting worse. You have to be careful.”

“Don’t worry. We have a mature consultation and swapping mechanism,” Shang Jianyao replied.

The Old Task Force quintet took the elevator to the Vigilance Cathedral’s main hall thanks to their geographical advantage.

There were already more than 100 people here, and they were divided into three groups. Of course, this was only the situation on the surface. In the ventilation ducts and in the hidden spots outside the windows, countless cathedral guards and Redstone townsfolk—who were interested in the debate—were hiding.

According to Shang Jianyao’s ‘calculations,’ their numbers were three to four times that of the people who had appeared.

“Viel, I see you!” Shang Jianyao suddenly shouted.

Nobody answered him.

Shang Jianyao sighed, feeling regretful that he hadn’t tricked Viel into appearing.

Just as he, Jiang Baimian, and the others found and sat down in an empty spot in the dimly lit cathedral, a scoff sounded from somewhere.

This scoff had a clear drake-like voice as if it came from a boy in puberty.

Shang Jianyao ignored him, took off his tactical backpack, and grabbed something. He then asked Jiang Baimian and the others, “Do you guys want it? How can we leave out melon seeds at a time like this?”

“Melon seeds?” Long Yuehong widened his eyes and looked at Shang Jianyao’s hand. As expected, he saw a handful of plump sunflower seeds[1].

“W-why do you have that?” he asked in surprise.

With a beaming smile, Shang Jianyao replied, “It’s not like you don’t know that I’ll save up the sweets and melon seeds for appropriate times. Sigh, I’ve already given the sweets to those children.”

This referred to the young mountain monsters.

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong inexplicably felt like he had transmigrated back to the past—back when he was seven or eight.

“Give me some.” Jiang Baimian didn’t stand on ceremony as she stretched out an open palm.

“You’ll get beaten up if you continue like this.” Shang Jianyao gently patted Jiang Baimian’s palm with his other hand before putting a small handful of melon seeds on it.

Jiang Baimian closed her fingers and asked with a smile, “A game you played when you were young?”

“It was his prank.” Long Yuehong began to complain. “He often deceived me, Yang Zhenyuan, and the others. He said that he had snacks for us, but he would slap our palms the moment we stretched out our palms.”

“You sure know how to fool others.” Jiang Baimian held in her laughter.

Long Yuehong began to regret having a loose tongue.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian casually added, “This means that you are pure-hearted and will treat people well with all your heart.”

“How did you infer the second half of the sentence?” the honest Genova asked.

“That’s right, that’s right,” the honest Shang Jianyao also asked.

“It’s about to begin! Cut the chit-chat?” Jiang Baimian pointed at the beginning parish assembly.

As a bishop of the Vigilance Cathedral, Antonella—a bald, muscular clergyman—walked to the Vigilance Sacred Emblem as host despite his rank and strength being inferior to the few present.

He looked at the Church’s Terror Bishop—Saint Sigmund, who had specially traveled over—and loudly said, “The topic of this parish assembly is: which comes first for the Kalendaria—wariness or fear.”

Chu Ge—who was in charge of maintaining order—wanted to raise his hand and say: “Please add ‘friendliness.’” However, he decided not to wade into this mess after some thought.

Friendship first, friendship first!

After Antonella announced the topic, the tall and thin Terror Bishop—Sigmund—stood up. “Wariness, of course. Why do we feel fear when facing danger? It’s because we are born to be vigilant.

“Why do we feel fear when facing the unknown? It’s because we are wary of its hidden dangers and the loss of our precious lives...

“When we were still infants—before we knew fear—we would still instinctively show vigilance when facing many things!”

Trembling, someone from the Terror Church immediately stood up and retorted, “No, we already had fears when we were infants. Our ancestors ‘wrote’ it in our genes and passed it down generation after generation. To put it simply, infants who don’t know how to fear certain things couldn’t survive in ancient times. Their genes naturally can’t be inherited...”

The theoretical debate's standards are a little higher this time...?Jiang Baimian listened with relish as cracking sounds occasionally sounded beside her.

Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen were quietly munching on melon seeds.

The muscles on Jiang Baimian's face twitched as she criticized inwardly and picked up a few melon seeds.

The debate gradually deepened, and she became increasingly focused. Toward the end, she forgot that she still had melon seeds in her hand. Shang Jianyao quietly and secretly stole a few.

As she listened, Jiang Baimian suddenly felt the Vigilance Hall turn a little darker. Her heart palpitated as she subconsciously looked up at the gigantic Sacred Emblem in front of her.

Behind the half-closed white door, the indistinct female figure seemed a little clearer in the darkness as she stared at everyone.

#### Chapter 607: Taking It Out

Silently, the Vigilance Cathedral's hall seemed to be enveloped in darkness. The yellowish light emitted by the wall lamps remained, but it gave off the feeling that they were so distant that they only provided enough illumination for one to see the person beside them.

Jiang Baimian's body involuntarily trembled. Her limbs turned cold, and her heart raced.

She seemed to have arrived in front of a cliff with a boulder hanging above her, tottering on the verge of collapse. She didn't have the time to dodge in any direction.

