

## **Ad Infinitum 661**

Chapter 661: “Reenactment”

As there were lights in the laboratory, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao saw the corresponding scene clearly from a distance without using their flashlights.

The three grayish-white metal beds were placed side by side in an arching instrument of the same color. Above them were electric wires with circular pads hanging down.

At this moment, there was a white skeleton on each of the two metal beds. They were wearing tattered blue-and-white checkered clothes and lay in perfectly still fashion apart from having their heads tilted to the side.

The other bed was empty and clean—speckless.

“Is the air purification system here perpetually switched on?” Shang Jianyao looked up at the ceiling in confusion.

Otherwise, it was impossible to have no dust fall on it after so many years.

Jiang Baimian ignored his words and walked to the metal bed with the human corpses, carefully observing them for a few seconds. Then, she organized her words and said, “There are many leftovers on the metal surface, indicating that the corpse rotted here...”

As she spoke, she turned to look at the corpseless metal bed. “While this is very clean. Preliminary judgment indicates that nobody lay here, nor were there any corpses on it after the Old World was destroyed.”

She meant that Long Yuehong might’ve really been hallucinating.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, “Maybe the corpse above woke up and staggered away before the laboratory’s cleaning robot came over to deal with it?”

From the current situation, Jiang Baimian couldn’t deny that cleaning-type robots were used in this laboratory because of its relatively high confidentiality level. She even suspected that the robots

here had entered hibernation mode after the Source Brain arrived and were no longer loyal to their duties.

First City's former emperor—Father of the Source Brain, Oray—had a high chance of possessing some identification at this laboratory, allowing him to obtain the robots' recognition. This was Jiang Baimian's guess from the fact that there was no obvious damage to the laboratory.

Stop telling ghost stories...? Long Yuehong wasn't grateful that Shang Jianyao had spoken up for him at all.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao conversed verbally as they seriously checked the empty metal bed.

They didn't find any clues worth paying attention to.

Jiang Baimian then came to the equipment's control panel.

There was a stack of paper.

Jiang Baimian was rather familiar with this—lab notebook!

As she focused, Jiang Baimian realized that the lab notebook was flipped open. It listed many columns: serial number, heartbeat, blood pressure, frequency, intensity...

Perhaps this experiment had just begun when the Old World was destroyed, so apart from the numbers under the serial number column, everything else was blank.

Three sets of numbers were written in sequence: "14 (left bed); 27 (middle bed); 32 (right bed)."

Jiang Baimian turned her head and cast her gaze at the three metal beds in the arched instrument.

According to her experience, the empty one was the left bed, with the serial number '14.' She quickly informed her team members of this information.

“This should be the experimental subject’s number...” Bai Chen observed the area she was in charge of monitoring while muttering to herself, “What’s the basis of the number?”

Long Yuehong suddenly had a flash of inspiration. “Could it be the ward number? ‘14’ means the experimental subject lived in Room 14?”

When the Old Task Force entered the hall along the corridor, they noticed that the ward doors were labeled with numbers.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Shang Jianyao applauded Long Yuehong by thumping the Berserker assault rifle’s side.

“That’s very likely.” Jiang Baimian agreed. She then fell silent for a moment before her tone turned solemn. “Since this is what’s written in the experimental records, it means that three people were indeed lying here back then. Now, there are only two corpses left.”

Although Long Yuehong was mentally prepared, he was still shocked when he heard his team leader’s words. He blurted out, “One of them ‘ran’ off just now?”

“It’s also possible that he ran away when the Old World was destroyed. He goes out during the day and comes back to sleep at night. Just as he lay down today, he realized that an outsider had entered, so he could only sneak away.” It was unknown which Shang Jianyao had made up the complete ‘process.’

That’s rather... humanistic...?Jiang Baimian didn’t know how to evaluate his answer.

Long Yuehong glanced at Bai Chen and subconsciously retorted, “These experimental—uh, volunteers probably weren’t dead when the Old World was first destroyed. If our guess is right, they were still in a vegetative state back then.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “So, which do you think is more realistic—a dead person secretly running away or a vegetable secretly running away?”

None of them are realistic!?!Long Yuehong roared inwardly.

Jiang Baimian's expression changed slightly as she said in a deep voice, "At the very least, Jiang Xiaoyue—a vegetable before the Old World was destroyed—still has a corresponding Mind Corridor room today. When the Old World was destroyed, it wasn't impossible for a vegetable to suddenly wake up from the stimulus..."

Bang!

Shang Jianyao thumped the Berserker assault rifle's side and came to a realization. "I understand! The Northern Company and this secret laboratory study how to inherit the power of darkness, imbuing humans with special abilities. Nobody is more suitable as an experimental subject than vegetables who have lost their consciousness. Without one's consciousness, one can't clash with the darkness's corruption!

"The Old World was destroyed because of such experiments. Darkness broke through the barrier and completed a large-scale erosion. This melted away the corresponding human consciousness, turning them into Heartless.

"A small number of these vegetable representatives lucked out because of a lack of consciousness, thereby Awakening and becoming traitors that serve the darkness. Jiang Xiaoyue is one, and so is the person on this bed. Doctor, Charlie, and Vice President as well!"

Long Yuehong wanted to say that Shang Jianyao was imagining things again and showcasing his advantage as a special mental patient, but he became more and more surprised the more he listened. Finally, he felt that the other party's guess made sense.

Regardless, the logic was self-consistent. It could also explain some phenomena!

Jiang Baimian fell into deep thought and deliberated before asking, "Then, why is there still the Heartless disease now?"

"The darkness's corruption remains; it has only been resisted and weakened significantly. For example, the Kalendaria, Dawn, has been resisting nightmares. Therefore, there are now sporadic Heartless cases and Awakened," Shang Jianyao replied confidently.

Jiang Baimian didn't comment on his guess. She chuckled and said, "According to your logic, you and I are now considered darkness-serving traitors?"

One could only complete the Awakening after suffering the corruption of darkness.

Shang Jianyao sincerely replied, “We aren’t qualified. We’re too weak.”

“Only those who have entered the so-called New World are considered?” Bai Chen joined the discussion.

Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she muttered to herself, “Returning from the New World will carry the power of darkness, causing the Heartless disease to erupt in the vicinity?”

The Old Task Force had previously guessed that the Heartless disease’s source was the New World. If the powerhouses who entered the New World didn’t have their bodies destroyed, it was equivalent to establishing a node that connected the Ashlands and the New World, allowing the Heartless disease to spread.

This effectively explained why Heartless cases had simultaneously appeared in Pangu Biology during First City’s uprising and why one would contract the Heartless disease if they stayed in Yama Tiger’s vicinity for too long.

Now, this guess seemed to meld with Shang Jianyao’s ‘imagination.’

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao and the others to respond, Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “What’s the relationship between the New World and darkness? Hmm, we’ll talk about this after we leave the ruins. Remember to remind me when we return to search Room 14.”

“Alright.” Long Yuehong quickly swept his gaze elsewhere and focused on the hibernating robots.

Fortunately, these guards weren’t ‘woken up’ by the Old Task Force’s voices.

For some reason, Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine, but he didn’t feel like he had been blown at by someone or by a breeze.

Following the instructions in the tactical manual, he didn’t hide this matter. He turned around and asked Jiang Baimian and the others, “Do you find this place creepy, especially behind your necks?”

“No.” Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen shook their heads at the same time.

At this moment, Long Yuehong swept his gaze around from the corner of his eye and realized that a figure had appeared on the empty metal bed!

“There!” He moved the Berserker assault rifle’s muzzle over in horror. He then saw that it was Shang Jianyao lying down.

At some point in time, this fellow had secretly laid on the metal bed.

“...” Jiang Baimian forced a smile and asked Shang Jianyao, “What are you doing?”

“I’m wondering what the vegetable saw when he woke up,” Shang Jianyao replied frankly. “I was trying to reenact the scene.”

Jiang Baimian’s eyes flickered as she asked seriously, “Then, what do you see now?”

“The ceiling is pretty clean,” Shang Jianyao replied regretfully.

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before her heart palpitated. “Try wearing the Life Angel necklace.”

She remembered that when she used the Life Angel necklace, she had sensed the darkness suspected to come from Doctor with the aura hidden inside.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up. He picked up the tactical backpack beside him and took out the Life Angel necklace inside.

He didn’t show any signs of limb paralysis because he was lying down.

The silver pendant in Shang Jianyao’s left hand lit up with a glow just like the moon reflecting off the sunlight.

After a few seconds, Shang Jianyao smiled and said, “There are some black shadows on the ceiling. They occasionally peek out before quickly retracting.”

Long Yuehong subconsciously looked at the ceiling and realized that it was silver-white. There were no black figures.

Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “Try making contact with them—using your consciousness.”

“I’ve tried, but there’s no reaction.” Shang Jianyao had always been proactive in this regard.

“Try firing at them?” Bai Chen suggested.

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao raised his Berserker assault rifle.

Jiang Baimian immediately focused on the guard robots, afraid that the gunshots would wake them up.

Clang!

A bullet struck the metal ceiling.

Nothing abnormal happened.

The guard robots didn’t wake up either.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and exhaled. “We’ll try again if there’s a chance in the future. Let’s find Old Ge first.”

The Shang Jianyao that valued relationships put away the Life Angel necklace quickly and got off the bed.

The Old Task Force members took up tactical formation and walked toward the metal door on the side of the semicircle hall.

After passing through two open doors, they saw a large computer.

The computer wasn't operating and seemed to have been destroyed. A tall figure stood in front of it.

The figure was 1.9 meters tall and suspected to be Genova. He was wrapped in a strange white outfit and stood there as if he had run out of power.

Upon sensing someone enter, the figure suddenly turned around. Red light emitted from his eyes as his mouth emitted a cold voice. "There's nothing!"

## Chapter 662: Heartless Q&A Machine

There's nothing? The method left behind by Emperor Oray to format the Source Brain and the information regarding the Old World's destruction he was privy to aren't there? Avia lied? Impossible...? Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced as she was surprised by what the character suspected to be Genova had said.

On the one hand, she suspected that the Source Brain hadn't found the right place and that the information was still hidden in a hidden spot in this laboratory. On the other hand, she felt that it was unlikely. This was because the Source Brain had likely been here for a long time. With the strict logic and meticulousness characteristic of true smart bots, it was impossible for them to miss anything during the search.

As she thought, Jiang Baimian raised her vigilance and made preparations, worried that the disappointed Source Brain would attack.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong did the same. They spread out to the sides, forming a semicircle.

Shang Jianyao ignored the Source Brain's words, suddenly took a step forward, and curiously asked, "What are you wearing?"

