

Ad Infinitum 811

Chapter 811 Research Team

Shang Jianyao turned his head and said to Jiang Baimian, “I think you should believe in Truth.”

A smart person wouldn’t believe in a fake god that appeared out of nowhere... Jiang Baimian subconsciously replied inwardly. She then recalled that Old He believed in Truth and was suspected to be an Awakened in the Last Man domain. He might be able to silently flip through her memories, so she quickly suppressed her thoughts.

Shang Jianyao—who didn’t receive a response -cast his gaze at Old He again and praised, “Your teachings are indeed good. It can match our philosophy of valuing life and loving children.”

“Are you from the Life Ritual parish?” Old He came to a realization. “You just realized?” the rash Shang Jianyao blurted out. “So you’ve never flipped through our memories!”

He spoke so quickly that Jiang Baimian couldn’t stop him even if she wanted to.

Things immediately became abnormally awkward.

After a few seconds, Old He coughed and said, “Reading memories is immoral and very dangerous. You will never know what the people you face have experienced. If I were to read a person’s memories every time I encounter one, I will sooner or later go crazy on the spot or die because it involves the content of a high-ranking existence. “Truth taught us that those who stare into the abyss will have the abyss stare back at them. Therefore, we have to know how to restrain ourselves and not abuse our abilities. Under normal circumstances, I just want to determine if the humans facing me have any ill intentions.” Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped. “Truth is indeed the truth. Actually, you can use an Ashlandic proverb to explain: Touch pitch, and you shall be defiled.”

This is indeed different from the Anti-intellectualism Church’s style. If you really flip through our memories, the probability of something happening is very high... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

While facing Old He, she instructed her team members to recall Eidolon Nun’s gaze and Master Zhuang’s dream from time to time.

In addition, they had also prepared Genova as insurance.

Old He smiled and said, "I'm used to using Truth's teachings."

"You people who believe in Truth get along well with the Arbiter of Fate's believers," Jiang Baimian said.

Old He glanced at his subordinates not far away and smiled. "When End Year City was established, our Truth believers put in a significant amount of effort. The Arbiter of Fate was very friendly to us." Truth existed when End Year City was established? That's quite early... Long Yuehong extracted the most important information in that sentence.

When they previously conversed with people in End Year City, they had established that the settlement was officially set up in the mid Chaotic Era-it wasn't much later than Pangu Biology

Shang Jianyao's focus had always been different. He widened his eyes and said, "Can you sense the Kalendaria's friendliness?"

As a believer of the Life Ritual parish and an employee of Pangu Biology, he had only sensed Big Boss's gaze once when he barged into the underground building's lowest floor. Old He almost couldn't understand what this fellow was saying; it took him a while to understand. "The Arbiter of Fate's friendliness is shown through the End Year Church's Elders."

"Is that so... How many Elders are there in total?" Shang Jianyao looked like he wanted to get to know them.

Old He sized him up and replied vaguely, "Many."

Jiang Baimian casually changed the topic. "In End Year City, those who believe in the Arbiter of Fate are mainstream, right?".

"Yes." Old He didn't deny it and even gave a rough estimate. "80%."

He then pointed at his subordinates beside the surrounding vehicles. "If you don't believe me, you can ask them one by one."

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao agreed immediately.

The Old Task Force had the intention of interacting more with people from End Year City and gathering the corresponding information. Now, they had a suitable excuse.

At noon, they returned to Cliff Village after asking around.

The village chief came with the lunch they had ordered in advance. “The scientific research team that previously went to Icefield is returning. They will arrive in the evening. Are you guys going to say hi when the time comes?”

The village chief was mainly here to report this matter.

Long Yuehong blurted out in surprise, “That fast?”

The Old Task Force estimated that there was still about a week. How long had it been?

The village chief smiled and explained, “They sent a telegram saying that they had encountered an unforeseen event, so they had to return early. They want us to prepare the supplies.” “An unforeseen event?” Jiang Baimian didn’t hide the inquiry in her gaze. “I don’t know what’s going on. Ask them yourself in the evening.” The village chief indicated that he didn’t have the right to ask about Pangu Biology’s employees.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “Alright.”

In order to wait for the scientific team to return, the Old Task Force stayed in Cliff Village in the afternoon and didn’t go to Col Town to chat with the people from End Year City.

In the evening, five to six cars came from a mountain road toward the north. The vehicles were covered in stains as if they had been drenched in rain and hadn’t been washed in time.

When they came close, Bai Chen sharply noticed that a small amount of thick ice formed by snow was still on the cars’ surface.

The temperature in Cliff Village wasn't too high in the current season, so the thick ice melted rather slowly.

The convoy quickly passed the verification, swiped their cards, and entered Cliff Village. They then stopped at the small square in front of the public office.

Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and smiled at Long Yuehong and the others. "Let's go down and greet our colleagues."

Shang Jianyao immediately nodded. "Meeting an old friend brings tears to my eyes."

You make it sound like we're really meeting an old friend... Long Yuehong criticized inwardly. Considering his position, he didn't say anything

Genava remained in the room as the four Old Task Force members went downstairs to the lobby.

Nearly 20 humans in thick clothes formed groups of three to five, and each occupied an area. They chatted as they waited for the village chief to arrange their accommodation.

About five to six of them clearly had a low status. They stood at the edge or in a corner. They didn't say anything and were very silent.

"Village Chief, hurry up. Everyone is waiting to take a hot bath. Didn't I send you a telegram in the morning to get you to prepare in advance?" urged a man in his forties with grizzled hair. He had clearly undergone genetic enhancement to a certain extent, but the effects weren't too good. His originally good looks were increasingly lost due to the sag in his cheeks, making him look a little harsh.

The village chief smiled obsequiously. "Researcher Xu, I was just about to distribute the keys and bring you guys up. "Ah, Team Leader Jiang, this is the Researcher Xu I mentioned. Researcher Xu, this is Team Leader Jiang, who just came from the company. They are also going to Icefield to complete mission."

Jiang Baimian smiled and walked over. "Researcher Xu, I'm Jiang Baimian."

Researcher Xu was stunned for a moment before a smile gradually appeared on his face. “Old Jiang’s daughter?”

Jiang Wenfeng was much more famous than Jiang Baimian when it came to Pangu Biology’s researchers.

Whenever Jiang Baimian was mentioned, they mostly referred to her as ‘Old Jiang’s beautiful, tall, and outstanding daughter.’ Later, they added the embellishment phrase ‘who has something wrong with her ears.’ Now, there was an additional phrase: ‘almost promoted to management at the age of 26.’

Jiang Baimian went with the flow and nodded with a smile. “That’s right, Uncle Xu. Before I came out, my father said that I might encounter an acquaintance of his on my trip to Icefield.”

“What a coincidence.” Researcher Xu was a little overjoyed by the praise. After all, he wasn’t in management yet, but Jiang Baimian had placed him in the same position as her father.

He then instructed his scientific research team members and volunteers, “Follow the village chief up first.”

After most of the people in the lobby had left, Jiang Baimian curiously asked, “Uncle Xu, I heard that you encountered an accident this time?”

Researcher Xu sighed and said, “That’s right. It’s relatively common in Icefield that you encounter inclement weather; you have to be careful.

“A huge blizzard suddenly stirred up, and the few volunteers outside the cars couldn’t be saved. Considering the loss of supplies and the number of volunteers, we can only return early.”

Jiang Baimian sighed in empathy. “Icefield is really dangerous. Uncle Xu, what experiment are you doing this time? Heh heh, pretend I didn’t ask if it involves confidential matters.”

Researcher Xu didn’t think it was a big deal. “It’s still the same study on how the cold environment affects human bodies and minds.”

“What’s the point of studying this?” Shang Jianyao forcefully interrupted.

Researcher Xu smiled. “How is it meaningless? We might even be able to undergo cryogenic genetic modification in the future. The company has never stopped exploring human evolution.”

“But this has nothing to do with cryogenic genes.” Jiang Baimian expressed her confusion.

It wasn't like they were screening humans with high resistance to the cold to search for cryogenic genes.

“You'll have to ask the Board of Directors. I'm only in charge of the specific research.” Researcher Xu shrugged.

He then moved his neck. “I'll return to my room to get some rest. Talk to you at dinner.”

Jiang Baimian was just about to agree when Shang Jianyao suddenly interrupted. “As a researcher, don't you have any guesses regarding this experiment?” Upon seeing Researcher Xu look at him with a ‘who are you and why should I answer you,’ Shang Jianyao smiled and added, “I'm also an employee of Pangu Biology and Team Leader Jiang's subordinate. I'm very interested in scientific research.”

Researcher Xu's eyes glazed over for a moment. “All this time, I personally feel that the company doesn't just want to produce new humans with a qualitative change in the body. It also wants a new human with a sufficiently tenacious spirit. This has a certain correlation with the environment and experiences they will have later.”

Chapter 812 ‘Fate’

A sufficiently tenacious spirit... Upon hearing this, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others exchanged looks.

This had something in common with one of their previous guesses: The reason Big Boss established Pangu Biology with the goal of developing genetic technology as the company's primary goal was to prepare a perfect body for ‘Her’ descent into the Ashlands.

From the looks of it, a perfect body still had to have a tenacious spirit and mind. Otherwise, it couldn't withstand the various negative effects when a Kalendaria descended. For example, the Heartless disease. Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped and praised sincerely, “As expected of a top researcher. What a broad and comprehensive train of thought.”

Researcher Xu didn't know if Shang Jianyao was mocking him or if he was being sincere.

“He always says whatever he wants and doesn't beat around the bush.” Jiang Baimian helped Shang Jianyao explain that he didn't use sarcasm.

Researcher Xu smiled. “But such praise...”

He didn't finish his sentence and shook his head to express his meaning: It was too direct, and it only made the person being praised embarrassed!

If not for the fact that he felt that he had a good relationship with Shang Jianyao and was a comrade in the same camp that he could entrust his back to, he probably wouldn't be able to muster a smile.

At dinner, the Old Task Force members found an opportunity to chat with the rest of the scientific research team. The information they obtained was identical to what Researcher Xu had said.

The reason the volunteers remained silent was that they had witnessed how fragile the experimental subjects were under the blizzard and were pessimistic about their future.

Although they were more or less mentally prepared when participating in this experiment in exchange for different benefits, humans always held hope. They felt that they might be one of the many volunteers who could return home alive.

After returning to the room where Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao lived, Long Yuehong exhaled and said, “We've already asked about the experiment project and the exact process. There doesn't seem to be any problems at the moment.”

With that said, he added, “We should've gotten out everything the scientific research team knows.”

