

## **Ad Infinitum 651**

### Chapter 651: Genetic Research

Jiang Baimian had wondered if the Holm Fertility Center had a certain connection with the Northern Company prior to the expedition.

After all, Fan Wensi's vegetable son was most likely connected to two Buddhist Holy Lands—Long River City's United Steel Plant and Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company. As a volunteer, he was sent to a certain place in the north for treatment. This inevitably made one form the connection with the Northern Company that attended the 29th International Biotechnica Expo in Fakh.

Therefore, as another Buddhist Holy Land, it was only natural for the Holm Fertility Center to have a certain connection with the Northern Company.

Now, this guess was confirmed. Everything was slowly amalgamating in a certain direction.

Jiang Baimian perked up and sized up the Northern Company's vice-president, Oak, excitedly.

This person was more than 1.8 meters tall, with blond hair and blue eyes—a relatively commonly seen example of the Red River ethnicity.

Although he wore a smart suit and had a smile, Jiang Baimian felt that he resembled a researcher or technical personnel more than company management. This was a judgment made from minor details.

The small lock of hair behind Oak's head stubbornly propped up his head, the tie that didn't look well-folded, the relatively obvious pimple on the side of his face, and his hands that he fumbled to place somewhere indicated something.

Of course, Jiang Baimian didn't dare to claim that her guess was definitely right. What if the other party was suffering from a handover from a night of drinking before and had some endocrine problems? What if he couldn't tidy himself in the morning due to time and rushed off?

After memorizing Oak's slightly rugged appearance, Jiang Baimian sized up the man suspected to be the director of the Holm Fertility Center beside him.

This man appeared in more than ten photos, so Jiang Baimian made this judgment.

He was about four to five centimeters shorter than Oak. He was relatively fat and had light-yellow hair. He wore glasses made of thin metal. Be it the hair gel on his head or the watch on his wrist, they matched perfectly.

"Kikhov." Jiang Baimian read his name softly.

There was also a row of people standing neatly behind Kikhov and Oak. On the left was clearly a famous employee of the Holm Fertility Center, and on the right was a representative of the Northern Company.

Unlike the Holm Fertility Center's row that was filled with people of Red River ethnicity, the representatives from the Northern Company included Ashlandics and Red Coasters. The former's number was no fewer than that of the Red River ethnicity.

This reminded Jiang Baimian of the introduction to the nine research institutes by Tarnan's lady boss, Aynor.

A research institute jointly established by the most powerful Ashlandic country and the most powerful Red River country before the Old World was destroyed. Its purpose was the future.

The members are of Red River ethnicity and Ashlandic. That matches...? Jiang Baimian carefully examined these people.

None of them had their names labeled, so she could only memorize their looks.

At this moment, Long Yuehong had already overcome his embarrassment. He flipped through the books, photos, and pamphlets on the ground, hoping to find something noteworthy.

His eyes soon lit up when he saw the title of a pamphlet: Genetic Optimization for Certain Congenital Diseases in Pregnancy.

Isn't this common knowledge?? Long Yuehong—who came from Pangu Biology—simply flipped through the pamphlet and searched for similar information.

Before long, he had a stack of books and pamphlets like 'The Effect of Genetic Optimization on Fetal Intelligence' and 'The Real Meaning of Early Genetic Optimization.'

If not for the fact that he was wearing the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor and holding the Berserker assault rifle, Long Yuehong would've vaguely thought that he had returned to his childhood.

In that era, he often read such promotional material at his—paternal and maternal—grandfather and grandmother's homes.

This was Pangu Biology's effort to promote genetic enhancement. After everyone saw the results with their own eyes and experienced the benefits, such promotions gradually stopped.

However, Pangu Biology preferred to use the terms 'genetic enhancement.' The area represented by the Holm Fertility Center was accustomed to using 'optimization.'

There was no right or wrong between the two, just a different choice of words.

Long Yuehong straightened his body and informed his companions of his discovery. "This fertility center also does genetic enhancement."

Not far away from him, Shang Jianyao scoffed honestly. "Before the Old World was destroyed, genetic enhancement was an inevitable development. Many key achievements were rather mature."

This wasn't a domain that only Pangu Biology and the White Knights could enter.

After the Old World was destroyed, many large factions had consciously or unconsciously promoted the matter over the years. Many people treated genetic enhancement as a violation of natural selection with humanity intruding on forbidden zones reserved for deities. They believed that this was the root cause of the Old World's destruction and the Heartless disease outbreak. Therefore, the corresponding technology became taboo in most areas. There was a high chance that they would destroy any valuable information they excavated from city ruins.

Pangu Biology was happy to see this happen, as were First City's nobles.

After generations of optimization, feedback, and improvements, the current genetic enhancement technology grasped by Pangu Biology and the White Knights had long exceeded that of what the Old World possessed before its destruction.

Long Yuehong argued, "I mean, we can't treat this place as a simple fertility center."

"It's naturally not simple. It's also a Buddhist Holy Land!" Shang Jianyao said sincerely.

Long Yuehong chose to shut up.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian shared how she had discovered the Northern Company's visit to the Holm Fertility Center. Finally, she said, "The Northern Company came to the Fakh region to participate in the International Biotechnica Expo to showcase their latest results on genetic research."

Bai Chen's heart palpitated. "They then received an invitation from the Holm Fertility Center? Both parties decided to have some level of cooperation in the field of genetic research?"

"In theory." Jiang Baimian recalled and said, "But given the date, the Old World was destroyed less than a week after the Northern Company finished touring the area and left the Fakh region."

Regardless of the cooperation, that wasn't sufficient time to fully develop it. In other words, even if the two parties did cooperate, it had nothing to do with the Old World's destruction or the Heartless outbreak.

Long Yuehong tersely acknowledged it. "Then, it's impossible that this place became a Buddhist Holy Land because of such weak connections with the Northern Company, right?"

If that were the case, the Fakh region's International Biotechnica Expo would be even more sacred!

"This is the direction we'll explore next." Jiang Baimian didn't make any judgment.

After a round of searching, apart from Shang Jianyao stuffing some 'holy magazines' into his tactical backpack, Jiang Baimian memorized the appearances of Northern Company's Vice President Oak, Holm Fertility Center's Director Kikhov, and the others, the Old Task Force gained nothing else.

After returning to the middle of the lobby, Shang Jianyao asked excitedly, "Can we begin?"

Jiang Baimian nodded and said to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, "Go outside and look at the lobby through the window."

This was their previous experience exploring Building 4, Room 302 in the steelworks factory ruins' Residential Zone 2.

By the time Bai Chen and Long Yuehong took their positions, Shang Jianyao had already sat down cross-legged. He held the Six Senses Beads in one hand and unfolded the original medical record in the steelworks factory ruins with the other.

He 'sang' the contents of the medical record in a tone as though he was reciting Buddhist scriptures.

Everything inside the Holm Fertility Center remained normal.

After confirming this with Bai Chen and Long Yuehong through the walkie-talkie, Jiang Baimian signaled for Shang Jianyao to take out the small jade Buddha.

Shang Jianyao readily agreed. He reached into his pocket, took out the small, lake-green jade Buddha, and held it in his palm.

The surrounding area remained the same.

All the useful solutions the Old Task Force had used to explore Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company had been useless.

"It doesn't work..." Shang Jianyao held the small jade Buddha and stood up regretfully.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before picking up the walkie-talkie. “Little White, Little Red, you can come back now. Then, we’ll search the second floor and do the same again.”

After Long Yuehong and Bai Chen returned to the team, the Old Task Force members maintained their combat formation and walked up the stairs to the second floor.

The damage inside the Holm Fertility Center was indeed relatively light. This place was well-maintained; only a small number of tables and chairs had been overturned or deviated from their original spots. Black blood could be seen in a few places.

As they walked along the long and quiet corridor, Jiang Baimian and the others entered every room to search for clues.

After investigating one room after another, Long Yuehong habitually led the way into the room on the right just ahead.

The first thing he saw was an oil painting of a woman revealing her breasts. He then saw a large number of similar items and LCD screens.

Long Yuehong blushed and retreated from the room.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Baimian asked curiously.

Shang Jianyao curiously went forward and came to Long Yuehong’s side to scan the room.

Thud!

He slapped the Berserker assault rifle’s side and said, “I get it—this is the Sutra Room.”

With that said, he chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.”

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen instantly understood Shang Jianyao’s true meaning.

Suppressing her laughter, Jiang Baimian simply instructed, “Do a quick search. There shouldn’t be any clues here.”

As she said, the Old Task Force didn’t find any useful information in this room.

After leaving the area and turning into a corridor, Jiang Baimian swept her gaze and saw a name tag: “Center Director’s Office.”

## Chapter 652: Names

The Old Task Force members looked at each other and felt the other party’s solemnity. Well, apart from Shang Jianyao.

Long Yuehong even believed that he wanted to play a song and dance.

Bai Chen deliberated and said, “As the center director’s office, this is the most likely place to hide secrets.”

The secret behind its becoming a Buddhist Holy Land.

The honest Shang Jianyao never cared about the other party’s identity; he always spoke his mind. “This is only under normal circumstances, but something like a Buddhist Holy Land is abnormal to begin with. Long River City’s United Steel Plant became a Buddhist Holy Land because there’s a small jade Buddha in Room 302, Building 4 of Residential Zone 2, as well as Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong’s corpses. Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company became a Buddhist Holy Land because of an ordinary sales manager—Liu Lu—and a former employee who might’ve become a vegetable through an accident. This has nothing to do with the steelworks factory’s factory owner or the food company’s general manager.”

Long Yuehong tried to retort, but he couldn’t organize his words. He could only say sullenly, “Times are different. Maybe the anomaly here is related to the director.”

Without giving the honest Shang Jianyao a chance to speak again, Jiang Baimian tried to smooth things over. “Regardless, this is a very important place. It can help us understand the Holm Fertility Center further.”

She then pointed at the office with her chin. “Enter in sequence.”

Long Yuehong kept to his role as the team’s vanguard. He held the Berserker assault rifle and walked into the office that belonged to the Holm Fertility Center’s director.

This place wasn’t small; it was bigger than Long Yuehong’s home. The ground was covered in a thick gray carpet.

“How extravagant!” Shang Jianyao—who had followed in—commented.

The Old Task Force’s Room 14 on the 627th floor was smaller than this.

On the left were bookshelves, exhibition cabinets, and other things. On the right was a reception area, and it consisted of a sofa, a coffee table, a few chairs, a small bar counter, and a coat rack.

In the middle, close to the floor-to-ceiling window, was a large, black desk and a leather chair. On the other side of the desk were two ergonomic chairs.

“It’s obvious that it’s very suitable for sitting,” Shang Jianyao said eagerly.

At this moment, Long Yuehong realized that there were many black marks on the office carpet, suspected to be splattered blood.