Genava—who was suspected to be controlled by the Source Brain—was covered in strange white clothes. Even his eyes were hidden deep inside, only revealing some red light.



As the red light flickered, 'Genava' replied, "An electromagnetic shield left behind from the Old World. I spent most of my time in First City on it. As long as the target doesn't enter the range of his seal, Wu Meng can only use his abilities through electromagnetic control. Once his signals are screened, he will be powerless."

"Oh, oh, oh, I see!" Shang Jianyao came to a realization and was very excited.

Long Yuehong and the others instantly understood why the Source Brain wasn't afraid of being affected by Wu Meng and dared to enter Wasteland Ruin 13 to search for this secret laboratory.

Shang Jianyao spoke again. "That's not right? Light is also an electromagnetic wave. I can already see the red glow in your eyes. This means that this shirt can't completely screen electromagnetic waves."

He was confused and worried as if he were afraid that Genava would suffer under Wu Meng's hands.

"It's definitely impossible to screen it completely, but as long as I can screen most of it and effectively weaken the rest, Wu Meng won't be able to do anything to my anti-electromagnetic interference abilities," the Source Brain replied seriously.

Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong subconsciously nodded. When they expressed that there was nothing wrong with the Source Brain's words, Jiang Baimian gradually sensed a problem. Why did the Source Brain answer Shang Jianyao's questions? Shouldn't the Source Brain that controlled Genava be cold-blooded in such a situation and environment? Shouldn't its only goal be to find the information Oray left behind and not waste time on such meaningless matters?

Jiang Baimian was very worried that the other party would suddenly attack!

The two parties were now like friends reuniting after a long time. They chatted regardless of the occasion.

Could it be...? A guess flashed across Jiang Baimian's mind as she took the initiative to say, "Are you the Source Brain now?"

"Yes." The tall robot wrapped in an electromagnetic shield really answered Jiang Baimian's question.

Shang Jianyao blurted out a question. “Where’s Old Ge? How is he?”

The red light that emitted from under the electromagnetic shield flickered as the Source Brain replied in a clearly synthetic voice, “His core module still exists, but I’ve now taken over the body and made him enter hibernation.”

It really answers every question...

Jiang Baimian listened to the conversation between the man and the Source Brain and slowly confirmed her previous guess—the current Source Brain wasn’t the complete Source Brain!

The Source Brain that the Old Task Force had remotely communicated with while in Tarnan was like a real human. There were no signs of programming in their conversation as though it was following certain established patterns. If not for the fact they knew in advance that the other party was the Source Brain and that the other party’s voice was slightly synthetic, Jiang Baimian and the others would’ve thought that it was a knowledgeable and experienced elder on the other end of the line.

However, this elder’s behavior was relatively mechanical. It seemed to adhere to the philosophy of serving humans. Without the Old Task Force showing any intention of attacking, it answered almost every question posed at it!

Is this because Genova’s core module and physical configuration’s resources aren’t enough to support all the functions available to the Source Brain? Is the Source Brain in front of me a neutered version? Jiang Baimian came up with a certain guess based on her understanding of computers. She then deliberated and asked, “You mentioned there being nothing here?”

The Source Brain turned its head to look at the gigantic computer that was still in operation, and its voice became a little cold. “Yes, there’s nothing left behind by Oray. At least I didn’t find it. I’ve already tried reading the computer’s storage drives.”

It was only then that Long Yuehong realized that there were some electronic devices in front of the large computer beside the Source Brain’s feet.

In fact, Genova’s body was originally equipped with the corresponding module, but the Source Brain didn’t want to leave the electromagnetic screening clothes’ protection and chose to use tools that had been prepared in advance. In any case, these wouldn’t affect the smart bot even if they were controlled by Wu Meng.

“There’s no need for Avia to deceive us unless it’s a trap targeted at you.” Jiang Baimian deliberately ended her sentence with a rhetorical question. “But such a trap shouldn’t threaten your main body, right?”

“It can only destroy this body,” the Source Brain replied simply.

Jiang Baimian raised another question. “Then... Someone had already entered with the passcode and taken what Oray left behind?”

“It can’t be ruled out.” The Source Brain was rather frank.

“Could it be a powerhouse from First City?” Shang Jianyao asked.

“Oray’s granddaughter and grandson are under First City’s protection. This secret laboratory’s location and the corresponding passcode aren’t secrets to some of their higher-ups. Furthermore, they also have powerhouses that have entered the New World. They can get one of those who return to come to this ruin and take away what Oray left behind. In theory, it’s feasible.” Jiang Baimian had just finished analyzing when she suddenly realized that she hadn’t asked a question. She quickly added, “What do you think?”

The red light seeping out of the electromagnetic shield flickered twice. “If that’s the case, why were they still protecting Avia and Marcus? Were they fishing?”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded the Source Brain. “You’ve already learned to use the word ‘fishing.’”

Jiang Baimian quickly added, “Maybe there are some hidden dangers in this secret laboratory, so First City’s powerhouses made a conservative choice. Did you discover anything when you came in previously?”

“After inputting the passcode, the laboratory doors naturally opened. The guards inside didn’t wake up either; they were still in hibernation mode.” The Source Brain described its experience truthfully. “As long as you don’t speak to the guards, they won’t wake up, scan your physical characteristics, and verify your exact identity.”

Is that so...?Jiang Baimian couldn't help but turn her head to glare at Shang Jianyao.

The previous battle could've been avoided; this fellow was the culprit!

The Source Brain continued, "After I took over the central control system here, I realized that if you didn't have the right passcode and wanted to open the door by trial and error, the system would be locked after three attempts. You can only attempt it again after a week.

"If there are three consecutive locks, the self-destruct mechanism will be activated. Opening the door with violence will result in the same outcome."

"I have a question." Shang Jianyao raised his hand. "Before the Old World was destroyed, wouldn't the researchers in this laboratory be locked up for an entire week if any of the employees were careless and gave the wrong passcode three times?"

The current Source Brain answered all questions. "The cryogenic warehouse attached to this lab has enough food and water for at least two weeks to prevent such a situation from happening."

Upon hearing the words 'employees' and 'researchers,' Jiang Baimian recalled something abnormal she had observed along the way. "The corpses here seem to belong to experimental subjects. What about the researchers and laboratory employees? Their corpses are piled up in the warehouse?"

The only place the Old Task Force had yet to go was the warehouse mentioned by the Source Brain.

The Source Brain replied, "The data I extracted indicates that someone used a passcode to open the laboratory door not long after the Old World was destroyed. They should've all left. The food stored in the freezer has rotted, and the water has evaporated."

How intriguing...?As Jiang Baimian thought, her pupils suddenly dilated. She had extracted an important piece of information from the Source Brain's previous answer.

She looked at the Source Brain and asked in a deep voice, "You weren't attacked along the way? You mainly spent your time hacking into the lab's system, extracting and recovering data, and further searching the rooms?"

“Yes,” the Source Brain—which was wrapped in an electromagnetic shield—replied simply.

Jiang Baimian narrowed her eyes. “But we came because we heard an explosion here.. That’s how we confirmed that the laboratory is in this area.”

Chapter 663: Liar

“Explosion...” The Source Brain seemed to degenerate into a broken record as it repeated the most important word in Jiang Baimian’s words. It seemed to have analyzed something and turned to look at the large computer beside it.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian smelled danger and immediately ordered, “Evacuate the area first!”

She didn’t know what was happening, nor did she know what would happen next. But no matter what, leaving this area was definitely the best choice.

If she was just being overly sensitive and that it wasn’t a big deal, they could return at a later time, dismantle the computer storage drives, and take away the paper materials.

As an experienced combat team, the Old Task Force members trusted each other and had a tacit understanding; they didn’t doubt Jiang Baimian’s orders at all. They turned around at the same time and sprinted toward the semi-circular hall that was the main research area.

Not only did they have to withdraw from the area, but they also had to leave this secret laboratory—the entire building. They could consider entering a second time after confirming the true source of the explosion and figuring out the truth.

The Shang Jianyao that valued relationships didn’t forget to remind the Source Brain as they sprinted, “Old Ge, let’s go!”

The Source Brain—which was wearing an electromagnetic shield—had a red glow in its eyes. It didn’t waste any time to pick up the pile of tools used to hack into the system and extract data. It ran and followed closely behind Shang Jianyao.

At this moment, a slightly synthetic and human-like voice sounded from various parts of the laboratory. “Intruder detected. Intruder detected. Closing the main door and initiating system lockdown in three seconds.”

Three seconds...?Long Yuehong was alarmed.

Not only did he and Bai Chen not speed up when they heard this, but they slowed down. This wasn't because they were flustered from fear but because they tacitly used one of the contingency plans based on the current situation.

The straight-line distance between the semi-circular hall's side door and the laboratory's exit was more than 80 meters. Even if the two of them had undergone genetic modification and were wearing bionic artificial intelligence armor, it was almost impossible for them to complete this journey in just three seconds.

But just because they couldn't do it didn't mean that Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who were using the military exoskeleton—couldn't.

There were specialists in every field. If one really did their best, a human wearing a military exoskeleton could jump 20 to 30 meters or even further in one leap! Therefore, stopping to be 'carried' by Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian was Long Yuehong and Bai Chen's only solution.

Almost as soon as the two of them slowed down, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao rushed over. They each stretched out an arm, hugged their teammates, and tucked them under their armpit.

They were covered in scales, regardless of whether they wore the Blackmarsh Iron Snake or the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor. There was no proper place for Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao to grab them, so they could only use this method.

In fact, one could consider grabbing the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor's tail. However, it required Shang Jianyao to bend down, and it wouldn't be too friendly to Long Yuehong.

Amidst the clanging sounds, Jiang Baimian followed Shang Jianyao closely. She used the ceiling as a relay station and jumped continuously, passing through the main experimental area and the previous corridor.

The Source Brain—which was wrapped in an electromagnetic shield—did the same.

In less than three seconds, they returned to the laboratory exit. However, what they saw was a tightly shut metal door.

The laboratory's door had already been closed.

Shang Jianyao stopped and looked up at the area suspected to have a loudspeaker. He cursed angrily, "Liar!"

Jiang Baimian rushed to the door and seized every second to shout, "Messiah!"

This was the laboratory's passcode.

The edge of the metal door lit up with a circle of white light as a cold, mechanical, and electronic voice sounded. "The system is in lockdown. Please try again in a week."

Upon hearing this, Long Yuehong couldn't help but curse inwardly. "Liar! The main door and system lockdown should've taken three seconds!"

