

Embers Ad Infinitum #Chapter 81: Meeting Again - Read

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On a street not far from the City Intelligence Network Control Center, Jingfa—who was wearing a yellow monk robe and a red kasaya—was monitoring the surroundings, searching for the source of the previous explosion.

The building with a sizable courtyard suddenly lit up ring after ring, emitting a bright, yellow glow.

In the dark and silent city ruin, it was like a lighthouse that illuminated an eternal dream.

Jingfa turned his head and glanced at the building before rushing over with large strides.

...

The moment the lights lit up, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Jiang Baimian instinctively closed their eyes to adapt to the sudden change in brightness.

Only Shang Jianyao tried his best to keep his eyes open, and he almost shed tears from the stimulation.

Jiang Baimian opened her eyes and nodded in praise when she saw this. “You’re very vigilant.”

“Because I don’t have sunglasses.” Shang Jianyao finally blinked.

Jiang Baimian couldn’t follow his train of thought and could only sigh. “I feel like I’m back in the company now...”

Back at Pangu Biology, they also lived in a building that relied on lights to illuminate everything. There were also spacious elevator lobbies.

The only difference was that this hall was spacious and empty. It was similar to the Rec Center in Pangu Biology. Furthermore, it was paved with seemingly extravagant black stone tiles. It also had a transparent and dreamy chandelier hanging from above.

“Is that so?” Long Yuehong—who was at the stairwell—didn’t dare turn his head as he guarded against the possibility of Qiao Chu coming up from the stairs.

“It’s brighter than the company,” Shang Jianyao described simply.

Jiang Baimian smiled at first before she frowned. “On such a dark night, there’s only one brightly lit building in such a city ruin. Won’t it be very eye-catching?”

Bai Chen—who was aiming at the three elevators opposite her—understood Jiang Baimian’s meaning and thoughtfully asked, “Team Leader, are you worried that Jingfa and the other Ruin Hunters will come over because of this?”

“You don’t have to worry about ordinary Ruin Hunters. You said that they would take the initiative to stay away from anything abnormal.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly.

“However, we already know that Jingfa is here. He has a special body, and his abilities embolden him. It’s very likely that he will be attracted here. He also hates women. Also, there’s a high chance that the Hyena bandits have entered this ruin. They like to circle around anomalies and wait for an opportunity.”

Shang Jianyao said thoughtfully, “This will depend on whose name sucks more, Qiao Chu or them.”

“Are you trying to say who’s more unlucky?” Jiang Baimian chuckled. “You sure have confidence in our Old Task Force. What if it’s the worst-case scenario? If they appear at the same time, we’ll be attacked from both sides—front and back.”

After spending so many days together, she had already figured out the relationship between a sucky name and a bad fate.

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, “How does Jingfa determine if someone’s female?”

“He’s already an Eternal. He definitely doesn’t rely on organs like a nose or eyes. Instead, he comes to a comprehensive judgment obtained by analyzing every aspect,” replied Jiang Baimian subconsciously. “Do you want to pretend to be a woman and lure him away before taking off your disguise? Haha, I find it a little difficult.”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “I’m just wondering what will happen if Jingfa encounters Qiao Chu.”

Jiang Baimian muttered in enlightenment, “Jingfa doesn’t hate women; he hates everyone who can trigger his lust and strike at his weakness. He can no longer relieve his corresponding desires. Qiao Chu’s Bewitchment seems to be indiscriminate. Not only is it useful against women, but it’s also very effective on men. Even animals are no exception.

“Once Jingfa encounters Qiao Chu, he will definitely be instantly bewitched. His mind has been warped for years, so he will only have one reaction: Rape the target that gives him a good impression and desires and let him die a tragic death...”

Jiang Baimian's whisper was loud enough for everyone present to hear. Bai Chen nodded indiscernibly and said expressionlessly, "I'm a little looking forward to Jingfa meeting Qiao Chu now..."

"You're so naughty." Jiang Baimian laughed. She then restrained her smile and instructed seriously, "In short, you have to mind your surroundings while waiting for Qiao Chu to come up. You can't let down your guard, and you have to be prepared for dangerous creatures to intrude at any moment."

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian stood up and opened the window deep in the elevator lobby. Outside was an overgrown garden.

"If Jingfa comes in from the front door, I'll use the grenade launcher to hold him back for a while. As I do that, take the opportunity to leave through the window. Our current firepower is insufficient to deal with a mechanical monk that is also an Awakened. This is something we have to admit. We can't risk our lives."

Jiang Baimian returned to her previous position, leaned against the wall, and squatted down. "Alright, Qiao Chu is about to come up. It will definitely be faster for him to go from the underground engine room to the elevator lobby than from the stairwell to the underground engine room."

At least they were already familiar with the route.

Just as Jiang Baimian said that, she frowned again. "Can you determine how large the influence range of Qiao Chu's Depression ability is? I remember that it can affect multiple targets. We can't just consider Bewitchment and ignore his other Awakened abilities."

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, "Such abilities should be weakened by obstacles like walls and metal doors."

Jiang Baimian quickly said, "But we can't be sure that it won't affect us after it's weakened. If Bai Chen is affected even from her position, how are we to snipe Qiao Chu? When the time comes, everyone will want to give up because of depression. We'll be in our spots waiting for death."

Before she could finish her sentence, she had already stood up. "We lack key information. This operation is suspended."

"Shall we go to the roof to snipe?" Bai Chen suggested.

Jiang Baimian quickly asked, "How confident are you of sniping a target wearing a military exoskeleton? Only one of our guns has sniping abilities."

Bai Chen did not put on a brave front. Her expression darkened slightly as she said, "I'm not confident."

"Then, retreat immediately and find an opportunity later," Jiang Baimian ordered.

"Yes, Team Leader!" Shang Jianyao and the others didn't say anything else to avoid wasting precious time.

While observing the surroundings, Jiang Baimian muttered to herself in frustration, "Why is my train of thought affected to a certain extent despite escaping Qiao Chu? I'm not as logical as normal. I always seem to ignore some problems..."

At this moment, Xiaochong—who was carrying a red school bag—returned to the elevator lobby. He looked up in disappointment and asked, "You're not playing anymore?"

"Next time." Jiang Baimian pointed at the window. "Walk from here to avoid colliding with the people coming in from the front door. Shang Jianyao, carry Xiaochong and take point. Quick, someone's coming."

As she spoke, Jiang Baimian picked up the grenade launcher with one hand and aimed it at the main entrance.

Shang Jianyao picked up Xiaochong and ran two steps before jumping up and passing through the window to land outside.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen climbed out of the window one after another.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian had already seen Jingfa, who was in a yellow monk robe and a red kasaya.

Jingfa ran over with bloodshot eyes when he heard the woman's voice.

Jiang Baimian didn't hesitate to pull the trigger and fire a grenade.

Boom!

Flames rose from the main entrance as fragments flew everywhere. Jingfa subconsciously dodged.

Jiang Baimian seized the opportunity to run to the window and rush out with a leap.

In just a second or two, the mechanical monk—Jingfa—smashed through the glass wall in the main entrance area. With a crashing sound, he ran in from the side.

He was just about to fire a grenade at the window when his head suddenly spun half a circle as he looked at one of the elevators. He then ran over crazily, his eyes bloodshot.

The elevator quickly stopped on the first floor, and it slowly opened its hoistway door and gate.

Jingfa raised his arms and aimed all his offensive weapons at the interior. However, there was only a cold, grayish-black metal wall inside. There was no one inside the elevator.

The elevator door closed while Jingfa was dazed, and the elevator continued its ascent.

On the top of this elevator, in the dark shaft, Qiao Chu—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—quietly stood near the main steel wire rope.

He looked down, his lips tightly pursed.

In the elevator lobby on the first floor, Jingfa finally reacted. He seemed to understand something and crazily pressed buttons, attempting to summon another elevator.

...

In the courtyard behind the City Intelligence Network Control Center.

Jiang Baimian bent her back and quickly walked where the light in the building couldn't reach. She quickly followed Bai Chen and the others according to the electric signals.

Shang Jianyao half-squatted in a corner and said in a deep voice, "Xiaochong disappeared."

"Where did he go?" Jiang Baimian asked with a suppressed voice.

Shang Jianyao gave a brief explanation. "When we got here, I put him down. He said he wanted to pee. He rushed behind the trees and then disappeared."

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment before speaking with a solemn expression. "It's a little strange. Let's leave this place as soon as possible."

Shang Jianyao and the others immediately replied by using actions in place of words.

Under Jiang Baimian's lead, they went straight to the side, attempting to climb over the fence and circle back.

They traversed the trees and flowers, getting closer and closer to their target.

At this moment, a desolate, hoarse roar sounded not far away. This roar was even louder than before as if it directly sounded in their ears.

Jiang Baimian and the others' minds instantly turned blank. Their hearts seemed to be gripped by intense, familiar fear, preventing them from beating.

After an unknown period of time, they suddenly heard a gentle voice. "Don't be afraid. Stay calm."

Shang Jianyao and the others trembled slightly before finally waking up. They felt their fear receding like the tide.

They then looked in the direction of the sound and saw a person squatting in the fence's shadows.

This person wore a loose black robe and had long hair draped over his shoulders. He had a very elegant beard, and his expression was gentle but a little solemn.

Shang Jianyao and company knew this person. They had previously met him in the wilderness—he was Du Heng, the man who called himself an antiquarian and historian.

Chapter 82: Eager to Assume the Role of Teacher

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and the others look over, Du Heng pointed at the tree shadows in front of him and said gently, "Don't move yet. Wait for this anomaly to pass."

Roars undulated through the city ruin at this moment, with no signs of subsiding.

Jiang Baimian stared at Du Heng for a few seconds before nodding at Long Yuehong and the others.

Before she could move over, Shang Jianyao had already jumped to Du Heng's side and squatted down very naturally.

This scene was inexplicably familiar to Long Yuehong. He felt as if he had returned to Pangu Biology. During dinnertime, people would often squat and chat at the Rec Center's entrance.

Jiang Baimian was originally a little hesitant, but she didn't mind. She squatted at the side and looked around before sincerely saying, "Thank you for saving us just now."

Du Heng chuckled and replied, "It can't be considered saving you. I just restored you to normal in advance. As long as you aren't attacked before the anomaly subsides, you will recover sooner or later."

“This definitely counts as saving us.” Jiang Baimian pretended to sigh casually. “You’re actually completely unaffected by that fear.”

At this moment, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong squatted in the shadows. They held their weapons, vigilant of the different directions.

Upon hearing Jiang Baimian sigh, Du Heng laughed. “I’m an antiquarian and historian who spends most of my time alone. How can I survive until now without something to rely on?”

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, “Are you actually an Awakened?”

Du Heng glanced at him and smiled casually. “Strictly speaking, yes.”

“Then, what should we do after entering the Sea of Origins?” Shang Jianyao was very direct, having no qualms about the situation.

Du Heng smiled. “Under normal circumstances, no Awakened will share such knowledge with others unless they have a relatively good relationship. Isn’t this training an opponent for themselves and their friends? However, heh heh, I’ve always had a bad habit: The trouble with people is that they are too eager to assume the role of teacher.

“Alright, I’ll give a simple explanation. Upon entering the Sea of Origins, you will encounter all kinds of ‘islands. Each island will provide you with rest. On these ‘islands,’ you will have to face and overcome different monsters and different adverse situations. They often correspond to the fear lurking in your heart or a certain memory from the past.”

At this point, Du Heng explained from the beginning. “According to my personal experience and guesses—it’s a personal guess, so it doesn’t mean it’s right—an Awakened’s strength comes from their mind and consciousness. The so-called Star Cluster Hall and Sea of Origins are only a manifestation of one’s subconscious.

“As we advance, we are essentially excavating our inner strength. This requires us to overcome the various traumas in our hearts.”

Shang Jianyao politely waited for Du Heng to finish explaining before asking, “Why does every Awakened see the same Star Cluster Hall?”

Du Heng’s face seemed to frown as he smiled bitterly. “That’s gonna stump me. I really can’t explain it. However, I’ve heard some theories. The first theory is that a similar scene is hidden in our subconscious. It’s a collective memory of humans—the experiences of their shared ancestors from an era older than the Old World.

“The second possibility is that the Awakened are the deities’ apostles or people who have received the gods’ favor. The 13 Kalendarium jointly created places like the Star

Cluster Hall to help their Blessed grow until they can enter the New World. On this point, an Awakened's abilities can be roughly divided into 13 categories, corresponding to the different Kalendarium's domains. This produces certain associations.

