

Ad Infinitum 871

Chapter 871: Oversight

Ceningmis, under the seemingly eternally dark sky.

Genava and Shang Jianyao—who were wearing military exoskeletons—were walking toward the ‘post’ where the Eighth Research Institute’s guards were stationed.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen hid on a nearby mountain and watched them through binoculars.

At present, the Old Task Force could only determine that the Life Angel necklace could help the owner avoid the Heartless virus that filled Ceningmis. They didn’t know if the small jade Buddha and the Six Senses Beads could.

They couldn’t test them via elimination because it would mean that a member would become a Heartless once it didn’t work. Therefore, they got Shang Jianyao to bring the Life Angel necklace and enter Ceningmis with the smart bot, Genava, to complete the exploration mission like last time.

Before entering the main city, the Old Task Force planned on confirming the situation regarding the Eighth Research Institute members they had previously encountered to prevent any sudden attacks.

After arriving at the abandoned building that served as a sentry post, Shang Jianyao stood at the door ‘with nothing to do’ and allowed Genava to walk around and check.

“There are no traces of humans recently.” After a while, Genava concluded, “Those people and the large feline creature probably didn’t return.”

His heart pained, Shang Jianyao said, “Can’t they come back to confirm the situation? How unprofessional!”

He looked angrier than if it was one of his own making such a mistake.

“You gotta ask them about that,” Genava replied truthfully.

“Maybe they encountered something in the main city area, or maybe they directly retreated to the Eighth Research Institute...” Shang Jianyao muttered to himself.

He wanted to raise his left hand to stroke his chin, but with the Life Angel necklace wrapped around it, his entire arm had lost its strength.

They didn’t stay any longer. They climbed up the green buildings and walked toward Ceningmis at a normal speed along the fractured road.

Shang Jianyao barked from time to time, but Geneva pretended not to hear him.

“Old Ge, what do you think is hidden deep in the Eighth Research Institute?” Shang Jianyao always deviated from the topic randomly.

Geneva—who was wearing the Chameleon bionic artificial intelligence armor—moved his metal neck from side to side. “I don’t know.”

“I’m trying to get you to make bold assumptions and carefully verify them.” Shang Jianyao refused to give up. He had always been patient and persistent.

Regarding this question, the Old Task Force had actually discussed it a few times and raised many guesses. At present, they had zero evidence for their theories.

They were currently more inclined to three answers: The first was the real reason why the Eighth Research Institute’s Awakening success rate was so high.

The second was the secret of the ‘darkness’—this was inferred from the saying that the Eighth Research Institute had become the darkness’s lackey after the Old World was destroyed.

The third was related to the New World. As for what it was related to, there were no clues to determine.

Geneva didn’t want to discuss such a topic that had nothing to do with this operation when they were close to Ceningmis’s central area. Furthermore, this was no different from the few brainstorms they previously had unless new information was obtained.

He pulled up Jiang Baimian's behavior database and simulated his team leader's response to such a situation. He then chose the option—threat of violence being one of them—that suited him best. He turned his head slightly and pointed in a direction. "What's that?"

"What is it?" Shang Jianyao looked over excitedly.

The next second, he frowned behind his visor. "Why didn't I notice anything?"

"I misjudged." Genova quickly apologized.

Shang Jianyao retracted his gaze in disappointment.

He continued walking toward Ceningmis's central area and fell silent for a few minutes.

Upon seeing the silent land with increasingly dark buildings in the sky, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "I keep having the feeling that I neglected some important information in Professor Qin's Sea of Origins."

"It's very normal. Destiny Connection only helps you mobilize all your memories. You still have to filter and examine them yourself, but you have limited manpower." Genova believed that there was no problem.

"You smart bots don't." Shang Jianyao had an envious expression. He then said, "But I didn't feel like I neglected important information a few days ago. I only realized this when I entered Ceningmis."

He described it strangely, but Genova could understand what he meant. "You think you suffered some hidden interference back then, causing you to ignore some important information?"

"Yes," Shang Jianyao guessed excitedly. "It might be a hint that makes me skip the corresponding memories."

With the chameleon head over him, the red glow in Genova's eyes flickered twice. "There were other Awakened back then. He hid in the dark and exerted his influence on you?"

This wasn't impossible. The assassin might've also watched the scene for a while or was sitting in the dark-red SUV with Gitis's male body.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "I think it's a problem with that portion of memories. They alone hint at something."

"Just the memory fragments of certain matters can undetectably plant thoughts in you?" The Awakened-related model Geneva had established didn't support such a situation.

"Yes," Shang Jianyao said with yearning. "This is probably power at the Kalendaria level."

"There are other explanations," Geneva analyzed. "It's also possible that Professor Qin was affected before this and that the corresponding memories were disguised to avoid your screening. You sensed something strange or incongruous back then, but you didn't mind. You only suddenly recalled it today."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Shang Jianyao slapped the armor on his chest with his metal skeleton-covered right palm. "So that's how it is!"

He acted as if he weren't the one who had used Destiny Connection to evoke Professor Qin's memories.

Without waiting for Geneva's response, he excitedly said, "What are the hidden memories about?"

"Darkness or the President." Geneva quickly established a model and came to a conclusion. "The Eighth Research Institute's strength is definitely not limited to those New World powerhouses. As a quasi-high-ranking member, Professor Qin shouldn't be unaware of his faction's greatest reliance. However, you didn't obtain such information when you used Destiny Connection to check his memories."

Bang! Bang! Bang! Shang Jianyao thumped in the same way again.

The honest him was good at nitpicking. He quickly raised another question: “Then, why aren’t the memories related to the Eighth Research Institute’s exact location hidden?”

“Maybe Professor Qin won’t know how to return if it’s hidden,” Shang Jianyao replied to himself.

Genava raised more possibilities. “Either only that portion of memories has the power to hide itself by influencing with hints, or the person who affected Professor Qin before this isn’t from the Eighth Research Institute. He wants us to find the Eighth Research Institute, but he doesn’t want us to know certain things...”

As they conversed, they officially entered Ceningmis’s central area.

As he looked at the cars haphazardly piled up on the street in front of him, Shang Jianyao suddenly exclaimed, “How can we discuss Professor Qin’s memories? We have to focus on this mission itself!”

The red glow in Genava’s eyes froze for two seconds.

“My bad.” Shang Jianyao had always been one to criticize himself.

He looked around and said, “Let’s go to the residence of Aester’s mistress and child first.”

This was something they had promised Gitis. They had to keep their promise.

When formulating the plan, Jiang Baimian prioritized this matter before exploring the secret of the Kalendaria’s Son. This was because nobody could predict the subsequent development if they first went to the luxurious apartment where the Kalendaria’s Son lived. Ceningmis might disappear and enter the New World as a whole, preventing the Old Task Force from completing Aester’s last wish.

“Alright.” Even if Shang Jianyao didn’t take the initiative to suggest it, Genava would’ve reminded him.

As a foreigner, Aester’s residence in Ceningmis clearly wasn’t central. Instead, it was located north.

It was also an apartment. The dark-blue building looked very stylish, but the plants and broken glass everywhere made it appear abnormally dilapidated.

“We haven’t reached the place where the New World overlaps with Ceningmis and produces projections...” Shang Jianyao said in disappointment.

“That’s good. After quickly obtaining what Aester wants, we can focus on finding the Kalendaria’s Son’s residence.” The red glow in Genava’s eyes flickered a few times. “If the disaster back then had happened very suddenly, the other Old Task Force might’ve been scattered inside or around the Kalendaria’s Son’s residence.”

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a moment before saying, “It’s also possible that they became Heartless, wandered elsewhere, and died in a corner of the city.”

Upon hearing this, Genava looked around by turning his neck back. “Did you notice anything amiss?”

“What is it?” Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Genava replied in a slightly synthetic deep voice, “The last time we came to Ceningmis, we discovered some fresh traces of Heartless along the way. However, there’s none this time.”

They had even previously encountered Heartless with abnormally high strength levels.

Chapter 872: Experience

After hearing Genava’s answer, Shang Jianyao suddenly raised his right hand that was holding the Berserker assault rifle vertically and chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.”

“What do you mean?” Genava asked sincerely.

He knew that this was a Buddhist mantra, but he didn’t know why Shang Jianyao used it here.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “Maybe the ripples we stirred up last time killed the Heartless here.”

Genava—whose head had become a chameleon’s—moved his metal neck up and down. “There’s a non-zero chance.”

Shang Jianyao then pointed the muzzle at the dilapidated apartment in front of him and said, “Let’s head in.”

He and Genava quickly found Aester’s home in Ceningmis according to the detailed information provided by Gitis.

It was a penthouse, and it was formed by two connected apartments. The living room was abnormally spacious, but there were only a few armchairs, a coffee table wrapped in leather at the edge of a junk pile, and some cabinets by the wall. All kinds of toys were scattered everywhere on the ground—this included a large number of Lego blocks.

Some of them had been stacked into fortresses, some had become animals, and some had yet to be completed. The corresponding parts could be seen scattered around.

There was a visibly thick layer of dust covering every spot.

The red glow in Genava’s eyes flickered as he sized it up for a while before saying, “It isn’t used for reception here; it has become a children’s playground.”

It was obvious that this was under the wishes of Aester or his mistress back then. They didn’t consider entertaining guests at home and weren’t even willing to set up more sofas.

“They should love those two children very much...” Shang Jianyao suddenly said.

Genava fell silent when he recalled his daughter.

In silence, his gaze swept across every corner of the living room before finally landing on a photo frame on the coffee table.

In the photo were two children. The older child was a boy—four or five years old. He was slightly chubby, and his blond hair had a side parting. He had an awkward and disdainful expression as if he were unwilling to take the photo. The younger child was a girl, only about a year or two old. Her

blond hair was tied in a small braid, and her blue eyes were clear and confused as she smiled carefreely, sweetly, and adorably.

Compared to other ruins, many things here—which had only been destroyed for about ten years with no Ruin Hunters daring to enter—remained relatively intact as if they had been sealed in a time stasis.

Genava stared at it for a while before saying, “The residents probably never returned.”

Shang Jianyao suddenly turned his head and asked, “Why do you say that?”