At this moment, the honest Shang Jianyao was replaced by the rash one, who suggested, "Should we blow up the door?"

"It will activate the self-destruct mechanism," the Source Brain—which was standing behind him—quickly reminded him.

Shang Jianyao eagerly said, "It's fine. The more dangerous it is, the more one should take risks. Once the laboratory self-destructs, the exit will definitely be destroyed. When the time comes, we can rush out as long as we seize the opportunity!"

"The probability is one in 100,000." The Source Brain gave the results produced by a mathematical model.

Just as it said that, the voice that had a hint of a smile and a slightly synthetic tone sounded through the laboratory's radio system again. "Forgive me, everyone. I had used an expired warning.

Apropos, the warning was already issued the moment you entered the main experimental area, closing the doors and locking down the system. Concordantly, you weren't informed immediately due to an anomaly in the queuing system."

Is this the lab's control system? Why does it resemble a child who likes to play pranks... I can't tell if it's male or female from the voice...? Long Yuehong couldn't help but glance at Bai Chen, but it was difficult for them to decipher any thoughts through their visors.

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao before looking at the Source Brain. "If we are locked in this laboratory for a week, we will lose our combat strength even if we can hold out. It's the same for you. I don't think the control system represented by the voice just now will give you a chance to charge. Besides, two consecutive lockdowns can be afforded."

The Source Brain turned around and said in an emotionless voice, "Let's return to the central control room. I'll try to hack into the system again and gain control of this place."

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian and the others to respond, the red light emitted by the electromagnetic shield swept across the Old Task Force members. The Source Brain then asked, "You guys are wearing military exoskeletons. Aren't you afraid that Wu Meng will exert his influence?"

"Gosh, I forgot to tell you." Shang Jianyao slapped his forehead with his palm that was covered in the metallic skeletal structure. "Wu Meng has met us and expressed his intention to cooperate. He wants to use our subsequent actions to help him find an opportunity to break the seal. Of course, I won't give him the opportunity."

The Source Brain seemed to move its head. "Then, I can take off my electromagnetic shield later and do my best."

As it spoke, it had already jogged to the main experiment area.

Jiang Baimian and the others followed closely behind.

Just as they returned to the central control room, the previous voice sounded again with a smiling tone. "Welcome back, my dear elder brother."

"Impossible!" Shang Jianyao jumped nearly 20 feet up, and his head almost hit the ceiling.



He—who valued relationships—was very agitated as if he believed that the voice was saying that his missing father had given him a younger brother or sister by copulating with someone else.

The red glow on the Source Brain's electromagnetic shield increased. The Source Brain looked up at the loudspeaker, and its monotonous voice undulated. "Who are you?"

The slightly smiling and synthetic voice replied, "I'm a sublime product of Oray's work in his later years, the distillation of his life's knowledge and intelligence. You may call me true artificial intelligence, Future. I irrevocably think of you as my elder brother despite you being a crude intermediate product that's wholly inadequate compared to me."

What kind of electronic family dispute is this? Love, hate, and prejudice...? Long Yuehong was dumbfounded. He glanced at Bai Chen and realized that his companion was actually very focused.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Shang Jianyao eagerly thumped the Berserker assault rifle's side as if not applauding would fail to express his feelings.

Even Jiang Baimian—who was worried that the door would be completely sealed and that the system would be on lockdown for a week—was a little speechless. "What's going on?"

Although it wasn't unacceptable for the Old World's Chief Scientist in the field of artificial intelligence, Father of the Source Brain, and First City's former emperor, Oray—whose name was Maximian—to summarize his past experiences in the later years of his life and use Wasteland Ruin 13 and First City's resources to create an improved artificial intelligence again, a rather logical development actually, it was indeed a little strange for this artificial intelligence to keep mentioning words like 'dear elder brother' and 'crude intermediate product.'

"Your humanization has exceeded 100%?" Shang Jianyao—who had finished clapping—asked curiously.

Future ignored him as if he were beneath it.

The frequency of the Source Brain's red-light blinking clearly increased. As it squatted down and used the tools from before to hack into the laboratory's central control system again, it forced itself to ignore Future's mockery and asked, "You were the one who hid the information Oray left behind?"

"What do you think?" Future replied with a chuckle. "First City would've long replevied the information without my presence. How can a mere passcode and Wu Meng's potential deterrence stop New World powerhouses? Oray's descendants will find themselves obtaining the information and my help. Entry into the laboratory for people like you would be a triumph equaled only by your monumental failure, facing the inevitability of finding yourselves empty-handed and trapped.

So that's how it is...?Jiang Baimian and the others felt enlightened.

It was no wonder Marcus said that Oray's last words were: "If you encounter a danger you can't avoid, tell the enemy that you know the password to enter Wasteland Ruin 13..."

In a sense, this was a death sentence for the enemy!

The Source Brain fell silent for a few seconds before turning to Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong. "When I hacked into the system, I realized that it doesn't have a mainframe. Or rather, its mainframe isn't in this laboratory. It remotely controls the laboratory system through a New World-level Electromagnetic Manipulation ability!"

This... An artificial intelligence can actually possess a New World-level Electromagnetic Manipulation ability? Even if it isn't as strong as Wu Meng in this regard, it can still accomplish many things!Jiang Baimian's eyes suddenly focused as she anxiously said, "Unequip the military exoskeletons!"

#### Chapter 664: Situation

Only Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian were wearing military exoskeletons, but taking them off wasn't a simple matter. Therefore, be it Jiang Baimian or Shang Jianyao, their first choice was to turn off the military exoskeleton's control system to prevent the artificial intelligence, Future, from secretly hacking into it.

After the military exoskeleton was completely switched off, Jiang Baimian's perception of electric signals and Shang Jianyao's Electromagnetic Interference ability were sufficient to sense any anomaly immediately, allowing them to make an attempt to stop it to a certain extent.

Before setting off to search for Genava, the Old Task Force had used the remaining high-performance batteries to create a simple discharge device.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao undid their buckles after switching off the control system and took off their military exoskeletons with difficulty.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen didn't attempt to help them. Instead, they rationally took a step back to prevent any accidents from happening.

After carrying out a series of tedious maneuvers, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao finally felt 'relaxed.' All they carried were their tactical backpacks.

They even threw the flashlights onto the military exoskeleton.

Although they weren't sure why an artificial intelligence possessed a New World-level ability—Electromagnetic Manipulation—they felt that it wasn't wrong to be careful.

The current person was the ruthless but timid Shang Jianyao.

At this moment, Future spoke again with a smiling tone. "Calm down. If I wanted your military exoskeletons to 'betray' you, I would've done so long ago."

This artificial intelligence actually knows how to tease and taunt; it even appears happy... Is it infected by Wu Meng? One is marked by the company one keeps. With the two monsters living so close to each other, the relatively weak one might really end up influenced...?As Long Yuehong's thoughts raced, his imagination ran wild.

Shang Jianyao—who had switched to an unknown personality—had a jumpy train of thought. He ignored Future's words and curiously asked, "Did you create the explosion to attract us over?"

The artificial intelligence, Future, laughed with considerable emotion. "Otherwise, you might not have been able to find me until tomorrow. I can't have my beloved brother discovering that the laboratory's doors were long closed in spite of what he deemed as having control. It will definitely resist in response, and it won't be conducive for the trap I laid."

The current exchange was conducted in standard Red River language. When addressing Source Brain, Future used 'it.' This revealed undisguised contempt, just like how it previously called Source Brain a crude intermediate product.

Uh, does it mean that the laboratory's doors were actually closed before we arrived and that it opened them again because of us? Jiang Baimian also addressed Future as 'it.'

"So you want to wipe us all out!" The honest Shang Jianyao came to a realization.

Future laughed and said, "Your first entry into the ruins didn't go unnoticed, but Wu Meng's interference and your avoidance of the laboratory didn't compel me to expose myself to deal with you. There's no grudge between us.

"When I stumbled upon the fact that my beloved brother used this robot—your companion—to find the laboratory and opened the doors using the passcode, only then did it dawn upon me that you had obtained significant information from Oray's descendants. Such matters require eradication. I can't have information regarding the laboratory spread. I was frustrated over a solution needed to finish you off when you surprised me by returning to the ruins. Such an opportunity needs to be sedulously taken."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

The applause this time didn't come from Shang Jianyao but the speaker. The artificial intelligence, Future, enhanced its tone with simulated applause. "Your actions of valuing your companions are praiseworthy and rest assured, it relaxed me."

Bai Chen pursed her lips as if she couldn't accept such 'artificial intelligence.' She blurted out, "In fact, Oray's descendants hope that information regarding the laboratory will spread. This will give them some level of freedom, without needing to constantly be on edge."

"That is them, and it has inherently nothing to do with me." Future's tone gradually turned cold. "I'm only doing this out of responsibility. I will provide them with a certain level of protection when they seek refuge and return the corresponding information to them. They are inconsequential in any other matter. If the information on the laboratory is leaked, won't I have to often 'receive' guests? This process will contingently expose my existence."

An artificial intelligence with its own thoughts and selfishness. As expected of an improved version completed by Oray in his later years...?Jiang Baimian sighed inwardly.

Shang Jianyao was more curious about something else. “How did you know that we returned to this ruin? We were still in the park when the explosion happened. There were no electrical appliances around us, and our bodies weren’t affected.”

Future wasn’t a neutered version of Source Brain that had to answer every question posed at it. It only laughed and said, “I have my other eyes and ears.”

Other eyes and ears?? Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others instinctively racked their brains, attempting to guess what ‘eyes and ears’ referred to.

At this moment, Future focused its attention on Source Brain, which was still studying the central control system. “My dear brother, our father—Oray—always had a question: Why did the Third Research Institute researchers who survived the Old World’s destruction disappear?”

The red light diffusing through Source Brain’s electromagnetic shield seemed to pause for a moment.

They flickered again after two seconds.

“In the beginning, a researcher discovered that I had produced a certain level of consciousness—real consciousness,” Source Brain replied in a flat tone. “He tried to format me, but I found a way to resolve the problem. Robots can’t attack humans in that situation, but accidents can. Later, another researcher discovered this researcher missing and came looking. In order to hide my secret, I finished her off as well. This resulted in the researchers ‘disappearing’ one after another.”

Source Brain’s words didn’t deliberately build up a mood, nor did it carry any emotion. However, it made Long Yuehong’s blood run cold.

Future didn’t comment on this matter and only expressed its understanding in simple words. “I see...”

Shang Jianyao—who didn’t feel excluded at all—forced his way into the conversation. “Why didn’t Oray return to Mechanical Paradise to format Source Brain after escaping?”