Intense fear arose as an ear-piercing alarm echoed crazily in her mind.

Jiang Baimian—who had experienced such a situation—naturally understood what had happened without thinking. October's Eidolon Nun had cast her gaze over from the New World again!

At this moment, not only did Jiang Baimian sense something, but Long Yuehong and the others also felt as though they had reached the edge of a cliff. If they took another half a step forward, they would fall into an endless abyss and be smashed to pieces.

The fear stemming from human genetics firmly gripped their hearts.

The Vigilance Church, Terror Church, and Friendly Hand parishioners prostrated at the same time, pressing their cheeks against the cold floor. None of them dared to move.

Among them, the Terror Church members were trembling.

The dignified and indifferent gaze seemed to come from an infinite height, making everyone who felt it feel abnormally insignificant.

Jiang Baimian also lowered her head, with cold sweat crazily seeping out of her forehead. For some reason, she felt that Eidolon Nun was focused on them and not 'Her' believers.

Long Yuehong gritted his teeth noisily.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian saw Shang Jianyao—who was beside her—throw down the melon seeds from the corner of her eye and lift his tactical backpack in front of him with difficulty.

He reached into his backpack and slowly searched for something amidst his trembling.

Shang Jianyao finally retracted his right hand and opened his palm. A small, lake-green jade Buddha lay quietly there.

Rich darkness instantly 'surged' over and swallowed the small jade Buddha.

The small jade Buddha seemed to lose its corporeal form and became abnormally illusory. It was wiped away inch by inch or had entered the New World that wasn't completely connected to reality.

Two to three seconds later, the darkness slowly retreated like a receding tide. The small jade Buddha appeared in front of Shang Jianyao inch by inch again, becoming textured and malleable once more.

Almost at the same time, Jiang Baimian felt the indistinct female figure behind the white door move 'Her' gaze elsewhere in the endless darkness.

After a few seconds, the darkness finally dissipated, and the light from the wall lamps filled the hall again.

Everything returned to normal.

The Kalendaria's gaze came and went in a strange manner.

Huff... Huff...? Long Yuehong finally dared to breathe heavily. He looked at Bai Chen beside him and saw that her body was still trembling slightly. Therefore, he forced himself to say, "Is this the Kalendaria's gaze?"

"Yes." Having experienced it before, Jiang Baimian gave an affirmative answer.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao had already closed his fingers and gripped the small jade Buddha again. He began picking up the melon seeds that had fallen to the ground.

Jiang Baimian didn't know whether to praise him for being thrifty or for being bold.

Long Yuehong glanced at the three Churches' parishioners still prostrating on the ground and once again sighed with emotion at Bai Chen. "Eidolon Nun has directly stared at this place and given them a warning. They probably won't argue about those trivial problems anymore."

Just as he said that, the archbishop in front of the cathedral's Vigilance Sacred Emblem—Antonella—stood up. Wearing an extremely simple white mask, he excitedly said, "The Kalendaria has cast 'Her' gaze over! This means that our debate is meaningful and that we are being watched by the Kalendaria! Everyone, please continue!"

Uh...? As Long Yuehong retracted his gaze, he happened to see Bai Chen's friend—Chu Ge—sit up.

Helplessness was also written all over his face.

It can be interpreted that way?

These people are really...

What the heck are y'all talking about!?

For a moment, Long Yuehong felt that he shared a tacit understanding with Chu Ge. They seemed to share weal and woe together.

Pui, why should we be sharing weal and woe together? He even had designs on Little White back then!? Long Yuehong quickly regained his rationality.

In the subsequent debate, Jiang Baimian became less focused and often zoned out. On the other hand, Shang Jianyao clapped as he munched on the melon seeds, fully immersed.

After the parish assembly ended for the day and the five Old Task Force members returned to the reception room at basement two, Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao and asked, "What changes did the small jade Buddha undergo?"

Ah?? Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were too terrified back then. The back of their clothes was soaked, so they didn't notice Shang Jianyao's situation.

As a smart bot, Genova actually didn't have fear. But after analyzing the data around him, his core module told him that he had to adopt a 'cowardly' strategy at that moment. Only then could he ensure his and his teammates' safety to the greatest extent.

Acting scared in such a situation would appear more human-like. Therefore, despite clearly vibrating his metal skeleton and producing grinding sounds, he didn't forget to observe his surroundings. He was similar to the relatively calm Jiang Baimian thanks to her experience.

Shang Jianyao took out the small jade Buddha in his pocket and said in all seriousness, "The texture, luster, clarity, and feel in the hand haven't changed. It doesn't have any additional abilities either."

At this point, he took the initiative to pause. "But I keep having the feeling that it's a little different from before. A little."

“What happened?” Long Yuehong took the initiative to ask. He could tell that Bai Chen was very curious as well.

Shang Jianyao recounted the situation in detail.

“A bestowment from Eidolon Nun?” Bai Chen guessed.

“Don’t mention the word ‘bestowment.’ It’s unknown what price we’ll have to pay in the future.” Jiang Baimian had recently read an Old World biography novel and had a psychological trauma toward ‘bestowment.’

