

Ad Infinitum 781

Chapter 781: 'Burying'

There's someone?

There's someone in the secret laboratory ruins at this time?

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen looked at each other as similar thoughts flashed through their minds.

Jiang Baimian looked at Shang Jianyao and whispered a possibility. "Heartless?"

Every night, the Heartless—who were affected by the secret laboratory's monster—would come to the ruins and loiter around for extended periods?

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "I don't know. Why don't I ask?"

He then sang excitedly, "Friend, oh friend. Do you remember me'..."

Forcing friendship? Jiang Baimian realized that ever since Shang Jianyao explored the Mind Corridor's depths and could use his singing to complete Thought Guidance, he was like a tiger that had grown wings. It was impossible to guard against him.

She thought for a moment and said, "There's no rush. Let's sneak over and observe."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao was slightly disappointed.

He sincerely said, "Unfortunately, Little Red brought the Blackmarsh Iron Snake, not the Chameleon. Otherwise, he could've completed this mission alone."

That isn't the case. The Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor can't hide human consciousness either. What if the person over there is an Awakened? Long Yuehong wasn't stupid.

Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao. "The two of us will hide our consciousness fluctuations and go over to see what's going on. Little Red and Little White will provide support from behind."

"alright!" Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited as he thought of something. He then bent his back slightly and crept toward the laboratory ruins as if he were about to play a prank on Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian quickly followed to prevent this fellow from causing any trouble again.

At present, the City Intelligence Network Control Center only restored the power to the entire city ruin. It didn't turn on the street lights. Therefore, everywhere that the starlight couldn't reach was dark. It was very suitable for the Old Task Force to approach the mysterious laboratory stealthily.

Before long, they arrived at the periphery of their destination.

They silently entered a building and went up to the third floor. They then sized up the area ahead through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

It was impossible to determine what the laboratory originally looked like. In Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's eyes, all that was left was a large pile of concrete blocks and jagged steel columns that extended into the sky.

'The dust and rocks that spewed out made the surrounding lawn and parking lot spell an obvious disaster.

Further away, the glass windows in the buildings and cars were more or less damaged. Some had even completely shattered.

At this moment, three figures in messy clothes were each carrying a canvas bag. They were using the shovels in their hands to dig up a pile of concrete.

It was obvious that Pangu Biology had long sent people to search this place. There were traces of excavation everywhere, and the three of them had chosen the most periphery where secrets were the least likely.

“They aren’t Heartless.” Jiang Baimian quickly made a judgment. “It doesn’t look like the company’s personnel either.”

‘The employees Pangu Biology sent to Swamp Ruin 1 belonged to a Security Department company. They had their own uniforms, so it was impossible for them to wear anything that kept them warm like these three people. They wore cotton jackets and leather pants, prioritizing warmth.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up. “Ruin Hunters? What are they digging here at this time?”

Apart from Qiao Chu, Jingfa, Pangu Biology’s employees, and a few others, ordinary Ruin Hunters probably didn’t know that there was a mysterious laboratory here. Therefore, how could they specially come here to excavate?

Compared to this blasted ruin, Swamp Ruin 1 had many places where high-value items could be obtained.

As Jiang Baimian focused, the three of them dug a small but not shallow hole in the concrete pile at the edge of the ruin. They then took off their backpacks and took out some things.

Under the dim starlight, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao—who were a distance away—couldn’t see what they were.

A few seconds later, the three people threw the items in their hands into the pit, picked up the shovels again, and tried to shovel all the surrounding concrete down.

They aren’t here to dig up items but bury something? Jiang Baimian frowned. She immediately said to Shang Jianyao, “Go over and ‘chat’ with them.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao couldn’t wait.

He found a window nearby and jumped to the ground in two to three leaps, heading straight for the laboratory ruins.

Before the three of them sensed him, he loudly said, “Don’t be afraid; I mean no harm. I’m just curious about what you guys are doing. I came over to ask.”

“It’s fate for strangers to meet. If fate wills it, we will meet despite the distance. When we meet, we will naturally be friends.”

‘The three men stopped filling up the hole and looked at each other. Their expressions gradually relaxed and became less vigilant.

‘They were all Ashlandic. Their hair was messy and greasy, and their faces were covered in stubble, preventing one from seeing their true appearances.

‘This was the standard image of wilderness nomads—perhaps Ruin Hunters as well.

“What are you guys burying?” Shang Jianyao calmly walked to the three people’s side and peered into the hole in front of him.

Jiang Baimian followed closely behind.

At this moment, the concrete blocks had yet to fill the hole. Through the cracks, the two of them vaguely saw what was buried.

‘They were white bones—human bones!

“Hiding a corpse after a murder?” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and looked at the three men with bright eyes.

At this moment, he was like a professional detective.

The tallest of the three men quickly defended himself. “Someone told us to bury these bones here.”

“Someone?” Jiang Baimian pressed.

She was very certain that the three men definitely didn't kill the person. This was because the corpse had rotted to the point that only bones were left—it clearly hadn't died recently.

If one wanted to kill and hide a corpse, throwing the corpse into the swamp was much better than coming to this ruin in the middle of the night to dig a hole.

“The man who had just spoken glanced at Shang Jianyao. “We took on a Hunter mission. Back then, I found it strange why we had to carry these bones to Swamp Ruin 1 and bury them in this baffling place. He also gave us a route and a way to bypass the guards; furthermore, the payment was too much.”

For some reason, Jiang Baimian suddenly recalled Shang Jianyao's random idea: “Deliberately make a ‘Dajiang City's Elite Middle School’ sign and randomly hang it outside a school to mislead people who come to explore.”

Could it be that someone is really trying to create a replica in an attempt to mislead subsequent excavators? Jiang Baimian gazed at the three men and asked in a deep voice, “What does the person who hired you look like?”

The three men assumed a posture of recalling something. Their expressions then turned pained.

“I don't remember.”

“L forgot.”

“He looked very ordinary; I don't have any impression of him. In any case, we've already received one-third of the payment, and the rest is escrowed in the guild. We just need to take a few photos and bring them back to receive payment.”

The tallest man patted his backpack; there was a digital camera there. This was lent to them by the Hunter's Guild.

“There's indeed something fishy.” Shang Jianyao was very happy.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and picked up the walkie-talkie to get Long Yuehong and Bai Chen to come over. She then said to the three men, "Take photos now. Dig out the items for us to see later."

"That's right. You came here, dug a hole, buried the item, and took a photo. This is equivalent to completing the mission. Any subsequent developments have nothing to do with the mission." Shang Jianyao guided them patiently.

He made sense, and the three men agreed one after another.

After taking the photo, they swung their shovels and removed the concrete blocks again.

By the time Long Yuehong and Bai Chen arrived, the three of them had already picked up the bones and placed them outside the hole.

'Without needing to observe carefully, Jiang Baimian could tell at a glance that this wasn't a complete corpse.

Ignoring everything else, the skull wasn't here.

After seriously distinguishing for a while, Bai Chen said, "An adult. Only half a corpse."

The three men replied in unison, "It's none of our business!"

"That's all the bones we had when they were given to us."

"That's all we got!"

An incomplete corpse... Why did they bury an incomplete corpse in Swamp Ruin 1's laboratory ruins? As Jiang Baimian thought, Shang Jianyao suddenly pointed at a certain spot in the crater and asked, "What's that?"

Under a pile of concrete was a palm-sized, black, rectangular object.

‘The tallest Ruin Hunter glanced at it and said, “It was given by the employer. He told us to bury it with the pile of bones. We forgot to pick it up.”

Shang Jianyao quickly looked at Long Yuehong and said with abnormal anticipation, “Go get it.”

Will it be different if I get it? Long Yuehong criticized inwardly.

This was business, so he didn’t refuse. He jumped into the hole and bent down to pick up the item.

Under the dim starlight, he realized that it was a name tag made of soft plastic.

He then flipped over the name tag and looked at its front.

Under the transparent plastic film was a yellow identification document. On the identification surface was a name: “Du Shaochong.”

Chapter 782: Remains

Long Yuehong jolted to his senses and used the Blackmarsh Iron Snake bionic artificial intelligence armor’s power to jump out of the hole and hand the name tag to Jiang Baimian. “Team Leader, look!”

His abnormal behavior attracted the attention of Bai Chen and Shang Jianyao. But due to the presence of outsiders and the fact that this place might not be safe, they could only continue monitoring the people and things around them. They couldn’t leave their posts.

Jiang Baimian took the name tag, focused, and raised her eyebrows.

The Old Task Force was no stranger to the name ‘Du Shaochong.’ They had once seen him in Master Zhuang’s dream, and Shang Jianyao had ‘acted’ the role. This was suspected to be Master Zhuang’s identity during a descent!

Now, the incomplete corpse in front of the Old Task Force belonged to Du Shaochong—Master Zhuang’s body of descent?

However, the entire matter exuded an indescribable bizarreness.

A certain fellow hired three Ruin Hunters and gave them parts of Du Shaochong's remains and a name tag indicating his identity, commissioning them to bring these things into Swamp Ruin 1 according to a location on a map and bury everything at the edge of the secret laboratory.

This looked like it was to mislead subsequent excavators. Therefore, the burial ground was fake, and the corpse might also be fake. They couldn't rule out the possibility that the name tag was also fake.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian lowered her right hand and placed the name tag in the darkness that the starlight couldn't reach. She then calmly said to the three Ruin Hunters, "Anything else the client gave you?"

"Nope."

"There's nothing else."

"Just the bones and the tag," the three people replied one after another.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "It's already so late, and this place isn't too safe. It's better if you leave early."

Shang Jianyao knew what she was getting at and immediately said to the three Ruin Hunters, "Don't mention us when you get back; just pretend that nothing happened. Think about it. You did complete the mission and buried the remains and name tag at the edge of this ruin. You also took photos to

prove this matter. Then, you left. You didn't encounter anyone on the way, and nothing unexpected happened."

"Got it." The three Ruin Hunters smiled in understanding.

They brought their backpacks, carried their shovels, waved at the Old Task Force, and walked in another direction out of Swamp Ruin 1.

After leaving the laboratory ruins, the tallest person suddenly shook his head. He said in confusion, “Why do I feel like something’s missing?”

“No?”

“Everything is very normal,” his two companions replied.

They all indicated that things had gone smoothly. They had successfully buried the bones and tag at the designated spot and completed the mission. Nothing had gone wrong during this process.

“It seems like I’m a little suspicious.” The tallest Ruin Hunter heaved a long sigh of relief.

After they left, Long Yuehong—who had restrained his thoughts—asked Shang Jianyao curiously, “Is this equivalent to hypnotizing them to forget what just happened?”