"Therefore, the proportion of Awakened that believe in the Kalendarium in those religions is higher than that of other groups. Of course, it won't be too high either. The number of Awakened remains limited."

Jiang Baimian listened very seriously and nodded slightly. "Maybe it's because many Awakened believe their abilities are bestowed by the gods and have taken the initiative to join the different religions that the corresponding proportion is higher."

It wasn't that the Kalendarium favored their believers that resulted in an increased chance of their powers awakening.

"Without any investigations or experiments, I can't give you a definite answer." Du Heng sighed and said, "Unfortunately, the Old World has been destroyed for nearly 70 years, and a large-scale war had lasted for nearly 20 to 30 years sometime after that."

"This has resulted in many things becoming impossible to investigate. Otherwise, we could've taken our time to search for the origins of Kalendarium faith. We could have looked at their domains and authorities and see if certain Awakened deliberately added the corresponding content during the proselytization process, allowing them to evolve into what they are now. Or maybe these things have never changed in the beginning. Maybe it can even be traced back to before the Old World was destroyed. This is our responsibility as historians."

Jiang Baimian deeply shared the same feelings. "Yes, this is also the source of motivation that drives me forward."

Du Heng didn't say anything else and continued speaking about the topic. "From Star Cluster Hall to the Sea of Origins, one needs to dig deeper and grasp their abilities."

He paused and glanced at Shang Jianyao before smiling. "You are almost done with that step. Otherwise, you wouldn't have asked the question. When you enter the Sea of Origins and overcome all the traumas in your heart, you will have a chance to find, accept, and accommodate yourself. This will allow you to complete your mind."

"This will cause your ability to undergo a qualitative change. Be it the limit of its effects or the range of its effects, they will increase. But the price you have to pay will increase bit by bit during this process, making your problem worse. As the saying goes, there's no free lunch."

At this point, Du Heng kindly reminded Shang Jianyao, "For every Awakened, the price they pay needs to be kept confidential. On the one hand, the price itself is a weakness that can easily be used and targeted. On the other hand, different prices will vaguely

reflect the different domains. This will allow those familiar with you to have a preliminary guess regarding your abilities. In a battle between Awakened, it is very dangerous for someone to know your abilities in advance.”

Shang Jianyao quietly listened and nodded seriously. “Thank you.”

Jiang Baimian glanced at Shang Jianyao and smiled. “I thought you would clap.”

At this moment, their surroundings were very quiet. It seemed like it was really as Du Heng had said. As long as they didn’t move or stand in an eye-catching spot, they wouldn’t be targeted by the ‘anomaly.’

“Thank you is an improved version of clapping,” Shang Jianyao explained sincerely.

Du Heng laughed silently. “After finding yourself, you’ll be able to cross the Sea of Origins. When the time comes, you’ll enter the Mind Corridor. Alright, I’ve already said so much. Shouldn’t you reciprocate by giving me some information?”

Shang Jianyao didn’t answer directly and turned to look at Jiang Baimian.

“What do you want to know?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Du Heng looked around and took out a yellow photo. “Have you seen this child? His name is Xiaochong.”

The boy in the photo had a chubby face, and he was wearing a monster costume. He looked very cute. He was none other than Xiaochong, whom Shang Jianyao and the others had just encountered!

Xiaochong... Long Yuehong felt his scalp tingle when he heard that name. He didn’t expect Du Heng to enter the city ruin to find someone. Furthermore, he was looking for the abnormally strange boy, Xiaochong!

Jiang Baimian couldn’t help but purse her lips. She turned her head and pointed at the spot from before. “We encountered him near the underground engine room. He came out with us and said that he was looking for someone to play games with him. But after we came out, he used the excuse of urinating and disappeared.”

Du Heng slightly nodded with a solemn expression. “Is that so...”

“Why are you looking for Xiaochong?” Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze from the previous spot.

Du Heng chuckled. “This involves a lot of important information. You definitely won’t be able to pay me with the equivalent right now. We’ll transact when we have the chance to meet again in the future and when you guys have other key information or clues.”

Upon seeing that Du Heng was clearly unwilling to say anything else, Jiang Baimian said to Shang Jianyao, "What else do you want to ask?"

Du Heng interrupted Shang Jianyao and said, "About the Mind Corridor, let's talk about it after you actually enter it. You won't understand it even if I explain it to you now."

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and asked, "Have you heard of the Eighth Research Institute?"

Du Heng was a little surprised. "Did you guys encounter its commissioner?"

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian and the others nod, he thoughtfully said, "The Eighth Research Institute is a very mysterious organization. They basically don't have any contact with other factions and seem to be self-sufficient. They only occasionally use smugglers to obtain special items. However, their commissioners often appear in the Ashlands. It's unknown what missions they are executing."

At this point, Du Heng paused. "Everyone believes that this organization is a remnant of the Old World. Some people feel that they are gathering all kinds of information to establish a new world. Others suspect that they are destroying clues and burying the real reason for the Old World's destruction."

"That's all I know."

After Shang Jianyao heard that, he suddenly asked, "Which Kalendaria has the Bewitchment ability in 'Their' domain?"

"Your train of thought is very jumpy," Du Heng joked and replied thoughtfully, "It should be Monitor, who's in charge of May."

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao and the others to speak, Du Heng spoke first. "It's my turn to ask, right?"

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao nodded 'obediently.'

"Which large faction are you from?" Du Heng asked confidently.

Jiang Baimian frankly replied, "Pangu Biology."

"Pangu Biology... I encountered your project team in the icy plain, where they were recruiting a team of volunteers. They were doing experiments on human bodies and minds in a cold environment. The way those people were frozen. Tsk, tsk. That was a little tragic."

Jiang Baimian blushed with shame. "At least they had enough to eat."

“That’s true.” Du Heng nodded.

He was just about to continue asking questions when he suddenly saw the buildings around him light up ring after ring.

At least half of the city ruin’s buildings simultaneously emitted light to various levels, lighting up one window after another.

The darkness and silence that enveloped the area quickly subsided to the city ruin’s edges.

All the electricity in the city was restored.

This was the first time Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and the others had seen such a scene. It was as if they had witnessed the galaxy mentioned in their textbooks being moved to the surface.

To Jiang Baimian, the scene in front of her shocked her the same way as when she first saw the real starry sky, the real blue sky, and the real sun.

Du Heng admired the scene for two seconds before standing up and saying to Shang Jianyao and the others, “The anomaly has subsided. You can climb over the wall and leave from here.”

Chapter 83: A Lit Up City

City Intelligence Network Control Center, 17th floor.

Qiao Chu—who was wearing the exoskeleton and carrying a silver rifle on his back—returned to the elevator lobby.

He was just about to press the button so that the elevator—which had previously stopped on the 16th floor—would go up when he saw the number representing the elevator beside him jump from 16 to 17.

This meant that the elevator’s door would open in two to three seconds, and the person inside was most likely a friend, not an enemy.

Qiao Chu didn’t hesitate. Ripples—which seemed real and illusory—spread out from his golden eyes, which were blocked by the goggles.

Almost at the same time, he saw countless figures around him.

These figures were slightly illusory as they surged to the potted plants in the elevator lobby and crazily ate yellow leaves, shriveled branches, and dry soil.

Qiao Chu did not feel any physical hunger, but he seemed to be influenced by this scene. He couldn't help but believe that he was starving and was in dire need to eat something. Such thoughts filled his mind, preventing him from thinking about anything else.

Hungry Ghost Realm!

Qiao Chu's hands—which were covered in black metal bones—immediately reached into a pocket. Qiao Chu took out a bag of dried beef and tore it open forcefully. He then crazily stuffed the black beef jerky into his mouth in an attempt to swallow it.

However, the beef jerky was as hard as stone. It was impossible to swallow it without using saliva to moisten it or using his teeth to tear and grind the meat up.

Qiao Chu undoubtedly choked. He even felt that he would choke to death here and become the research institute's commissioner who died the most ridiculous death.

Qiao Chu managed to resist the starving self-awareness to a certain extent because of his survival instincts and the fact that food had already entered his mouth. This allowed him to divert his attention to start chewing.

At this moment, the grayish-black metal door to the elevator beside Qiao Chu opened. A black robot—wearing a tattered monk robe and a red kasaya—jumped out.

The red light in Jingfa's artificial eye lit up as if it dyed the world red.

Jingfa looked at Qiao Chu—who was wearing a military exoskeleton. He did not raise his arms directly and use the grenade launcher, laser weapon, and flamethrower. Instead, he took a large step forward and jumped over, prepared to knock the other party out with a literal iron fist.

As Qiao Chu couldn't stop biting, chewing, and swallowing the beef jerky, he barely managed to shrink his body and roll to the side with difficulty. This barely allowed him to dodge the mechanical monk's punch.

During this process, Qiao Chu followed the strong urge to search for food and reached into his pocket with his right hand. Not only did he take out an energy bar this time, but he also took out a stack of poker cards.

At this moment, Qiao Chu had already swallowed the beef jerky until his eyes rolled back, leaving behind tears. But this also eased his hunger a little. Qiao Chu now had the strength to throw the stack of poker cards to the ground.

Pa!

With the sound of the poker cards falling to the ground, Qiao Chu rolled to a spot near the stairwell. Qiao Chu's eyes reflected Jingfa—who had quickly turned to pounce at him again with brightly shining red eyes.

“Go... play... cards...” As Qiao Chu swallowed the beef jerky and energy bar, he spoke three words in a very indistinct manner.

Jingfa—who had just pounced at Qiao Chu—was stunned. The mechanical monk's head spun half a circle as he looked at the poker cards on the ground.

The red glow in his eyes flickered as his feet uncontrollably walked over. Jingfa bent down and picked up the cards. At this moment, nothing seemed more important to him than playing cards.

Even if his companions needed help or if danger was close, he had to play a game of cards first.

When Jingfa picked up the poker cards, Qiao Chu's hunger vanished instantly. He returned to normal, but he still choked a little. He could completely imagine what he had become under the metal helmet.

As Qiao Chu was still desperately swallowing food to prevent himself from choking to death, his face distorted, and his eyes rolled back slightly. His tears and mucus flowed freely, and there was nothing about him that could be called handsome.

This infuriated Qiao Chu greatly. He diverted his attention to raise his arm, prepared to use the grenade launcher and the electromagnetic weapon simultaneously to attack Jingfa.

At that moment, Jingfa had already turned around and spoke in his unique, cold electronic voice. “Let's play cards together.”

The price Jingfa paid was so high it made his mental distortions so serious that he didn't just play cards quietly and attentively. Instead, he decided to combine the two 'hobbies' into one and get Qiao Chu to join him!

As the mechanical monk spoke, Qiao Chu saw countless blurry figures again. He strongly believed that he was very hungry and needed to eat something.

Fortunately, he still had food in his mouth and food that he had yet to finish. This staved off the 'hunger' at the beginning, allowing Qiao Chu to divert his attention to do something else.

Qiao Chu quickly raised his left hand and covered the metal helmet's goggles.

He suddenly became extremely depressed. Even though he felt very hungry, he didn't want to eat or do anything.

No longer choking, Qiao Chu moved his left hand away and looked at the mechanical monk, who was walking to him with the poker cards in hand.

The depression seemed contagious. Jingfa suddenly felt like everything had become meaningless and that everything was just an illusion.

Under this incomprehensible depression, the dark-black mechanical monk seemed to comprehend something. He suddenly sat down cross-legged, pressed his palms together, and muttered, "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. All conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow..."

Qiao Chu immediately relaxed. He exerted strength with his waist and abdomen and relied on the military exoskeleton to jump into the air. White gas spewed out, horizontally propelling him into the stairwell.

After landing, Qiao Chu raised his arm and aimed the grenade launcher at the mechanical monk in the tattered monk robe and red kasaya.

Jingfa continued reciting the scriptures in a low voice as if he had achieved enlightenment.

Qiao Chu looked at the loaded grenade and realized that it was not a highly explosive grenade. He immediately hesitated.

As the designated enemies were Superior Heartless and mutated creatures, not a robot, he didn't change the grenades before taking action.

One or two of such grenades probably couldn't destroy the mechanical monk. This would instead help the other party escape their depression. The electromagnetic weapon similarly shared the same characteristic.

It might not have been too late to replace the grenade launcher on the spot. Qiao Chu couldn't make the already depressed person feel even more depressed or constantly depressed. Once Qiao Chu failed to grasp the moment, the situation would become terrible for him when the mechanic monk's depression ended and didn't dish out another round of control.