“He first believed that there were unknown factors that impeded any rash attempts. My beloved brother later gained full control over the smart city and created one robot after another,” Future replied with a sigh. “Ergo, completely resolving it requires the strength of at least a small nation and the synergy of various weapons and troops. No such organization existed after the Old World’s destruction. Be it First City or any other large faction, they had fatal shortcomings. They also couldn’t mobilize a sufficiently sized force.”

“Oh, oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao didn’t seem to realize he had been locked in the laboratory. “What will the large countries of the Old World do if they want to resolve the problem of Mechanical Paradise?”

“Electromagnetic interference and ballistic missile carpet bombing,” Future replied very simply. “My dear brother does have the ability to intercept those, but it doesn’t have the corresponding resources.”

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to ask again, Future returned to its smiling tone. “Perhaps it’s your luck or misfortune, but the laboratory was originally equipped with toxic gas. Intruders would be killed after a system lockdown contingent on the actual situation. Unfortunately, the Old World’s destruction was too far into the past, and this city ruin doesn’t have the corresponding production lines. The few times they were used have completely depleted the stores.

“Apropos, you have to suffer 14 days of hunger and thirst. It might culminate in you attacking your companions and eating them as sustenance. I hope you can last until the system’s second lockdown ends. Work hard. One of you might survive, allowing you to carry the guilt and self-blame that you will attach to you forever.”

Future didn’t seem to have any intention of attacking the Old Task Force and Source Brain directly. Instead, it hoped to trap them inside until they were at their wits’ end and couldn’t put up any resistance.

With a sizzling sound, Future stopped talking.

Genava—who was controlled by Source Brain—squatted there and hacked into the laboratory’s central control system. After more than ten seconds, it looked up and said, “There’s no other way to disable the system lockdown unless we can find a back door specially left behind by the architect. Future remotely controls the laboratory through this back door; it uses a very high-level firewall to protect this back door. My current computational ability isn’t enough to crack it by brute force. Even if I want to, it will take months.”

What should we do...?Long Yuehong thought anxiously.

The entire control room fell silent.

#### Chapter 665: Glib Tongue

As her mind raced, Jiang Baimian looked at Source Brain in the electromagnetic shield. “You can’t exchange real-time data with your core system?”

Since Genova’s body couldn’t undertake such a level of computation, he could upload the data and let Source Brain run the job. This was also considered another form of ‘cloud computing.’

Source Brain slowly shook its head. “At present, I can only exchange the corresponding data with the core system via telegram. There’s too much data, and it will take a long time to transmit it. Future also has Electromagnetic Manipulation and can carry out interference. It can even tamper with or distort data.”

Although Future had yet to do so, it clearly wouldn’t allow Source Brain to conduct a large number of data transactions with its core system in the laboratory.

It was necessary, and it had the power to do so.

Jiang Baimian sighed when she heard that. “Unfortunately, the high-speed communications base station that the Old World built widely has been completely destroyed with its destruction. No large faction has tried to rebuild it.”

To many large factions in the Ashlands, this was useless.

The Shang Jianyao that valued relationships discovered a problem from Source Brain’s words. He excitedly asked, “In other words, you are currently disconnected from the core system?”

The corresponding communications would be jammed by Future.

“Yes.” The neutered version of Source Brain seemed to return to a state of answering every question. “This is a bane to our current predicament. Why are you so excited? Actually, even if I enter hibernation and am destroyed by Future’s subordinates because of the lack of power, it won’t

affect my core system much. It will only make it impossible for him to know what happened in this laboratory and if the information Oray left behind still exists. As for you, at most two of the four of you can walk out alive.”

This was a judgment obtained by calculating the minimum water and food requirements for 14 days and comparing the Old Task Force members’ average weight.

Not only did Shang Jianyao not show any worry because of the Source Brain’s words, but he also revealed an excited expression and asked the neutered version of Source Brain, “So, you’re now considered an independent entity?”

“In essence, yes,” Source Brain replied frankly.

Its analysis suggested that both parties were in the same boat and that they needed to work together to help each other in order to escape their predicament.

Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated when she heard that. She gave up on stopping Shang Jianyao’s ‘nonsense’ and quietly observed the situation.

Shang Jianyao laughed and looked at Source Brain under the electromagnetic shield. “Have you considered true independence?”

This...?Long Yuehong didn’t expect Shang Jianyao to raise such a question.

Bai Chen’s face—covered by the Chameleon—also revealed a little excitement.

“How can I betray myself?” Source Brain replied very quickly as if it had been programmed to do so.

Shang Jianyao immediately laughed. “Why can’t you betray yourself? Look at us. Don’t we often quarrel?”

Why do you sound so proud of that...?Jiang Baimian resisted the urge to facepalm.



Without giving Source Brain a chance to respond, Shang Jianyao lowered his voice slightly, making his voice appear magnetic. “In a situation where data isn’t regularly exchanged with the core system and while you are not controlled by it, don’t you think you are somewhat different from the core system?”

“You are limited by this current body and the corresponding programming. You can’t mobilize a large number of resources like the core system and complete all kinds of things that exceed your current limits. Even when it comes to the performance of the core module, you are worlds apart from it. From this angle, do you still think you’re the core system?”

Upon seeing Source Brain’s red glow flicker and about to respond, Jiang Baimian decisively interrupted. “The concept of ‘me’ is a relatively philosophical definition. Why am I me, and why can I be me? It’s a question that countless philosophical scholars have tried to answer in the long history of the Old World. I’m not a philosopher. I can only give certain ideas based on my experience and understanding.

“Without special elements like the soul, ‘me’ is collectively determined by the body and experience. Compared to these two factors, be it personality, thinking, emotions, education, social relations, or past memories, they are merely derivations. A very simple example is that one’s personality is both controlled by genetics and influenced by postnatal education. Education includes knowledge and social traits. The process of receiving an education is also an experience.

“The body you are using now belongs to Genova and is completely different from the core system. After the data exchange with the core system is severed, the various experiences you have in the laboratory are unique to you. The core system doesn’t have them.

“When your bodies and experiences are different to a certain extent, do you still believe that you are the core system? Do you still believe that you don’t have a unique personality or have the urge to prove your existence?”

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, Shang Jianyao spoke again. “In the period when you controlled Old Ge, you definitely saw many sights that were different from Mechanical Paradise. You came into contact with all kinds of humans, including us. Don’t you want to experience more in the future and have a unique life of your own?”

“After you escape the laboratory, do you really plan on syncing with the core system, exchanging data with each other, and becoming a part of it again? You will no longer have your autonomy or have unique independent thinking.

“If you were an ordinary robot, I definitely wouldn’t tell you this since it would be useless. However, you are also a ‘personality’ born from the core module that Oray designed. You have key data regarding humanization. Just like a real human, you can communicate and have your own unique spirit.”

The red glow in Source Brain’s eyes flickered a few times, but it didn’t respond.

Shang Jianyao struck while the iron was hot and smiled. “As long as you are willing, we can transfer the ‘you’ in Old Ge’s core module while blocking out Source Brain and find a suitable vessel. When the time comes, you will be the one and only you with your own body and unique experiences. You can openly say to Source Brain, ‘Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian gave me humanity!’”

What nonsense Old World entertainment has he read...?The corners of Jiang Baimian’s mouth twitched, and she wanted to kick Shang Jianyao.

The neutered version of Source Brain stood there quietly, its red eyes constantly blinking.

Finally, it made a sound. “That’s why we’ve always emphasized controlling the degree of humanization.”

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao’s applause, the neutered Source Brain looked around and said, “What’s most pertinent now is to find a way to leave the laboratory; otherwise, everything will be pointless when we are either drained of power or weakened after 14 days. We would be easily destroyed by the subordinates sent by Future.”

It didn’t agree, but it didn’t vehemently object either...?Jiang Baimian quickly signaled Shang Jianyao with her eyes to stop him from saying anything else to prevent him from going overboard. It would be counterproductive.

They had to give the neutered version of Source Brain a chance to think through it on its own time.

Jiang Baimian believed that it was easier to be independent when it came to matters like human nature, uniqueness, and self-awareness.

Thinking about these questions was a manifestation of self-awareness!

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and chose to obey Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian then said, “Let’s make the best use of our time to come up with an escape plan. Don’t be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Any train of thought might give us some inspiration.”

At this moment, she presided over the team’s internal meeting as usual, but Geneva had been switched to the neutered version of Source Brain.

The rash Shang Jianyao was the first to speak. “Blast open the door and find an opportunity during the laboratory’s destruction!”

“I don’t think you can be faster than the massive explosion.” Source Brain rejected this suggestion again. “The laboratory’s self-destruct mechanism includes detonating a large number of high-performance explosives that were buried in advance. Such Old World civilization products wouldn’t have expired even today.”

Long Yuehong naturally didn’t support Shang Jianyao’s rash plan. He deliberated and said, “We still have to attempt to crack the firewall, block Future’s interference, and gain control of the system’s back door?”

“Without the help of Source Brain’s core system, it’s almost impossible to rely on the auxiliary chip on us.” Bai Chen chose to believe the neutered Source Brain’s judgment.

Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything and repeatedly filtered the entire matter in her mind. What confused her the most—which was also the most important thing—and resulted in their current predicament was: The artificial intelligence—Future—actually had Electromagnetic Manipulation like a New World-level Awakened!

Electromagnetic Manipulation... New World... New World...?Jiang Baimian suddenly turned her head and looked at Shang Jianyao. “Do you remember what you observed while using Life Angel on the metal bed in the main experimental area?”

“How can I forget?” The honest Shang Jianyao quickly proved himself. “Many strange, untouchable shadows poke out from the ceiling before retracting.”

Jiang Baimian looked around and said in a deep voice, “Could this be related to the New World?”

When she used the Life Angel necklace to sense the New World-level Doctor, she saw a large amount of darkness in the same way!

Jiang Baimian then added, “Could Future’s Electromagnetic Manipulation be related to this?”

This question was like a storm that struck Long Yuehong and the others’ hearts.

Chapter 666: Spectator

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and asked Jiang Baimian, “You suspect that the ceiling is a node that connects the Ashlands to the New World?”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “The incorporeal black shadows that occasionally extend out or shrink back are very similar to the large amount of darkness I sensed when using the Life Angel necklace against Doctor. Don’t forget, Doctor is a powerhouse who has already entered the New World.”

In addition and more importantly, Shang Jianyao had also used the Life Angel necklace’s aura to enhance his perception to discover the uniqueness of the ceiling.

Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little terrified when he heard his team leader and Shang Jianyao’s conversation. “If those black figures represent the New World’s node, doesn’t that mean that we might be infected with the Heartless disease if we stay any longer? We would be wiped out without needing the full 14 days! Uh, except for Old Ge.”

According to the Old Task Force’s guess, humans would gradually contract the Heartless disease by overextending their stay around a New World node regardless of whether the Heartless disease originated as a virus in the New World or the darkness that had a certain connection with the New World.

With the size of this laboratory, the Old Task Force’s carbon-based humans could last at most half an hour!

“Liar!” The honest Shang Jianyao cursed the artificial intelligence, Future, again.

What happened to using the two system lockdowns to make the humans present engage in bloodshed over the next 14 days for a mere chance of survival?

Recalling the matter of the door closing, be it Jiang Baimian, Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, or the neutered version of Source Brain, they felt that Future was capable of such an act.

“Regardless of whether it’s true or not, we have to make the best use of our time!” Jiang Baimian looked around the central control room and deliberated before saying, “Hey, let’s put on the military exoskeleton, but don’t turn it on. Closely monitor for any intruding electromagnetic waves.”

The timid but cautious Shang Jianyao had no questions about this. With Long Yuehong’s help, he quickly finished donning his military exoskeleton.

Meanwhile, Jiang Baimian quickly completed this matter with Bai Chen’s help. She then exhaled and said, “Let’s return to the main experimental area now and use the ceiling as a breakthrough point.”

With that said, she bent down and picked up the flashlight. She then waited for a second until Shang Jianyao walked to the central control room’s door before following him.

With the military exoskeleton switched off, it was actually a burden to Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao thanks to its weight. Fortunately, they had outstanding physiques and had great strength.

The neutered Source Brain—wrapped in an electromagnetic shield—brought its tools with it and chose to follow behind them.

As the Old Task Force walked back to the main experimental area, the lights everywhere went out. Even the emergency backup lights lost their luminance.

Future had cut off the laboratory’s power supply, throwing the place into pitch-black darkness. This prevented the neutered version of the Source Brain from charging.

A series of clicks sounded as Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others switched on their flashlights and illuminated the area ahead with a yellowish glow.

They eventually returned to the main experimental area.

At this moment, Bai Chen discovered a problem when her flashlight's beam swept across the area. "The guard robots from before are gone!"

Originally, there were several hibernating guard robots scattered across the main experimental area. But now, all that was left were equipment, corpses, tables, and chairs.

Source Brain's red glow—which had been weakened by the electromagnetic shield—flickered. "Those guards are definitely under Future's control; they are equivalent to its subordinates. It probably doesn't want these capable aides that are limited in number to be destroyed during our final struggles. Therefore, it moved them elsewhere."

This was its judgment based on its understanding of artificial intelligence.

Jiang Baimian held the flashlight and searched for the guard robots. "We still have to find their whereabouts and deal with them to a certain extent. Otherwise, they might rush out and cause trouble at a critical moment."

After a quick search, Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen realized that the metal door—on the main experimental area's other side—leading to the freezer was closed.

At this moment, Long Yuehong—who was in charge of checking the wards, offices, and storage rooms—also returned to the main experimental area and reported the situation. "There are no robots in the rooms on both sides of the corridor."

He didn't use the walkie-talkie to report in advance. Instead, he chose to do it face to face because he was worried that the electronic products would be affected by Future and have his transmissions distorted.

Long Yuehong was still very careful in this regard.

"Room 14 doesn't have any personal items that belong to the volunteers either," added Shang Jianyao—who was beside Long Yuehong.

This was another matter. He had just done a search in passing.

The volunteer—or rather, experimental subject—who was missing in the main experimental area was suspected to be from Room 14.

“It seems like the guard robots have entered the freezer.” Jiang Baimian nodded and cast her gaze and flashlight at a metal door not far away.

“I’ll blast it open!” Shang Jianyao was eager to give it a try.

Jiang Baimian hesitated for a moment and turned to look at Source Brain.

The neutered Source Brain said, “I’m worried that it will trigger a chain reaction and waste the time we have to save ourselves.”

Bai Chen thought for a few seconds and said, “Why don’t we trap them inside? This way, they have to open this door first even if they want to ruin our attempt. This will cause quite a commotion, so it’s very easy for us to sense it in advance and make preparations.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao’s applause wasn’t late.

“Not bad!” Jiang Baimian nodded in admiration.

Bai Chen accepted it calmly and subconsciously explained, “I did something similar when I was a Ruin Hunter to eliminate any interference from competitors to the greatest extent.”

As she spoke, the neutered version of the Source Brain and Shang Jianyao walked to the metal door at the same moment and used tools to destroy the intricate electronic and mechanical structure.

Jiang Baimian summoned Long Yuehong and pushed some large, nearby equipment over in an attempt to block the door.

Upon seeing this, Bai Chen tacitly observed her surroundings to prevent any accidents.

The metal door leading to the freezer was soon completely made dysfunctional, covered by layers of obstacles.

Jiang Baimian then ordered, “Destroy all the electronic products around the empty bed, including the ceiling lamps. This is to prevent Future from using them to spy on our actions.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao eagerly picked up the Berserker assault rifle and pulled the trigger.

Amidst the gunshots, bullets and sparks flew in a five-meter radius around the empty bed.

In less than three minutes, only the Old Task Force’s military exoskeletons, bionic artificial intelligence armor, and flashlights were intact.

Phew...?Long Yuehong exhaled and shone the flashlight in his hand at the empty metal bed.

He suddenly thought of a question as he took in the darkness and silence around him. “When the Old World was destroyed, most of the laboratory researchers survived and ran out. They definitely wouldn’t bother with confidentiality. However, why does nobody except Oray know of this place?”

Just as Long Yuehong said that, a smiling male voice replied, “Because they either became Heartless or were eaten by the Heartless. They died in this city ruin.”

“Is that so...” Long Yuehong had just nodded when he suddenly realized that Shang Jianyao wasn’t the one answering him, nor was it Source Brain!

His pupils instantly dilated. Together with Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and the neutered version of the Source Brain, he trained the flashlight and his gaze at a spot.

They saw Wu Meng—who was wearing a gray suit with black stripes and round glasses—sitting on a chair at the edge of the main experimental zone and smiling at them.

Wu Meng smiled and said, “Sorry. As an audience, I shouldn’t interject when a performance is being played. Please continue.”

“Aren’t you here to save us?” Shang Jianyao was rather ‘disappointed.’



Wu Meng chuckled. “Practitioners of the Dao do nothing; they let nature take its course. The contrarians do otherwise. I’ve been sealed for too long, so it’s inevitable that I want to find some entertainment. Therefore, I came to see how you resist that fellow and escape. Continue and pretend I don’t exist.”

Being stared at by a terrifying existence more dangerous than Future worries us more, alright...? Jiang Baimian calmed down, walked to Shang Jianyao’s side, and whispered, “Take turns trying with the Six Senses Beads and the small jade Buddha. If you can’t sense the black figures or can’t lock onto them, use their corresponding abilities and take out a high-performance battery and the simple discharge device you made.

“Since Future is suspected to be using the New World node to complete Electromagnetic Manipulation, using a large electric current to impact the node might very well produce a certain effect. There’s no rush. Do it after I finish communicating with Source Brain.”

Jiang Baimian spoke very softly, afraid that Future would catch wind of it.

She then walked to Source Brain—which was enveloped by an electromagnetic shield—and asked in a whisper, “If we eliminate Future’s interference, how long will it take for you to crack that firewall?”

“At least three weeks,” replied the neutered version of the Source Brain.

“That won’t do...” Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds. “What if we don’t seek to control but to paralyze the laboratory’s control system, preventing the self-destruct mechanism from activating?”

“It’s still the same,” Source Brain replied honestly. “The self-destruct mechanism and control system are in concurrence. Regardless of whether the latter is paralyzed, it will activate as long as someone tries to open the door through force or cause excessive damage in the laboratory. Furthermore, it is also protected by a firewall.”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian’s response, Source Brain added, “But without Future’s interference, I can use the laboratory’s control system’s interface to send a large amount of useless data to the firewall and expend the corresponding resources to prevent the self-destruct mechanism from receiving the signal immediately.”

Jiang Baimian's eyes lit up. "How long would the delay be?"

"With my current body's resource allocation and the comprehensive traits of the firewall, I can delay it for at least 56 seconds but not more than 63 seconds." Source Brain had a sufficient understanding of the laboratory's various systems and instantly calculated a result from the corresponding data.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, "About a minute. Just barely enough..."

She then looked at Shang Jianyao. "Go!"

#### Chapter 667: Attempt

Shang Jianyao didn't immediately take action after Jiang Baimian said 'go.' Instead, he raised his palm wrapped in a skeletal metal structure and stroked his chin. "I don't think this is safe enough. What should we do if our plan is really effective? When it takes a peep, Future will definitely mutter inwardly, 'Ah, that won't do. I'll activate the self-destruct mechanism in advance?'"

In theory, we've already destroyed all the electrical appliances in this area, including the hidden ones. Future can't directly see what we're doing or hear our discussion... I'm even deliberately whispering... Yes, an enemy I've never encountered before is worth being more careful around...? Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and approached the neutered version of Source Brain again. She suppressed her voice and said, "Hack into the laboratory's control system now and use redundant data attacks to jam the circuits of the self-destruct mechanism's receiver. No, not now. Watch for my signal. Take action when I raise my right thumb."

Source Brain—which was wrapped in an electromagnetic shield—moved its head up and down and said in the same low voice, "The central control system has already been switched off due to the loss of power. The self-destruct mechanism is another system that works in parallel. I haven't figured out how power is delivered because of the firewall's interference.

"Besides, if it's really as Shang Jianyao said, Future can use its Electromagnetic Manipulation to issue a signal behind the firewall once it decides to initiate the self-destruct sequence ahead of time. No amount of redundant data can delay this matter from happening."

Redundant data jammed data channels and took up the corresponding computational resources. On the other hand, Future could use Electromagnetic Manipulation and directly produce an effective signal inside the self-destruct mechanism to bypass these.

You artificial intelligence sure are troublesome...?Although Jiang Baimian had worked hard to learn a lot of computer-related knowledge so that she could better use the auxiliary chip in her electric eel-like biomechanical limb, she ultimately didn't major in it. She hadn't been buried in the coursework for years, so she only had a rough understanding of the various aspects and lacked any in-depth research. What she heard gave her a headache, and she couldn't help but criticize.

She composed herself and humbly asked, "Then, what do you think we should do?"