He meant that there wouldn't be any additional gains from pestering the scientific research team. They would only run the corresponding projects according to the higher-ups' instructions.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “Compared to the experiment itself, Researcher Xu's guess is more valuable.”

The Old Task Force long knew about the effects of the cold environment on human bodies and minds.

“How pitiful...” Shang Jianyao suddenly sighed.

The honest Genava asked, “Who’s the pitiful one?”

He couldn’t figure out who Hey was talking about.

Shang Jianyao replied with a look of pity, “The perfect body prepared for Big Boss’s descent into the Ashlands.”

“How is the body pitiful?” Long Yuehong asked in confusion.

Jiang Baimian and Bai Chen didn’t say a word and roughly understood what Shang Jianyao wanted to say.

Shang Jianyao let out a long sigh and said to Long Yuehong and Genava, “Since a perfect body and a sufficiently tenacious spirit and mind are required, it’s not something an embryo can handle.

“Think about it. Once that body grows up and builds up a tenacious spirit, it will be a living person. They will have their own emotions, past, memories, and a uniqueness of their own. However, someone will suddenly tell them one day that they exist for the Kalendaria. Regardless of whether they are willing or not, they have to sacrifice themselves to become a vessel for the Kalendaria’s descent.

“How pitiful.”

Long Yuehong was speechless. As he looked at Shang Jianyao, he suddenly felt a little ashamed of his inferiority.

It wasn’t that he had never thought of such a possibility, but he refused to empathize. He subconsciously felt that as long as he could exchange for Pangu Biology’s safety and the permanent

stability of all the employees in the underground building, it was completely acceptable to sacrifice an experimental subject that had been specially nurtured.

Shang Jianyao clearly didn't agree.

"It's indeed pitiful." The honest Geneva didn't think there was anything wrong with Shang Jianyao's words.

"That's right." Jiang Baimian echoed and said, "This is only our guess for the time being. There's no need to feel any psychological burden."

She then got her team members to return to their rooms to rest and continue visiting End Year City's personnel tomorrow.

After washing up and chatting for a while, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao lay on their beds.

In order not to let Shang Jianyao harp on the topic, Jiang Baimian took the initiative to tell him, "You can explore other rooms and search for the door that leads to the New World."

Shang Jianyao's attention was indeed diverted. He excitedly massaged his temples and fell asleep. In the Mind Corridor, he had his hands in his pockets. As he casually chose a direction, he looked around.

He didn't immediately enter the rooms that he had yet to explore as if he wanted to choose a seemingly interesting destination.

"Why don't we throw a die?" suggested the Shang Jianyao that sought novelty eagerly.

The calm and rational Shang Jianyao snatched the initiative and stroked his chin. "There's no rush. Let's find the rooms in the strategy guide first."

The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty immediately retorted, "Wouldn't that be boring?"

The calm and rational Shang Jianyao laughed. “A room described in the strategy guide isn’t equivalent to a boring room. Don’t you think some of the rooms the company has explored are equally interesting? For example, 101’s mental hospital.”

“That’s right!” Shang Jianyao—who sought novelty—clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “A mental hospital suits us very well!”

The rash Shang Jianyao squeezed his head out and shouted, “There’s also 102, which represents Master Zhuang, Jiang Xiaoyue’s 503, and 205, which is suspected to be Dawn’s dream.”

Back then, Pangu Biology only said that Room 205 was suspected to be a certain Kalendaria’s dream and didn’t mention Dawn’s name. Since it started with 2, it could either be February’s Kalendaria, Dawn, or it could also be Master Zhuang, who represented the entire year. Now, it had been confirmed that 102 was the former.

Just as the rash Shang Jianyao said that, the four eyes on the two heads froze at the same time.

Not far in front of the corridor, golden numbers clearly labeled a door number on a vermilion door: 205!

Shang Jianyao fell silent. He squatted down and didn’t move for a long time.

He squatted until he was almost mentally exhausted and had to passively return to the real world. During this process, Shang Jianyaos constantly tried to go over but were constantly suppressed by other Shang Jianyaos. On the bed, Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and gently sang, “We sailed together for ten years, and slept together for a hundred years[1]...”

Jiang Baimian was still awake and interrupted, “What’s wrong? Did you enter a strange room?”

“We haven’t entered yet.” Shang Jianyao yawned.

Jiang Baimian suspiciously asked, “Then, why are you singing?”

“I’m reflecting on how fated we are. I bumped into Room 205,” Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

“The room suspected to be Dawn’s dreamscape?” Jiang Baimian suddenly felt surprised and reasonable.

She muttered to herself, “It hasn’t been two days since we heard the name ‘Dawn’ from Room 506’s owner...”

“We are indeed fated!” Shang Jianyao made a judgment with certainty.

Jiang Baimian understood what he meant and nodded solemnly. “It’s indeed fated. Yes, there’s no rush to enter; make more observations.”

Shang Jianyao had the same idea. He wanted to find other rooms to enhance his strength and find the door that led to the New World.

“Why aren’t you asleep yet?” he asked curiously.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “I’m thinking about my island of fear.” “Any progress?” Shang Jianyao asked in concern.

“No.” Jiang Baimian shook her head. “Maybe I have to investigate the company’s true situation before I can recognize reality and let go of my burden to face it calmly.”

She believed that such a realization was the best way to clear the island of fear.

Shang Jianyao had expended a lot of mental energy. He had just opened his mouth and fell asleep before he could ask any further.

Jiang Baimian spaced out for quite some time before closing her eyes.

The next day, the Old Task Force had breakfast, got into the jeep, left Cliff Village again, and headed for Col Town.

However, they were greeted by an empty square and street. There was a lot of trash scattered here without a good cleanup-End Year City’s convoy had already disappeared.

After returning unhappily, the Old Task Force obtained definite information from the village chief.

When most of the transactions with End Year City were completed, they received another telegram with unknown content. Therefore, they left Col Town at dawn and headed to Icefield.

“Something happened in End Year City?” Long Yuehong guessed.

Shang Jianyao eagerly suggested, “Should we use the tracks left in the snow to search for clues and follow them?”

“Not for the time being,” Jiang Baimian replied concisely. “The reason was previously mentioned.”

She then looked around. “We’ve done all that needs to be done here. We’ll also leave Cliff Village for Icefield today. Our destination is the city ruin where Shang Jianyao’s father last appeared.”

Nobody had any objections.

Chapter 813 Snow City

It was snow-white-everywhere.

This was the only feeling Long Yuehong had after the Old Task Force had traversed Icefield for three days.

Here, apart from the light-blue sky, darkness, and the various colors coming from the Old Task Force, all he saw was snow-white.

In this season, the few creatures that existed in Icefield remained dormant.

If not for the sunglasses, Long Yuehong suspected that he would’ve already been blinded.

Shang Jianyao—who was driving—muttered as he stared ahead with his eye-protecting sunglasses, “Where are the bandits? Can’t some bandits come?”

At this moment, the music didn’t seem to make him forget the boredom outside.

In the passenger seat, Jiang Baimian nudged her sunglasses and scoffed. “Where would bandits come from in Icefield? The only outcome of being a bandit here is to starve to death or freeze to death.”

There were pitifully few human settlements in Icefield, and no caravans came. Bandits couldn’t make a living.

It was only in the summer months when the snow melted and the climate was no longer chilling cold that many Ruin Hunters came to explore the cities abandoned in this area and obtain the corresponding supplies, becoming a little more lively. This resulted in the appearance of bandits.

The Old Task Force’s current route was planned by Geneva. They wouldn’t venture deep into Icefield; instead, they would head east along Icefield’s southern end and head to the area closest to the White Knights to search for the city ruin where Shang Jianyao’s father had last appeared.

This way, they could avoid most of the extreme weather, and the surrounding temperature wouldn’t be ridiculously cold. This was a boon for their team’s jeep that used high-performance batteries.

Shang Jianyao deliberately ignored Jiang Baimian’s words and looked into the rearview mirror. “Little Red, why don’t you pretend to be a bandit?”

If not for the boring scenery outside, Long Yuehong couldn’t be bothered with him. “Why not you?”

The shock brought about by the ice and snow had already subsided.

“Sure, sure!” Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

Long Yuehong was at a loss for words. Fortunately, Bai Chen—who was beside him—looked in front of her and said, “There seems to be ruins over there.”

“Yes.” Geneva gave definite feedback.

Shang Jianyao looked over and found black silhouettes suspected to be high-rise buildings looming across the snow-laden horizon.

They were covered in snow, but there were some exposed areas. Otherwise, Bai Chen wouldn't have been able to confirm that they were ruins and not snow mountains. "Shall we go take a look?" Shang Jianyao glanced at Jiang Baimian and eagerly suggested, "It's on the way anyway."

It was only a slight detour.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "Sure, it's much safer to camp in a city ruin than in the wilderness."

The high-rise buildings could shield the Old Task Force from the wind and snow. In Icefield, where they slept in the wilderness, the jeep might be buried if they encountered a blizzard. These were forces of nature that Jiang Baimian and the others couldn't resist.

Of course, city ruins often had other dangers in general, but those dangers were most likely ones the Old Task Force could resolve themselves. "Huzzah!" Shang Jianyao shouted, mimicking the Old World's entertainment to express his excitement.

Long Yuehong cautiously asked Genava, "Are you sure it's not a mirage?"

"In theory, no. But if we really encounter a large-scale illusion created by an Awakened, I won't be able to tell for the time being," Genava replied very honestly.

"Isn't that better?" Shang Jianyao became increasingly excited.

When it was almost evening, the jeep finally arrived at the city ruin.

The top of every building here was covered in thick snow. Ice stalactites hung down, not only covering some of the outer walls but also creating a feeling that everything was crystal.

In addition, the ground, pools, protruding eaves from the buildings, iron railings, and abandoned vehicles were covered in snow. At a glance, the city seemed to be frozen in time.

This was completely different from the city ruins that the Old Task Force had previously been to. It was more shocking and desolate.

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze and expressed his opinion. “It looks the same as the snow forest we previously passed by.” Long Yuehong noticed that the abandoned vehicles on the street were haphazardly squeezed together. It bottlenecked traffic, and skeletons could be seen protruding everywhere.

The skeletons were buried in snow, and most of them only revealed a certain outline. Only a few were exposed for various reasons and were rotten.

No matter how many times she saw such a scene, Jiang Baimian couldn't help but feel depressed and sigh.

This wasn't an outcome that humans should have.

Be it natural disasters or wars, they weren't what humans-or rather, what most humans hoped to see.

Sigh. Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, “Find a place with shelter from the snow and set up camp.”

She didn't plan on enjoying the protection of the walls in this city's high-rise buildings to prevent any accidents or loss of the vehicle.