After considering for two seconds, Qiao Chu pursed his lips and decided to give up on this opportunity. He ran to the stairs, gripped the handrail, and jumped down, firmly landing on the next floor.

Just like that, Qiao Chu used the exoskeleton's ability to jump down the stairs one floor at a time. He quickly left the 17th floor and went straight to the bottom.

At this moment, Jingfa ended his recital and looked up again. On his black metal face, his mechanical eyes emitted a blood-red glow again.

The next second, Jingfa jumped into the stairwell from his lotus position in a way that exceeded a human's body structure.

He mimicked Qiao Chu's method of descent—press down on the handrails, flip over, and jump down.

...

Upon hearing Du Heng, Jiang Baimian didn't hesitate and turned to Shang Jianyao and the others. "Let's leave immediately."

After giving the instructions, she nodded at Du Heng. "Be careful. Pray we meet again."

Du Heng smiled and said, "When the time comes, I hope you have sufficient important information, intelligence, or data to trade."

He then glanced at Shang Jianyao. "It's not a good thing to work hard to improve your Awakened abilities. The price you have to pay is something that can never be made up for. Consider the pros and cons yourself."

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao's response, Du Heng stood up, bent his waist, and jumped into the trees' shadows, heading toward the spot where Xiaochong had disappeared.

"Let's go." Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze.

Shang Jianyao nodded, straightened his body, and jogged to the back of the team with the Berserker assault rifle.

They soon arrived at the fence by the side.

Long Yuehong—who was in charge of the left—quickly glanced outside the fence. He suddenly met a pair of turbid, bloodshot eyes.

Heartless... Long Yuehong was shocked. He instinctively raised his assault rifle while dodging to the side.

On the street outside, lights flickered on the metal poles' tops, each illuminating an area.

As far as Long Yuehong knew, these were probably Old World street lamps. Currently, at least half of them were still working.

The Heartless stood under a street lamp diagonally in front of the team. He was wrapped in a shriveled blue coat, wore a wide-brimmed hat of the same color, and held a broom and an iron dustpan.

There were some wrinkles on his face, and his skin was very rough. There was no intelligence in his eyes. He only stared blankly at Long Yuehong and the others without any signs of attacking.

This scene surprised Long Yuehong, and he stopped his attempt to pull the trigger.

The Heartless quickly lowered his head and swept away the fallen leaves that had accumulated by the side of the road.

Bai Chen and the others suddenly had some baffling guesses when they saw this scene.

“Let’s head out first.” Jiang Baimian quickly snapped to her senses and quickly flipped over the metal fence.

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Shang Jianyao left the City Intelligence Network Control Center under their companions’ cover and returned to the streets outside.

“He’s sweeping the fallen leaves...” Long Yuehong couldn’t help but look at the Heartless—who had no inclination to ‘hunt.’

Jiang Baimian looked up and opposite her. “Look over there.”

Following the direction of Jiang Baimian’s chin, Shang Jianyao and the others saw a tall building.

At the bottom of the high-rise building were streetside outlets. On each floor, a few glass windows emitted a bright light.

The light seemed to form a halo around them, inexplicably warming Long Yuehong’s heart.

Among them, many figures were moving around behind some of the lower floors’ windows. Some of them seemed to be hugging infants as they paced back and forth by the windows. Some held rags and seriously wiped the glass. Some sat on the sofa by the windows, holding something unknown as they blankly stared at the LCD screen on the wall opposite them...

The figures—which Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others could barely identify—were wearing old and messy clothes. Their actions were stiff, and their gazes were sluggish. They were clearly Heartless.

On the LCD screen that the Heartless was looking at, the scene was colorful. Scenery, people, words, and a square frame were displayed. However, the entire screen remained fixed in place without any changes.

But this didn't stop the Heartless from watching very attentively.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for two seconds before speaking with a complicated tone. "It's these Heartless who regularly 'maintain' this city... Every time the lights are switched on, they will become like normal people..."

Chapter 84: Silhouette of the Old World

Long Yuehong felt enlightened when he heard Jiang Baimian's words, but he also felt like he had fallen into a dream. He couldn't help but look around again. He couldn't connect the Heartless—who were seriously cleaning the fallen leaves and wiping the windows—with the ingrained image in his mind.

It wasn't like the Old Task Force had never encountered the Heartless in this ruin on their way to the City Intelligence Network Control Center. They were the same species as the ones outside. They were fierce, irrational, and filled with aggression. They had strong hunting instincts as if they had degenerated to the point when humans had just escaped their feral state.

Back then, if someone had told Long Yuehong that the Heartless here would sweep the floor, wipe the windows, and maintain the wires, he definitely would've scoffed at them and treated them as a joke.

But this scene was actually happening in front of him now.

At a glance, the distant street lamps stretched endlessly, and figures were everywhere. After the city lit up again, countless Heartless returned to the streets or walked to the windows to do all kinds of things.

The Heartless were no longer fierce, nor did they treat Long Yuehong and the others as prey. They completed their work methodically and seriously, making the entire city appear prosperous—nothing like its former self.

At this moment, Long Yuehong felt like they were in a different world. The two parties lived in harmony, but they couldn't establish a connection.

As Long Yuehong's thoughts raced, he heard Jiang Baimian sigh.

"This is like a silhouette projected from the Old World of the past..."

Shang Jianyao suddenly asked, "Why are they sweeping the ground, wiping the windows, and maintaining the outer walls and streets?"

Long Yuehong subconsciously replied, “Maybe it’s some kind of instinct. This is what they did in the Old World. After they became Heartless, it became instinctual...”

As Long Yuehong spoke, his voice gradually softened until it went silent. He also realized that his explanation didn’t hold any ground. This was because the Old World had been destroyed for nearly 70 years. These Heartless were generations removed from the ones of the past. There were no longer those who had lived and worked in the Old World.

Finally, Long Yuehong forcefully added, “This instinct has been demonstrated and taught by their parents for generations. The mechanic’s descendants are still repairing equipment, and the cleaner’s descendants are still cleaning the streets...”

Jiang Baimian laughed and spoke before Shang Jianyao could reply. “Don’t engrave all kinds of nonsense into one’s genes. This will result in a physical breakdown. It’s indeed possible to teach, but it’s only useful for simple and repetitive jobs.”

Bai Chen remained vigilant of her surroundings and thoughtfully said, “After many generations of reproduction, the Heartless can already learn relatively complicated things? No, even if the current Heartless can master such things, the previous few generations of Heartless wouldn’t have been able to. The corresponding skills should’ve been lost...”

“Maybe someone is teaching them and instilling some ‘instincts’ in them.” Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze and voiced his guess.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen recalled the strange, mysterious boy—Xiaochong—and were momentarily unable to refute Shang Jianyao’s words.

They had all taken several steps across the street during their discussion, hoping to see the figures behind the bright windows more clearly.

A few seconds later, Long Yuehong looked at the Heartless—who were sweeping the streets, pruning the tree branches, and walking elsewhere—and sighed with emotion. “Is this the Old World’s city scene? Is this how people lived and worked back then? Back then, were the lights so bright at night, looking as if the stars were reflected on the ground?”

Jiang Baimian looked up at the building opposite her because of that sentence.

On each floor, more than a third of the windows emitted yellowish or white light. The ‘people’ inside came and went, either wiping the windows, ‘watching’ television, playing with their ‘children,’ or chopping at the chopping board. Although no sounds came out, Jiang Baimian fully found it ‘lively’ and ‘vigorous.’

At this moment, she felt like she had been transported decades back in time, back when the Old World had not been destroyed. She could smell the scent of life.

As Jiang Baimian's gaze kept moving up, her pupils suddenly dilated. She saw a red dot moving on the top of a tall building not far away. This seemed to come from a sniper rifle.

"Dodge forward!" shouted Jiang Baimian as she jumped and rolled to the side of the road before hiding in an open outlet.

With a snap, gravel flew up from the spot she had been standing in.

Thanks to their previous experiences, Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong didn't doubt their team leader's orders at all. They reacted immediately and rushed into the outlets opposite the City Intelligence Network Control Center with different postures.

With two bangs, two more bullets flew from the top of different buildings and burrowed into the ground.

After Jiang Baimian hid in the room with her back against the wall, she took off the walkie-talkie, pressed the button, and anxiously said, "There are snipers on the rooftops in three locations at least. This style of ambushing 'not entering despite coming to the anomaly's source' reminds me of a person—Hyena!"

This was the standard style employed by the Hyena bandits. This did not mean that they were the only ones who liked to use similar methods. However, they were the most famous ones around the area with at least three sniper rifles in their team. They might very well be the only team.

"Isn't that too sinister?" Long Yuehong blurted out a response as he held the walkie-talkie.

The Hyena bandits actually didn't want to explore the anomaly and search for something more valuable. They only wanted to finish off the Ruin Hunters that had withdrawn.

"They're bandits," Jiang Baimian replied in amusement. "Fortunately, they were probably blinded by the changes after the city ruin regained power. Hence, they didn't deal with us immediately."

"But we were also affected by the changes in the city ruin," stated Bai Chen simply.

"It's also possible that we came out after they had just finished climbing more than 20 floors and had yet to catch a breather. Furthermore, there's electricity now. Thus, they can use the elevator now." Shang Jianyao sighed inexplicably. "Unfortunately..."

Long Yuehong had a tacit understanding. “What’s a pity?”

“It’s a pity that I was attracted by the changes in the city ruin. Otherwise, I could’ve danced a Gold Coast hula dance for them first.” Shang Jianyao’s tone revealed a clear sense of regret.

“... I’m looking forward to such a day in the future.” Jiang Baimian held the walkie-talkie and casually said, “The most important question now is how we will escape Hyena’s ambush. They definitely have more than just snipers in place.”

“Hyena and the others have armored vehicles, heavy machine guns, and rocket launchers. After using snipers to control our range of activity, they will send people to sweep the area.” Bai Chen recalled the various pieces of information she had heard and calmly gave the most likely development.

“What should we do?” Although Long Yuehong wasn’t too alarmed, he still felt that they were in danger.

Without the military exoskeleton, it was impossible for them to avoid heavy machine gunfire in such a limited area. Be it their grenade launchers, rifles, or grenades, they could not break through thick armor.

If the military exoskeleton were still here, he could try using the electromagnetic weapon.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before issuing an order through the walkie-talkie. “There’s definitely no sniper in the City Intelligence Network Control Center. Hyena and the others won’t dare to enter that area at all. Therefore, we can head to the entrance by sticking close to the walls. This is their blind spot.

“After finding a spot in advance and waiting for the armored vehicle to arrive, Bai Chen will shoot the machine gunner immediately and temporarily suppress him. If the armored vehicle’s fire control system is intact and the heavy machine gun can be controlled from the inside, I’ll try unleashing Thunder Spear at the firing point. In short, the goal is to create an opportunity for Shang Jianyao to approach.

“Shang Jianyao, go to the bottom of the armored car when the time comes. You will be less than a meter away from the personnel in the vehicle, so you can use your abilities to their fullest. You also don’t have to worry about the sniper threat.”

Jiang Baimian named her electric eel-like biomechanical limb’s attack ‘Thunder Spear.’

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao seemed to have wanted to do so long ago.

Bai Chen also gave an affirmative.

Long Yuehong listened silently, and after two seconds of silence, he asked, "What should I do?"

"Cheer for me," Shang Jianyao said seriously.

Just as Shang Jianyao said that, Jiang Baimian added, "You're in charge of guarding the surroundings. What if it's not just the armored vehicles? I'll give you the grenade launcher later."

Long Yuehong immediately replied loudly, "Yes, Team Leader!"

Jiang Baimian was just about to say something when she suddenly turned her head and sensed something. "Incoming! There's only one vehicle on the street to our right."

She quickly told Shang Jianyao and the others the information and found a pair of metal scissors in the room.

The Old Task Force's four members immediately returned to the entrance and moved along the wall, heading to different spots. During this process, they exchanged a few weapons with each other and prepared themselves for what was to come.

The armored car soon appeared at the street corner.

On one side were three large wheels. The armored vehicle's surface was painted military-green. There was a door on its side and dark bulletproof glass on the front. The armored vehicle was more than twice the size of an ordinary vehicle. An iron-black heavy machine gun was mounted on the top; something that resembled an antenna was also erected.

Long Yuehong only took a glance before the words 'steel,' 'hard,' 'strength,' 'steamroll,' and 'indestructible' surfaced in his mind.