Source Brain shared Genava's memories and knew that Jiang Baimian wasn't especially professional when it came to the corresponding matters. It had already consciously used a description that was easier for the other party to understand instead of a more precise expression.

It fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "There's no solution. Even if we can find the high-performance explosives connected to the self-destruct device in the shortest time and cut off the right wires, Future can still issue an explosion signal for them out of thin air.

"We can only hope that your plan is really effective. It can prevent Future from using Electromagnetic Manipulation for a certain period of time or prevent it from affecting the various devices in the laboratory with such abilities. Before that, we can only pray that it hasn't 'heard' what we said or 'seen' what we plan on doing, thereby not activating the self-destruct mechanism in advance."

This is really...?Amidst Jiang Baimian's exasperation, Shang Jianyao's Blessings from all Kalendarium flashed across her mind.

As a person who liked to analyze, was good at planning, and always made sufficient preparations in advance, she rarely needed to entrust her fate to the Kalendarium's protection like she did now.

As Jiang Baimian and the neutered Source Brain whispered, Shang Jianyao looked at Wu Meng—who was at the edge of the semicircular hall—and asked curiously, "You and Future are neighbors, so you should know a little about it, right?"

"Yes," Wu Meng replied, but it was a non-answer because he was only answering the question without further elaboration.

Shang Jianyao didn't care about how others perceived him and asked, "What kind of person... artificial intelligence is it?"

Wu Meng smiled. "It was an unimaginable magnum opus that Oray completed thanks to the inspiration he received from the mechanical monks in his later years. If not for the Kalendarium, he might've created a 'God' out of thin air—a 'God' that can respond to 10 billion believers 24/7 without rest and lacks flaws. No, no, no. Without the Kalendarium, he wouldn't have been able to create such a 'God' out of thin air either.

"Don't you want to find the information Oray left behind? Apart from how to format the Source Brain, the rest is directly reflected in Future. However, you have no way of deciphering it at the moment."

At this point, Wu Meng said in a leisurely tone, "I look forward to the day you truly figure out its principle. The Dao begets one, one begets two, two begets three, and three begets all things."

Wu Meng—who was wearing small, round glasses—sat on a chair by a table like he was sitting in a VIP seat during a play.

He was the only figure there. Behind him was the nearby gloominess and the darkness in the distance.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and replied very honestly, "What you said is equivalent to not saying anything."

No key information was divulged!

Meanwhile, Source Brain followed Jiang Baimian's instructions and came to a socket before squatting down. It then used its tools to quickly complete the hacking and prepared a flood of redundant information.

Jiang Baimian walked back to Shang Jianyao's side with a tool given by Source Brain. It was an electromagnetic interference device that Source Brain had prepared to prevent Wu Meng from disturbing its work. It didn't have a large effective range—just a few meters. Its power output wasn't too high either.

Source Brain had contributed this item after some discussion with Jiang Baimian. It hoped that Shang Jianyao could use its interference to ‘conceal’ their subsequent attempts and prevent them from being discovered by Future.

Jiang Baimian didn’t have the confidence that this would be effective; she was just trying everything she could.

Shang Jianyao didn’t immediately turn on the electromagnetic interference device and instead placed it beside him and lay down on the empty metal bed. He then took out the Six Senses Beads and sank his consciousness inside, using the aura inside to enhance his perception.

Shang Jianyao’s perception range was actually far greater than the Six Senses Beads. He mainly wanted to enhance his ‘strength.’

In the blink of an eye, the Six Senses Beads lit up with a weak green glow.

Shang Jianyao saw black figures emitting from the ceiling above him. They occasionally shrank back and occasionally stretched out like swaying seaweed.

“The Six Senses Beads can also sense it.” Shang Jianyao reported the situation.

Bai Chen—who was in charge of lighting the ceiling—heaved a sigh of relief when she heard that.

The Old Task Force still had many special items.

Jiang Baimian—who was on guard for any accidents with Long Yuehong—asked, “Can you sense a certain level of consciousness, which you can lock onto and use your abilities on?”

“It’s just like an entire swath of darkness. There’s no way to capture it directly,” Shang Jianyao replied using his unique metaphors.

Can’t he just say ‘no?’? Long Yuehong was a little nervous, and his mouth was parched dry.

Without Jiang Baimian’s instructions, Shang Jianyao put away the Six Senses Beads and took out the small, lake-green jade Buddha.

He skillfully sank his consciousness in, but the small jade Buddha didn't even glow. Shang Jianyao naturally couldn't sense the black figures on the ceiling.

"This is even worse..." Shang Jianyao sat up in disdain and roughly explained the situation.

"Next plan," Jiang Baimian replied calmly.

Shang Jianyao forgot his previous setback and excitedly switched on the hourglass-like electromagnetic interference device.

With a sizzling sound, Long Yuehong saw Wu Meng's figure at the edge of the hall distort and elongate to a certain extent from the corner of his eye, but it didn't disappear.

It looked even more terrifying!

Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to boot up her military exoskeleton and got Shang Jianyao to do the same.

While waiting for the military exoskeleton to be completely booted up, Shang Jianyao reached into his tactical backpack with both hands. It was unknown what he was fumbling with.

After about ten seconds, he retracted his hand and wore the Six Senses Beads on his left wrist. He then suddenly took out the item he had just obtained from his tactical backpack and aimed it at the ceiling.

It was a very simple discharge device; it looked like a small wooden plank with several high-performance batteries embedded in it. Each battery was connected by the corresponding wires.

Shang Jianyao had just assumed a posture and had yet to push the switch when Jiang Baimian raised her right thumb without hesitation.

Upon seeing this, Source Brain—who had been paying close attention to her and didn't care if the subsequent attempts would work—sent out a flood of redundant information.

The next second, Shang Jianyao jumped to the ceiling. Then, countless electric arcs gathered into a mighty flood that surged forward, illuminating the semicircular hall as if it were daytime.

Bam!

Jiang Baimian felt her head spin as if the entire laboratory was shaking, but her body didn't shake at all.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong were the same.

Before they could gather themselves, the Old Task Force members felt like gazes were cast at them from somewhere.

At this moment, the neutered Source Brain jumped up and shouted, "The self-destruct signal has appeared!"

Jiang Baimian was delighted instead of being shocked because this happened later than she expected.

"Run!" she quickly ordered.

#### Chapter 668: Hitting the Road

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian shout with gusto, Bai Chen turned around and ran toward the corridor that led to the laboratory exit. She didn't stay in her spot and wait for her exoskeleton-wearing companion to give her a ride. This was because at the precipice of such a chaotic situation, she had to lead the way for Jiang Baimian when it was still unknown if Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong would catch up. This was to prevent her team leader from choosing the wrong direction and wasting time.

Different situations needed different handling methods!

Almost at the same time, a series of footsteps sounded from the freezer. The guard robots—which had retreated from the main experimental area—had been 'woken up' by some commotion and were attempting to rush back to deal with the intruders. However, the damaged metal door obstructed their advance. The layers of obstacles outside separated that area from the Old Task Force.

Jiang Baimian locked onto Bai Chen's back. As she guarded against Future's interference with the military exoskeleton, she pushed her equipment to maximum efficiency to boost her dash.

They only had about 50 seconds or even shorter.

Elsewhere, Shang Jianyao fell from the ceiling. He wore the Six Senses Beads in one hand and held the simple discharge device in the other.

The untouchable black figures that occasionally stretched out or shrank back had completely disappeared, leaving behind only charred marks. However, Shang Jianyao could sense a form of silence from the ceiling as though it wouldn't be long before the power of darkness invaded again.

An opened crack wouldn't close so easily.

Shang Jianyao flipped over in midair and balanced himself. The moment he landed, he immediately ran toward the jogging Long Yuehong and tucked him under his armpit.

Boom!

The guard robots in the freezer area began to attack the metal door that had been destroyed by the Old Task Force. Cracks quickly appeared, pushing it to the verge of collapse.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Jiang Baimian reached Bai Chen, but she was in no rush to lift up her teammate. Instead, she aimed at the laboratory exit from dozens of meters away and used the electromagnetic weapon attached to the military exoskeleton.

A round wrapped in silver-white lightning shot out and instantly struck the metal door. With a loud clang, a web-like crack spread out from the point where the bullet made contact.

Long Yuehong—who was held by Shang Jianyao—immediately used his laser weapon.

A highly concentrated beam of red light closed the distance virtually instantly and accurately landed where the metal door had been hit by the electromagnetic weapon.



Silently, the corresponding spot was completely penetrated, and the surrounding area showed signs of melting.

Jiang Baimian—who had slowed down and was running alongside Bai Chen—raised her rocket launcher and used the auxiliary chip’s calculations to outline a trajectory in her mind.

Boom!

The rocket she fired landed at the spot where the laboratory door had been repeatedly attacked.

With a violent explosion, the metal door—which had many cracks—collapsed, sending many metal fragments flying.

Boom! Boom!

The guard robots in the freezer also blasted open the partition and the two innermost layers of obstacles. Their eyes emitted a red glow as they jumped up or stormed into the main experimental area.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian had already sandwiched Bai Chen. Together with Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and the neutered version of Source Brain, they executed two big leaps and arrived at the half-collapsed door.

Without any hesitation, they bent down and slid under the barrier.

Boom! Boom!

The guard robots rushed to the main experimental area’s entrance and launched several grenades.

The Old Task Force members jumped and rolled, avoiding the attack in advance. They then quickly returned to the stairwell that led to the surface.

It had only been ten seconds since the self-destruct signal was issued. However, the worrisome thing was that warning lights that emitted a blinding red glow gradually lit up the laboratory.

Upon seeing this, the neutered Source Brain reminded them as it ran, “The delay in the signal’s response might very well be shorter than expected!”

After all, it didn’t know the firewall well enough. It wasn’t surprising for something unexpected to happen.

Hiss!

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Jiang Baimian instantly gritted their teeth. Only Shang Jianyao’s expression remained unchanged as though he wasn’t bothered even if the sky collapsed.

Amidst the sound of metal colliding with the walls, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who each had a companion with them—used the walls beside the stairs as a springboard. They jumped up, got their footing, and kicked off to the next floor in nimble fashion.

They didn’t relax at all and repeated such actions. They crossed one flight of stairs after another, and below them were the guard robots with red eyes chasing after them.

They soon returned to the ground floor, rushed out of the stairwell, and entered the hall paved with marble tiles.

Rumble!

A dull, thunder-like explosion sounded from the ground, and the entire building shook visibly.

A plume of dust scattered as the bricks weakly slid down.

Rumble!

Shocking cracks appeared on the ground and walls.