Correspondingly, the large desk’s surface in front of the floor-to-ceiling window was messy. There were documents, pens, and other things scattered around.

“There should be traces of someone continuing forward despite being shot.” Jiang Baimian looked down and examined the area. “The blood kept dripping until it reached the desk.”

She said that it was a shot instead of being chopped because she had discovered a few bullet holes in the wall near the door.

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian walked to the large desk. Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen tacitly dispersed, each guarding a direction.



Jiang Baimian soon arrived at her destination and saw many dark spots on the leather chair. The carpet in the area was clearly dirtier than in the other areas, and there were black stains everywhere.

Jiang Baimian subconsciously looked up at the ceiling and realized that there was also a large black splatter of what was suspected to be blood. She muttered to herself, “His carotid artery was severed, and blood spewed a few meters into the air?”

This was the most reasonable explanation she could think of. Unfortunately, she couldn’t verify her judgment since there were no corpses here.

Jiang Baimian checked the traces at the scene again, turned around, and said to her team members, “When the Old World was destroyed, many people in the Holm Fertility Center became Heartless. They chased after humans and tried to kill them. One of the Heartless broke in and was shot by the center’s director, who is suspected to be called Kikhov. However, the Heartless didn’t die on the spot. Instead, he rushed in front of the other party, jumped onto the desk, and bit or tore open the director’s carotid artery. After that, the Heartless dragged the corpse away and found another place to enjoy it?”

“Why couldn’t it be them perishing together, thereby benefiting the other Heartless?” The honest Shang Jianyao had a different opinion.

Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth. “You’re right.”

Bai Chen said, “Did the Crystal Consciousness Church’s monks go up to the second floor or other floors? Did they enter these rooms? Why did they let the documents, books, and pens fall to the ground without tidying them? Could it be that they head straight to a room that truly represents the Holy Land every time?”

“I think they’ve entered before,” Long Yuehong answered Bai Chen’s question. “Otherwise, it’s impossible for us not to see a single skeleton after searching for so long.”

This didn’t conform to the rules—the habits of the Heartless.

Although it was possible for Heartless to drag the corpses to a safer place to hide and enjoy them, they rarely carried heavy items or traveled long distances. In other words, the corpses of those who had died in the Holm Fertility Center should still be in this building.

Of course, this was only a Heartless habit in the early Chaotic Era. Later, many Ruin Hunters realized that as food was reduced and competition with their own kind started, the surviving Heartless began to form small groups and split up the work. After they successfully hunted, they would get one or more members to return to their nests with the food and provide the rest with protection.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Perhaps to the Crystal Consciousness Church’s monks, apart from the dirty corpses that need to be cleaned, it’s best to maintain this holy land in its original state.”

She then ordered, “Search around for any clues. Finally, we’ll get Zen Master Redemption to read the scriptures and pay respects to Buddha, repeating our attempt on the first floor.”

Jiang Baimian jokingly called Shang Jianyao ‘Zen Master Redemption,’ but Shang Jianyao immediately became excited. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Is this Penniless Monk the first Shang Jianyao Democratic Association member to be recognized apart from the main body?”

“...” Jiang Baimian was first taken aback before she silently felt contrite and penitent. I shouldn’t have done that.

The next second, Shang Jianyao chuckled. “Make yourself clear. Who’s the main body?”

The Shang Jianyaos argued over this question, making Long Yuehong feel like the solemn atmosphere that had been painstakingly built up had vanished quickly.

Finally, Jiang Baimian stopped the Shang Jianyaos’ friendly discussion with her authority as team leader.

According to the division of labor, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong went to the bookshelf and exhibition cabinet. Bai Chen checked the reception area, and Jiang Baimian placed her focus on the black desk beside her.

She found a place to put down the rocket launcher and bent down to pick up the documents, books, and pens.

Jiang Baimian quickly flipped through them one by one without finding anything. With nothing left to do, she opened the desk drawers and searched for other clues.

During this process, she tried to switch on the computer here—hoping to have Shang Jianyao power it, only to realize that it was completely damaged. She planned on dismantling and retrieving the corresponding storage components later to see if Geneva could recover some data.

Time quickly passed.

After a while, Shang Jianyao spoke without hiding anything. “They are all biographies of famous people, management experience, common knowledge regarding horse rearing, and wine appreciation. There are relatively few scientific books regarding genetics and reproduction.”

“That’s right,” Long Yuehong echoed. “The display cabinet has many awards obtained by the Holm Fertility Center. There are also trophies from golf competitions and medals from horse racing competitions...”

“The reception area is very clean.” Bai Chen also gave her search results.

Jiang Baimian was just about to respond when she swept her gaze around and, through the corner of her eye, saw a document in the drawer with the title: ‘Genetic Research Frontier Academic Seminar Schedule.’

She took it out and flipped through it.

The date labeled on it perked her up. The seminar was held two days after the Northern Company delegation visited the Holm Fertility Center.

Jiang Baimian immediately focused and read it carefully from beginning to end.

At this moment, the idle Shang Jianyao walked over curiously.

“First lecture, research on the possibility of genetic modification... Main speaker, Richard Halloy (Northern Company’s Senior Researcher)...” Jiang Baimian only scanned the first portion of it and felt that this document was valuable.

It meant that the Northern Company didn't immediately leave the Fakh region and return to the city after they visited the Holm Fertility Center. Instead, they stayed for a few days and held a joint seminar.

Jiang Baimian didn't read it quickly. Instead, she looked up and said in a deep voice, "Be vigilant."

Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Shang Jianyao entered a highly vigilant state at the same time. Among them, Shang Jianyao would occasionally poke his head in Jiang Baimian's direction, attempting to take a few glances.

Jiang Baimian finished reading all the daily arrangements and memorized some of the researchers' names. She confirmed that the office's owner was indeed the man named Kikhov.

At the end of the document were more than ten special guests. According to the labels beside them, they were either cross-disciplinary scientists, representatives of several companies in the genetic industry, or people with a government background.

Jiang Baimian read each name and realized that there were several Ashlandics among them. Behind their Red River language names were parentheses labeled with transcribed Ashlandic names and their corresponding identities.

"Catelyn." Jiang Baimian habitually read out the first Ashlandic guest's name. "Suí LIN..."

According to Ashlandic naming habits, this should be reversed. In other words, Catelyn's real name was Lin Suí.

Shang Jianyao quickly corrected her. "Sùi LIN—Lin Sùi!"

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before her eyes widened. "Lin Sùi?"

The genius scientist who went on the cover of Renwu?

This was the name Shang Jianyao had seen in the psychological trauma corresponding to Iron Mountain City Ruin!

“It feels like it.” Shang Jianyao nodded sincerely.

Jiang Baimian quickly glanced at the suspected Lin Sui’s identity. “A young scientist from the Northern Company, a committee member of a major project.”

Jiang Baimian had previously noticed that the Northern Company’s vice-president—Oak—was also a special guest. He also had another title—co-principal investigator of a major project.

“Lin Sui is actually from the Northern Company?” Jiang Baimian muttered to herself as she quickly scanned the last few names.

Among them, the last person didn’t have a Red River name. He only had an Ashlandic transcription.

Jiang Baimian carefully pieced the words together. “Heng DU...”

At this point, her eyes suddenly widened, and her expression became abnormally serious. She then said the name, “Du Heng...”

Chapter 653: One Level After Another

“Du Heng...”

The name Jiang Baimian said seemed to carry magic, depriving the Old Task Force members in the room of their ability to speak.

Before this, they never imagined that they would see Du Heng’s name in a city ruin’s Buddhist Holy Land.

There shouldn’t have been any connection between the two.

After more than ten seconds, Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion. “Teacher Du Heng is indeed a person who has lived from the Old World to this day!”

He had a proud expression. Those who didn't know better would think that the former was really his teacher.

"His physical appearance doesn't show at all..." Long Yuehong muttered.

Du Heng looked to be in his forties, and the Old World had been destroyed for nearly 70 years. Even though he was a child prodigy when he participated in the genetic research seminar held by the Holm Fertility Center and the Northern Company as a special guest, he was definitely more than 80 years old now.

Bai Chen organized her words and said, "Could it be that they share the same name or have the same pronunciation but a different character?"

"With Teacher Du Heng's strength and uniqueness, it's completely acceptable for him to have eternal youth." Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, "A figure like him being famous in the Old World suits my imagination."

This was a mysterious existence that was chasing after the suspected King of the Heartless, Xiaochong. It was a most logical guess that he had experienced the Old World's destruction. Furthermore, he had many old friends, such as the Crystal Consciousness Church's Buddha's Nirmanakaya.

"If it were really Teacher Du Heng, we should've asked him about the reason for the Old World's destruction and the Heartless disease's origins." Long Yuehong sighed regretfully.

The honest Shang Jianyao scoffed. "Have you forgotten? Teacher Du Heng said that he lost many of his memories."

"It's not like he didn't have the intention of using the opportunity to retrieve his memories when he chose to be an antiquarian." Jiang Baimian agreed with Shang Jianyao and felt that this formed a logical chain with Du Heng's claim.

At this moment, Bai Chen recalled something. As she guarded against any possible accidents, she asked, "What capacity did Teacher Du Heng come in to participate in that academic seminar?"

Jiang Baimian slowly shook her head. "I don't know. He's the only special guest without a Red River name, identity, or position."

Even those with a government background had very proper titles listed.

“How mysterious!” Shang Jianyao actually showed obvious envy.

“Is there anything else after that?” Long Yuehong wondered if they should discuss Du Heng’s origins or why he was participating in such an academic seminar that involved cutting-edge genetic research.

On the one hand, they lacked effective clues. On the other hand, the Old Task Force was in Wasteland Ruin 13. Time was equivalent to life, so they couldn’t waste it.

Jiang Baimian flipped to the last page of the document. “After the list of special guests is the academic seminar location. It’s on the fourth floor of this building, Conference Room 3. There’s nothing else.”

Without waiting for her team members to respond, Jiang Baimian sighed. “It seems like it’s necessary to conduct a search there.”

Although under normal circumstances, the relevant conference rooms would definitely be cleaned up after the seminars and there would be other arrangements for the rooms, it was only a few days before the Old World was destroyed. Jiang Baimian hoped that the Holm Fertility Center’s employees hadn’t cleaned up thoroughly enough, leaving behind some clues or traces.

With that said, she pointed at the desk drawer and said, “Come over and help flip through the remaining documents. Let’s try to finish this quickly.”

Since Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong had already completed their missions, they naturally had to divide up the labor efficiently to save precious time.

After more than ten minutes of searching and flipping through the documents, the Old Task Force finally confirmed that there was no other valuable information in the director’s office.

“To be able to see Lin Sui and Teacher Du Heng’s names on such a document makes our trip worth it.” Jiang Baimian wasn’t disappointed at all.