In Icefield, without a car and the supplies loaded on it, the Old Task Force couldn't last long no matter how powerful they were.

Genava was the same.

Under the smart bot's exploration and calculations, the Old Task Force's jeep soon drove behind a tall building and stopped beside a collapsed perimeter wall.

The howling wind was blocked by the building as it circled around the sides and stopped attacking them.

“Let's eat, let's eat!” Shang Jianyao enthusiastically pushed open the door and alighted.

“Why are you so enthusiastic?” Long Yuehong—who had alighted-asked casually.

After the initial excitement of arriving in Icefield, he had never seen Shang Jianyao in such a state.

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up as he replied, "We can only explore after we have our fill."

"Get some rest." Jiang Baimian—who was on the other side of the jeep—stopped this fellow's delusions.

Bai Chen had just pushed open the door when she suddenly saw a white figure jump from the top of a tall building covered in thick snow to another building in the distance. The figure then disappeared from her field of vision.

"There seems to be some creature over there." Bai Chen pointed in the corresponding direction.

Jiang Baimian looked over and didn't discover anything. Geneva and the others were the same.

"What is it?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, "A white leopard or some other feline creature."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "A creature from Icefield that has relatively high resistance to the cold?"

Shang Jianyao was concerned about another question. "What does such a creature usually eat?"

"Other Icefield creatures." Long Yuehong felt that the question was self-explanatory. Would you feed it if it didn't have anything to eat?

Jiang Baimian clapped her hands. "Alright, everyone knows that creatures exist in Icefield. Let's just mind our own business."

Apart from Shang Jianyao, who had some objections, the others had no objections.

The Old Task Force soon split into two teams. One team prepared dinner, and the other team chopped down the doors nearby and gathered a large amount of firewood.

The bonfire burned, and the crackling flames made one feel a sense of warmth.

Long Yuehong hadn't seen flames for days and was rather touched. He exhaled and said, "I used to think that compared to the company, places like the Blackmarsh Wilderness don't seem like places humans should live in. But I now feel that compared to Icefield, those places in the Blackmarsh Wilderness are like heaven."

For once, Shang Jianyao didn't retort.

In the middle of the night, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao wrapped themselves in thick clothes and alighted from the jeep to replace Bai Chen and Long Yuehong.

The bonfire gently swayed, bringing light and warmth, as well as black shadows and silence.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao were experienced warriors who didn't lower their vigilance because of the harsh environment. They circled the bonfire and slowly paced around, observing and sensing their surroundings.

After nearly an hour, Jiang Baimian suddenly frowned and tilted her ear. "Is there a sound?"

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao clapped. "Your ears are much better than before."

He indicated that there was indeed a sound through such a reply.

The sound was deep and rumbling as it came from afar, sounding like a whimper from the wind.

Jiang Baimian focused for a while and muttered to herself, "The sound of engines? And there's more than one, perhaps more than ten..."

“A convoy?” Shang Jianyao guessed excitedly.

Jiang Baimian frowned. “What convoy won’t rest in the middle of the night?”

More importantly, which convoy would come to Icefield in this season?

“You’ll have to ask them that.” Shang Jianyao said matter-of-factly.

Jiang Baimian listened for a while before saying, “The sound of the engines is getting further and further away. It shouldn’t have anything to do with us. Maintain basic vigilance and don’t get involved.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao didn’t act up this time.

After more than half an hour, the sounds completely disappeared. Jiang Baimian informed Geneva, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong of this matter at dawn. They then had breakfast and got into the jeep, prepared to leave the city ruin and continue heading to their destination.

The jeep drove out of the city along the streets on both sides of the road.

After passing through an intersection, Shang Jianyao—who was sleeping in the backseatsuddenly opened his eyes and excitedly said, “There are people over there. There’s one, two, three, four, five...”

He kept counting until Jiang Baimian interrupted him. “Give a rough number.”

Shang Jianyao had to stop counting. “Fewer than 100, but it’s not much fewer.”

Chapter 814 New Friends

1-100? Then, why were you counting? We’d have already encountered those people before you finished counting! Even though he had joined the Old Task Force for several years, Long Yuehong still couldn’t completely adapt to Shang Jianyao’s style. This was because the other party often came up with new antics.

“Nearly 100 people?” As Jiang Baimian signaled for Bai Chen to slow down the car, she frowned and muttered to herself, “Why would such a large team appear in Icefield?”

“We’ll know by asking.” Shang Jianyao had an expression that said: “What’s there to worry about?”

These words were written all over his face: If you have any questions, just consult the person involved. How simple is that? We have brothers everywhere!

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Let’s find a place to observe from afar before considering making contact. Hey, take out your loudspeaker and be prepared to say something. Old Ge, monitor the others’ conditions. If there’s also a Mind Corridor-level Awakened among them, us heading over won’t be able to hide from them.” “Alright!” Shang Jianyao replied excitedly before volunteering. “Old Ge, drive. I’ll sit in the passenger seat; this will make it easier to observe and react.”

Jiang Baimian said in relief, “That’s a good idea, but why must we drive over? Hide the jeep somewhere nearby and let Little White, Little Red, and Old Ge guard it. Wouldn’t it be better for you and me to hide our consciousness and sneak over?”

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

Jiang Baimian quickly ordered, “Little White, stop the car by the side.”

The Old Task Force quickly split into two teams.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao put on their military exoskeletons, concealed their consciousness, and headed for the target area. They didn’t take the main road and used the snow-covered alleys to circle around to the place where a large number of human consciousnesses had gathered.

Before long, they entered the third floor of a building and looked down.

The first thing they saw were ice stalactites hanging from the half-open windows. Following that was a cleared square without much snow.

There was a memorial monument and a human statue in the square, but they had been seriously eroded. This peppered their surfaces with deformed holes, making them look extremely terrifying.

Around the monument and the human statue were heavy trucks. They had anti-slip tires and surrounded a camp with many RVs.

The plastic cloth used to shelter them from the rain and snow on these trucks had been removed, revealing the empty cargo hold.

In the camp were many RVs and a few SUVs. They were of different colors—black, white, brown, and red—as if they were holding an expo.

At this moment, 50 to 60 humans were gathered around a few bonfires. Their expressions were blank, and they looked at each other silently as if their souls had been extracted.

There were also 30 to 40 people distributed across the different cars based on what Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian sensed.

Every car had people.

“This way of setting up a camp...” Jiang Baimian revealed an expression of reminiscence.

Shang Jianyao was rather excited. “My brothers, Rootless!” Rootless lived in RVs and were accustomed to wandering. Their customs were different from ordinary human ethnicities. Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “This is a little different from the Hometown caravan we’ve seen before. Hometown mainly employs RVs, while this team’s RVs and trucks are evenly split. Besides, Hometown is basically Ashlandic. Most of the people here are of Red River ethnicity.”

“Cousins.” Shang Jianyao corrected his words. He then said in concern, “These Rootless seem to have encountered something and lost their

goods.”

This was his judgment from the empty trucks.

Without waiting for Jiang Baimian’s response, he continued, “As a group that mainly transports goods and does trading, losing their goods means losing their credibility. They could only come to

Icefield to search for a quiet place to collectively repent and decide if they should commit suicide...”

“Stop, stop, stop!” Jiang Baimian forcefully interrupted his guess.

It was getting more and more ridiculous!

She looked at Shang Jianyao and chuckled. “I know. You want to go over to ask what happened and show your concern for your cousins.”

“That’s right, that’s right,” Shang Jianyao admitted frankly.

“The problem now is that it’s difficult to determine whether the Rootless are friend or foe.” Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, “Take out your loudspeaker and express your kindness.”

The ‘kindness’ of becoming friends.

After obtaining permission, Shang Jianyao immediately took out his blue and white loudspeaker from his tactical backpack.

He had previously tested it before. When exerting influence, the loudspeaker module attached to the military exoskeleton wasn’t as effective as using an independent loudspeaker directly. It seemed like too many turns and complicated circuitry resulted in excessive loss. Of course, this decline was only about 10%. At this distance, it didn’t affect Shang Jianyao from using Thought Guidance on the group of people suspected to be Rootless. He only found it more interesting to shout through the loudspeaker.

“Good morning, everyone.” He politely greeted them in the Red River language. The group of people suspected to be Rootless instantly reacted. They came to their senses one after another and went their separate ways in search of cover. “I know the Hometown caravan and am brothers with Ferlin. They are also Rootless and are active in the vast lands between Weed City and the Gold Coast.” As Shang Jianyao shouted, Jiang Baimian used the binoculars to pay attention to those people.

When they heard ‘Hometown’ and Ferlin, they clearly paused. Some even revealed thoughtful expressions. According to this, Jiang Baimian determined that these people were indeed Rootless. Even if they weren’t, they were closely related to the Rootless.

Shang Jianyao held the loudspeaker and continued, “I like the Rootless very much and am willing to become friends with every Rootless and become siblings...”

After he finished his ‘ramblings,’ the people relaxed. Apart from those who stayed in the cars, the rest gathered by the bonfire again and waved at Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao with a smile.

Shang Jianyao put down the loudspeaker in satisfaction.

“Let’s go over.” Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything else.

The two of them—who were wearing military exoskeletons—easily jumped down from the third floor and arrived at the camp in a few jumps. “How should I address you?” Shang Jianyao pushed up the helmet visor, stretched out his hands, and enthusiastically shook the convoy leader’s hand.

Jiang Baimian—who also propped up her visor—slowed down her breathing because the strong smell of gasoline and diesel greeted her.

“Smith,” replied the Red River man in his fifties with a head full of frost. “What about you?”

Although he was tall, he was only 1.75 meters tall. But compared to most surface people, he was considered quite tall.

“Zhang Qubing.”

“October Xue.”

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian skillfully gave their aliases in the Red River language.

The blue-eyed Smith asked in surprise, “Zhang Qubing and October Xue—who are wanted by First City?” You Rootless are really well-informed. As expected of nomads who live in vehicles and wander around... Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly. “That’s right. We’re very valuable,” Shang Jianyao replied proudly. The people around him nodded in unison.

They were indeed very valuable, and being valuable often meant that they were very powerful or very dangerous.

Shang Jianyao asked in confirmation, “Are you really Rootless?” “Yes,” Smith admitted frankly. “We just encountered Fer’s Hometown caravan in the Orange Company’s sphere of influence last year.”

Shang Jianyao nodded. “What’s wrong with you guys?” He pointed at the empty heavy trucks.

Smith revealed a confused and blank expression. “We got a transport job. The cargo owner requested that we transport a large number of supplies to this Ice Ruin, and someone will receive them.