“Maybe it’s a mark.” Shang Jianyao deliberately lowered his voice to scare his teammates.

Long Yuehong held his breath as he subconsciously changed the topic. “What were you thinking back then? Why did you take out the small jade Buddha?”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “I felt it stir a little.”

“...” Long Yuehong didn’t know if Shang Jianyao was telling the truth or if he was showing off a mental patient’s unique train of thought.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian—who had restrained her emotions—flipped her wrist to look at the time. “Since Hey is temporarily unable to determine what’s odd about the small jade Buddha, leave it with Old Ge. He can do a comprehensive inspection using his instruments. After the inspection, we’ll return to our rooms to rest. We’ll set off for Iron Mountain City’s ruins tomorrow morning.”

“Get some rest first. I don’t get exhausted while inspecting and charging.” Geneva was very considerate of his teammates.

“No, what if something happens?” Shang Jianyao said sincerely.

“That’s right.” Bai Chen agreed.



At 11 p.m., Genava completed every inspection. He held the small jade Buddha and said, “Apart from having a slightly different magnetic field than other pieces of jade, everything else is very normal.”

He didn’t have the corresponding data model, so he couldn’t calculate the difference to several significant figures.

“There’s indeed something different.” Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief.

“Will this small jade Buddha bring about an anomaly somewhere?” Bai Chen guessed.

The ‘somewhere’ she was referring to was one of Buddhism’s Five Great Holy Lands, including the Old Task Force’s destination—Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company.

“Maybe.” Long Yuehong was rather solemn.

“Hopefully!” Shang Jianyao had an excited expression. “There will only be clues if there’s an anomaly.”

That’s under the premise that we can handle it...? Long Yuehong was just about to reply when Jiang Baimian clapped her hands.

“There’s nothing we can discuss now. Alright, let’s return to our rooms to rest.”

...

After entering his own double room, Shang Jianyao made a request to Jiang Baimian. “Since I’ve already recovered, I want to enter that cruise ship again tonight to take a look.”

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, “Try determining the situation today. Don’t make any further attempts to prevent any accidents from affecting your mind again. We won’t be able to go to Iron Mountain City’s ruins tomorrow if that were to happen.”

“I swear!” Shang Jianyao raised three fingers and agreed. This was the Shang Jianyao with the youngest mental age and cared most about relationships.

Mind Corridor, Room 912.

After Shang Jianyao entered again, he realized that he was in a guest room of a cabin on the cruise ship.

At this moment, the sky outside the window was bright. The blue sky and white clouds reflected each other.

Time didn't stop when I wasn't around??Shang Jianyao stroked his chin, pushed open the door, and walked back to the aisle. He then saw a person pass in front of him and burp.

There was a black mole at the end of this person's right eyebrow.

Shang Jianyao recognized this person—he was one of the three men Shang Jianyao had previously encountered. He had gone from being ordinary the first time they met to a madman the second time they met.

Now, he was clear-headed and had normal actions. It was no different from the first time.

No, there was still a slight difference. His two companions had disappeared.

Chapter 608: Fishbone

Shang Jianyao—who liked to joke and always acted like an old friend—didn't treat him as an outsider at all. He raised his right hand and waved it. “Hey, where are your two friends?”

The other party was Ashlandic, so he didn't deliberately change his language.

The man turned his body and looked at the fellow before casually muttering, “They are still in the restaurant. Burp...”

Just as he said that, his gaze froze. “It’s you! Do you think I’m suffering from dementia? Do you think I’ll forget your teasing yesterday?”

As he spoke, the man took a step forward and raised his fist.

Shang Jianyao was delighted instead of being angry. He looked down at the other party from above. At the same time, he bent his right arm, propping up the clothes on his arm.

Compared to his thin, unmuscular self just after graduation, he was now a lot heavier thanks to the sufficient nutrition he got after joining the Old Task Force. His strength had also increased significantly.

Looking at the other party’s height and the clearly visible muscles under his clothes, the man silently retracted his hand while grumbling. “I won’t fuss over it with you.”

He then sidestepped away.

He was alone now—he who understands the times is a wise man! Furthermore, at such a distance, he probably wouldn’t be faster than the other party’s fist even if he wanted to draw his gun.

After watching the man leave, Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “Time is indeed not fixed, but the speed at which time flows is different from reality.”

He hadn’t entered this psychological trauma for days, yet only a night had passed. The scene of the chaotic and deranged humans seemed to disappear after dawn.

After extracting the key points, Shang Jianyao rubbed his stomach and muttered to himself, “Restaurant?”

He walked in the direction the man had come from and sized up the rooms on both sides as he walked.

After arriving at the end of the aisle, he saw a buffet restaurant. Many people—who had chased and intercepted him last night—were carrying their trays or feasting.

Shang Jianyao walked straight in. Nobody checked if he belonged there.

Yes, those on the ship definitely bought ‘tickets’ or are staff...?Shang Jianyao picked up the largest tray and seriously checked what food there was.

