

Ad Infinitum 891

Chapter 891: Deeper

Along the way, Jiang Baimian realized that there was nothing in the open rooms. They were empty.

If not for the fact that she occasionally encountered a few damaged beds and chairs, she couldn't be sure that this was a place that housed people.

“What a clean move...” She sighed with emotion.

“Not giving Ruin Hunters a chance.” Shang Jianyao sighed.

Du Heng touched the door handle beside him and smiled. “Not necessarily. This handle, the tiles, the ceiling, and these lamps have non-zero value. Furthermore, there might be steel bars in the walls...”

Clang! Clang! Clang!?

Shang Jianyao's applause interrupted Du Heng. He praised, “Teacher Du Heng, you have a lot of life experience.”

Du Heng laughed. “No matter what, I'm still a Ruin Hunter with many years of experience.”

You became an Official Hunter a few years ago...?Jiang Baimian added inwardly.

After arriving at the elevator area, she checked and said, “There's still electricity.”

“There's actually electricity!” Shang Jianyao was shocked. “The Ruin Hunters are lucky.”

Jiang Baimian guessed the reason. “Maybe the Eighth Research Institute didn't have the time to dismantle the power station. Furthermore, they probably moved a few days ago. The power station is still operating autonomously.”

From the mountain range's terrain and Icefield's characteristics, it was impossible to build a hydropower station or a thermal power plant here, nor was it suitable for solar power. Wind power

was limited by the seasons, so it was impossible to maintain the entire research institute's stable operation. Therefore, Jiang Baimian suspected that there was a miniaturized nuclear power plant somewhere in the mountain.

"That's a good thing. There's no need to climb the stairs." Du Heng pressed the button casually.

One of the elevator doors immediately opened.

Jiang Baimian suddenly frowned. This was blocked by the military exoskeleton's visor, so nobody noticed her frown.

Upon seeing Du Heng and Shang Jianyao walk to the elevator, Jiang Baimian quickly said, "There's a problem."

"What's wrong?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Jiang Baimian pointed at the elevators and said, "Look, at least one-third of the elevators are parked on the fifth floor."

"What's wrong with that?" The honest Shang Jianyao expressed his confusion.

Upon seeing Du Heng look over, Jiang Baimian explained, "Normally speaking, any migration will definitely involve gathering at the entrance. Those elevators should be parked at the bottom."

"Maybe the last batch of people didn't use all the elevators," retorted the honest Shang Jianyao.

"The problem is that the number of people going up is the same number of people going down." Jiang Baimian had long analyzed the corresponding situation.

The same batch of people used seven to eight elevators to go up, so they wouldn't only use three to four elevators to come down.

"It's normal to squeeze a little." As Shang Jianyao spoke, he suddenly lowered his voice and spoke as though he was retelling a ghost story. "It's also possible that some people don't come down after going up..."

This was what Jiang Baimian wanted to say. “Then, where did they go?”

“I don’t know.” Shang Jianyao shook his head. “In any case, I don’t sense their human consciousness.”

At this point, he had a look of horror. “Could there be a trap up there?”

“We’ll know when we go up and take a look.” Du Heng remained carefree and didn’t mind.

You make it sound so easy...?Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and didn’t object. She only used the communications system embedded in the military exoskeleton to remind Shang Jianyao, “Keep a distance from Teacher Du Heng later and stay behind him.”

Shang Jianyao raised his right hand and gestured okay.

This time, he and Jiang Baimian didn’t carry any assault rifles. After all, the military exoskeleton had the corresponding weapon modules.

The trio took the elevator and quickly arrived at the fifth floor.

There was no natural light here; it completely relied on the ceiling lamps that lined the passageway.

Fortunately, there was no power outage. Otherwise, it would greatly reduce Jiang Baimian and the others’ search efficiency.

According to Professor Qin’s memories, the fifth floor was divided into three parts.

After coming out of the elevator, the first area was where the Professor’s Association usually held meetings and the various departments that provided services.

Not a single piece of paper was left in the meeting room, much less any information. Perhaps it was because the black conference table was too large and inconvenient to move, but there were no chairs around it.

“Too thorough, too thorough...” Shang Jianyao shook his head and sighed.

The nearby rooms belonging to different departments were in a similar state; only the most cumbersome items were left behind. One or two pieces of paper could occasionally be seen, but it was either the punishment decisions meted onto some particular person or the allocation of certain supplies. They were documents that were outdated and wouldn't affect anything if they weren't taken away.

After passing through this area and passing through a pair of dark metal doors, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Du Heng entered the residence of New World powerhouses like Vice President and Professor Li.

Not only were there rooms for sleeping, but there was also the original president's office.

For some reason, Jiang Baimian felt her heart sink the moment she stepped into the area. This was very similar to the heavy calm before a storm.

She used the military exoskeleton's communications system to ask Shang Jianyao, “Do you sense anything wrong?”

Shang Jianyao replied, “There's nothing wrong.”

“You don't feel heavy or suffocated?” Jiang Baimian asked.

“No.” Shang Jianyao usually didn't joke at times like this.

Jiang Baimian turned her head and asked Du Heng.

Du Heng also shook his head. “It's very normal.”

“That might be my problem...” Jiang Baimian was almost speechless.

She analyzed the situation and found the most likely reason: She was the weakest of the three.

In the Awakened domain, although she had already cleared the psychological trauma that had stumped her for a long time, she had no way of knowing how far she was from the Mind Corridor. As for Shang Jianyao and Du Heng, one was an Awakened who had explored the Mind Corridor's depths, and the other had a mysterious background and could only be stronger than Shang Jianyao.

In the New World powerhouses' rooms, not only were the instruments used to maintain their physical activity gone, but even the beds they lay on were gone.

"A locust swarm! A locust swarm!" Shang Jianyao felt pained. "If it weren't for the fact that it's inconvenient to dismantle the toilet bowl, they probably would've taken it away."