“First, there are no traces of biological activity here. Second, everyone in the city should’ve become Heartless when the disaster began,” Genava explained dutifully.

Shang Jianyao shook his head and said very seriously, “Heartless also know how to head home.”

Genava didn’t retort and only analyzed the logic. “There are no traces of Heartless in the living room either—unless they entered and left through the bedroom windows.”

“We’ll know after checking.” Shang Jianyao held the Berserker assault rifle and walked into the living room, heading deeper into the rooms.

Every scene he and Genava saw felt quiet but desolate. The owners seemed to have never returned.

Shang Jianyao fell silent for a long time as he looked at a large fenced bed and the teddy bear on it.

Genava stared at it for a while before saying, “They should’ve been strolling or playing outside back then and weren’t home...”

Considering the collision of many cars on Ceningmis’s roads, the disaster happened during the day.

Shang Jianyao and Genava’s previous judgment was that the residents of Ceningmis couldn’t calm down when they first became Heartless. A large-scale massacre had happened between them.

Shang Jianyao didn't say a word. He walked to the bed, picked up the teddy bear and the diamond necklace on the nearby cabinet, and stuffed them into the empty backpack on Genava's back. He then walked back to the living room, found a Lego box, dismantled a small chunk of the fortress, and placed it inside.

Similarly, this ultimately entered Genava's backpack.

After doing this, Shang Jianyao looked around and said in surprise, "We actually didn't encounter any accidents!"

He had an expression as if he were laughing at fate and the enemy's lack of intelligence.

"It's very normal," Genava analyzed. "This isn't the area that overlaps with the New World, and there isn't any Heartless activity. Aester isn't a particularly powerful figure that involves many secrets. We came to his house to retrieve a few ordinary items, so it would be strange if we encountered an accident."

"Lame." Shang Jianyao had a look of disappointment. He then used the communications system embedded in the military exoskeleton to tell Jiang Baimian that Aester's mission had been completed.

Jiang Baimian specially reminded him, "Don't be careless. You have to be absolutely careful in what follows."

Shang Jianyao agreed very quickly.

He and Genava then headed for the luxurious apartment labeled on the map from where they were. Before long, the area shrouded in fog—which seemed to be in perpetual darkness—appeared in front of them.

Shang Jianyao and Genava were familiar with the route. They switched on their flashlights, circled around the area illuminated by the light, and approached their destination step by step.

The deeper they went, the wider their detours to prevent themselves from being sensed by the powerhouses in the New World projection. After all, there was no guarantee that they were acquaintances or friendly people like Flora and Barnard.

Flora and Barnard were the two New World powerhouses Shang Jianyao and Genova had first encountered in the overlapping area. They had been chatting in a lit café.

Of course, the café was a projection of the New World. In reality, it was only an empty room with piled-up trash.

As they made another detour, Genova looked at the corpses by the street and on the road. He turned his head to look at Shang Jianyao—who was maintaining a certain distance from him to prevent them from being wiped out together—and said, “Our current strategy is very useful. It should help us reach our destination successfully.

“However, it will probably be very difficult to use tricks like circling around subsequently. Aren’t you worried that the Life Angel necklace won’t be able to protect you anymore? Just like how we encountered the man in the library’s projection last time.”

Shang Jianyao looked ahead through the military exoskeleton’s visor and smiled. “Since fate has arranged for us to come this far, I believe we will definitely turn misfortune into a blessing and gain something. Isn’t it good to relax when you can?”

“But when fate achieves its goal and no longer favors us, things will be completely different,” Genova reminded in a slightly synthetic voice. “Big White said that a mountain or wall you rely on can also collapse. You yourself are the one that can always be relied on.”

Shang Jianyao scoffed. “Try getting a person to live their entire life on their own. He’ll be dead while still a baby!”

“You can dispute that with Big White.” Genova indicated that this wasn’t his words.

Shang Jianyao laughed and said, “If fate really doesn’t favor us anymore, that should be the end of our story.”

His tone gradually turned serious and solemn.

“Aren’t you afraid that the story will have a tragic ending?” The red glow in Genova’s eyes flickered twice.

Shang Jianyao turned his head to look at Geneva and smiled. "I'll work hard to strive for the outcome I want, regardless of whether it's beautiful or tragic. This is my dream. I've done so much for the sake of an opportunity to have a choice when fulfilling my dream."

With that said, he slapped the Berserker assault rifle to his left chest and solemnly said, "For all of humanity!"

Before Geneva could respond, Shang Jianyao anxiously asked, "How is it? Am I becoming more and more like a real Salvation Army soldier?"

He acted like a child looking forward to being praised and afraid of criticism.

"..." Geneva almost failed to appreciate the turn of events and bugged out.

The honest him finally moved his metal neck up and down. "Yes."

Shang Jianyao was immediately excited, making Geneva momentarily unsure if he was acting or if he was being sincere.

The two of them walked for a while before encountering a street with lights shining through the fog. There seemed to be roadside stalls there.

Shang Jianyao's eyes widened. He retracted his gaze with great difficulty and said to Geneva, "We have to circle a block this time."

"Yes." Geneva's analysis was the same.

After circling around for a few minutes, Shang Jianyao suddenly said, "Why are there lights in the New World projections? We came in at two different times. Why can't a pitch-black New World projection overlap with a dark and foggy street? That way, we won't be able to sense it in advance and circle around it!"

Geneva had to admit that it was a good question.

He quickly analyzed for a moment before saying, “Maybe the New World’s projection in Ceningmis is related to New World powerhouses. At least we encounter humans every time.”

He meant that powerhouses had increased the strength of the corresponding area, causing the New World to overlap with Ceningmis.

Genava then added, “And those powerhouses can only live in places with lights in the New World?”

“Interesting.” Shang Jianyao thumped his chest with the Berserker assault rifle. He looked as if this guess suited his appetite.

At this moment, Genava confirmed their current location and compared it to the map. He then said in a slightly synthetic voice, “We should be able to see the luxurious apartment where the Kalendaria’s Son lives once we circle around this block.”

“I’m looking forward to it!” Shang Jianyao said without hiding anything.

After moving forward for nearly 20 minutes, the two of them finally successfully circled the dangerous area they had identified.

What appeared in front of them was a high-rise apartment building more than a hundred meters away.

It stood quietly in the darkness, shrouded by a faint fog. Yellow or pure white light emitted from every floor and room.

Chapter 873: Buff Augmentation

Shang Jianyao and Genava stood not far from the apartment and looked up.

The building in front of them was well-designed. From the side, it looked like a knife slicing vertically into the dark sky.

Its outer walls were dark, and light seeped out of every window. It looked as luxurious as yesteryear.

“Do you feel the vortex?” Geneva asked Shang Jianyao.

After they triggered the ‘ripples’ in Ceningmis last time, they felt a large vortex seemingly existing deep in the central area that was slowly accelerating and expanding.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “No.”

He gradually sounded pleased with himself. “Didn’t the vortex calm down when we left? Our strategy was indeed very successful this time. We’ve reached the source of the problem without triggering the vortex.”

“But we still have to be careful next.” Geneva looked at the luxurious apartment in front of him and said, “Apart from a few places, the rest are covered in lights. Are there so many New World powerhouses?”

According to the Old Task Force’s previous experience, every light corresponded to one to two New World powerhouses. This luxurious apartment had more than 30 floors, with two units on each floor.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao agreed with Geneva’s first sentence. “I have to make some preparations.”

He slung the Berserker assault rifle over his body and took out the Six Senses Beads and the small jade Buddha from his tactical backpack with his mobile right hand. He then wore the former on his left wrist, side by side with the Life Angel necklace.

As for the latter, Shang Jianyao chose to stuff it into the pocket of the gray camouflage uniform near his waist, which wasn’t covered in armor or supported by the exoskeleton.

Geneva imagined that this was all to his preparations, but Shang Jianyao took out something else—it was neatly folded paper.

Shang Jianyao piously unfolded it, revealing a simple drawing that resembled a child’s scrawl.

Blessings from all Kalendarium! Of course, it wasn’t complete; there were still a few missing.

Shang Jianyao then took out a transparent film and pasted the Blessings from all Kalendarium on the military exoskeleton's chest armor, having it face outward.

“Done.” He heaved a sigh of relief in satisfaction.

Without waiting for Genova's response, he stretched his body and muttered to himself, “No, there's something missing...”

A few seconds later, Shang Jianyao came to a realization. “I know what's missing!”

He quickly stood up and shouted at the luxurious apartment where the former Kalendaria's Son lived, “Who dares to kill me!?”

Shang Jianyao then lowered his voice. “Uh... That just sounds strong on the outside but cowardly at heart...”

He adjusted himself and shouted at the building again, “Who dares to stop me!?”

“Who dares to stop me!?”

“Who dares to stop me!?”

After shouting thrice, Shang Jianyao stood akimbo with one hand and smiled in satisfaction. “That will do.”

Genava glanced at the Blessings from all Kalendarium stuck to his chest and analyzed. “The words you shouted just now had the effects of Thought Implantation?”

He felt that although Shang Jianyao was crazy, he rarely did meaningless things. Even if he liked to make the steps overly complicated, they always had a goal.

Shang Jianyao scoffed. “Old Ge, are you silly? I can't even sense any human consciousness in the building, so how can I use Thought Implantation?”

“You can sense human consciousness in the target area when you use a loudspeaker to enhance your range? This should exceed your perception limit.” Geneva had never discussed this problem with Shang Jianyao before.

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, “After my power fuses with the sound through electric waves, I can sense human consciousness within a certain distance as it propagates.”

“Got it.” Geneva moved his metal neck up and down. He then asked, “Why did you shout?”

“To embolden myself,” the honest Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

Geneva chose to remain silent.

Shang Jianyao raised the Berserker assault rifle again and strode forward. After that, he said, “Let’s go. The Kalendarium are protecting us now!”

In a sense, this might be true. However, it’s impossible for so many Kalendarium to bless you...? The red glow in Geneva’s eyes flickered a few times.

He followed and walked to the apartment’s open door with Shang Jianyao. On the way, he glanced at the latter and asked in confusion, “Why are you still holding the assault rifle? Even if you think that the enemy’s body here is weak to bullets, the military exoskeleton also has a weapon module and a grenade launcher. You might as well hang up the assault rifle and free your right hand.”