Compared to the teams that had spent years exploring city ruins without finding any effective clues, the Old Task Force could be considered lucky.

As Jiang Baimian stuffed the document into her tactical backpack and picked up the rocket launcher on the ground, Long Yuehong flipped out the window and assumed a posture of spying inside.

Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao calmly sat down cross-legged, spun the Six Senses Beads, and recited the contents of the medical record in the steelworks factory ruins.

After completing this ‘ritual,’ he took out the small jade Buddha.

Nothing happened.

“We aren’t fated...” Shang Jianyao’s words were always baffling.

After sighing, he put away the small jade Buddha and the original medical record. The Old Task Force then slowly evacuated the room and searched elsewhere on the same floor.

They went up floor by floor and finally arrived at the top floor—the fourth floor. They didn’t find anything along the way. Of course, this was mainly because nothing really caught their eye. If an ordinary Ruin Hunter team entered, they would find everything valuable and have the eagerness to move everything away.

After a brief inspection, Bai Chen pointed diagonally ahead and said, “That’s Conference Room 3.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao took out a piece of paper and unfolded it. On it were nine pictures that corresponded to different Kalendarium—Blessings from all Kalendarium.

Shang Jianyao pushed the map out and raised it. He lowered his head and fell silent.

After a few seconds, he finally said, “May all Kalendarium bless us.”

It’s best not to wear the Six Senses Beads when praying, or else only September’s Kalendarium, Mandara, will appreciate you. However, you didn’t draw the symbol that represents ‘Her’...?Jiang Baimian couldn’t help but criticize inwardly.



After Shang Jianyao put away the Blessings from all Kalendarium, Long Yuehong curiously asked, “Why don’t you use the prayers corresponding to every Kalendaria—things like ‘everything is but a dream; why so serious,’ ‘always be vigilant,’ or ‘newborns are likened unto the sun; life is what’s most important?’”

Shang Jianyao sighed and said awkwardly, “Who should go first and who should go last? This is a very serious problem. I’m afraid that ‘They’ will fight because of this.”

“Can’t you just do it by month?” Bai Chen suggested.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up. “That’s right! Why didn’t I think of that? Then, I’ll start over!”

He wanted to take out the Blessings from all Kalendarium again.

“Stop, stop, stop!” Jiang Baimian stopped him from wasting time. She then stepped past Bai Chen and Long Yuehong and walked to Conference Room 3 first.

Shang Jianyao craned his neck, feeling rather disappointed when she didn’t walk to the wrong door.

Conference Room 3 was relatively large, and it was still set up as if it were holding an academic seminar. In front of it was a large projector screen and a podium to the side. Below it were rows of seats and projectors.

Unfortunately, there was no paper here. There wasn’t even black blood. It was as if the Heartless had never been here after the Old World was destroyed.

Jiang Baimian secretly exhaled, but she still followed procedure by giving orders. “Search an area each.”

Shang Jianyao walked to the front of the meeting room, lightly patted the projector screen, and gently asked, “It’s been hard on you all these years. What happened back then? Did that academic seminar invite some impressive figures?”

He seemed to be asking an old friend.

The projector screen didn't answer him, unsurprisingly.

If the projector could speak, the first sentence would definitely be 'you're nuts!'

Jiang Baimian wanted to facepalm, but she couldn't do so thanks to the single-man combat rocket launcher in her left hand while her right arm was paralyzed. She could only pretend that nothing had happened.

Using the afternoon sun shining in from the window, she checked the corners, behind the door, and some rows of seats.

But without a doubt, the Old Task Force failed to find anything.

They then searched the other rooms on the same floor but also failed to find any valuable clues.

Jiang Baimian didn't forget to get Shang Jianyao to recite the medical record and showcase the jade Buddha, but this Buddhist Holy Land really seemed different from the previous two.

At the stairwell on the fourth floor, Long Yuehong expressed his opinion. "It feels too—too normal and ordinary."

As a Buddhist Holy Land, being too normal was the greatest abnormality.

There were more or less 'abnormalities' lurking in Long River City's United Steel Plant and Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company!

Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, "But we've already searched and tried everything we could."

"No." Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and asked with a smile, "Don't you think there's something missing here?"

Bai Chen's expression was slightly blank. She thought for a few seconds but didn't have an answer.

Jiang Baimian coughed and said, “We didn’t see any storage for cryogenic materials along the way. This is necessary for a fertility center that can treat infertility.”

As employees of Pangu Biology, they were always sufficiently sensitive to such matters.

Long Yuehong came to a realization. “It’s... It’s underground? We haven’t gone to basement one!”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded. “Let’s go now.”

Just as she said that, she suddenly turned around and looked at the floor-to-ceiling window opposite her. “There’s a relatively strong bioelectric signal!”

It didn’t belong to a human.

Long Yuehong was alarmed before he felt intense fear. This fear seemed to turn corporeal and gripped his heart tightly.

He then saw a large black figure slap the floor-to-ceiling window.

It was a python as thick as a water barrel. Its eyes were cold, round, and large as if they were filled with blood.

Chapter 654: It’s Better to Be Prepared

Red-eyed python? The one wrapped around Wu Meng?

Although Long Yuehong had never really seen this terrifying python and had only heard Ferrington describe it, the stark characteristics made him instantly make some connections.

Long Yuehong became even more afraid when he thought that the python’s attack might be Wu Meng’s doing.

He trembled in fear, and his limbs went limp. He felt suffocated and couldn't muster any will to resist. Even the thoughts in his mind seemed to be frozen, but there was still flowing water under the ice, just that it couldn't affect his body.

Long Yuehong had a vague guess.

This was a mutated creature—its abilities were in Eidolon Nun's domain, allowing it to induce fear in the target. Although this couldn't compare to Extreme Terror, which could directly scare people to death, it was enough to break down the prey's resistance.

Similar to Long Yuehong, Bai Chen—who was wearing the Chameleon—was also frozen in her spot. She didn't immediately raise her Orange rifle to aim.

Jiang Baimian revealed a pained expression. The muscles on her face were slightly warped as if she was using all her strength to resist the intense feelings that came from the depths of her subconscious.

Only Shang Jianyao didn't show any fear. Instead, he had a calm expression as if he had facial paralysis. He didn't look like any of the Shang Jianyaos.

“Remaining staid even if the sky fell!”

Before entering the cave in the North Shore Mountains, the Old Task Force had made many preparations for possible encounters. Among them were precautions against the Awakened abilities they had previously encountered and found indefensible—terror, bewitchment, and friendliness.

The preventive method was Thought Implantation.

Of course, the effects of Thought Implantation became more problematic with an increasing number of overlapping effects. Therefore, the Old Task Force's strategy was for every member to receive a specific 'thought' to resist the corresponding abilities. This would prevent the entire team from being affected, resulting in nobody being able to step forward to wake their teammates up—just like how they were previously controlled by Qiao Chu.

Among them, Shang Jianyao might not be that afraid or might even appear excited when he encountered the fear that came from the bottom of his heart—even during normal times. Therefore,

after a mutual discussion, they decided to let him resist any fears in case there was nobody to stop him when they encountered a situation that required fear and vigilance.

In fact, Jiang Baimian's Stimulation Disorder could achieve a similar effect with limited durations. It couldn't satisfy the hours of exploration. It required constantly replenishing energy along the way, and it was too troublesome. Furthermore, Jiang Baimian's mental strength couldn't keep up since she was still in the Sea of Origins.

In addition, Shang Jianyao had been forced to reduce the effects when he used Thought Implantation on himself. This allowed him to remain calm even if the sky collapsed for targeted scenes that could bring fear and not other situations to prevent having his normal judgment and reaction affected.

The calm Shang Jianyao raised his hands and pulled the trigger with his firearm trained at the floor-to-ceiling window.

The Berserker assault rifle immediately spewed out crimson flames.

Amidst the gunfire, the floor-to-ceiling windows shattered, and blood bloomed from the red-eyed python's body.

The mutated creature's mouth suddenly opened to its greatest extent as it let out an indescribable howl, making the invisible fear become increasingly obvious.

Bam!

It swung its body back and slammed into the trees outside, causing them to totter.

Faced with such an opportunity, Shang Jianyao didn't take the opportunity to attack. He took a few steps forward and 'reprimanded' the other party. "You cheated! You have no limbs!"

He seemed to have failed to use Limbs Immobility on the red-eyed python.

The red-eyed python had previously hidden its consciousness and approached stealthily. It only appeared when Jiang Baimian sensed its bioelectric signal just moments before it 'entered' Shang Jianyao's detection range.

The red-eyed python clearly didn't hear Shang Jianyao's reprimand. Even if it did, it might not understand. It was rolling around in pain at this moment, almost squeezing out the sap from the tree.

Although its scales weren't as sturdy as the Blackmarsh Iron Snake's, they had a certain level of defense. Coupled with its thick skin, its injuries did not seem fatal.

Just as Shang Jianyao decided to switch abilities, a white wolf rushed up from the third floor.

Jiang Baimian—who was resisting her fear—failed to give a warning. The wolf named Bai Xiao hid its consciousness again and only revealed itself when its Bewitchment was effective, pouncing behind the Old Task Force members.

Its original plan seemed to involve carrying out a pincer attack with the red-eyed python to finish off the enemy in the shortest time possible. But by the time it appeared, its companion had already been repelled.

At this moment, Long Yuehong turned around. The eyes under his goggles were bloodshot, and he didn't look like he had been bewitched at all. Instead, he seemed to have a grudge with the white wolf as though it had snatched his wife and killed his son.

He stared at the other party and fired crazily.

He was the one chosen to resist Bewitchment!

According to Shang Jianyao's private theory, there was no need to implant 'thoughts' in Little Red. He could directly challenge all the Bewitchment effects unless the other party had transformed into Little White.

In order to maximize the effects, the thought that Shang Jianyao implanted for Long Yuehong was: "When you are Bewitched by a certain creature, you should clearly know that the person you like will also be bewitched by 'him.' Therefore, the best solution is to kill 'him' and turn 'him' into a specimen for collection."

At this moment, not only did the hatred and desire in his heart help Long Yuehong defeat his Bewitchment, but it also allowed him to escape the influence of ‘fear.’ If it weren’t for the fact that Shang Jianyao didn’t have the luxury of time, he definitely would’ve applauded him.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Bullets shot out of the Berserker assault rifle one after another, stirring up dust and sparks.

Unfortunately, the white wolf seemed to be more careful than the red-eyed python—it didn’t pounce without regard. Upon realizing that Long Yuehong’s reaction wasn’t right, it immediately jumped toward the flight of stairs heading down.

Woo!

Its tail was struck by a bullet, and its body lost its balance. Thus, it fell heavily on the stairwell railing and fell down with a series of thuds.

Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao were just about to chase after their respective ‘enemies’ when the lights on the Holm Fertility Center’s fourth floor instantly lit up. They became a contiguous whole with a brightness that could almost rival the sunlight outside.

Bang! Bang! Bang!?

The calm Shang Jianyao turned his body and shattered the fluorescent tubes in the room.

Long Yuehong was stunned for a moment. Considering his companions’ safety, he also destroyed the lights in the corridor.

As their Fear and Bewitchment subsided, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen recovered one after another and helped their teammates deal with this floor’s out-of-control lights.

With a sizzling sound, the remaining lights went out. The Holm Fertility Center returned to normal, apart from the floor strewn with glass.

Jiang Baimian quickly ordered, “Check yourself and see if you have any strange thoughts.”

She was worried that she or her teammates had been unknowingly affected by Wu Meng.

At this moment, the red-eyed python and the white wolf had already disappeared and evacuated the area.

After a round of self-checks, the four Old Task Force members confirmed that Wu Meng had only saved his pets.

Shang Jianyao's implanted thoughts were written in the comparison notes. It wouldn't fail because of the 'self-checks,' but everyone knew that their teammates had similar external thoughts to which they would give a reminder the moment they left the ruins.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and said in a deep voice, "I wonder what Wu Meng will do next. Let's go to basement one quickly to complete the search and evacuate while there's still enough time."

When the time came, they could come back the next day if they didn't find anything.

"Yes, Team Leader!" Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited.

His excitement made Jiang Baimian and the others inexplicably tremble.

After a few minutes of searching, the Old Task Force found the cryogenic storage in the basement.

Standing in front of the storage's iron-black door, Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, "There's no way to open it unless the power supply is restored."

"Restoring the power won't do either. I've tried it, and the components inside the door are seriously damaged." Shang Jianyao indicated that he had silently helped the team eliminate a wrong solution.

Jiang Baimian didn't hesitate and nodded. "Stand back. I'll blast it open."

After all, it had been nearly 70 years. It was unlikely that the biological materials inside were still active.



As he walked behind Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao revealed a thoughtful expression. “Could the reason the Holm Fertility Center became a Buddhist Holy Land be that Subhuti or Master Zhuang’s reproductive materials are stored here?”

“...” For a moment, Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen didn’t know how to answer.

Shang Jianyao stood still and turned to look at the iron-black door of the cryogenic storage. He eagerly asked, “Then, is it considered a holy relic?”

Jiang Baimian only had one thought at this moment: I need to stay away from this fellow to prevent myself from being implicated when the Kalendarium smite him!

Jiang Baimian took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. She then placed the rocket launcher over her shoulder.

Boom!

A rocket flew out and blew up the iron door.

As the dust settled, Shang Jianyao walked over and excitedly said, “I’ll help you scout the way!”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and didn’t stop him.

Shang Jianyao came to the cryochamber’s entrance and walked in from the collapsed ruins.

Suddenly, a green glow lit up in his pocket.

Chapter 655: White Light

An anomaly really happened?? Long Yuehong—who was wrapped in the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor—almost popped his eyes out.

The anomaly in the Holm Fertility Center—a Buddhist Holy Land—was actually hidden in the fertility cryochamber!

For a moment, Long Yuehong couldn't help but recall Shang Jianyao's words: "Master Zhuang, Subhuti... Fertility materials... Holy relics..."

Long Yuehong tried his best to stop himself from making any connections to prevent himself from being smote to death by the Kalendarium.

It's all Shang Jianyao's fault! He guiltily emphasized.

Shang Jianyao had just passed through the half-collapsed iron door when he stopped. He then reached into his pocket and took out an item that emitted a green glow.

It wasn't the small, lake-green jade Buddha but the Six Senses Beads that Shang Jianyao had previously removed.

This item—which had fused with Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company, an abnormal Buddhist Holy Land—emitted a faint green glow over the wooden patterns.

Shang Jianyao then muttered to himself, "The small jade Buddha from Long River City's United Steel Plant retraced time at Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company and replicated the past. The Six Senses Beads representing Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company triggered an abnormality at the Holm Fertility Center... Therefore, we have to strictly follow an order? Is a certain item or abnormality in the Holm Fertility Center the key to opening the next Buddhist Holy Land's key area?"

Jiang Baimian replied helplessly, "We can discuss this after we leave the ruins."

It wasn't the time and place for that.

In fact, Jiang Baimian also felt that Shang Jianyao's guess was very reasonable. She believed that exploring the Five Great Buddhist Holy Lands was an intricately chained matter, so one had to start from the beginning and not mess up the sequence.

Where should we explore next? Icefield's Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School or under the old pagoda tree in Linhe Village, Dajiang City? As Jiang Baimian watched Shang Jianyao hold the Six Senses Beads in his palm again, she expanded on the question from before.

As she thought, she realized a very important question. If it's really as Shang Jianyao said and there's a sequence to exploring Buddhist Holy Lands, then why did our team have a smooth journey without making any mistakes?

Jiang Baimian felt that this might not be a coincidence when she thought of how she had planned to visit Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company midway by specially taking a detour instead of visiting on their return trip. It was mainly because Shang Jianyao entered Room 522 and discovered the psychological trauma corresponding to Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company. Furthermore, he had awakened the strange aura hidden inside after repeated attempts and fused it with the Six Senses Beads. She felt that perhaps it wasn't a coincidence.

Room 522 was the second room Shang Jianyao entered after entering the Mind Corridor. It was the first room he explored in the true sense of the word!

Too many coincidences meant that it wasn't a coincidence!

As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, Shang Jianyao took off his flashlight and illuminated the interior of the cryochamber.

This place was divided into several areas with steel plates. In each area were items that resembled gas canisters.

They weren't that large and were tightly sealed. They were liquid nitrogen containers that stored reproductive materials.

At this moment, under the illumination of the flashlight mixed with the Six Senses Beads' light, these containers were dyed a strange green. However, one of them was slightly different as if it had an additional layer of white fog.

Shang Jianyao had the Berserker assault rifle hanging in front of his chest as he spun the Six Senses Beads with one hand and walked toward the 'anomaly' with the flashlight in the other.

"Could it be..." Jiang Baimian had already arrived at the door and saw this scene.

She didn't dare to continue thinking about it.

Could it be that the reproductive material of Master Zhuang or Subhuti is really stored in that liquid nitro canister? Could the Old World's destruction and the Heartless outbreak be due to someone researching what they shouldn't have, hoping to combine a god with a human to give birth to a new creature?? Long Yuehong couldn't control his brain.

Bai Chen was first stunned before she warily observed her surroundings, worried that an accident would happen.

Shang Jianyao's remained staid even if the sky collapsed. The more terrifying this critical moment was, the more indifferent he became. He walked to the liquid nitro canister that suffused with white fog under the greenish-blue light.

After carefully observing for more than ten seconds, Shang Jianyao said in a deep voice, "This canister was opened at some point in time."

The other liquid nitrogen canisters in the freezer were tightly sealed.

Long Yuehong made a strange connection.?The reproductive materials came to life and reproduced on their own. They opened the cans, lined up, and left...

"See what's left inside," Jiang Baimian said calmly.

Shang Jianyao shone the flashlight beam in and quickly gave an answer. "There's nothing."

With that said, he stretched out his palm that was holding the Six Senses Beads and made the item make direct contact with the liquid nitro canister.

Almost at the same time, white specks of light rose from the can.

They were very illusory. After circling for a moment, they flew straight into Shang Jianyao's body.

This white light didn't attempt to fuse with the Six Senses Beads. Instead, it targeted Shang Jianyao!

Shang Jianyao's vision turned hazy as if his soul had been forcefully pulled out from his body. He then saw himself appear in the Sea of Origins—his Sea of Origins.

Below him was an illusory sea that shimmered with a faint glow and indistinct islands. Above them was the sky covered in a faint white fog and a rather large, dark rift.

At this moment, the Shang Jianyaos had already naturally separated. They were each entangled by a white light.

While bound, faces appeared in every Shang Jianyao's body as if they wanted to split into more Shang Jianyaos.

“No, we can't have that!” one Shang Jianyao shouted.

At this moment, countless black figures instantly came to life in the dark rift that led to Xiaochong's mind world. They then slammed into the invisible barrier as if they wanted to corrode it.

The white lights stopped. Right on the heels of that, they quickly left the Shang Jianyaos as if they had encountered their nemesis and reassembled into one in midair.

Following this, this beam of light shot out like lightning and stabbed at the dark rift. It collided with the heavy black figures and fused together, piling at the rift before falling silent.

The Shang Jianyaos watched for a while before carefully fusing. With two of them as wings, they flapped over.

He suppressed his voice and shouted for Xiaochong, but nobody replied.

After waiting for a while, Shang Jianyao stretched out a hand and slowly touched the rift. He touched the 'dimness' formed by white light and black shadows and gently poked it.

There was no reaction.

“That's it?” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and muttered to himself.

The next second, he sighed regretfully. “Why can’t it last a little longer? Just a little while longer, and our numbers will at least triple.”

When the white light wrapped around them, the Shang Jianyaos were splitting up. The Shang Jianyao Democratic Association members were about to increase greatly.

After confirming that the rift had returned to normal, Shang Jianyao left the Sea of Origins and opened his eyes.

Jiang Baimian had already come to his side and asked in concern, “How was it?”

The Six Senses Beads in Shang Jianyao’s left hand no longer emitted a green glow. The faint white fog that surfaced from the corresponding liquid nitro canister had also disappeared.

“We entered the Sea of Origins, and it perished together with the aura left behind by Xiaochong. No, they faded to silence,” Shang Jianyao replied casually.

Jiang Baimian frowned. “Is there any other problem?”

She didn’t ask if there were any latent dangers—it was obvious!

“Not for the time being.” Shang Jianyao smiled. “If it really doesn’t work out, I can still transfer the aura in the Life Angel necklace. There’s also the one inside the Six Senses Beads.”

Stop stuffing everything into your Sea of Origins! Jiang Baimian roared inwardly. She looked down and said, “This liquid nitrogen canister doesn’t seem to have a number.”

Normally, there should be a number corresponding to the source of the reproductive material.

“There was definitely one. Who removed it after the Old World was destroyed?” Shang Jianyao pointed to the side. “The numbers on the other liquid nitrogen canisters were gone as well.”

Jiang Baimian sighed. “How careful. I also plan on memorizing the numbers of the other liquid nitrogen canisters. I’ll then attempt to extract data from the hard disk obtained from the director’s office and compare it to find the one that has been wiped.”

The Old Task Force had taken out a hard disk from the computer in the director's office and prepared to bring it back to Geneva for data recovery.

This was an electronic product that could be affected by Wu Meng, but it didn't have any offensive power like a walkie-talkie. Furthermore, it was under Jiang Baimian's strict surveillance. It would immediately be shattered if anything happened.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, Jiang Baimian nodded and continued, "This isn't too much of a problem. As long as we can successfully restore the inventory, we can go through the names for suspicious candidates."