At this moment, a pleasant sound of music quickly approached from the distance and turned into the current street.

The source was a large blue car with large metal cans. The car's headlights were on, and it played music as it sprayed water onto the street. A Heartless in an old, orange-white cotton coat sat in the driver's seat, steering the steering wheel in a slightly stiff manner.

His eyes were blank, and a black, peeling earpiece hung from his head.

This sprinkler—which illuminated the road ahead—drove very quickly, almost colliding with the armored car that came out from the side.

With a creak, the Heartless driver reflexively stepped on the brakes, causing the vehicle to block the way.

The armored car's driver had never encountered such a situation before, so he stopped the vehicle as well.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian's eyes lit up as she shouted, "A chance!"

Amidst the light and melodious sprinkling of water, she took a step forward and pulled back her left arm.

The pair of metal scissors in her hand was immediately 'entangled' by crackling, silver-white electric arcs.

Chapter 85: Battle Power

As the City Intelligence Network Control Center occupied a huge area and was extremely strange, the Hyena bandits did not dare enter. Hence, they were unable to occupy the building's roof. They could only scatter three snipers on the surrounding buildings' rooftops.

This resulted in two snipers not seeing Jiang Baimian once she moved against the wall on the road opposite the City Intelligence Network Control Center.

As for the sniper in charge of monitoring the main entrance, he had little chance of hitting the target due to the distance and poor angle. Even a Chosen One—who had undergone genetic enhancement—had to be extremely talented with firearms and specialized in sniping to have a certain level of confidence.

Besides, the sprinkler car had blocked a portion of the sniper's line of sight.

Due to this, nobody interfered when Jiang Baimian took a step forward and pulled her left arm back.

She swung her arm and threw out the metal scissors.

Countless silver-white electric arcs wrapped around each other, dragging out a bright trajectory. The scissors accurately struck the object—which appeared to be an antenna—on the top of the armored vehicle.

A strong, violent electric current extended outward with a bang, flowing along the 'antenna.' The electric current instantly flowed into the armored vehicle, sweeping through the electronic systems inside.

Some of the vehicle's equipment suffered catastrophic failures due to the power overload. Some emitted black smoke, and some exploded with a bang, significantly affecting the crew inside.

When Shang Jianyao—who was waiting in the nearest building—saw that his team leader's attack was effective, he immediately moved his arms back and forth as he rushed out.

He didn't bring the assault rifle along this time in case it affected his speed and agility.

One step, two steps... Shang Jianyao suddenly pounced forward and burrowed under the armored vehicle like a jumping fish.

After Shang Jianyao stabilized his body and clung onto the chassis, two gunshots sounded from the route he had been running through.

Shang Jianyao immediately released one hand from the chassis and wagged his finger from under the vehicle before laughing. "You guys are too slow..."

As he spoke, his eyes quickly turned dark.

Two to three seconds later, someone pushed open the hatch at the top of the armored vehicle and stood up, attempting to control the heavy machine gun directly.

This person's impulsive action caused him to escape the armored vehicle's protection.

Bang!

Before he could see the scene in front of him clearly, blood bloomed on his forehead. His entire head rapidly swelled as it exploded like fireworks.

Bai Chen—who was squatting at the door of a room—was holding her rifle the entire time, trained at the heavy machine gun.

The armored vehicle's door opened shortly after, and a burly man—carrying a grenade launcher on his back—was about to jump off the armored vehicle and kill the target with his own abilities.

Hiding behind thick armor was a cowardly behavior.

A true warrior had to deliver a shot with every step. He had to kill everything around him and exact vengeance quickly!

With two bangs, more than half of the muscular man's neck was torn off, and blood spewed into the air.

At the same time, one of the grenades wrapped around him was hit.

Rumble!

Continuous explosions sounded as the burly man's charred corpse rained down, scattering everywhere.

In the crimson flames, the man's grenade launcher flew out and shattered into many components.

Shang Jianyao seized the opportunity. He pulled with both hands, flipped his body, and jumped over the muscular man's two remaining legs. He tore through the remaining flames and rolled into the armored vehicle.

There was still one bandit inside. He had a shaved head and looked very fierce.

At this moment, the burly man wanted to raise his arms and fire at the enemy with an automatic rifle, but he couldn't do so. His hands had forgotten their corresponding instincts.

He looked at Shang Jianyao—who was opposite him—and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"I..." The burly man opened his mouth, attempting to beg for mercy.

Shang Jianyao rushed forward and stuffed the Ice Moss pistol into the bald bandit's mouth.

"You can talk about it in the next life," replied Shang Jianyao with a deep gaze. Just as he said that, he squeezed the trigger.

Bang!

A bloodied bullet drilled out of the bald bandit's head and hit his armor's inner wall before ricocheting elsewhere.

Shang Jianyao immediately retracted his pistol and watched the bald bandit's body collapse bit by bit. He could smell the stench of incontinence.

He quickly grabbed the bald bandit's shoulders, pulled him along, and threw the corpse out.

Amidst repeated gunshots, the corpse was sniped.

"Done." Shang Jianyao sat in the driver's seat. He picked up the walkie-talkie and spoke before driving the armored vehicle.

Fortunately, this was not an electric vehicle. Otherwise, it would be unknown if they could still drive it after Jiang Baimian's attack.

Amidst gunshots, the armored vehicle withstood the sniper rounds and turned its big mass around.

It drove straight into the street and stopped in front of the open outlet.

At this angle, the snipers high up were completely helpless against Jiang Baimian and the others.

After Long Yuehong and Bai Chen quickly passed through the armored vehicle's open door and entered, Jiang Baimian quickly jumped into the vehicle.

The sprinkler car was still parked there at this moment. Amidst the melodious music, the car constantly sprayed water at the sides, washing away the blood.

Jiang Baimian looked at the sprinkler car beside her and muttered to herself loudly, "There's no way to go straight. We can either reverse or continue forward and circle around."

"Where are the rest of the Hyena bandits?" Long Yuehong blurted out a question.

After snatching this armored vehicle—which came equipped with a heavy machine gun—Long Yuehong inexplicably felt a little inflated. He felt like he could counterattack and wipe out the bandits who had massacred Blackrat Town.

Jiang Baimian sensed the area and said, "There are also some electric signals approaching; they are from where the armored vehicle came."

"Hyena and the others still have rocket launchers. They might even have anti-tank rounds," reminded Bai Chen.

The Hyena bandits even had thermobaric rounds, so it was definitely possible for them to be equipped with anti-tank grenades, firearms, and bullets.

"Then... forget it." Long Yuehong was instantly shaken.

Jiang Baimian smiled and sat beside the vehicle door. She then said to Shang Jianyao, "Go straight, circle around, and return to the spot where the jeep is parked."

Their supplies were still there.

Shang Jianyao didn't say anything and made the armored vehicle drive along the street.

Along the way, the armored vehicle deviated from its path and knocked away countless abandoned vehicles and wooden tables, forcefully clearing a relatively spacious and empty path.

During this process, the snipers seemed to give up on their efforts and stopped firing. It was obvious that the three snipers didn't bring any anti-tank firearms or bullets. After all, they definitely wouldn't have thought of attacking their team's armored vehicle in the beginning.

The armored vehicle was thick and hard. Even the 'window' could not be shattered by ordinary bullets.

At this moment, on the street where the armored vehicle had come from.

Two SUVs drove over one after another.

'Hyena' Lin Li—who was in the car behind—wore a grayish-green beret and spoke into the walkie-talkie. "They're up ahead. Waiter, give them a taste of an anti-tank rocket."

He learned of the armored vehicle's condition from the snipers high above. He then calmly ordered his subordinate—who was holding a rocket launcher—in the car ahead.

"Yes, Boss." The bandit nicknamed 'Waiter' had already seen the two corpses thrown to the side of the road and the charred pieces scattered on the ground.

He identified with them, and he was also filled with grief and indignation. Thus, the SUV he was in sped up, rushed past the sprinkler car, and turned in the armored vehicle's direction.

At this moment, the armored vehicle had already arrived at an intersection and turned into the left street.

The armored vehicle's back was the last thing the bandits saw.

"Chase after them!" Waiter shouted angrily.

Since the SUV was faster and the armored vehicle had cleared the path of any obstacles, the bandits quickly reached the intersection and turned left.

After chasing for a while, the two SUVs unknowingly escaped the three snipers' range.

After making another turn, Waiter's eyes lit up. He saw the military-green armored vehicle slowly driving not far away.

He carried the rocket launcher, about to stand up and destroy the target through the open sunroof. At this moment, his pupils suddenly dilated.

The armored vehicle's door had opened at some point in time, and a beautiful woman with a ponytail revealed half of her body. She aimed a grenade launcher at them, and she pulled the trigger.

After the grenade was fired, Jiang Baimian raised her right hand and waved it gently.

Boom!

The SUV was hit by the grenade, and a dazzling fireball tumbled out.

Much of the ammunition in the car exploded as a result. This caused the flames to interweave one after another, producing a loud explosion.

Waiter and the driver beside him were vaporized. The SUV's door and windows were missing, leaving behind only a metal frame.

When 'Hyena' Lin Li turned into this street, saw this scene, and heard the explosion, he couldn't help but tremble.

In the fire's light, his face turned pale.

"R-retreat!" Lin Li immediately ordered.

Given its speed and mobility, the SUV definitely wouldn't be caught by the armored vehicle as long as it could leave this street.

This SUV's driver was also shocked. He didn't hesitate to make a sharp U-turn. He then floored the accelerator, prepared to drive back to the other street.

Just as their car turned around and approached the intersection, a blob of blood burst out of 'Hyena' Lin Li's temple.

Splash!

The glass in the passenger seat shattered at the same time.

The driver couldn't be bothered to check the situation. He stepped on the accelerator crazily, allowing the car to leave the danger zone and disappear from the intersection.

At the top of the armored vehicle, Bai Chen—who was hiding behind the heavy machine gun—moved her eyes away from the scope. She then retracted her Orange rifle and sat down.

"How is it?" Long Yuehong asked in concern.

Bai Chen slowly exhaled. "Hyena is dead."

“Then, should we chase after them?” Long Yuehong’s sense of importance inflated again; he wanted to wipe out all the Hyena bandits in one fell swoop.

Jiang Baimian laughed when she heard that. “Do you think the city ruin is the same as the wilderness outside? It’s better not to wander around in such a dangerous and strange city ruin. Besides, we won’t be able to catch up.”

She looked at the tightly shut door and ordered Shang Jianyao, “Go straight, cross two streets, and make a left. We’ll return to the route we took when we came here.”

“Yes, Team Leader!” Shang Jianyao replied loudly.

Through the dark bulletproof glass, Shang Jianyao saw bright street lamps in front of him. He saw Heartless clearing the streets on both sides of the street, unaffected by the explosions.

In the surrounding buildings, light emitted from countless glass windows as figures walked back and forth.

Chapter 86: Reminder

In ‘Hyena’ Lin Li’s SUV, the driver didn’t dare divert his attention to look at his boss until he drove back to where the City Intelligence Network Control Center was located.

His heart sank when he saw the scene behind him, and a chill ran down his spine.
Nôv(el)B\jnn

Lin Li had collapsed in the passenger seat at some point in time. His grayish-green beret was dyed red, and the stench of blood filled the air.

The driver subconsciously slowed the vehicle down and shouted, “Boss...”

Lin Li had zero reaction.

Only then did the driver finally confirm one thing: The boss—who had been in high spirits and casually wiped out a Subhuman settlement—was truly dead.

They were ambushed and killed while dealing with a team of four that didn’t appear to be very powerful. Furthermore, at least six people from his team had died, and nearly half of the core members had been lost.

This made the driver panic. As he controlled the steering wheel, he gulped saliva down his parched throat.

After the sprinkler car with melodious music passed by, he shivered and came to a realization. In any case, we've already gained enough. As long as we can escape the four-man team's pursuit, we can leave this city ruin tomorrow morning.

Although we have lost our boss, the armored vehicle, heavy machine guns, and many members, we still have three cars at least, six to seven people, and a single rocket launcher. Furthermore, we still have sufficient firepower.

After selling the items we obtained this time, we can recruit five to six skilled wilderness nomads. It will then be another capable and powerful team. Although it's definitely incomparable to the past, it's still enough to bully the weak in the Ashlands.

Upon thinking of this, the driver's expression gradually softened, and he even smiled.