"It's understandable." Du Heng smiled and consoled him. "There's a lack of supplies in the Ashlands. Although the Eighth Research Institute controls some military bases, corresponding farmlands, and factories, it's not like they don't lack anything. Besides, this is also to prevent us from finding useful information through clues."

Shang Jianyao looked at the toilet in the room and indignantly said, "If they really force us into a corner, we'll dig out the feces! This can analyze the physical condition of a New World powerhouse. I don't believe they took away the feces!"

You've watched too much Old World entertainment...?Jiang Baimian exhaled and said, "There's so much feces mixed together in the septic tank. Do you know which belongs to whom?"

Furthermore, New World powerhouses usually relied on injections to maintain their vitals.

Shang Jianyao was stunned for a moment. "I didn't consider it carefully enough."

After leaving the New World powerhouses' rooms, they continued deeper into the area.

Under the corridor, a wind that came from somewhere blew, bringing with it a bone-chilling coldness.

It wasn't completely summer in Icefield, and the mountainside was especially cold.

Shang Jianyao looked up at the ceiling and said, "Why aren't these lights moving? If they sway around and flicker, it will give off better vibes."

His tone was filled with regret.

"It's meaningless. Little Red isn't here," Jiang Baimian casually replied.

"That's right..." Shang Jianyao sighed.

Before long, they arrived at the office that originally belonged to the president in Professor Qin's memories.

This room was tightly shut and locked as if there was a ferocious beast inside.

"Shall we go in?" Jiang Baimian deliberately asked.

Before Du Heng could answer, Shang Jianyao said, "Professor Qin has never sensed human consciousness here."

"Let's take a look. We might discover something." Du Heng spoke in a tone as if they might as well do it, having come all the way here. "If there really is something, the Eighth Research Institute should've long moved it."

Jiang Baimian didn't object.

The key to the door had been thrown somewhere, but this didn't stump Shang Jianyao. He raised his metal skeleton-covered right foot and kicked forward.

With a bang, the door collapsed.

There was no light in the room. With the help of the street lamps, Jiang Baimian saw flying sawdust and visible dust.

Tak!?

Shang Jianyao switched on the lights inside.

The entire room reflected into their eyes under the illumination.

This place wasn't large. A desk was placed in the innermost corner, and a few documents were scattered on it. There was no computer or books.

There was a row of bookshelves by the door. On the other side were sofas.

With the help of the military exoskeleton, Jiang Baimian saw the books on the bookshelf clearly from the door.

There weren't many of them left; they didn't even fill one-fifth of the bookshelves. Most of them were philosophical. Some were ancient Ashlandic classics, and some originated from the Red River people.

Another portion was on management.

In short, there was no value in flipping through them.

Jiang Baimian turned her head and said to Du Heng and Shang Jianyao, "Let's split up and search to see if there are any clues here."

"Alright." Du Heng didn't object. He walked straight to the bookshelf and seemed very interested in the books.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao approached the desk as they searched.

On the way, Shang Jianyao sighed. "It's been a long time since anyone cleaned this place."

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged his words. "To the Eighth Research Institute, the president is taboo. It's very normal for employees not to enter the office he used."

They soon arrived at the desk, picked up the scattered information, and flipped through it. Some were the Eighth Research Institute's architectural repairs, some were a particular year's budget plans, and some were requests for leave.

Some of them were written in Ashlandic, and some were in the Red River language. They appeared very mixed.

The only two things in common were that they were very old and didn't contain valuable information.

"There's another one here." After Shang Jianyao opened three drawers in a row, he took out an equally old document.

Jiang Baimian went over and realized that it was an application written in Ashlandic for permission to modify the Second Research Zone.

Shang Jianyao quickly flipped to the last page of the document. Someone had written in fancy handwriting: "Approved."

Under the word was a signature. Jiang Baimian focused and recognized it.

It wrote: "Du Heng."

Du Heng! As Jiang Baimian's pupils dilated, she suddenly heard footsteps behind her.

Amidst the bone-chilling wind, Du Heng's voice drifted over. "What are you guys looking at?"

Chapter 892: The End of the Dream

Jiang Baimian could be considered knowledgeable and experienced, yet at this moment, she still felt a chill run down her spine and nearly shivered.

She forced herself to calm down and took the document from Shang Jianyao's hand. She overlapped it with the information she had read previously and turned to hand it to Du Heng, who had walked close.

“Reading these documents on the table. They’re all left behind from the Old World and are relatively well-preserved.”

Du Heng—who was wearing a black robe—took the information and casually flipped through it. He then chuckled and said, “They’re all trivial matters with no value. No wonder they were left in this room.”

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao agreed.

If Jiang Baimian hadn’t already warned him with the communication system embedded in the military exoskeleton, he might’ve pointed out the document and flipped to the signature. He would then proudly tell Du Heng that there was a person here whose name was identical to his, and he was suspected to be the mysterious president of the Eighth Research Institute.

Du Heng only flipped through the first page of every document before shaking his head. “There’s nothing to see here.”

He then returned the information to Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian started spouting nonsense. “It still has some value—it can help us understand the Eighth Research Institute’s operating model before the Old World was destroyed. This might contain many secrets.”

Du Heng was the same as he usually was. He stroked his beard nonchalantly. “Then, study it well.”

In any case, he wouldn’t waste his time on it.

Aren’t you an antiquarian? These are all ancient documents...?Jiang Baimian rejoiced as she couldn’t help but criticize.

They split up again and searched the rest of the office.

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Seeing that Du Heng had distanced himself from the two of them, Jiang Baimian relaxed a little and thought about what had happened. This office belongs to the original president of the Eighth Research Institute, and he signed off with the name 'Du Heng'... In other words, either the Eighth Research Institute's mysterious president is indeed Du Heng, or he encountered something like the Grand Elder of End Year City, Qin Ke, and started calling himself Du Heng. Therefore, he became a taboo in the Eighth Research Institute and was forbidden from being mentioned by New World experts.

