

Ad Infinitum 711

Chapter 711: The Light of the Right Path

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen remained silent. As their thoughts raced, Shang Jianyao suddenly looked up and laughed boisterously.

“Why are you laughing?” Genava asked cooperatively.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “It involves the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the New World secret. If we don’t find ourselves in an arrangement, it can only mean that we’ve deviated from the right path.”

He switched the ‘Heartless disease source’ he often used to say to ‘New World secret’ because the Old Task Force had already preliminarily confirmed that the Heartless disease originated from the New World. However, they weren’t sure what it was in the New World or what its essence was.

After hearing Shang Jianyao’s words, Jiang Baimian didn’t retort and nodded slightly. “The company clearly hopes to do something about these matters. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have sent out one Old Task Force after another. My current question is: Is the company’s real goal the investigation of the reason behind the Old World’s destruction and the New World’s secret to prepare for such dangers in the future, or is it to sow discord in the New World and obtain some kind of benefit?”

Long Yuehong thought for a long time and only came to one conclusion: It was all possible.

If powerhouses who entered the New World could transmit the New World’s secrets to the Ashlands without restraint, the company would definitely fall into the second camp. However, it was obvious that powerhouses who entered the New World were restrained by certain rules or threats.

“It’s also possible that it’s a mix of both possibilities.” Bai Chen expressed her thoughts.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped. “Yes! After investigating the reason for the Old World’s destruction and figuring out the New World’s secret, the company might be able to make a name for itself in the New World and obtain more benefits. This is precisely the preparation for such dangers in the future.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Regardless, we will definitely encounter greater and greater danger if we continue investigating the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the New World’s secrets. Our current situation is like crossing a large river—we’ve finally reached the middle, but we realize that our boats are leaking. We are unprepared in all aspects and are muddle-headed. We are no different from minesweepers.”

She then looked at Shang Jianyao and said seriously, “I plan on returning to the company after exploring Tai City’s Buddhist Holy Land to see if our current gains can squeeze more information from the board of directors. After we gain a deeper understanding of the New World and make more preparations, we’ll set off again. We’ll first search for the remaining Buddhist Holy Land before heading to the city your father last appeared in.”

The place the Heartless disease destroyed.

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before answering in a slightly low voice, “Alright.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and cast her gaze at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen.

Long Yuehong naturally agreed with her idea of returning home early. Bai Chen only wanted to move with the team, so she didn’t care where she went.

After moving her gaze away from them, Jiang Baimian instructed, “Let’s conserve our energy and wait for the migration.”

In fact, she was thinking further than anyone else. She planned on leaving Bai Chen and Long Yuehong in the company after returning to Pangu Biology.

From Jiang Baimian’s point of view, they—who weren’t Awakened—would definitely be in greater danger as the investigation progressed. If this continued, it might even be a problem for them to protect themselves.

After the Old Task Force members found their seats and sat down, Shang Jianyao suddenly jumped up. He looked at Bai Chen and anxiously asked, “Are you driving later, or should I drive? Or should we get Little Red to do it?”

In short, Jiang Baimian was out of the question.

As for Genava, it was best to save him some electricity.

“I’ll do it. You can focus on guarding against any accidents.” Bai Chen had no complaints about the division of labor in the team, nor did she feel inferior.

“I can do it too.” Long Yuehong wasn’t too sure why Shang Jianyao had to confirm this matter now.

“Then, Little White it is.” Shang Jianyao ignored Long Yuehong’s answer. He then took off his tactical backpack, took out a small black speaker with a blue bottom, and handed it to Bai Chen.

Bai Chen looked at him in confusion. Although she didn’t speak, it was best asking a question.

Frankly speaking, Jiang Baimian couldn’t guess what this fellow’s train of thought was. She only roughly understood that he wanted Little White to play music while driving.

The next second, Shang Jianyao smiled, revealing his white teeth. “Remember to play the song while driving. I’ve already raised the volume to the maximum.”

“You want background music during a battle?” Bai Chen tried her best to understand this from the perspective of a mental patient.

Most likely...? Long Yuehong believed that he had a certain level of understanding of Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “I want to attract Doctor’s attention. If he can really make it in time, I want him to know that we’re here and that we’re heading southwest along the Yuelin River. This way, he won’t attack the ordinary people evacuating in another direction just because he can’t find us.”

At this second, Long Yuehong suddenly found the sunlight a little blinding and couldn’t help but tilt his head.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Genava clapped without holding back. As a smart bot, protecting humans was one of his duties.

Jiang Baimian also fully realized what it meant to have noble sentiment and pure integrity. For a moment, she felt 'tiny.'

She muttered inwardly, 'The only problem is that this fellow is mentally ill...'

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suggested, "Why don't I borrow a car from the Salvation Army? When the time comes, I'll drive it myself and play the song to attract Doctor's attention."

"There's no need," Bai Chen replied firmly.

Jiang Baimian also shook her head and snorted. "Wouldn't that make us disloyal?"

Shang Jianyao said in surprise, "Isn't this a very simple plan? I'm in charge of attracting attention, and you guys are in charge of ambushing."

This... Which Shang Jianyao is this!?? Jiang Baimian took a deep breath and said, "There's no need. If Doctor really can rush over, the first target definitely won't be us but the one sleeping in Ubei. Without restricting him, influencing him, and bypassing him, Doctor shouldn't be able to deal with us directly."

"Since a powerhouse from the New World can take the initiative to spread the Heartless disease, there's a high chance that he has the ability to use the node to absorb the corresponding virus and reduce its range or numbers. Otherwise, Commissioner Huang wouldn't have suggested that we follow that person during the migration."

Shang Jianyao had no objections to this.

The Old Task Force continued conserving their energy. After a while, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian cast their gazes at the door at the same time.

Before long, there was a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” Shang Jianyao walked to the door.

“E-Elder Zhang is looking for you.” Shen Kang’s slightly trembling voice sounded.

Shang Jianyao’s face lit up as he opened the door and saw Elder Zhang with the grayish-white, deep aluminum pot. The latter was still wearing the faded, black Salvation Army uniform.

“Elder Zhang, they’re in the room. I-I can leave now, right?” Shen Kang turned to Elder Zhang.

Elder Zhang waved his hand and said, “Go back and reflect on yourself and your mistakes. Hmph, don’t think I don’t know why the thief previously succeeded. It’s because you and your subordinates always turn a blind eye. You don’t check the people who leave or even accept their gifts. You open the door for them and let them out when you shouldn’t!”

A layer of sweat broke out on Shen Kang’s forehead. “I’m just upholding the principle that customers are above all and that service is of utmost importance. I-I...”

“Go back.” Old Zhang didn’t want to hear his explanation.

After Shen Kang left the third floor, Elder Zhang lowered his head and walked into the room using the gap under the aluminum pot to find his path. He then identified the person by their shoes and said to Jiang Baimian, “Lass, you’re amazing. You didn’t seem to discover anything back then, but you found that fellow in a blink of an eye!”

“I was worried that acting too abnormally back then would alert the target,” Jiang Baimian admitted frankly.

Elder Zhang nodded in satisfaction. This was obvious from the aluminum pot’s up and down motion.

He said, “There’s no need to explain. Although our Salvation Army is honest with others, we are also methodological and strategic when dealing with enemies.”

His voice gradually became loud. “Let me ask you: Did something happen? Why did the Public Security Council suddenly change their plan and are now gathering the citizens to head northeast?”

Shang Jianyao didn't hesitate to tell him about Doctor using what Jiang Baimian had said without a single stutter.

Elder Zhang didn't say anything for a while.

"I see..." Finally, he sighed with emotion. "You guys have experienced a lot. You're already coming into contact with the New World at such a young age."

He didn't question Commissioner Huang's management.

Elder Zhang then waved his hand and said, "I'll go back and inform my old comrades to prepare for the migration."

Just as he said that, a flurry of footsteps suddenly sounded from the stairwell.

Shang Jianyao looked over and saw Commissioner Huang, his staff, and the security guards beside him. Ding Ling was also among them.

Commissioner Huang glanced at Elder Zhang and didn't say anything before walking into the room.

Elder Zhang seemed to have guessed who it was as well. He stood motionless inside while Ding Ling took the initiative to close the door and leave the others outside.

"That fast?" Jiang Baimian looked at Commissioner Huang and instinctively felt that something was amiss. "Didn't you need a few hours?"

At this moment, the ordinary citizens had probably not completely gathered, much less evacuated on a large scale.

Commissioner Huang's gaze swept past Jiang Baimian, the others, and Old Zhang. He suppressed his voice and said, "We can't contact the person sleeping in Ubei."

What do you mean by ‘you can’t contact him?’? This thought flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind first before she recalled Shang Jianyao using his Awakened abilities to connect to Yama Tiger’s consciousness and hear him cry for help.

In the blink of an eye, Jiang Baimian had a clear guess of Commissioner Huang’s words: After he used his Awakened abilities to connect to the consciousness of the New World powerhouse in Ubei, he realized that the other party didn’t respond?

Something happened to that person in the New World?

Doctor has done something?

Chapter 712: Extra Urgency

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “If the probability of Doctor’s attack was still low before and all our precautions and responses were just a matter of convenience, we have no choice but to consider this possibility seriously now. It seems imminent.”

Otherwise, it was impossible for them not to be able to contact the New World powerhouse sleeping in Ubei.

Too many coincidences often meant that something was inevitable.

While Long Yuehong and the others were shocked, Commissioner Huang sighed and nodded slightly. “That’s indeed the case. Over the years, we’ve contacted people who have entered the New World. We’ll fail at most two to three times out of a hundred attempts, and these two to three attempts had omens that made them foreseeable. It’s completely different from this instance.”

“What omens?” Shang Jianyao—who sought novelty—raised the question regardless of the occasion.

Commissioner Huang casually replied, “Their bodies—which are sleeping in reality—show signs of dying or visible deterioration.”

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to ask again, he steered the topic back on track. “In the current situation, such an abnormality is enough to indicate that some of your worries and mine aren’t delusions. I was originally just taking the opportunity to provide you with some help. After all, the

people, warriors, and the sleeping person in Ubei have to be evacuated because of the nuclear warhead—a simple change of plan is as easy as raising a finger. But from the looks of it, we have to seriously consider how to deal with the Doctor you mentioned. We have to make some adjustments to the previous plan.”

“Without the blessings of a New World powerhouse, can humans escape the Heartless disease’s infection?” Long Yuehong asked anxiously.

Otherwise, a New World powerhouse was equivalent to a nuclear bomb on another level. No matter how Commissioner Huang adjusted the plan, it couldn’t change the outcome that a large number of people here would become Heartless.

Commissioner Huang glanced at Elder Zhang—who was wearing a deep aluminum pot. “Based on my personal experience and the various information I’ve read, nobody can escape the Heartless disease that a New World powerhouse proactively spreads unless they maintain a sufficient distance. Awakened who enter the Mind Corridor might be able to last a little longer, but it’s precisely because of this that such humans often become targets that New World powerhouses focus on. Under the influence of a highly concentrated virus, the little time they can last is easily offset.”

Commissioner Huang’s gaze swept across the Old Task Force members again. “Only robots are guaranteed not to be infected.”

Genava wasn’t proud of this.

Upon seeing that her team leader was in thought, Bai Chen took the initiative to ask on her behalf, “How far do we have to be to maintain a sufficient distance from a New World powerhouse?”