As long as he seized the opportunity later and established his authority, he might be able to become the second boss!

If Lin Li could do it, why couldn't he?

The driver's cold heart quickly burned up because of his boss's death. He turned the steering wheel and drove toward the other members.

...

The military-green armored vehicle drove heavily down the street toward the intersection.

With the help of the machine-gun mount and the bulletproof window on the door, Long Yuehong looked at the building to the side and idly counted the number of glass windows that had light coming out from them.

He didn't dare stick his head out, afraid that he would have his skull blown off by a sudden bullet like the other bandits.

"There, look. There's a Heartless there..." Long Yuehong suddenly spoke as he pointed into the air.

Jiang Baimian looked over and saw a figure sitting around a cement pole that propped up electric wires. He was holding tools and repairing the equipment seriously.

This figure was a man in dark clothes, who had a black pistol—which he had picked up from somewhere—at his waist.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and casually asked, "Was he the one who attacked us previously?"

She was referring to the attack they encountered on their way to the City Intelligence Network Control Center with Qiao Chu.

"I'm not sure." Bai Chen shook her head. "Back then, there were too many Heartless."

"That's right. How can you remember the characteristics of so many Heartless in such an emergency?" Long Yuehong echoed.

"Forget it, forget it." Jiang Baimian looked up into the air again. "He really does look like a skilled worker."

Just as she said that, a large car drove over from the intersection ahead.

This car was large. Its entire body was painted a striking red. It had a total of six tires and looked very sturdy.

It drove along the road that was mostly blocked by abandoned vehicles, heading toward the armored vehicle.

"What should we do?" Long Yuehong was a little nervous. This was a situation he had never encountered.

"What else can we do? Do you want to crash into it?" Jiang Baimian glanced at Long Yuehong. "Although armored vehicles aren't afraid of such situations, it will be very dangerous if we damage some components and can't drive it anymore. How dangerous would it be if we have to walk?"

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian's instructions, Shang Jianyao took the initiative to operate the vehicle. He made the armored vehicle turn into an alley diagonally ahead and made way.

"Yo, you're that rational?" Jiang Baimian asked in amusement. "I thought you would take the initiative to slam into it to see who's harder."

Without turning his head, Shang Jianyao replied, "It doesn't deserve it."

"..." Jiang Baimian was speechless.

Just as she was about to find another topic, the red car drove over and sped into the distance.

A male Heartless in thick green clothes and a yellow helmet sat in the driver's seat, holding the steering wheel with a stiff but focused expression.

Frankly speaking, Jiang Baimian wouldn't even be sure that the other party was definitely a Heartless if not for her preconceived notions.

Light scattered from everywhere, making the Old Task Force's four members fall silent.

The armored vehicle returned to the previous street. People occasionally came and went, appearing very lively.

As Jiang Baimian scanned the area, she suddenly saw a familiar figure. It was a green-eyed, blond woman in a grayish-blue robe.

Galoran, whom they had encountered in the wilderness!

"That Daoist priest..." Jiang Baimian muttered and signaled for Shang Jianyao to stop the vehicle. She then opened the door and shouted at Galoran, "Daoist Galoran!"

Galoran—who was strolling along the road—turned her head. When she saw them, she smiled. "Fate has led us to meet again."

"Did you discover anything?" Jiang Baimian didn't waste any time and got straight to the point.

Galoran nodded. "Leave as soon as possible."

"Why?" Jiang Baimian asked.

Galoran looked up at the sky. "A Kalendaria's leftover aura is here."

A Kalendaria's leftover aura... Jiang Baimian and the others repeated these words in their hearts at the same time, recalling the various abnormalities in the city ruin.

"Which Kalendaria is it?" After a few seconds, Shang Jianyao leaned back and held his body horizontal to the door.

Galoran sighed and said, "Master Zhuang."

She then chanted, "The Celestial Worthy of Immeasurable for Blessings."

"Why are you so sure?" inquired Jiang Baimian quickly.

The blond Galoran shook her head. "Leave at dawn."

She didn't say anything else and walked forward.

Jiang Baimian stared at the Daoist priest's back for a few seconds before pushing Shang Jianyao back into the driver's seat. Before closing the door, she said, "Drive; go back to the jeep. We leave this city ruin at dawn."

The armored vehicle continued moving forward in the world of light created by the street lamps and building windows, heading back toward the tunnel.

On the way, they saw a man dazedly repairing a car, a woman constantly using a spatula in an empty pot, a child walking back and forth without doing anything, and Heartless doing all kinds of things.

There weren't many Heartless. Bathed in yellowish or white light, they were like projections that originated from the Old World.

When another large car drove past and pushed many abandoned vehicles to the side of the road, Jiang Baimian silently sighed and smiled. "I finally understand why the middle of the road is still considered empty, allowing our vehicles to pass."

"There might not be many of them to begin with." Bai Chen stared for a while before saying, "If the Heartless from the beginning were like the current Heartless, they would definitely drive their cars away and park them at a suitable place..."

As they spoke, the armored vehicle returned to the street where they had set off from.

On the side of the road were signs with words like 'foot bath,' 'supermarket,' 'barbecue,' 'hot pot,' and 'police.' The words were clearly displayed under the light.

The brownish-yellow stone archway at the entrance to the dormitory district reflected a golden glow, making the remaining words 'Yang' and 'Yuan' appear somewhat noble.

In the seven to eight buildings inside, many windows also emitted different lights, dispelling a portion of the darkness.

After returning to this familiar place and seeing this scene, Jiang Baimian and the others suddenly felt a little warm and secure.

Jiang Baimian slowly retracted her gaze and instructed, "Turn in."

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze, let the armored vehicle pass through the entrance, and entered.

As many roads were narrow, Shang Jianyao casually found a spot close to the jeep and stopped the armored vehicle.

"Are we staying here tonight?" Long Yuehong felt that the armored vehicle gave him a sense of security.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, "If it were anywhere else, such a choice would definitely not be wrong. However, there are many Superior Heartless and powerful mutated

creatures in this city ruin. Their abilities are rather strange, and we might be affected if we aren't careful. It's very difficult to guard against them by simply assigning night duty.

"Such an armored vehicle is too eye-catching. It's very easy to become a hunter's target. When the time comes, not only will the armored vehicles be unable to protect us, but they will also become an iron cage that restricts us."

Long Yuehong was shocked and quickly asked, "What should we do then?"

Jiang Baimian pointed at the building they had previously been in. "Go there and find a room without Heartless to hide in. During night duty, one person will be assigned to monitor the jeep and the armored vehicle. Once any creatures approach, immediately fire. To put it simply, use the jeep and the armored vehicle as bait."

Long Yuehong opened his mouth to praise his team leader, but he realized that it wasn't a good thing.

"Team Leader, he wants to say that you're sinister." Shang Jianyao took the initiative to help.

"I-I didn't!" Long Yuehong denied it.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. "Being sinister is better than being stupid. Also, praise me for being smart and intelligent, understand?"

As they spoke, they alighted from the armored vehicle and took out many cans, biscuits, and energy bars from the jeep's trunk. They then packed them into their respective tactical backpacks.

This way, they wouldn't have to worry about a grenade destroying their food if they really encountered a powerful enemy.

After checking their surroundings, the four of them entered the first building. Under the bright light, they immediately saw a Heartless.

The Heartless was in his prime, and he wore a mess of clothes. His hair was messy and dirty, but it wasn't too long. It didn't reach his shoulder.

At this moment, the Heartless had just opened the door to a silver-black elevator. He was holding a tool and gripping the safety rope.

He looked up and glanced at Jiang Baimian and the others with his turbid eyes. Then, he quietly retracted his gaze and looked down.

Long Yuehong fell silent for a few seconds before blurting out, "He's maintaining and repairing the elevator?"

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. "I think so."

At this moment, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "I've seen him. I saw him coming this way when I was on night duty..."

He paused and added, "Like a beast."

Chapter 87: Something Once Had

After hearing Shang Jianyao's description, Jiang Baimian nodded and didn't say anything.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little heavy and didn't know how to respond.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian looked at the blue LCD screen and said, "Which floor are we going to? The two elevators should be usable."

At this moment, the numbers representing the other two elevators were normal.

"Sixth floor? We've carefully searched through the previous room already. It should be the safest place," Bai Chen suggested.

"Alright." Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and smiled. "Besides, Qiao Chu definitely won't expect us to dare to continue staying there. Even if Qiao Chu returns, we'll catch him off-guard."

As she spoke, she took a few steps forward and pressed the button with her Ice Moss-wielding hand.

The silver-black door to an elevator soon opened, emitting a slightly putrid aura.

Jiang Baimian examined it carefully and walked in first. "Clear."

After Shang Jianyao and the others entered, the elevator door slowly closed and went up steadily.

When they left, they didn't close Unit 605's door but left it ajar.

A white light now shone out from its interior, illuminating the metal door's gap.

Shang Jianyao had just opened the door when Jiang Baimian suddenly stretched out a hand and blocked his path.

"There's someone inside," said Jiang Baimian in a low voice.

“How many?” Shang Jianyao seemed to be asking how many guests there were.

Long Yuehong raised his gun in response, prepared to fire.

Jiang Baimian slowly took a deep breath and glanced at Shang Jianyao. “One.”

“Qiao Chu definitely isn’t as fast as us... The stronger ones should have rushed to the City Intelligence Network Control Center... The weaker ones won’t act alone either...” Bai Chen quickly analyzed the situation. “Either all their companions have died, and they are Ruin Hunters who are searching for a place to hide alone. However, this is too much of a coincidence.

“This city ruin is so large and has so many buildings. How can it be possible that they happened to choose the one we previously stayed in? Or it could be that this apartment’s original owner—a Heartless—came back based on their instincts after the lights were switched on.”

“Yes, my rationality tells me that the probability of the former is equal to zero. But didn’t we happen to encounter many things along the way and ended up here? As humans, we shouldn’t be stubborn. We should be more vigilant.” Jiang Baimian originally wanted to say, “This might be because our luck hasn’t been good recently.” But she was afraid of agitating Long Yuehong, so she forcefully changed her words.

Just as she was about to give the order to change rooms, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, “I want to go in and take a look.”

“Okay...” Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and said, “Let’s take a look. I’m also curious about this apartment’s original owner. Be careful.”

Shang Jianyao nodded and carefully entered Unit 605 with the assault rifle.

This place was almost the same as when they left. But the white tiles and brown floor now reflected the light, giving off an indescribable warmth.

After entering a certain range, Shang Jianyao could sense the person’s location without Jiang Baimian’s reminder.

‘He’ was deep in the corridor, in a small bedroom to the right.

Shang Jianyao walked over step by step and quickly saw that the bedroom door was open. Orange-yellow light seeped out.

On the small bed inside, on the blue bedsheet with many golden stars, lay a person.

She was likely a woman. Her body was slightly hunched, and her face was shriveled. She was covered in wrinkles like a dried orange peel. Her hair was long and messy, completely white.

Upon seeing this woman, Shang Jianyao instantly understood where the strand of white hair he had found on the bedroom pillow came from. At the same time, he recognized the other party. It was a Heartless he had seen during night duty.

The Heartless had already pulled up the messy, curled-up blanket and covered half of her body. She had her hands stretched out at this moment, holding something as she stared at it attentively.

Her sleeves were pink and a little white, looking as if they didn't fit.

Upon sensing Shang Jianyao's approach, the Heartless looked up at him before lowering her head to look at the booklet in her hand.

Shang Jianyao stared at her for a while before gently walking over with the assault rifle in hand.

Jiang Baimian—who was behind Shang Jianyao—wanted to remind him, but she saw Shang Jianyao squatting by the bed and looking at the item in her hand together with the Heartless.

After considering for a second, Jiang Baimian followed him. She leaned over Shang Jianyao's head and looked at the booklet.

With her experience and knowledge, she immediately recognized it as a photo album.

Every page of this photo album was made of transparent plastic. Inside were many colorful photos.

Jiang Baimian saw a little girl first.

The little girl was wearing furry clothes and looked rather cute. She was being hugged by a young woman with a dignified and elegant smile on her face. The girl was crying very sadly.

At this moment, the Heartless flipped through the album and went to the next page.

This also allowed Jiang Baimian to see the back of the photo. The white color there was slightly yellowish. Someone had written a sentence with a black pen: "When Nan Nan was one."

Jiang Baimian seemed to understand something. As the Heartless flipped through the photos, she glanced at the other photos.