Shang Jianyao asked in surprise, “Don’t you think it’s cooler to walk forward with a weapon in such an environment?”

“No,” the honest Geneva replied.

“Old Ge.” Shang Jianyao spoke sincerely. “This is something you’re still lacking when it comes to real humans. You already could respond to memes previously, so why have you degenerated today?”

“That’s not a meme.” Geneva had long searched the database.

Shang Jianyao shook his head in exasperation.

At this moment, the two of them had already arrived at the entrance to the luxurious apartment. They didn't speak any further and observed the interior through various means.

What they saw was an extremely spacious and modern lobby that was mainly light-gray in color. An artistic crystal chandelier hung over it, and its pure white light quietly illuminated the empty ground floor.

At the edge and corner before the light reached them, fog billowed amid thick darkness.

Unlike Shang Jianyao and Geneva's previous experience, there was nobody here despite the lights.

"Haha, they were scared away by my Blessings from all Kalendarium!" Shang Jianyao laughed.

"I can't tell if this chandelier belongs to the New World or Ceningmis, nor do I know where its light comes from." Geneva very rationally steered the topic back on track.

This was completely different from the New World projections they had previously encountered and how Ceningmis worked. It didn't feel like it could be determined at a glance by considering the overlaps. It was as if there really was such an artistic chandelier in this luxurious apartment. The area it illuminated was really the same spot in Ceningmis.

Here, it was difficult to distinguish between 'new' and 'old.'

Shang Jianyao was satisfied. "That's more like it. The source of the problem doesn't disappoint!"

The red light in Geneva's eyes flickered a few times. "Let's go to the elevator and take a look first. It's best if we can go straight to the top floor from there."

"The premise is that there's no projection of any New World powerhouse inside," said the calm and rational Shang Jianyao.

He didn't mention if he wanted to confirm if they would be friendly or not because there was no way to take the gamble. If the gamble failed, he and Genava would definitely be trapped here—basically spelling their doom.

Therefore, his plan was to observe the situation in the elevator in various ways from a certain distance. If there was anyone, he would consider climbing the stairs.

Without waiting for Genava's response, Shang Jianyao looked around and said, "Before going up, let's check the bottom—mainly the places that the light can't reach and the places that are covered by the New World projection."

"Alright." Genava analyzed Shang Jianyao's goal.

The two of them carried flashlights, slowly stepped through the door, and entered the lobby, walking toward the edge of the billowing fog.

On the way, Shang Jianyao occasionally took a side step and stomped the ground as if he wanted to confirm if there was anything buried under the marble 'bottom.'

Genava did the same. The electromagnetic environment here was abnormally chaotic and complicated. He couldn't use many of his means and could only do what Shang Jianyao did.

After more than ten steps, the two of them arrived at a dark corner where the chandelier's light was blocked.

As the yellow beam of light shone in, they saw a slightly curled-up corpse.

The corpse had already been reduced to bones. The gray camouflage clothes on its body were very similar to Shang Jianyao's.

With a clang, Shang Jianyao fell to his knees, put down the Berserker assault rifle, and reached out to touch the corpse's pocket.

He didn't find anything.

“This should be a member of that Old Task Force, but he’s not your father,” Geneva said.

As they were here in Ceningmis to search for traces of the previous team, Shang Jianyao boldly applied for all kinds of information regarding his father through Jiang Baimian before setting off.

Geneva used this opportunity to record the relevant data. Coupled with Shang Jianyao’s memories and photos, it basically established a three-dimensional image of Shang Jianyao’s father.

“Why?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Geneva patiently explained, “First, his height is wrong. Second, he didn’t leave anything behind except his clothes. The commissioner from the Eighth Research Institute previously said that they found many corpses of your father’s teammates—this should be one of them. All the items have been taken away by them.”

Shang Jianyao stood up with the help of the military exoskeleton and asked, “The cause of death is?”

“Unknown.” Geneva did a check, but he didn’t find the reason.

The two of them found seven to eight more corpses on the first floor of this luxurious apartment, but they didn’t belong to Shang Jianyao’s father. They weren’t even all members of the Old Task Force—this was determined by whether they had Ashlandic skeletal characteristics. The items on them had also been taken away by the Eighth Research Institute.

Failing to find anything, the duo carefully approached the elevator.

After observation, there was nobody there either.

Shang Jianyao rushed over and went straight to an open elevator. Suddenly, he stopped.

“What’s wrong?” Geneva also braked.

Shang Jianyao pointed at the elevator’s LCD and said in disappointment, “It’s out of power...”

Chapter 874: Status

There was only one problem with the elevators—there was no electricity.

This wasn't surprising since it had been more than ten years since Ceningmis was destroyed by the disaster. Even if there were autonomous generators that were maintained by robots, they wouldn't be of any use due to insufficient energy.

This place wasn't like Dajiang City—Swamp Ruin 1. It didn't have sufficient hydropower.

“Then, we can only choose to take the stairs.” As a smart bot, Genova wouldn't be depressed because of this.

“No, no, no.” Shang Jianyao shook his head. “There's another choice.”

The face under his visor smiled. He then pointed at the elevators. “We can also just climb the cables.”

Genava immediately evaluated the feasibility. “To me, there's no problem. For normal humans, it's extremely dangerous with extremely low chances of success. But with the military exoskeleton's help, it shouldn't be difficult.”

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao denied his own idea. “Let's take the stairs. We might encounter more corpses along the way.”

The red glow in Genova's eyes flickered a few times without making a sound.

Shang Jianyao's gaze swept across the two open elevators before he suddenly jumped and 'flew' into one of them.

Thanks to the military exoskeleton's weight, he clearly sank the car and shook it a few times.

“Be careful!” Genova quickly warned.

The elevators here had been abandoned for over a decade. Nobody knew if the cables would snap as a result.

Shang Jianyao didn't answer. He lowered his head and measured every inch of space in the elevator with his feet.

In just a few seconds, he said in disappointment, "There are no corpses."

Genava understood the meaning of his actions and knew that he was worried that the overlap with the New World might cause this apartment to appear empty despite containing hidden secrets. This made it easy for Shang Jianyao to miss clues regarding his father.

After checking the other elevator, Shang Jianyao regretfully walked to the stairwell.

There were no lights here, only darkness.

As the flashlight beam shone in, the mottled stairs appeared in Shang Jianyao and Genava's eyes.

"Apart from looking relatively dilapidated, it's rather clean." Shang Jianyao clicked his tongue in wonder.

The red light in Genava's eyes flickered a few times. "Maybe the electromagnetic environment in this area is too chaotic, preventing the dust outside from entering. The exact principle is..."

Shang Jianyao turned his head and glanced at his companion before interrupting him plaintively. "Old Ge, at a time like this, all you need to do is say 'yeah, yeah.'"

Genava couldn't figure out the reason, but he still chose to cooperate. "Alright."

The two of them walked up the stairs to the top floor.

It was obvious that the light outside the stairwell on each floor was bright. Through the door gaps, they revealed a lit area beyond.

The careful Shang Jianyao didn't choose to pass through such areas directly; he circled around those he could. For those he couldn't, he simply used the staircase railing to climb to the next floor.

Genava mimicked him.

They didn't dare to bet that they wouldn't be discovered without being 'seen' by New World powerhouses or other creatures on every floor.

The timid but careful Shang Jianyao suspected that the light was actually a manifestation of the powerhouses' minds. And at the source of the overlapping problems, touching the light was equivalent to singing loudly in someone else's ear. There was no way to hide it.

As for why there was only light on the first floor and no figures, he had no idea.

As he slowly made his way up, Shang Jianyao kept his human consciousness converged. He only relied on the flashlight beam that he had specially switched to a low-powered state to illuminate the path ahead.

On the way, he and Genava discovered several corpses.

The few corpses on the lower floors also had one thing in common—all that was left of them were clothes. Their bodies were empty, clearly having been plundered by the Eighth Research Institute. The few corpses that were discovered in the second half had some personal items in their pockets.

Through their clothes and items, Genava clearly determined that they were Pangu Biology employees and members of the previous Old Task Force.

With the help of the skeletal characteristics and items, another conclusion could also be reached: None of them were Shang Jianyao's father.

"They are all personal items..." Shang Jianyao—who was squatting on one knee on the stairs—took out everything from the corpse in front of him and handed them to Genava. His tone revealed unconcealed disappointment.

Genava knew that he wanted to find the corresponding clues from those items. Unfortunately, they were compressed biscuits, chocolate, sweets, or other items that could quickly replenish energy or pistols, bullets, and other self-defense items.

“Maybe that team’s management is very strict, preventing members from secretly recording information to prevent others from obtaining it after they are separated.” Geneva stuffed the items he received into his backpack.

“That’s true.” Shang Jianyao stood up, picked up the Berserker assault rifle again, and walked up the stairs.

As he walked, he suddenly staggered.

“Be careful.” Geneva mimicked a human and used a reminder to express his concern.

“It’s fine.” Shang Jianyao first consoled Geneva before saying, “I should’ve been hit by an Awakened’s ability.”

“You call this fine?” The red glow in Geneva’s eyes flickered violently, but he remained puzzled.

Shang Jianyao didn’t stop. “This ability feels relatively weak; it doesn’t affect me much. Besides, although I was hit by an ability, I didn’t sense the enemy’s consciousness.”

Normally speaking, an ability affecting a person meant that one had established a connection with the person. This also meant that one couldn’t hide their human consciousness from the other party’s perception unless they could cut off the connection before the enemy discovered them, hide again, or be outside the target’s perception range.

The former could be temporarily ruled out because Shang Jianyao’s footsteps weren’t too stable. It only appeared fine with the help of the military exoskeleton. The latter meant that the hidden Awakened was much stronger than Shang Jianyao, but this was relatively contradictory to the weaker effects of his abilities.

“That’s quite strange,” Geneva replied in a slightly synthetic voice.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “It’s fine; there aren’t many floors left. Let’s not care about anything else. Let’s make... good use of our time... and head up...”

As he spoke, his tongue seemed to expand. His body swayed, making it difficult for him to maintain his balance.