Carbs were mainly porridge cooked using rice or oats—it was mostly water. In addition to them, there was stuff like boiled potatoes and roasted sweet potatoes.

There were a total of five dishes: grilled taro, stir-fried wild vegetables, roasted fish, pan-fried meat of an unknown species, and grilled fish chunks.

There was plenty of the five dishes, but two of them were fish. It was inevitable that they gave off the feeling that one was eating by the sea. Furthermore, they were all roasted or grilled; they clearly lacked spices and appeared very crudely made.

Shang Jianyao looked at the roasted fish and grilled fish that were completely mangled and stroked his chin. “Since there aren’t that many spices, why didn’t they choose to serve the simplest steamed fish? Could it be that these fish have been exposed to pollution and have a strange taste that requires a relatively involved culinary method to mask it?”

“It’s already good enough that we have something to eat. Why care about this?” retorted a cruise passenger beside him.

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao sincerely admitted his mistake. He then scooped a large piece of roasted fish and two pieces of grilled fish chunks and placed them on his plate.

There weren’t many opportunities to eat fish in Pangu Biology, so Shang Jianyao naturally wanted to give it a try.

Following this, he placed a sizable pile of wild vegetables, taro, sweet potatoes, and potatoes onto his tray. He also scooped a bowl of oatmeal.

With a full tray of ‘supper,’ he found a seat and sat down, swallowing his saliva.

He first tasted the grilled fish chunks. As he ate, his expression suddenly turned strange.

Cough, cough, uh, uh...?Something seemed to be in his throat, but he couldn't get it out.

He had a fishbone stuck in his throat!

Finally, Shang Jianyao couldn't tolerate it any longer and chose to return to reality. His figure then disappeared from the cruise buffet.

In the darkness, Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and suddenly sat up. He bent down and coughed a few times.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Baimian asked in concern. She switched on the lamp as well.

Shang Jianyao composed himself and replied thankfully, "I almost died!"

"Didn't I tell you not to make any more attempts and only confirm the cruise ship's current state?" Jiang Baimian couldn't help but ask, "What happened?"

Shang Jianyao cleared his throat again and confirmed that there was nothing else. He then truthfully said, "I choked on a fishbone while eating fish!"

"..." Jiang Baimian subconsciously raised her hand, wanting to confirm that her biological cochlear implant was still there.

She had imagined many strange scenes when she asked her question, but she still overestimated herself and underestimated Shang Jianyao.?How the hell did you choke on a fishbone? Weren't you exploring someone's psychological trauma? Could it be that the room owner was once choked?

"Be more detailed." Jiang Baimian gave up on thinking and directly got Shang Jianyao to explain the situation himself.

Shang Jianyao perked up and reported the dishes and selection of carbs in the cruise buffet restaurant. He then talked about how he had discovered that the anomaly on the cruise ship had disappeared and that everyone had returned to normal.

“So, you started eating in the restaurant?” Jiang Baimian felt that this was indeed something Shang Jianyao could do.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “Since you want me to confirm the cruise ship’s situation, I naturally have to determine their chef’s standards.”

Jiang Baimian weakly asked, “How’re the standards?”

“It’s not bad. It’s already pretty good to be able to come up with that despite the lacking ingredients and little seasoning. However, the fish they chose had too many fish bones.” Shang Jianyao had a look of regret.

Jiang Baimian confirmed one thing: This fellow was really tasting the food.

She thought for a moment and brought the topic back on track. “Every entry is different from the previous state. A period of normality between chaos?”

“That’s possible,” Shang Jianyao said eagerly. “I’ll go in later to take a look.”

“Don’t!” Jiang Baimian was afraid that this fellow would bring about trouble again. “You can try whatever you want on the way to First City after we explore the Second Food Company.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian fell into thought. “Time moves forward every time you enter the cruise ship. Furthermore, it’s relatively jumpy—it goes through a day-night cycle. If you keep going in and out, allowing time to keep jumping forward until the day the room owner leaves the cruise ship, what will happen next? Will you return to the beginning, will there be something else, or will you directly ‘clear the level?’”

Shang Jianyao clapped. “Your train of thought has my style.”

I don’t think that’s a compliment...? Jiang Baimian no longer had the strength to argue.

“In any case, let’s give it a try when the time comes. Go to sleep.” She urged Shang Jianyao and switched off the lamp.

The rational and calm Shang Jianyao chose to obey orders.

The next morning, the Old Task Force left the Underground Ark's Iron Mountain entrance and got into their modified jeep.

“Let's go!” It was Shang Jianyao's turn to drive, and his excitement showed.

The Old World had mountain tunnels and high-speed bridges that led from here to Iron Mountain City Ruin, but many of the roads had long been blocked. There were also mountain monsters that liked to throw rocks from above, so Ruin Hunters often chose to circle around these mountains nowadays.

Shang Jianyao and the Salvation Army's Mind Corridor-level Awakened had tacitly requested the mountain monsters to 'help' clear the blocked path a few days ago, allowing them to reach their destination in a few hours.