Uh, Teacher Du Heng has the same ability that matches the special state of ignoring particular memories of Professor Qin...

It makes sense that Teacher Du Heng appeared in the Holm Fertility Center's academic lecture...

As the president of the Eighth Research Institute and the actual controller of the Northern Company, it's normal for him to listen to lectures organized by his organization and other research organizations under his personal name... Yes, the Eighth Research Institute is a confidential organization. Teacher Du Heng might not even have a position in the Northern Company, so he doesn't have any other titles...

The more Jiang Baimian thought about it, the more she felt that this Du Heng was the real deal. As for which situation it was, she was currently leaning toward the former. This was because the academic lecture at the Holm Fertility Center was held before the Old World was destroyed.

At that time, 'Du Heng' was called Du Heng.

As for the Eighth Research Institute's president, he definitely had all kinds of special traits. Perhaps he had once been surrounded and killed by Vice President, Professor Li, and the others. He had lost his body, but he didn't die completely. After that, the Awakened deep in the Mind Corridor across the Ashlands would go crazy from time to time and start calling themselves Du Heng.

Stop, I can't be infected by Hey and script out a blockbuster myself...?After some thought, Jiang Baimian decided to explore the Eighth Research Institute's depths and determine what the important thing was before finding an opportunity to probe Du Heng.

With this in mind, she used the communication system embedded in the military exoskeleton to say to Shang Jianyao, "I'll create an opportunity for you later. Enter the Mind Corridor directly and repeat the solution you memorized in the dream of Room 205 to see if it's still the conference room after clearing it. If not, continue exploring and see if you can find anything.

“Yes, this is firstly to prevent Teacher Du Heng from suddenly regaining his memories and going berserk. Secondly, we have to go deeper into the Eighth Research Institute, and we might encounter something else. It’s best to improve as much as possible.”

Shang Jianyao had no objections and was only curious. “How will you create an opportunity?”

“That’s simple.” Jiang Baimian smiled. “Most of the time, telling the truth is the best solution.”

She walked straight to Du Heng, who had come to the bookshelf again, and smiled. “Teacher Du Heng, I plan on finding a place to rest for half an hour before continuing.”

“Why?” Du Heng asked with a smile.

Jiang Baimian explained sincerely, “We’re about to enter the Eighth Research Institute’s depths. I think Shang Jianyao has already grasped the solution to the academic discussion in the dream. He might as well take the opportunity to complete this matter and see if he can gain something from the dream.”

“There are important secrets hidden in the Eighth Research Institute’s depths, and it’s very likely to be filled with danger. I don’t want to let go of an opportunity to raise his strength before the exploration.”

She was telling the truth and wasn’t lying at all; she just didn’t mention that the person they were guarding against was the person in front of her.

Du Heng nodded and joked, “I understand. It’s never too late.”

He then asked, “Why don’t you rest here?”

Because I’m afraid that you would be bored and flip through the documents in the room...? Jiang Baimian had already come up with a reason. “This is the office of the Eighth Research Institute’s president. He’s very mysterious, and anything that involves him is taboo. I’m afraid that something will happen if we stay too long.”

“What’s there to be afraid of with me around?” Du Heng didn’t mind at all.

You are precisely the person we are afraid of...?Jiang Baimian didn’t give Shang Jianyao a chance to speak. “Just to be safe.”

Du Heng was insouciant. “That works too.”

After searching the office, they continued forward. Before long, a closed silver-white metal door appeared in front of them.

“Let’s rest here,” Jiang Baimian immediately said.

“Alright.” Du Heng found a seat against the wall and sat cross-legged. He held the book he had brought out of the president’s office to pass the time.

Jiang Baimian secretly glanced at the book and relied on the military exoskeleton’s auxiliary function to accurately capture the title: Notes on the Three Metaphysical Classics.

Ashlandic ancient philosophy...?Jiang Baimian retracted her gaze and took on the responsibility of being vigilant.

Shang Jianyao sat down cross-legged like Du Heng and pinched his temples that were blocked by his visor before entering the Mind Corridor.

Outside Room 205, he spent some time rehearsing to ensure that he could completely repeat the solution Jiang Baimian had provided.

Afraid of forgetting, he started spouting the explanation the moment he entered the room and saw those figures appear on the chair.

After he finished speaking and there was a short silence, those people erupted into enthusiastic applause. “A very outstanding train of thought.”

“It’s very groundbreaking.”

“...”

With such praise, the brown door to the meeting room creaked open.

Seeing this, Shang Jianyao couldn't care less and immediately walked out.

There was no longer a conference room outside but a dimly lit corridor. There were no rooms on either side.

“Progress!” Shang Jianyao praised happily.

At least he didn't have to listen to academic exchanges anymore!

The next second, he spread open his arms and muttered to himself: “I feel like I'm home... It's right ahead!”

He then stroked his chin. “Is this the feeling of being close to the door to the New World? My New World door is right in front? I searched high and low for it, only to find it so easily? Isn't this too sudden and coincidental?”

Shang Jianyao didn't delay and walked along the dim corridor.

This place was clearly different from Pangu Biology's underground building, but he still walked faster and faster as if he could return to his home with his eyes closed.

After an unknown period of time, Shang Jianyao stopped.

A pair of double-paned doors appeared at the end of the corridor. It was dark black, heavy, and ethereal.

Two completely different and contradictory auras were gathered on it.

...

“I found the New World door. It’s in Dawn’s dream.” After returning to reality, Shang Jianyao used the communication system embedded in the military exoskeleton to tell Jiang Baimian about his encounter.

Jiang Baimian was first surprised before feeling that it was only right.

Room 205 had been moved in front of Shang Jianyao for a long time, so it wasn’t surprising that the door to the New World was hidden there.