“In the end, we realized this morning that all the supplies were gone—there were plenty of supplies! The people on night duty have no impression of this at all! Neither do we!”

How could a thief casually steal from 20 to 30 heavy trucks and RVs filled with supplies? It was impossible to do so without a convoy with the same number of loading capability.

Furthermore, even with such a convoy, the transfer of supplies took time and effort. It was impossible for the Rootless not to notice.

Therefore, Smith and his people were at a loss for a long time. The only thing they were thankful for was that the vehicles they treated as family and loved ones weren’t lost.

“Oh...” Shang Jianyao first felt sympathy before asking excitedly, “Did you guys all have the same dream?”

You suspect that these Rootless were forced into sleep? Jiang Baimian thoughtfully waited for an answer.

Smith and the others matched it and shook their heads. “The people on night duty remember that they didn’t sleep,” Smith emphasized.

Jiang Baimian thought for a few seconds and asked, “Are you sure the cargo owner wanted you to complete the transaction here?”

Who would come to Icefield to make such a large transaction? Apart from it being well-concealed, it was very inconvenient!

“We’ve confirmed it repeatedly,” Smith replied.

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Shang Jianyao asked in concern, “Did the cargo owner pay you? That’s the point.” “50% down payment. We’d be paid the rest upon returning.” At this point, Smith suddenly revealed a pained expression. He frowned and heaved. “I-I don’t remember the cargo owner’s looks, identity, and address...”

Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated. “Something actually happened last night, but all of you have forgotten? The corresponding memories were deleted en masse? Besides, this might be what the cargo owner meant by taking ‘receipt.’

Smith and the others looked at each other, unable to answer.

Jiang Baimian didn’t rush him and thought about it. According to our experience dealing with the Anti-intellectualism Church, large-scale memory erasure is an ability only available at the Mind Corridor. Furthermore, it affected nearly 100 people at the same time without leaving any traces. This means that it’s at least the kind that has explored the Mind Corridor’s depths...

A mysterious and suspicious transaction of large supplies... Both parties didn’t want to expose their identities and used very high-level powers... It involves some sensitive supplies, people in sensitive positions, or... At this thought, Jiang Baimian suddenly had a suspect.

That faction was clearly located in Icefield, but it had never made transactions or replenished supplies from the outside world. This resulted in nobody knowing their exact location. Eighth Research Institute!

Chapter 815 Place of Origin

With the number of Awakened the Eighth Research Institute has, it's completely reasonable for them to make such an exaggerated commotion over a large transaction... However, this is mainly my personal guess. Due to the fact that Icefield is within the Eighth Research Institute's sphere of influence, it's only right to push the blame to them if there's any problem... Jiang Baimian

—who had her eyes lowered-looked at Smith and the others again and asked, “Have you confirmed the situation near the square? For example, were there any signs of other vehicles?”

Snow covered the square, so it was impossible for a team consisting of dozens of cars to ‘appear’ out of thin air and ‘disappear.’ They would definitely leave behind evidence from having the tires travel across the snow.

Smith replied with a bitter smile, “If there was, we wouldn't be staring blankly here and not know what to do. We wander the northern Ashlands and have seen Awakened. We have them ourselves.”

He meant that there were no signs of other vehicles appearing in the square. The goods escorted by their Rootless team seemed to have evaporated.

Shang Jianyao jumped up on the spot and used the military exoskeleton to jump five to six meters high.

During the split second he was stationary in midair, he relied on his superior vantage point to quickly observe the situation around the square.

Pure snow covered the roads, streets, and abandoned vehicles' surfaces, turning everything pure white. Apart from the Rootless convoy's route into the city ruin, there were no tire tracks over the pure whiteness. There were only a few human footprints. They were clearly left behind by Smith and the others as they split up to search for clues.

They seemed to have been in the city ruin for several days, so much so that most of the tire tracks had been covered by the snowfall a few days ago. In other words, there were indeed no new vehicle tracks in the surrounding area.

Clang!

Shang Jianyao landed on the ground under everyone's slightly dazed gazes. He then asked Smith, “Are you sure you lost the supplies last night? Could it have been earlier?”

Smith thought for a moment and exchanged a few words with the other Rootless before shaking his head. “That’s how it is from our memories.”

He didn’t answer with certainty because since there was a large-scale deletion of memories, there might’ve been large-scale memory tampering Jiang Baimian refuted Shang Jianyao’s guess. “Even if the supplies were picked up on the day Smith and the others arrived, and the subsequent experiences were forged memories, it’s impossible for the vehicles that transported the supplies away to leave no traces behind.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “I mean that the tire tracks weren’t left behind by Smith and the others but left behind by the group of people who took away the supplies. Smith and the others actually arrived here earlier. The corresponding tracks have been completely buried in the heavy snow.”

“Although this is indeed a possibility, it’s too complicated. It’s better to erase memories on a large scale; it’s convenient, fast, and saves time.” Although Jiang Baimian said that, she still switched on the walkie-talkie that came with the military exoskeleton and instructed her distant teammates, “Old Ge, Little Red, Little White, go to the intersection ahead and follow the tire tracks in reverse to see where the vehicles were heading.”

She didn’t say that even if the group of people didn’t have the ability to erase memories on a large scale and only had the conditions to tamper with them, they wouldn’t pile difficulties on themselves to fabricate memories spanning a few days. At most, they would modify the memories that only involved an hour or two after the ‘transaction.’

Everyone had the tendency to be lazy. In a situation where there was no clear advantage or disadvantage between the two solutions, nobody would torture themselves.

Shang Jianyao had only casually raised the possibility, forgetting the matter almost instantly. He excitedly chatted with Smith and the others about anomalies they felt might exist. He even asked the other party what grade of gasoline they liked to use as perfume and if they had any special dishes.

Finally, Jiang Baimian received Geneva’s reply: “The vehicle tracks head south. Shall we continue tracking?”

“Not for the time being,” Jiang Baimian calmly ordered. She then turned to Smith and the others. “Those vehicle tracks should be yours.”

“Without vehicles, how did they move away so many supplies...” Smith revealed his confusion again.

Even if the other party was using helicopters that didn’t need land, they would still have to mobilize many helicopters in one go. It was impossible for them not to leave behind any traces.

With Icefield’s environment and weather, it was barely possible for helicopters to transport people for a short distance. Transporting supplies over a long and arduous journey was tempting fate.

“Could it be that those people’s base is nearby?” Jiang Baimian also thought in this direction.

Without waiting for Smith and the Rootless’s response, Shang Jianyao smiled. “The answer is very simple; I know what’s going on.”

“Tell me.” Jiang Baimian exhaled, expecting to hear a magical train of thought.

The so-called magical train of thought was a simplified term for the strange train of thought unique to mental patients.

Shang Jianyao casually pointed at the snow on a street near the square. “If it were me, I would use Matter Interference to control the snow and hide my tracks as the convoy leaves.”

This... On the one hand, Jiang Baimian found it a little ridiculous; it was just like how figures in the Old World’s entertainment could have their hair fly and look cool upon appearing because someone was blowing at them with an electric fan. On the other hand, she believed that it was rather possible after some thought and deliberation.

Apart from the relatively high mental expenditure, this was more reliable than any previous guess.

The only problem was that Awakened in the Last Man domain had Electromagnetic Interference. However, it was very normal for the other party to be an Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor’s depths and had Matter Interference abilities.

At this thought, Jiang Baimian asked Shang Jianyao, “How long can you keep controlling the snow?”

If it could only be maintained for less than an hour, the Old Task Force could use the square as the origin and draw a large circle before circling around to seek out traces of the convoy.

Shang Jianyao sized up the Rootless’s trucks and RVs and estimated, “Two to three hours.”

That makes things difficult... Jiang Baimian frowned slightly.

The Awakened, suspected of being able to erase memories on a large scale, was very likely to have more rooms under his belt than the ones Shang Jianyao had explored in the Mind Corridor, so he naturally was able to control the snow for longer periods. After all, the latter had been ‘obsessed with going to Room 506 and peeping at 102 and 205 ever since he entered the Mind Corridor’s depths. He had never explored other rooms.

A circle depicting the possible distance a convoy could cover in two to three hours was huge. The time it took and the electricity consumption more than doubled.

As time dragged on, it might snow again considering Icefield’s weather. Besides, the other party might not only send a Mind Corridor-level Awakened to ‘carry ‘the supplies away.

If it were really the Eighth Research Institute, they could completely do such a thing with their plentiful Awakened. Jiang Baimian suppressed the urge to search for traces with great difficulty and decided to obtain clues from another direction. She looked at Smith and the others and asked, “Where did you take on this business?”.

Although the owner’s looks, name, and image had been deleted, Jiang Baimian believed that the large settlement which the Rootless team set off from involved the moving and loading of many supplies and a large number of other matters. It was a rather difficult task to delete all of them, and the person who did it might not be willing to do so.

This didn’t affect anything.

Smith quickly replied, “Gesterbourg.”

This was a large settlement belonging to the White Knights, near Icefield.

Hmm... Jiang Baimian silently filed this in her memories and planned on going there later to see if she could discover any clues.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao consoled his good brothers. "You don't have to worry. In any case, what's the difference between losing the goods and not losing the supplies when you can't remember the cargo owner? At most, you'll lose half of your transportation fees. Just treat this trip as a vacation on company money."

Although Smith didn't know the Old World phrases like 'vacation on company money,' he still understood the meaning. He nodded and said, "That's all we can do."

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and asked, "Do you know of a human city that turned to ruins more than ten years ago?"

She roughly described the situation where Shang Jianyao's father had last appeared.

Smith immediately smiled. "I know! Before the Heartless disease destroyed that place, we often transported supplies over to trade."

At this point, Smith's expression turned serious. "You want to go there?"

"Yes!" Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation. "We aren't outsiders anyway. Quick, tell us the exact location."

Smith frowned. "I don't suggest you go."

"Why?" Shang Jianyao asked. Smith sized him and Jiang Baimian up and said, "Many Ruin Hunters attempted to go there to search for treasure, but very few returned alive. It's said that it's covered in the Heartless virus. As long as one enters, they might be infected, and it's very easy to be infected."

Chapter 816 Ceningmis

There's also the danger of a very serious Heartless infection there? Jiang Baimian's eyelids twitched when she heard Smith.

Before this, she had neglected this problem.

There were two reasons for this. The first was that the captured Eighth Research Institute's commissioner had clearly said that they had entered the city and had made preparations to be quarantined in advance to resolve the danger that the Heartless disease would sweep through the world again. The second was that the subsequent dangers in the cities that experienced the Heartless disease outbreak in the Chaotic Era mainly came from the Heartless's attacks and their own kind's strife, not the constant infection.