“It can’t be considered forgotten; it’s just neglected. Furthermore, they found a reason to deceive themselves,” Shang Jianyao explained seriously. “Memory Erasure involves the deleting of the corresponding content in the physical sense. Forgetting through Hypnosis involves hiding the corresponding

memories and burying them in places that aren’t easy to be discovered. Forgetting under Thought Guidance is probably equivalent to requiring someone to right their bearings, allowing the keywords that can stir this memory to point toward other content.”

The more he spoke, the more esoteric it sounded. He sounded very professional.

Fortunately, Long Yuehong had learned this before and could understand.

“Team Leader, what was wrong with the item from before?” Bai Chen paid more attention to the item Long Yuehong had picked up from the hole.

Jiang Baimian raised her right hand and showed the name tag to Shang Jianyao and Bai Chen. “See for yourselves.”

Shang Jianyao looked over and suddenly wailed. “Xiaochong, you died a tragic death!”

Xiaochong says, “don’t curse me...” Jiang Baimian sometimes found Shang Jianyao very gullible.

Of course, this depended on which personality presided over the body.

“How can Xiaochong’s corpse be that large?” She chose the most direct reason to patronize the fellow.

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm.

Long Yuehong couldn’t help but criticize inwardly. An existence with a mysterious background like Xiaochong that might involve Master Zhuang might not even have a normal skeleton

Bai Chen looked at the incomplete corpse on the ground and pursed her lips. “Why did someone want these bones buried here and make later generations believe that they belong to Du Shaochong?”

Shang Jianyao ‘recovered’ from his outbreak of emotions and excitedly said, “I get i

You get it again... Jiang Baimian didn’t interrupt his wandering thoughts.

Shang Jianyao explained excitedly, “This is a ritual—a form of evil-warding. They buried Du Shaochong’s corpse and the name tag somewhere in the city where he had studied middle school or even primary school. They used the corresponding principle to suppress the other party’s resentment and

hatred. The reason the corpse is incomplete is that the rest are buried elsewhere for the same reason.”

You make it sound like it’s real... If Long Yuehong hadn’t watched a large amount of Old World entertainment, he might’ve been convinced by Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian followed Shang Jianyao's train of thought and asked with a smile, "Then, who killed Du Shaochong? Or rather, who made him have overwhelming resentment and hatred?"

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "I don't know. It will require further investigation."

Bai Chen remained silent for a moment before slowly saying, "We can't be sure that this skeleton really belongs to Du Shaochong. Maybe even the name tag is fake and was forged later."

"Besides, there's no way to conduct a DNA test. Without a sample for comparison, we can't find Du Shaochong's descendants for the time being." Jiang Baimian exhaled. "I don't sense any power from these bones."

She deliberated for a moment and said, "I'm more willing to believe that this skeleton and name tag were buried here to mislead subsequent excavators. For example, people like us who pursue the truth behind the Old World's destruction."

"If we believe that this is Du Shaochong and that he died in this laboratory, what will happen?" Long Yuehong boldly hypothesized based on Jiang Baimian's suspicions and raised a question.

Bai Chen tried to analyze the situation. "At most, we'd believe that Master Zhuang is already dead. But after 'He' returned to the New World, isn't it normal for 'His' body to die?"

Jiang Baimian stared at the pile of remains for a while. "We don't have any clues for the time being. Let's store away the remains and name tag first. We'll study them later."

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao was very enthusiastic.

After wrapping up the remains and putting them into their backpacks, they searched the laboratory ruins for a while but didn't find any other clues.

Upon seeing that it was getting late, Jiang Baimian made the order to return.

Just as the Old Task Force returned to the room in the building of the previous estate, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "Quick, give me the remains!"

His eyes lit up as if he had thought of something interesting.

“What do you want it for?” Jiang Baimian asked suspiciously.

With a beaming smile, Shang Jianyao replied, “I plan on piecing together these bones, carrying the corpse, and wearing the name tag to enter my Sea of Origins to see how Xiaochong’s rift reacts. If it reacts, it means that this corpse is indeed related to him!”

Jiang Baimian deliberated and asked, “Won’t you worried that it’s really Xiaochong’s corpse?”

Shang Jianyao chuckled. “I’ve thought it through.”

Everyone dies? Long Yuehong replied inwardly.

Shang Jianyao continued, “It doesn’t matter even if it’s Xiaochong’s corpse. The fact that the rift still exists means that Xiaochong is still alive and that nothing serious has happened. Think about it. Don’t mechanical monks have corresponding corpses?”

Long Yuehong wanted to say, “You call this nothing serious has happened” but he realized that it seemed to be the case when he heard the latter sentence.

The existence of mechanical monks proved that humans could already escape their mortal coils.

“Then, give it a try.” Jiang Baimian had no other options anyway.

Shang Jianyao happily pieced together the bones. Then, they realized that this skeleton was missing a head and half a body.

Without hesitation, Shang Jianyao put on the name tag, lay beside the skeleton, and hugged it. He then massaged his temples and quickly fell asleep.

In the Sea of Origins, Shang Jianyao’s figure appeared.

He simultaneously conjured a name tag and the skeleton. He used his two selves as wings and flew into the air toward the deep rift that represented Xiaochong.

However, nothing had changed.

Ever since it fused with the aura from the Holm Fertility Center, Xiaochong's rift seemed to have frozen.

"Sigh..." Shang Jianyao sighed and tried throwing a bone into the rift.

The bone was a non-corporeal item he had conjured. Once it left his Sea of Origins, it immediately disappeared without causing any ripples.

After many attempts failed, Shang Jianyao muttered to himself regretfully, "It's not Xiaochong's?"

He then left his Sea of Origins and returned to the real world.

Somewhere in a valley in Icefield where green grass grew over fertile lands, the temperature was like the south.

End Year City's Elder Lawton lay on his bed and entered the Mind Corridor.

He was an Awakened who had explored the depths and was currently searching for the door that led to the New World.

He had already been to the rooms that End Year City knew of. With nothing he was familiar with, he could only attempt unfamiliar rooms that he had never come into contact with.

After walking along the aisle covered in thick, dark-yellow carpet for a while, Lawton finally saw a new room: 131..

Chapter 783: The Last Place

“131...” Lawton read the room’s door number.

As an Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor’s depths, he had sufficient confidence in his strength. However, this didn’t mean that he would enter a new room without any scruples or worries.

This might belong to some New World powerhouse or a Kalendaria’s dream!

Even an Awakened at Lawton’s level could cause him to suffer if their price was a little stranger and their psychological trauma was broader in scope.

Lawton touched his increasingly deep wrinkles, composed himself, stretched out his right palm, twisted the brass handle, and opened Room 131.

He didn’t plan on going deep this time. He was prepared to observe from the edge of the dream or psychological trauma to understand the situation, prepared to leave at any moment.

As the vermilion door opened, Lawton took two steps forward.

The scene in front of him changed.

A corridor stretched to the end of his line of sight. The ceiling and sides were painted pure white, and the pungent smell of disinfectant filled the air.

Hospital? Lawton guessed based on his experience and knowledge. This increased his vigilance another notch.

A hospital in reality was already a place he didn’t like going. A hospital in the traumas of the Mind Corridor was even more terrifying.

Lawton tried to take another step forward.

At this moment, the rooms on both sides opened in unison. A person draped in a white bedsheet stood at each door.

Their entire bodies were enveloped by white bedsheets, and even their faces were hidden in the shadows brought about by the cloaks. The blackness exuded the feeling of a nightmare.

These people rushed out of the room, right for Lawton.

Lawton calmly snorted.

Just as he made the grunt, the strange people draped in white bedsheets fell to the ground as if they had instantly lost their lives.

Lawton didn't advance rashly. He stopped in his tracks and observed these people to see if there would be any subsequent changes.

Suddenly, he lost all his strength.

His heartbeat gradually accelerated, and his forehead quickly heated up. He found it hard to breathe, and his nostrils were blocked as they burned.

I'm sick? The essence of this psychological trauma is the fear of being sick? The experienced Lawton came to a realization.

This was a relatively common psychological trauma that Lawton had experienced in several rooms.

If that were the case, he felt that this psychological trauma wasn't a big problem. He would return to make preparations and try three to four more times before coming up with a suitable and effective plan.

At this moment, voices sounded in Lawton's ears—who had become a little weak because of his illness.

"You're sick."

"You're infected"

“You have to be treated in quarantine.”

“Here’s an injection.”

“We’ve already prepared a stretcher and disinfectant.”

Lawton looked over and saw doctors and nurses in white coats rush over from the end of the corridor.

Some of them carried stretchers, some held syringes, and some carried bandages. All of them had the same face.

Yes, although these doctors and nurses wore masks, preventing Lawton from seeing what they looked like, he instinctively realized that they were essentially the same.

He then realized that the stretchers, the syringes, and the bandages had eyebrows that resembled those of the doctors and nurses.

They were bright and spirited.

“Don’t run!”

“You need immediate medical attention.”

“An injection will do.”

The discordant sounds echoed in Lawton’s mind, making his already sick forehead throb. He felt dizzy and seemed to be on the brink of fainting.

He was just about to attempt to deal with these monsters when he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his arm.

Lawton hurriedly turned his head and realized that his right arm had been given an injection.

The one administering the injection was the wall—the corridor’s wall! The wall also had eyebrows similar to that of doctors and nurses!

“Alright, you’ve been anesthetized,” said the wall.

Lawton immediately felt drowsiness surge through him in an unbearable manner.

He knew that something was amiss. He quickly took two steps back before collapsing.

With a thud, Lawton fell out of Room 131. He instantly became clear-headed and was no longer affected by the anesthesia, nor did he feel sick.

Lawton silently crawled up and stared at Room 131 in front of him. After a long time, he muttered to himself, “It’s very dangerous...”

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In Swamp Ruin 1, Shang Jianyao woke up when it was almost noon.

“After we finish our meal, we’ll leave this place and go to the hydropower station, We’ll then search for Linhe Village along the river.” Jiang Baimian informed them of the subsequent plans.

Shang Jianyao nodded. “How long have you been awake?”

The two of them didn’t sleep until almost dawn. They were previously in charge of guarding the night.

“Not long ago,” Jiang Baimian replied in high spirits. “The main reason is that my biological clock hasn’t adapted to it, so I didn’t sleep well.”

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it and looked at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen—who were busy preparing lunch. “Let me relieve myself first. In any case, I have nothing to do later. I’ll walk around the Mind Corridor and see if there are any changes to Master Zhuang’s room. I’ll see how 506 is during the

day and see if the surrounding rooms hide the New World's door.”

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Who knows what you'll encounter next. There's no need to incur more trouble in the exploration of the Mind Corridor. Yes, just take a look at the changes in Master Zhuang's room.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao didn't insist.