Commissioner Huang shook his head. “Without the data to back it up, we can only say that if one is in Ubei’s southwest city district and the other is in the northeast, they won’t be affected; they won’t be infected with the Heartless disease.”

That’s terrifying...?Long Yuehong almost gasped.

They had previously repelled Doctor ‘easily,’ making him feel like a New World powerhouse was nothing more than this. Who knew that once such a big shot really returned to the Ashlands, the danger level would rise exponentially? It was incomparable to attacking through a node.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao's expression became rather gloomy. His body seemed to be presided over by the timid and ruthless person.

Jiang Baimian composed herself and looked at Commissioner Huang. "How do you want to adjust the plan?"

From her point of view, Commissioner Huang definitely knew New World powerhouses better than them. The plans he formulated would be relatively more effective.

Jiang Baimian had always had the advantage of not being blindly confident and knowing how to listen to other people's opinions.

Commissioner Huang clasped his hands behind his back and took a few steps toward the window before stopping. "I hope you can understand that my utmost priority will be the ordinary people and most of the warriors in Ubei, as well as the sleeping one. But don't worry—our Salvation Army doesn't have the habit of throwing out our partners as bait."

"No problem!" Shang Jianyao replied abnormally loudly, just short of raising his right hand and pressing it against his left chest.

Wearing the grayish-white aluminum pot, Elder Zhang—who had been listening quietly—nodded slightly.

Since Shang Jianyao had already replied on behalf of the Old Task Force, Jiang Baimian could only maintain her expression and wait for Commissioner Huang to elaborate on the exact plan.

Commissioner Huang took out the pack of wrinkled cigarettes, took one out, and stuffed it into his mouth.

This time, he didn't have any scruples. He lit it with a match and took a long drag.

Amidst the spreading grayish-white smoke, Commissioner Huang thought for a moment and said, "Assuming that Doctor is the only New World powerhouse who returns this time—yes, the probability is very high. Having New World powerhouses returning in batches only happened in a few cases. The most recent occurrence should be when First City was in chaos.

“If the Eighth Research Institute wants to deal with you, it’s enough for Doctor to return alone. It’s better for the other powerhouses to stay in the New World and interfere with the one sleeping in Ubei, preventing him from providing help.

“With this premise, we know that Doctor has two prioritized targets. The first is you, and the second is the one sleeping in Ubei. The Eighth Research Institute definitely won’t let go of the opportunity to weaken our Salvation Army.

“I’ve already sent a telegram to Pingnan and reported the anomaly here. It won’t be long before our Salvation Army’s other New World powerhouses provide help to the one sleeping in Ubei. In other words, the latter might recover in 15 minutes, half an hour, or an hour later and provide the necessary protection. The core of my plan is to stall for time as much as possible until then.”

Pingnan was the Salvation Army’s headquarters.

“To make a long story short, since the sleeping person has been interfered with, it means that the so-called Doctor will arrive in half an hour or even less,” interrupted Elder Zhang—who was wearing a deep aluminum pot.

Commissioner Huang tersely acknowledged his words and said to the Old Task Force, “The evacuation of the civilians and most warriors toward the northeast won’t change. We’ll head southwest along the Yuelin River and help them draw attention, giving them time to organize themselves and widen the distance between us.

“The people retreating along the Yuelin River will be divided into several batches. With the general direction unchanged, Doctor and his followers will be distracted. At most, they will be able to intercept two to three batches in time.

“You will split up and hide in different teams with the one sleeping in Ubei. Take the opportunity to go as far away as possible.

“I can’t guarantee that you won’t be discovered or locked onto; this really depends on luck. I can only tell you that I’ll personally choose a group of people to pretend to be you and the sleeping person and strive to lure Doctor away. Once he’s exposed, the people still in Ubei will fire ballistic missiles to bombard the corresponding area and destroy his body!”

It seems like the Salvation Army's consensus is that New World powerhouses can't resist missiles. Xu Datong—who we previously encountered—said the same thing...?Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully.

Shang Jianyao frowned and asked, "Then, won't the group of people targeted by Doctor be doomed?"

On the one hand, there was a high chance that they would be infected with the Heartless disease. On the other hand, even if they could escape the virus, they would lose their lives due to the subsequent ballistic missiles.

"Yes." Commissioner Huang nodded frankly. "The current situation is that if the sleeping person doesn't wake up in time, a portion of the people will have to sacrifice themselves to create a chance of survival for the others. You share this possibility as well. Therefore, I'll give you a few signal rounds. Once Doctor's location is confirmed, I'll fire them at the corresponding spot."

Don't you think you're overestimating us...?Long Yuehong felt a headache coming on.

If not for the fact that Doctor's main goal was the Old Task Force, he felt that he would most likely choose to follow the main team and run as far as he could.

"This plan is fine." Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and agreed.

The Old Task Force could naturally choose not to listen to Commissioner Huang, but this couldn't avoid an intense conflict with the Salvation Army before Doctor's attack, wasting their chances of escape.

In such a situation, it was already considered lucky to have many teams cover their retreat.

Upon seeing that the Old Task Force had agreed with his plan, Commissioner Huang took another drag of his cigarette and said, "I'll make the arrangements now. I'll give you ten minutes to prepare; we'll meet in the hotel parking lot later."

With that said, he walked out of the room and led the people outside down the stairs. Elder Zhang didn't say a word and left with the grayish-white aluminum pot.

“Get ready, get ready,” Shang Jianyao shouted as he took out the black trench coat he had obtained and draped it over his body. He then put on his sunglasses.

“What preparations are those?” Long Yuehong asked in confusion.

Shang Jianyao puffed up his chest and looked up. He replied righteously, “Looks better dying in this.”

“...” Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “We’ve already made the necessary preparations. What’s missing is the company’s reply. Yes, send another emergency telegram to inform them of a confirmed impending attack from Doctor.”

Chapter 713: People With No Ideals Don’t Get Hurt

Pangu Biology replied rather quickly for once. “Gather all items and act according to the Salvation Army’s plan.”

Long Yuehong—who had always been loyal to the company—couldn’t help but grumble, “That’s equivalent to not saying anything.”

To be honest, he didn’t expect the company to provide any substantial help. After all, they were worlds apart. Unless Pangu Biology grasped fantasy technology like spatial folding, curvature navigation, and wormhole travel, they could only watch helplessly.

Long Yuehong originally hoped that the company could at least provide some exploitable information on New World powerhouses or get the intelligence agents lurking in the Salvation Army to provide some help.

In the end, there was nothing!

After some thought, he found a reason for Pangu Biology. The company didn’t have much information on New World powerhouses either. There was nothing that could allow the Old Task Force to resist the New World’s returners. Furthermore, the Salvation Army carried out strict inspections. No intelligence personnel from the company could successfully infiltrate their borders. Even if they joined the Salvation Army, they were in the periphery of power. They were useless.

At this moment, Long Yuehong heard rustling. He turned his head and saw Shang Jianyao take out a neatly folded piece of paper.

“What’s this?” Long Yuehong asked in confusion.

Shang Jianyao smiled back. “Other preparations.”

Other preparations...?Jiang Baimian had a bad feeling.

Shang Jianyao then unfolded the piece of paper, revealing the various patterns depicted on it— Blessings from all Kalendarium!

Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Jiang Baimian fell silent. They watched helplessly as Shang Jianyao placed the Blessings from all Kalendarium on the table. He bowed once, twice, and a final third bow.

“What kind of preparation is this?” the honest Genava asked.

“A prayer for blessings,” Shang Jianyao replied seriously. “As the saying goes, sharpening a spear at the last minute beats doing nothing.”

So you do know that it’s a last-minute effort!?Jiang Baimian roared inwardly. However, she was still looking forward to it.

The Old Task Force had received the attention of many Kalendarium, and they might be chips of one or many of ‘Them.’ In theory, they would more or less be protected.

Of course, they couldn’t rule out the possibility that the Kalendarium were spreading their net. In that case, the Old Task Force definitely wouldn’t receive any additional help if they couldn’t survive Doctor’s onslaught and reach their expected ‘destinations.’

After Shang Jianyao finished paying his respects to the Blessings from all Kalendarium and put away the piece of paper, Jiang Baimian signaled for Long Yuehong and the others to stuff the radio

transceiver into the box and carry the crates containing the military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor on their backs.

While doing so, she said with a frown, “I’m only worried that Commissioner Huang’s plan won’t achieve its goal. Do you still remember the assassin? She’s Doctor’s subordinate and is good at hiding herself. She might be hiding somewhere nearby now to gather information for Doctor. When the time comes, it won’t be a secret which team the one sleeping in Ubei and we will be in. Doctor doesn’t need to gamble to easily lock onto the target.”

“We’ve previously told Commissioner Huang about the assassin’s abilities and the corresponding price. He should be wary.” Bai Chen wasn’t too worried about that. “The Salvation Army should have a way and the ability to avoid such spies.”

The price the assassin paid was symmetry OCD.

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

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “That’s true. We can remind Commissioner Huang later.”

The Old Task Force—who had long made preparations—quickly packed their items and carried them on their backs. They planned on going downstairs later and heading straight to the jeep to stuff everything in. They would then follow Commissioner Huang’s arrangements and mix in with the troops before leaving Ubei by following the Yuelin River.

Before long, they heard loud and noisy rotary sounds.

Jiang Baimian looked up and saw seven to eight dark-colored armed helicopters approaching from the distance.

They landed in the Ashlands Hotel’s empty parking lot one after another.

“I see...” Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she roughly understood Commissioner Huang’s strategy.

These helicopters had their labels smeared, and their appearances were almost the same. After the teams boarded the helicopters, they would lift off and circle back and forth. The ‘assassin’ on the

ground wouldn't be able to tell which helicopters the Old Task Force and the one sleeping in Ubei were in.

She couldn't follow behind the helicopter like she was tailing a car; there was a speed restriction and a height problem. Furthermore, the helicopter had limited space. After it was filled with people and equipment, there was no way to squeeze in another 'invisible person.' This eliminated the possibility of the other party sneaking into the right team.

Yes, an assassin can hold onto a helicopter's landing skids and be airborne as well. However, Commissioner Huang will likely take precautions against this...?Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and said to her team members, "Alright, let's go down. It seems like we have to bid our jeep farewell for the time being."

It was obvious that the Old Task Force would evacuate in one of the helicopters. When they reached safety, their jeep would be driven over by the Salvation Army to rendezvous with them.

"Yes, Team Leader!" Shang Jianyao and the others replied in unison. They then followed Jiang Baimian, carried their tactical backpacks and different crates, left the room, and went down the stairs to the bottom.

At this moment, many cars had already appeared in the Ashlands Hotel's parking lot. Hundreds of Salvation Army warriors in black uniforms stood in an orderly manner near the hotel's back door.

In addition to them, there were about a number of civil servants in neat blue uniforms.

Jiang Baimian looked over and saw two familiar faces. The first was Director Hong Guangming from Ubei's Entry Office, and the second was the hotel manager, Shen Kang.

These people weren't standing in an orderly manner. Their expressions were varied and indescribable.

Shen Kang knew Hong Guangming. He suppressed his voice and asked, "Director Hong, why did Commissioner Huang suddenly get us to gather here?"

From his point of view, Director Hong was an old subordinate of Commissioner Huang. He should know some inside information.