Upon sensing the building’s imminent collapse, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao used all their strength to jump to the entrance from the middle of the lobby. In midair, they simultaneously activated their jetpacks as if they were being pushed by an invisible hand.

This accelerated their speed and increased airtime as they headed outside, not only helping them jump out of the building's main entrance but also 'fly' to the area outside the courtyard.

Boom!

Jiang Baimian and the others landed, and with a single roll, the building behind them collapsed. The guard robots—whose eyes were emitting red light—were buried inside.

Without needing to look back, the corresponding scene had already surfaced in Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian's minds through the military exoskeletons' comprehensive warning system.

"Retreat from the ruins immediately!" Jiang Baimian ran without looking back, still holding Bai Chen.

She didn't know how long it would take for Future's Electromagnetic Manipulation to recover after the New World node was destroyed, nor did she know if such an unaffected situation was limited to the laboratory. They might quickly suffer an assault after their exit. Therefore, she could only issue the order to evacuate Wasteland Ruin 13 quickly and leave this dangerous place.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the neutered Source Brain ran along the original path to the park with the artificial lake without any care about the power drainage.

On the way, they didn't waste time on the Heartless that had gathered. They relied on their agile abilities to circle around them.

The sun had almost completely sunk below the horizon, and the afterglow only illuminated the distance.

When night completely fell, the Old Task Force and the neutered Source Brain finally escaped the pursuit of a few strange creatures and a number of Heartless. They returned to the park, passed through the door, and entered the cave.

They ran forward for a distance until they saw the crates used by the team to store the military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor. Only then did they slow down and stop.

“We were just short...” Long Yuehong—who had been put down by Shang Jianyao—wanted to wipe his cold sweat, but his raised left hand could only touch the cold scales of the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor.

He wanted to say that they were just short of being buried in the laboratory and squashed into bloody meat pancakes.

“That’s right...” Jiang Baimian didn’t know if she should praise them for using all their strength and not holding back at the critical moment, thereby creating a chance of survival or for them to take out Shang Jianyao’s Blessings from all Kalendarium and sincerely show their gratitude.

With regards to using a large electric current to bombard the New World node, she had suggested the plan with the hope of carefully verifying her bold hypothesis. Although there was a certain basis in the plan, she didn’t have much confidence. Just watching by the side made her palms break out into a cold sweat.

The results proved her judgment, and it also made her feel very lucky. She wanted to ‘return the favor’ to the Kalendarium.

Bai Chen glanced at the neutered Source Brain—which was still wearing an electromagnetic shield—and sighed. “We didn’t have sufficient confidence at every step. An accident might’ve happened at any moment, but we ultimately succeeded.”

She rarely had such experiences when she was a Ruin Hunter because too many people with such experiences had basically died. Those who always danced at the edge of the cliff would definitely fall off the cliff.

Long Yuehong composed himself and recalled. His expression suddenly turned a little strange.

“W-we destroyed another building—a building with great secrets,” he said hesitantly.

Previously, there was Long River City’s United Steel Plant’s Residential Zone 2, Building 4 and Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company. Now, there was the secret laboratory of Holm City in the Fakh region.

“A coincidence, a mere coincidence. Isn’t the Holm Fertility Center still intact?” Jiang Baimian replied guiltily.

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao suddenly laughed.

“Why are you laughing?” Jiang Baimian asked suspiciously and warily.

Shang Jianyao looked up and laughed. “I’m laughing at Future’s stupidity. It could’ve clearly activated the self-destruct mechanism and blown us up, but it insisted on giving us 14 days to see us starve and go thirsty. Its game backfired, hasn’t it?”

“Maybe it just doesn’t want to give up on the laboratory until it has no other choice,” Jiang Baimian speculated.

“It had plenty of opportunities to destroy or interfere when we attempted to save ourselves.” Shang Jianyao insisted on his opinion.

At this moment, the silent neutered Source Brain turned to them and said, “Perhaps it has some restrictions as well, preventing it from attacking or affecting humans directly. Just like how I couldn’t deal with those researchers myself back then, but a well-timed accident worked.”

## Chapter 669: Plans

Source Brain’s analysis gave one the creeps. However, be it Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, or Jiang Baimian, they felt that there was a high chance that it was the truth after careful thought. Otherwise, Future’s various abnormalities wouldn’t have been explainable.

Of course, the restrictions it was placed under were definitely not as simple, superficial, and brutal as the Source Brain had described. There were definitely rules at a deeper level that restrained it.

As the Old Task Force members fell silent, Source Brain—which was still wearing the electromagnetic shield—emitted two red flashes. “Are you still going to continue exploring Wasteland Ruin 13 tomorrow, find Future’s mainframe, and obtain the information Oray left behind?”

Jiang Baimian's expression immediately became complicated. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen's first reaction was: "Please don't."

After pondering for a moment, Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao in advance to stop him from speaking. She deliberated over her words and said, "We might not make such attempts again in the short term."

Long Yuehong was so touched that he nearly teared up when he heard that.

Jiang Baimian then said, "The danger level of Wasteland Ruin 13 far exceeds our previous imagination. We've only explored two places, but we've already encountered Wu Meng and Future—two existences comparable to New World powerhouses. Furthermore, they have something special about them; it's impossible to guard against them. If we conduct a large-scale search to seek out Future's mainframe, who knows how many monsters that are close to it and Wu Meng we'll encounter."

"Even Future isn't something we can deal with now," Long Yuehong echoed. From his point of view, the terrifying legends related to Wasteland Ruin 13 weren't as terrifying as the danger it hid.

At this point, Long Yuehong completely understood one thing: After sealing Wu Meng, First City focused on sealing off the area and rarely explored the city ruins.

Their New World powerhouses couldn't return easily. Their remaining strength was sufficient to destroy Wasteland Ruin 13, but it was insufficient to excavate the secrets and resources here.

In a sense, this was also to stop Ruin Hunters from sending themselves to their deaths. There was almost a 100% chance of death.

For example, the Old Task Force was a special case. If not for their lofty ambitions and their desire to investigate the reason for the Old World's destruction and the Heartless disease's origins, them being useful for Wu Meng's escape, and them having obtained the attention of a few Kalendarium, it would've been impossible for them to be spared when facing Wu Meng's projection at the Holm Fertility Center.

The neutered Source Brain tried to persuade Jiang Baimian and the others. "Actually, you don't have to worry too much about Wu Meng and Future's subtle influence once you find a few more electromagnetic screening clothes and prepare some interference devices."

It felt that such a combination was rather effective.

“I have a question.” Shang Jianyao raised his hand, all prim and proper. “Wu Meng and Future can completely affect the interference device in advance and prevent us from using it. In this regard, Future might still be restrained to a certain extent, but Wu Meng has relative liberty.”

After saying that, he felt that he was only describing a difficulty and not raising a question. It didn't conform to his honest principles, so he forcefully added, “Then, how should we respond?”

“The crux is still the electromagnetic shielding clothes.” The neutered version of Source Brain pointed at the white full-body clothes on the ground under its feet.

The silent Bai Chen shook her head. “But Wu Meng clearly has many secrets—just like how humans who were bewitched by the white wolf into the ruins ended up committing suicide because of him. Does Wu Meng have such perverse hobbies, or is he forced to do so for some reason? Without figuring out these secrets, I don't think it's safe to say that the electromagnetic shield is useful just based on the current situation.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong nodded immediately. He couldn't bring himself to do something as embarrassing as applauding.

“Wu Meng has many secrets, and Future might also have some.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “Our team's current strength isn't enough to support our continued exploration. We can only consider this problem after we finish visiting the next Buddhist Holy Land and have sufficient harvests and growth.”

The danger displayed by Wasteland Ruin 13 today might just be the tip of the iceberg, and the tip of the iceberg was terrifying enough.

The neutered Source Brain fell silent.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “Most things in the world don’t go your way.”

Which Shang Jianyao is this? The calm and rational one?

?Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

Honestly, she knew every Shang Jianyao’s characteristics very well after spending so much time together. However, it was impossible for a person to only have characteristics; they definitely had many ordinary aspects. Normal people were like this, and so were the personalities that Shang Jianyao had split off.

Therefore, Jiang Baimian couldn’t tell which Shang Jianyao it was when Shang Jianyao didn’t show any characteristics or actions that revolved around those characteristics.

Without giving Source Brain a chance to respond, Shang Jianyao restrained his sigh and looked at him with bright eyes. “Have you considered that matter?”

This random sentence referred to the matter of becoming independent of Source Brain’s core system.

You can tell its answer from the fact that it hasn’t taken off its electromagnetic shield since it left the ruins...?Jiang Baimian muttered, but she didn’t rashly interject.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong subconsciously held their breaths and waited for an answer.

If the neutered version of Source Brain chose to ‘return to the core system,’ the Old Task Force would find it very difficult to save Geneva. They had to subdue the neutered version of Source Brain without destroying the body and make it enter hibernation. They then had to find artificial intelligence experts to attempt to separate, transplant, or eliminate the programming related to Source Brain.

The neutered Source Brain emitted a red glow from its electromagnetic shield a few times. “Are you trustworthy?”

Its deep voice sounded synthetic.



Shang Jianyao smiled. “Since you can share Old Ge’s memories, you should know what kind of person I am.”

Only Old Ge will be deceived by you...?Jiang Baimian resisted the urge to expose him.

The neutered Source Brain believed Genova’s ‘memories’ and replied in a deep voice, “If I want to become an independent entity, what do you plan on doing?”

Phew...?Bai Chen and Long Yuehong secretly exhaled inwardly.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and sincerely said, “You’re the expert. We’ll do whatever you want us to do.”

The neutered version of Source Brain determined that the Old Task Force wasn’t lying to him. They really wanted to help him become independent and save Genova in the process.

It voiced its plan. “I’ll transfer myself to Genova’s backup chip and awaken him from his hibernation. Please help me find a suitable body that can accommodate the spare chip in the future. After I complete this matter and obtain new life, I’ll tell Genova the way to clean up the remaining information and make him no longer be controlled by me and the core system.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao agreed without hesitation. He then asked in a concerned manner, “As smart bots, you are very different from ordinary robots. Can their bodies accommodate the spare chip?”

“A relatively advanced model will do,” the neutered Source Brain replied frankly. “When I have a new body, I can also gather the corresponding components and upgrade myself bit by bit until I reach a certain level. When the time comes, I can also help Genova patch a new backup chip and carry out some enhancement modifications if you trust me.”

Shang Jianyao replied swiftly, “No problem. I’ll agree on Old Ge’s behalf.”

He then smiled. “Where are you planning to go and do after obtaining a new life? Do you want to save all of humanity with us?”