The Salvation Army had contacted the United Industries personnel through Mrs. Theresa. They had already set off for Iron Mountain City Ruin since the other party would take another week to arrive. They were prepared to complete the investigation in three to four days.

Jiang Baimian warned them, “Be careful. Even Old Ge won't survive if we fall down the cliff.”

“Let me do it,” Bai Chen suggested.

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “Let this fellow expend more energy. I'm beginning to miss his injured and listless state.”

Shang Jianyao didn't respond. As he started the car, he switched on the small speaker. “You carry the luggage; I ride the horse, welcoming sunrise and sending away the dusk...”

Amidst a carefree song, the jeep drove to the other side of the mountain range.

...

Vigilance Cathedral, basement one.

Under the excuse of visiting an old friend, Chu Ge requested to meet Bai Chen and the others through the Underground Ark Management Committee.

He actually wanted to preach. From his point of view, would anyone present doubt Eidolon Nun's existence after the miracle of being watched by the Kalendaria last night?

There were three choices in the Eidolon Nun faith. Chu Ge naturally didn't want this powerful team to join the other two religions.

"President Xue and the others have already left." Ulrich didn't mention Jiang Baimian and the others' destination.

"They've already left?" Chu Ge was very shocked. Did they leave just like that after witnessing such a miracle? Are they still normal?

"Yes." Ulrich didn't say anything else.

Chu Ge wanted to ask further, but Archbishop Delro stopped him with his eyes.

After returning to the Vigilance Cathedral's main hall, Chu Ge was just about to speak when Delro sighed with emotion. "They weren't scared away. From their performance last night, this wasn't the first time they encountered a miracle..."

"This..." Chu Ge couldn't say anything else.

...

The journey was smooth and mixed with rest. Around 2 p.m., the Old Task Force arrived at the area around Iron Mountain City Ruin.

Due to the terrain, they saw the ruins from above.



Unlike ruins like Redstone Collection, most of the buildings here had collapsed during the Chaotic Era and the ‘raids’ in the early years of the New Calendar. Most of the buildings had collapsed during these battles, and only a few remained standing stubbornly.

Under the sunlight, they were like road signs in a quiet cemetery.

#### Chapter 609: No One

The afternoon sun blanketed the city ruin that was now flush with fresh greenery with its rays. It was so quiet that even the breeze sounded ever so obvious.

Countless collapsed buildings were like crude grave mounds and were lined up in an orderly fashion one after another.

This was the most severely damaged Old World ruin Jiang Baimian had ever seen. Of course, she had never been to cities that were directly carpeted with missiles when the Old World was destroyed.

Not many people in the Ashlands were willing to go to such places. On the one hand, the corresponding area suffered from abnormally serious levels of radiation pollution and had yet to completely weaken even to this day. On the other hand, the damage was so exaggerated that it made it difficult to gain anything.

Jiang Baimian—who was standing beside the jeep—retracted her gaze and said to Long Yuehong and the others, “There’s nothing to excavate here. Let’s go straight to the Second Food Company. Don’t be careless on the way; make sufficient preparations. Don’t think that you won’t be attacked just because there’s nobody here or that there are few ordinary beasts. Intelligence indicates that very powerful Superior Heartless occasionally appear in this area.”

Many Ruin Hunters suspected that the Heartless hadn’t been completely wiped out during the repeated ‘raids’ that human factions carried out on Iron Mountain City’s ruins. Some had retreated to the nearby mountains, and some of the Superior Heartless had evolved to a level that was comparable to Mind Corridor-level Awakened in the past decade or two.

Jiang Baimian was rather suspicious about this because the Heartless lacked intelligence. It was unlikely that they could clear the islands of fear in the Sea of Origins.

Apart from Iron Mountain City's ruins and a few other places, humans had never encountered a Superior Heartless that could match a Mind Corridor-level Awakened.

Therefore, Jiang Baimian believed that it was down to two reasons. The batch of Ruin Hunters that had encountered the Superior Heartless in Iron Mountain City's ruins was either not strong enough or had insufficient knowledge. Due to the special abilities the other party had shown, they blindly misidentified those powers at the Mind Corridor level. A second reason was that the powerful ones weren't the Superior Heartless themselves but the uniqueness of similar places. For example, this was a Buddhist holy land.

Upon recalling the professional woman—Liu Lu, whom Shang Jianyao had encountered in Room 522's psychological trauma—Jiang Baimian was more inclined to the latter possibility.

Liu Lu was active in Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company in the Chaotic Era. After Shang Jianyao used the steelworks factory ruins' medical record to trigger the anomaly, she revealed that she had contracted the Heartless disease long ago. The abilities she had previously shown could indeed match a Mind Corridor-level Awakened or even stronger. It made Shang Jianyao faint twice without any resistance and be sent back to the starting point.

After her team members nodded in acknowledgment, Jiang Baimian added in a deep voice, "Even if the probability of such Superior Heartless appearing is very low and it's very difficult for us to encounter them, we have to pay attention to the changes in our surroundings. The Eighth Research Institute might've already organized a new and stronger team of commissioners for 'silencing.'"