In those photos, the little girl gradually grew up. She was either riding a man's shoulder or being held by a man and woman—who appeared in the photos repeatedly. She had also worn a green monster suit with a tail. She had also been in pink, making her skin look fair and tender.

Behind these photos were the same black handwriting.

They wrote: "When Nan Nan was two."

"When Nan Nan was three."

"When Nan Nan was four."

When the photo album was flipped over, the words stopped at "When Nan Nan was seven."

Jiang Baimian silently finished looking at the photos. She looked up and sized up the Heartless lying on the bed again.

The Heartless's body was slightly hunched, and her face was shriveled and wrinkled like a dried orange peel. Her completely white hair was long and messy.

Jiang Baimian closed her eyes and leaned into Shang Jianyao's ear. "Let's not disturb her."

Shang Jianyao nodded, slowly stood up, and retreated to the living room area.

Jiang Baimian wiped her eyes and pointed outside. "Let's go somewhere else."

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had no objections.

Before long, they found a temporary hiding spot on the eighth floor. The layout was identical to Unit 605.

"You can only see the jeep and the armored vehicle through the dining room's windows. Bai Chen, go there and monitor the vehicles." After checking Unit 805, Jiang Baimian looked around and began issuing missions. "Long Yuehong, stay here by the floor-to-ceiling windows and observe the street outside. Shang Jianyao and I will rest for a while. It'll be your turn in an hour."

"Yes, Team Leader!" Bai Chen and Long Yuehong went to the vantage spots with their weapons in hand.

Shang Jianyao didn't rest. He found a spot with a power outlet and sat down. He then took out the palm-sized speaker from his tactical backpack—as well as various small instruments, tools, components, and wires.

“There’s no need to be in such a rush to fix it, right?” Jiang Baimian saw through his intentions.

Shang Jianyao tested the tools one by one with the lamps’ glow as he replied, “This is very important.”

“Why?” Jiang Baimian was slightly stunned.

“Don’t you think you can perform better with music accompanying you at critical moments?” said Shang Jianyao without looking up. “This speaker seems to have its own storage chip. There must be Old World music in it.”

“... I don’t think so.” Jiang Baimian gave up trying to persuade him.

In any case, Jiang Baimian didn’t think she could really rest here. This was because the existence of Superior Heartless and mutated creatures made her worried about a rookie like Long Yuehong.

Jiang Baimian said that she wanted to rest, but she was actually just resting with her eyes closed. She would still divert her attention to sense her surroundings.

In that case, Shang Jianyao could do whatever he wanted.

With a Genetic Enhanced’s physique, Shang Jianyao would still be energetic even if he didn’t sleep for one or two nights.

While Shang Jianyao focused on repairing the speaker, Long Yuehong guarded the outside and looked into the distance.

Although this was only the eighth floor, he could still see the city’s lights spreading out like stars.

Although he had yet to see the starry night, he had at least seen photos and could make the corresponding connections. After staring at it for an unknown period of time, he finally sighed. “How beautiful...”

In addition to its beauty, Long Yuehong felt that such a scene also contained a unique flavor. However, he couldn’t describe it.

After a while, Long Yuehong sincerely said, “Unfortunately, this place is too low. It would definitely be more beautiful if we could look at it from a very high spot.”

Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian stood up and walked to the floor-to-ceiling window. She stared out for a long time before smiling. “Do you want to give it a try at the top of the building? Do it while ‘everyone’ is very polite and while it’s still very quiet.”

“Alright,” replied Long Yuehong immediately.

Jiang Baimian turned around and asked Shang Jianyao and Bai Chen, “Are you guys going?”

“Sure.” Bai Chen knew that this was the time to relax a little.

“I’m almost done.” Shang Jianyao stood up and stuffed the mess back into his tactical backpack. He only held the small speaker with a blue bottom and a black surface. “I wonder if the battery can still be used.”

“Let’s go. Let’s go. We’ll try again when we get back,” Jiang Baimian urged.

They quickly took the elevator to the top floor, then climbed the stairs, opened the door, and entered the rooftop.

Before they approached the rooftop’s edges, they saw the scene around the building.

Lamps covered the surroundings, emitting yellow or white light. Some of them were situated by the side of the road, some came from different buildings, and some were built on high ground. They were like lighthouses that illuminated an area in a boundless sea, but they were also like dazzling stars slowly flowing in the night sky.

Near these lights were figures moving or cars driving past, making the city even more lively.

“How spectacular...” Long Yuehong sighed with emotion again.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others didn’t say a word. They stood at the edge of the rooftop and stared at the picturesque scene dazedly.

They couldn’t find the right words to describe what they saw.

After an unknown period of time, Shang Jianyao suddenly took two steps back and squatted down.

“You have to match it with a song at a time like this...” He put down the speaker and continued fiddling with it, beginning to tune it.

At this moment, another desolate roar echoed from the City Intelligence Network Control Center.

As the roar echoed, Jiang Baimian saw a bright fire erupt from the corresponding spot.

Boom!

A deafening explosion sounded, drowning out all the commotion. Grayish-white gas quickly gathered and rose up like a gigantic mushroom.

This made the building—where Jiang Baimian and the others were—tremble uncontrollably.

Shang Jianyao subconsciously stood up, walked to his companion's side, and looked over.

As the surging flames and airflow expanded, the lights in the area flickered a few times before extinguishing one after another. This included the building where the City Intelligence Network Control Center was located.

Right on the heels of that, the entire city—be it the street lamps or the lit building windows—went dark one area after another.

In just a few seconds, the city became abnormally dark. Only the weak moonlight and starlight made the row upon row of buildings appear indistinct. The buildings looked like monsters hiding in the depths of a nightmare.

The figures moving behind the windows, the Heartless who were busy outside, and the cars driving on the road were also swallowed by the thick darkness, preventing them from seeing anything else.

The entire city fell silent again.

Shang Jianyao and the others blankly stared for more than ten seconds, their hearts inexplicably heavy. They didn't know how to express their emotions, so they could only continue watching.

After a while, they subconsciously looked down at the bottom of the building.

In the weak light, a Heartless crawled out of a window. Her hair was completely white and messy.

She climbed up and jumped down with some difficulty, quickly disappearing into the building's shadows like an old ape.

Long Yuehong retreated two steps as if he had suffered a blow.

Smack!

He accidentally kicked the speaker Shang Jianyao had placed on the ground.

The speaker immediately produced sizzling sounds.

The Old Task Force's four members instinctively turned their heads and looked over. Almost at the same time, a melancholic female voice sounded from the speaker.

"Reminiscing the past..."

"A painful yearning that I can't forget..."

On the empty sky platform, in the boundless darkness and the dead city, this song sounded like weeping as it echoed from where Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen stood silently.

Chapter 88: Ending of the Song

On the high roof—the empty rooftop—the mournful female voice sounded melodious and ethereal.

Jiang Baimian quietly listened for a while before looking around the silent, dark city. She sighed and said, "This song is not bad."

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao and the others to respond, Jiang Baimian continued, "Let's go down. The lights are off, and we don't know what will happen now. We have to monitor the jeep and the armored vehicle after all.

"If we are careless and end up losing them, it will be even more troublesome when we face danger later." She was not worried that there wouldn't be any means of transportation tomorrow morning because there seemed to be quite a number of drivable cars in the city ruin.

"Yes, Team Leader!" Long Yuehong replied reflexively.

Jiang Baimian then looked at Shang Jianyao. "Turn off the speaker. Otherwise, it might easily make us a target."

Shang Jianyao did not retort. He squatted down, picked up the small speaker with a blue bottom and black surface, switched it off, and threw it into his tactical backpack.

The surroundings immediately became extremely quiet, with only the wind howling at the high altitude.

As the four people from the Old Task Force walked towards the staircase, Bai Chen couldn't help but turn her head and look at the city scene that stretched into the distance.

The buildings were hidden in the darkness. No sound came out, nor did any light appear.

“Team Leader, don’t you think this looks like a tombstone?” asked Bai Chen gently when she retracted her gaze.

Jiang Baimian looked back and fell silent for a moment. “Yes, those buildings are like tombstones of the Old World. One tombstone after another...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Shang Jianyao took the initiative to ask, “What’s a tombstone?”

There was no cemetery inside Pangu Biology. Every dead employee only had a line of words engraved on a corresponding wall.

“It’s...” Jiang Baimian organized her words. “Forget it. I’ll explain it to you later.”

She then walked down the stairs and switched on the flashlight.

They couldn’t take the elevator anymore. They could only jog down.

Fortunately, their physical fitness was relatively good. Three of them had undergone genetic enhancement. Therefore, their breathing was only slightly heavy when they returned to Unit 805, but they weren’t tired.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao separately checked the room again and confirmed that no dangerous creatures had intruded.

“Bai Chen, have a rest with Long Yuehong. I’ll be in charge of monitoring the jeep and the armored vehicle. Shang Jianyao, pay attention to the streets outside.” Jiang Baimian returned to the living room with the flashlight.

“Yes.” Bai Chen watched her team leader walk to the dining room window and mount the Orange rifle before saying in thought, “The place where the explosion happened seems to be the mysterious laboratory that Qiao Chu mentioned.”

Jiang Baimian didn’t turn around and focused on monitoring the vehicles downstairs. “Judging from the direction and the location, that is most likely. I wonder if Qiao Chu’s mission is to destroy that place or whether the explosion happened because he was entangled by Jingfa...”

Shang Jianyao looked at the spot where the flames and airflow had risen and said seriously, “I guess it’s the first possibility.”

Jiang Baimian subconsciously asked, “From the Eighth Research Institute’s situation that Du Heng described?”

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “I just counted the cars by the side of the road. The result was a single digit.”

“...” Jiang Baimian spat. “I shouldn’t have discussed a problem with you so seriously.”

Long Yuehong had not spoken since he left the rooftop. At this moment, he looked at the city ruin—which was drowned in the darkness outside—and spoke in a slightly ethereal voice. “Team Leader, I now understand why you want to investigate the reason for the Old World’s destruction and why you like to dig up past history from city ruins...”

Jiang Baimian listened quietly and smiled in relief. “It’s good that you understand.”

Long Yuehong wanted to say something, but he didn’t know how to express it. He could only continue staring at the silent, danger-filled city ruin before saying, “What will happen next?”

“Who knows?” Jiang Baimian continued staring at the jeep and the armored vehicle. “I only hope that all the changes don’t affect us. I only hope that Jingfa drove Qiao Chu out of this city ruin. That or both parties have fought to their limits and are seriously injured. In short, I hope we can stay here until dawn and drive away.”

“Team Leader, what you said doesn’t seem auspicious,” replied Shang Jianyao casually.

Jiang Baimian said angrily and helplessly, “We’ve been unlucky so many times. Things always reverse when pushed to the extreme. It’s time for happiness to come.”

Long Yuehong felt inexplicably guilty when he heard the word ‘unlucky.’ He scratched his mouth.

It was unknown if Jiang Baimian’s words were really effective. Although explosions, gunshots, and roars occasionally sounded in the city ruin for the next few hours, they did not spread toward the tunnel.

By the middle of the night, it became completely silent.

As time passed, the horizon gradually lit up. The buildings broke free from the darkness’s stranglehold and revealed their figures.

But in the eyes of Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others, the buildings increasingly resembled tombstones—black, gray, or yellowish, faded tombstones.

After quickly having breakfast, Jiang Baimian ordered, “Let’s go.”

This time, she got Bai Chen and Long Yuehong to sit in the armored vehicle and take turns driving. She and Shang Jianyao were in charge of the jeep.

Under the morning light, they did not return along the original tunnel. This was because the path was too winding and dangerous. Without Qiao Chu's guidance—who was familiar with the situation—it was very easy for the vehicles to sink into the swamp.

Furthermore, Jiang Baimian suspected that some of the roads there couldn't support the armored vehicle's weight.

According to An Ruxiang and the traces left behind by Ruin Hunters, they circled north and left the city ruin via a relatively fine route.

On the way, they didn't forget to gather some watches, LCD screens, sunglasses, and all kinds of useful metals. They even found two barrels of suitable oil for the armored vehicle.

As they drove, Jiang Baimian narrowed her eyes and said to Shang Jianyao in the passenger seat, "There's a convoy coming from ahead with dozens to a hundred people."

As soon as she finished speaking, she came to a realization. "About a hundred people... This is Wang Beicheng's company."

It was a team sent by Pangu Biology to investigate the anomaly here.

As expected, they quickly saw armored vehicles and other things. They also saw the 23rd Company's OC, Wang Beicheng.