Shang Jianyao was delighted instead of being alarmed as he loudly said, “This is very similar to the Drunkard ability that Big White, Little Red, and Little White encountered! Is that Awakened from the... Eighth... Research Institute... hiding nearby? However, she... should be weaker... than me!”

Genava understood what he meant—it didn’t make sense for him not to sense the other party’s human consciousness and be passively beaten.

Before Genava could respond, Shang Jianyao fell to the ground with a thud.

“I’m drunk... and my head is still spinning... It hurts...” he muttered to himself. He then began relegating control to the military exoskeleton, switching it from an auxiliary system into a primary one.

With equipment as the lead, Autopilot.

With the command input, Shang Jianyao ‘stood up’ and steadily continued walking up the stairs to the top floor. Although he was still drunk, it didn’t affect his actions at all.

“Porridge... is... strength... Old Ge...” Shang Jianyao’s tongue was so big that he was slurring.

At this moment, a rope clipped to the glass window in the stairwell swayed with the wind. In the dark night, it was like a dancing venomous snake.

Shang Jianyao’s eyes froze as he looked like he wanted to turn around and run, but the military exoskeleton stopped him. The order received by this equipment had yet to be changed, and it determined that the rope posed no threat!

“No!” Shang Jianyao screamed as he was ‘hijacked’ by the military exoskeleton.

The closer he was to the rope, the more he screamed. Finally, he shouted, “Old Ge, save me!”

Genava analyzed a possibility and chose to follow without saying a word.

Finally, Shang Jianyao crossed the glass window in the stairwell and could no longer see the rope that swayed like a snake.

He immediately calmed down. After a few seconds, he excitedly said without turning around, “Old Ge, this should... be caused... by the power... seeping out from... the top floor. Otherwise... it’s impossible... It has the ability... the effects... and the price.”

As far as the Old Task Force knew, Dysmorphophobia was a price.

“Although part of the price is the same as the effects of certain abilities, I still believe that there’s a high chance your guess is true.” Geneva agreed with Shang Jianyao’s guess.

Shang Jianyao excitedly said, “Then... let’s continue... We’re not far... from the source... of the problem!”

At this point, his voice turned deep. “The closer... I get to... the top floor... the greater the influence... Later... if I... can’t control... myself... knock me out... and bring me up.”

“Alright.” Geneva agreed. “But you need to adjust your orders and put me on the whitelist without any precautions or resistance.”

Otherwise, he really couldn’t deal with the military exoskeleton that controlled Shang Jianyao’s body in a short period of time.

Just like that, Shang Jianyao trudged forward while Geneva followed beside him, prepared to provide him assistance at any moment.

Just as Shang Jianyao was about to concuss from his Drunkard state, the two of them finally arrived at the stairwell on the top floor. They were only separated by a wooden door.

This place was pitch-black, and the flashlight could only illuminate a small area.

Chapter 875: Top Floor

Geneva looked at Shang Jianyao—who was ‘fixed in place’ by the military exoskeleton—and did his duty as a teammate. “I’ll go in first, and you can follow after the situation is confirmed.”

He meant that even if there were New World powerhouses or projections of certain existences inside, there was a high chance that he wouldn't be discovered and trigger the terrifying vortex as a smart bot without consciousness.

Shang Jianyao—who had his expression covered by the visor—muttered, “Once... you open... the door... the light... will... shine in... I will... also be... sensed...”

“Shall I send you down first?” The red glow in Genova's eyes paused at the location of Shang Jianyao's ear for a few seconds.

Shang Jianyao 'walked' to the stairwell exit and laughed loudly. “Are... you... sure... that you... won't be... discovered? Here's... the root cause... of the problem... The overlap... is most serious... Maybe... we can be... directly seen... You... have nothing... As for me... I have... the Life Angel... necklace... Six Senses Beads... small jade Buddha... Blessings... from all Kalendarium!”

Genava understood Shang Jianyao very well. With the latter around, there was still room for salvation even if an accident happened. If Genova was the only one, he—who was downstairs—wouldn't be spared if anything really happened.

“You can give me those items,” Genova suggested. Although he couldn't use the items, the true effects of those items in the current environment weren't reflected by their Awakened abilities.

“You... aren't a... company... employee,” Shang Jianyao pointed out.

He had just switched the military exoskeleton's operating mode to prevent the artificial intelligence from failing to understand his eagerness at opening the door.

The red glow in Genova's eyes flickered for a while before he finally chose to remain silent and didn't stop him.

Shang Jianyao's words actually made sense.

They had been pushed here by Fate. Items like the Life Angel necklace were only useful in their hands.

Shang Jianyao—who completed the mode switching—staggered over. Genava quickly walked over and helped him up.

The next second, Shang Jianyao stretched out his unparalyzed right palm, grabbed the wooden door's handle, and pulled it back.

Pure white light shone in like a flood breaching the embankment, dispelling all the darkness.

Although there was only a corridor beyond the stairwell, a scene surfaced in Shang Jianyao's mind and Genava's 'vision.'

It was a large living room with a carpet, sofa, and other things.

At this moment, a black figure was standing in front of a row of floor-to-ceiling windows, quietly looking out.

The black figure suddenly turned around and 'looked' at Shang Jianyao and Genava.

Almost at the same time, Genava's vision turned black. He couldn't gather any information regarding his surroundings in any way.

The drunk Shang Jianyao first recovered his clarity of mind before shouting, "Vortex!"

He then lost all his thoughts. He couldn't see, hear, or think as though his soul had been forcefully sucked out.

On the mountain path outside Ceningmis, Jiang Baimian's expression turned solemn. She saw the sky darken at a speed visible to the naked eye in the central city area, turning the entire area from dusk to a dark night.

A faint fog filled the area and quickly enveloped every corner of Ceningmis, but this wasn't the end. Be it the darkness or the fog, they were spreading out.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen grunted in pain and couldn't help but raise their hands to cover their heads.

Jiang Baimian's head throbbed as she felt a certain level of dizziness.

This made the three people—who had the corresponding experience—suddenly have a thought: Heartless disease!

Amidst his horror, Long Yuehong saw that the darkness and fog were still expanding. He subconsciously recalled something: The Eighth Research Institute's commissioner had said that if not for their early quarantine, the disaster in Ceningmis might've affected the entire Ashlands.

At this moment, the intense pain and dizziness suddenly disappeared.

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen returned to normal. If not for the fact that their memories remained, the sky was still dark, and the surroundings were filled with fog, they would've suspected that they were hallucinating.

The next second, they saw the fog quickly thin and fuse into the air. The darkness rapidly shrank before finally disappearing from Ceningmis.

Sunlight shone down from the sky, making the area no longer dark.

Long Yuehong was speechless for a long time as he took in this scene.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian laughed self-deprecatingly. "If it were Hey, he definitely would've sincerely thanked the Kalendarium, saying things like 'Newborns are likened unto the sun; life what's most important' and 'Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.'

...

"Newborns are likened unto the sun; life what's most important." Shang Jianyao—who had woken up—stood at the door to the stairwell. He bent his right arm and gently rocked it like a disabled person carrying a baby. He then shouted, "The End will belong to the Arbiter of Fate!"

After he completed the ritual, Genava asked, “Are you sure that the Life Angel necklace has taken effect?”

“I’m not sure,” Shang Jianyao replied confidently. He then raised his right palm and chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.”

Following this, he took a step back and loudly said, “Wariness is a hint from the Goddess!”

Just like that, he went through the prayers corresponding to the Kalendarium on the Blessings from all Kalendarium. He made it clear that everyone had a part in this.

Genava didn’t continue the topic. He looked at the corridor that had lit up because of the sunlight and said to Shang Jianyao, “There shouldn’t be any problems now. We can go in and search.”

“There’s no problem for the time being,” Shang Jianyao emphasized.

Nobody was sure if the overlap between Ceningmis and the New World would happen again.

“Therefore, we have to make the best use of our time.” Genava stepped into the corridor.

Shang Jianyao was unwilling to fall behind.

There was only one suite on the entire top floor, so they quickly arrived at the main door.

The first thing they saw was an open door, a spacious living room, and a row of floor-to-ceiling windows. All of this was identical to the scene they had previously ‘seen.’ The only two differences were that the black figure and the night scene outside the window were gone.

Shang Jianyao was just about to walk into the living room when he suddenly heard human voices coming from the other side of the corridor. “We have to rush back now!”

“Eh...” Shang Jianyao chose to ‘watch’ the commotion first. At the same time, he told Genava, “I don’t sense any human consciousness.”

Genava didn't discover any signs of human activity either.

When they approached the corridor, they saw a person wearing bionic artificial intelligence armor that resembled the Chameleon. This person was discussing something with his two companions, completely indifferent to Genava and Shang Jianyao's approach.

"The Eighth Research Institute person from last time?" Shang Jianyao recalled Jiang Baimian's description.

Genava made a judgment of the situation. "It's a side effect of the chaotic electromagnetic environment. Their conversation was recorded by the environment. With the disappearance of the overlap between the two worlds, it got replicated at the penthouse. It's like there's a projection screen here, and a projector projected the scenes from afar."

Shang Jianyao and Genava had seen many such situations in the depths of Ceningmis and had personally witnessed the many scenes of the disaster back then. However, Ceningmis and the New World were still overlapping back then.

"Without the overlap, it won't be long before the electromagnetic environment disappears." Shang Jianyao assumed a 'fear of missing out' attitude. He planned on hearing what the Eighth Research Institute members were saying.

After the replay, he and Genava roughly knew why these Eighth Research Institute personnel didn't return to the previous sentry post.

They hid all the way to the east of Ceningmis. The electromagnetic environment there was relatively okay, allowing them to send a telegram to the Eighth Research Institute for help.

Before the help arrived, they didn't dare to leave their hiding spot to confirm the Old Task Force's situation because the Mind Corridor Awakened was quite injured and needed time to recover.

When the injured were almost recovered, the Eighth Research Institute sent a telegram, requesting the team to return to headquarters immediately.

These matters were extracted from the conversation between those people by Genava and Shang Jianyao. Back then, they should've passed through Ceningmis's central area and headed north.

They had doubts about the Eighth Research Institute's orders, so they had this discussion.

“From the timing, it should be the day after we captured Professor Qin and obtained the Eighth Research Institute's exact location,” Geneva analyzed.