Therefore, Jiang Baimian understood the situation in the sense that there wouldn't be much danger as long as they didn't cross the Eighth Research Institute's 'isolation zone.'

Now, she realized that the situation didn't seem like it.

A large number of Ruin Hunters later went, but they still couldn't escape the Heartless disease's threat.

As long as one enters, there's a high chance of them being infected with the Heartless disease, regardless of whether they pass through the isolation zone? Or is the Eighth Research Institute actually isolating the entire area? But did the Eighth Research Institute not leave behind any obstacles that allowed the Ruin Hunters to pass through? As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, she heard Shang Jianyao ask in confirmation, "Really?"

Smith nodded solemnly. "Although I've only heard of these things, many Ruin Hunters I know and those who have been there have indeed never returned. At least I've never encountered them again."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "Actually, I've been wondering about something: That city and the surrounding area have only been destroyed by the Heartless disease for about ten years. How does nobody know its exact location? If it could feed hundreds of thousands of residents, that faction had more or less transacted with the outside world and used their products to exchange for the necessary resources."

It was already rather impressive to be able to ensure a basic food supply chain in such an area. Even if they had a large number of factories that could produce weapons, bullets, cloth, and other things, there was a high chance that they lacked the corresponding raw materials.

Even a faction like Pangu Biology—which was hidden deep underground and had already established an internal ecosystem—had to buy ores, oil, and other supplies from the outside world.

It was unlikely that the city could be like Pangu Biology or the Eighth Research Institute, which were famous for their secrecy. They had preserved their exact location very well. The fact that the Old Task Force of Shang Jianyao's father could find them back then proved many things. Old He from End Year City also said that he had occasionally encountered people from that city more than ten years ago. Now, Jiang Baimian roughly knew the answer: After the news of the city's destruction by the Heartless disease spread, almost everyone who knew its exact location rushed over in an attempt to take a share of the loot. In the end, only a few returned alive and didn't dare to eye it any further.

Smith smiled awkwardly. "I once wanted to go over and get some supplies to sell, but I didn't dare to do so after hearing those rumors. We usually don't talk about that city, and we're no longer the kind of people who have to worry about the next meal all the time and need to risk our lives to snatch supplies. Only by staying alive can we have more opportunities."

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded him.

Jiang Baimian asked about the exact situation before the city was destroyed and obtained a satisfactory answer. It was only then that they figured out the complete name of the target location: Ceningmis.

This was an ancient name that was somewhat different from the current Red River language. It meant the King's Forest.

According to Smith, the forest there had long been seriously damaged due to Icefield's southern expansion. Later, humans in the city and the surrounding area cultivated more farmlands and cut down a large number of trees. The forest then failed to live up to its

name.

The next morning, outside the icy ruins.

Long Yuehong sat in the backseat of the jeep and watched Shang Jianyao extend half of his body out the window before waving enthusiastically at Smith and the Rootless, who were heading south to return to the White Knights' sphere of influence.

“Goodbye! We must meet again!” Shang Jianyao shouted, but he didn't implant the corresponding thoughts. After he sat back in the driver's seat, Long Yuehong said solemnly, “Are we still going to Ceningmis?”

It was so dangerous that there was a high chance they would be infected with the Heartless disease the moment they entered.

At this moment, snow started to flutter outside the window, but it wasn't too heavy. The wind was also relatively gentle.

“Why not?” Shang Jianyao asked in response. “Since there's still a large amount of hidden Heartless virus there and the possibility of it spreading, we can't ignore it. Yes, when the time comes, we'll get Old Ge to send the nuclear bomb in and detonate it remotely. With a boom, the apocalyptic crisis will be resolved.”

You make it sound so noble and righteous... I thought you would play the family card. After all, that's where your father last appeared... Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said to Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, “I thought about it for a long time yesterday and have some ideas. The most terrifying thing about the Heartless disease is the unknown. One doesn't know how the disease is contracted or when the disease will act up.

“However, we already have a lot of understanding of the Heartless disease. We clearly know that it's related to the New World. We have three speculations about the Heartless disease's source: The first is a New World powerhouse. The second is a node that connects to the New World. The third is humanity's faith in the Kalendarium and even some New World powerhouses. Then, where does the Heartless virus—which remains active in Ceningmis—originate?”

Genava didn't snatch the chance to answer from the carbon-based humans and allowed Bai Chen to answer. “The third method can be ruled out. There are no longer any living humans to provide faith to, so there are only corpses and a small number of Heartless left.”

After so many years, it was very difficult for Heartless—who didn't know how to carry out industrial production to maintain their original scale. Furthermore, although the climate in that area was relatively warm and arable, making it different from other places in Icefield, people could still freeze to death in winter.

Long Yuehong said, “The New World effect brought about by faith shouldn’t be able to create such a large-scale Heartless disease either. Ever since the mid to late Chaotic Era, there have been many places with faith. But apart from Ceningmis, we’ve never heard of any place suffering from such a serious outbreak.

“As for the New World’s powerhouses, I can’t find a reason why they had to destroy Ceningmis or even stay there all this time. They didn’t even let go of the Ruin Hunters who subsequently entered.”

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Maybe it’s something like Yama Tiger-he can’t return to reality, control his body, and do anything about it.”

“Now that you mention it, it does seem like it.” Long Yuehong nodded as he thought about it.

After Yama Tiger fell asleep, the human settlements on Lake Heart Island were also destroyed by the Heartless disease. Although not all of them contracted the Heartless disease, the rest didn’t last long under the continuous Heartless infection and the Heartless attacks.

As for the people who subsequently went to the island to explore, they would also be infected with the Heartless disease once they stayed longer than a certain limit.

“I think there’s still a difference.” Bai Chen voiced her opinion. “As Ruin Hunters, they definitely won’t want to explore any secrets after entering Ceningmis. Instead, they want to obtain supplies as soon as possible. Even if the Heartless interfere, they can fill their cars in a few hours, assuming the area hadn’t been plundered. To put it simply, they should be able to leave Ceningmis the next day. They won’t stay more than three days. It’s impossible for so many people to be unlucky enough to encounter the area where a New World powerhouse is sleeping, right?”

Jiang Baimian added, “The entire Ceningmis should be much larger than Lake Heart Island. If it’s only active in the periphery or even at the city’s edge, it might not be a problem even if one stays for more than three days.”

She meant that it was impossible to create a situation like that with a New World powerhouse.

Jiang Baimian then concluded, “Either a certain Kalendaria’s body of descent is sleeping there, the investigation back then created a mega New World node, or there a large number of New World nodes that are distributed across different parts of Ceningmis.”

“Why didn’t the Eighth Research Institute’s people get infected with the Heartless disease when they entered? They also claim that they didn’t find my father despite searching the entire city.” Shang Jianyao took this to heart. “Can’t they do more? This can save us a lot of time!”

He was filled with disappointment toward the Eighth Research Institute.

“Maybe the Eighth Research Institute has also grasped a way to eliminate New World nodes, but the effects aren’t permanent. When the Ruin Hunters rushed over, the New World nodes were already restored. It’s also possible that the Eighth Research Institute didn’t search the entire city and deliberately avoided the most dangerous area.” Geneva voiced his analysis.

Long Yuehong nodded. “The Eighth Research Institute still has powerhouses from the New World like Professor Li, Vice President, and even the legendary darkness to provide protection. It shouldn’t be that easy to contract the Heartless disease.”

“We do too!” Shang Jianyao immediately took out the Life Angel necklace and lowered his hand. “The night is long; the Arbiter of Fate blesses thee!”

“...” Long Yuehong and the others were speechless.

Our background isn’t much worse than the Eighth Research Institute...

Shang Jianyao emphasized righteously, “Our mission to explore Ceningmis was approved by the company. We will definitely obtain Big Boss’s blessing.”

That might really make sense... Jiang Baimian muttered silently.

“When the time comes, I’ll hold the Life Angel necklace and enter Ceningmis with Old Ge to determine if the problem there is a New World node, a New World powerhouse, or the remains of a certain Kalendaria.” Shang Jianyao requested to be the vanguard.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a moment before saying, “Alright.” She continued, “According to Smith’s description, it’s only a two to three-day drive between Ceningmis and here. We’ll go over now. Hey, you have to keep your mental state in tip-top condition.”

The time taken she was referring to was based on the speed cars could travel at in Icefield.

Chapter 817 Belief

Under the slightly dark sky, green buildings crept along the cracked path into the distance like silent tombstones in a dead cemetery.

Shang Jianyao and Genava—who were wearing a military exoskeleton and the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor respectively—walked alongside each other while distanced apart. There was only the sound of the wind.

Shang Jianyao turned his head and looked around through the helmet visor. He excitedly said, “Dark sky, abandoned buildings, empty roads, a human and a robot walking into the unknown together... This does remind me of doomsday scenes in the Old World entertainment shows...”

After two days of traveling, the Old Task Force arrived at Ceningmis. They then sent Shang Jianyao—who was carrying the Life Angel necklace—and Genava into the area according to the plan to carry out advanced reconnaissance. They hoped to figure out the root cause of the Heartless virus here.

Genava—who appeared in the form of a large Chameleon—said, “We’re missing a dog.”

“That’s true. Without a dog, a lonesome man and robot still feels a little lacking. It feels like a wasteland.” Shang Jianyao admitted his mistake. He then fell into deep thought. “But we won’t be able to find a dog for the time being...”

After 20 to 30 seconds, Shang Jianyao barked, “Woof, woof, woof!”

“We’ve got them all now!” he said in satisfaction.

Genava had long established Shang Jianyao’s behavior database and had some predictions regarding this development. He was more confused about another question. “Why did you decide to play the

dog after so long? I thought you didn't care about so-called face in such relationships at all and could make a decision on the spot."

Shang Jianyao smiled. "We were carrying out a democratic negotiation and vote to determine who will play the role. This takes some time."

"Understood." Geneva augmented his Shang Jianyao behavior database.

Shang Jianyao looked up at the sky and completely forgot what topic they had been discussing. "Old Ge, don't you think the closer we are to Ceningmis City, the darker the sky becomes?"

Ceningmis was surrounded by mountains on three sides, and the cold draft heading south was thus blocked. The climate was much warmer than elsewhere in Icefield. In this season, the snow had long melted and pooled into streams. The ground also grew a faint green, a vibrant scene of new life.

This should've been a very beautiful scene, but for some reason, this place remained gloomy. There was no sunlight, making one feel stifled as if doomsday was looming once again.

Geneva moved his metal neck up and down. "Yes."