Hong Guangming—who was less than 1.7 meters tall and had his left arm and right leg electronically modified—stroked his sparse white hair and replied in a nasty temper, “Who should I ask if you’re asking me?”

Shen Kang remained uneasy. “Don’t tell me they want to investigate us? If there’s no problem, we will follow the troops. If there’s a problem, we will be cannon fodder...”

Hong Guangming turned around and glared at Shen Kang angrily. “What problem? What problem can there be? Everything here was a result of us fighting for it. What’s wrong with getting more benefits? Saving all of humanity? Who still believes in this nowadays? They’re just shouting slogans! Look at the people above them. Most of them don’t believe it themselves. Everyone can see how their children are doing!”

Shen Kang looked at Hong Guangming’s mechanical left arm and right leg and didn’t dare respond. He could only mutter inwardly, “Weren’t you so loyal back then?”

As the two of them conversed, Commissioner Huang led his staff and security guards to the steps. In an abnormally loud voice, he said to the young warriors in the black uniforms and the civil service personnel in blue uniforms, “Everyone, some of you will be chosen to carry out a difficult mission. This mission is very dangerous, but don’t worry. I’ll participate personally!”

Upon seeing everyone look at him, Commissioner Huang nodded and added with a serious expression, “I can’t lie to you. According to the Salvation Army’s tradition, such missions have to be explained in advance. I can’t tell you about the confidentiality clauses involved. I can only tell you that this mission is very important and will affect the Salvation Army’s foundation. Its danger level is...”

At this point, Commissioner Huang paused and said, “There’s no chance of survival!”

He didn’t mention that only two to three batches might end up like this. There was still a chance of survival for the others. After all, nobody knew which two to three teams would be destroyed.

Upon hearing that there was no chance of survival, the entire parking lot suddenly went into an uproar.

The originally disciplined Salvation Army warriors revealed panicked and terrified expressions. They were willing to accept orders and fight a bloody battle with the enemy, but this didn't mean that they weren't afraid or didn't want to retreat when facing a suicide mission.

The civil servants who had been away from the front line for years or had never experienced such things were even worse. They cast their gazes at the warriors as if they were saying: "This is your problem; don't implicate us."

Commissioner Huang's gaze swept across the faces as he sighed silently. "This time, we will do it voluntarily. Anyone who is willing to step forward will be rewarded according to the highest standards. Your family will also receive the corresponding preferential treatment. Alright, those who are willing to participate in this mission, take a step to the left!"

The entire parking lot suddenly fell silent. Many people looked at each other, but their legs went limp, making it difficult for them to take that step.

After dozens of seconds, only a few people showed any intention of participating.

At this moment, someone shouted, "Old Huang, don't make things difficult for these young children. Leave it to us old bastards!"

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and the others looked over and saw 20 to 30 people wearing different aluminum pots walking into the parking lot.

The leader was Elder Zhang—who was wearing the faded Salvation Army uniform.

Elder Zhang walked to the front of the team and turned to face Commissioner Huang. He then took off the aluminum pot on his head, revealing his white-haired, wrinkled face.

He looked at Commissioner Huang and laughed self-deprecatingly. "Many people think that old folks like us are conservative, stubborn, rigid, and have psychological problems; they wish we could die earlier. Now, it's just as they wish; we can show some of our remaining enthusiasm."

With that said, Elder Zhang's expression turned solemn. He pressed his feet together and said, "Regimental Commander Huang, Zhang Wangyuan from the Second Battalion reporting for duty!"

Following him, the old Salvation Army warriors wearing aluminum pots removed the aluminum pots that blocked their eyes and ‘protected’ their heads one after another. They straightened their bodies and shouted, “Regimental Commander Huang, Liu Ming from Regiment HQ reporting for duty!”

“Regimental Commander Huang, Zhou Kaiqi from the Third Battalion’s Charlie Company reporting for duty!”

...

Hong Guangming—who was standing among the civil service personnel—looked at the familiar faces and suddenly wore a dazed expression. He seemed to have returned to the past, to the era when his blood still boiled.

Commissioner Huang fell into a daze for a moment before he nodded with emotion. His already upright body became straighter as he pulled his feet together and pressed his legs tight.

Upon seeing this, Hong Guangming’s mind buzzed. He felt that he couldn’t suppress the burning blood in his heart.

He limped out of the team and saluted solemnly to Commissioner Huang. “Regimental Commander Huang, Hong Guangming from the Second Battalion’s Alpha Company Hong Guangming reporting for duty!”

Commissioner Huang exhaled in relief. Following this, he stretched his right hand with a solemn expression and pressed it to his left chest. He then looked around and shouted loudly, “For all of humanity!”

Elder Zhang, Hong Guangming, and the others raised their right hands and pressed them to their left chests. They replied in the most solemn and pious manner, “For all of humanity!”

The young Salvation Army warriors and the civil servants watched this scene in a daze, momentarily unable to come to their senses.

At this moment, a small speaker with a blue bottom and a black surface boomed at maximum volume while placed beside the feet of Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a black trench coat and black sunglasses.

“I don’t want to die in lonely defeat;

“I don’t want to forever live underground.

“The materialist scams;

“The scurrying ants;

“People with no ideals don’t get hurt;

“He doesn’t get hurt!”

Chapter 714: Sacrifice

Amidst the hoarse shouting, Commissioner Huang said to Elder Zhang and the others, “A team of four will each board a different helicopter.”

This was based on the Old Task Force’s numbers.

Commissioner Huang didn’t count Genava. Although he already knew that this was a smart bot from Mechanical Paradise, the other party didn’t have human consciousness and wouldn’t be sensed by Doctor.

Without the aluminum pot blocking his line of sight, Elder Zhang strode forward and walked toward one of the black helicopters in high spirits. Hong Guangming limped behind him.

These veteran Salvation Army warriors didn’t ask for weapons. On the one hand, Elder Zhang and the others knew that ordinary weapons were useless. On the other hand, the helicopters here were well-equipped. Once Doctor’s location was locked onto, they could immediately fire air-to-surface missiles.

As Jiang Baimian watched Elder Zhang and the others get into different helicopters one after another without filling up the seats other than the pilot’s, she muttered inwardly, “Is the person sleeping in Ubei already sitting in a helicopter, or will he evacuate with the convoy?”

At this moment, Commissioner Huang cast his gaze at the Old Task Force. “You guys will board the last one.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a black trench coat and black sunglasses—curled his right foot and threw the small black speaker with a blue bottom into the air. He then stretched out his hand and grabbed it firmly.

However, he didn’t take the lead. Instead, he turned around and signaled for Jiang Baimian to take the lead.

The one who emphasizes manners is back??Jiang Baimian muttered silently and calmly walked to the black helicopter parked not far away.

The five Old Task Force members sat in the back row. Jiang Baimian took the left, and Shang Jianyao took the right. In the middle, from left to right were Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Genava.

Upon seeing this, Commissioner Huang turned to the remaining Salvation Army veterans and ordered, “You will form teams freely and fill up the empty seats in every helicopter. Heh heh, leave one for me.”

After giving the instructions, he turned his head and smiled at the staff and security guards beside him. “You guys are still young, so don’t take this risk with me. However, it’s not like you don’t have to bear any responsibility. In a while, you will split into a few teams and drive different vehicles southwest along the Yuelin River.”

As he spoke, Commissioner Huang asked Ding Ling, “Did they give you the key to their car?”

This referred to the Old Task Force’s jeep.

Ding Ling nodded. “They gave it to me the moment they came downstairs.”

Commissioner Huang tersely acknowledged her words. “Then, take a few people and drive that car out. Wait outside the Anse settlement.”

It was the forested settlement closest to Ubei.

After quickly briefing them on all kinds of matters, Commissioner Huang glanced at the helicopters, confirmed his ride, and quickly walked over.

His security guards checked all the helicopters' appearances according to the plan to prevent anyone from secretly adding markings so that Doctor could identify the target. Right on the heels of that, they used riot forks, long bamboo poles, and other tools to sweep and scan the area around the helicopters that could be used for climbing.

Invisibility didn't mean that one didn't exist; it just meant that others couldn't see, hear, or sense anything. Once they came into contact with each other, it was impossible for the assassin to turn something corporeal into illusory and allow the pole to pass through their body.

At the same time, everyone in the helicopter completed their confirmation of the remaining space.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

The rotors let out rapid spinning sounds as a strong wind lifted them from the ground.

Elder Zhang—who was sitting in the front row by the window—turned around before the helicopter door closed. He smiled and waved at his old comrades in the other helicopters. In a rather relaxed state, he shouted, “For all of humanity!”

Commissioner Huang and the others also smiled and waved their hands, scrambling to respond. “For all of humanity!”

Unlike the solemnity and sobriety from before, the shouting this time was like a group of old companions going on a road trip to their next stop in life. They would all say, “Cya at our destination.”

Shang Jianyao was unwilling to lag behind. He also half-raised his body and waved his hand with eager participation. “For all of humanity!”

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The doors completely closed as helicopters rose into the air amidst the strong winds created by the rotors. They circled in the air before flying in different directions.

Of course, they mostly headed southwest along the Yuelin River.

In the helicopter where the Old Task Force was, the loud noise didn't affect Shang Jianyao. He looked at the relatively young pilot and blurted out in surprise, "You're not a vet?"

The pilot straightened his back and laughed. "In order to protect the Salvation Army's foundation and cover the evacuation of the Ubei people, there are people in our younger generation who are willing to sacrifice themselves! There are many others like me; they are in the other helicopters."

The Salvation Army veterans in the same row as him nodded in relief like Shang Jianyao. They pressed their hands to their chests again and said, "For all of humanity!"

The pilot's hands were busy, and he couldn't salute. He could only respond in the loudest voice possible. "For all of humanity!"

Shang Jianyao then retracted his gaze, opened his tactical backpack, and took out the Six Senses Beads and the Life Angel necklace.

As he threw the two items to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, he said, "These are all special items. They might be effective in your hands."

At this critical moment, be it Bai Chen or Long Yuehong, they didn't waste their breaths. One held the Six Senses Beads, and the other wrapped the Life Angel necklace around himself.

Shang Jianyao said to Jiang Baimian, "You have Chaotic Right Hand, which is also special and comes from a strange psychological trauma. I won't give you the small jade Buddha."

As he spoke, he took out the small, lake-green jade Buddha and casually held it in his hand.

"Alright!" Jiang Baimian had already put on Chaotic Right Hand and was trembling.

Amidst the rotors and the sound of the wind, their conversation unconsciously became louder.

A Salvation Army veteran in the front row clicked his tongue in wonder. “You guys sure have good stuff. It seems like you’ve experienced a lot. It’s no wonder you were targeted by a New World powerhouse.”

Before Shang Jianyao could respond, the helicopter’s radio broadcast sounded.

“Heli 1, safety confirmed.”

“Heli 2, safety confirmed.”

...

The young pilot picked up the communication device and reported the situation. “Heli 5, safety confirmed.”

Just as he said that, Heli 6 began to provide feedback.

...

“Heli 8, safety confirmed.”

Elder Zhang looked at the pilot in front of him and turned to smile at Hong Guangming beside him. “You didn’t embarrass our battalion by stepping forward!”