Shang Jianyao came to a realization. “Are they making preparations regarding the exposure of the headquarters?”

“Very likely.” The red glow in Geneva's eyes flickered.

The two of them walked back to the door of the penthouse and entered the living room.

The moment he walked in, Shang Jianyao eagerly looked around, searching for any possible figures.

He and Geneva saw several corpses at the same time.

Chapter 876: Notes

The images of the corpses were recorded by Geneva's main module one after another, quickly comparing them to Shang Jianyao's father in the database that he had long established.

After about ten seconds, Shang Jianyao turned his head to look at his smart bot companion and asked in a slightly deep voice, “How is it? Any results?”

The red glow in Geneva's eyes flickered for a few seconds before he pointed at the skeleton in the middle of the living room. “It should be that one.”

With a clang, Shang Jianyao used the military exoskeleton to jump over. He kneeled on the ground and stretched out his right hand, searching through the gray camouflage clothes on the skeleton as though he wanted to find the corresponding evidence.

As for whether he truly hoped to verify it, Geneva didn't know.

Shang Jianyao first took out a few crudely packaged sweets and chocolates before finding a palm-sized black notebook in the inner pocket of the camouflage uniform.

He was stunned for a moment as if he had forgotten what to do next.

Genava approached and asked warily, "Is it your father's?"

Shang Jianyao shook his head. "No."

Genava wanted to say that this was a good thing, but he recalled that such items might've been picked up by chance when out exploring and were kept as backup.

Shang Jianyao then flipped through the notebook.

Genava watched and listened to the surroundings. As he remained vigilant, he didn't forget to pay attention to the contents of the notebook.

"Fruit rats are a mutated creature in the Blackmarsh Wilderness's northeast. They are larger than normal rats, and their meat is very similar to that of chickens. The most suitable cooking method is to roast them until their skin turns yellow when a fruit-like fragrance seeps out. However, they carry many viruses and bacteria with them. Protective gear is needed when capturing and handling them.

"In the settlements of the White Knights, raising fruit rats is their business and also their greatest source of meat."

This was everything recorded on the first page, leaving Genava confused. He originally imagined that this was key information recorded by the Old Task Force member suspected to be Shang Jianyao's father or a description of his emotional journey on his long-term adventures. Who knew that it was more like a culinary record?

The first few pages contained similar content, but Shang Jianyao quickly flipped to something different. "Hyster is a relatively special settlement in the White Knights. The people here push temperance and self-discipline to their limits. They wake up, eat, and sleep at a fixed time every day without ever changing. They always like to say mantras like 'self-discipline makes one human; indulgence makes one a beast.'

“They only fill their stomachs to 70% full. Even if babies and children cry because of this, they won’t receive anything more. This goes against human nature.

“According to our investigations, we discovered that the people here secretly believe in a religion. That religion is called the Heart of Self-Discipline. They believe that humans are born with too many bad traits, preventing them from entering the New World. Only by using strict self-discipline and restraint to resist these inclinations and change themselves can they ultimately gain redemption.

“Such a point of view coincides with the White Knights’ chivalry. Therefore, the knights here have also been convinced and abide by the corresponding rules. It’s difficult for the high-ranking knights on patrol to discover anything abnormal. They only believe that the residents of Hyster are a little extreme, but it’s essentially good. They believe that they are carrying out the two types of chivalry.

“This also results in many strange rules for Hyster. For example, one can’t hug for more than three seconds. Parents can only kiss their children’s cheeks once a day. When in bed, uh—this can’t be written. It will lead the child astray...

“When I was about to leave Hyster, I finally couldn’t stand seeing a few children starve. I fought with their parents and the sheriff here. Haha, my teammates are all very impressive. What I didn’t tell them was that I secretly fed the children some food.”

How did this become a tale of customs??After a serious analysis, Genava found a definition that matched the notebook:Travelog!

But as a travelog, it was too simple. It was closer to a memo, filled with content that could help its owner recall what they had eaten, seen, and experienced.

Up to this point, the things displayed in the notebook matched Genava’s previous judgment: Members of the Old Task Force couldn’t secretly jot down details regarding their missions.

Shang Jianyao didn’t stop as he continued flipping through the notes. His flipping speed was clearly slower than before.

“The pollution in Gesterbourg is too serious. This doesn’t come from the Old World’s destruction but its own industry.

“The workers here are tragic. The harsh environment and high-intensity labor cause people to die in the factories every day; it compels me to organize them to protest such treatment. Unfortunately, this is the White Knights’ industrial base. There’s a powerhouse presiding over it, and we have our own missions.

“Yes, I ultimately chickened out. I have my own concerns and people I care about. I can’t stand out for strangers without hesitation.

“The White Knights’ genetic enhancement drugs are different from ours. Each adjusts a particular ability of the human body, and it is also effective for adults. I hope the company can use it as a reference...

“The residents of Gesterbourg are relatively wild and impatient. They do things rather simply and roughly. Most of the time, they rely on muscles instead of brains...

“There’s nothing worth reminiscing about the food here. There’s only one type of mutated beef that left an impression on me. Yes, I’m mainly surprised that it’s not much different from ordinary beef...”

After the records on Gesterbourg, the other Old Task Force entered Ceningmis.

“We came to a city named Ceningmis. It still keeps up with Old World traditions rather well. Melodies echo everywhere, and there is even a musical fountain in the square.

“The people here show a sense of stability and joy that comes from the bottom of their hearts. The psychological trauma and real-life suffering left behind by the Old World’s destruction can’t be found here.

“Although it’s a city of Red River ethnicity, I still feel like I’m home. This comes from all the graffiti on the walls, from the pedestrians and performers in the square, and from the people walking through the various old buildings...

“Civilization belongs to all humans.”

Shang Jianyao flipped to another page, revealing new content. “We are visiting a gentleman today to persuade him to tell us something. He’s already very old. Furthermore, Ceningmis also lacks medicine.

“His health isn’t good. This also gave us a breakthrough because our team has amazing doctors, good drugs, and medical supplies. Maybe there will be an operation soon.”

This was the last bit of content in the notebook. Shang Jianyao—who had raised his visor at some point in time—lowered his head and looked at it without moving for a long time.

“What’s wrong?” Geneva asked in concern.

Shang Jianyao looked up and choked. “Every time my dad comes back, he will tell me what he ate outside, what he saw, and what interesting things he encountered. He always told me to be a kind person and a real man...”

His face was already covered in tears, and he looked miserable.

Geneva wanted to say something, but he couldn’t find a suitable template or sentence. At this moment, he seemed to understand the subtleties of human emotions.

After an unknown period of time, Jiang Baimian’s voice sounded through the communications system embedded in the military exoskeleton. “Can you hear me?”

“Loud and clear,” Geneva immediately replied.

Jiang Baimian clearly heaved a sigh of relief and asked, “Are you on the top floor? How’s Hey?”

“Hey found his father’s corpse on the top floor,” Geneva replied truthfully.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “Give him some space to vent his emotions. Check the surroundings for any clues.”

“Alright.” Geneva analyzed the situation and told Jiang Baimian about the last notebook of Shang Jianyao’s father.

Jiang Baimian muttered to herself in confusion, “They wanted to operate on the Kalendaria’s Son in exchange for some information? An accident happened during the surgery?”

“It seems so at the moment,” Shang Jianyao was the one who replied. He wiped the tears on his face with his sleeve, and his voice was deep and hoarse.

Jiang Baimian didn't offer any condolences, nor did she mention his father. She deliberately reminded him, “Pack up the items you want to take away as soon as possible. The overlap might happen again at any moment.”

“Okay.” Shang Jianyao—who hadn't stood up—took off his backpack and picked up the bones one by one.

Upon seeing that his bag was about to run out of space, he transferred the rest to Geneva.

After finishing this matter, he stood up again and looked around. “Let's find the operating table first. There might be important clues there.”

From the current situation, the surgery should've happened in this penthouse because the Old Task Force members' corpses were scattered here, down the stairs, and at the bottom. Of course, they couldn't rule out the possibility that an accident had happened to the 'patient' before the surgery began.

Chapter 877: Problem

The operating theater was clearly not in the living room. After a simple search, Shang Jianyao and Geneva discovered the target location on the right side of the suite.

This was a room that had been repurposed. A surgical light hung above, and under the lamp was a mobile operating bed. Beside the bed were many high-tech instruments.

An uncovered skeleton lay quietly on the bed. Around it were several corpses and unrusty medical equipment.

Slinging the Berserker assault rifle over his shoulder and carrying his bulging backpack, Shang Jianyao walked to the operating bed and seriously observed the corpse that was suspected to be the Kalendaria's Son. After a while, he turned his head and asked Geneva, “Can you tell what surgery it was?”

Genava—who had a chameleon head—moved his metal neck from side to side. “It’s very difficult to determine from bones alone.”

At this point, he changed the topic. “However, it’s impossible for a surgery to be carried out without any preparations. We definitely have to figure out the source of the problem in advance.”

He meant that the doctor in charge of the surgery should have a relatively complete medical record.

Bang!

Shang Jianyao patted his chest—which had the Blessings from all Kalendarium covering the metal skeleton—and said in enlightenment, “Quick, check the surrounding corpses!”

As he spoke, he looked at the bones on the operating table. “Is this the Kalendaria’s Son? The bones left behind are no different from ordinary people.”

Genava—who had already done a round of checks—said, “There’s a high chance that the child left behind by a Kalendaria’s body of descent is a normal human.”

Shang Jianyao skipped the sentence and continued, “Which Kalendaria’s child is it? April’s Kalendaria, Shadow of Distortion?”

This guess was based on the influence he had suffered in the stairwell.

“There’s an 82% chance.” Genava gave a calculated outcome.

Shang Jianyao’s thoughts jumped to another matter as he said in pain, “The mighty Kalendaria actually failed to treat ‘His’ child and allowed him to take the risk of surgery!”

“The Kalendaria’s interference with the Ashlands is clearly limited in some way.” Genava didn’t attempt to understand Shang Jianyao’s train of thought. He only answered the questions.

The Shang Jianyaos finally controlled themselves and squatted down to examine the corpse in a white coat by the operating table.