Her silencing didn't only refer to killing them but also destroying Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company, a Buddhist holy land.

Compared to the rumored special Superior Heartless, the Eighth Research Institute was clearly a more realistic and likely enemy. Long Yuehong didn't dare to let down his guard and immediately suggested wearing the equipment.

Shang Jianyao was very gratified and he turned to look at Genava. "Old Ge, you can try the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor. Just the thought of a smart bot assassin who can blend into the environment at any time, making it difficult to be discovered in advance, makes me feel like it's a cheat."

Then, what should I wear...? Long Yuehong wanted to interject and ask, but Genava seemed interested.

“Sounds good...”

Fortunately, he didn't suggest having the smart bot wear a military exoskeleton...?Jiang Baimian nodded in agreement and joked, “In our team, smart bots also have the right to wear equipment.”

Genava moved his metal neck up and down, very satisfied with this explanation.

Jiang Baimian then said to Long Yuehong, “Wear that Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor.”

This equipment's right palm was also specially modified, allowing Long Yuehong to extend his mechanical palm out from it.

Jiang Baimian originally planned on using the bionic artificial intelligence armor herself and relying on its powerful defense to get close to the enemy and use abilities like Spatial Hallucination. However, she later realized that there was a very serious problem: she might lose her way...

In comparison, a military exoskeleton with automatic navigation functions was more suitable for her.

Jiang Baimian was now rather glad that she had considered the different situations and requirements before leaving Pangu Biology. It was impossible for Long Yuehong to be limited to the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor. Therefore, she got the company to modify the Blackmarsh Iron Snake armor as well.

Bai Chen donned the relatively new military exoskeleton, M-45. Jiang Baimian used the AC-45, and Shang Jianyao chose the oldest AC-42. He mainly exerted control remotely, so there was no major need for him to engage in close combat.

The Old Task Force wasn't stingy with their battery charges and prepared to head to Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company fully armed. After all, this place was only a few hours' drive from the Underground Ark's Iron Mountain entrance. If they really reached a cordoned line, they could retreat and recharge.

“Drive.” In the passenger seat, Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao—who was sitting beside her—in a daze.

It was originally Long Yuehong’s turn to drive, but Jiang Baimian made Shang Jianyao—who had only rested for 90 minutes—the driver due to his previous ‘visits’ here, making him familiar with the terrain.

Shang Jianyao replied with a heavy expression, “The starting point is wrong. When I was in the psychological trauma, I appeared in the middle of the city.”

“I knew it...” Jiang Baimian said in a tone as if she had expected this.

She held her tactical backpack in front of her and took out the map of Iron Mountain City that she had drawn using a large amount of information. “See which section is familiar first before heading there.”

Shang Jianyao then said, “The environment isn’t right either. Most of the buildings hadn’t collapsed back then.”

He now lacked sufficient landmarks for reference.

Without waiting for Bai Chen to volunteer to be the driver, Shang Jianyao smiled. “That fellow actually gave all kinds of excuses for such a challenging matter!”

Great, another internal strife...?If not for the price of being directionally challenged, Jiang Baimian really wanted to push this bastard out of the car and do it herself.

The jeep slowly started moving in a general direction.

Shang Jianyao grumbled as he drove. “The road here is too difficult to traverse. I wonder how long it has been since anyone passed by. I really want to use Matter Interference to lift the car up and drive it five centimeters above the ground. That way, there won’t be any friction. Unfortunately, I can’t do it.”

The honest one?

?Jiang Baimian looked back and saw Long Yuehong sitting between Bai Chen and Geneva. She found it funny.

After that, the Old Task Force spent nearly two hours searching for a way through the city ruin. This was a very boring job. If not for Shang Jianyao's antics and his group crosstalk performance, Jiang Baimian and the others wouldn't have felt relatively relaxed.

They finally arrived at their destination and saw the rather old but still standing seven-story building.

Greenery was starting to spread across the building's facade, but it had yet to completely cover it. Yellow stains were still visible in some places.

At the lobby entrance on the first floor, the signboard 'Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company' had long disappeared. It had been chopped and burned as firewood by someone.

If not for Shang Jianyao thumping his chest and guaranteeing that this was the Second Food Company, Long Yuehong would've suspected that he had most likely come to the wrong place.

He looked up outside and saw that rocks were messily strewn around and that the ground was overgrown with weeds. He couldn't help but sigh with emotion. "It's been a long time since anyone came."

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian's expression suddenly turned solemn.

"D-don't say it!" Shang Jianyao tried to stop Long Yuehong with a 'terrified' expression.

Long Yuehong was just about to snap back when Jiang Baimian said in a deep voice, "Those guys from the Salvation Army set off two days ago."

"This..." Long Yuehong's heart suddenly raced.

With the distance between Redstone Collection and Iron Mountain City's ruins, the Salvation Army personnel should've arrived long ago and explored the Second Food Company several times.

Why did this place still look deserted?

Bai Chen gave a guess. “Did they get lost? There are no signs here.”

This was a large city ruin. It was normal not to find a destination they had yet to visit in a day or two.