At the edge of Ceningmis, where the Old Task Force camped, the darkness was only equivalent to a gloomy sky. When they approached the main city, they felt as though the city was blanketed in dark clouds.

"It seems like it's not my illusion. This darkness is related to the New World." Shang Jianyao had one hand lowered, wrapped around the Life Angel necklace, and the other covered the metal skeleton as he held the Berserker assault rifle.

He happily said, "The rest is easy; we just need to find the darkest spot. That's definitely the source of the problem!"

"Your inference is too hypothetical and lacks the necessary conditions," the honest Geneva replied. "Maybe it's about to rain, or the entire city might share the same environment."

Shang Jianyao taught his companion in a righteous manner, “Old Ge, have you forgotten our team’s motto? Make bold assumptions and carefully verify them!”

“That’s Big White’s mantra, not the team’s motto.” Genova remembered it very clearly.

Shang Jianyao—who failed to fool him—chuckled. “Big White is my role model!”

“Then, there’s no problem.” Compared to the past, Genova already knew when to stop.

He looked at the main city buildings approaching and seriously warned, “Hey, you have to be careful. The Heartless disease might infect you at any moment. Why didn’t you let me come in first to reconnoiter? We could wait till then to decide if we wanted to find the root cause of the problem after we roughly understood the situation.”

Smart bots weren’t afraid of the Heartless disease.

“Because I’ll come in regardless of whether you discover anything useful.” Shang Jianyao’s answer seemed to imply that this season was suitable for holding spring outings.

Without waiting for Genova to say that Shang Jianyao could enter Ceningmis after a preliminary reconnaissance was conducted, Shang Jianyao smiled and added, “Besides, I’m not worried about being infected.”

Genava—who was wearing the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor—turned his head to look at the fellow.

Shang Jianyao raised his right hand that was holding the Berserker assault rifle and said in a deep voice, “The night is long; the Arbiter of Fate blesses thee!”

He tried to swing the Life Angel necklace around his left wrist, but he decided not to because his hand was paralyzed.

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The red glow in Genova's eyes flickered a few times before he asked, "Hey, do you think your father is still alive?"

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before replying, "I've always believed that he wouldn't stay away from home for no reason. He must've encountered something, and I need to investigate."

Genava crossed the cracked cement ground that had been a casualty of the freezing and scorching ground over the years and changed the question. "Then, do you think we can find your father's whereabouts or related clues in Ceningmis?"

Shang Jianyao smiled. "After joining the Old Task Force, I upheld such a belief everywhere I went."

The red light in Genova's eyes flickered a few more times. "Your carbon-based feelings are indeed more varied and subtle than those of us smart bots."

He looked at the dark sky and the silent, towering buildings in front of him and asked, "Where do you think the clues are most likely?"

Shang Jianyao smiled. "The most dangerous place. Since the Eighth Research Institute's commissioners said that the disaster in Ceningmis originated from that team's investigation of the reason for the Old World's destruction, the center of the disaster must be somewhere or the last place they appeared when they investigated the truth."

"That's an idea." Genova first gave affirmation before asking, "But what if it's only something the Eighth Research Institute's commissioner cooked up?"

Shang Jianyao turned to look at his companion. "Isn't that a good thing?"

Genava analyzed the situation and understood what Shang Jianyao was getting at. He was just about to say something when he suddenly detected a few abnormalities.

"There's blood there—it wasn't left more than two weeks ago." Genova pointed at the intersection that led into Ceningmis City.

There were black marks under a cluster of weeds by the side of the road.

Clang! Clang! Clang! One of Shang Jianyao's hands was paralyzed, and he could only use the Berserker assault rifle's collision with the armor on his chest to create applause. "I didn't discover it at all." He was very honest and calm.

Even with the help of the military exoskeleton's comprehensive warning system, he still couldn't compare to an underground smart bot in terms of detection, even though he had always had good ears and eyes.

"There are no corpses nearby, but there are some traces of a fight. It wasn't too intense." Genova reported his discovery and analysis as he checked.

"Yes, yes." Shang Jianyao nodded repeatedly. "What do you think the situation is?"

The red light in Genova's eyes flickered twice. "Neither side used any guns during the fight. I think the greatest possibility is an internal conflict between the Heartless. A small number of Heartless should still be alive in these ruins, and it seems like there aren't enough supplies left."

After all, Ceningmis had hundreds of thousands of Heartless.

"Heartless..." Shang Jianyao was a little disappointed. He then pointed into the city. "Let's go to the most dangerous place!"

At the intersection where the western mountains led to Ceningmis.

The Old Task Force's jeep was parked in a forest, using the natural protection to conceal themselves.

Jiang Baimian stood on the hood of the car and observed the distant villages, roads, and the edge of the city with binoculars.

Ceningmis's main city district was slightly west.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen took one side each, guarding against any accidents.

After a while, Long Yuehong broke the silence. “Team Leader, why didn’t you stop Shang Jianyao?”

“This should be the last non-negotiable matter apart from saving all of humanity.” Jiang Baimian slowly exhaled. She paused and said, “Besides, since we’ve already painstakingly come this far, the existences behind the curtains probably won’t just watch us be killed by the Heartless disease. With the corresponding items, there’s a high chance that we can enter if the Eighth Research Institute’s people can.”

Those existences referred to the Kalendarium like Big Boss and Eidolon Nun.

Just as she said that, Jiang Baimian suddenly saw a black figure flash in an abandoned village.

She had long expected the Heartless and wild creatures in Ceningmis and wasn’t surprised. She only briefly informed Bai Chen and Long Yuehong of the situation. “I saw a relatively large black feline creature.”

“Feline creature...” Bai Chen pursed her lips and said, “I also saw one in that icy ruins, but its fur was closer to white.”

The icy ruin where they encountered the Rootless convoy.

Jiang Baimian immediately frowned and muttered to herself, “Isn’t this too much of a coincidence...”

Chapter 818 Café

Upon hearing Bai Chen and his team leader’s conversation, Long Yuehong thought for a moment and said, “Maybe this is a relatively common creature in Icefield that will change the color of its fur according to the season.”

Being covered in white fur when there was snow made it easier for it to use the environment to conceal itself and avoid danger. When the snow melted and the climate warmed up, the white faded, and black fur that was more suitable for its current situation grew.

The Old Task Force had already encountered such creatures several times elsewhere.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “Maybe, but there’s a saying that goes: one needs to have broad predictions of the enemy’s actions. When making speculations, one has to try their best to let their thoughts run free and cover up a few more possibilities to prevent you from missing anything and failing miserably. Yes, apart from the large feline creatures that appear in the Ice Ruin and Ceningmis, what else do they have in common?”

She believed that if it wasn’t a coincidence to see such a large feline creature, the reason was definitely hidden in a secret connection between the two places.

Bai Chen recalled and said, “They are both located in Icefield and are all dead. There usually isn’t human activity.”

“The former residents were mainly Red River people,” Long Yuehong added.

Jiang Baimian nodded as her thoughts raced. “Also, also...”

She paused, and her expression gradually turned serious. “Also, these two are somewhat related to the Eighth Research Institute. The one at the icy ruin is just a mere suspicion, but the one here is without a doubt related.”

The Old Task Force currently suspected that the Eighth Research Institute was the one who had made the Rootless team’s goods ‘evaporate into thin air’ at the icy ruin. The Eighth Research Institute’s commissioners had clearly said that not only had they quarantined the area around Ceningmis to prevent the Heartless disease from spreading, but they had also entered the city district to search for the whereabouts of the Old Task Force which Shang Jianyao’s father was a part of.

“Team Leader, you mean that those large feline creatures are related to the Eighth Research Institute?” Long Yuehong was shocked.

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “Xiaochong can control mutated creatures, so the Eighth Research Institute might be able to command certain animals.”

She meant that the Eighth Research Institute might have Awakened with similar abilities to Xiaochong that could exert influence on other creatures.

Of course, Xiaochong currently appeared to be one of Master Zhuang's personalities. It wasn't difficult for him to create and control mutated creatures like Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat. The Eighth Research Institute clearly couldn't be compared to a Kalendaria's persona shards. Therefore, they could only use ordinary animals.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian added, "The Eighth Research Institute specializes in Awakening research. It might be able to create creatures similar to Nightmare Horse and Slumber Cat."

They were mutated creatures with Awakened abilities.

"Those feline creatures are the Eighth Research Institute's 'scouts' in Icefield?" Bai Chen roughly understood what her team leader meant.

Jiang Baimian nodded. "This is only a possibility. Most of the details were through inference, but we have to pay attention to this."

"Yes, we can't be careless!" Long Yuehong had always been careful.

Jiang Baimian immediately put on the military exoskeleton and used the built-in communications system to contact Shang Jianyao and Genova. "Hey, Old Ge, come in. Can you hear me?"

According to her estimates, Shang Jianyao and Genova were already out of the ordinary walkie-talkies' effective range. After all, the closer they were to the main city area, the denser the buildings were, and the more complicated the environment became. Therefore, she switched to a higher-powered communications system. "I can hear you! You're breaking up!" Shang Jianyao's voice sounded with static in the background.

Jiang Baimian immediately warned him, "Be careful of animals! Especially feline animals!"

In the Ceningmis main city area, the sky was so dark that it seemed like evening or a storm was about to descend.

"Be careful, animals?" Genova restored Jiang Baimian's words amid the static with great difficulty.

"Why should I be careful of animals?" Shang Jianyao was a little unconvinced. "Aren't they the ones who should be careful of me?"

The honest Geneva replied, “Maybe she wants you to be careful and not bully animals.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao was satisfied.

Geneva then said, “We can’t ignore the abnormalities in the animals here either. It’s relatively dangerous, and Big White should’ve discovered something. In short, there’s nothing wrong with being careful.”

“No problem.” Although Shang Jianyao said that, he looked eager to see and take on whatever may come.

Geneva—who was wearing the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor—looked around and said, “I’ve calculated the distance between here to Big White and the others, and I’ve also analyzed the surrounding buildings’ layout. I don’t think the communications system’s effects will be that bad. Therefore, I’ve preliminarily determined that there’s relatively strong electromagnetic interference in this area, and it’s very special. I failed to detect it immediately.”

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Shang Jianyao smiled. “Electromagnetic disruptions in city ruins after the apocalypse are very normal. Besides, a New World node can be destroyed by a high-voltage electric current. Its form might be related to electromagnetism.”

“Indeed.” Geneva didn’t retort. He looked at the messy street in front of him and reminded Shang Jianyao, “From the western mountain pass to here, you didn’t sense the existence of a New World node. This means that the possibility that the current situation originated from a large number of small New World nodes is basically eliminated.