Jiang Baimian even suspected that if Shang Jianyao didn’t choose 205 and took the risk of contracting the Heartless disease to enter 503, he would similarly find the door to the New World that belonged to him.

Sigh...?She sighed silently and then said to Shang Jianyao, “Don’t be anxious. We’ll decide whether to push open the door when we reach the depths of the Eighth Research Institute.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao had no objections. He knew very well that if he entered the New World now, he would have to be carried into the Eighth Research Institute’s depths.

Chapter 893: Behind the Door

Jiang Baimian didn’t end their break immediately. Instead, she patiently waited for half an hour to end before turning to Du Heng. “Teacher Du Heng, I think it’s about time. We can continue forward.”

Du Heng closed the Notes on the Three Metaphysical Classic in his hand and smiled. “How punctual. Actually, there’s no rush. I’m used to taking things easy, and I’m not the kind of person who’s impatient.”

Jiang Baimian smiled under the visor and sincerely said, “Shang Jianyao gained something from the dream. This has boosted my confidence for the subsequent explorations.”

As for what he gained, it was naturally inconvenient to say.

It was precisely because it was inconvenient to talk about it that it was reasonable for her and Shang Jianyao to use the exoskeleton’s communications system to communicate privately. There was no need to hide anything.

“That’s right, that’s right,” Shang Jianyao echoed proudly.

Du Heng threw down the book, stood up, and smiled. “Let’s go then.”

He then cast his gaze at the tightly shut silver-white door.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian—who were wearing military exoskeletons—walked over, stretched out their hands, and clasped one end of the doors each.

Amidst the heavy rattling and ear-piercing noise, the silver-white door opened.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao exclaimed, “So this is a password door!”

A door that required a password to open by itself.

“Do you think I don’t know?” Jiang Baimian replied angrily.

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Old Ge wasn’t here. It was very difficult to break through the Eighth Research Institute’s system in a short period of time with just the auxiliary chip in her electric eel-like biomechanical limb and Shang Jianyao, who was an undergraduate-level electronics specialist. In that case, it was better to try opening it by force.

Jiang Baimian felt that if she couldn’t get it open, she would’ve used the laser launcher, electromagnetic weapon, and other weapons to destroy the door after confirming that there were no traps. Who knew that the power of a military exoskeleton and a biological prosthetic limb was indeed extraordinary?

Jiang Baimian didn’t discuss this matter with Shang Jianyao because she could imagine this fellow saying: “Why don’t we just nuke it? It will be a clean open without leaving any repercussions.”

Shang Jianyao had already forgotten about the door and cast his gaze ahead.

It was a corridor large enough for two large trucks. The ground was paved in concrete with two metal rails laid over them. Under the light from the ceiling, they shimmered with a cold luster.

Apart from these, the passage was empty. It was so quiet that it seemed like no human had entered for decades.

The heavy and oppressive feeling in Jiang Baimian's heart intensified as if the source of the storm lay ahead.

"It's a little dark." Shang Jianyao sighed with emotion.

Du Heng smiled and said, "A problem with the electromagnetic environment."

He strode forward, passed Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao, and entered the passage.

The footsteps echoed in the distance, accentuating the dead silence.

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao followed closely behind and walked to the end of the corridor.

"It's not too bad. There's a little wind." Shang Jianyao seriously evaluated the working environment.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, "It seems like it leads outside."

On the way, they saw abandoned railcars, a few robots standing quietly to the side, and a small number of metal components scattered on the ground.

"From the looks of it, this place relies on robots to maintain automatic operations," Jiang Baimian said thoughtfully. "But with the Eighth Research Institute's migration, most of the robots in good condition have been taken away. Work here has stopped. Yes, I wonder what they were transporting deep inside..."

It was obvious that the remaining robots were under maintenance.

“Sigh, there’s nobody,” Shang Jianyao said in disappointment. “It’s actually like this the entire way in. It’s too unreal and fake—it’s like an illusion!”

“It’s not an illusion,” Du Heng replied firmly.

“Then, what do you want it to be?” Jiang Baimian casually asked.

Shang Jianyao said in a hopeful tone, “Us battling the Eighth Research Institute from the moment we approach the entrance. The enemies go from weak to strong until we finally arrive here.”

“That’s fantasy.” Jiang Baimian scoffed. “When facing an intruder like you, the strongest will definitely join forces to kill you.”

Du Heng also chuckled. “It’s definitely best if there aren’t any conflicts. What we pursue is subduing an enemy without a fight.”

As they spoke, their voices echoed into the distance.

They walked for more than half an hour in the tunnel that only had tracks, special trucks, robots, components, and oil stains.

Finally, they saw the end of the tunnel. There was an equally heavy iron-black door.

Jiang Baimian felt that behind the door was the source of the storm—the direct reason for the area’s oppressiveness, depression, and darkness.

At this moment, Du Heng said in a slightly pained tone, “I remember now. That thing is behind the door...”

“Shall we open it now?” Shang Jianyao was eager to give it a try.

“You decide.” Du Heng returned to normal and smiled. “If you don’t dare, return to the place you previously rested at. I’ll do the opening.”

Jiang Baimian didn't immediately respond. She switched to the exoskeleton's communications system and said to Shang Jianyao, "What do you sense behind the door?"

"I don't know," Shang Jianyao replied bluntly.

"Describe the feeling," Jiang Baimian asked.

Shang Jianyao began to organize his words. "How should I put it? It's similar to the feeling you get every time you raise your left hand at me and make lightning flash. Yes, it also seems like there's a sea outside. We came straight to the bottom of the sea and will see a crystal palace the moment we leave."

Jiang Baimian was nearly bemused by the first sentence, but the latter sentence gave her a direct understanding.

The water pressure at the bottom of the sea was very strong.

"No other abnormalities?" she asked again.

"No." Shang Jianyao was very certain.