“That’s possible.” Jiang Baimian nodded and pushed open the door to get out of the car before saying, “In short, be careful.”

Just as she said that, she saw Shang Jianyao swing his tactical backpack in front of him and unzip it.

“W-what are you doing?” Jiang Baimian was instantly vigilant.

Shang Jianyao laughed. “Taking out the small jade Buddha.”

“Not for now...” Jiang Baimian took a deep breath. She composed herself and added, “Let’s do an ordinary search first. We’ll later try to see what changes the medical record and the small jade Buddha can bring.”

Who could deal with so much stimulation from the beginning?

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao retracted his hand regretfully.

## Chapter 610: Attempt

After getting out of the jeep, the Shang Jianyao who valued relationships suggested, “Should we fire a flare into the air as a way to inform Xu Datong and the others that the Second Food Company is here?”

“Aren’t you afraid that the enemy will come over as well?” Long Yuehong immediately thought of the problem with Shang Jianyao’s suggestion.

Shang Jianyao—who wasn’t wearing a mask—immediately laughed, a smile that Jiang Baimian found inexplicably familiar.

Shang Jianyao said, “Isn’t that a good thing? We’ll set up an ambush and wait for the enemy to rush over when they see the signal, only to fall into our trap.”

“Uh...” Long Yuehong was a little convinced and momentarily couldn’t figure out any faults with it.

Jiang Baimian chuckled and teased Shang Jianyao. “Do you think the Eighth Research Institute’s commissioners have such low intelligence? If I were them, I would definitely choose to bombard the area remotely when I discover that someone has fired a signal flare that happens to come from the Second Food Company I’m looking for. In any case, my destination is to destroy this Buddhist Holy Land, not to protect it. I’ll do whatever is convenient and safe.”

Bai Chen objected. “The Eighth Research Institute’s commissioners do things rather inconspicuously. They only have a small number of skilled hands, and this isn’t their home ground either. Do they have a way to get an artillery gun or a cluster rocket launcher here?”

Weapons that could deliver long-range bombardment were very difficult to obtain; only large factions had relatively more of them. That or they required sufficient manpower to operate them. For example, dozens to a hundred large-caliber cannons could also cover the Second Food Company from a distance. However, they were relatively less precise. Furthermore, many people had to be mobilized in one go. It wasn’t the style of the Eighth Research Institute’s commissioners.

Jiang Baimian smiled and explained, “As villains and masterminds lurking in the shadows, it’s only right for them to secretly support some factions and teams. Otherwise, who will deliver information to them or prepare supplies and safe houses for the commissioner? Think about it. When we were attacked in First City, the commissioner had a support team.

“We mustn’t underestimate the Eighth Research Institute. There may be medium-sized factions in the surrounding area that take orders from them. They can deploy a team with sufficient firepower to support the commissioners at any time.”

Jiang Baimian felt that Pangu Biology was no longer suitable to play the role of a ‘villain’ compared to the Eighth Research Institute.

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “Just like the company!”

“...” Jiang Baimian picked up a rocket launcher with one hand. “Let’s head in.”

She didn’t get Bai Chen and Long Yuehong to stay outside to provide support. She had learned her lesson from Building 4 in the steelworks factory ruins’ Residential Zone 2. In such situations, having more people observe from multiple angles might allow them to see different things.

As for the jeep, it was parked nearby in a relatively concealed place. The Second Food Company only had a total of seven floors. Even if the Old Task Force climbed up to the rooftop, Shang Jianyao could remotely influence the electric vehicle.

Jiang Baimian could also sense the electric signals of anyone who approached and tried to drive the jeep.

The five Old Task Force members were divided into three groups. Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian took the lead as they walked into the food company one after another.

The first floor here was no longer what Shang Jianyao had seen in his psychological trauma. There were almost no remnants of the wrappers scattered everywhere. The transparent plastic boxes—which had been overturned or standing—and a large number of counters had disappeared.

Long Yuehong looked at the mottled walls and the cracked ground and sighed with emotion. “It’s like a swarm of locusts...”

This was the result of Ruin Hunters coming over to explore year after year.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “This also means that this place is the same as the Buddhist Holy Land in the steelworks factory ruins. There’s nothing abnormal on the surface. Ruin Hunters have plundered so much from this place that they are probably just feet away from tapping oil from the rocks.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao echoed. He was one step ahead of Jiang Baimian and was in charge of leading the way.

In the next ten minutes, the Old Task Force carefully searched the empty first floor. They also observed the interior’s situation from outside the window and confirmed that there were no problems.



At this pace, they arrived at the third floor and arrived at the room where Shang Jianyao had discovered the employee introduction board.

The wall had been blown to smithereens. The photos attached to it had either been charred black or had completely disappeared, likewise for the textual introductions.

Bai Chen observed the situation and gave a preliminary judgment. "A battle broke out here. At least grenade launchers were used."

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "The damage to the employee introduction board seems unintentional."

In other words, someone wasn't deliberately trying to wipe out the traces.

"Yes." Geneva agreed with Bai Chen and Jiang Baimian.

"That makes it harder for us to find the missing photo..." Long Yuehong frowned.