“This way, the probability of us encountering a large New World node somewhere in the main city district has increased. In addition, there are two possibilities—a New World powerhouse that exhibits strange mannerisms and has strength that’s close to the Kalendarium.”

The latter three situations were clearly more serious and dangerous than the first.

“Well, we’re already here.” Shang Jianyao didn’t mind.

Wearing the military exoskeleton, he lowered one hand and held the Berserker assault rifle in the other as he tore through the abandoned vehicles.

Compared to the cities that had been reduced to ruins when the Old World was destroyed, there were much fewer cars on Ceningmis Street. It wasn't even one-tenth of the former.

As Ceningmis didn't produce oil, the electricity supply from the surrounding power plants could only maintain the production and basic needs of the citizens. Therefore, only a few people drove.

The difference between this place and places like Weed City was that it was surrounded by Icefield. This made it relatively difficult for Ceningmis to exchange supplies with the outside world; they had to choose the season.

At the same time, Ceningmis's residents couldn't freely explore other city ruins in the nearby area to obtain gasoline from those places. This way, the additional vehicles were naturally refurbished and made into raw materials for other items.

Amidst slight clunking sounds, Shang Jianyao and Geneva walked toward the city district.

Suddenly, a figure pounced out from the second floor of a tall building by the roadside and went straight for Shang Jianyao.

His face was warped, and it was impossible to tell his age. His eyes were abnormally turbid and bloodshot. His golden hair reached his singlet, and the hair was clearly frayed. He wore a tattered, black cotton coat.

It was a Heartless.

Shang Jianyao—who was supposed to sense it in advance and use his abilities—watched in a daze as if he had been stunned at the critical moment.

Bang!

Genava shot the Heartless down. Not only was his marksmanship abnormally precise, but he could also make a certain level of judgment.

The Heartless had clearly attempted a dodge but failed. The bullet hit his head, blasting it apart like a watermelon.

Thud!

As the corpse fell to the ground, blood quickly pooled.

“What’s wrong?” Genava asked Shang Jianyao in concern. “Why didn’t you counter-attack?”

“I was hit by an ability.” Shang Jianyao excitedly shared his encounter. “The Heartless should’ve hidden his human consciousness from the beginning. He then used a certain ability on me after I entered his range.”

“Superior Heartless.” Genava concluded and asked, “An ability that makes you dazed?”

Shang Jianyao shook his helmeted head. “No, I wanted to use Limbs Immobility back then, but I realized that I had forgotten how to use my Awakened abilities. Uh, I haven’t figured out how to use them yet, but I feel like it’s slowly returning.”

“Forgot the way to use your abilities?” Genava looked down at the Heartless corpse. “The question now is: Why did he ignore my existence and directly attack you?”

“Heartless are brainless. They probably don’t know how powerful smart bots are.” Shang Jianyao chuckled and said, “Besides, you’re still wearing the Chameleon armor. He might think that you’re a large chameleon. He can deal with you easily after finishing me off.”

Genava’s gaze moved to the corpse’s abdomen, and he moved his metal neck up and down. “No chameleon carries or uses weapons. He should be starving; it’s been a long time since he found food, so he took the risk and felt that he could avoid my attack. From the looks of it, the other Heartless in Ceningmis aren’t weaker than him. Or rather, at least one in each small group is about as strong as him.”

Genava didn't receive Shang Jianyao's response because the fellow had already looked ahead.
"There seems to be fog over there!"

At the end of the street and deep in the main city district, a faint fog filled the darkness, making the environment there closer to night.

"Let's go take a look." Shang Jianyao did as he said and ran over.

Genava couldn't stop him in time and could only follow closely behind.

Before long, they arrived at the edge of the area by relying on their equipment or themselves.

"Could the source of the problem be in this area?" Shang Jianyao asked excitedly as he stepped into the light fog. The next second, he saw a yellowish light suddenly appear in the distant darkness.

A window was lit up; it seemed to be a café by the side of the road. Two people appeared to be sitting inside.

"There's someone?" Shang Jianyao became increasingly excited. "I'll go over to greet them and make friends!"

"Be careful!" Genava could only warn him.

He had already determined the two figures sitting by the window clearly: One was a lady with her back facing Shang Jianyao and Genava. She wore a thin white dress, and her hair was golden and wavy.

One was a male elder in a formal black suit, a white shirt, and a dark tie. He was in his sixties, and there were obvious wrinkles on his face. His eyes were brownish-yellow, and his hair was thin and white.

The two of them were drinking coffee and chatting calmly.

Chapter 819 Illusion?

Shang Jianyao had just run a few steps toward the lit café in the fog when he stopped.

“What’s wrong?” Geneva braked at will.

Shang Jianyao looked at the two figures reflected in the café window and said under his breath, “I can’t sense their human consciousness. I can already see them, but I still can’t sense their human consciousness. Therefore, when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth, regardless of the ludicrousity.

“They are ghosts...”

Geneva replied objectively, “In such an environment, it’s not too dangerous if they are only ghosts.”

“Are you looking down on ghosts?” Shang Jianyao was in disagreement. “Although Little Red always talks tough, he’s actually very afraid!”

“I mean that ghosts are relatively harmless compared to other situations. At the very least, they are definitely weaker than a Kalendaria’s body of descent.” Geneva fully expressed his opinion. Shang Jianyao skipped the topic and stared at the only light in the darkness. “We can only determine if they’re ghosts after asking. I’ll follow the original plan of going over to greet and make friends.”

Geneva wanted to say that they didn’t have such a plan, but Shang Jianyao had already strode forward and walked deeper into the faint fog.

The yellowish light from the café by the roadside was like a lighthouse that gave pedestrians directions in a dark environment.

Geneva entered combat readiness mode. He stood at a distance staggered from Shang Jianyao and headed for the café.

It was abnormally quiet, and there was no sound of the wind.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—soon arrived at his destination.

The café’s decoration was in the classic style of the Old World. On the heavy brown wooden door was thick, frosted glass.

After restraining the rash one, Shang Jianyao was in no rush to push open the door and enter. He walked to the window and waved at the man and woman. "Hello!"

He enthusiastically greeted in the Red River language.

Be it the lady with long blond hair and a white dress or the man in a formal suit with brownish-yellow eyes, they ignored his gesture and continued chatting as they drank the coffee that emitted twirling steam. They didn't seem to see Shang Jianyao wave his hand or hear his greeting.

"The soundproofing is that good?" Shang Jianyao turned his body and placed his ear against the glass window, attempting to hear what the two people inside were talking about. However, he didn't hear anything.

His eyes widened again as he looked inside, but he realized that only the windows in the entire café were illuminated. The lighting became darker further in until there was no light.

In the area illuminated by light, there were four to five tables but only these two customers.

"It's a little odd," Geneva commented.

Shang Jianyao nodded solemnly. "It seems like we can only discover the problem after entering."

"Did you sense a New World node?" Geneva sought confirmation.

"No." Shang Jianyao shook his head as he walked to the heavy brown wooden door and stretched out his right hand.

With the help of the military exoskeleton, he easily pushed open the door. He then shouted inside with a strong desire to perform, "I'm here to check the hydropower meter! Give me a cup of coffee as well."

Nobody replied.

Shang Jianyao walked into the café and immediately cast his gaze at the unlit area.

There was almost no light there, and it was filled with all kinds of junk as if a group of monsters was reared in the darkness.

“It doesn’t look like a café...” Shang Jianyao who had the help of the night-vision equipment didn’t hide his opinion.

“Indeed.” Geneva agreed.

He felt that the unlit area looked more like an abandoned shop. Valuable items and usable cabinets had been moved away, leaving only a pile of messy items.

“The problem is the light?” One of Shang Jianyao’s arms was paralyzed, and the other held the Berserker assault rifle, preventing him from stroking his chin.

He and Geneva cast their gazes at the window at the same time.

The man and woman continued chatting, but no sound came from them. Furthermore, they didn’t react to Shang Jianyao and Geneva’s entry.

“The two of you!” Shang Jianyao shouted with a rather friendly attitude.

Nobody bothered with him.

He walked to the table by the window.

As the distance closed and the angle changed, he saw what the lady with her back previously facing him and Geneva looked like.

She had beautiful facial features, and her cheeks were thin. Her eyes were as blue as the sea, and there were a few wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. She looked to be in her forties.

At this moment, she was sitting there in a very relaxed state. From time to time, she would take a sip of coffee as if she was fully enjoying her leisure time.

It was obvious that she often acted this way with an intellectual and elegant bearing.

The male elder's left hand—which was opposite her—kept trembling uncontrollably. This clearly affected his left arm, left body, and left leg. Even though he could keep it under control, he appeared to be trembling.

Shang Jianyao greeted them in Ashlandic again, but he still didn't receive a response.

He wasn't discouraged and persevered in using the few dialects he knew. He then took a few steps closer to the coffee table.

He turned his head and said to Geneva, who was guarding the door to prevent any accidents, "I can't smell the coffee's fragrance."

"Illusion?" Geneva analyzed such a possibility and asked in confirmation, "Did you activate the military exoskeleton's anti-poison filter?"

"Definitely! What if I get poisoned without it being activated after entering such a place?" Shang Jianyao replied confidently.

"Is there a possibility that the anti-poison filter system actually screened the coffee aroma?" Geneva reminded.

Shang Jianyao came to a realization. "That's right!

As one hand was paralyzed, he couldn't perform a right-hand punch to his left palm. "Pay attention to my condition. Be prepared to inject me with a biological antidote at any moment," Shang Jianyao shouted as he terminated the anti-poison filter system's operation without waiting for Geneva's response. He then excitedly said, "There's a slight coffee aroma, but it's very faint. This isn't normal; I'm almost beside them!

"What's wrong with these two? We've been whispering for so long, but they haven't reacted."

As he spoke, Shang Jianyao gave up on holding the Berserker assault rifle and allowed it to hang from his body. He then stretched out his right palm and stretched it toward the elder—who seemed to have lost control over half of his body.

No, it was the coffee cup in front of the elder.

Upon seeing this, Genova gave up on persuading him. After all, Shang Jianyao didn't rashly touch the two strange figures.

"I've always respected the old and loved the young. Grandpa, I don't think it's too convenient for you to move your hands and feet. I'll help you carry the cup and feed you." As Shang Jianyao stretched out his hand, he rattled on.

The two of them still ignored him.

The next second, his finger passed through the coffee cup—he didn't touch anything.

After moving his fingers a few times, Shang Jianyao said in disappointment, "Illusion."

"It's indeed an illusion." Genova moved his metal neck up and down.

Shang Jianyao stretched his hand toward the elder in the formal suit and tie. As expected, he saw his palm pass through the other party's body.