Surgical knives, biological agents, and other items were scattered around the corpse. The body was clean, and there was no information.

“Found it,” Genova said as he squatted diagonally behind the corpse.

Shang Jianyao relied on the military exoskeleton to do a 180-degree turn.

“What is it?” he anxiously asked without pulling down his visor.

Genava flipped through the information and acted as a translator. “The surgery’s goal is to resolve the patient’s heart problem. For this, they prepared a cardiopulmonary bypass.”

Ceningmis didn’t suffer much from the Old World’s destruction. Hospital equipment was relatively well-preserved, but as time passed, it gradually entered a state of having few doctors and drugs since it didn’t have any drugs or medical equipment production lines.

“It seems like an accident did happen during the surgery. It triggered a disaster before it ended.” Shang Jianyao stood up and stared at the remains of the Kalendaria’s Son again.

Genava then said, “The pre-op evaluation indicated considerable risks, but the Old Task Force still wanted to give it a try. The patient agreed after fully understanding the situation. They probably didn’t expect the failure of the surgery to bring about a disaster that destroyed the entire city.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao agreed. He then raised his right palm vertically and said, “*Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti*, saving a life is better than building a seven-storied pagoda.”

Genava continued talking about the listed medical information. “The surgical plan mentioned that the patient is a powerful Awakened. After being anesthetized, he might unconsciously interfere with the electromagnetic information in the surroundings. It required the help of a Mind Corridor-level Awakened who is good at such abilities...”

“How powerful?” Shang Jianyao interrupted Genova.

“One that explored the Mind Corridor’s depths and can also interfere with matter to a certain extent,” Genova replied. He then said, “The patient is 81 years old and very weak. This was the main risk.”

“81 years old?” Shang Jianyao blurted out in surprise. “He’s only a child!”

Genava knew that this was a superficial understanding Hey had of the term ‘Kalendaria’s Son.’ He seriously explained, “The destruction of Ceningmis happened in Year 37 of the New Calendar. The Chaotic Era before the New Calendar lasted for about 20 years.

“Since Ceningmis’s Council of Virtue claims that the Kalendaria’s Son protected this city and the villages around it from the Old World’s destruction, it means that the other party had relatively strong autonomy and mobility back then. Coupled with the information that he was 81 years old, the Kalendaria’s Son was about 24 years old when the Old World was destroyed. It matches our previous guess.”

Different factions had different takes on how long the Chaotic Era lasted—it could only be said that it lasted about 20 years. If it weren’t for the fact that the major factions in the Ashlands had been communicating more frequently in recent years, the New Calendar would have different varieties with their own unique characteristics, requiring conversion between them.

Shang Jianyao sighed without hiding anything. “I thought he was the same age as Xiaochong. He’s already in his seventies or eighties, but he’s still addressed as the Kalendaria’s Son. He’s using his father’s prestige to showcase his identity. Tsk, tsk, he wasn’t doing well.”

At this moment, Genava deeply understood an idiom: whistling in the wind.

He didn’t know what Shang Jianyao was sighing about.

Shang Jianyao quickly forgot what he had just said. He checked the remaining corpses and didn’t discover any useful clues.

He looked at the remains of the unclothed Kalendaria’s Son and turned to the door. “Search the other rooms.”

“Should we report our discovery to Big White?” Genava’s red eyes flickered.

Shang Jianyao looked up and laughed. “Is there a need to ask?”

Without giving Genava a chance to react, he relied on the communications system embedded in the military exoskeleton to give Jiang Baimian a simple report of the situation in the operating theater.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and said, "There's a problem."

"What problem?" Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Hey, is this how someone who just discovered their father's corpse should behave?

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but criticize inwardly. However, she also knew that Shang Jianyao had long accepted the fact that his father had passed away. He only wanted to figure out what his father had done and the reason for his death.

Now, Shang Jianyao's grief was undoubtedly still there. The relief and acceptance of having his wish fulfilled were definitely there.

Besides, it was very difficult to guess a mental patient's condition with a normal person's thoughts and logic.

Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, "The Kalendaria's Son was already 81 years old and had explored the Mind Corridor's depths. Why did he take the risk to undergo heart surgery and not directly enter the New World? His father is a Kalendaria. A room with a New World door can easily be made to appear in front of 'His' child."

It was recognized that the Kalendaria could adjust the order and location of rooms. Shang Jianyao had encountered it several times.

Shang Jianyao immediately smiled. "From the looks of it, the Kalendaria doesn't want 'His' child to enter the New World either."

Jiang Baimian fell silent. This was also the conclusion she came up with.

Of course, this wasn't the only possibility. Jiang Baimian deliberated for a moment and said, "Maybe there's an obstacle that prevents the Kalendaria from providing help to 'His' child."

"How pitiful." Shang Jianyao suddenly felt empathy, even though he didn't have children.

Time was of the essence, so Jiang Baimian didn't say anything else. After giving some brief instructions, she took the initiative to end the communication.

Shang Jianyao and Geneva then left the operating theater and entered the room next door.

This was a sizable study. Rows of shelves were filled with books, and there were even ladders in some places.

At a glance, Geneva saw books in the field of music, painting, sculpture, and other arts. He also saw medical books like *How Humans Stay Healthy*, *Love Your Heart*, and *Unlock Your Brain*.

"The room owner's reading preferences are very mixed." Geneva made a preliminary judgment.

This dealt a relatively serious blow to the Old Task Force's idea of searching for clues based on the book list.

Shang Jianyao—who had his visor up—smiled. "After the Old World was destroyed, there were too few ways for humans to entertain themselves. They can only read."

The next second, he retorted himself. "Who said so? As the ruler of Ceningmis, you can't imagine the joy of being a Kalendaria's Son!"

"You make it sound like something you can imagine..." The Shang Jianyaos argued.

This made Geneva wonder if his condition had deteriorated.

He was just about to stop the argument when Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a military exoskeleton—walked to the desk by the window.

There were pen holders, books, and other items. In the most eye-catching spot was a photo frame.

Shang Jianyao stretched out his right palm, picked up the photo frame, and turned it to face him.

There were two men in the photo. One was a middle-aged man, and the other was less than 20 years old.

Chapter 878: Name

In the photo, the young man in his twenties had dark-brown hair. He had a few freckles on his face, and his eyes were dark blue. His facial features weren't outstanding; he was just an ordinary person of Red River ethnicity.

The middle-aged man beside the young guy looked similar to him. It was obvious that they were related by blood.

The middle-aged man's hair was messy, and he didn't have a clean shave. He had an honest-looking smile, but there was a sharp twinkle in his eyes.

Judging from their clothes, the two men weren't considered well-off. They just weren't poor and weren't middle-class.

Shang Jianyao extended his right palm that was covered in metal bones and pointed at the young man in the photo. "That's the Kalendaria's Son?"

"Probably." Geneva moved his metal neck up and down. "Normal people wouldn't place someone else's photo in their room out in the open. One of them must be him, and I'm guessing he's the younger one."

"Why?" Shang Jianyao had a habit of getting to the bottom of things.

Geneva extended a silver-black finger and tapped the young man in the photo. "The Kalendaria's Son was about twenty-four when the old world was destroyed. This can't be a photo he took at the end of the Chaotic Era or the beginning of the New Calendar, right?"

"Why not?" The honest Shang Jianyao raised the question. "Can't the one to the side be the Kalendaria's Son, while he's the Kalendaria's Grandson?"

"From the background of the photo, the style of the clothes, and the degree of wear and tear..." Geneva explained in detail.

Shang Jianyao patted his chest with his right hand that was holding the photo frame as though he had come to a realization. “I see.”

Genava kindly reminded him, “If you slap it a few more times, the Blessings from all Kalendarium will be destroyed.”

It didn’t matter if the photo frame was damaged.

“Don’t jinx it like Little Red,” Shang Jianyao grumbled. He anxiously tore off the scotch tape and carefully folded the Blessings from all Kalendarium before putting it back into his pocket.

He looked at the photo again and nodded. “This was likely taken a few years before the Old World was destroyed. Then, the person beside him is April’s Kalendaria, Shadow of Distortion?”

“Probably,” Genava replied in a measured tone.

“That’s not right.” Shang Jianyao retorted himself. “The exact term is Shadow of Distortion’s body of descent.”

As he spoke, he laughed. “He looks very ordinary. How does he look like the Kalendaria’s body of descent?”

“Master Zhuang’s body of descent, Du Shaochong, was also relatively ordinary,” Genava reminded him.

“He was good at his studies!” Shang Jianyao replied loudly. He then returned to his normal volume. “Xiaochong’s aesthetics are also very unique. Not everyone can pull off the colors of tomato omelet well. Besides, he likes games!”

The red light in Genava’s eyes flickered. He thought for ten seconds before choosing a target to imitate. “That’s right, that’s right.”

Shang Jianyao looked at the middle-aged man in the photo again. “Maybe you can’t judge a book by its cover.”

He opened the frame and seriously examined the photo, but he didn't find any other clues.

“Can we take this photo away?” Shang Jianyao turned to look at Genova.

“Are you asking me?” Genova had long discovered that Hey always acted independently without Big White around.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “No, I'm asking April's Kalendaria, Shadow of Distortion.”

With that said, he bent his arm and assumed a posture of flexing his biceps. At the same time, he shouted, “Muscle above all!”

This was the prayer action and slogan of the Holy Body Church that believed in the Shadow of Distortion.

After shouting, Shang Jianyao quickly looked around.

Upon seeing that the sun was still shining brightly, he handed the photo to Genova and got him to put it away. As for himself, he checked the things on the desk.

These were mainly pens, stationery, and a few books. The latter included Superpower Analysis, Consciousness Switch, and Mystery of the Human Body...

“I can tell that the Kalendaria's Son is seeking an explanation for an Awakened's abilities. Be it scientific or unscientific, he reads them all.” Genova picked up the books and quickly flipped through them, recorded, and analyzed them as though he were a banknote counter.

Shang Jianyao was ‘shocked.’ “Wasn't it bestowed by his Kalendaria father?”

“This means that he doesn't agree with this explanation,” Genova made a judgment.

Shang Jianyao was excited and immediately used the military exoskeleton's communications system to inform Jiang Baimian of the discovery.