Wang Beicheng was also surprised to encounter Jiang Baimian and the others again. He straightened the grayish-black beret on his head, looked at the armored vehicle behind the jeep, and spoke to Jiang Baimian. "Didn't you guys go to Qifeng Town? Why are you here again? How did you get yourself an armored vehicle?"

More importantly, it seemed like they had entered the newly-discovered city ruin earlier than them.

"Haha, an accident. An accident." Jiang Baimian laughed dryly.

Jiang Baimian then became serious and roughly explained how they had been bewitched by Qiao Chu and how they had entered the city ruin through a separate path.

Her explanation included information on the City Intelligence Network Control Center, the mysterious laboratory, the Superior Heartless, Nightmare Horse, Xiaochong, Du Heng, Galoran, and the final explosion.

Whilst explaining, Jiang Baimian only hid the Awakened knowledge provided by Du Heng and the parts where Shang Jianyao's abilities were useful. She cleverly linked the

reason why they escaped Qiao Chu's charm to the Superior Heartless and the boy, Xiaochong.

From a certain perspective, this was actually the truth.

Wang Beicheng's expression turned solemn as he listened. Finally, he sincerely said, "Thank you so much. If not for this information, I don't know how many people would've died if we rashly entered! Besides, the Superior Heartless and mutated creatures you've encountered are definitely not the only ones. It's still very dangerous for our company, even if we know about them in advance.

"I'll immediately send the information back and request reinforcements. Next, we probably will only build an outpost at the edge of the city..."

Jiang Baimian waved her hand. "What you do has nothing to do with us."

Wang Beicheng looked at the armored vehicle again, rubbed his hands, and smiled hesitantly. "Can you reinforce the troops?"

To them, an additional armored vehicle and a heavy machine gun meant the addition of considerable combat strength.

Jiang Baimian smiled. "No problem. However, we have a lot of things in the armored vehicle. It's impossible to take them away in the jeep alone. You have to help us transport them back to the company. I have a list of everything. Also, that armored vehicle's heavy machine gun is also our war spoil. It has to be counted as our contribution."

For them, traveling through the Ashlands was still more convenient with a jeep.

Wang Beicheng took a deep breath as if he had a headache. "Alright."

After bidding farewell to Wang Beicheng's company, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen returned to the jeep.

As she drove, Jiang Baimian thoughtfully said, "Since we encountered Wang Beicheng and the others, it means that there shouldn't be any danger on this road. We won't encounter Qiao Chu again. Shang Jianyao, you can remove your Inference Clowning effect."

Shang Jianyao was playing with a pair of black sunglasses. He sometimes wore them, and sometimes he took them off.

Upon hearing his team leader's instructions, Shang Jianyao smiled and said, "There are many couples in the company who are free to date."

Jiang Baimian was stunned for a moment before she patted the jeep's horn. "That's right. Why would I think that true love is assigned?"

Shang Jianyao then turned his head and said to Bai Chen, "Humans can also be trusted and relied on. After the past few days, do you think you can give your back to us for protection?"

Bai Chen was stunned, and her eyes flickered uncontrollably.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian interrupted. "Why does this sound so familiar? You plagiarized what I said!"

"It's called quoting," replied Shang Jianyao in all seriousness.

Bai Chen's lips unconsciously curled up as she listened to their argument.

Shang Jianyao looked at the confused Long Yuehong and smiled. "Organ transplant, neural reconstruction, artificial uterus."

"..." Long Yuehong's facial muscles twitched a few times, and he resisted the urge to beat Shang Jianyao up. After all, he wasn't Shang Jianyao's match.

He recalled the past and realized that he had unknowingly been influenced by Inference Clowning. He immediately blurted out a question in fear. "Do you usually use Inference Clowning to mislead me?"

Shang Jianyao didn't turn around and directly said, "You don't deserve it."

"..." Long Yuehong didn't know whether to be happy or sad.

Jiang Baimian finally couldn't stand it any longer and said to Shang Jianyao, "Have a nap first. It'll be your turn to drive later."

"Phew, I've finally gotten rid of the mess here. We can't delay any further. Our destination, Qifeng Town!"

Having heard that, Shang Jianyao massaged his temples and wore his sunglasses. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

...

Deep in Star Cluster Hall, in front of the grayish-white stone door at the top of the silver staircase.

Shang Jianyao looked at the three grooves above him. With one hand in a pocket and the other stretched out, he pressed against the door.

White light rose from the indentations and condensed into three illusory stars. Among them, the white light representing Inference Clowning was much brighter than the other two.

The next second, the white light—which showed the words ‘Corny Person’—rapidly lit up, quickly matching Inference Clowning’s brightness.

After a brief pause, the heavy stone door trembled slightly and slowly opened.

As the gap widened, Shang Jianyao saw the scene inside clearly.

It was an illusory ‘sea’ that stretched as far as the eye could see. Light gently slid across the water surface.

Sea of Origins.

...

After Jiang Baimian drove the jeep deep into the swamp, she woke Shang Jianyao up. “It’s your turn. Let’s have a safe journey from now on!”

Shang Jianyao opened his eyes, took off his sunglasses, and went to the driver’s seat without a fuss to swap seats with his team leader.

After taking his seat, he saw an endless grayish-black wilderness ahead. There were few clouds in the bright-blue sky.

“The weather is great.” Shang Jianyao nodded. He first put on his sunglasses and took out the small speaker from his tactical backpack.

Upon seeing Jiang Baimian look over, he stretched his body and smiled. “How can you drive without music?”

When Bai Chen and Long Yuehong looked over, Shang Jianyao switched on the speaker.

A hoarse shout sounded. “Arise, ye prisoners of starvation...

“Arise, ye wretched of the earth...”

Shang Jianyao waved his hand amidst the passionate and emotional singing. “Let’s set off!”

Before he could finish his sentence, Shang Jianyao floored the accelerator and let the jeep speed through the wilderness and into the distance.

(End of the First Volume—Prelude)

Note 1: From *The Internationale*, you can refer to the Tang Dynasty band's version.

Chapter 89: Returning Home

"We want no condescending saviors. To rule us from a judgment hall.

"We workers ask not for their favors..."

Amidst the hoarse singing, the jeep drove through the forest in a rather wild manner.

Long Yuehong stared at the endless road and couldn't help but sigh with emotion.

"We're finally returning to the company..."

Although the Ashlands had a blue sky, white clouds, the sun, and trees—as well as all kinds of scenery and abnormally open environments—he still missed the company's stable and quiet life after spending so much time outside.

For the knowledgeable people in the Ashlands, the name 'Pangu Biology' was no stranger to them. But almost nobody knew where the company's headquarters was. This added a layer of mystery to Pangu Biology. Many Ruin Hunters only knew that several powerful bandits resided in the area where the Old Task Force was located, and they didn't dare approach it.

Jiang Baimian—who was sitting in the passenger seat—heard Long Yuehong's sigh. She rubbed her ears and tilted her head with a smile. "I thought you didn't want to return to the company at all. Those girls in Qifeng Town sure were enthusiastic."

Long Yuehong blushed when he heard that. "There was nothing like that. Team Leader, don't spout nonsense!"

Qifeng Town was located in the Blackmarsh Wilderness's mountains and forests. Its location was remote and difficult to find. The Old Task Force couldn't even drive the jeep in.

They had followed the guards at the foot of the mountain for about 15 minutes before the road opened up in front of them. They then saw a large piece of farmland.

The geographical advantage gave Qifeng Town a safeguard, but it also resulted in a lack of water resources.

This didn't mean that there was no water on the mountain, but the water looked very dirty as if it had mixed with a lot of soil. Even if it was used to irrigate the soil, it still

worried the townsfolk of Qifeng Town. They were afraid that it would be polluted and unclean.

Before they became one of Pangu Biology's vassals, they had to gather rainwater or circle to the other side of the mountain and do the laborious task of transporting water over.

During harsher seasons and when the mountain trails were difficult to traverse, they could only bite the bullet and drink the dirty water that had set in. Their average lifespan was far shorter than that of Moat Town's people.

Therefore, Qifeng Town's townsfolk were sincerely happy and grateful when they saw the Old Task Force deliver a new water filter chip and repair the crude water plant.

For this reason, they took out their precious food to entertain their guests.

Back then, many Qifeng Town women had surrounded Shang Jianyao and Long Yuehong, showing extreme enthusiasm—just like the men circling Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “Whoa, I'm just hard of hearing, not blind. In those few days, you had ladies accompanying you everywhere you went. You looked pretty happy.”

Long Yuehong coughed and didn't know how to respond. He was indeed quite happy back then. After all, this was the first time he had been so popular with the opposite sex since he was young.

Jiang Baimian did not 'understand' Long Yuehong's true intention of coughing and asked mischievously, “Why? None of your relationships went beyond friendship? That shouldn't be the case...”

Shang Jianyao—who was driving with the music on—cut in. “He was terrified.”

Long Yuehong wanted to retort, but he sadly realized that it was the truth. Those ladies were too enthusiastic—which scared him—making him afraid to do anything. Of course, this was also because he had heard his team leader mention the ladies' true motives—marrying him and joining him inside the utopia-like Pangu Biology.

If not, they would strive to get pregnant and add outstanding descendants to the town.

In addition, Long Yuehong had to admit that a small part of the reason he was frightened was that the ladies looked dirty. After all, Qifeng Town lacked clean water before the water filter chip was delivered.

“It’s fine if you were scared.” Jiang Baimian clicked her tongue and asked Shang Jianyao, “What about you? Why didn’t those ladies pester you toward the end? Did you use your abilities on them?”

Shang Jianyao’s body slightly swayed with the rhythm of the music. “No. I just seriously discussed the current human situation with them. We discussed pollution, disease, famine, mutation, and the Heartless. We discussed the fate that all of us should shoulder.

“They were very touched and inspired. They all expressed their desire to return and think about it. Yes, it will take some time to digest. I hope they can figure it out as soon as possible.”

Jiang Baimian pursed her lips tightly, afraid that she would laugh. She eventually praised him with a ‘serious expression.’ “I underestimated you.”

Bai Chen sat in the back row and listened to the three of them chatting. She did not join in, but her expression appeared very gentle. She listened attentively and would occasionally smile.

The jeep drove for a few minutes before Jiang Baimian patted the armrest compartment and said, “Stop. It’s my turn to drive. Either way, we still have to change seats when we reach the door and undergo inspection.”

Shang Jianyao reluctantly parked the car and sat in the passenger seat.

Jiang Baimian then switched off the speaker and smiled. “Let’s go home!”

She then stepped on the accelerator and headed straight for the entrance to Pangu Biology’s underground building.

During this process, scenes from his previous experiences uncontrollably flashed across Long Yuehong’s mind.

The battle against the Blackmarsh Iron Snake and the military exoskeleton; the recital of Moat Town’s children; the encounter with Jingfa in the steelworks factory ruins; the massacre of Blackrat Town; Qiao Chu’s powerful bewitchment; the Superior Heartless and mutated creatures. Then there were the Heartless that looked like normal people after the ‘lights’ lit up; the mournful song that echoed in the dead city; the enthusiastic Qifeng Town; the wilderness survival training...

In just a month, he felt like he had lived for more than ten years.

The four soon saw the entrance to Pangu Biology’s underground building.

At this moment, Long Yuehong's heart finally returned to normal. He felt extremely at ease. He was like a fallen leaf that had finally drifted back to its roots.

Jiang Baimian sighed as she drove. "You want to come back after leaving for a long time, but you want to head out after staying inside for a long time. Humans are really contradictory creatures."

The car continued forward and approached the door.

...

After a series of inspections, the Old Task Force's four members returned to Room 14 on the 647th floor.

"Give me all the things you brought back." Jiang Baimian looked around and said, "These will be returned only after the company's inspections."

She smiled and added, "Don't worry. The items that are handed over to the company will definitely be returned in the form of contribution points as compensation. The company won't treat you unfairly. As for the trinkets, the company most likely won't think much of them and will return them to you."

"Haha, I wonder if Wang Beicheng and his company are back. We have an armored vehicle's worth of items with them."

Upon hearing the name 'Wang Beicheng,' Bai Chen thoughtfully said, "I wonder if they found any useful clues regarding the city ruin."

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged her words. "I'll ask when we meet later. I hope the confidentiality level isn't too high. Sigh, I don't think the chances of them finding clues are high. That laboratory has been blown up, and the roaring creature inside might've been vaporized..."