Hong Guangming said awkwardly, “Actually, I sometimes wonder how good it would’ve been if I died on the battlefield. That way, I wouldn’t have to see the current situation and be implicated by my child. I wouldn’t have to do those things against my conscience...”

This involved his guilt, so he was unwilling to mention it further. He then asked, “Battalion Commander, why aren’t you wearing the aluminum pots? You might really be able to resist the Heartless disease later.”

Elder Zhang had just informed his former subordinate of the horror of a New World powerhouse.

Elder Zhang shook his head and laughed self-deprecatingly. “Actually, we all know very well that aluminum pots can’t prevent the Heartless disease, but mind control really exists! Some people will unconsciously change their personalities and do things that they wouldn’t have done in the past. You probably did the same—yes, definitely. It was only when you were shocked by everyone’s performance that you returned to normal...”

Before Elder Zhang could finish speaking, he suddenly saw Hong Guangming’s face distort. The latter’s eyes quickly turned turbid, and blood vessels protruded.

“Guangming...” The latter half of Elder Zhang’s words were stuck in his throat. A gasping sound came from his mouth as if he had become a beast that couldn’t speak human.

In just a few seconds, everyone in the helicopter was infected with the Heartless disease.

The helicopter’s flying trajectory became stranger as it plummeted to the ground not long after.

Boom!

A fireball rose.

...

“Heli 7, safety confirmed.”

Sizzle...

In the second round of situation reports, nobody replied after Heli 7.

After a few seconds, a voice sounded. “Heli 1, safety confirmed...”

Without the pilot’s explanation, Long Yuehong and the others clearly knew one thing: Something had happened to Heli 8.

Doctor was really here!

Just as this realization flashed through his mind, the pilot—who knew the callsigns and had also observed the situation—said in a deep voice, “It’s the one Elder Zhang and the others were on.”

Elder Zhang...? Long Yuehong suddenly felt his mood sink.

A faint sense of grief quickly filled the helicopter.

In Heli 3, Commissioner Huang—who also knew the callsigns—couldn’t help but sigh.

“Old Zhang...” He felt like he had lost another pillar that could support his memories.

At this moment, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his head, accompanied by strong dizziness.

Heartless disease!? This realization suddenly flashed across Commissioner Huang’s mind. He tried his best to mobilize his mind and stimulate his consciousness to mount a defense. However, his vision became darker and darker, and his thoughts slowed down.

Before long, Commissioner Huang felt like he couldn’t hold on any longer. With his lingering obsession, he opened his mouth and shouted, “For all of...”

These were the words that had accompanied him through a long life fraught with danger—words that he had lost and found puzzling before finding them again.

At the end of his sentence, a beast-like roar replaced the word ‘humanity.’ Commissioner Huang’s eyes rapidly turned turbid as countless blood vessels surfaced.

The helicopter—which had lost its pilot—soon crashed into a nearby mountain.

Boom!

A fireball bloomed in midair.

...

“Heli 1, safety confirmed.”

“Heli 2, safety confirmed.”

After a moment of silence, the pilot in Heli 5 said with a sobbing tone, “Commissioner Huang and the others have sacrificed themselves.”

Commissioner Huang...? Long Yuehong’s heart palpitated as if he saw the shadow of death looming over. He couldn’t help but turn his head to look at Bai Chen. “I...”

Bai Chen cut him off. “We’ll talk about it later. We’ll definitely survive!”

At this moment, Shang Jianyao raised his right hand that was holding the small jade Buddha with a solemn expression and pressed it to his left chest.

“For all of humanity!” he shouted in a deep voice.

The Salvation Army veterans in the front row bowed their heads because of Commissioner Huang’s death. Their eyes seemed to flicker with tears as their right hands neatly pressed to their left chests. “For all of humanity!”

A firm and passionate voice echoed in the helicopter.

Chapter 715: Suddenly

Outside Ubei City, on a hill by the Yuelin River.

Xu Lan—who was wearing a cowboy coat and a wide-brimmed hat with her body exuding symmetry—cast her gaze at the tablet computer in front of her.

It lay quietly on the ground as the LCD screen projected rays of light that condensed into a gigantic figure in midair.

This figure was indistinct, preventing others from seeing its appearance. One could barely distinguish a head, eyes, nose, mouth, hands, and torso. It was like a human that had been magnified more than ten times in size.

Overall, it looked like a deity that had descended from the heavens or a devil that had crawled out of the abyss.

Doctor had indeed returned from the New World, but he could only return to the body hidden in the Eighth Research Institute.

Most of the available transportation wasn't capable of transporting him to Ubei in the few hours after he received the news. A jet plane might work, but the target was too obvious. There was a high chance that they would be intercepted by missiles the moment they entered Salvation Army airspace. It was very unsafe.

Therefore, Doctor still chose to use his grasp of electromagnetism and exert influence on Ubei's target through Xu Lan's tablet computer.

Of course, compared to before, the threat he could create with this method was definitely incomparable to him fully returning. He could bring about the Heartless disease within a certain range, but there was still a considerable difference in strength compared to his true body.

If Commissioner Huang, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others remained in Ubei and stayed with the bulk of the troops, Doctor really couldn't do anything to them. This was because if human consciousness gathered and had many pillars consisting of Mind Corridor-level powerhouses, it would be difficult for him—who remotely exerted his influence—to spread the Heartless disease and achieve his designated goal. He could only make people's minds weaken like back in First City. They would have nightmares at night and have headaches and nausea the next day.

If nobody interfered and allowed this situation to continue for more than a month, causing the affected person's mental state to worsen, the Heartless disease might still erupt. However, this was Ubei, one of the Salvation Army's core cities. How could nobody interfere?

If the Old Task Force didn't sense any danger, Doctor could still get Xu Lan to sneak into Ubei and find an opportunity to attack the target with other means before her symmetry OCD acted up. However, Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others were too vigilant.

Left with no choice, Doctor could only strike and alert the enemy. He requested the help of his colleagues in the New World to temporarily trap the one sleeping in Ubei. It depicted a story of a New World powerhouse's imminent attack to alarm the local Salvation Army's higher-ups and get them to evacuate the citizens and evacuate important figures in batches.

This way, the gathering effect would be nullified. Doctor could infect the evacuating teams with the Heartless disease one after another.

This was also the reason why he didn't immediately attack after the one sleeping in Ubei became uncontactable; he was giving the Ubei citizens time to 'evacuate.'

Normally speaking, his New World colleagues would only suddenly attack when Doctor was about to take action, not giving the Salvation Army a chance to react.

Although Doctor was limited by his abilities and the helicopter's evacuation speed, he believed that he had the time needed to affect three to four teams. However, it didn't matter. The probability of success being close to 50% was already considerably good. Furthermore, he could still get Xu Lan to continue tracking the target later. In any case, the one sleeping in Ubei was definitely not following his main target; otherwise, they stood a risk of being wiped out.

When the time came, even if the other Salvation Army powerhouses timely resolved the predicament faced by Ubei's sleeping one, it would be too late for him to help the Old Task Force by returning!

As these thoughts raced through his mind, the gigantic figure extending out of the tablet computer cast his gaze at an armed helicopter that was almost out of his range of influence.

On Heli 5, be it the Salvation Army veterans or the Old Task Force members, they straightened their backs and waited for an attack that might or might not come.

Jiang Baimian—who was trembling—composed herself and became very focused. She no longer considered the problem of dying from the Heartless disease.

She focused her mind on monitoring her condition. Once she discovered anything amiss, she would immediately attempt to sense the enemy in reverse and strive to rely on a consciousness-level connection to lock onto the other party's location.

When the time came, the auxiliary chip in her biological prosthetic limb could record the corresponding information and transmit it to Genova even if she inevitably contracted the Heartless disease.

As a smart bot, Genova definitely wouldn't become a Heartless. He could fire a flare in the right place according to the coordinates he received, which would invite ballistic-missile bombardment from Ubei's defense zone.

At the same time, Genova could also help control the helicopter and use the various weaponry installed.

Jiang Baimian had such plans, and so did Shang Jianyao. Long Yuehong had no choice but to let his thoughts wander.

If I'm really infected with the Heartless disease, I choose to be euthanized...

No, what if they find a way to treat the Heartless disease in a few years?

Yes, I'll get Old Ge to lock us up and take care of us while we wait for technology to improve. As long as I'm not dead, there's still hope! Long Yuehong turned to look at Genova with a strong desire to live.

Just as he opened his mouth in an attempt to inform his robot companion, Shang Jianyao's head suddenly throbbed.

As a Mind Corridor-level Awakened, he had a certain level of resistance to such effects. Therefore, he suffered the brunt of the attack. This prevented Jiang Baimian and the others from being infected with the Heartless disease immediately; they only felt the light in the helicopter dim a little.

Shang Jianyao knew that he couldn't last long. He immediately wanted to sink his consciousness into his mind world, rip open the rift representing Xiaochong to the extreme in the Sea of Origins—which was mixed with the Holm Fertility Center's strange aura—and await any changes.

Amidst his intense headache and dizziness, Shang Jianyao—who had yet to enter the Mind Corridor—suddenly saw rich darkness gush out from a rift in his right fist. He subconsciously released his fist and revealed the small jade Buddha in his palm.

The small, lake-green jade Buddha had already become illusory as if it no longer had a corporeal body. In addition, it didn't emit a green glow but surging 'darkness.'

Darkness suddenly erupted and filled the entire helicopter. It then covered the sky and the gigantic figure in the distance along an invisible connection.

A scene suddenly appeared in Doctor's eyes: In the rich darkness, a faint female figure quietly stared at him through a half-concealed 'barrier.'

"Ah!" An extremely terrified scream echoed through the clouds as if it reached the north mountains deep in Icefield.

With a cracking sound, the gigantic holographic projection instantly vanished. Even the tablet computer that supported its existence had web-like cracks on its screen.

Xu Lan kneeled on the ground, her heart racing from shock—this almost scared her to death. Fortunately, she wasn't the true target but a target of the aftershocks.

The surging 'darkness' quickly faded and didn't return to the small jade Buddha.

In just a second or two, the light in Heli 5 returned to normal.

Long Yuehong sensed this change and shook his head, realizing that he could still think.

"It's over? I'm not infected with the Heartless disease..." he blurted out as he grasped the Life Angel necklace.

In the anomaly from before, he seemed to have been frightened. He went from having one leg paralyzed to being unable to move his limbs. It only took him until now to recover.

Upon hearing Long Yuehong's words, Jiang Baimian, Bai Chen, and Genava cast their gazes at the small, lake-green jade Buddha in Shang Jianyao's palm.

It had already regained its presence—lustrous and hard.

Shang Jianyao let out a long sigh and sighed with relief. "I knew that the Blessings from all Kalendarium was useful!"

Jiang Baimian wanted to smack this fellow, but she held back. She ignored the Salvation Army veteran and the pilot and muttered to herself, "Eidolon Nun's help?"

From the looks of it, Eidolon Nun's gaze at Redstone Collection's parish assembly didn't only bring about the anomaly in Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company. It was also equivalent to giving the Old Task Force a protective charm.

That's right. By obtaining the small jade Buddha, it's actually equivalent to obtaining the special key to opening Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company. Eidolon Nun's attention was only icing on the cake in this matter. There's actually no need...? Only then did Jiang Baimian come to a realization.

Shang Jianyao looked down at the small jade Buddha in his palm and sighed again. "There's none left."