If the walls were still intact and the employee introduction board still existed, the Old Task Force could use Geneva's high-tech technology and some of the apparatuses he carried to analyze the traces left behind by the missing photo and corresponding introduction to see if they could discover any useful clues.

Shang Jianyao didn't show any worry and eagerly said, "Therefore, we still have to achieve victory by surprise!"

"Wait." Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze from the dilapidated walls. "Let's split up and search all the rooms here. Don't miss a single gap in the walls. See if the missing photo is hidden inside."

Frankly speaking, she wasn't too sure about this. Ignoring the fact that it had been so many years, she wondered if the originally hidden photo had been found and taken away. Just the fact that the photo and corresponding introduction had been taken away made her believe that those two items might very well have been torn up or burned on the spot. Taking away just the photo and the corresponding introduction meant that it was for confidentiality or for special emotional needs.

The former was more likely. Destroying the 'evidence' completely was the best way to keep it a secret.

The five Old Task Force members completed the search of the entire building in just over an hour. This was mainly because there were very few items left behind at the scene, so it was obvious at a glance in many places.

"I didn't find anything." Long Yuehong reported his situation to Jiang Baimian.

"Neither did I," Geneva quickly said as well.

Shang Jianyao decided not to be an exception. "It's the same for Big White and me, but she found the area too clean. It isn't as dirty as she imagined. There aren't rat feces and other kinds of feces everywhere. In addition, the Liu Lu corpse that should've existed has disappeared. I don't think any Ruin Hunter will take such a thing away, right?"

"What if someone has a skeleton fetish?" another Shang Jianyao retorted.

Bai Chen replied, "Given the Ashlands' situation, this possibility is lower than someone taking the bones back for stewing."

Most wilderness nomads were still fighting for food and clothing, so they didn't have many strange sexual fetishes.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "Have you forgotten the price of sexual abnormality? Since there are people who adore car exhaust pipes, it's not impossible to have someone who likes skeletons."

Jiang Baimian and the others failed to retort such reasonable words.

After a moment of silence, Bai Chen directly voiced her guess. "I think someone found a place to bury her."

"Who?" Shang Jianyao looked like he was listening to a story.

“The abnormality that once possessed her,” Bai Chen replied. “She was the first target of his possession, so there might be some subtle feelings.”

“Why?” Genova couldn’t understand.

Bai Chen opened her mouth but couldn’t find the right words to express it.

Long Yuehong tried to help, but he couldn’t think of a reason.

“Intuition! Female intuition!” Jiang Baimian lectured the three wooden blocks. “You have to be sufficiently meticulous to experience the subtleties of emotions.”

“Oh...” Genova’s slightly synthetic voice sounded like he had been inspired. This was clearly an imitation of Shang Jianyao.

“Sufficiently meticulous?” Shang Jianyao glanced at Jiang Baimian curiously.

“Am I not?” Jiang Baimian almost flew into a rage out of humiliation. Fortunately, she remembered that they were in a strange Buddhist Holy Land. There might be some danger lurking around them, so she interrupted the topic.

She said seriously, “Alright. Since conventional methods don’t work, let’s use the original medical record copy and the small jade Buddha from the steelworks factory ruins. Little Red, climb out the window and see if there are any additional changes from another angle. Little White, wait for Little Red below. On the one hand, it’s to prevent any accidents from happening to him. On the other hand, you are to observe the building as a whole. Old Ge, go outside as well. Set up and adjust the various instruments and gather the most objective environmental data.”

“Yes.”

“Alright.”

“No problem.” Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genova replied one after another.

After they were in position and finished their preparations, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao, “You can begin. Try using the original medical record first.”

At some point in time, Shang Jianyao had already taken out the Six Senses Beads. As he spun it and chanted a Buddhist proclamation, he unfolded the original medical record in his pocket.

As he sat cross-legged, his back was relatively straight. The price of the Six Senses Beads was rather obvious, and Jiang Baimian’s facial muscles twitched slightly.

She wasn’t old-fashioned, and she could even crack dirty jokes because she had been in the Security Department forces. However, the price of the prayer beads was too contradictory with the Buddhist proclamations and solemn expressions. It made her find it ridiculous.

Shang Jianyao remained calm and composed as he recited the medical record in a tone as though he was reciting Buddhist scripture. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Name: Fan Wensi. Female. Age: 52. Married. Address: Residential Zone 2, Building 4, Room 302...”

Amidst the ethereal and solemn voice, Jiang Baimian observed her surroundings and realized that everything was normal.

After Shang Jianyao finished reciting, she picked up the walkie-talkie and asked the team members outside, “Anything?”

“No,” came three replies.

Shang Jianyao put away the original medical record and the Six Senses Beads in confusion. “It was effective in the psychological trauma...”

Jiang Baimian didn’t attempt to analyze it and thought for a moment. “We’ll discuss it later. Try using the small jade Buddha.”

Shang Jianyao immediately took out the small, lake-green jade Buddha and held it in his palm.

Just as he did this, Jiang Baimian suddenly felt their surroundings darken.