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment before saying, "Make the best use of your time to go to Room 205 and confirm if the New World door in the dream can be opened. Make sure not to enter; the main thing is to confirm it. Otherwise, it will be a joke if you discover that the door can't be opened by ordinary means when we encounter an accident and need you to enter the New World to resist the danger."

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao agreed without hesitation. He then said to Du Heng, "Teacher Du Heng, I'll make some preparations before we open the door."

"Okay." Du Heng nodded.

Shang Jianyao leaned against the military exoskeleton and fell asleep standing up.

...

Pangu Biology, underground building entrance.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong arrived at the inspection area in the jeep.

Due to the suitable season, good road conditions, and the fact that they weren't afraid of common dangers, they entered an expressway not long after heading south from Gesterbourg. It only took them half a month to return to the company.

Looking at the metal door in front of him, Long Yuehong sighed heavily. "We're back again."

"Yeah." Bai Chen pursed her lips.

...

Mind Corridor, Room 205.

The moment Shang Jianyao entered, he stood in front of the dark door that was both real and illusory.

Without hesitation, he stretched out his hands and pushed forward with all his might.

Rays of light shone into the dark corridor, and Shang Jianyao's eyes reflected a tall tower that pierced the clouds.

Surrounding the tower were various buildings that were lit up. They formed a small city.

Shang Jianyao felt the tower's summoning—a fatal attraction.

He forced himself to take a few steps back, turned around, and left Room 205. He didn't enter the New World.

...

After returning to reality, Shang Jianyao opened his eyes and nodded at Jiang Baimian, indicating that he was certain the New World's door could be opened.

Jiang Baimian exhaled and calmed down. "Open the door."

As she spoke, she stretched out her metal skeleton-covered palms.

Shang Jianyao assumed the same posture.

The two of them began to exert strength, and the heavy iron-black door creaked slightly.

As the gap widened, gentle natural light shone into the silent corridor.

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian then saw a tall tower. It was located in the middle of the valley, and it was surrounded by all kinds of buildings and roads that connected them.

These formed a small city.

After a brief silence, Shang Jianyao said, "New World..."

Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she suddenly turned her head. The next second, she saw Du Heng—who was wearing a black robe—shatter bit by bit like a dream and disappear.

Just as Jiang Baimian's pupils dilated as if she were hallucinating, figures walked out from the city outside the valley. Their clothes were rather old, and their eyes were dull and listless. They ambled around like zombies.

Whoosh!

The wind blew into the valley and sounded what appeared to be ear-piercing instruments.

(End of Volume 7—Fantastique)

Chapter 894: New World

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian stood at the end of the tunnel. In their eyes was the small city surrounding the tower and the walking dead that staggered out. They heard the ear-piercing sounds of a gale blowing through the valley, the streets, and many buildings. It was as if a group of beginners was playing their musical instruments.

Du Heng—who had come here with them—was like a bubble that shattered and evaporated under the sunlight.

To Jiang Baimian, this was like an illusion.

The next second, she and Shang Jianyao felt their heads throb at the same time. They became dizzy, and their souls seemed to be leaving their bodies.

Having experienced this before, they knew that this was a sign of them contracting the Heartless disease. This was very likely a Kalendaria or a New World powerhouse attempting to absorb their consciousness!

Shang Jianyao didn't hesitate, nor did he have the time to pinch his helmet that blocked his temples. He sank his mind, and he retracted his consciousness before entering the Mind Corridor.

He ran out of Room 131 and came to Room 205 without taking any detours. Then, he pushed open the door and entered.

The heavy and illusory black door stood quietly in the dream. It didn't change, but it was no longer open.

Shang Jianyao stretched out his hands and pushed hard. The door silently opened.

As rays of light shone over, Shang Jianyao couldn't be bothered to size up the situation inside. He glanced at the towering tower and suddenly pounced forward.

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As the dizzy Jiang Baimian's head ached, she suddenly obtained an indescribable calmness. The intense dizziness and extreme headache disappeared as if they had never happened.

If not for the veins on her forehead still twitching, Jiang Baimian would've suspected that she had encountered an illusion again.

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Considering how Du Heng was beside her, she hadn't gotten Shang Jianyao to take out the Life Angel necklace, the Six Senses Beads, and the small jade Buddha. Such a situation probably wasn't a result of the Kalendarium's protection.

Her heart palpitated as she cast her gaze at Shang Jianyao beside her.

Shang Jianyao stood there motionless. It was all thanks to the military exoskeleton's support that he didn't lose his balance.

Jiang Baimian—who roughly understood that Shang Jianyao had already entered the New World and had provided her with a certain level of protection—immediately stretched out her hand, 'lifted' Shang Jianyao, and rushed out of the tunnel with him. They entered the valley and arrived at the small city's periphery.

This wasn't a result of her being directionally challenged, but Jiang Baimian recalled Du Heng saying that he suspected that entering the New World with only one's mind or consciousness was seriously flawed. One had to simultaneously enter in both body and mind to be considered a perfect New World powerhouse.

But as the two of them stepped into the small city, Shang Jianyao's body didn't lighten or disappear, nor did it undergo any other changes.

The walking corpses that staggered out from different corners of the city surged over. It was only then that Jiang Baimian saw them clearly.

All of their eyes were turbid and bloodshot, and their bodies were slightly hunched.

Heartless!

This small city suspected to be the New World had a large number of Heartless! However, these Heartless's expressions weren't too warped. Furthermore, their eyes were dull, and they didn't resemble starving beasts.

It was precisely because of this that Jiang Baimian had previously thought that it was the 'living dead' in the Old World's entertainment.

Upon closer inspection, her heart palpitated.

Among the Heartless, dozens to a hundred wore relatively new clothes. Their hair was smooth, forming a sharp contrast with their greasy and ancient-looking companions.

Could it be that the Eighth Research Institute members who didn't leave ended up taking the elevator to the fifth floor's tunnel, entered, and became Heartless... The Eighth Research Institute's last 'sacrifice'? As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, she saw the Heartless's eyes gradually change. They became fierce, hostile, and bloodthirsty.