After a while, he returned to the living room and sat cross-legged on the ground. He leaned against the railing by the floor-to-ceiling window, massaged his temples, and fell asleep.

In the Mind Corridor, Shang Jianyao pushed open the vermilion door to Room 102 again.

He took a step in and saw a deep-blue sea that was almost black.

The sea was endless, and the sky was abnormally dark.

At this moment, the darkness moved, shifting into the distance.

It was actually a gigantic bird that blotted out the sky!

“Lame.” Shang Jianyao had already seen such scenes too many times and was sick of seeing them. Therefore, his expression was cold and indifferent.

He then left Room 102.

In the afternoon, the Old Task Force evacuated Swamp Ruin 1—the Old World's Dajiang City—by car.

Right on the heels of that, they circled the city ruin and searched for the surging river. This took Jiang Baimian and the others two hours.

Finally, a wide river—even in winter—appeared in front of them. Further away, a towering hydropower station stood amidst a mountain stream.

“Search downstream first,” Jiang Baimian ordered.

Long Yuehong—who was in charge of driving—tersely acknowledged it.

After a few seconds, the previously silent him muttered to himself, “Why did the company hide the fact that Swamp Ruin 1 is in Dajiang City? There’s no way to hide this. Any Ruin Hunter who has entered this place might be able to get the answer.”

‘What he meant was that the company likely wasn’t deliberately hiding the matter from them but that there was a problem with the clearance.

“Maybe they don’t want us to know that the last Buddhist Holy Land is here too soon?” Bai Chen guessed.

“But we’ll know sooner or later,” the honest Shang Jianyao said.

Jiang Baimian guessed thoughtfully, “Trying to take advantage of a time lag? It’s been more than two years since Swamp Ruin 1 was discovered to this day. If the company really needs time, it’s enough to do anything...”

The four Old Task Force members were puzzled by Pangu Biology’s abnormality in this matter.

Even if Big Boss was the Arbiter of Fate, and she treated the company’s employees as livestock, that didn’t give them a reasonable explanation.

With these questions in mind, the Old Task Force discovered a village when it was almost dark.

This village’s building looked ancient. It was located in the bay and was hidden in the sun’s afterglow. But due to its location, the Old Task Force couldn’t see if there was an old pagoda tree at the other side of the village entrance.

“Is it here?” Jiang Baimian asked Shang Jianyao.

On the right side of the backseat, Shang Jianyao stuck his head out the window and carefully looked at it for a few seconds. “Maybe, perhaps, probably. In short, there’s some resemblance.”

“How careful.” Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth. She then said to Bai Chen, “Don’t be in a rush to enter the village. Circle to the other side.”

In any case, the focus was on the old pagoda tree.

Bai Chen—whose turn was to drive—nodded and drove the car through the wilderness outside the village.

At this moment, there was still some white snow, making the tires produce grinding sounds.

Shang Jianyao suddenly leaned forward and said to Long Yuehong in the passenger seat, “Speaking of the old pagoda tree reminds me of a ghost story.”

“Stop!” Jiang Baimian interrupted him.

Shang Jianyao immediately shut his mouth.

Before long, they arrived at the village entrance through an unpaved path.

A large pagoda tree stood there, swaying its grayish-brown, bald branches that were decorated with white snow with the wind.

“It’s gone bald,” Shang Jianyao pointed out.

“It’s winter.” Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him. “Is it the one you saw in Master Zhuang’s psychological trauma?”

“Very similar, but it doesn’t have any leaves.” Shang Jianyao didn’t dare to be ‘sure.’

Jiang Baimian exhaled and said to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, “Stop the car. It should be here.”

The final Buddhist Holy Land..

Chapter 784: Searching for Anomalies

The Old Task Force parked the jeep and pushed open the door to alight one after another.

Jiang Baimian half-closed her eyes and sensed the area in two ways at the same time.

“Nothing special,” she said very calmly.

If she could immediately discover the anomaly in the last Buddhist Holy Land, it would only incur her suspicion that something was wrong.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “That’s because your method is wrong.”

He took off his tactical backpack and took out the Six Senses Beads.

A faint green light illuminated the surroundings, giving the area a serene feeling. Coupled with the setting sun’s rays and the darkness of the environment, it added an eerie and bizarre feeling.

All kinds of horror films and ghost stories from the Old World’s entertainment flashed across Long Yuehong’s mind.

Shang Jianyao walked toward the old pagoda tree with the Six Senses Beads in hand. However, the green light didn’t reveal any ‘anomalies.’

From the tree to the ground, it was no different from before. It was only dyed the color of the Six Senses Beads.

This wasn’t like Shang Jianyao’s time at the Holm Fertility Center. After the Six Senses Beads were activated, it directly illuminated the white aura hidden in a liquid nitro canister.

“Doesn’t work.” Shang Jianyao shook his head in disappointment. He then put away the Six Senses Beads and found the small jade Buddha.

This didn’t bring about any changes either.

“It doesn’t work either.” Shang Jianyao said to the small jade Buddha with a pained expression, “As an item that bears the heavy responsibility of a Buddhist Holy Land, you can’t degenerate just because you left the steelworks factory ruins. Think about it. What else did you do in the end? You activated the

‘stored’ scenes in Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company, attracted Eidolon Nun’s attention in Redstone Collection, and had ‘Her’ imbue some of ‘Her’ aura into you. After that, you relied solely on your aura to scare Doctor!”

Shang Jianyao looked like he wanted to reason with the small jade Buddha. Unfortunately, the small jade Buddha ignored him and didn’t accept his ‘persuasive education.’

Jiang Baimian sighed silently and tried not to let him get carried away. “Forget it, forget it. It has actually done a lot. There’s no need to call it ‘small jade Buddha’ when it’s useful, but call it ‘trash’ when it’s not useful.”

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao’s response, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “Besides, didn’t we previously guess that the Five Great Buddhist Holy Lands are interconnected? We had to reach the steelworks factory ruins first and obtain the small jade Buddha before we could see the hidden past in

Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company. Only by obtaining the green aura from Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company did we discover the abnormality at the Holm Fertility Center and find the white aura.”

Upon hearing this, Bai Chen looked to the side in high vigilance and said, “But after we entered Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School, the white aura didn’t come in handy.”

“That’s right.” Long Yuehong agreed. “Besides, the reason we obtained the green aura in Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company isn’t that we triggered the hidden scenes but that Hey cleared the corresponding psychological trauma.”

The loops weren't tightly intertwined, and there were even disconnects.

Jiang Baimian nodded and voiced her thoughts. "If it weren't for the fact that Hey cleared the psychological trauma corresponding to Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company in advance, I think we could still obtain that special green aura after triggering that hidden scene.

"Back in Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School, it was because the white aura at the Holm Fertility Center entered Hey's Sea of Origins and fused with the rift corresponding to Xiaochong, solidifying it, that it didn't play its role when we fell into Master Zhuang's dream. Fortunately, we had the number that

directly connected to Master Zhuang. Otherwise, we would've been wiped out there."

She meant that it was purely an accident that there had been no overlaps. The Old Task Force had relied on other resources and methods to barely clear the obstacles.

"In order to activate this Buddhist Holy Land and make it reveal its hidden secrets, we need to use a certain item obtained from Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School?" Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. "But we didn't obtain anything in Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School. We only experienced Master Zhuang's

dream and learned that his body of descent, suspected to be Du Shaochong, had once studied in Dajiang City's Elite Middle School."

"I not for this, we wouldn't have come to Swamp Ruin 1." Bai Chen felt that this was a connection in a sense.

Long Yuehong muttered, "Maybe it's because we didn't use a normal method to unravel Master Zhuang's dream of Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School and directly made a call that we didn't obtain the key item that can trigger the anomaly here."

Jiang Baimian tersely grunted. "It's useless to speculate. The important thing is to test our gains from Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School and see the effects."

"How?" the ruthless Shang Jianyao immediately asked. He then revealed an excited expression and shouted at the old pagoda tree, "Du Shaochong! Du Shaochong!

“Xiaochong! Xiaochong!”

Nobody replied. There was nothing abnormal.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and said, “We are teachers from Elite Middle School. We are here for a home visit!”

That’s excessive... Long Yuchong shivered.

Within Pangu Biology, every floor had a corresponding school that provided compulsory education. There weren’t many students, with only about one class per grade, each having ten to twenty people. The teachers and parents were very familiar with each other because of this. Some of them were even

neighbors or could be associated via a few contrived degrees of separation. Therefore, home visits were part of every detail of life and became horrific matters of the past for students.

The old pagoda tree’s branches swayed with the wind without changing.

“It doesn’t work.” Shang Jianyao shrugged at Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian thoughtfully said, “We aren’t done trying, Didn’t we just obtain an incomplete skeleton yesterday that belongs to Du Shaochong?”

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

Bai Chen’s expression changed slightly. “The mastermind got someone to bury the skeleton in the laboratory ruins so that someone could identify it and bring it here when they dig it out in the future?”

Eventually bringing it to the last Buddhist Holy Land.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Have more confidence. You could just say that it’s for us to dig it out and bring it under the old pagoda tree.”

“Is this the missing link? What does that person want?” Long Yuehong was confused and worried.

Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled. “We’ll know once we try. Take out all the remains.”

The four Old Task Force members took out the bones in their tactical backpacks and placed them under the old pagoda tree one after another. During this process, they had one person approach while the other three stayed far away to prevent any accidents from happening.

But after the incomplete corpse without a head and the name tag with the identity labeled were piled up under the old pagoda tree, reflecting the shadows of the branches under the setting sun, this Buddhist Holy Land remained no different from the beginning.

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment before saying, “Let’s search this area before it gets dark.”

This referred to the area around the old pagoda tree, excluding Linhe Village itself. This was because it was darkening, so there was definitely no time.

After a careful and serious search, the four Old Task Force members confirmed that there was nothing abnormal about the old pagoda tree. There was nothing around it either.

“What should we do...” Shang Jianyao muttered to himself.

suddenly, he took a few steps forward and sat cross-legged under the old pagoda tree.

“What are you doing?” Long Yuehong asked in surprise.

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “Simulate the scene from back then. Maybe Master Zhuang sat here to preach or pass away.”

He then chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti...”

As his voice echoed, the sky turned darker.

Apart from that, everything was normal.

As Jiang Baimian watched this scene, countless thoughts surfaced in her mind before slowly settling.

After a while, Bai Chen said to her, “Team Leader, it’s almost dark. Shall we find a place to camp?”

Jiang Baimian snapped to her senses and exclaimed, “There’s no rush. Let’s try one more time.”

“What do we try?” Long Yuehong and Shang Jianyao asked in unison.