The 'protection charm' that Eidolon Nun had provided had been depleted.

With that said, Shang Jianyao's face revealed clear penitence and regret. "If we had known this would happen, we shouldn't have left. Commissioner Huang, Elder Zhang, and the others wouldn't have died either..."

The Salvation Army veteran in the front row sighed. "There's no need to feel guilty; you can't predict such matters at all. Regimental Commander Huang and Battalion Commander Zhang died for their ideals. They died a meaningful death!"

In order to soothe Shang Jianyao's emotions, Jiang Baimian asked, "How's Doctor?"

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "He might've died from the scare, gone crazy from the shock, or might've just been paralyzed from shock."

He had no way of confirming Doctor's situation and could only be certain of one thing: Doctor couldn't stir up trouble in the short term.

Chapter 716: Unexpected Discovery

After many people died in the severe crisis, it stopped in an unexpected manner. This made everyone in Heli 5 fall into an indescribable silence with different emotions.

After a while, the pilot straightened his back and relied on the vehicle's communications equipment to communicate with the other helicopters. "I've received confirmation that the danger has been resolved. I repeat: received confirmation that the danger has been resolved. All teams will land at their original destinations and await further notice."

After a pause, the pilot said in a slightly hoarse voice, "I suggest that everyone observe a minute of silence for the sacrifice the warriors and Commissioner Huang made. There's no need to close your eyes."

"I agree."

"I agree."

...

Voices sounded one after another before there was silence.

After nearly two minutes, Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and asked Jiang Baimian across his three companions, "Did you sense Doctor's location just now?"

What's the use of asking now? Even if Doctor isn't dead, he has definitely escaped...? Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly and then replied with a sigh, "No."

If there was, she would've said it immediately.

“Me neither.” Shang Jianyao had a look of regret. “What a pity. I won’t be seeing a scene of ballistic missiles launching in unison.”

Be serious. You just finished your minute of silence! Are you the one that seeks novelty??Jiang Baimian shut her mouth and didn’t say anything else. She felt that silence was a form of respect for Commissioner Huang, Elder Zhang, and the other sacrificed victims.

Before long, the helicopter began to descend and stopped outside a small human settlement—there was a flat area here.

Before this, the helicopter had already received orders from the Ubei Supplies Management Committee to return with the surviving Salvation Army veterans and wait for further notice in the military base attached to Ubei.

Jiang Baimian and the others carried different crates and waved goodbye to their temporary comrades.

Upon seeing the black helicopter circle in midair before flying into the distance, Long Yuehong rubbed his ear. “It was so loud. My hearing hasn’t fully recovered yet.”

He could hear everything around him, but he kept having the feeling that there was a thick barrier between them.

“Is that so?” Jiang Baimian didn’t have such an experience. Her biological cochlear implant could adjust itself.

“Yes.” The honest Shang Jianyao stuffed two fingers into his ears and squeezed them in before pulling them out. “This will make it much better.”

Bai Chen did as he said and asked, “Where are we going next?”

“Let’s wait for the Salvation Army to send our car over and figure out the latest situation first.” Jiang Baimian looked around and was in no rush to walk to the human settlement not far away.

As a representative of being lazy whenever possible, the ruthless Shang Jianyao put down the crate on his back and sat on it.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian mimicked him. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen followed closely behind.

Genava hesitated for a moment and decided to be more human.

More than ten minutes later, two cars—including the Old Task Force’s jeep—drove over from Ubei and stopped in front of Jiang Baimian and the others.

Ding Ling was in charge of driving their car.

Ding Ling pushed open the door and threw the key at Jiang Baimian.

Shang Jianyao jumped up and snatched it.

“...” Ding Ling was a little stunned.

The Salvation Army warriors’ cars behind didn’t approach. They seemed to be guarding them from afar.

Shang Jianyao held the key, took a few steps forward, and said to Ding Ling with a heavy expression, “Commissioner Huang, Elder Zhang, and the others have sacrificed themselves.”

His voice gradually softened as he didn’t hide his grief.

Ding Ling lowered her head and looked at her toes. “I learned of it midway; there’s a radio in the other car.”

She then looked up and forced a smile filled with sadness. “From the first day I joined the Salvation Army, I knew that sacrifices were inevitable. Unlike the warriors around Ubei, I’ve been in a border settlement for a long time. I often face danger and have been injured several times. I’ve always been mentally prepared for the people around me to suddenly sacrifice themselves one day.

“Although I’m definitely sad when it really happens, the most important thing is to continue walking down this path. We have to cherish the people we value and spend time with them. We have to try our best not to leave too many regrets in our normal lives.”

Jiang Baimian could understand Ding Ling’s feelings. Just as she was about to comfort her, the honest Geneva suddenly said, “Then, do you know that Zeng Ping’an likes you? Did you get along well with him and not let him have too many regrets?”

Not only was Long Yuehong dumbfounded at this moment, but even Bai Chen and Jiang Baimian were as well. Only Shang Jianyao seemed to want to applaud.

What the hell is that question? Old Ge, don’t interrogate people about human nature at a time like this! That’s too rude! Besides, are you sure you aren’t trying to start an argument??After coming to her senses, Jiang Baimian awkwardly wanted to dismantle the crappy robot.

She had already recalled who Zeng Ping’an was; he was the young man at the border outpost. He had saved Ding Ling during First City’s probing attack last year and had almost died from being shot a few times.

Just as Jiang Baimian tried to smooth things over and apologize, Ding Ling replied with a complicated expression, “I slept with him.”

“...” Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Shang Jianyao temporarily lost the ability to speak. Only Bai Chen didn’t react much.

Before Geneva continued asking, Ding Ling sighed softly. “Do you wish to comment about me having a husband and that I had requested you to find him in Icefield? It’s been two years. There’s no news of him from Icefield, and I’m guarding my hometown at the border. I don’t even know if he’s dead or alive, and it’s the same for him. Maybe one of us will be infected with the Heartless disease the next minute or have a bullet hit our hearts.

“I love him, but I also pity and love my comrades. When a child—who protected your back and was seriously injured for you—is about to die while giving you a look yearning for love, can you just refuse him? He’s a wilderness nomad. His parents died early, and he suffered a lot. It wasn’t easy for him to come to our Salvation Army, live through the required stipulated years, and join the army. He has never felt love. Do you want him to die like this without being able to satisfy his last wish?

“Heh heh, I’ve seen people who never meet again but uphold the love of their lives for each other. However, that’s a luxury. The Ashlands is only about today, never tomorrow.” At this point, Ding Ling lowered her eyes and said in a disappointed tone, “I once yearned for it too...”

Long Yuehong couldn’t criticize Ding Ling; he felt that people who had never experienced the corresponding matters were just armchair critics. He could only curse inwardly, “This f*cked up world!”

Ding Ling quickly composed herself, looked at the Old Task Force, and exhaled. “If my husband can still return, I’ll tell him everything that happened to me and let him decide our future.”

As she spoke, Ding Ling spoke faster. “I hope you can find him and tell him—tell him that I miss him very much.”

A hopeful glow remained in her eyes.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Don’t worry. We will definitely work hard to do what we promised you.”

She didn’t continue the topic and asked, “How’s the situation in Ubei?”

“We’re investigating if there are any nuclear bombs hidden. Countless Salvation Army warriors are busy searching at the risk of being blown up.” Ding Ling smiled bitterly. “After we confirm that there’s no problem, we’ll get the evacuated citizens to return. It should be quick.”

“That fast?” Shang Jianyao asked cooperatively.

Ding Ling nodded slightly. “The threat of a New World powerhouse was pressing. In order to save every second, we evacuated a large number of citizens quickly without doing any stringent checks when they left the city. As of now, there’s a high chance that the nuclear warhead has already been moved out of Ubei. Heh heh, let it be. It’s not like our Salvation Army only has one nuclear warhead.”

From the looks of it, the group of people who stole the nuclear bomb didn’t want to blow up any important city in the Salvation Army. After all, the only city more important than Ubei in the Salvation Army was its headquarters in Pingnan City.

“You can only take time investigating then,” Jiang Baimian consoled.

Ding Ling looked back at the other car. “I have to go. Whether you return to Ubei to replenish your supplies or head straight to Icefield and replenish your supplies on the way, either works. You didn’t lose your pass, right?”

“No.” Jiang Baimian shook her head.

Ding Ling grunted tersely. “If you want to return to Ubei, it’s best to wait three days or wait until the all-clear is given.”

She then waved her hand. “I’ll wait for you to bring me good news!”

After watching Ding Ling get into another car and drive north, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao and the others, “Move all the crates back to the car.”

Long Yuehong quickly took a few steps forward and opened the jeep’s trunk. As he swept his gaze, he frowned slightly. “That many supplies? A gift from the Salvation Army?”

He realized that the tiny bit of supplies they had now filled more than one-third of the trunk.

“Are we that lucky?” Shang Jianyao excitedly rushed over and rummaged through the pile of supplies.

Amidst his rummaging, the pile of supplies collapsed, revealing a large box below.

“It’s just stacked over this...” Shang Jianyao opened the box in disappointment and curiosity.

With a smack, the Old Task Force members’ gazes suddenly froze.

In the box lay a silver-gray, rather heavy warhead.

After a few seconds of confusion, Jiang Baimian muttered to herself, “Could this be the nuclear warhead?”

I'm actually the criminal?

Upon hearing this and seeing this scene, a blurry memory suddenly became clear in Long Yuehong's mind.

When Team Leader and Shang Jianyao went to meet Commissioner Huang, they took over Geneva's position. When they came to the window and monitored the activity near the jeep, it seemed like—probably, maybe, possibly—a person had pushed a cart over and opened the trunk of their vehicle. He had placed such a large box in with some difficulty and covered it with the remaining supplies.

That person had avoided the surveillance cameras the entire time and knew the parking lot like the back of his hand.

Chapter 717: The Result of 'Coincidences'

As his blurry memories quickly became clear, Long Yuehong shivered and blurted out, "I remember, I remember. Someone stuffed this box into the trunk of our jeep!"

You remember?? Without Long Yuehong's detailed explanation, Jiang Baimian instantly had a rough guess. "Your relevant memories were blurred by the person in Room 214? When was that?"

Long Yuehong said with obvious fear, "Back when you followed Captain Ding to meet Commissioner Huang. I-I was taking turns with Little White and Old Ge to guard the window and monitor the jeep's surroundings to prevent anyone from stealing the supplies inside. Back then, I saw a person push a cart over, bring this box into the car, and conceal it. However, this memory was muddled, and there was an additional memory of nothing happening. I only remembered it when I saw this box."

Shang Jianyao laughed when he heard that. "It's very in line with the style of Room 214's guest. Besides, he knows how to pick on the weak."

Hey...? Long Yuehong resisted the urge, not having the intention to divert the topic.

Jiang Baimian subconsciously wanted to nod as well, but her rationality returned, and she controlled herself. "The question now is: What's the goal of Room 214's guest?"

Bai Chen tried to guess. “Did he want to separate himself from the nuclear warhead to facilitate his escape from Ubei?”

Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated. She then pressed her right hand down. “Let me think, let me think. Room 214’s guest has a brooch that has Heavenly Ears. In other words, he can hear all our conversations. It only depends on whether he wishes to listen in by maintaining the effects or not.”

“No wonder he knows that Little Red is a pushover!” Shang Jianyao came to a realization.