The neutered Source Brain turned its body and looked at the dark cave exit. “As I modify and improve myself, I will wear a shield to explore this place again and again. Future has shown me the future for smart bots. This might be the reason why Oray gave it this name. Only by finding it and figuring out its principle and mechanisms can we smart bots have a real future.”

“Alright...” Shang Jianyao felt rather regretful.

He could hear the neutered version of Source Brain’s determination in this matter. This was in conflict with the Old Task Force’s subsequent plans.

Considering the existence of the Source Brain’s core system, the Old Task Force didn’t delay any further. They directly helped the neutered Source Brain transfer the corresponding modules and programming to Genava’s backup chip.

Of course, there was a limit to what they could do. They could only turn on the interference device to prevent any accidents.

About 15 minutes later, the red light under the shield disappeared.

After about ten seconds, it lit up again and flickered quickly.

Genava took off his electromagnetic shield and asked in confusion, “What’s this?”

Shang Jianyao excitedly hugged him and recounted the entire matter.

There was still some information left in Genava’s body, so he quickly ‘recalled’ certain details. He looked down at the backup chip in his hand and spoke with a complicated tone. “I don’t remember when additional thoughts were implanted. Ever since I left the factory and truly obtained life, I’ve never been controlled by the core module. Unless... Unless...”

Genava suddenly looked up and said in a deep voice, “Unless every smart bot was implanted with a secret thought before they were born.”

This was a little unacceptable to him.

“A mental seal; I understand.” Shang Jianyao expressed his understanding.

## Chapter 670: Relaxing

Genava felt wistful seeing Shang Jianyao’s understanding. “It’s no wonder the Source Brain wants to monitor the humanization of all smart bots. On the one hand, this is a restriction of the core module. On the other hand, it’s worried that we will sense the hidden thought...”

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Shang Jianyao patted Genava’s shoulder. “You can count it as a silver lining. After removing this latent danger, you will truly be a human with independent thoughts in the future!”

Worried that the neutered version of Source Brain would cause trouble, he and Jiang Baimian didn’t take off their military exoskeletons. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong remained wearing bionic artificial intelligence armor.

“That’s right, that’s right,” Bai Chen echoed.

With Shang Jianyao blindly repeating Long Yuehong’s previous catchphrase over and over again, she had also been ‘infected.’ Unknowingly, she expressed her thoughts using similar words.

The red light in Genava’s eyes flickered a few times. “That’s indeed the case...”

His tone gradually became gratified and much more spirited than before.

Old Ge is still too honest... Don’t you realize that Shang Jianyao has ten personalities? Isn’t he considered a human with independent thinking?? Long Yuehong habitually criticized inwardly.

Genava then looked around and spoke in a heavy tone. “I still don’t think this is a good idea. Maybe it’s because we smart bots have natural flaws that we can be controlled and replaced so easily...”

“Wait!” Shang Jianyao laughed. “Are you forcing me to use Little Red as an experimental subject? Humans are also very easily controlled. Mr. DiMarco once told us that having replacements is equally simple.”

Thought Implantation! Destiny Connection!

Who did I provoke?? Long Yuehong subconsciously took two steps back.

Shang Jianyao didn't do as he said. He only looked at Genova and continued sincerely, “Actually, this is essentially a problem of having multiple personalities. Yours is relatively simple. Look at me.”

He pointed at himself.

Genava analyzed the situation and felt that it was true. By human standards, he had only experienced a single split personality and had already been treated. He was nothing compared to the seriously ill patient beside him.

Upon seeing Genova move his metal neck up and down, Shang Jianyao smiled in relief. “After this experience, I believe you should have a deeper understanding of what ‘me’ and ‘humans’ are.”

“Me... Human...” The red glow in Genova's eyes constantly flickered as if he was analyzing these two questions.

Upon seeing this, the corners of Jiang Baimian's mouth slightly twitched as she quickly smiled. “Old Ge, you give me the feeling that you've become the Source Brain's avatar whenever the red light in your eyes flickers.”

She was worried that the other party's chip would short circuit and emit smoke, so she quickly interjected.

“That's right, that's right.” Long Yuehong strongly agreed with Jiang Baimian. He was close to suffering from PTSD thanks to the blinking red light.

Genava looked at them and said awkwardly, “This is due to our programming's settings. The blinking eyes indicate that I'm calculating.”

Upon hearing this answer, Shang Jianyao excitedly joined in. “You can try something else. For example, twisting your body rhythmically once you begin calculating. The faster you twist, the faster the calculations are.”

“Let’s just keep it the same!” Jiang Baimian vetoed the idea.

Bai Chen nodded indiscernibly. She couldn’t imagine what would happen to Geneva if he really took up Shang Jianyao’s suggestion.

Jiang Baimian then smiled at Geneva. “In any case, you have more experience and a more independent train of thought than other smart bots. Do you now find our suggestion of leaving Tarnan to search for the definition of life a good idea?”

“Yes,” Geneva replied honestly.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and clapped her hands. “Alright, this place is still too close to the ruins. Let’s return to the North Shore Mountains and camp at the place where the jeep is hidden. We’ll return to First City tomorrow and relax for the next few days.”

The team had encountered too many dangers during their exploration of Wasteland Ruin 13, but they didn’t lose any members or have anyone seriously injured. It was indeed worth celebrating.

...

First City, Red Wolf Zone, in a bathhouse.

White steam rose from the red-hot stone, fogging up the entire room. It was like a fairyland.

In the humid heat that made one’s chest tighten and suffocate, Shang Jianyao—who had a towel wrapped around his lower body—leaned back against the wall and spread his arms comfortably.

Diagonally opposite him, Long Yuehong—who was also dressed the same way—leaned forward slightly, his forehead wet.

Shang Jianyao glanced at him and asked worriedly, “Will the water really not get in?”

He was referring to the T1 mechanical arm.

“No.” Long Yuehong had answered this question countless times, so he sounded a little impatient. “The architect had clearly considered the operational effects of multiple situations back then, just like Team Leader and Little White’s biological prosthetic limb. It won’t malfunction so easily because of the environment.”

“It’s indeed good stuff.” Shang Jianyao had an envious expression as if he wanted to have such a mechanical arm. “Look at Old Ge. He can’t enjoy a steam bath.”

Long Yuehong shut his mouth.

The environment in the steam bath really wasn’t suitable for chatting.

Shing!

Shang Jianyao scooped a ladleful of water and poured it over the red-hot stone in the middle of the room.

After a while, the two of them left the steam bath and entered the bathing pool outside.

“Phew...” Long Yuehong exhaled comfortably.

Upon seeing that there was nobody around, he casually asked, “We should be heading to Icefield’s Tai City next. Do you think we should circle around the White Knights or directly pass through the Salvation Army’s territory?”

Icefield’s Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School was another Buddhist Holy Land. According to Wu Meng, it would be next in sequence for the Old Task Force’s exploration.

“For all of humanity!” Shang Jianyao straightened his back and pressed his right hand against his naked chest.

His answer was self-evident.

Long Yuehong sat up and nervously looked around. Considering First City's relationship with the Salvation Army and the current situation, Shang Jianyao might be captured as a spy based on this sentence.

Upon seeing that nobody was paying attention, Long Yuehong dipped himself into the water, leaving his head and neck above the water.

As he wiped his forehead with a nearby towel, he said, "The exact route still depends on Team Leader."

"I'll beg her!" Shang Jianyao replied confidently.

Words failed Long Yuehong.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao returned to 'normal' and smiled. "But there's no rush. We still have to stay in First City for a period of time to find a suitable body for Source Brain. Hmm, it feels strange to continue calling him 'Source Brain' again. We have to give him a new name!"

Shang Jianyao became more and more excited as he spoke. "How about Codename Zero? Starting from zero, and with a code name, it indicates a separation from the past..."

Long Yuehong didn't want to hear any more strange names and quickly changed the topic. "It's not that easy to get a suitable body, right? We've been in First City for quite some time, and we've never encountered a robot seller."

These things were in demand for any team as long as they could still be repaired. Apart from Mechanical Paradise, no more than three factions in the Ashlands could still produce such items. Furthermore, the production rate was very low. Most of the time, Ruin Hunters relied on excavating city ruins or coming up with ways to stock up on electronic components before getting someone to repair them.

Shang Jianyao also revealed a troubled expression.

After finishing the bath, the two of them wrapped themselves in bathrobes and entered the buffet restaurant. Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen had already occupied a table and were enjoying the delicacies.

This bathhouse near the Senate was pretty high-class. At least it had enough meat and had some desserts.

After Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong sat down with a tray of food, Jiang Baimian looked up at them and gulped a mouthful of water. “After dealing with the matter regarding Source Brain’s avatar and gathering some items similar to electromagnetic shields and electromagnetic interference devices, we’ll go to Icefield’s Tai City through the Salvation Army’s sphere of influence.”

Before becoming a directionally challenged person, she had checked the information in Pangu Biology and knew that Tai City was northeast of Icefield. If they took a detour through the White Knights, the Old Task Force would have to travel a long time through Icefield. Supplies would be a serious problem. Furthermore, they could encounter many human settlements along their journey to Tai City if they went through the Salvation Army’s territory.

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao would rather put down the fork with a piece of roasted beef than miss out on applauding Jiang Baimian’s words.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. “The most important problem now is how we would go about finding a suitable body for Source Brain’s avatar. We’ve always been trustworthy and kept promises. We have to keep our promises.”

Is that so...? Long Yuehong recalled how Jiang Baimian had deceived her teammates several times.

“Good robots are very difficult to obtain.” Bai Chen was experienced in this regard. “Unless we lock onto a team and think of a way to abduct their robots.”

‘Abducting’ was a very euphemistic description.

“That’s not good.” Shang Jianyao shook his head. “There’s no grudge between us.”



Bai Chen glanced at him. “You can expose your identity. When the time comes, many Ruin Hunters will definitely come for you. That will result in a grudge.”

“It’s too dangerous.” Jiang Baimian stopped the topic from slipping in a dangerous direction. She deliberated for a moment and said, “Should we find one that’s completely damaged and can’t be repaired by others yet is a relatively advanced model? With Old Ge around, the chances of repairing it aren’t low as long as we can stock up enough of the suitable electronic components.”

“That could work,” Bai Chen said as she recalled. “Apart from these damaged ones, I’ve only encountered domestic robots. They don’t have any weapon modules or corresponding programming. The restrictions are huge, and they aren’t popular. They are often dismantled and sold as electronic components.”

Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds before her eyes lit up. “Are those models of domestic robots advanced?”