After a quick search, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian left the freezer. They then met up with Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, preparing to return to the lobby and leave the Holm Fertility Center.

Just as they arrived at the first floor along the stairs, Jiang Baimian and the others suddenly saw a figure.

This figure sat on a green sofa in the hall.

He was a man in his late twenties. His hair was neatly combed, and he wore a formal gray suit with black stripes. He also wore round but relatively small-framed glasses as he seriously flipped through a pamphlet.

Suddenly, a name surfaced in Long Yuehong's mind: Wu Meng!

Chapter 656: Powerful

Wu Meng! This name flashed nearly simultaneously across Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen's minds.

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

Although the Old Task Force members had never truly seen Wu Meng, the deceased Ruin Hunter—Ferrington—had previously encountered a man with such a description in this ruin. Back then, the man had a red-eyed python coiled around him and a white wolf squatting beside him. They were

certain that the two mutated creatures were mutated by Wu Meng, making them equivalent to his pets.

Therefore, Jiang Baimian and the others naturally came to the conclusion that the man was Wu Meng without needing to say anything.

The terrifying monster that the Eternal Time Church's elderly Celestial Master sealed at the cost of his life has finally escaped??Jiang Baimian's heart tightened before she made a different judgment.

She didn't sense any electrical appliances being activated, nor did she sense any other human consciousness. However, she realized that the electromagnetic environment in the lobby on the Holm Fertility Center's first floor was rather chaotic!

Jiang Baimian recalled that although they were certain that Wu Meng was sealed, he had still 'appeared' to meet Ferrington. With his help, he had passed a copy of the Fakh Post to the Old Task Force and the few lone Hunters who had explored Wasteland Ruin 13. Jiang Baimian suspected that Wu Meng had relied on the nearby appliances, circuit boards, and wires to modify the corresponding area so that the electromagnetic signals he transmitted could show images.

In order to break out of their current situation, apart from depriving themselves of their hearing and not listening to Wu Meng, the Old Task Force had a very simple solution: By changing the electromagnetic environment here, Wu Meng's signal would be useless!

Jiang Baimian did as she thought. She threw down the rocket launcher and stretched out her left palm.

She wanted to use the remaining high-voltage electric current in her biological prosthetic limb to destroy the electromagnetic environment within range!

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly laughed smugly as though he had some random screw loose. "Haha, you didn't have your pets following you this time..."

Just as he said that, the man—wearing small, round glasses and a formal gray, black-lined suit—suspected to be Wu Meng looked up. He was leisurely flipping through the Holm Fertility Center's pamphlet.

He looked at the four Old Task Force members, and the corners of his mouth curled up slightly.



In an instant, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen's heads went blank; they didn't know what they wanted to do or what they should do. They didn't even remember who they were. They were in a daze as if they had lost the ability to think.

The electric shock that Jiang Baimian prepared to release came to an abrupt and premature abortion.

The black-haired, brown-eyed man chuckled and said in a strange Ashlandic accent, "Don't worry. If I really wanted to deal with you, why go through so much trouble? All that's needed is a flash of an electric spark. The Grand course is like water. It is mighty and unstoppable."

His voice indeed belonged to Wu Meng.

As Wu Meng spoke, Jiang Baimian and the others finally found their rhythm. Their thinking abilities quickly recovered.

The first thought that flashed through their minds was: "Isn't this poisonous sore too powerful?"

Shang Jianyao wasn't afraid even though he had no way of resisting. He calmly and curiously asked, "Stupid Halo?"

This was an ability in the Master Zhuang domain. Shang Jianyao felt that it was very similar to the influence Wu Meng had just exerted.

Wu Meng remained on the sofa without getting up. He leaned back and smiled. "When you enter the New World, you will be able to control all the abilities in a major domain."

Jiang Baimian recalled her previous experience. On the one hand, she felt that she and the others were indeed helpless. They needed to make sufficient preparations before they could resist Stupid Halo, so it was better to listen to what Wu Meng was up to. On the other hand, she still refused to give up. She wanted to find an opportunity to 'send' Wu Meng away and grasp the initiative.

However, this didn't stop her from taking the opportunity to fleece him. "In any case, we are already in such a situation. Why don't we take it easy and counter every move that comes to see if we can gain some benefits!?"

Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to ask, “What about the Kalendarium?”

Wu Meng smiled. “Ambitious, but that’s not a good thing. Only by giving up the competition for minor interests can a man find no competitors in this world.”

Just as Jiang Baimian thought that her attempt to fleece him had failed, Wu Meng patted the green cushion beside him. “From a macroscopic point of view, the Kalendarium each controls three domains. They naturally suppress all Awakened in their domains.”

Three domains... Three bestowments for one price...?Jiang Baimian realized that they were all related.

Wu Meng—who was wearing small, round glasses—swept his gaze around and realized that Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were very tense.

“There’s really no need to be nervous. If I wanted to control you, I could’ve done it previously. There’s no need to wait until now.” The mysterious existence—who was known as a monster and poisonous sore—was like a real radio host. His attitude was amiable, and his words were filled with laughter. “After your last departure, three people should’ve committed suicide. Don’t tell me you thought I could only affect the three of them back then?”

Upon being reminded by Wu Meng’s words, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao, and Jiang Baimian recalled Waite, Fars, and Ferrington—who had clearly finished the expedition and obtained a bountiful harvest, only to suddenly choose to commit suicide.

This made Long Yuehong feel like a bucket of ice water had been poured over his head, and he couldn’t help but shiver. This cultured and polite man in front of me can control other people’s thoughts and kill them without them realizing it!

“Why did you let us go?” the honest Shang Jianyao asked in response.

Wu Meng crossed his legs and relaxed. “Because you have the Kalendarium’s attention.”

His gaze gradually stopped on Shang Jianyao. “Arbiter of Fate, Eidolon Nun, Dawn, Double Sun, Shattered Mirror, Subhuti...”

This was Wang Fugui's guess back then, but he believed that we were pious believers of a particular Kalendaria...?Jiang Baimian realized that her previous guess—which she had previously thought was virtually impossible—was actually true.

As for the fact that so many Kalendarium were watching, the Old Task Force found it nothing surprising. Their bodies and minds were numb to the fact.

In Redstone Collection, after the small jade Buddha underwent a magical change under Eidolon Nun's watch, they knew that the situation was already so bad that to make it worse made no real difference.

“Then, why are the Kalendarium watching us?” Long Yuehong blurted out a question.

Wu Meng had an amused expression. “You need to ask ‘Them,’ not me.”

“Then, why did you come looking for us?” Jiang Baimian asked calmly.

Wu Meng straightened his gray suit with black stripes. “You injured my pets. It's not too much for me to meet you, right?”

Here comes the main topic...?Long Yuehong recalled that he had injured the white wolf's tail and immediately became a little nervous.

Shang Jianyao's thoughts jumped as he asked about something else. “Someone previously attacked us. Why didn't you affect them and instead allowed them free passage in this ruin? Didn't you say that dealing with people at our level is only a matter of a spark? Could it be that they are also being watched by a Kalendaria?”

Good question! This time, it was Jiang Baimian's turn to applaud Shang Jianyao.

Wu Meng turned his head to look outside the automatic doors. “One needs some entertainment after being sealed for a long time. Besides, they have Doctor protecting them.”

“Doctor? The Eighth Research Institute's Doctor?” Jiang Baimian acutely captured the keyword.

Wu Meng nodded. “Yes.”

Teacher Du Heng said that Doctor and the others had become traitors that lurked in the darkness, while Dawn’s Morning Star and the True Self Church believe that they are the nightmare’s minions... Therefore, the nightmare is part of the darkness??Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced as she analyzed the situation.

Shang Jianyao raised another question. “Since you said you don’t want to deal with us, why did your pets attack us? Why did you repeatedly affect our team’s electrical appliances?”

Wu Meng laughed, and the eyes behind his small, round glasses suffused a red glow. “Guess how many of us want to kill you and how many of us are suppressing them with all our might?”

In Long Yuehong’s eyes, this poisonous sore’s smile carried indescribable cruelty and baffling joy.

No, don’t agitate him... He’s indeed from the Master Zhuang domain, and his price is very similar to Hey’s...?Jiang Baimian made a gesture with her left hand, motioning for Shang Jianyao not to continue the topic.

Without waiting for the Old Task Force members to speak, Wu Meng chuckled and said, “I actually came to see you for a reason. The matter you are investigating has special meaning to me. It might help me break the seal in the future; therefore, I passed you the Fakh Post using that Hunter. Now, I mainly want to tell you: The Buddhist Holy Land you should explore next is Icefield’s Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School.”

With that said, Wu Meng’s expression turned sullen. The air around him immediately froze like lead. “You may leave now.”

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others looked at each other and didn’t dare stay any longer. They carefully crossed the lobby and walked out of the Holm Fertility Center.

Just as she stepped through the automatic doors, Jiang Baimian recalled something and asked, “Can you really transform mutated creatures?”

Wu Meng smiled. “Guess.”

He didn't answer directly.

After the four Old Task Force members left the Holm Fertility Center, a figure suddenly appeared behind Wu Meng—she was Xu Lan in a cowboy suit.

“Why didn't you control them to help you escape?” Xu Lan asked with a frown.

Standing beside Wu Meng, her symmetry OCD seemed to have ‘recovered.’ She didn't show it at all.

“It's not enough with just you and them.” Wu Meng smiled. “Besides, Doctor will likely do his best to deal with them. The necklace's owner isn't simple.”

Xu Lan revealed a confused expression. “Don't you care?”

Wu Meng shook his head, and his figure gradually faded until he disappeared. He only left one sentence: “What doesn't kill them only makes them stronger.”

...

Jiang Baimian and the others returned to the cave passage before dusk.

They used the key information they had previously recorded to confirm that their memories hadn't been modified or that they had no strange thoughts implanted in them. They then reminded each other and removed the ‘protection’ provided by Shang Jianyao.

“What did Wu Meng mean?” Long Yuehong muttered to himself in confusion.

Jiang Baimian was just about to answer when the flashlight's beam swept across the crates on the ground, which were used to store their military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor.

It wasn't surprising for these boxes to appear here, but something else was strange.

Jiang Baimian looked around and asked, “Where's Old Ge?”

Surprisingly, Geneva wasn't guarding the place.

## Chapter 657: Saving Geneva

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian's words, Long Yuehong looked around.

With the help of the flashlight, he realized that this wasn't the place they had previously separated from Geneva. In other words, the crates containing the military exoskeletons and the bionic artificial intelligence armor had been moved at least 300 meters forward instead of being further away in the cave.

Therefore, Jiang Baimian only thought of searching for Geneva when she saw the crates.

As a smart bot that had a sense of duty engraved into a chip, Geneva had actually left his post without permission and wasn't nearby!