Jiang Baimian glared at him and continued, “Ding Ling personally invited us to meet Commissioner Huang. Uh, I remember Ding Ling saying that Commissioner Huang was in charge of military supplies statistics and allocation.”

“Ding Ling didn’t directly mention Commissioner Huang; she only mentioned a commissioner from Ubei’s Supplies Management Committee.” Geneva—who had the best ‘memory’ among everyone present—corrected her.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Based on the jurisdictions, one can infer that the commissioner meeting us is most likely in charge of searching for the nuclear warhead. The fact that we were invited means that we have a certain connection with the other party. This is a relatively easy conclusion from our conversation with Ding Ling.

“Then, what kind of thoughts would Room 214’s guest have if he really heard such a conversation? He most likely will believe that even if he creates an atmosphere that requires an emergency evacuation, it’s still a relatively high-risk matter for him to leave Ubei with the nuclear warhead. After all, it’s impossible for the Salvation Army not to carry out inspections on the people leaving the city and guard against the interference of certain Awakened abilities. In this regard, Commissioner Huang is an expert who targets Last Man’s abilities.

“By hiding the nuclear warhead in our car, it’s possible to escape inspection with our special relationship with Commissioner Huang and bring the item out of the city. He will then swagger away without any problems and quietly tail us to retrieve the nuclear warhead secretly. Yes, he’s an outstanding hacker who could hack into the Ubei radio system, so it’s probably a piece of cake for him to open our jeep’s trunk without triggering the alarms.”

The Old Task Force’s jeep was an electric vehicle. The closing and opening of the doors relied on the control system.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clang! Clang!

Shang Jianyao and Geneva applauded Jiang Baimian's guess.

This was the most logical inference that agreed with human psychology.

“But isn't he afraid that we will discover an additional box when we return the military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor to the car...” Long Yuehong's words turned soft because he could answer this question himself.

That person had definitely made preparations by fading the memories of the Old Task Force's corresponding members immediately.

Jiang Baimian helped Long Yuehong fill in the gaps. “When the time comes, he should think of a way to divert Old Ge away, preventing him from moving the items.”

Geneva's memories couldn't be muddled.

Shang Jianyao raised another possibility. “It's also possible that he can rely on hacking Old Ge by using a wireless signal, causing him to produce a certain level of 'illusion' and ignore the existence of the additional boxes.”

Geneva moved his metal neck up and down. “I'm inclined to believe the latter possibility because the person in Room 214 doesn't seem to be able to read memories accurately. There's a high chance he doesn't know that I'm a real smart bot from Mechanical Paradise; it's very easy for him to treat me as an ordinary robot. With the technical abilities he has shown and the means he might have at influencing electromagnetism, he can indeed interfere without anyone noticing and achieve his desired goal.”

Bai Chen said, “The reason he monitored our conversation with Ding Ling is that a Salvation Army captain meeting outsiders at the Ashlands Hotel was worth paying attention to.”

“Yes, things have more or less straightened out.” Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words.

“I have another question.” Shang Jianyao raised his hand.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at him. “What question?”

Shang Jianyao pointed at the box. “Try lifting it—with your right hand.”

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully walked over, lowered her body, and pulled the box containing the nuclear warhead out with her right hand.

“It has to be more than 100 kilograms.” Jiang Baimian first found it really heavy before she sighed. “It’s only about 100 kilograms!”

This weapon of mass destruction that could blow up Ubei was only about 100 kilograms!

The Old World’s technology was astonishing. It was obvious from the Eternal project and the Source Brain’s existence to this nuclear warhead.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “My problem is that it doesn’t seem possible for the person in Room 214 to move such a heavy box to our trunk with his physique.”

“He’s only suffering from hypertension, not physical weakness!” Jiang Baimian scolded jokingly. “If I were him, I definitely would’ve tried my best to improve my physique apart from using drugs to control my condition. For example, using some genetic enhancement drugs. Although the effects can’t compare to those of us who have been under their effects before they were born, it’s better than nothing. For a man in his prime, he can still move something weighing more than 100 kilograms into the trunk if he tries hard enough.”

“But won’t this trigger his hypertension?” the honest Shang Jianyao asked.

“He’s taking medicine. He won’t be that weak...” Jiang Baimian said as she cast her gaze at the nuclear warhead. “The problem now is: how should we deal with it?”

“Return it to the Salvation Army, of course!” Shang Jianyao—who represented justice, virtue, and the responsibility of saving humans—replied without hesitation.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Long Yuehong also felt that there was no question about it.

This wasn’t something without an owner. Besides, it was meaningless for the Old Task Force to hold such a large cannon in their hands. The probability of them ‘igniting’ and throwing it, only to be within the blast radius, was 100%.

Bai Chen thought so too, so she agreed with Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong. Geneva was busy analyzing other factors and didn’t say a word.

Jiang Baimian looked at the silver-gray nuclear warhead with the detonator and the corresponding password and thoughtfully said, “Don’t you think there are too many coincidences in this entire matter? After the person in Room 214 went out, the antihypertensive drugs he placed in his room happened to be stolen by a disappointed Ruin Hunter that planned on leaving Ubei. This resulted in his hypertension acting up, and he was sent to the hospital for emergency treatment. The nuclear warhead was thus left in Ubei.

“This matter happened to be heard by Elder Zhang—who often comes to the Ashlands Hotel—and we learned of it from him. On the first day of martial law, Commissioner Huang happened to want to meet us. This gave that person the intention of hiding the nuclear warhead in our car and all the subsequent actions.

“I first got the wrong room because of my poor sense of direction. I didn’t immediately discover that there was someone in Room 214 and happened to numb that person, significantly reducing his subsequent vigilance.

“When he was ‘deprived of his consciousness,’ he happened to bump into a certain spot in his head, causing him to die on the spot and leave no evidence.

“Doctor’s sudden attack basically made the Salvation Army give up on checking the people leaving the city.

“The result of so many coincidences is that the nuclear warhead landed in our hands without anyone knowing.”

Long Yuehong’s expression changed repeatedly.

Before he could clear his thoughts, he heard Bai Chen say, “Who deliberately arranged for us to secretly obtain this nuclear warhead?”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “This is the same as Eidolon Nun secretly injecting a little of her aura into the small jade Buddha using Redstone Collection’s parish assembly. However, one is direct, and the other is tactful.”

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “Does the person behind the curtain think that we need to use this nuclear warhead one day, just like how we dealt with Doctor today?”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words.

Shang Jianyao ‘helped’ her finish her sentence. “When we want to destroy a Buddhist Holy Land in the future, ordinary methods will be useless. We have to install this nuclear bomb and detonate it remotely?”

Why are we combining ‘destruction’ with a Buddhist Holy Land...? Jiang Baimian retorted weakly in her heart.

Bai Chen agreed with this guess. “It seems like we have to keep this nuclear warhead.”

“Yes, from a different perspective, something bad might happen if we return it. It’s the same for both the Salvation Army and us. The person who set up this coincidence might’ve never considered the option of returning it.” The ruthless Shang Jianyao tried to persuade the Democratic Association members.

“Shall we report this to the company?” Long Yuehong blurted out a question.

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before she slowly shook her head.

After the vote, apart from Shang Jianyao, the other Old Task Force members believed that they should keep the nuclear warhead. After all, the Salvation Army had more than one, and it was impossible for the Old Task Force to use it to deal with the Salvation Army.

Shang Jianyao didn’t insist. He only turned his back and muttered, “This matter resulted in Commissioner Huang, Elder Zhang, and the others sacrificing themselves...”

“We’ll avenge them sooner or later!” Jiang Baimian patted his shoulder and said to Genava, “Make the best use of your time to modify the detonator and install new instructions to prevent anyone from detonating it remotely.”

While Genava busied himself and Shang Jianyao watched, Jiang Baimian and the others cleaned the trunk and exchanged for some supplies in a nearby forested settlement.

In the evening, they camped in the clearing outside the settlement.

According to the team’s manual, they needed to go to the bathroom together after leaving the company and arriving in the Ashlands. Therefore, Jiang Baimian pulled Bai Chen and walked into the nearby forest.

After relieving herself, Jiang Baimian glanced at Bai Chen, suddenly cleared her throat, and said seriously, “Little White, what do you think of Little Red? You’ve also heard what Ding Ling said. If you really have no other thoughts, explain it to him as soon as possible and stop him from having any thoughts of heading out again after returning to the company.”

Chapter 718: Intelligence

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian’s question, Bai Chen slowed down her footsteps and calmly replied, “I quite like him.”

Ah...?Jiang Baimian was first stunned before she looked around and unconsciously lowered her voice. “Since he likes you and you like him, you should’ve taken the initiative long ago given your style.”

It was precisely because of this that Jiang Baimian couldn’t guess Bai Chen’s thoughts. Frankly speaking, her mind was filled with:“With Bai Chen’s style, she should’ve already walked in front of Long Yuehong, reached out, grabbed his collar, and pulled him in front of her. She would’ve directly asked him, ‘I want to have sex with you. Are you willing?’”

Of course, she definitely couldn’t imagine such an exaggerated scene. She had to be polite and not act like a certain person.

Bai Chen frowned and replied thoughtfully, “I just think my style in this regard conflicts with the atmosphere in the company. As the saying goes, ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do.’ I’m not

afraid that having too much initiative will damage my reputation, but I'm worried that it will scare him and embarrass him in front of others. Therefore, I've been waiting for him to take the initiative."

Oh shucks, I thought you had an inferiority complex because of your past experience. I was just thinking about how to counsel you...? Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief and happily used terms she had learned from the Old World's entertainment. She then deliberated over her words and said, "There are only a few of us in our team. If I don't say anything, and Hey or Old Ge doesn't say anything, who will know what happens between you and Little Red?"

"Will Hey really keep silent?" Bai Chen expressed her worry.

Jiang Baimian stammered and couldn't give her guarantee.

Shang Jianyao couldn't guarantee it himself!

Jiang Baimian then said, "Ding Ling is right about one thing: There are often times when there's no tomorrow in the Ashlands. You have to cherish the people in front of you and not waste time on baffling concerns. You are a wilderness nomad, so you should know better than me."

Bai Chen fell silent for a few seconds before nodding slightly. "I understand."

Jiang Baimian didn't say anything else. After all, this was someone else's relationship; it was inappropriate to get too involved.

The two of them walked back to the camp together in silence.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong were strolling around the jeep to digest their food.

Bai Chen suddenly quickened her pace and walked toward Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong froze a little as Shang Jianyao whizzed away and distanced himself.

Upon seeing this, Genova—who was in charge of guarding the area—continued casting his gaze out of the camp.

Upon seeing Bai Chen stand in front of him, Long Yuehong stammered, “W-what’s the matter?”

Bai Chen calmly asked, “Do you like me?”

Woah! Just as Shang Jianyao was about to whistle, a hand wrapped around his mouth—it was Jiang Baimian.

Long Yuehong was first stunned before he became abnormally nervous. He blurted out, “I-I’m only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement. My looks are average...”

Bai Chen interrupted him. “Do you like me or not?”

Long Yuehong stammered for a while. With a flushed face, he replied with a wandering gaze, “I-I like you. Don’t be troubled by...”

Bai Chen nodded. “I like you too.”

“...” Long Yuehong was stunned for a few seconds before his eyes lit up. “Really?”