This was like an outsider waking up a sleeping gravekeeper and suffering the most violent attack.

Jiang Baimian assessed the situation and felt that it was very stupid to use the military exoskeleton to fight head-on without knowing how many Superior Heartless were here.

She planned on a temporary retreat. After Shang Jianyao had a preliminary understanding of the New World's situation and could provide some support or information, she would hide her human consciousness and use the military exoskeleton to secretly infiltrate this place. She would then confirm and 'identify' the Heartless that posed a threat and investigate the small city's secrets. Following that, she would cooperate with her companion in the New World in reality.

As an experienced warrior, Jiang Baimian didn't hesitate to take action the moment she made a decision. She lifted Shang Jianyao up again and retreated into the tunnel with him before the Heartless could arrive.

It was only because the tunnel was so close that it was visible to the naked eye that Jiang Baimian didn't get lost.

As for whether this would affect Shang Jianyao's consciousness and body entering the New World at the same time, it wasn't something that bothered Jiang Baimian for the time being because there was a high chance that he would be eaten if she left his body in the small city.

They would literally eat him.

She hadn't seen any difference in bringing his body into the New World yet. Therefore, she definitely had to move Shang Jianyao's body out first to ensure his safety.

She would make up for it after Shang Jianyao gained a foothold in the New World and obtained the corresponding information.

After returning to the tunnel, Jiang Baimian didn't immediately retreat further. She calmly turned around and closed the heavy iron-black door again.

After doing this, she retraced her steps with Shang Jianyao. After getting lost several times, she finally left the Eighth Research Institute's main building with difficulty and saw the Old Task Force's jeep.

...

Pangu Biology, Room 14 on the underground building's 647th floor.

Like every time they returned, Bai Chen and Long Yuehong completed the usual procedures and returned to the team office to wait for the test results.

Long Yuehong—who was sitting in his seat—looked around and laughed self-deprecatingly. “I actually find it a little quiet.”

“With only two people left, it will definitely be much quieter,” Bai Chen said truthfully.

Long Yuehong quickly stopped her. “You can't say that! I-it's too inauspicious.”

“Yeah.” Bai Chen wasn’t angry because of this, nor did she joke about how it wasn’t he who said it. She nodded solemnly and said, “They will definitely return.”

When the time comes, they might not return to the underground building. Maybe we will meet on the surface...?Long Yuehong didn’t dare to say it out loud.

He subconsciously wanted to discuss if the special state that Teacher Du Heng had attached to that portion of memories was effective, but he rationally remained silent.

The room fell silent again.

...

Around the tower that pierced into the clouds were lit buildings. They lined up one after another and formed streets.

Shang Jianyao bathed in the darkness and stood at the entrance of a street at the city’s edge. He clicked his tongue and said to himself, “There are still many differences. The tower in reality isn’t that tall, and there are no lights around them. I don’t see those zombies here either...”

As soon as he entered the New World, he couldn’t be bothered to observe the environment. He directly used the connection between his consciousness and body to penetrate the barrier and return to the Ashlands, adding a protective shield to Jiang Baimian’s consciousness.

After doing this, he had the time to look around.

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao echoed himself. He then stroked his chin and said, “As expected, at the New World level, one can directly extract human consciousness to replenish their expenditure. It’s no wonder that a New World powerhouse can crush a Mind Corridor-level Awakened even without completely returning...”

At this point, Shang Jianyao suddenly felt a little excited. “I wonder if I can split into ten people in the New World and act separately?”

He gave it a try the moment he thought of it. After a while, he was still alone.

“It clearly feels like it can be done, but I’m restrained by a certain power. Furthermore, it’s very difficult to materialize weapons…” The ruthless Shang Jianyao looked at the tower in the middle of the city again. “We have to obtain the permission of certain existences first?”

The rash Shang Jianyao urged, “Do you plan on standing here forever? Walk toward that tower. If you encounter Wu Meng, Flora, and Barnard on the way, ask them about the details of the New World.”

This time, most of the Shang Jianyaos agreed with his suggestion.

Shang Jianyao immediately walked into the street ahead.

Silently, a street lamp beside the road lit up, scattering a yellowish glow.

“How friendly!” Shang Jianyao—who valued relationships and was the youngest mentally—said with sincerity. “They are afraid that I wouldn’t be able to see the road, so they specially turned on the street lamps for me.”

As he continued forward, another street lamp suddenly lit up, and the one behind him returned to darkness and silence.

“What’s this? This is called conserving electricity!” Shang Jianyao applauded.

At this moment, he saw a dim yellow light shining from a second-floor room of a classic three-story building by the street that was in the Red River architectural style.

It was dead silent.

Chapter 895: Light

Shang Jianyao happily walked to the classic-looking building and planned on knocking on the door. He had always been polite.

Just as he approached the door, a slightly sharp female voice sounded from the only lit room in the entire building. “Don’t come in!”

This was spoken in the Red River language.

The voice sounded far into the dark and quiet street, bringing out a hollowness to it.

“Why?” Shang Jianyao asked in confusion. He stopped by the street and looked up at the lit window on the second floor.

On the painted glass, a faint yellow light quietly effused, but it didn’t outline a figure.

The slightly sharp female voice sounded again, but it became a little calmer. “This is my home. Nobody is allowed in.”

“Oh, oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao readily agreed.

At this moment, only the street lamps beside him and the building’s second floor had light to dispel the darkness.

“Then, can I ask a few questions?” Shang Jianyao made a new request. “I just came here, so there are many things I don’t understand.”

He was rather honest and didn’t hide anything.

There was silence behind the empty window on the second floor. The woman didn’t agree or refuse.

Shang Jianyao took it that she had tacitly agreed to his request and asked, “Is this the New World?”

.....

“Yes.” The female voice passed through the window and entered the empty and dead street.