Jiang Baimian looked at the old pagoda tree and slowly said, “I remember the name of this Buddhist Holy Land is ‘Under the old pagoda tree in Linhe Village, Dajiang City,’ and not ‘the old pagoda tree in Linhe Village, Dajiang City.’ In other words, the real Buddhist Holy Land isn’t this tree but the place

under the tree.”

“But we’ve already searched and didn’t discover anything,” said Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian suddenly laughed. “Have you really searched everywhere? Not necessarily. At least we haven’t dug up the land under the tree to see if anything is buried.”

Shang Jianyao—who was sitting cross-legged—jumped up. “Where’s my shovel? Where’s my shovel?”

He anxiously ran to the jeep, took out two shovels from the trunk, and threw one to Long Yuehong.

The two of them got busy while Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen guarded against any accidents.

After digging for a while, Shang Jianyao suddenly smiled. “There’s indeed something!”

He pulled up his shovel and brought something out of the soil.

The object rolled to the tree root and stopped.

It was a white human skull with black eye sockets..

Chapter 785: Piecing Bones

A skull... The Old Task Force members had already seen many deaths and corpses. They wouldn't panic, tremble in fear, or be shocked just because a human skull was dug out.

A thought simultaneously flashed through their minds as they cast their gazes to the other side of the tree root. Sitting there was an incomplete skeleton and a name tag labeled 'Du Shaochong.'

"Could this be his head?" Long Yuehong muttered.

In the dark environment, such a guess made him feel that the wind had become rather cold.

The Old Task Force found the incomplete remains buried by Ruin Hunters in Swamp Ruin 1's laboratory ruins. The rest was under the old pagoda tree in Linhe Village?

This was unexpected but also reasonable for Jiang Baimian.

She fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "This is a Buddhist Holy Land corresponding to Master Zhuang. It's actually quite reasonable to dig out 'His' corpse used for the descent. The unreasonable thing is that we happened to obtain the other half of 'His' descent's body not long ago elsewhere."

"Maybe this is why the man behind the curtains hired those Ruin Hunters to bury the remains in Swamp Ruin 1's laboratory ruins," Bai Chen said in a guessing tone.

Shang Jianyao smiled. "He wants us to return everything intact—no, piece together Du Shaochong's remains?"

Without waiting for the others to respond, he looked at his three teammates and said creepily, "When the time comes, something very terrifying might happen."

Long Yuehong couldn't help but shiver when he heard that.

"Let's first dig this area up and find all the bones to see if we can piece together a complete corpse," Jiang Baimian replied calmly, unaffected by the 'ghost story.

"That's what I'm afraid of..." Shang Jianyao dragged out his words.

Long Yuehong instinctively asked, "What are you afraid of?"

Shang Jianyao smiled. "It will be interesting if we can't piece together a complete corpse."

"This means that what we previously obtained was fake." Long Yuehong scoffed.

Shang Jianyao's tone suddenly changed. "What if there's one or two more additional bones?"

..." Long Yuehong was momentarily at a loss for an answer. The more he thought about it, the more he found the hidden possibility abnormally terrifying.

Shang Jianyao immediately gloated. "The correct answer is that some of the missing bones might've been taken away by a feral dog. Having extra bones might mean this was a grave in the first place. If you continue digging, you can dig out more bones."

Jiang Baimian—who had planned on hearing what creative ideas this fellow had in mind to obtain inspiration—couldn't maintain her expression any longer and urged, "Get digging! It's getting dark!"

Shang Jianyao bent down and dug up the soil under the old pagoda tree with Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian guarded their surroundings.

In the next ten minutes, Shang Jianyao found the bones around the area where he had dug out the skull.

They were buried together to begin with.

“That’s all.” After a while, Shang Jianyao straightened his body and said to Jiang Baimian, “See if the number and location of the bones are right.”

Jiang Baimian—who was a researcher—had a sufficient understanding of the human body structure. As she sensed her surroundings, she used the flashlights light to count and identify the human bones that had been dug out. At this moment, she used a few minutes to make confirmation. “The numbers

and locations are right.”

“It’s indeed the same body.” Bai Chen sighed softly.

Long Yuehong said, “It seems like these are really Du Shaochong’s remains.”

A complete skeleton.

Shang Jianyao smiled again. “Maybe these were also buried here a few days ago.”

“There are no traces that they were recently buried.” Jiang Baimian denied his ‘guess.

Shang Jianyao immediately said, “A few years ago.”

Jiang Baimian ignored him and looked around the dark entrance of Linhe Village. She frowned and said, “We gathered the remains but didn’t trigger anything abnormal...”

Team Leader, you really want to trigger an anomaly? Long Yuehong was shocked.

Shang Jianyao was immediately excited. He glanced at the pale and dim moon in the sky and said, “We might have to combine this skeleton and piece it back into human form.”

Ever since Jiang Baimian pointed out that this was an adult’s skeleton and not a child’s, Shang Jianyao had stopped associating it with Xiaochong or giving the dead the necessary respect.

Long Yuehong subconsciously wanted to say, “don’t be rash,” but he felt that they might miss something if they didn’t try.

Didn’t some people painstakingly ‘send’ the remaining corpse to their team with the hope of causing something?

“Shall we try again at dawn?” Bai Chen suggested solemnly.

Although with their experience, abnormalities had nothing to do with the day or night, the environment and visibility directly affected their performance.

Shang Jianyao wore a heavy expression. “I’m afraid delays will lead to unexpected developments!”

He tried his best to advertise a plan that could be used at that very moment.

Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment before saying, “Little White, Little Red, put on the exoskeleton and bionic artificial intelligence armor. Drive the jeep a kilometer away and find a place where you can monitor this area.”

Upon seeing their team leader make a decision, Bai Chen and Long Yuchong didn’t waste their breaths. After replying with a terse acknowledgment, they got busy.

After they retreated a kilometer and found a tree to give them a vantage point, they relied on their military exoskeletons and night-vision binoculars to monitor the space under the old pagoda tree.

Jiang Baimian also walked about 300 meters out. She held the night-vision binoculars in one hand and the walkie-talkie in the other. “Hey, you can start piecing together corpses.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao agreed happily.

He didn’t act rashly. He first took out the Six Senses Beads, the small jade Buddha, and the Life Angel necklace and placed them to the side so that he could use them at any time. He then seriously pieced together the bones and used the walkie-talkie to consult Jiang Baimian about things he didn’t

understand.

Before long, a complete human skeleton appeared under the old pagoda tree.

It was clearly an adult, standing between 1.75 to 1.8 meters tall.

Shang Jianyao squatted beside the corpse. As he hung his hand above the three items, he sized up his surroundings.

“Nothing has changed.” He was rather disappointed.

Jiang Baimian was also observing and didn’t immediately respond.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao came to a realization. “I get it. You still have to chant Buddhist scriptures for the sending.”

He immediately sat down cross-legged and made Zen Master Redemption chant a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti...”

‘The night was quiet, and there was no other sound.

“Sigh...” Shang Jianyao let out a long sigh.

Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds and spoke into the walkie-talkie. “Enter the Sea of Origins and see if there are any changes to Xiaochong’s rift. Oh, also go to the Mind Corridor and open the door to Master Zhuang’s room to confirm the situation with ‘His’ dream.”

“alright!” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm with an inspired look.

He maintained his sitting posture and ritualistically massaged his temples before entering his Mind Room.

Above the Sea of Origins, Xiaochong’s rift remained deep and silent as if it had frozen in time.

In the Mind Corridor, in Room 102, the giant bird flew over the sea endlessly.

Shang Jianyao left the Mind Corridor in disappointment, picked up the walkie-talkie, and reported to Jiang Baimian, "Everything is normal."

Jiang Baimian frowned. After repeatedly confirming that everything was normal, she walked to the old pagoda tree and got Long Yuehong and Bai Chen to return.

'The four Old Task Force members soon surrounded the complete corpse. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong remained armed out of caution.

After a moment of silence, Long Yuehong asked, "What should we do next?"

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "Although we didn't discover anything abnormal about the last Buddhist Holy Land, the corpse itself can 'speak.' Let's get some equipment later and bring Old Ge over. We'll get the corpse's age at death and how many years ago it died. We'll see if it died before

the Old World was destroyed, when the Old World was destroyed, or a long time after the Old World was destroyed.

"He's suspected to be Master Zhuang's body of descent. Figuring out these questions will help us investigate the truth behind the Old World's destruction."

Jiang Baimian was rather careful. She didn't completely label the corpse as being equivalent to Du Shaochong or Master Zhuang's body of descent.

"Why don't we just put it in the trunk and bring it to Weed City to find Old Ge?" Long Yuchong asked in confusion.

Jiang Baimian looked at the skeleton and said, "The cruise trauma Hey experienced tells us that things left behind by New World powerhouses that are closely related to them in the Ashlands might form a node which connects to the New World and bring about all kinds of danger. If they can, so is it highly

likely for the Kalendarium. If these are really the remains of Master Zhuang's body of descent, we might end up contracting the Heartless disease if we keep them by our side for too long."

Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped—

That's right... Long Yuehong was shocked and felt a little scared about how he had carried the incomplete corpse everywhere.

Fortunately, this only lasted for a day and a night.

The Old Task Force had previously been more inclined to believe that the incomplete remains and the name tag brought by the three Ruin Hunters were fake.

"Yes." Bai Chen agreed with her team leader's decision. "Leave the name tag here as well. We'll get Old Ge to determine if it's fake."

Jiang Baimian looked at the dark Linhe Village and nodded. "Then, bury this skeleton with the name tag. We Ashlandics believe that the dead need to be 'buried to rest in peace.'"

"But we still have to dig it out for Old Ge to test later." Shang Jianyao spoke the truth.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. "Even a day counts."

Shang Jianyao didn't dare to say anything else. He obediently placed the corpse and the name tag into the hole he had previously dug. He then got Long Yuehong's help to scoop up the soil to fill the hole.

Before long, they buried the complete corpse suspected to be Du Shaochong.

Shang Jianyao picked up the Six Senses Beads and stood beside the land under the old pagoda tree. With a benevolent expression, he chanted another Buddhist proclamation. "Namo..."

Just as he spat out the word, Jiang Baimian suddenly saw yellow or pure white lights light up not far away from her from the corner of her eye.

They all came from Linhe Village, which was sleeping in the darkness.

Chapter 786: Back then

Jiang Baimian had seen many abnormalities in the past, so other than the slightly dilated pupils, she managed to maintain her calm.

She suppressed her voice and said to Shang Jianyao and the others, “Look over there.”

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Shang Jianyao followed the hint and turned to look at Linhe Village.

The tiny lights reflected in their eyes at the same time.