"Old Ge! Old Ge!" Shang Jianyao—who had already placed the Six Senses Beads into his tactical backpack—shouted.

His voice echoed in the cave, overlapping with the lingering echo. However, nobody replied.

Shang Jianyao shouted again, "Is your battery dead?"

Bai Chen denied Shang Jianyao's guess. "Old Ge has so many high-performance batteries. It definitely won't be a problem for him to use them for a week even without recharging."

Shang Jianyao asked in frustration, "Tell me why then. Was he abducted by passing Ruin Hunters?"

He sounded as though Geneva was like a weak, helpless, and easily lost child.

Bai Chen fell silent.

Under the flashlight's yellowish light, her expression was rather solemn as if she had already guessed something.

After a few seconds, Bai Chen slowly said, "Could Old Ge have entered the ruins to search for the secret laboratory?"

"No way?" Long Yuehong was so shocked that he was about to jump up. "There's no need for him to take this risk. A smart bot like him can't resist Wu Meng at all!"

"You make it sound like we are the same," retorted the honest Shang Jianyao.

"We didn't know that before..." Long Yuehong replied softly.

Wu Meng had previously acted as if he was still manageable, something the Old Task Force could prepare against or avoid. Now, he had shown an overwhelming strength advantage despite being sealed.

This compelled Jiang Baimian into sighing about how poisonous sores and Mind Corridor-level Awakened didn't seem like people from the same world.

Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and stopped Shang Jianyao from continuing. She then nodded slightly and said, "I agree with Little White's guess."

"But..." Long Yuehong still didn't believe that Geneva would enter Wasteland Ruin 13 so rashly. The latter wasn't Shang Jianyao!

Bai Chen understood his confusion and pursed her lips. "Maybe Old Ge is now controlled by the Source Brain."

"H-how can that be?" Long Yuehong's eyes widened. "We didn't mention the secret laboratory, Oray's inheritance, or the formatted Source Brain again after that. We tried our best not to agitate him, and the Source Brain is worlds apart..."

There were no satellites in the sky as relay points.

Bai Chen glanced at Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian and exhaled. "Back when we were discussing those points, it might've already been directed at the Source Brain."

This...?Long Yuehong felt like he was listening to a horror story.

Jiang Baimian nodded heavily. “I guessed as much. Perhaps after we came into contact with Avia and conveyed Oray’s words, a personality named ‘Source Brain’ gradually appeared in Old Ge’s core module. He didn’t sense it himself, or he was controlled even though he did. If that’s the case, the ones recently communicating with us alternate between Old Ge and the Source Brain...”

“I-I didn’t notice anything...” Long Yuehong recalled the various details after he met Geneva again.

Jiang Baimian sighed and said, “It’s the Source Brain after all.”

It was the source of all the smart bots in Mechanical Paradise. Furthermore, its ‘personality’ was hidden in Geneva’s core module, and Geneva himself operated according to a program. Therefore, it was easy for the Source Brain to simulate Geneva’s various reactions.

“After having his personality split, there are indeed very few people who are as harmonious and lively as us.” Shang Jianyao was proud and sad.

He felt sad for Geneva.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, “Have you forgotten the gentleman blocking the golden elevator’s door?”

“Can you not be so sarcastic?” The timid but ruthless Shang Jianyao was fuming.

Jiang Baimian—who had already returned the Life Angel necklace to Shang Jianyao—raised her right hand and pressed it down. “Stop arguing. Search for traces to confirm Old Ge’s whereabouts.”

As a smart bot, Geneva still wasn’t light despite being made of alloy and having a partially skeletal body structure. It was inevitable that he left behind ‘footprints’ when walking.

After some searching, the Old Task Force confirmed that Geneva had walked to the cave exit and entered Wasteland Ruin 13.



After a brief silence, Long Yuehong raised a new question. “Why did Old Ge move these crates forward? Why did he move them so close to the door?”

Shang Jianyao sighed. “There’s a program malfunction, right? The two personalities were arguing.”

He was experienced in this regard.

Bai Chen shook her head and deliberated before saying, “Maybe Old Ge hopes that we can wear the military exoskeletons as soon as possible when we return to the cave after encountering danger to enhance our ability to fight, run, and retreat.”

Therefore, he moved the crates a long distance forward.

Shang Jianyao fell silent.

Jiang Baimian nodded and agreed with Bai Chen’s guess. “Normally speaking, there’s no need to do this because Old Ge will be the one meeting us...”

Now, Geneva had entered Wasteland Ruin 13 himself.

Without wasting any time, Jiang Baimian restrained her sigh and looked around. “What should we do next?”

Broad consultation with the team members before making a decision was a sign of democracy.

Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation, “Find Old Ge!”

Bai Chen’s expression relaxed a little. “I don’t want to give up on any companion.”

She only said ‘me,’ not ‘us.’ It meant that she didn’t want to represent the other team members.

“Yes.” Long Yuehong nodded before raising his difficulties. “It’s almost evening.”

Wasteland Ruin 13 was definitely more dangerous at night!

“In any case, the most dangerous Wu Meng won’t deal with us. What’s there to be afraid of?” As the rash Shang Jianyao spoke, he looked like he would rush to the cave exit at any moment.

“That’s only part of Wu Meng...” Long Yuehong tried to reason with him. “What if Wu Meng intermittently ‘goes crazy?’”

The rash Shang Jianyao scoffed. “It’s enough to have that part holding him back! Let’s make preparations to prevent Stupid Halo and strive to last a little longer. We can then look forward to our ally.”

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, “Actually, Wu Meng’s usage of his abilities is clearly limited because he’s sealed. As long as we don’t give him a chance to modify the corresponding environment and transmit electromagnetic signals, we don’t have to worry too much about encountering the situation in the afternoon. Of course, the premise is that he has no other options.”

At this point, Jiang Baimian sighed. “Unfortunately, we don’t have an electromagnetic bomb. It will definitely be very useful when facing such an enemy.”

Electromagnetic bombs were currently useless in the Ashlands, and very few factions produced them. After the ones left over from the Old World passed their shelf life or were depleted, people could only obtain them from the Orange Company.

The Old Task Force had been in First City for so long, had Pangu Biology backing them, and had connections with United Industries, but they had never encountered anyone selling electromagnetic bombs.

Most of the high-voltage electric current stored in Jiang Baimian’s biological prosthetic limb had been expended, and it would take some time to replenish.

Shang Jianyao squatted down without a word. He opened a crate containing a military exoskeleton and shone the flashlight’s beam inside.

He quickly said in relief, “Old Ge left us some high-performance batteries. Coupled with what we originally have, we can produce a simple discharge device. It might be useful at critical moments.”

The bionic artificial intelligence armor also required high-performance batteries, but they didn't consume much. One battery could last a long time.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "Alright, work on it with Little Red."

Her words had already indicated her attitude, but after a pause, she said seriously, "We are about two hours away from it becoming completely dark. We can't just leave while watching our companion plunge into danger."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped and enthusiastically said, "If we don't even save our own companions, how can we save all of humanity?"

There's no need to be so noble, nor do you need to represent everyone...? Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly and then said, "We can wear the military exoskeletons this time and take a slight risk, betting that Wu Meng won't really 'go crazy.'"

Long Yuehong frowned again when he heard that. "Old Ge, uh—I mean, is the Source Brain really not afraid of being controlled by Wu Meng? It's impossible that it knows that Wu Meng actually doesn't want to deal with us..."

They only understood this after their afternoon experience.

"The Source Brain might have its unique solutions," Jiang Baimian said solemnly. "In short, it executed."

Shang Jianyao clapped his hands and played Jiang Baimian's usual role. "Alright, let's not waste any more time. Are you afraid that the sky isn't dark enough?"

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong quickly restrained their thoughts and helped their companions wear their military exoskeletons.

Before long, the fully armed Old Task Force walked to the cave exit again.

The sun was setting outside, and the sky seemed to be on fire. From time to time, crows cawed.

## Chapter 658: Lab

Under the setting sun's illumination, the entire city ruin gave off a magnificent, quiet, and sad vibe.

Long Yuehong wasn't intoxicated by such a beautiful scene as he looked around, wanting to ask how they could find the secret laboratory.

The Old Task Force didn't obtain the specific location from Avia as she had never been to Wasteland Ruin 13 and didn't know anything about this place. She could only mechanically repeat what her grandfather Oray had said.

Jiang Baimian and the others—who similarly lacked overall confidence while in this city—were at a loss. They had some idea after finding a city map in a bookstore during the afternoon, but due to a lack of time, they didn't manage to analyze and infer at a deeper level.

From Long Yuehong's point of view, searching for the 'footprints' left behind by Genova might be the most pragmatic and effective method. He believed that when the smart bot was left alone in First City, he might've secretly gathered the city map of Wasteland Ruin 13 and figured out where the dangerous, secret laboratory was.

Of course, the Source Brain—which stored much of the Old World's information—might've long obtained the corresponding city map; all it was lacking was further information.

Just as Long Yuehong opened his mouth and made a sound, a loud boom suddenly sounded from somewhere in the city ruin.

The ground trembled slightly as many birds soared from the top of different buildings.

"North." Jiang Baimian—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—quickly locked onto the general area where the explosion happened. "That secret laboratory seems to be in that area."

Bai Chen instantly made the connection. "Old Ge did it?"

“Very likely.” Jiang Baimian nodded solemnly.

“There’s no need to waste time finding the target location now.” Shang Jianyao didn’t hide his satisfaction.

He heaved an exaggerated sigh of relief. He then turned his head and asked Long Yuehong, “Did you secretly complain about how we acted rashly without even knowing the target’s location?”

“No!” Long Yuehong replied stubbornly despite the guilt. He looked in the direction of the explosion and happily said, “It doesn’t overlap with the Dao and Electrical Appliance Repairs radio station. There’s a certain deviation...”

In other words, the secret laboratory wasn’t the place where Wu Meng was sealed.

“Shh.” Shang Jianyao raised his index finger and placed it in front of his mouth, indicating for Long Yuehong not to continue.

Long Yuehong rationally chose to shut his mouth.

After examining the various traces around the cave entrance, Jiang Baimian looked up. “Old Ge did indeed head in that direction. Let’s go.”

As the team leader, she wanted to take the lead and lead the way. However, she gradually slowed down after running a few steps. She only started running again when Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong overtook her.

Even with the help of the GPS and navigation system attached to the military exoskeleton, she didn’t dare to be careless.

The well-equipped Old Task Force quickly circled around the artificial lake and entered a block before running toward their target area.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

They didn’t deliberately control their footsteps.

As he ran, Shang Jianyao suddenly raised his Berserker assault rifle and pulled the trigger, aiming it somewhere to the side.

Bang!

A glass window shattered, and a figure fell to the ground from the fourth floor.