Jiang Baimian muttered to herself thoughtfully, “He believes that the essence of Awakening has nothing to do with the Kalendaria and that the Kalendarium are only able to use such powers? His Kalendaria father told him?”

“That’s possible,” Shang Jianyao replied in relief.

Jiang Baimian immediately ordered, “Bring these books back. Old Ge, remember to scan all of them and do a backup and analysis.”

“No problem.” Genova found paper and rope on the spot, bundled the books up, and hung them over his body.

His and Shang Jianyao’s backpacks were already filled to the brim.

Shang Jianyao then eagerly asked Jiang Baimian, “Shall we take away the pack of bear biscuits on the table?”

“Bear biscuits?” Jiang Baimian was a little surprised.

Shang Jianyao nodded hard. “Yes, there’s also a bag of teddy bear biscuits on the table. The production date is early in the New Calendar’s 37th year, produced locally.”

This bag of biscuits was placed beside the ink bottle. Its outer shell was brownish-yellow kraft paper.

Jiang Baimian muttered to herself in confusion, “Ceningmis had maintained a production line for bear biscuits? Isn’t that too extravagant?”

Although Ceningmis didn’t suffer any damage when the Old World was destroyed—having both factories and farmlands relatively well-preserved—its surroundings had been swallowed by Icefield, preventing it from providing them with food.

In other words, their food production could only sustain their lives. Factory production also mainly satisfied their basic survival needs and energy imports.

Shang Jianyao expressed his understanding. “Maybe the Kalendaria’s Son likes the bear biscuits very much. As a savior, it’s acceptable to provide him some privileges and waste some resources.”

“He was already 81 years old in the 37th year of the New Calendar,” Jiang Baimian muttered.

“Maybe it’s a part of his childhood memories,” Shang Jianyao argued.

Upon recalling the Awakened’s strange ‘habits,’ Jiang Baimian didn’t say anything else and directly said, “Check the biscuits. Don’t take them away if there’s nothing wrong.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao was a little disappointed.

After Geneva’s appraisal, it was an ordinary bag of bear biscuits.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao found a document under a few books.

The document’s content was a plan to build a power station. One was to buy coal from Gesterbourg and build a new thermal power plant. The other was to think of a way to obtain the corresponding Old World technology and supplies to build a nuclear power plant.

Beside the latter plan, someone had written the word ‘approved’ and signed his name: Brooklyn Garland.

“The name of the Kalendaria’s Son?” Shang Jianyao handed the document to Geneva.

Geneva moved his metal neck. “It’s basically confirmed.”

Shang Jianyao immediately imagined excitedly, “Will you be protected if you shout this name at the critical moment?”

“He’s already dead,” Geneva reminded.

Shang Jianyao sighed. “From the looks of it, it will only backfire and make us die faster. Might as well shout Du Shaochong.”

After a round of searching, they didn't find any more clues in the penthouse.

“He actually didn't write a diary or record his insights!” Shang Jianyao said in exasperation.

The words left behind by the Kalendaria's Son they found here were either signatures or corrections to certain documents. There was nothing that involved the Awakened or the New World of the Kalendarium.

Genava replied, “This actually explains many things. Even the Kalendaria's Son doesn't dare or is unwilling to write down matters regarding the New World.”

“That's right, that's right.” Shang Jianyao agreed with this. “The New World's waters run very deep!”

They didn't stay any longer. They carried their items and retreated to the suburbs of Ceningmis.

Before this, Shang Jianyao gathered the Old Task Force corpses apart from his father and found a place to bury them.

He took away one item from every corpse that had personal items.

From the corpse of the Old Task Force's leader, Genava and Shang Jianyao learned that they had indeed come all the way to Ceningmis because there had been no large-scale Heartless outbreaks during the Old World's destruction. This was very rare in the Ashlands.

...

Ceningmis, western mountains.

The Old Task Force ate dinner and discussed their discovery in Ceningmis.

As they conversed, Long Yuehong suddenly said, “We've completed the two missions this time. Are we returning to the company next?”

Jiang Baimian and the others fell silent.

After a few seconds, Jiang Baimian deliberated and said, “There’s something else we have to confirm: The Kalendarium’s goal for rearing humans.”

“But how can we confirm it?” Long Yuehong had previously thought of this, but he had no clue.

Jiang Baimian looked around and slowly said, “Go to End Year City, which believes in Big Boss and the bizarre existence, Truth.”

Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped—

Chapter 879: Change

To the Old Task Force, the biggest problem now was that they didn’t know where End Year City was.

Long Yuehong thought for a moment and took the initiative to say, “We can only consider returning to Cliff Village and waiting for End Year City’s people to head south to trade.”

He had always been proactive when it came to matters regarding the company and the Kalendarium’s rearing of humans. After all, this directly affected his family, relatives, friends, and future life.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “Summer is approaching. The people of End Year City will definitely seize this window to make more transactions and stock up on supplies.”

Since End Year City’s exact location needed to be kept confidential, they could only send people south. This was an opportunity.

Upon seeing that his suggestion had obtained his team leader’s approval, Long Yuehong couldn’t hide his joy and added, “We can go to Cliff Village to replenish our electricity and food.”

At this point, he exclaimed and frowned. “When we submitted the application, we only declared two missions—finding the Eighth Research Institute’s exact location and exploring Ceningmis. Both have been completed, so the company will definitely be suspicious if we don’t return soon.”

The higher-ups would feel that the Old Task Force had thoughts to themselves and that they were busy with or planning something.

Jiang Baimian smiled after hearing Long Yuehong’s words. “I haven’t reported the matter of finding the Kalendaria’s Son’s remains to the company.”

In other words, in Pangu Biology’s records, the Old Task Force had yet to complete all their missions.

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao clapped again.

Jiang Baimian glanced at him and didn’t say a word. She could sense that Hey was relatively quiet today as if he were only a mood maker.

This was understandable.

“However, the environment in Ceningmis has already changed. If it no longer overlaps with the New World, it won’t be long before someone notices its abnormality,” Bai Chen reminded her team leader. “Besides, doesn’t our arrival at Cliff Village mean that the mission is completed?”

If they hadn’t finished exploring Ceningmis, normal people would choose to replenish their energy and supplies in Gesterbourg. They wouldn’t cross Icefield to return to Cliff Village.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “To the humans in Gesterbourg and the surroundings, Ceningmis is a forbidden zone. Unless something unexpected happens, nobody will specially go over to check on it. Only when summer comes and a large number of Ruin Hunters enter Icefield and occasionally pass by will the problem with Ceningmis be discovered.”

She meant that her team still had plenty of time.

There was still about a month before summer in Icefield.

“As for Cliff Village, let’s go to Gesterbourg to stock up on supplies and strive to last a little longer in Icefield. Let’s see if we can wait until the southward-heading caravan of End Year City comes,” added Jiang Baimian.

Everyone knew very well where they would be waiting—it was on either side of the road that led from Icefield to Cliff Village.

“Yes.” Genava moved his metal neck up and down. “We still have to hand the items Aester wants to Gitis.”

“They take up too much space!” Shang Jianyao pointed at his and Genava’s bulging tactical backpacks.

Long Yuehong scoffed. “Haven’t you always liked missions that help people fulfill their wishes? Why would you disdain the corresponding items occupying space?”

Shang Jianyao replied seriously, “They are squeezing my father.”

Some of his father’s remains were in his backpack, and another portion was with Genava.

Long Yuehong was speechless.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Baimian cleared her throat and said seriously, “It’s very clear what we should do next. We’ll head to Gesterbourg tomorrow.”

The night passed uneventfully.

After dawn, the five Old Task Force members were in no rush to get into the car. They lined up on the flat hill and faced Ceningmis as they held their chests and closed their eyes.

They mourned in silence for the other Old Task Force members.

Each of these people played many roles. They were the children, parents, partners, relatives, and friends of others.

After three minutes, Jiang Baimian opened her eyes and whispered, “Everyone, don’t worry. The real reason for the Old World’s destruction is about to surface. When the time comes, the wind will pass the news to you on our behalf.”

With that said, she bowed deeply.

As a team that investigated the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the Heartless disease’s origins, she was very respectful and sorrowful to the predecessors who had sacrificed themselves in Ceningmis.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao shouted, “For all of humanity!”

He then bowed deeply as well.

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava did the same.

...

White Knights, Gesterbourg.

The moment the Old Task Force returned, they sensed a strange atmosphere in the air.

There were clearly more knights and soldiers wearing alloy armor coming and going. The Ruin Hunters—who were supposed to be active—appeared timid.

“Nervous!” After leaving Ceningmis for a period of time, Shang Jianyao returned to normal.

“Why are you nervous?” Jiang Baimian—who was driving the jeep with the help of manual navigation—glanced at the passenger seat.

Shang Jianyao looked out and excitedly said, “Could they be sent by the White Knights’ headquarters to capture us?”

“Why would we deserve this?” Jiang Baimian laughed.

The Old Task Force had always been law-abiding in Gesterbourg. They only attacked the Eighth Research Institute’s people and didn’t do anything out of line that would attract attention.

“We’re worth tens of thousands of Oray!” Shang Jianyao seemed rather proud of this.

Long Yuehong muttered, “To a large faction like the White Knights, tens of thousands of Oray is nothing.”

“Any faction is made up of people, and people have selfish motives. To an individual, tens of thousands of Oray is enough to buy their lives.” Shang Jianyao was prepared to enter a war of words.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Long Yuehong couldn’t be bothered to argue with him.

Before long, Jiang Baimian drove the car to the Fire & Iron Hotel’s entrance.

The receptionist today was Gitis.

Upon seeing that nobody was around, Shang Jianyao directly asked the former intelligence peddler, “Did something happen recently? I feel like there are many more knights in Gesterbourg.”

Gitis looked up at him and calmly said, “One Knight silver coin.”

“There’s a fee for that?” Shang Jianyao was very surprised.

“Apart from me, you won’t be able to get the real reason from anywhere else,” Gitis replied calmly.

Jiang Baimian’s heart stirred. She looked around and suppressed her voice. “You’ve Awakened?”

Gitis combed the honey-colored hair by her ears and said happily, “I have Heavenly Ears again!”

She deliberately didn't mention what the other two abilities were.