This looked very warm, like a person waiting for a loved one to return at night. But placed in contrast to the entire environment and the dead silence from before, it was terrifying.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped—

This dispersed the various fears that surfaced in Long Yuehong’s heart.

“So we have to make the corpse complete and bury it in peace to trigger the anomaly,” Shang Jianyao said in a tone of enlightenment. He then muttered to himself in confusion, “But doesn’t Buddhism preach that it’s best to burn one’s mortal coils clean? Why does Lokeshvara~Tathagata want the remains

buried intact?”

“After all, He’ is Daoism’s Master Zhuang,” Jiang Baimian replied simply.

Bai Chen looked at the lit Linhe Village and instinctively assumed a defensive posture. She then deliberated and said, “Does the occurrence of an anomaly mean that this skeleton really belongs to Du Shaochong and that it belongs to Master Zhuang’s body of descent?”

“Not necessarily,” Shang Jianyao replied honestly. “What if this skeleton comes from Subhuti’s body of descent? It can also trigger abnormalities in Buddhist Holy Lands.”

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Although there are other possibilities, the matter has developed to the point that the probability that this skeleton belongs to Du Shaochong and is Master Zhuang’s body of descent is more than 90%.”

This basically confirmed two things: First, this complete skeleton belonged to Du Shaochong.

Second, Du Shaochong was indeed Master Zhuang’s body of descent.

In the dreamscape at Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School previously, the Old Task Force couldn’t be completely sure that Du Shaochong was Master Zhuang’s body of descent because everyone was a manifestation of a certain personality of Master Zhuang and had the same past. After all, he might be a

former classmate played by one of Master Zhuang’s personalities.

‘The reason the Old Task Force tried to equate Du Shaochong with Master Zhuang’s body of descent was that he was indeed a trigger point. Furthermore, they had previously encountered a person named Xiaochong.

As Swamp Ruin 1 was confirmed to be Dajiang City, and Elite Middle School was on the street beside the City Intelligence Network Control Center, Du Shaochong being an adult Xiaochong increased the possibility of the former being Master Zhuang’s body of descent.

It was even more so now.

‘As his teammates conversed, Shang Jianyao looked at the tiny lights in Linhe Village and eagerly said, “Shall we explore?”

“It’s too dangerous.” Long Yuehong immediately objected. “If it’s like Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School, where we fall into Master Zhuang’s dream and begin acting as someone after entering... We don’t have Old Ge to save us this time.”

Shang Jianyao confidently suggested a plan. “Two people will go in, and two will stay outside. Once they discover that something is amiss, they will immediately go to Weed City to get Old Ge to save the day.”

“It will normally take up to half a month for a round trip. The ones who fall into the dreamscape definitely won’t be able to last that long.” Bai Chen chose to side with Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian tersely grunted. “No rush; let’s take a look from afar. This isn’t like Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School. Everything looks normal from the outside; we can discover that something is wrong even from standing here.”

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian picked up the binoculars and brought them in front of her eyes.

Shang Jianyao and the others followed suit.

With the help of the yellowish or pure white lights, they saw figures in many houses in Linhe Village. It was very lively.

“There were people of all ages and genders. Some were watching TV, others were on their phones, and some gathered at a table, playing cards or mahjong. The scenes presented by each window were different.

“Is this a scene from before the Old World was destroyed?” Long Yuehong muttered to himself.

“There was no doubt about this. The focus was only on how many days, months, and years it was before the Old World was destroyed.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “This should be Linhe Village around Lunar New Year.”

“Why do you say that?” Long Yuehong blurted out a question.

Jiang Baimian casually explained, “I’ve studied a lot of the Old World’s human culture and countryside folklore. Many of them mention one thing: Most Ashlandic villages have fewer and fewer young people because of the draw from cities. Only before and after the Lunar New Year can there be such a lively

scene of a family reunion.”

Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped—

That makes sense... Long Yuehong increasingly felt the gap between him and his team leader.

For the same scene, the team leader could identify more details and infer more information.

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “I remember that the Old World was destroyed a few days before the Lunar New Year.”

This was the verdict of the masses, and the memories of Moat Town’s Tian Erhe confirmed this.

Jiang Baimian was just about to nod when she suddenly saw many children walk out of a shop on the largest and only street in Linhe Village. They held sparklers and excitedly played.

‘They were all young, and all they could buy was the safest kinds. Sparks weakly spewed out bit by bit, but they still brought about a dreamy scene.

“Xiaochong!” Shang Jianyao suddenly shouted.

Long Yuehong and the others saw that the leader of the group of children resembled Xiaochong. His face was chubby, and he was wrapped in a black cotton coat.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “It does resemble Xiaochong, but he seems younger. He’s only about five or six years old.”

The Xiaochong the Old Task Force knew was about seven or eight years old. Sometimes, he sounded like he was above ten years old.

“I get it!” Shang Jianyao held the binoculars in one hand and slapped his face with the other. “This was when Xiaochong was young!”

When Xiaochong was young... Xiaochong is equivalent to Du Shaochong. Du Shaochong studied in Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School. This scene happened many years before the Old World was destroyed... Jiang Baimian made a new judgment based on this.

Similar thoughts flashed across Long Yuehong and Bai Chen's minds almost at the same time.

They continued observing the situation in Linhe Village through the binoculars and focused on the children.

The child suspected to be Xiaochong led his companions, running and skipping to the village entrance. He was very happy setting off fireworks along the way.

He suddenly muttered and turned to walk into the darkness of the village's wilderness.

Jiang Baimian determined that Xiaochong was likely heading elsewhere to 'pee.' Of course, she couldn't lip-read, so she couldn't be sure.

Back when her hearing was poor, she habitually used lips, body language, and environmental factors to determine the exact meaning when faced with a situation where she couldn't hear the other person clearly and was embarrassed to ask.

Xiaochong quickly found a spot, unzipped his pants, and peed.

This confirmed Jiang Baimian's judgment.

Xiaochong's companions followed—be it boy or girl—they lined up with him. They stood, squatted, unzipped, or pulled down their pants to pee.

"Isn't this too orderly?" Long Yuehong muttered to himself in confusion.

Shang Jianyao laughed. "It's very normal to use the bathroom together at this time. Only by being together can one have courage."

Normal my ass! Jiang Baimian criticized inwardly.

Even if those children really wanted to head to the bathroom together to boost each other's courage, it was impossible for all of them to go together. There would always be a few who didn't want to pee. Furthermore, there were a few little girls among them.

Bai Chen said, "It's quite normal if there are only three or four people, but there are about a dozen of them."

During the Old Task Force's discussion, Xiaochong finished peeing and started zipping it. He then shouted at his companions.

As it was relatively loud this time and they had already walked out of the village entrance, they weren't too far from the old pagoda tree. Therefore, Jiang Baimian and the others heard him clearly: Why do you keep mimicking me? None of you wanted to do so previously, but the moment I said I wanted to

pee, all of you became urgent."

The other children replied in a cacophony, "It suddenly came to mind."

"It's all your fault for mentioning the word 'pee!

Jiang Baimian gradually frowned as she listened.

After the group of children finished arguing, she pondered for a moment and said, "Does it ring a bell?"

Before Long Yuehong could think, Shang Jianyao whistled.

That's right! Long Yuchong instantly understood what his team leader wanted to ask.

At this moment, Bai Chen replied, "It reminds me of Xiaochong's whistling in First City. It made people who hear it want to pee."

Jiang Baimian slowly nodded. "Could the current situation be the same? The word 'pee' that Xiaochong unconsciously said and his actions have a similar effect as Thought Guidance."

“Very similar.” The more Long Yuehong thought about it, the more he felt that this was the reason.

Shang Jianyao was ‘surprised and delighted’ as he asked for confirmation, “Xiaochong had Awakened abilities since he was young?”

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen were stunned for a moment before they realized that this scene had revealed an abnormally important piece of information.

Although it was very reasonable for Master Zhuang’s body of descent to be a little abnormal since he was young, this situation gave an answer to a question on many people’s minds for the first time: Awakened existed before the Old World was destroyed!

Chapter 787: Choices

As for whether the Awakened were born after the disaster that destroyed the Old World, the Old Task Force had always lacked sufficient clues and couldn’t make effective guesses.

Many people were similar to them. Many historians and antiquarians secretly suspected that the disaster had brought about two abnormalities in humans. One was physical, resulting in Subhumans, and the other was mental, resulting in Awakened.

This was because they couldn’t come to a conclusion that Awakened existed in the Old World from the Old World text and various obtained items. They couldn’t even find the corresponding traces.

After the Old Task Force came into contact with Yama Tiger and DiMarco, they pushed the time node for Awakened to appear from the late Chaotic Era to the early years. They also believed that there was no Star Cluster Hall or the ritual process of exchanging three abilities for a price back then. However,

they had never been able to confirm if there were Awakened before that.

Now, through the Linhe Village that had appeared in the Buddhist Holy Land, they saw evidence that an Awakened was suspected to exist many years before the Old World was destroyed.

This made the truth of the Old World's destruction even more confusing.

Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced. After some thought, she slowly said, "The Eighth Research Institute's main focus is to study the awakening of humans. During this process, they came into contact with the Kalendaria's body of descent and discovered the New World. Therefore, they became highly

ambitious and tried to build a staircase that led to a forbidden zone of deities, bringing about a disaster that almost destroyed all of humanity?"

This guess was made based on the current situation and the Old Task Force's past gains.

Bai Chen fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "I suspect that the Eighth Research Institute has already built a staircase that leads to the forbidden zone of deities."

"Why so?" Long Yuehong's eyes widened.

Bai Chen calmly read out the terms. "Star Cluster Hall, Sea of Origins, Mind Corridor, and the New World. Beyond that might be the Deities' Forbidden Zone."

Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped—

He excitedly said, "One might become a Kalendaria after entering the Deities' Forbidden Zone."

Long Yuehong wanted to retort, but he was inexplicably horrified and didn't dare to discuss it.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian exhaled slightly. "From this angle, Star Cluster Hall—a series of originally non-existent items—might really be the staircase that leads to the Deities' Forbidden Zone. However, the Eighth Research Institute seems to have paid a price. It has completely become

darkness-serving traitors and is working hard to do certain things like a slave."

The four Old Task Force members didn't relax their observation of the children at Linhe Village's entrance as they discussed.

‘They were having fun under Xiaochong’s lead, and there was nothing else abnormal for the time being.

Suddenly, Shang Jianyao frowned. He kept making faces, attempting to attract his teammates’ attention so that they would ask what was troubling him.

Unfortunately, it was already dark. In order not to attract the anomaly over, Jiang Baimian and the others switched off the flashlight and hid by the old pagoda tree’s side, only relying on binoculars to observe.