As she spoke, Shang Jianyao had already taken out the harvests he had brought with him and placed them on the table. They were: a pair of black sunglasses, a mechanical watch that had a black faceplate, a transparent glass ball with yellow petals that he obtained in Moat Town, a piece of paper from the steelworks factory's hospital ruins, a recording pen from the Blackrat Town girl, a Ubei 7 pistol from Wu Shoushi, 12 coins, and the Hunter's Badge from the exoskeleton-armed bandit...

The rest of his items were in the jeep.

Jiang Baimian swept her glance and pointed at the piece of paper. "What's this?"

"A piece of paper picked up from the hospital's outpatient department in the steelworks factory ruin," replied Shang Jianyao.

“Why didn’t you tell me about it?” Jiang Baimian subconsciously asked.

Shang Jianyao said boldly, “I forgot.”

“... That’s true. We encountered Jingfa back then.” Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze. “It’s just nice. I’ll pass it to the higher-ups and let them study it to see if there’s any useful information.”

After settling this matter, Jiang Baimian invited everyone to sit down and smiled. “I know you’re all tired, but you still have to do an after-action review of the entire field training session.”

As she spoke, she glanced at Bai Chen. “What do you have to say?”

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “I’ve said all that needs to be said in the previous few rounds of after-action review.”

“It’s mainly from a general perspective this time.” Jiang Baimian guided the discussion topic.

Bai Chen fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “There were too many accidents. This single field training session had dangers equivalent to the dangers I encountered in the past three years.”

Just as she said that, Shang Jianyao nodded in all seriousness. “It’s mainly because we were unlucky...”

Long Yuehong’s expression collapsed when he heard that.

“Enough.” Jiang Baimian interrupted Shang Jianyao’s ‘statement’ and smiled at Long Yuehong. “I don’t believe in fate or luck. There’s nothing scientific about them at all!”

Long Yuehong exhaled silently. He was just about to say something when he saw his team leader smiling at him.

“However, your name does suck a little. Why don’t you go back and change it? How about Long Aihong? Your parents will definitely be satisfied.”

“...” Long Yuehong responded with a blank expression upon hearing the similarly-feminine name. “Team Leader, I thought you didn’t believe in superstition?”

“In the Ashlands, it’s sometimes better to be safe than sorry.” Jiang Baimian laughed as she spoke. “Haha, I’m joking. Yes... I’ll label you as qualified in this mission report. At the same time, I’ll write that you aren’t used to the Old Task Force’s lifestyle and suggest a change of job. There won’t be any black marks this way, even if you are transferred to another position.”

Long Yuehong was touched. “Thank you, thank you.”

Jiang Baimian smiled and shook her head. “There’s no need to thank me so early. I only have the right to give suggestions. Whether you can be transferred will depend on the higher-ups. Unless I write that you and I are at odds, are completely unqualified, and there’s a problem with your mind, only then can I guarantee that you will be transferred. However, that will leave a mark on your file.”

“I understand. Thank you, Team Leader,” replied Long Yuehong sincerely.

Jiang Baimian smiled and said, “Actually, I’m a little unwilling to part with you. Bad luck isn’t necessarily a bad thing sometimes. Think about it. If we didn’t encounter so many accidents, how would we have entered the city ruin and discovered that the Old World’s humans were doing some very dangerous experiments? This is a very valuable harvest!”

Long Yuehong weakly defended himself. “Team Leader, I’m really not that unlucky...”

Chapter 90: Small Test

Translator: CKtalon

Jiang Baimian laughed at Long Yuehong’s defensive words. “I know, I know. I’m just trying to give you some confidence. This means that you played an important role in this field training.”

Seeing that his team leader was making things worse, Long Yuehong couldn’t be bothered to emphasize further. He only muttered, “It’s better not to have such a role.”

“What did you say?” Jiang Baimian tilted her head as if she was listening attentively. “Forget it. Let’s get back to the topic at hand and continue the after-action review.”

She then looked around. “We had a detailed discussion and summary of every incident we encountered during this field training session. We won’t repeat that today. What I hope for is for you to do an after-action review from an overarching point of view and evaluate every choice taken before and after the matter. This is to see if there’s anything you need to improve on.”

Bai Chen quietly listened and recalled something. “I don’t think there are any problems. Every decision you made was the best choice in the situation we faced. It only appeared dangerous because of the numerous accidents we encountered.”

“That’s right, that’s right. Be it the bandits with the exoskeleton, the mechanical monk—Jingfa—or the massacre in Blackrat Town, you did your best to let everyone survive and lead us away from the vortex of danger,” Long Yuehong echoed.

Shang Jianyao nodded. "It's mainly because you're unlucky."

"..." If Long Yuehong didn't know Shang Jianyao, he definitely would've imagined that Shang Jianyao was targeting him.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and said seriously, "If you don't like such jokes, directly tell him that he won't have any friends if he continues like this."

"Actually, I'm already used to it," replied Long Yuehong subconsciously.

Jiang Baimian spread her hands and teased, "What else can I say?"

Jiang Baimian adjusted her hair to her sides, and her expression gradually turned serious. "Although you guys are praising me and making me burst with joy, I still have to say that many things could've been avoided if we acted well from the beginning.

"Think about it. How long could Jingfa stay in the steelworks factory ruins? How long could Qiao Chu wait at the broken bridge? As long as we missed them by a few hours, there would've been a high chance that we wouldn't encounter them.

"Our jeep wouldn't have been damaged if we had fired at the bandits when we encountered them and wiped them out, preventing them from wearing the exoskeleton. We wouldn't have taken a detour to Moat Town then. It's very likely that we would've arrived at the steelworks factory ruins that evening and left the next morning. Jingfa probably wouldn't have arrived to search for the Fated by then.

"Similarly, we definitely wouldn't encounter Wu Shoushi and the others subsequently. By the time we obtained information on the newly-discovered city ruin, it might've already crossed the river. We could've chosen another wilderness nomad settlement to send the information to the company. We also wouldn't have been 'intercepted' by Qiao Chu."

Upon seeing Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and the Shang Jianyao reveal thoughtful expressions, Jiang Baimian asked in a low voice, "If you were the ones making the decisions, would you choose to deter the other party and leave, avoiding contact without any conflict when you encounter such a team again? Or would you choose to attack directly and eliminate any latent dangers?"

Shang Jianyao immediately replied, "Team Leader, I think you have some misunderstandings about my lofty ideals. Do I look like someone who will attack the innocent? It's difficult to determine if a group of people is sinful through a brief interaction."

Jiang Baimian laughed after being momentarily taken aback. "You look like one! Who wanted to fire on the grounds that the other party was disturbing your ears?"

“I sensed their hostility,” Shang Jianyao replied seriously. “Besides, I knew you wouldn’t agree.”

“Alright.” Jiang Baimian turned to look at Long Yuehong and Bai Chen. “What about the two of you? What kind of decision will you make?”

Long Yuehong hissed. “I wouldn’t have directly ordered an attack either. If I did so, what’s the difference between those bandits and me?”

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “There’s a difference between humans and beasts. Unless I had no food back then and was about to die, then I would have to snatch something.”

Jiang Baimian looked around again with a serious expression as the corners of her mouth gradually curled up. “Congratulations on passing your first psychological test.”

Upon seeing that Long Yuehong looked a little stunned, Jiang Baimian explained with a smile, “I still hope that my team members have basic morals and principles. Although I can’t use this as a measure of the desperate actions you might take in dire situations, I can at least trust such companions with my back most of the time.”

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. “A true companion is one that can dance the Gold Coast hula dance together with you.”

Jiang Baimian couldn’t be bothered to respond to him and continued reviewing their training session.

Near the end, she thought for a moment and said, “I kept holding off on the analysis of the city ruin. Since I have time today, we can specifically discuss it. What do you think the connection between Daoist Galoran’s words about the aura left behind by the Kalendaria and the various abnormalities in the city ruin is?” Nôv(e)B\jnn

Bai Chen had occasionally considered this problem over the past few days and was the first to raise her guess. “Could it be that ‘He’ conducted some forbidden research that involves the domain of deities in that city’s laboratory and has angered the Kalendaria that represents the entire year, Master Zhuang? Therefore, ‘He’ sent down divine punishment?”

“Perhaps this also raises the curtain on the Old World’s destruction. It’s also precisely because this city ruin is the origin of the destruction that no one survived, including the surrounding villages and towns. Therefore, the city ruin was completely forgotten until it was recently discovered.”

She had linked the widely circulated theory of ‘Kalendarium destroying the Old World’ to this discovery.

"It's possible, but I can only say that it's possible." Jiang Baimian did not reject the theory directly.

Shang Jianyao then asked, "Then, why didn't Master Zhuang erase the howling creature in the laboratory? Why did 'He' allow the city ruin to have so many Superior Heartless and mutated creatures? Isn't this divine punishment a little too incomplete?"

He paused and said, "If that's the case, I would feel ashamed for Master Zhuang."

Bai Chen was speechless and unable to answer. If she could answer these questions, she wouldn't have said that it was just a guess.

"If Master Zhuang knew that a person like you was so considerate of 'His' reputation, 'He' would definitely feel ashamed," joked Jiang Baimian. "Personally, I'd like bolder guesses."

She then looked around, lowered her body slightly, and suppressed her voice. "Could it be that the laboratory's forbidden research gave birth to the Kalendarium? The humans of the Old World tried to create deities, but they were destroyed by the deities they created?"

Such a guess and such a low, echoing voice made Long Yuehong's forehead twitch. He felt inexplicably terrified and felt that it was sacrilege.

Human laboratories resulted in the Kalendarium, and the Kalendarium ended up destroying humanity?

"Why did the Kalendarium leave behind the howling creature in the laboratory then? Because it's 'Their' younger brother?" Shang Jianyao raised his doubts again. "Also, why didn't 'They' destroy that laboratory and hide the secrets regarding 'Their' birth? Why did the Eighth Research Institute behind Qiao Chu send people to find this city ruin and blow up the laboratory?"

"I said that it's only a guess!" Jiang Baimian glared at Shang Jianyao. "Besides, we can't be sure that Qiao Chu's mission was to blow up that laboratory. What if he was only searching for information? After all, there are many possible reasons for the explosion. For example, a self-destruct mechanism."

At this point, Jiang Baimian softened her ferocious expression. "What we can now be certain of is that it would've been difficult to discover the city ruin for a long time without Qiao Chu. Ah, when can we find the Eighth Research Institute? They definitely know many of the Old World's secrets!"

After discussing for a while, Jiang Baimian looked at her watch. "That's about it. Let me talk about what's going to happen next. You have two days off, and everything will return to normal after that."

“However, our daily training will be halved. We have to reserve the morning for studying information, organizing the clues, and preparing for an official investigation. We have to set off next spring to head to the first investigation point or the area where the target is located. Before that, I will organize a winter field survival training session. But it will be near the company. We won’t go too far to avoid trouble.”

Jiang Baimian actually felt a little apprehensive when she said the word ‘trouble.’

Bai Chen nodded and said, “Actually, that city ruin is a very suitable place to investigate.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged her words. “This will depend on whether the company finds any valuable clues from the city ruin in the next few months. I’m pessimistic.”

The most important laboratory had been completely destroyed.

Upon mentioning this, Long Yuehong asked curiously and worriedly, “Team Leader, what will happen to the Superior Heartless in the city ruin after the company interferes?”

“What else can they do? They will either migrate, be killed, or become experimental subjects,” answered Jiang Baimian seriously. “In the Ashlands, unnecessary pity is of zero value.”

Long Yuehong fell silent for a few seconds before suddenly saying, “But they will definitely bring considerable casualties to the company... Those are our colleagues, so we might even know each other...”

As she spoke, she stood up and patted Shang Jianyao’s shoulder. “That’s why we are seeking the New World.”

“Therefore, we need to save all of humanity,” Shang Jianyao said cooperatively.

Jiang Baimian took the opportunity to wrap things up and pointed outside. “It’s almost dinner. I’ll be treating all of you today to celebrate our first mission’s completion.”

Long Yuehong, Shang Jianyao, and Bai Chen stood up at the same time.

“To be honest, I’ve been missing the company’s canteen.” Long Yuehong sighed sincerely. Although he had tasted quite a bit of wildlife meat this time, the meat was either very dry or had an unpleasant taste. Without sufficient seasoning and good culinary techniques, the meat could only be barely used to fill his stomach. The experience couldn’t be considered good.

“Me too,” Jiang Baimian replied frankly.

Shang Jianyao wiped the corners of his mouth.