“When did this happen?” Shang Jianyao asked happily as if he were the one who had Awakened.

Gitis replied with bright eyes, “On the third day after you left, I dreamed of a bodhi tree and later Awakened.”

“Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.” Shang Jianyao raised his right palm vertically in satisfaction and chanted a Buddhist proclamation.

Jiang Baimian was also happy for Gitis. She took out a Knight silver coin she had and handed it to the latter.

Gitis bluntly accepted the silver coins and suppressed her voice. “It seems like the headquarters specially sent many powerhouses over to deal with the Eighth Research Institute.”

The company told the Eighth Research Institute's exact location to the White Knights? The various large factions are joining forces to deal with the Eighth Research Institute??These thoughts flashed through Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Jiang Baimian's minds at the same time.

“Do you know when it will begin?” Shang Jianyao asked excitedly.

Gitis shook her head. “That organization is very strong. It will probably take months to prepare.”

Most importantly, the various factions have to coordinate well. Otherwise, whoever takes the lead will suffer... The Eighth Research Institute's strength isn't to be underestimated...?Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully.

Gitis looked around and asked instinctively like an intelligence peddler, “Did you guys return from Ceningmis?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao signaled for Genova to take off his backpack and take out the toy bear, building blocks, and other items.

Gitis's eyes widened slightly as she said in surprise, "Did you really enter Ceningmis?"

Furthermore, they came out alive!

However, she found it completely understandable after glancing at Genava. Ceningmis was forbidden to humans but not to robots.

Robots wouldn't contract the Heartless disease!

"That's right, that's right," Shang Jianyao admitted frankly. He then kindly told Gitis, "Ceningmis is no longer in danger; you can organize a team to gather supplies. Yes, you have to pay attention. If it's dark in Ceningmis, even at noon, you must not enter..."

Gitis was confused. She felt like she understood every word, but she didn't know what it meant when pieced together.

After a few seconds, she suddenly came to a realization and looked at Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others in surprise. "You restored Ceningmis to normal?"

Made that place no longer a forbidden zone?

Chapter 880: New Room

In Gitis's heart, Ceningmis was a place that all the White Knights combined didn't dare enter. Any human would end up infected with the Heartless disease there.

Back when she had the Subhuti figurine, she had never thought of getting an avatar to enter Ceningmis to gather some supplies, afraid that the Heartless disease would infect her main body.

Not only had this team been to Ceningmis, but they had also returned to Gesterbourg alive. They even claimed to have resolved the problem with Ceningmis and made the widespread Heartless disease there completely disappear. It was no longer a forbidden zone!

As Gitis reeled in disbelief, Shang Jianyao replied in an abnormally sincere and humble manner, "We only made an insignificant contribution."

That's the truth... It's unknown which Kalendaria resolved Ceningmis's problem. There's a high chance that it was Big Boss, Arbiter of Fate. We were only in charge of 'delivering' the relevant items in...?Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

She didn't mind Shang Jianyao telling Gitis that Ceningmis had returned to normal. She wasn't worried that it would reveal the fact that the Old Task Force had completed all the missions. This was because Gitis definitely wouldn't publicize this matter and allow others to seize the initiative. Furthermore, the teams she had organized in the past two to three times were definitely trustworthy. Those people wouldn't spread the opportunity to make a killing to avoid increasing the competition and preventing them from choosing the best and most valuable supplies.

Although most Ruin Hunters in Gesterbourg liked to brag and might not be able to keep the secret if they secretly drank some smuggled hard liquor after two to three explorations, Ceningmis was large. No matter how many Ruin Hunters there were, they wouldn't be able to empty it in a year or so. However, that would happen in at least a month—the Old Task Force should've completed their designated goal by then.

Since that was the case, it was only right for them to benefit their friends.

An insignificant contribution...?Gitis stared at Shang Jianyao for a few seconds and gave up on asking.

These people had too many mysteries surrounding them. The more she knew, the more dangerous it was.

She reined in her shock and turned her thoughts to pragmatic problems. "Are there still plenty of Heartless in Ceningmis?"

If there were plenty or stronger ones, she would have to consider the composition of the team carefully.

"They should all be dead," Shang Jianyao replied truthfully. "In any case, we didn't encounter them again."

Jiang Baimian nodded. "Ceningmis has run out of food. Even if there are Heartless, they will search for food in the surrounding area with summer approaching instead of staying in Ceningmis."

“However, you still have to be very careful. The remaining Heartless in Ceningmis are definitely very strong,” Shang Jianyao added.

After bidding Gitis farewell, the Old Task Force went upstairs and entered the suite they had booked.

Jiang Baimian threw her tactical backpack to the side and sat in the single-seater. She smiled and said, “We can relax a little for the next two to three days. Our primary mission is to charge up our electricity and stock up on supplies.”

“There’s no way to truly relax on the surface,” Shang Jianyao replied. He then explained, “I said it on Little Red’s behalf.”

“I don’t think so!” Long Yuehong immediately retorted.

Although it was indeed impossible for him to relax his body and mind like he did in the company, he wasn’t that strung up when he was in a safe area. After all, his wife was lying beside him, and he had trustworthy companions on night duty outside.

Jiang Baimian stopped Shang Jianyao from continuing and exhaled. “It’s getting late. We have to consider what to eat.”

Shang Jianyao’s eyes lit up as his attention was instantly diverted.

...

In the dark night, Shang Jianyao entered the Mind Corridor again after lying in bed. He squatted in front of Room 205, which represented February’s Kalendaria, Dawn.

The rash him escaped and anxiously shouted, “Can we enter now?”

The honest Shang Jianyao joined him. “That’s right; we don’t lie to ourselves. The two targets we previously set have been completed. Didn’t you say that we can enter after finding the Eighth

Research Institute's exact location and exploring Ceningmis? That we can die without regrets even if we encounter something?"

"That's right, that's right," another Shang Jianyao echoed.

He had always stood on the side of reason.

The ruthless Shang Jianyao scoffed. "Don't drag us down if you want to die!"

"You make it sound like I'm dragging you along. If it weren't for the fact that I can't shake off a coward like you, I would've long done it alone!" the rash Shang Jianyao replied bluntly.

There was no need to be polite to himself.

The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty also interrupted. "I wonder what it will be like to explore the Kalendaria's room and what we will find..."

His tone was filled with strong yearning.

Upon seeing that everyone was losing cohesion and that it was difficult to lead the team, the calm and rational Shang Jianyao walked toward Room 205.

Just as the Shang Jianyaos were about to cheer, this Shang Jianyao suddenly turned around and blocked Room 205's door. He then looked around and said, "We still haven't figured out why the Kalendarium rear humans and what dangers are hidden in the company. Do you want to die in advance and let everyone in the company slide into the bottomless abyss?"

"I don't want to die with such unfinished business." Shang Jianyao—whose eyes were still a little red and swollen—agreed.

"That's right, that's right," echoed the Shang Jianyao that didn't have a mind of his own.

"Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti." Zen Master Redemption—who was half-mechanical and half-human—raised his palm vertically and said sincerely, "We redeem others first to redeem ourselves."

Nobody paid attention to the Buddhist preaching that he had painstakingly come up with. Shang Jianyao—who abhorred evil—said, “If we can’t even save everyone in the company, how can we save all of humanity?”

The most cheerful Shang Jianyao grinned at his peers. “Since there’s disagreement, let’s vote.”

After a vote, the Shang Jianyao Democratic Association approved the proposal of solving the mystery of the Kalendarium rearing humans before exploring Room 205 with a vote of six to four.

“Sigh.” The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty let out a long sigh. “Why didn’t we find the Mind Room of End Year City’s Awakened?”

In that case, it might be easier to lock onto End Year City’s exact location. They might even obtain the answer as to why the Kalendarium reared humans.

“Our luck sucks,” replied the honest Shang Jianyao.

“It’s also possible that someone doesn’t want us to encounter them.” The ruthless Shang Jianyao sneered.

As they spoke, they gathered and fused into one before heading deeper into the Mind Corridor to see if they could find the door that led to the New World or anything related to End Year City in other rooms.

After walking for a while, Shang Jianyao’s gaze froze again.

Not far in front of him, the number ‘503’ was written on a vermilion door—this was Jiang Xiaoyue’s room.

...

The next morning, Jiang Baimian—who had heard Shang Jianyao’s report—asked in relief and amusement, “You actually didn’t enter?”

Shang Jianyao said seriously, “Room 503 might not be less dangerous than Room 205.”

Clang! Clang! Clang!?

Genava clapped for Shang Jianyao this time.

Shang Jianyao wore a regretful expression. “Unfortunately, Old Ge can’t enter the Mind Corridor. Otherwise, he can explore 503.”

The danger shown by Room 503 was to make the explorer contract the Heartless disease, but robots were immune to the Heartless disease.

Jiang Baimian nodded. “Yes, we’ll discuss this problem later tonight. Let’s go out and get some supplies now.”

They still had some coins left.

Downstairs, Long Yuehong saw a sheriff leave the front desk and walk out of the hotel.

Gitis was still at work during the day.

“What was he asking?” Shang Jianyao approached as if they were acquaintances.

Gitis looked around and suppressed her voice. “Eman was the deputy commander of the local Knights. His death caught the attention of the Grand Knights, and they have been investigating the real reason.”

“Did they suspect you?” Jiang Baimian asked before Shang Jianyao could.

Gitis shook her head. “Fortunately, I insisted on not using my avatars to obtain unreasonable benefits. Eman and I have no interactions on the surface, so they can’t suspect me at all. Those sheriffs only know that I’m a relatively good intelligence peddler and want to see if I have any clues.”

Jiang Baimian slowly nodded. She then suppressed her voice and said, “In the future, don’t mention Eman and your avatars anywhere, even if there’s nobody around or when communicating with us. I don’t think anyone knows better than you what it means by ‘walls have ears.’”

Gitis wasn’t the only one with Heavenly Ears.

Gitis’s expression changed slightly as she nodded solemnly.

Just as Shang Jianyao planned on bidding his friend farewell and buying supplies in different places in Gesterbourg, Bai Chen suddenly asked, “Have you heard of End Year City? Have you heard of End Year City during your three years as an intelligence peddler?”