In such an environment, nobody noticed Shang Jianyao’s tiny facial movements.

Finally, Shang Jianyao couldn’t help but suppress his voice and sigh.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, “I just thought of a problem.”

“What problem?” Long Yuehong turned to look at the fellow.

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “There are 13 Kalendarium. They happen to be allocated 12 months and the leap month, or the entire year. If anyone enters the Deities’ Forbidden Zone, where will they find a new month for them to control?”

“Maybe they are jointly in charge of a month?” Long Yuehong guessed.

“It’s also possible that the new Kalendaria lives and that the old Kalendaria dies.” Bai Chen expressionlessly voiced a terrifying possibility.

Jiang Baimian didn’t say a word and began to associate this matter with the New World disputes.

Shang Jianyao smiled and gave his ‘answer.’ “Maybe a Kalendaria will degenerate to a Dayendria. If that happened, there would be more than 300 empty seats!”

Dayendria? Days... That naming sucks... Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

After talking about Dayendria, Shang Jianyao looked at Linhe Village's entrance again in satisfaction. He held the binoculars and said, "Why don't I greet and make contact with the young Xiaochong? I think they're about to return after they're done with the fireworks. It won't be easy to observe when the

time comes."

Before Jiang Baimian could make a decision, Shang Jianyao had already run out and shouted as he ran. "Xiaochong! Xiaochong!"

Long Yuehong and the others were already numb to such matters. After all, a mental patient who had always been able to control himself couldn't be considered a real mental patient. The price of performing crosstalk across multiple personalities every day wasn't a real price.

Jiang Baimian was a little vexed, vexed that she had been too focused on thinking about the New World's disputes and couldn't grab Hey's collar in time or stop him with her electrical sparks in her left hand.

In response, the only thing they could do was retreat in unison and do their best to distance themselves.

"Xiaochong! Xiaochong!"

As Shang Jianyao approached, the children—led by Xiaochong—rapidly faded and dissipated into the dark night.

Further away, the lights in Linhe Village went out at the same time.

It was dead silent again—desolate and cold.

Shang Jianyao stopped and quickly said, "Sorry! Sorry for the disturbance! I'll make a move now!"

He suddenly turned around and ran back to the old pagoda tree.

Unfortunately, the anomaly in Linhe Village wasn't restored.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen look over at the same time, Shang Jianyao sincerely apologized. "I was wrong."

With his attitude so proper, Jiang Baimian couldn't bring herself to reprimand him. She thought for a moment before saying, "Let's wait a little longer and see if it continues."

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao replied very loudly.

The Old Task Force waited for nearly half an hour in the cold wind, but Linhe Village remained dark and silent.

"Are we going to wait a little longer?" Long Yuchong felt that this wasn't a solution.

Shang Jianyao glanced at Linhe Village—which had blended into the night—and looked down at the old pagoda tree. He then revealed a ruthless expression and chuckled. "Why don't we dig out Du Shaochong's corpse and bury him again?"

This would reenact the burial.

"He's your good friend!" Jiang Baimian was peeved and amused.

Upon seeing Shang Jianyao's disdain, she added, "This is Master Zhuang's body of descent."

If they really dug it out, it might anger Master Zhuang. 'He' could definitely use the corpse to establish a stable New World node.

The ruthless Shang Jianyao's expression gradually softened as he nodded in fear. "Indeed."

Jiang Baimian then said, "Let's retreat to a kilometer away and camp. We'll try to explore Linhe Village after dawn and see what we can find. If not, we'll confirm if any abnormalities happen when it turns dark."

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen had no objections, nor did Shang Jianyao dare to have one. He believed that he was guilt-ridden.

About two kilometers away from Linhe Village, at the Old Task Force's camp.

After a simple dinner, Jiang Baimian instructed Shang Jianyao to guard the surroundings while she called Long Yuehong and Bai Chen over.

"Team Leader, what's the matter?" Bai Chen asked directly.

Jiang Baimian said seriously, "The fact that the company hides the equivalence of Swamp Ruin 1 and Dajiang City has given me doubts about why Big Boss established the company and provided shelter. This is indeed rather intriguing when combined with the matter regarding the Fourth Research

Institute that Hey talked about.

"The company is our home, and our family and friends are in the underground building. I won't become enemies with the company for no reason, nor will I ignore these suspicious points. Therefore, I plan on arranging a mission as soon as possible after this training session to leave the company.

Through investigating Shang Jianyao's father's whereabouts and the Eighth Research Institute's location, we'll figure out the truth behind the Old World's destruction and figure out what the Kalendarium want to do. I believe we should be able to obtain an answer when the time comes and determine what

we should do in the future.

"This is my choice. There's a high chance that Hey will do the same, but I won't force you to do the same." At this point, Jiang Baimian smiled bitterly. "In fact, I don't know what choice I want you to make either. You can act together with us or stay in the company to enjoy peace and stability while waiting

for us to bring back the answer.

“The former is very dangerous, and someone might die at any moment. The latter might end up getting good news, bad news, or suddenly face the company’s anomaly before any news can be obtained.

“Hmm, there’s no rush to make a decision. Just tell me your choice before we return to the company.”

Bai Chen didn’t answer and turned to look at Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong fell silent for a while before laughing self-deprecatingly. “How can I stay in the company with a clear conscience after knowing so much... Besides, I’m also afraid that someone will secretly flip through my memories as time passes.”

Bai Chen’s expression clearly relaxed a little as she said, “If we know the answer in advance, we can make preparations in advance and save our relatives and friends in the company in time.”

Her choice was self-evident.

Long Yuehong exhaled. “I think so too.”

Clap! Clap! Clap! The patrolling Shang Jianyao clapped...

Chapter 788 Missing Villagers

The next morning, the Old Task Force waited until the sun completely rose before leaving the campsite and returning to Linhe Village in the jeep.

Apart from the soil under the old pagoda tree having traces of being dug up, this place was no different from before dark yesterday. These traces were left behind when Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong buried Du Shaochong’s corpse.

Jiang Baimian sized it up for a while and said to her team members, “Let’s enter the village.”

After taking a few steps, Shang Jianyao suddenly exclaimed.

Just as Jiang Baimian suspected that this fellow had another episode again and was hesitating about asking, Shang Jianyao took the initiative to ask, “Do you think the remains buried under the old pagoda tree are still there?”

How can it not be here? We just buried it yesterday! Long Yuehong muttered inwardly.

Although he said that, he couldn't help but think about the possibility of them really being gone.

This was very horrifying and terrifying! Jiang Baimian calmly replied to Shang Jianyao's question. “I just observed the soil's condition; it's no different from when we left last night. Besides, since we won't attempt to dig out the skeleton now, what's the difference between whether it's there or not? It's not like you can confirm it. When we are away from the company in the future, we'll do another inspection when Old Ge is with us.”

For some reason, a scene surfaced in Bai Chen's mind when she heard her team leader's last sentence: They, as carbon-based humans, hid a few kilometers away, holding binoculars and watching Old Ge—a smart bot—shovel the soil.

“Alright...” Shang Jianyao was very disappointed that the horrifying development he came up with hadn't been recognized.

The Old Task Force continued forward and arrived at the entrance of the village.

Shang Jianyao turned his head and cast his gaze at the spot where Xiaochong had taken the children to pee.

“Wipe that thought from your mind!” Jiang Baimian gave sufficient warning and stopped him in advance.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “That's a Holy Ruin!”

... Long Yuehong was momentarily at a loss for words. After a few seconds, he muttered, “Those patches of soil are called Holy Relics then?”

Jiang Baimian didn't give Shang Jianyao a chance to discuss this matter and directly ordered, "Enter the village!"

She led the way and walked into Linhe Village.

Bai Chen and the others followed closely behind.

Through the relatively intact glass windows, they sized up the situation in the houses by the side of the road.

Swamp Ruin 1 had never been discovered, so it seemed like this place had never been visited by Ruin Hunters to this day. Be it high-end items like televisions, refrigerators, air conditioners, and cars or normal stuff like tables, chairs, instant noodles, and canned food, they sat quietly in their original spots. They had not moved for decades.

Long Yuehong suddenly felt that something was amiss. Something is missing here!

The next second, Bai Chen said, "Where are the villagers?"

No matter what the villagers encountered when the Old World was destroyed, people would eventually die, and there would be remains. However, there were no corpses in Linhe Village!

Shang Jianyao smiled. "Maybe they were fine back then and survived the Old World's destruction. Then, the entire village moved elsewhere. That's how it is with a Kalendaria's protection."

He spoke with certainty as if he had seen it with his own eyes.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and said concisely, "It's impossible for an entire village not to bring the food along during a mass migration."

In particular, canned food and instant noodles that were easier to carry.

Long Yuehong tried to guess. "Maybe some people contracted the Heartless disease, and others were forced to evacuate in a rush. Yes, the Heartless chased after them and never returned."

Bai Chen disagreed. “If some people really become Heartless when the Old World is destroyed, some of the rest will definitely die. When the survivors evacuate in a rush, they won’t leave behind any portable food if they still have time to bring the corpses with them.”

This was experience from the things she had heard and seen over the years. Once a large group of people suddenly became Heartless somewhere, there would definitely be people around them that couldn’t react in time and would be hunted. If there weren’t many Heartless in Linhe Village and the villagers were able to mount a defense, the survivors wouldn’t have to rush to escape without bringing any food. “That’s right.” Long Yuehong nodded.

He raised another possibility. “They all became Heartless and went elsewhere to search for food...”

Long Yuehong’s voice gradually softened as he spoke because the Heartless also knew how to use simple tools, open canned food, and tear packaging.

This was confirmed in many city ruins.

Jiang Baimian looked around and thoughtfully said, “What the Kalendaria provides might not be a blessing. Do you still remember Tai City’s situation?”

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong recalled the Tai City citizens’ conditions: They had all instantly died when the Old World was destroyed!

“Could it be that the people in Linhe Village died when the Old World was destroyed?” Long Yuehong muttered to himself in confusion. “But if they died, where did the corpses go?” Shang Jianyao smiled when he heard this. He suppressed his voice and said, “They became zombies... They’re hiding somewhere, looking at your neck...”

Although Long Yuehong knew that this fellow was telling a ghost story, he didn’t dare deny the possibility after experiencing so many abnormalities.

Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment before saying, “Continue searching and see if there are any clues.”

They slowly walked forward. From time to time, they would open a door and enter to conduct an inspection.

The situation in these houses was rather similar. They existed in normal day-to-day living before suddenly freezing in time. Therefore, the Old Task Force saw cutlery on some families' tables. The food had long rotted and evaporated, leaving only some bones and stains. Some families' mops were lying in the middle of the living room as if they had only completed half the work...