Without waiting for Bai Chen’s answer, he quickly said, “It’s not that I don’t believe you; I’m just habitually asking.”

Bai Chen nodded again. “Yes, it’s real.”

Long Yuehong gaped his mouth but was momentarily at a loss for words. All kinds of thoughts raced through his mind like a wild horse that couldn’t be reined in.

Bai Chen took the initiative to extend her hand and grab Long Yuehong’s left palm. She glanced at the jeep and nodded slightly. “It’s inconvenient to do many things now that we’re out. It’s even more troublesome if we get pregnant. Otherwise, we can do it tonight...”

“There’s no need. There’s no need to be so fast!” Long Yuehong swung his mechanical arm in embarrassment and joy. He then saw a faint smile appear on Bai Chen’s lips, and it showed a little playfulness. Only then did he come to a realization that apart from the girl in front of him being sincere, there was also a hint of teasing and bantering.

Not far away, Shang Jianyao tried his best to shout, “I can lend you the Six Senses Beads,” but he failed. His mouth was tightly covered by Jiang Baimian.

At the same time, Jiang Baimian also glared at Genava to stop the crappy robot—who couldn’t read the atmosphere—from randomly clapping and affecting the heart-to-heart talk between the two.

However, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong didn’t carry out their private conversation for too long. After all, three pairs of eyes were watching them, and one of them had red lights occasionally flashing.

After sitting around the bonfire again, Jiang Baimian looked at the two of them—who were still holding hands—and joked, “You can’t do this when patrolling later. It will affect your combat strength!”

“That’s right. For the team’s safety, we might as well change the pairing. I’ll be with Little Red, Big White will be with Little White,” Shang Jianyao said cooperatively.

“There’s no need. We’re fine.” Long Yuehong quickly shook his head.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “Then, when we return to the company, should I give you marriage leave, honeymoon leave, and parent care leave?”

Pangu Biology didn’t have the concept of honeymoon leave as it was included in marriage leave. However, the Old Task Force members were experts in Old World entertainment.

Jiang Baimian honestly heaved a sigh of relief. She had previously been worried about how she would persuade Long Yuehong and Bai Chen to stay behind after returning to the company and stop participating in the subsequent investigations.

Long Yuehong was easy to persuade, but Bai Chen was more troublesome. If they formed a family and began to give birth to life according to Pangu Biology’s customs and procedures, things would become simpler.

“We-we’ll see,” Long Yuehong replied awkwardly.

But despite the embarrassment, he couldn’t bear to let go of Bai Chen’s hand.

Bai Chen nodded. “It depends on the team’s arrangements.”

Jiang Baimian immediately felt a headache. She then pretended to wave her right hand boldly. “It’s fine. I’ll give you guys a break!”

As they chatted and laughed, the gloomy atmosphere weighing over the Old Task Force—no thanks to Commissioner Huang, Elder Zhang, and the others’ sacrifice—gradually returned to normal.

Two days later, the Old Task Force learned from the forested settlement named Anse that the all-clear had been given to Ubei and that the evacuated citizens were returning one after another.

Therefore, they drove the jeep and headed to Ubei again. Their goal was to receive the Eighth Research Institute’s information that Commissioner Huang had previously applied for and planned on sharing with them.

Jiang Baimian believed that with the Salvation Army’s style, they wouldn’t return them with nothing after the Old Task Force took the initiative to share with them so much important information. The only thing worth paying attention to was how much valuable information they would provide or what intelligence they had on the Eighth Research Institute.

Upon seeing Ubei, Long Yuehong looked at Bai Chen—who was driving—and said worriedly, “Will the Salvation Army check the vehicles coming and going in search of the missing nuclear warhead?”

And it was still hidden in the Old Task Force’s jeep.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “If they find it, we’ll let them know that we specially made the trip back to return it to the rightful owner after finding it.”

“Tsk...” Shang Jianyao clicked his tongue and gave in under Jiang Baimian’s raised left hand.

As expected of Team Leader...?Long Yuehong muttered and cast his gaze at Ubei's entrance into the city.

The Salvation Army warriors there briefly checked the Old Task Force's pass and instructed them not to take out their military exoskeletons and bionic artificial intelligence armor before letting them pass.

As he drove toward the Ubei Supplies Management Committee, Shang Jianyao rolled down the window, leaned against the door, and took in the street's scenery.

Not far away was a non-staple food shop under the Salvation Army's jurisdiction. More than ten people were in line, waiting patiently while holding negotiables.

They stood in an orderly line, and nobody cut the line. They even spoke to each other from time to time, and the corners of their eyes were filled with the joy of finally having a safe celebration.

There was a market further away. The older generation carried a basket as they walked in and out.

As the jeep drove forward, Shang Jianyao also saw the nursery, kindergarten, and primary school.

Tiny figures were playing, listening, or doing inter-class exercises.

Ring! Ring! Ring!

A bicycle drove past and rushed to the factory at the edge of Ubei.

Shang Jianyao leaned against the window and quietly watched without saying a word. Jiang Baimian did the same.

Finally, they arrived at the Ubei Supplies Management Committee. After informing them of their goal, they were led to a room on the first floor after waiting for about ten minutes.

Before long, a young man in the Salvation Army's black uniform entered and handed them a folder.

“Burn it after reading,” he said simply and sat the furthest he could.

Jiang Baimian nodded, opened the folder, and quickly scanned through it.

Much of this was information that the Old Task Force had already grasped, but there were also some things they didn't know. For example—

Vice President, Professor Li, Charlie, and Doctor aren't like many New World powerhouses who often interfere with the Ashlands.

They and some Awakened who have explored the Mind Corridor's depths form the Professor's Association to manage the Eighth Research Institute. The latter group deals with day-to-day affairs.

The captured Eighth Research Institute commissioners don't seem to believe in any Kalendarium...

Chapter 719: Missing Team

Don't believe in any Kalendaria... Doctor and the others interfere with the Ashlands more frequently than other New World powerhouses...?After quickly browsing through the intel, two things that sounded the alarms in Jiang Baimian's mind surfaced in her mind automatically.

She then made a connection.?A New World dispute?

Hmm, I wonder what the New World is like...?Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and handed the document to Shang Jianyao, indicating for him to take out a lighter and burn the intel.

The Salvation Army also didn't know the Eighth Research Institute's exact location. They only went one step further by pointing out that only the members of the Professor's Alliance and a small number of people who definitely wouldn't be deployed other than for escorting were aware of it. The rest was similar to what the Old Task Force knew.

Shang Jianyao had hovered beside Jiang Baimian and finished reading the entire document with her. At this moment, he didn't take out a lighter. Instead, he handed the document to Bai Chen's left palm and said with anticipation, “You do it.”

He seemed to want Bai Chen to perform the ability attached to the Merfolk biological prosthetic limb—Flamethrower.

Long Yuehong glared at him and stretched out his right hand.

Whoosh!

A lighter flicked out from his mechanical palm and ignited the intel.

Jiang Baimian turned to look at the young Salvation Army warrior who had delivered the document. She deliberated for a moment and said, “Commissioner Huang mentioned that he might organize a team and explore Icefield’s Tai City with us. I wonder if you still have such thoughts? If there is, we can wait a few more days. If not, we will set off after replenishing our supplies.”

The expressionless young man in the black uniform shook his head. “I’m not sure about this, and the higher-ups didn’t mention anything.”

His meaning was very clear: The Salvation Army was digesting the loss of the nuclear warhead and Doctor’s attack. They didn’t have the energy to send people to Icefield’s Tai City, so they didn’t give any instructions.

“I understand.” Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything else and stood up to leave with her team members.

After leaving the Ubei Supplies Management Committee and getting into her jeep, Jiang Baimian said to Long Yuehong, whose turn it was to drive, “Go to the market and exchange the negotiables for some supplies. Try to leave Ubei before noon.”

“Alright!” Long Yuehong replied readily.

With the nuclear warhead hidden in the trunk, he remained a little nervous and didn’t dare stay in Ubei for long.

...

Beside the road heading to Icefield, not far from the Salvation Army gas station—which was in charge of providing fuel for vehicles—was a camp beside a water source that provided a rest stop for people.

It was almost evening, so the Old Task Force chose to stay.

“Little White, get some water.” Jiang Baimian assigned the mission.

She wanted Geneva to follow, but Long Yuehong had already volunteered. “I’ll go with you. I can also observe the surroundings.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian had always tried to help couples.

After watching the couple walk out of the camp, Shang Jianyao chuckled. “How proactive! I’ve known him for so long, but I’ve never seen him so proactive!”

“Is that so?” It was the honest Geneva who expressed his doubts.

Shang Jianyao glanced at Geneva with a ‘you sure are cooperative.’ He then excitedly said, “Not really. This is considered an exaggerated rhetoric. He has also been proactive other times. For example, he was especially proactive about buying sweets and soda before blind dates, but he didn’t have the mind to share them with me.”

Whoa, how long has he held a grudge??Jiang Baimian almost laughed. She cleared her throat and said seriously, “There’s no need to mention this in front of Little White.”

“I don’t think Little White will mind,” Geneva said according to his understanding of his companions.

Uh...?Jiang Baimian wanted to argue, but she ultimately chose to give up. This was because she was merely theorycrafting.

Even Geneva—a smart bot—was more experienced than her!

“Old Ge, exchange for some firewood or coal with the negotiables,” Jiang Baimian instructed Geneva.

Geneva never slacked off. “Alright.”

After he walked to the camp warden’s cabin, Shang Jianyao steered the topic back to the previous topic. “That’s why I always say it behind Little White’s back!”

“Right, right.” Jiang Baimian nodded perfunctorily and changed the topic. “Ding Ling helped us a lot in Ubei. What are your thoughts on finding her husband?”

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “We can only try our luck. Icefield is huge, and that expedition team’s destination and route are confidential information. We won’t be able to find them even if we want to.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and thought for a moment before saying, “If we really want to analyze it, there are still clues. Sigh, I previously forgot to ask Ding Ling what kind of scientific research her husband does. This can allow me to infer many things directly.”

The honest Shang Jianyao clicked his tongue. “Did you really forget?”

Jiang Baimian felt a little guilty and didn’t answer.

Previously, she hadn’t asked mainly because Ding Ling had requested them to deliver a message if she could encounter or bump into him. It was impossible for the Old Task Force to deviate from their original route for something that had nothing to do with them and waste too much time in Icefield.

When summer passed and autumn arrived, Icefield’s climate would become a major enemy. Due to this, Jiang Baimian originally planned on just taking a wait-and-see attitude during their journey.

She now wanted to do her best after receiving Ding Ling’s help many times.

The timid Shang Jianyao saw that the situation was amiss and took the initiative to change the topic. “I think the chances of the person named Ji Qiang surviving are almost zero.”

Jiang Baimian slowly nodded. "If death is confirmed, it's impossible for the relevant departments to hide it from Ding Ling. It's meaningless; many people from the Salvation Army sacrifice themselves every year. It's not a secret that a researcher dies."

"You mean that although they confirmed that Ji Qiang and the others had disappeared, they still feel that there's hope of them surviving and didn't rashly declare him dead?" Shang Jianyao pinched his chin.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. "Then, where does their confidence come from? Icefield's environment is harsh, and there's a lack of supplies. Not many people can last one winter, much less two years."