Shang Jianyao inquired, “Then, are you a New World-level Awakened or a native here?”

The woman fell silent for a few seconds. “There are no natives here.”

“Were they all wiped out?” The honest Shang Jianyao probed.

This time, the woman didn’t answer.

Shang Jianyao then asked, “Is everyone here as friendly as you?”

The female voice sounded in the quiet ‘night’ again. “I’m not as friendly as you think I am if you had barged into this building. In the New World, you have to avoid the starving ones and not broach the topic regarding the price of others.”

“I thought the New World doesn’t have hunger or diseases?” Shang Jianyao was shocked.

The female voice fell silent for a moment before saying, “You’ve already entered the New World, so you should know what I mean by hunger.”

“But I’m not hungry at all.” Shang Jianyao expressed his doubts.

The faint yellow light from the second-floor window flickered, and the female voice said, “It seems like you still have your body. Furthermore, you haven’t encountered any Kalendarium or relatively strong Awakened.”

“From the looks of it, it’s a good thing to keep the body intact?” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin.

“Not necessarily,” the female voice replied without going into detail.

Shang Jianyao’s thoughts raced as he changed the question. “The core here is that tower?”

“Yes.” The female voice paused and said, “The Kalendarium live there.”

Her tone revealed unconcealed fear.

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “Then, I have to do my registration at the tower.”

The light at the second-floor window didn't flicker, nor did any sound come out. After a while, the female voice anxiously said, “Stop asking. I can't answer any other questions.”

“Who said so?” Shang Jianyao retorted. “I also plan to ask if your price is cowardice or vigilance. Don't you know what your price is?”

At the window on the second floor, the lights shook violently a few times, but nobody appeared.

Shang Jianyao didn't seem to realize how unwelcomed he was at all. He continued asking, “Then, why don't you turn off the lights? That way, nobody would know that you are hiding in the room. Could it be that the darkness will devour you without the light?”

The female voice sounded from behind the window. “The light is a manifestation of your mind and consciousness. It will only go out when you die.”

Shang Jianyao came to a realization and clenched his right fist to punch his left palm again. “It's no wonder the street lamps light up wherever I go. Everything from before was switched off! I thought the Kalendarium were being hospitable and mindful about energy conservation.”

The female voice didn't respond.

Shang Jianyao asked again, “Then, what dangers are hidden in the darkness here?”

“There's no danger.” The female voice sounded a little impatient.

Shang Jianyao gave a terse acknowledgment. “Then, is there day? It can't always be night, right?”

“There's no day,” the female voice replied quickly.

“Why?” Shang Jianyao was confused.

The female voice sounded sharp again. "I don't know!"

She fell silent, and only the light reflected from the window indicated that she was still there.

Shang Jianyao asked a few more questions, but the other party didn't answer. He could only wave his hand and say, "I'll go to the tower then. Talk to you later."

He continued along the dark and silent street. The street lamps followed his footsteps, lighting up one after another before extinguishing one after another. Only one lamp remained lit the entire time.

On the second floor of the building behind him, the dim yellow light quietly illuminated a small area.

Shang Jianyao looked at the tower after taking a few steps, his thoughts unknown.

Suddenly, he clapped his hands and muttered to himself, "I still remember what the tower looked like from where Yama Tiger was locked up... We should be able to determine which floor of the building he's on through some analysis... Should we visit Yama Tiger first and hear how he describes the New World?"

Shang Jianyao was very proactive and did whatever came to his mind. He immediately changed his route and walked in the general direction.

...

On the mountain road outside the Eighth Research Institute, Jiang Baimian parked the jeep in a hidden spot beside the road. She then looked at Shang Jianyao in the passenger seat and considered what to do next.

The most important thing now was that she had to establish a connection with the New World's Shang Jianyao as soon as possible and obtain the corresponding feedback. Without the information, it was very difficult for her to determine her future plans.

As for how to 'contact' Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian had already come up with a plan. Back then, Shang Jianyao had communicated with the sleeping Yama Tiger to a certain extent!

Jiang Baimian exhaled, stretched out her mind, and connected with Shang Jianyao's consciousness.

Her vision abruptly turned pitch-black, and only a faint glow flickered in the distance.

The faint light gradually lit up and condensed into a street lamp. Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a gray camouflage uniform—stood under the lamp.

“Save me!” Shang Jianyao waved his right hand happily.

Jiang Baimian was shocked. “Why are you shouting that?”

Perhaps it was because there was a thick barrier between the two parties, but her voice sounded very soft. Therefore, she repeated it loudly.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “I'm imitating Yama Tiger.”

“...” Jiang Baimian fell silent for a few seconds before saying, “You still seem to be in a good mental state.”

She didn't waste any time and immediately asked, “How is it? Was our guess true?”

She didn't mention the exact matter, worried that it would trigger any 'sensitive words' from the surveillance and cause Shang Jianyao to be harmed.

The Salvation Army powerhouses who tried to reveal the New World's secrets didn't end up well.

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao nodded seriously.

In the New World, Awakened could absorb the target's human consciousness to supplement themselves.

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but sigh and ask, “Are there Heartless in the New World?”

“Haven’t encountered any,” Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

From the looks of it, those undead Heartless belong to the real New World? Then, I can only infiltrate and investigate by myself in the future...?Jiang Baimian frowned slightly. “Where do you think the New World’s secret is most likely hidden?”

“That tower! The Kalendarium live inside!” Shang Jianyao replied excitedly.

The Kalendarium live in the New World’s tower... What about the tower in reality??Jiang Baimian’s thoughts raced without stopping.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao rambled, “This place is still quite different from reality. The tower is very tall, and there are lights everywhere. The architectural style isn’t that uniform either. There are classical buildings with the Red River style, compound buildings like those in the ancient Ashlandic style, and high-rise buildings from the Old World...”

The small city in reality had the style of the buildings a decade or two before the Old World’s destruction, but it didn’t have many skyscrapers.