The elder was still speaking to the lady opposite him without showing any abnormalities. Of course, there was no sound. "It's just an illusion." Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion again. At the same time, he tried nudging the blond lady according to the non-standard operating procedure he had defined.

His hand passed through the other party's arm again.

"What will Big White do if she knows of such a situation?" Shang Jianyao retracted his skeletal metal palm.

Genava's first reaction was to contact Jiang Baimian, but the electromagnetic interference here was even worse, preventing him from succeeding

At this moment, Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and said, "The first is to search for the source of the illusion. The second is to record the two phantoms' mouths and analyze what they are saying later."

"I'm already recording it. I'll begin analyzing while recording now," Genava immediately replied.

Shang Jianyao took two steps to the side and used the Life Angel necklace's power to carefully sense the situation in the café.

"There's nothing wrong..." he muttered. "Let's take a look around. It might be outside my perception range."

As he spoke, he walked to the café's entrance —where Genava was.

Suddenly, the two figures—who were chatting over coffee—turned their heads at the same time and looked at him!

The wavy, blond-haired lady in the white dress frowned slightly. Her eyes were half-closed as if she were listening to something

"Someone's shouting for her? The source of the illusion? Someone's shouting for her?" Shang Jianyao guessed excitedly.

Genava said in a slightly synthetic voice, "If that's the case, we can stay a few more minutes and see what changes will happen."

He believed that there were many possibilities to the source of the illusion and couldn't make a crude conclusion.

Even though he believed that it was most likely the case, there were several possibilities: First, the electromagnetic environmental disorder naturally resulted in a recording function that constantly reenacted what had happened in Ceningmis back then.

Second, this was what was currently happening. In another place in Ceningmis, the electromagnetic environment's anomaly was projected here.

Third, a certain movie from the past played on an endless loop in such a strange environment.

The next second, the blond lady opened her eyes, looked at Shang Jianyao, and said something.

Genava quickly analyzed her lips, but at the same time, Shang Jianyao shouted, "S-she's talking to me! I can hear her voice!"

He was extremely excited.

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to finish speaking, Genava had finished lip-reading through analysis. "The Arbiter of Fate's Blessed?"

Shang Jianyao then shouted, "S-she's asking if I'm the Blessed of the Arbiter of Fate!"

Chapter 820 Voices

Genava gained confirmation of his lip-reading and asked Shang Jianyao, "I didn't gather any sound waves. How did you hear her?"

"It rang in my head!" Shang Jianyao seemed to have found a new and fun game.

Without waiting for Genava's response, he shouted at the man and woman, "Can you hear me?"

He deliberately raised his voice. Coupled with the echo from the café's walls and glass, it turned into a resounding boom.

The blond woman in a white dress and the elder in a formal suit with half of his body trembling didn't react. They only continued staring at the spot Shang Jianyao was standing in. Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and jumped horizontally. With the exoskeleton's help, he moved several meters forward and arrived in front of Genava from the nearby coffee table.

The blond lady and the formal elder turned their bodies and turned their heads to the two of them. However, they didn't get up, their actions clearly stilted.

The former propped herself up with her hands on the edge of the table and barely moved her body to the designated spot as if she were stuck between the seat and the table. The latter looked like he couldn't exert any strength with his left and could collapse at any moment. "They can totally see me!" Shang Jianyao's face—which was covered by the helmet visor

—was filled with the joy of the experiment's success.

"But they don't seem to hear you," Genova added a conclusion.

Shang Jianyao was immediately vexed. "How can I communicate with them? How should I answer that I'm indeed the Arbiter of Fate's Blessed?"

"Nod." The smart bot's thoughts had always been extremely clear unless it encountered a bug. "That's right!" Shang Jianyao moved his head vigorously.

As he nodded, he muttered, "Unfortunately, I didn't systematically learn sign language, or I could've communicated directly. I can use sign language to express myself, and Old Ge can read their lips. That's not right. They might not be able to understand sign language, so we can only rely on common body language..."

However, the two of them ignored his nod; yet, they didn't look away.

Genava was just about to analyze the situation and get Shang Jianyao to wait patiently to see if he could still hear the lady when Shang Jianyao came to a realization. "I get it! They actually can't see me; they can only vaguely sense my human consciousness!"

He then turned his head and said to Genova, "Therefore, it's me they've been 'looking' at, not you."

"Then, how did the voice you heard come about?" Genova asked.

Shang Jianyao replied firmly, "Telepathy! Maybe they are also Mind Corridor-level Awakened. They might already be at my door and are shouting inside.

"I have to check my room."

He did as he said. He closed his eyes on the spot and raised his right hand to massage his temples.

Although his temples were actually blocked by the military exoskeleton's helmet and his fingers couldn't touch it, he still had to carry out the necessary ritual.

The next second, Shang Jianyao fell asleep while standing.

As soon as he appeared in Room 131, he immediately ran to the door and tried to open it for the guests. The rash Shang Jianyao was then held back by the arms that appeared from his body.

His head automatically went to the peephole and sized up the situation outside.

There was nobody outside.

He then carefully opened the door and looked around.

No guests came.

"Sigh..." He sighed in disappointment and returned to the real world.

"How is it?" Geneva sensed the motion from his body.

Shang Jianyao replied regretfully, "Nothing."

He had always been hospitable.

"How should we communicate..." Shang Jianyao fell into deep thought again.

Suddenly, he shouted, "She spoke to me again! It's: Leave this place!"

"Leave this place..." Geneva repeated these words as he cast his gaze at the man and woman to check their lips.

Shang Jianyao spoke in Ashlandic, so even as a smart bot, he couldn't tell if Shang Jianyao had said 'he' or 'she.'

At this moment, be it the blond lady or the formal elder, they shut their mouths again.

Genava could only ask Shang Jianyao, "Is leaving this place a warning or a reminder?"

This could mainly be determined by the tone.

"It feels like a reminder," Shang Jianyao said as he recalled.

Suddenly, his eyes lit up as he pulled his tactical backpack in front of him.

With a zipping sound, the zipper was unzipped.

Shang Jianyao's right hand reached into his backpack and grabbed the small, lake-green jade Buddha. He then explained to Genava, who had a red glow in his eyes, "In the steelworks factory ruins, this small jade Buddha was the intersection of reality and illusion. It might help me communicate with the people opposite me now."

Just as Shang Jianyao said that, the small jade Buddha suddenly emitted a faint, clear glow.

This was like an aqueous wave that drowned the entire café. Be it the darkness or the area illuminated by light, they were dyed green.

Shang Jianyao then heard the blond lady's words again. "Subhuti's bestowment?"

At the same time, Genava let out a slightly synthetic voice. "I can hear it this time."

This meant that both parties could communicate.

The small jade Buddha was really useful!

“Yes, yes, yes.” Shang Jianyao smiled and answered the blond lady’s question. As a polite person, although he didn’t raise his visor to reveal his face, he still politely asked, “The both of you are?”

The blond lady frowned slightly as if she were considering something and casually replied, “Flora, from the Orange Company.” The elder in formal clothing spoke with a wavering voice, “Barnard, from the Linhai Alliance.”

Without waiting for the two people opposite him to ask, Shang Jianyao took the initiative to say his name. “Shang Jianyao, from Pangu Biology.”

At this moment, Geneva used the communications system to inform Shang Jianyao about the two names he had searched through his database. “Flora is a relatively common female name in the Orange Company’s sphere of influence. The most famous one used to be their board member, but it’s said that she has been dead for more than 20 years.

“There was once a president in the Linhai Alliance named Barnard. He was the first president of the Red River race there. He also passed away 11 years ago.”

“They’ve all passed away?” Not only was Shang Jianyao not terrified, but he was also abnormally excited. “Did we really encounter ghosts?”

Before he could finish his sentence, he suddenly heard a clear sizzling sound.

The scene in the café warped, and a large number of static spots even appeared like a malfunctioning television.

At this moment, Flora finally understood the current situation. Before the darkness could sweep over, tear apart, and drown the lights in the café, she shouted, “Never ever enter the New World!”

As the sharp voice echoed, the green light emitted by the small jade Buddha disappeared. The yellowish light that illuminated the area by the window was also extinguished, and the two figures disappeared.

Geneva then realized that there was no café in front of him. There was only a pile of worthless trash.

Even the window was covered in cracks.

“Hey, hey, hey!” Shang Jianyao shouted a few more times, but there was only silence.

“What’s going on?” he muttered to himself.

Without waiting for Genova to analyze the situation, he answered his question. “It would be interesting if the ones we saw-Flora and Barnard-are indeed the long deceased that Old Ge mentioned. To be able to sit on the Orange Company’s board of directors and the Linhai Alliance’s president seat, the two of them are most likely Awakened who have explored the Mind Corridor’s depths.

“Could their deaths be another way of saying that they entered the New World? After all, they can’t often appear from now on and can only return occasionally?”

“Very likely,” Genova commented objectively. “Do you think we just saw a scene from the New World?”

He skipped many inference steps and came to a direct conclusion.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Ceningmis is closely related to the New World to begin with. This either comes from a large New World node or comes from a high-level existence’s body that is sleeping; this brought about the spread of the Heartless virus. Since the Heartless virus has spread, it’s normal for New World overlaps to happen in certain areas in Ceningmis.” Genova moved his metal neck up and down. “To put it simply, the scene just now might very well be a projection created by the New World’s power leakage.”

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao suddenly felt depressed. “I should’ve asked a few more questions in one breath!”

Genova consoled him. “It’s already pretty good to receive a reminder not to enter the New World.”

“They’re pretty nice,” Shang Jianyao commented sincerely. He then looked out the window and smiled. “If we continue deeper, we might encounter more New World scenes.”

Genava easily interpreted the fellow's hidden meaning: This is too interesting!

He had to remind Shang Jianyao, "But it also means that the probability of contracting the Heartless disease rises exponentially. Besides, the ones we encounter in the future might not be as friendly as Flora and Barnard. When the time comes, the Life Angel necklace might not be able to protect you from the two problems."

Shang Jianyao's response had nothing to do with Genava's words. He excitedly asked, "Will we encounter an old friend?"

"Who?" Genava asked.

"Doctor." Shang Jianyao had an expression that said: "If he's still alive, I'll give him a nuclear bomb!"

With that said, Shang Jianyao put away the small jade Buddha, held the Berserker assault rifle again, and walked to the café's entrance.

The next second, he stopped.

"What's wrong?" Genava asked in concern.

Shang Jianyao requested help without any hesitation. "Help me open the door. It opens inward, so I can't kick it open directly."

One of his hands had been paralyzed 'all this while,' and the other held a weapon that he couldn't use.