This was increasingly similar to Jiang Baimian's guess.

When the Old World was destroyed, the people here instantly died no matter what they did. But the problem was that their corpses were gone. "How is it?" Shang Jianyao looked at Long Yuehong and smiled. "A real ghost story."

"There must be a reason behind this," Long Yuehong replied stubbornly. "That's right. The reason for that is that the corpses were reanimated..." Shang Jianyao deliberately made his voice sound creepy. Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and looked not far ahead. "According to my knowledge of folklore, that should be the village's ancestral hall. We might discover something interesting if we go over and take a look."

For example, a tablet with Du Shaochong's name written on it.

"Alright." Bai Chen didn't want to listen to Shang Jianyao tell a ghost story here.

The Old Task Force continued forward, circled around a house, and arrived at Linhe Village's ancestral hall.

This ancestral hall had the style of the Old World's ancient times, but be it the eaves or arches, they were made of cement.

At this moment, the black wooden door to the ancestral hall was tightly shut.

"Shall I open the door?" Shang Jianyao cracked his knuckles and volunteered, his Berserker assault rifle slung across his chest. Jiang Baimian nodded. "Go. Be careful."

Shang Jianyao excitedly quickened his pace and walked to the ancestral hall's entrance.

He listened for a while before closing his eyes to sense the area for a while. He then put on his gloves and pushed open the door.

After all, Jiang Baimian had told him to be careful.

A creaking sound echoed in the clearing in front of the ancestral hall as the door opened. The situation inside was also gradually revealed to the Old Task Force members.

Long Yuehong raised his binoculars due to the distance.

Bai Chen had undergone the corresponding genetic modification, and Jiang Baimian had very good eyesight. She still relied solely on her eyes.

They soon saw grayish-white grave mounds.

These grave mounds weren't large. They were densely packed in the ancestral hall's impluvium and filled every spot.

"Wow!" Shang Jianyao exclaimed. He turned around and shouted at Jiang Baimian and the others, "This place has become a mass grave!"

Not only was the impluvium filled, but even the side, back, and altar area of the ancestral hall seemed to be filled with mounds.

Jiang Baimian stared at it for a while and muttered to herself, "The missing corpses in the village?"

The dead are buried in the ancestral hall? Long Yuehong was shocked.

"Probably." Bai Chen felt that it was impossible. She then pursed her lips. "But who buried them?"

Survivors? Long Yuehong guessed inwardly.

However, he quickly overturned this possibility. This was because the survivors wouldn't have not taken away the canned food and instant noodles or not exhausted themselves.

Shang Jianyao stuck his head past the ancestral hall's door and sized it up for a while. Only when Jiang Baimian and the others walked to his side did he say with a respectful expression, "Back then, a few people should've survived and buried the entire village's deceased in the ancestral hall."

This was the same as Long Yuehong's guess, but the subsequent development was completely different.

"They also lost the confidence to live. They dug their own grave and buried themselves."

A terrifying and sad development... Long Yuehong muttered.

He didn't retort because this was a possibility.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words and tried to walk into the ancestral hall.

There were only a few places to land her feet between the grayish-white grave mounds. It was rather difficult for the Old Task Force members to enter the hall that worshiped ancestors without stepping on someone's tomb.

This place was still filled with small grave mounds. Only a few places with tablets weren't occupied.

Jiang Baimian looked around carefully and realized that the names here all had the Du surname, but there was no Du Shaochong.

She deliberated and said, "Du Shaochong wasn't dead before the Old World was destroyed, or the news of his death wasn't sent back."

She then looked at the grayish-white grave by her feet and hesitated for a moment. "Let's dig one out and take a look. I keep having the feeling that these tombs are too small. They don't look like they can bury a person unless they are buried vertically." "Alright!" Shang Jianyao volunteered. He led Long Yuehong out of the ancestral hall as if he were singing a nursery rhyme and quickly brought back two shovels.

Before long, they dug up a grave.

The corpse wasn't buried deep. Just a little below, all the bones were piled together.

They had clearly not been buried in a normal manner.

“Chopped up before burying? That saves space.” Shang Jianyao ‘came to a realization.’

Perverse... Long Yuehong only had this thought.

Jiang Baimian shook her head. “These bones were likely picked up for burial. They were buried here after their corpses rotted to bones.”

“Then, who buried them?” Bai Chen frowned.

This definitely wasn't done by the survivors.

Chapter 789: Drawing

From the pile of human bones' distribution and condition in the soil, Long Yuehong was more inclined to believe his team leader's theory of the bones being picked up and buried.

This could indeed rule out the possibility that the survivors had done it. This was because even if the survivors really returned to Linhe Village after so many years, it was impossible for them not to take away useful supplies since they knew how difficult life was.

If they didn't do so, the wilderness nomads who found this place in the future would've done the same.

Then, who buried these villagers in the ancestral hall?

Shang Jianyao held the shovel and slapped his face. “I know who it is!”

“Who?” Although Long Yuehong had never expected to hear a normal answer from this fellow, he couldn’t help but want to hear what ‘strange ideas’ the other party had.

This might give everyone inspiration.

Shang Jianyao replied in all seriousness, “Xiaochong.”

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian and the others to question him, he explained in detail, “Wasn’t Xiaochong staying in Swamp Ruin 1 for many years? He had a group of Heartless under him that often worked for him. It will only take 20 to 30 minutes by car from Swamp Ruin 1.

“Could it be that one day, he suddenly recalled the people in his hometown and recalled that his corpse had already turned cold but had yet to be buried? This didn’t conform to the folk tradition of being buried. Therefore, he sent a large number of Heartless to bring his corpse—which had turned into

bones—over. As they buried him under the old pagoda tree, they collected the remains of Linhe Village’s residents and stuffed them into the ancestral hall?”

What a pure horror story. What do you mean by ‘recalling that his corpse has already turned cold and that he hasn’t been buried...’ Uh, this feels a little comical... Long Yuehong muttered to himself.

He had to admit that the situation Shang Jianyao described was really possible! After all, Xiaochong couldn’t be treated as a normal person. There was a high chance that he was a personality or one of the descended bodies that the Kalendaria, Master Zhuang, had split off. Furthermore, he had the

precedent of slave-driving Heartless. He even made the Superior Heartless work to support his expenses.

With his relationship with Linhe Village, it was a relatively reasonable development for him to remember this place by chance and send his ‘subordinates’ to bury the people from his hometown.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “That’s quite a possibility. Yes, because this is Xiaochong’s hometown, the Heartless are restrained. They didn’t randomly take things and even brought their own rations.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao released his grip on the shovel and applauded himself.

The shovel stood in the soil, motionless.

Bai Chen also nodded slightly. “Indeed. Xiaochong has the motive and ability. His previous residence is very close to here as well.”

Jiang Baimian wanted to take a few steps back and forth, but she gave up on the idea when she saw that there were grave mounds everywhere and that she might accidentally step on the head of ‘someone.’

She deliberated and said, “But there are two problems with that. The first is why are the remains under the old pagoda tree incomplete? The second is why Xiaochong didn’t bury himself in the ancestral hall.”

“Maybe the old pagoda tree has a special meaning to him.” Shang Jianyao had a look that said: “I know Xiaochong very well.”

“What special meaning can there be...” Long Yuehong muttered.

Bai Chen tersely acknowledged it. “There are too many possibilities.”

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up as if he had imagined a contrived romance drama.

Jiang Baimian didn’t give him a chance to perform and nodded slightly. “What if it’s not Xiaochong but the people who buried the last remains in Swamp Ruin 1’s laboratory ruins?”

This clearly didn’t refer to the three Ruin Hunters but the people behind the scenes.

Bai Chen and Long Yuchong began to infer this possibility.

Jiang Baimian continued, “They clearly have a certain level of understanding of Swamp Ruin 1 or Dajiang City. They know where the secret laboratory is, so it’s not too strange for them to know where Linhe Village is.

“Yes, in a particular year after the Old World was destroyed, they brought Du Shaochong’s remains deep into the swamp. They came to Linhe Village and buried it under the old pagoda tree. But for some reason, they separated Du Shaochong’s corpse and only buried half of it

“Heh heh, this reminds me of the evil-warding ritual Hey previously mentioned.

“At the same time, these people gathered the corpses of the Linhe Village villagers and buried them in the Du family’s ancestral hall, perhaps to ward off evil or because they were given instructions by someone.”

Long Yuehong recalled their experiences and made a bold guess. “They only buried half probably because they knew that something abnormal would happen if they buried everything. But before Qiao Chu entered, Swamp Ruin 1 was virtually unknown...”

Jiang Baimian immediately smiled. “Qiao Chu knows this place because he belongs to the Eighth Research Institute. Those people might also have a certain relationship with the Eighth Research Institute.”

She only said that there was a certain connection and didn’t mention that those people might be from the Eighth Research Institute. This was because according to the Eighth Research Institute’s style, they preferred to just blow up the old pagoda tree, Linhe Village, and everything that involved a certain

truth in the Old World than burying corpses.

“But why didn’t those people gather some supplies in passing?” Bai Chen objected.

It would definitely consume a lot of supplies to come here from beyond the swamp. Normal people would replenish some on the spot.

Shang Jianyao suppressed his voice and replied for Jiang Baimian. “Because those supplies are toxic.”

Everyone has a brain. Why did you come up with such a strange answer? Long Yuehong didn't know what to say.

Jiang Baimian laughed. “It's impossible for it to be toxic, but this is Xiaochong's hometown, the hometown of Master Zhuang's body of descent. Just taking something in passing might result in them not sleeping well at night.”

“They dared to take away the other half of the remains.” The honest Shang Jianyao pointed out the problem.

Having an agile thought process, Jiang Baimian quickly replied, “Because they received guidance, they know that nothing will happen as long as the remains aren't complete. Uh, this is limited to the remains.”

After Bai Chen heard that, she nodded thoughtfully. “There are roughly two explanations.”

One was Xiaochong, and the other was the mastermind.

Jiang Baimian looked around and ordered, “Despite the times and the weather, making the chances of there being any traces left extremely low, we still have to make the best use of our time. Yes, let's circle around and search each room simply to see if we can find anything.”

She wanted to search for traces of the buriers.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian added, “This is Xiaochong's hometown. A house here should belong to his grandparents or some other relative. There might be valuable clues hidden inside

As for Xiaochong's home, there was a high chance that he had moved to Dajiang City and later moved to Tai City.

Upon hearing that the main goal was to find the home of Xiaochong's grandparents, Shang Jianyao became excited as if he were playing hide and seek with Xiaochong.

The Old Task Force wandered around the village and entered different houses in search of possible clues.