He wore several different clothes. His limbs were bare, and his nails were tough and sharp. He looked like a Heartless.

Shang Jianyao didn't stop advancing. With the help of the military exoskeleton, he suddenly jumped up.

He estimated that the place he was about to pass through would be covered in bullets.

At this moment, a rocket flew to the third floor of another building and drilled into a room.

Rumble!

Several pieces of glass shattered, and flames engulfed several figures.

Shang Jianyao—who was no longer attacked—landed steadily. He then turned around and looked back at his team members.

Jiang Baimian held the rocket launcher and ran in a straight line without slowing down. She said in a deep voice, “Don't stop. Rush over! Don't waste time on these Heartless!”

Clang! Clang! Clang!

As Shang Jianyao patted the Berserker assault rifle's side, he firmly executed the order. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen followed closely behind.

After a burst of speed, they traversed two blocks in a row and finally shook off the ordinary Heartless.

Long Yuehong panted slightly and said, “Phew, I thought there weren’t any Heartless here.”

As he spoke, he continued running.

The bionic artificial intelligence armor was different from the military exoskeleton—it didn’t boost one’s running or strength significantly. It could only compare with the latter when its main feature was in that aspect. Therefore, Long Yuehong inevitably panted a little after running such a long distance in the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor.

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

The Old Task Force had entered this place a few times without encountering any Heartless, so they thought that Wasteland Ruin 13 was relatively special because of monsters like Wu Meng. This resulted in the Heartless not being able to reproduce and live to this day.

“Phew, it seems like the Heartless here are mainly active in this area and rarely go elsewhere.” Although Bai Chen—who had undergone genetic modification—was also panting, she was relatively fine.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Maybe they were attracted by the explosion.”

As they conversed simply, the Old Task Force occasionally jumped up and walked on the roofs of the cars blocking the road. They also used the shops along the street to take a straight-line path so as to shorten the distance.

In about 20 minutes, Jiang Baimian and the others arrived at their estimated destination.

There were buildings here that were either tall or short, leaving one overwhelmed.

Recalling Oray’s recount, Jiang Baimian ran to the left with the single-man combat rocket launcher. At the same time, she enhanced her voice with the military exoskeleton’s speaker. “Head right. After circling around that building, find a white building that’s only three stories tall with a courtyard attached.”

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen slowed down. The honest Shang Jianyao asked, “Is it left or right?”

Jiang Baimian stopped and thought about her judgment again.

“Right!” She sullenly adjusted her direction.

However, she didn’t take this matter to heart at all. In a good state of mind, she followed Shang Jianyao and the others around a block filled with tall buildings.

Before long, the white building described by Jiang Baimian appeared in the Old Task Force’s eyes.

It wasn’t tall, but it occupied a large area with a park-like courtyard. There were no signs at the door that specified its location exactly.

After rushing through the gates and passing through the courtyard, Shang Jianyao and the others saw that the white building’s door was completely open.

“Slow down.” Jiang Baimian ordered again, “Assess the surroundings.”

This was a necessary step in any operation!

After completing the preliminary assessment, the Old Task Force entered the building to search for traces of Geneva’s visit.

This place was paved with black marble tiles that were as smooth as mirrors. It was very hard, and there were no depressions. But perhaps because nobody had been here for a long time, the ground was covered in dust, leaving a series of footprints.

They clearly belonged to a robot.

“Old Ge did come here,” Shang Jianyao said in relief. “He went to the stairwell.”

As he spoke, he followed the footprints forward.



Jiang Baimian didn't stop him and only guarded against any enemies that might jump out of the dark stairwell.

The flashlight beam shone in and dispersed the 'fog.'

Upon seeing that there were indeed no dangerous creatures lurking, Jiang Baimian signaled for Long Yuehong and Bai Chen to follow.

Originally, they had already handed the task of exploring the area ahead to the team's vanguard, Long Yuehong. But in consideration of how dangerous this laboratory was and how Shang Jianyao had put on a military exoskeleton—giving him a certain level of defense and sufficient dodging abilities while still being able to sense things in a large area—Jiang Baimian felt that he was more suitable than Long Yuehong.

The Old Task Force arrived at basement two.

A silver hall was built from heavy metal walls. Above it were lamps that were half-concealed.

At this moment, these lamps were all lit, making the hall seem like daytime.

"Where does the power come from?" Long Yuehong blurted out.

It had been 60 to 70 years since the Old World was destroyed!

Shang Jianyao slapped the Berserker assault rifle's side with his right palm and guessed excitedly, "They kidnapped Wu Meng here to generate electricity?"

As expected of you...? Jiang Baimian cast her gaze deep into the hall.

There was a pair of silver-black metal doors that were already open. Beside them stood a statue-like robot.

The robot was smaller than Genava, and its appearance was closer to the ones left behind by the Old World.

It seemed to have run out of power. It had its head bowed like it was sealed in dust.

Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “It seems like Old Ge has already opened the laboratory door and barged in.”

She paused and said, “Swamp Ruin 1—which also has a secret laboratory—is equipped with a hydropower station. Electricity is available every night.”

She meant that there was probably a similar electric station here that could be used for extended periods as long as it was maintained slightly to maintain the laboratory’s operation.

The ones in charge of maintenance were most likely the Old World robots.

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, Shang Jianyao rushed to the secret laboratory’s entrance. In the blink of an eye, he stopped by the door and politely asked the motionless silver robot, “Have you seen a smart bot that’s this much taller than you?”

Shang Jianyao gestured Genava’s height as he spoke.

It would be terrifying if it could answer you...?Long Yuehong criticized inwardly when he saw this.

At this moment, the robot suddenly looked up, and its eyes emitted a red glow. It then said coldly, “Intruder alert! Intruder alert!”

Chapter 659: Knowledge Is Power

“Intruder alert! Intruder alert!” As its voice echoed, the silver robot raised its hands.

Two grenades shot out with flaming tails and flew at Shang Jianyao, who was inches away.

It was fast, but Shang Jianyao was even faster. Almost as soon as it raised its head and emitted a red glow in its eyes, Shang Jianyao leaned back, kicked with his feet, exerted strength with his waist and abdomen, and flipped backward.

This would only be a backflip under normal circumstances, but Shang Jianyao was now wearing a military exoskeleton. Be it his jumping ability or balance, they far exceeded that of humans. Therefore, he seemed to have obtained a magical cloud from an Old World myth, and he flipped backward so high that he almost touched the ceiling.

Two grenades passed him and landed at the edge of the metal hall, producing a violent explosion.

On the other side, the Old Task Force members reacted equally quickly.

Encased in the Chameleon, Bai Chen disappeared from her spot and entered stealth mode in search of the most suitable opportunity to attack.

Although Long Yuehong was a little nervous and didn't have sufficient confidence in fighting a robot head-on, he still relied on the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor's outstanding defense to jump out and run toward the enemy.

He didn't run in a straight line. Instead, he used the tail attached to the smart armor to snake out an S-shaped trajectory while maintaining sufficient balance. At the same time, he raised his right palm, placing the T1 mechanical arm's laser weapon on firing mode.

Once he locked onto the target and aimed at the other party's vital spots, he would immediately deliver the fatal blow.

Jiang Baimian jumped onto the metal wall beside her. She then continuously bounced off the wall, ceiling, and ground to approach the robot in a dazzling and difficult-to-detect manner.

She didn't choose to engage in a long-range battle with the other party because the hall wasn't an open square that provided sufficient maneuvering room. Furthermore, this was basement two. If they really fought to the death here and damaged the corresponding load-bearing walls, it could cause the building to collapse.

The four fragile carbon-based members of the Old Task Force definitely couldn't compare to metal robots. When the time came, there was a high chance that nobody would survive.

The Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor couldn't withstand having a few tonnes or more crashing down on it. In such a situation, even though it might be able to maintain a

certain level of integrity, Long Yuehong—who was inside—would definitely become a meat pancake mixed with blood.

Faced with the Old Task Force members' encirclement, the silver robot didn't stay in place foolishly. It followed its programming and moved horizontally like it was equipped with combat intelligence.

This resulted in Long Yuehong's lock-on failing.

The robot then nimbly jumped and ran, constantly changing positions. It also seized every opportunity to fire grenades at the intruders and used electromagnetic weapons to create wave after wave of explosions.

It didn't seem worried that this would cause the building above its head to collapse and bury the laboratory. If not for Jiang Baimian and the others supporting each other and their fast reactions, it was very likely that they would've been injured by this merciless killing machine.

Only about ten seconds had passed since the sudden battle began.

Just as the silver robot rolled back to the laboratory entrance, completed a wave of attacks, and was about to jump away, the red glow in its eyes suddenly flickered, and its body temporarily stiffened.

This stiffness only lasted for a second, but in the blink of an eye, a bullet wrapped in silver-white lightning shot out and hit the robot's chest with immense kinetic energy.

With a clang, the crack that resembled a metal spider web crumbled, revealing the hidden chips, densely packed electronic components, and transmission lines beneath.

Jiang Baimian seized the opportunity to use the electromagnetic transmitter attached to the military exoskeleton in midair! She then used the ceiling as leverage to change directions, jumping in front of the silver robot and pressing the rocket launcher's face against the enemy's chest.

Without any hesitation, Jiang Baimian stared at the two expanding red lights and pulled the trigger. At the same time, she jumped back using the momentum, exerting strength with her feet.

She flew backward while her body stuck close to the ground.

Boom!

Huge flames spread from the silver robot's body as countless components were thrown out, scattering everywhere.

After the explosion subsided, only an incomplete metal body remained. It shook two to three times before crashing to the ground with a clang.

Long Yuehong stopped what he was about to do and turned to look at Shang Jianyao, who was standing at the edge of the silver hall. "How did you do it?"

The robot from before had clearly shown an abnormality for about a second. Shang Jianyao probably couldn't 'control' electromagnetism and could only 'interfere.'

Shang Jianyao stuffed his right palm—which was covered in a metallic skeletal structure—into his pocket and smiled smugly. "I interfered with one of its signal receivers, causing a malfunction. It started a self-check."

It was unknown who he was imitating, but he insisted on putting on a relaxed posture.

"Isn't this too precise?" Long Yuehong didn't hide his surprise. "Is this something that can be completed by electromagnetic interference?"

Shang Jianyao—who had switched personalities—stopped posing and walked to the laboratory entrance. He smiled and said, "I spent some time identifying the model of its signal receiver and recalled the corresponding malfunctioning code and the interruption mechanism. I often asked Old Ge about how to stimulate the receivers of different models in the simplest way so that I could temporarily affect a robot at my current stage. Have you forgotten what you learned in university? Do you usually not chat with Old Ge? My friend, knowledge is power!"

In terms of understanding of the Old World robots, Geneva was undoubtedly the best among the Old Task Force. Even Bai Chen—who once had an Old World robot—couldn't compare.