"It has something to do with the destination? Although that place is dangerous and strange, it doesn't lack the corresponding supplies and buildings that can resist the cold?" Shang Jianyao analyzed Jiang Baimian's train of thought. "Besides, Ji Qiang is a researcher and participated in a scientific expedition. What will they be examining and studying?"

According to these conditions, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, "An Old World city ruin with an important laboratory, something similar to Wasteland Ruin 13?"

"But in a place like that, how can a person go missing, whether dead or alive..." Shang Jianyao fell silent as he spoke.

This was because it made sense when comparing Wasteland Ruin 13's situation.

There were many monsters similar to Wu Meng in the corresponding ruins, so the Salvation Army could only conduct limited explorations. Once someone disappeared inside, they couldn't conduct a comprehensive search and couldn't confirm the final situation. Furthermore, Ji Qiang's expedition team might occasionally send back telegrams that they were awaiting rescue.

Of course, it was difficult to say who sent these messages.

The Shang Jianyao that valued relationships took over the body and sighed, feeling stumped. "If that's how Ji Qiang's expedition team disappeared, it would really be difficult for us to help Ding Ling pass a message."

Ignoring the fact that the Old Task Force's strength was insufficient, such places would definitely be monitored by the Salvation Army. Without developing into conflict, it was difficult for Jiang Baimian and the others to enter.

Jiang Baimian shared the same feelings. "Let's take it one step at a time."

She looked at the jeep and said to Shang Jianyao, "There's no time like the present. Clear Room 522's cruise trauma tonight; then, I hope you can strictly follow the strategy guide and explore the Mind Corridor's depths before we reach Tai City."

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything strange. He stretched out his right hand and pressed it against his left chest. "No problem. To save all of humanity!"

At this moment, Jiang Baimian felt that he seemed a little different from before, but nothing as well.

...

That night, Jiang Baimian entered the Sea of Origins and searched for the next island of fear; she had already spent a lot of time on this.

After almost an hour, she finally discovered a new island.

The island was grotesquely rugged and filled with a bloody fog.

What kind of psychological trauma will it be this time??Jiang Baimian accelerated and stepped foot.

After walking forward for a distance, she suddenly saw a figure jump down from the top of the strange rock and fall in front of her with a thud.

As the figure fell, it encountered many protruding stone pillars. The body was in pieces, and its organs were splattered everywhere. Blood seemed no different from paint as it covered a large area of the ground.

The deceased's head rolled to Jiang Baimian's feet.

Jiang Baimian lowered her head and focused. She saw a familiar grimacing face—it was her face.

Chapter 720: Icefield

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she looked elsewhere on the island.

Unlike before, figures appeared on the jagged rocks one after another. Some of them hung from protruding stone pillars, their tongues hanging out from being strangled. Some of them had been shot several times, and their flesh was mangled. Some of their heads seemed to have been smashed by something hard, causing them to cave in and bleed red blood and white brain matter.

There were all kinds of situations, but one thing they had in common was that their faces belonged to Jiang Baimian.

My own fear of death??Jiang Baimian muttered to herself silently.

Frankly speaking, she was accustomed to death. Be it the tragic situation Blackrat Town suffered from bandits or the corpses strewn across Weed City's riots, they weren't much better than the current scene. However, she still felt her heart palpitate when she saw the tragic deaths of figures sharing her face and figure.

Normal people would have such a reaction, apart from unconventional people like Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian subconsciously took a deep breath and felt the strong stench of blood fill her mouth and nose.

She resisted the discomfort and took a passive stance. She didn't make any additional attempts and only walked around the island slowly, trying her best not to miss a single corner. During this process, she would occasionally see her head being blown up by a bullet like a bursting watermelon. Sometimes, she would discover that her body was tattered and thrown into the grass. The body had clearly suffered terrifying destruction when she was alive.

These scenes were so realistic that Jiang Baimian suspected that she would have nightmares for days after leaving the Sea of Origins.

Finally, she couldn't help but mutter, "I'm fine with dying, but why must the deaths be so strange..."

At the same time, she began to think of a way to clear this island of fear.

It was obvious that it was impossible to clear it by adapting to such scenes. Otherwise, with Jiang Baimian's mental fortitude, she would be able to face her dead 'selves' calmly every day for a week or two while admiring the bloody scene and conjure some snacks to watch.

The key to defeating this island of fear lies in reality? But who would put themselves in danger for no reason? In such cases, 90% of people will really die... Besides, many people will be scared out of their wits after experiencing a life-and-death danger, leaving behind even more serious psychological trauma...? Jiang Baimian left the Sea of Origins when she saw that she was almost mentally exhausted and opened her eyes in the jeep.

She gently sat up and cast her gaze at the backseat, planning to ask Shang Jianyao about the result of him clearing Room 522's cruise trauma tonight.

With the moonlight shining in from the window, a scene reflected in Jiang Baimian's eyes: Shang Jianyao had already woken up at some point in time. He was pressing his face against the car window on the right as if he had become a statue.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Baimian asked with a frown.

Shang Jianyao turned his head and gestured for her not to speak. He then turned his head again and continued pressing his face against the glass surface to look out the window.

Jiang Baimian suspiciously crawled to the driver's seat and followed Shang Jianyao's gaze to size up the situation outside.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were holding their weapons and patrolling around the bonfire and the jeep. Genava sat cross-legged between the fire and the vehicle as if he had entered sleep mode.

"What's wrong with that?" Jiang Baimian muttered. Just as she said that, she saw Long Yuehong and Bai Chen look at each other. After a brief moment of eye contact, they slowly looked away with respective faint and bright smiles.

Jiang Baimian unconsciously smiled like a satisfied elder. She then turned her head and suppressed her voice as she said to Shang Jianyao, “So you’re eating dog food.”

Old World entertainment was harmful.

Shang Jianyao pulled his face away from the car window and looked back at Jiang Baimian before opening his mouth. “Woof, woof, woof.”

“...” Jiang Baimian really couldn’t swallow her pride—or rather, lower herself to argue with Shang Jianyao.

This was equivalent to lying on the ground!

“Ahem.” Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and inquired, “Have you cleared Room 522’s cruise trauma? Any progress?”

“It’s cleared.” Shang Jianyao quickly became serious. “Another cluster of Chaotic aura was obtained. Furthermore, it can be fused into your Chaotic Right Hand and enhance its usage.”

“You actually obtained more Chaotic aura...” Jiang Baimian frowned. “Although I also know that everyone’s mind world and psychological trauma are independent of each other and that an exploration of the same scene in Room 912 won’t affect Room 522’s situation, the aura that involves the New World and can be melted into the mind is actually non-unique...”

“This is called being impartial.” Shang Jianyao didn’t mind at all and stretched out his left palm. “Give me your Chaotic Right Hand.”

A cold shiver quickly spread between the two of them. Shang Jianyao trembled as he said, “This is simply a godsend when used in summer.”

He transferred the newly obtained Chaotic aura into the glove. The two perfectly fused because the source was clearly the same.

“You... make it sound... like you’ve been through many summers.” Jiang Baimian quickly stuffed Chaotic Right Hand back into her tactical backpack.

Pangu Biology was located underground. The difference between spring, summer, autumn, and winter was that it was cooler at night, cold, or colder.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao’s response, Jiang Baimian mentioned her third island of fear.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes gradually lit up. “Sounds interesting.”

He—who sought novelty—was eager to make the other Shang Jianyaos make different death poses.

“Therefore, you don’t have such islands of fear.” Jiang Baimian sighed helplessly.

Shang Jianyao had a look of regret. “There’s also one among us who’s afraid of death.”

This referred to the timid one.

“What are your thoughts on defeating this fear?” Jiang Baimian skillfully steered the topic back on track.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “Everyone has fear of death. Apart from a few people who are overwhelmed by life’s troubles or have mental disorders, we are all afraid of death. It’s like we would yearn to borrow from the heavens another 500 years of lifespan...”

As Shang Jianyao’s voice gradually rose, Jiang Baimian calmly stopped him. “Don’t sing it!”

Shang Jianyao took more than ten seconds to gather his original thoughts. “Find the value of life and understand the meaning of death. Only then can we face it more frankly.”

“For example, the way Elder Zhang, Commissioner Huang, and the others did?” Jiang Baimian asked thoughtfully.

Shang Jianyao nodded solemnly.

...

Thanks to the few roads that the Salvation Army had repaired and the settlements and rest stops along the way, the Old Task Force arrived at Icefield in less than three days.

It was midsummer, and this place was relatively south. Jiang Baimian and the others didn't see any frozen soil. All they saw were long or short weeds and patches of black-green forests.

After replenishing their supplies, they entered Icefield. The road gradually became dilapidated, and the intervals between their encounters with settlements became longer and longer.

After two to three days, they rarely encountered Ruin Hunters. The land was vast, and there were more animal encounters.

Just like that, the Old Task Force headed for Tai City according to a map that wasn't too precise or hardly had any landmarks to use as a reference.

Several days later, a large lake appeared in front of them; this wasn't smaller than the Lake of Wrath near Redstone Collection. Long Yuehong couldn't see the end of the water body.

The lake's water was clear, reflecting the blue sky without any impurities. It was as beautiful as a fairyland.

"How beautiful." Long Yuehong held it in for a long time but couldn't think of a suitable poem.

Bai Chen echoed, "The weather is good too."

"We'll rest early today and camp by the lake." Jiang Baimian knew that she and her team needed some time to relax during their long journey; they couldn't stay tense all the time.

As the jeep stopped, Shang Jianyao pushed open the door and went straight to the lake. He had his eye on an Old World swing and eagerly sat on it.

This Shang Jianyao was the one who valued relationships but was mentally young.

Bang!

The swing collapsed, and Shang Jianyao fell, covering him in dirt.

Long Yuehong forced himself not to laugh to prevent Little White from believing that he had a dark side.

Bai Chen and Jiang Baimian smiled, but they didn't gloat.

"Why didn't you check it first?" the honest Genava asked in concern.

Shang Jianyao didn't show any shame. "I can't let Little Red beat me to it!"

I'm not a child! Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Shang Jianyao continued, "He will definitely offer it to Little White and have her sit with him."

Uh...? Long Yuehong suddenly felt like he had really missed something.

In order to hide his embarrassment, he walked to the lake and looked at the clear, blue water surface. He muttered to himself, "I wonder how the fish meat here is..."

Just as he said that, the fish underwater opened their mouths at him, revealing two rows of white teeth.

Smack!

Several black tentacles streaked out of another relatively large fish and slapped the water as if they wanted to drag Long Yuehong down.

Long Yuehong quickly took a few steps back. "This?"

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “This place doesn’t belong to the Old World’s Icefield in the true sense of the word. It’s a product of Icefield’s expansion after the Old World was destroyed and climate change. I believe the reason for climate change in this area is related to the bombardment of various high-energy weapons. The pollution left behind must be very serious.”

She was explaining why mutated fish appeared in the fairyland-like lake.

“No wonder there aren’t any settlements around such a large lake.” Bai Chen nodded.

According to her understanding, if there really was such a lake with good water quality and a large number of fish, it would definitely attract a number of wilderness nomads to migrate over in spring; they would only head south during autumn.

Settlements popped out near water and prey.

As she spoke, Bai Chen looked around. Suddenly, she realized that there were a few black spots along the horizon.

They seemed to be boats.