Unfortunately, decades had passed, and it was common for the elements to strike this area. Many of the traces that should've been there had been wiped away by time.

When it was almost noon, Shang Jianyao—who had been walking in front of the team—pushed open the door to a house.

After entering the room, Jiang Baimian did a simple inspection and frowned. “Something’s not right here.”

“What’s wrong?” Long Yuehong didn’t discover any problems.

Jiang Baimian looked around and said

no words at a glance...”

“Compared to the other houses in the village, there’s much less here. The ancestor-worshipping altar doesn’t have any tablets. The walls, coffee tables, and television cabinets don’t show any family photos or photos of the occupants like many families. Also, there are

She simply picked out several flaws.

The Old Task Force members immediately dispersed. In teams of two, they carefully searched the first and second floors of the house.

They couldn’t find anything to prove the owner’s identity like they did in the other houses in Linhe Village. They weren’t even sure how many people lived here.

After meeting in the living room on the first floor, Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and said, “Any abnormalities or clues just means that this is the home of Xiaochong’s grandparents.”

Jiang Baimian's eyes darted around slightly. "Someone deliberately wiped away Xiaochong's traces and prevented future generations from investigating such matters? That resembles the Eighth Research Institute's way of doing things."

At this point, compared to Xiaochong sending Heartless to bury the villagers, she was increasingly inclined to the guess she had made.

"Looks like it." Long Yuehong and Bai Chen thought so too.

They then left and prepared to head to the surrounding houses.

When they circled to the side, Jiang Baimian and the others saw a drawing on the wall of the building from before.

This drawing was already very blurry from the elements. One could only vaguely tell that it was a sea and a bird. Its style was very childlike.

"A sea, a bird..." Jiang Baimian turned to look at Shang Jianyao.

She remembered that this was the content of Master Zhuang's recent dream.

After leaving Linhe Village, they returned to their campsite.

Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. "I'm going to the Mind Corridor."

"Don't explore Master Zhuang's dream." Jiang Baimian quickly stopped him.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "I'm not; I just want to see if there are any changes there. Then, I'll go to Xiaochong's rift and attempt to wake him up."

"How?" Jiang Baimian asked with a frown.

"How can you be sure that the one woken up will be Xiaochong?" Long Yuehong was inexplicably terrified.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “I plan on playing games by that rift!”

Chapter 790: Happy Send-Off

After hearing Shang Jianyao’s answer, Jiang Baimian asked worriedly, “Are you really just playing games?”

Shang Jianyao replied honestly, “They won’t agree even if I want to crawl over.”

It was the rash one now.

Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief. “Then, conjure a game console, projector, and Xiaochong’s favorite games and play by the rift for a while. Remember, you mustn’t do anything else.”

The Shang Jianyao Democratic Association held a meeting lasting a few minutes in his mind before solemnly making a promise. “No problem.”

He then whispered, “The conjured games are meaningless; they’ve all been played. It’s like watching a replay.”

In this regard, the human brain was indeed inferior to computers. It couldn’t calculate the development of a complicated game in real-time.

Long Yuehong was afraid that this fellow would cause trouble, but he was also afraid that Shang Jianyao wouldn’t get what he wanted after taking an ordinary path. He could only comfort him whilst unsure of the words to say. “It’s fine. Xiaochong can play a game many times.”

“Yes, and I’m more open-minded than him and know many novel ways of playing. I should be able to attract his attention...” Shang Jianyao gradually became smug. He then sat in the backseat of the jeep, leaned back in the chair, massaged his temples, and fell asleep.

In the Sea of Origins, Shang Jianyao eagerly used himself as wings and flew to the rift that represented Xiaochong in midair. He then conjured his laptop and connected it to a projector.

The rash Shang Jianyao and the honest Shang Jianyao moved to Zen Master Redemption's side and became his wings, helping him float in the air.

The Shang Jianyao who liked to goof around, sing, dance, and play games used Zen Master Redemption as a cushion. He looked at the projected scene from the computer and played the game.

This was a role-playing game he liked the most recently. He chose Hunter, and his main characteristic was spewing vulgarities and controlling flames.¹

As he played, Shang Jianyao became obsessed.

suddenly, he vaguely felt a faint glow flash through the rift beside him.

Shang Jianyao—who valued relationships—quickly turned his head and shouted through the rift, “Xiaochong! Xiaochong, is that you?!”

It was dead silent. Nobody replied, and there was nothing abnormal.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin, retracted his gaze, and played the game again. He kept staring at the frozen, deep rift from the corner of his eye, but he didn't see anything else.

Could it have been an illusion? The rash Shang Jianyao that acted as a wing couldn't help but ask.

Meanwhile, the honest Shang Jianyao on the other side said, “This happens after playing games for extended periods.”

After an intense discussion, the Shang Jianyaos waited for a while, but nothing happened.

Considering the mental expenditure, they didn't persist and left the Sea of Origins.

In the Mind Corridor, Lawton—who had failed to fully explore 131—returned to the door of this room.

He had carefully ruminated over his previous encounter several times recently and discovered many problems. The most obvious one was that, normally speaking, an Awakened entering a certain psychological trauma was equivalent to acting as the room owner and reliving their previous fear.

In other words, it was unlikely that the Awakened who explored this room would encounter the room owner's original form in the corresponding psychological trauma. However, the doctors, nurses, stretchers, bandages, syringes, and walls in 131 seemed to originate from the room owner.

This was contradictory to the experience of the Mind Corridor Awakened Lawton knew.

After some thought and inquiries, Lawton had a rough guess. Excluding the possibility that the room belonged to a Kalendaria and had a strange and varied corresponding psychological trauma that didn't conform to the norm, the only remaining possibility was that the room owner had mental illnesses

like a split personality or delusional disorder.

An ordinary Awakened's subconscious was stable and predictable. Therefore, the corresponding psychological trauma was the same. However, Awakened with personality dissociation, delusional disorder, and other mental disorders had their subconscious equally fractured, filling them with unknown

variability. Just like in the microscopic world, they were uncertain.

Therefore, after entering such a room, it was very likely that they would only act as one of the personalities, so one had to face the challenge of other personalities or imagined 'me.'

Such a psychological trauma will indeed be even more troublesome. Lawton looked at 131's vermilion door and muttered to himself, "If it's really a split personality, the other personalities might bring other memories with them, Other fears or even some dreams might form a mixed psychological trauma.

To clear it, one has to be prepared to deal with complicated situations."

To Lawton, the difficulty of such a psychological trauma wasn't danger but chaos. He couldn't resolve it by using a mature plan; it might take a lot of time.

Of course, not being dangerous was only relative. Lawton knew very well that if he wasn't careful enough and something went wrong, there was a high chance that he would be infected with the corresponding mental illness.

A mental illness wasn't that easy to treat!

After weighing the pros and cons, Lawton decided to give it a few more tries.

Since he had never really ventured deep into the first psychological trauma in Room 131 and couldn't determine if there was any familiarity coming from a New World's door, he couldn't give up easily.

2

The wrinkled Lawton—whose lips were slightly dark—turned the brass handle and opened Room 131. After quickly going through the formulated plan, he took two steps forward.

He came to the hospital's white corridor again.

The doors on both sides were tightly shut, and the end was dark and gloomy.

Lawton quickly conjured a pocket watch and waved it in front of him.

Before entering the Mind Corridor, he got another elder in End Year City to 'hypnotize' him and make him believe that he had already abandoned his body to become an existence similar to a mechanical monk.

The signal to start the Hypnosis was the pocket watch's monotonous swinging.

Soon, Lawton's face emitted a metallic glow. His body quickly recombined and transformed into an iron-black robot.

He put away his pocket watch and looked down at his body before speaking in a synthetic voice. “I’m an Eternal. Eternals aren’t afraid of physiological diseases, and mental diseases aren’t directly infectious. Hahahaha.”

Lawton strode toward the end of the hospital corridor.

The rooms on both sides opened at the same time, and figures covered in white bedsheets rushed out.

They fell one after another, and Lawton didn’t feel sick at all.

Before long, the doctors, nurses, stretchers, and syringes appeared at the end of the corridor. The walls on both sides also grew eyebrows.

Lawton remained motionless and fearless. He was an Eternal that couldn’t be pricked by a needle or be drugged. He was someone that doctors couldn’t defeat.

Just like that, he forcefully cleared this mentally chaotic scene as if he could steamroll anyone.

His arms and calves had a few doctors and nurses hanging on or being dragged along, but this didn’t stop him from advancing.

These doctors and nurses didn’t release their hands even though their hearts had stopped beating.

Finally, Lawton came to the end of the hospital corridor.

There was a door here—a white door.

Lawton deliberated for a moment and observed his surroundings. With the excuse that he was an Eternal, he stretched out his metal right palm, gripped the handle, and gently twisted it.

The white door slowly opened, revealing a gap.

The gap was dark, and a female figure could be vaguely seen looking out from the darkness.

With a loud bang, Lawton's mind was enveloped by immense fear. This came without reason as if it rose out of instinct.

I'm dead... This was the only thought that flashed through Lawton's mind before he fainted. He didn't even have the time to think of hoping that the other Elders in End Year City would come to this room to save him.

Being unconscious or dead in another person's psychological trauma often meant being completely trapped and becoming a vegetable in reality.

After an unknown period of time, Lawton suddenly found his thoughts and slowly opened his eyes.

He saw a surgical lamp, a doctor, and many nurses.

They were all wearing light-blue masks as they looked down at Lawton and spoke at once. "You're awake."

"The surgery was very successful."

"You've already recovered. You can go home now."

Recovered... Go home... Lawton was confused at first, but he suddenly sat up and sized himself up.

He was still an Eternal and had steel bones. But unlike before he fainted, his paint job had been changed to a rainbow color. A small speaker was embedded in his chest.

After a moment of silence, Lawton probed the doctor and nurses. "Can I go now?"

According to his general knowledge, fainting in another person's psychological trauma was equivalent to suffering serious damage. After being locked in a heavily guarded mental prison, it was unknown if one could still wake up, much less leave the corresponding room.

"You can be discharged." The doctor in the light-blue mask reached out to shake his hand. "You've progressed a third this time. Continue working hard next time."¹

Although Lawton was confused, he knew that an opportunity couldn't be missed. He immediately got off the bed and walked out of the operating theater.

In the white corridor, doctors and nurses sang and danced as they shouted, "Congratulations on being discharged!"

"Get well!"

"Remember to send us flowers to show your appreciation!"

Lawton walked back to the starting point in a daze, opened the door, and left Room 131.

Even when he stood in the Mind Corridor, he still suspected that he was dreaming.

Why did the originally dangerous development turn into a happy send-off? The more Lawton thought about it, the more he felt like his mind had been corrupted...