This was a talent stemming from his race.

Long Yuehong blushed with shame, and he really felt that his efforts in certain aspects couldn't compare to a mental patient's. However, this was never his goal.

Shang Jianyao glanced at him and smiled warmly. "Study more on how to deal with different enemies. It can effectively help you survive an intense battle. Big White and I need to do this—you even more so because we aren't afraid of death while you are."

I'm afraid too! Jiang Baimian didn't disturb the temporarily serious Shang Jianyao and took the opportunity to remind her teammates.

She guessed that this was the Hey who valued relationships.

Long Yuehong's heart palpitated as his expression gradually turned solemn.

"I understand." He nodded hard.

At this moment, Bai Chen appeared again. She had already sneaked to the laboratory entrance.

If Jiang Baimian hadn't used the electromagnetic weapon in time, she would've thrown a bunch of high-performance adsorption explosives over.

Shang Jianyao stopped at the laboratory entrance and cast his gaze past Bai Chen. He said in relief and disappointment, "I thought a series of 'intruder alert' would sound from inside as robots run out one after another."

Don't think about things that sound so terrifying...? Long Yuehong was afraid that he couldn't help but think about it.

Jiang Baimian reloaded the single-man combat rocket launcher with ammunition and deliberated before saying, "There shouldn't be that many robots awakening. Old Ge already entered using the passcode, and the Source Brain is definitely best at dealing with robots."

She meant that as long as they didn't court death like Shang Jianyao and took the initiative to 'provoke' the guard robot, it was impossible for the robots to regain mobility for no reason.

“What I fear most is that they have already become the Source Brain’s slaves,” reminded Bai Chen.

Jiang Baimian had naturally thought of this, and she smiled bitterly. “If such a situation really happens, there’s only one solution: Run!”

With the abilities Shang Jianyao had just shown and the Old Task Force’s equipment, they still had the strength to deal with three to four such Old World robots. Any more, and they wouldn’t be able to handle it.

This didn’t include the Source Brain.

After a simple inspection, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong led the way. The Old Task Force members passed through the door and entered the secret laboratory.

The walls here were cast from metal, but some places were painted with insulating paint of different colors.

As the Old Task Force slowly walked forward, they sized up the rooms on both sides.

In the beginning, those rooms were like offices. There was nothing special about them except for a large number of computers and a small amount of paper. If there was plenty of time later, Jiang Baimian didn’t mind flipping through them or taking them away.

After moving forward for about 30 meters, there were many experimental apparatus in the rooms on both sides of the aisle. Some of them were standard equipment, while some were equipment Jiang Baimian couldn’t immediately identify.

They came to a room that had doors that were either tightly closed or ajar, preventing anyone from seeing what was inside at a glance.

Shang Jianyao casually pushed open the door on his side.

Under the ceiling lamps’ illumination, large and sealed cylindrical glass containers appeared. They were filled with a light-yellow liquid, and a naked corpse floated in each of them. There were men and women.

Due to the vessel's shape, these corpses were vertically upright. It was terrifying.

Shang Jianyao suddenly smiled. "Will they suddenly look up like the robot from before, their eyes glowing?"

Chapter 660: In the Lab

Although Long Yuehong knew that Shang Jianyao would most likely say something terrifying since he was already used to it, he never expected it to sound so terrifying.

Shang Jianyao's previous 'anticipation' of the guard robot was still within reasonable limits, one within the confines of a sci-fi film in Old World terms—something that might become a reality. However, the scene he had just imagined was an out-and-out horror film.

As everyone knew, Long Yuehong hated horror films the most among the Old Task Force members.

"Don't jinx it!" Jiang Baimian found a reason to stop Shang Jianyao from speaking. At the same time, she took in the room's situation.

The human bodies sealed in cylindrical glass containers were completely naked. Although they hadn't completely decayed due to the preservatives they were soaked in, there were many spots on them that would leave the average person nauseous. It wasn't a pleasant sight.

There were no obvious abnormalities on their bodies, and they didn't look like they had been infected. To Jiang Baimian, they might be closer to the cadavers used by Pangu Biology for doctor training.

"This secret laboratory does research on the human body?" Jiang Baimian deliberated and commented.

Shang Jianyao laughed. "I wonder what this laboratory has to do with the company's former self before the Old World's destruction..."

Regarding Pangu Biology's status and which organization it belonged to before the Old World's destruction, even Jiang Baimian—who was a child of management—didn't know, much less ordinary employees. The corresponding confidentiality clearance was above the board of directors.



Back then, only a portion of the people who entered the underground building were Pangu Biology's former employees. The rest were ordinary humans in the surrounding area. They entered in order to avoid the radiation pollution after the Old World's destruction, the dramatically changed weather, the spread of the Heartless disease, and total societal breakdown.

The portion of former Pangu Biology employees had already been warned in the Chaotic Era, so nobody leaked the corresponding information.

"All of them studied genetics?" Jiang Baimian muttered to herself as she answered Shang Jianyao's question. "The Holm Fertility Center is a subsidiary. Is that why it is involved in areas like genetic enhancement and congenital disease prevention while treating infertility?"

The Holm Fertility Center was in the same city as this secret laboratory, so Jiang Baimian had to make such a connection.

D-don't discuss this problem. I don't want to worry about not being able to return to the company and see my relatives. I might be exiled to the surface, only to be smote by the Kalendaria one day...? Long Yuehong felt his liver and guts tremble when he heard his team leader and Shang Jianyao's discussion.

Bai Chen seemed to share similar feelings. She stood in the corridor and looked around. "Now isn't the time to discuss these questions. Spending time here might result in unforeseen events."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded by patting the Berserker assault rifle.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "Then, let's continue forward and search for Old Ge. When we encounter such a scene in the future, we just have to make some observations and confirm that there's no danger. On the return trip, we can gather further information if the situation permits."

With that said, she planned on setting an example and leading the team forward.

"Are we returning now?" the honest Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Jiang Baimian glared at him and said in a desperate tone, “What are you waiting for? Lead the way!”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Shang Jianyao immediately became serious. He left the room and jogged forward.

“Slow down, slow down. Be careful not to encounter any accidents,” Jiang Baimian reminded helplessly.

The Old Task Force quickly controlled their advancement speed.

On the way, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong didn’t forget to open the doors to the rooms on both sides to check for any danger lurking inside.

After passing by a few places that had human corpses soaking in preservatives, the situation in the rooms on both sides suddenly changed.

They became like wards; there was a number on each door, and a single bed was placed in the middle. There was a cabinet by the bed and equipment to monitor heart rate, pulse, blood pressure, and oxygen saturation. There was also a respirator and various resuscitation devices.

Shang Jianyao and the others found a white skeleton in tattered clothes on a single bed in each of the rooms they could see.

These corpses lay quietly in almost identical positions as if they had died of old age. They didn’t cause a single stir.

“Patients?” Long Yuehong guessed.

Patients that were also experimental subjects?

Jiang Baimian observed for about ten seconds before thoughtfully asking, “Don’t you find that these people have died too ‘peacefully?’ It’s like they were moved onto the bed after death and kept in that posture...”

“Yes. If they had died from an attack, their bodies definitely would’ve curled up or shifted to a certain extent.” Bai Chen had often seen such situations.

Long Yuehong echoed, “These people look like they were seriously ill to the point of being immobile. It took them a while before they took their last breaths.”

Shang Jianyao glanced at the corpses and suddenly said in a very serious tone, “Vegetables?”

Many thoughts immediately flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind like struck matches that blazed. She looked at Shang Jianyao and said, “Just like Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong’s son, as well as Jiang Xiaoyue—vegetables who underwent experimental treatment as volunteers? The only difference is that the first two were sent to a place in the north, suspected to be the Northern Company... As these are all vegetables, nobody took care of them after the Old World was destroyed. Nobody replaced the nutrient solution in the intravenous bag, so they slowly and quietly died?”

This matched the various details presented by the current environment.

“The Northern Company isn’t the only one doing the corresponding research?” Bai Chen felt that although this guess was relatively broad, it was really acceptable.

“Maybe.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and suddenly thought of something. If the Holm Fertility Center was somehow related to this secret laboratory, would anyone from this secret laboratory attend the genetic lecture jointly held by the Northern Company or even give a lecture?

Jiang Baimian’s body stiffened when she quickly recalled the speakers’ jobs and research direction.

She recalled a special name. It was a person who was a special guest but only had a translated Ashlandic name and no other information: Du Heng!

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and ordered again, “Continue forward!”

The current environment was not suitable for discussion.

As they walked, the Old Task Force members passed by suspected wards. In those rooms, corpses were placed on individual beds, and some were empty.

Upon seeing that there were no more rooms on both sides and that a semi-circular hall had appeared not far away, Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “40 wards—26 have corpses, and 14 are empty.”

She didn't forget to record this basic information and inform her teammates. These were words that didn't need a response.

Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong entered the hall first.

There were large pieces of equipment here. Some had metal walls as partitions with white curtains drawn, and some didn't. They were open.

Jiang Baimian looked over and suddenly found a few of the instruments familiar.

Some of them looked like space capsules, and some had glass covers that looked like overturned coffins. Under them was a bed covered in sensors. On the bed lay a white skeleton in tattered clothes...

Long Yuehong also found it familiar and blurted out, “Could this laboratory be used for human Awakening experiments?”

He had seen a portion of the equipment in Project C-14!

“Maybe.” Shang Jianyao smiled.

“Don't waste any more time. Find Old Ge.” Jiang Baimian swept her gaze across the hall. She then realized that there was a metal door diagonally opposite her.

The metal door was already open.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen seriously checked the various equipment and their surroundings because several guard robots were standing there motionless.

They didn't wake up.

As he checked, Long Yuehong carefully counted the white corpses lying in some of the equipment.

“11, 12, 13, 14... There are 14 empty wards. The numbers match.” Long Yuehong heaved a sigh of relief and retracted his gaze from an instrument that was attached to three metal beds.

Three skeletal corpses lay side by side.

Jiang Baimian turned her head and asked, “Is there anything abnormal on your side?”

Long Yuehong was just about to respond when he suddenly saw a scene from the corner of his eye. In the instrument with three metal beds, only two corpses lay side by side.

Two!

“Th-ther- there’s a corpse missing!” Long Yuehong’s pupils dilated as he raised his finger.

Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao, and Jiang Baimian instantly raised their weapons and looked over.

Nothing strange happened.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, “Could they only have two corpses to begin with? The 40 wards don’t need to be filled.”

“I’m sure there’s three.” Long Yuehong first gave an affirmative answer before hesitating. “But we can’t rule out the possibility that I was affected by an illusion.”

Jiang Baimian nodded and summoned Shang Jianyao to approach the instrument.

This was something that might contain danger. They couldn’t ignore it and continue forward.