“Hmm.” Jiang Baimian didn’t know what to make of this.

Shang Jianyao took the initiative to say, “Every lamp here represents the corresponding Awakened’s mind and consciousness. They won’t go out unless they die.”

At this point, he clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “I get it! Back then, Yama Tiger only had a faint glow. It was as if he was lying in the darkness because his consciousness was almost gone!”

So that’s how it is...?Jiang Baimian nodded as well.

Shang Jianyao continued, “I plan on finding Yama Tiger first and visiting him to see what he has to say.”

Jiang Baimian frowned again. “Yama Tiger was locked up. Aren’t you afraid of infuriating the person who imprisoned him? That might be a Kalendaria.”

Without giving Shang Jianyao a chance to find a reason, she suggested, “Find Flora, Barnard, and the other friendly New World powerhouses first and figure out the corresponding situation before considering what to do next.”

Chapter 896: Communication

“But I don’t know where they are.” Shang Jianyao sighed. “We can infer where Yama Tiger is locked up as long as the New World’s spatial structure is normal.”

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “It’s not impossible to infer. Back then, you said that the place where Ceningmis’s Kalendaria’s Son lived likely overlapped with the tower to a certain extent. With that as a reference, you can determine the café where Flora and Barnard are in the New World.

“Right, the premise is that the phenomenon of overlapping is closer to two pieces of paper stuck together and not another model.”

Although Shang Jianyao and Genova didn’t see the tower’s phantom when they entered Ceningmis for the second time and went to the luxurious apartment where the Kalendaria’s Son lived, they only realized that light shone from every floor and every room. However, they could still make a preliminary inference based on their first experience. When they previously entered Ceningmis and sensed the vortex appear and expand, they saw the hazy tower in the direction of the luxurious apartment. In addition, only the tower in the New World had ‘lights’ on every floor. The other buildings more or less had windows that were mostly ruled by darkness.

Shang Jianyao thought for a while and posed a problem, “But Barnard and Flora can’t be there drinking coffee all the time.”

“We still have plenty of time to wait patiently. Besides, there’s still the boss and other customers in the café. You can also try making friends,” Jiang Baimian consoled.

Shang Jianyao shook his head. “Many of the New World’s Awakened are unfriendly. Some are even starving and want to eat anyone they see.”

At this point, he changed the topic. “Even if we want to make friends, we have to wait for someone to be alone to prevent any accidents.”

Jiang Baimian tersely acknowledged it. “Since Flora and Barnard are friendly, the café they frequent should still have some basic order. You can attempt to make contact with the boss. In short, everything depends on your judgment.”

She then added, “Try to figure out what to do with your body after your consciousness enters the New World as soon as possible and what to do if you want the latter to enter the New World as well. I’ve moved your body outside the Eighth Research Institute. I’m afraid things will become irredeemable if there’s too much delay.”

Shang Jianyao was surprised. “I thought you had already wiped out the zombies.”

“They aren’t zombies; they’re strange Heartless,” Jiang Baimian explained helplessly. “Without knowing if there are any Superior Heartless among them and how many there are, I plan on being careful.”

At this point, she suddenly came to a realization. “I’m not a deity. I can’t finish off so many enemies in just an hour or two by myself!”

.....

“You can do it,” Shang Jianyao encouraged.

Jiang Baimian gave up arguing and said, “Figure out the New World as soon as possible and tell me according to the secret code we agreed on.”

“Alright,” Shang Jianyao agreed readily. He then said worriedly, “What if my body gets hungry?”

“If bad comes to worse, I’ll feed you liquid food via intravenous means.” Jiang Baimian put on a professional attitude. “Besides, we still have many nutrient shots, enough for you to last for a period of time. This will also compel you to figure out those problems as soon as possible and let me know what to do next...”

As she spoke, she asked in puzzlement, “You can’t return to the Ashlands?”

“I can in theory.” Shang Jianyao turned around and looked at the pitch-black end of the street. “As long as I return to the place I came in from and pass through the door, I can return to reality. Uh... Those New World powerhouses don’t often return to the Ashlands. Perhaps there are some hidden restrictions.”

He stroked his chin.

Jiang Baimian nodded.

The Old Task Force had previously guessed that New World powerhouses needed a certain amount of human consciousness as ‘fuel’ to return to the Ashlands.

Shang Jianyao turned vexed again. “What if my body needs to relieve itself?”

“I’ll help you deal with it.” Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth. “It’s best if you can inform me in advance.”

In that case, she only needed to handle the pee and poop without having to frequently change or wash Shang Jianyao’s clothes.

The Old Task Force didn’t have plenty of resources in this regard when outfield!

“How can I bring myself to burden you with that?” Although Shang Jianyao said that, his face was filled with an expression that said: “I’m counting on you.”

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes and steered the topic back on track. “Can you still enter your mind room?”

“I haven’t tried it. I’ll give it a try later.” Shang Jianyao revealed an eager and impatient expression.

Jiang Baimian asked, “How much have your abilities improved?”

This was definitely not a sensitive topic for the New World. The Old Task Force had previously acquired information on it, so Jiang Baimian asked very directly.

Smack!?

Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “I haven’t checked!”

He had actually forgotten about this.

After dozens of seconds, Shang Jianyao raised his right hand and started counting with his fingers. “I’ve grasped all the abilities in the field of Thought. Apart from the original Inference Clowning and Thought Implantation, there’s also Temporary Dementia, Thought Disorder, Extreme Impulse, Mathematical Idiot, Traitor, Moron Halo, Subconscious Thought, and Thought Extraction...”

Subconscious Thought...?Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she asked, “Subconscious Thought can add a special state to a certain portion of memories, causing the viewer to be unknowingly affected?”

“That’s one of the applications,” Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, “From the looks of it, Teacher Du Heng is an Awakened in Master Zhuang’s domain...”

At this point, she couldn’t help but sigh. “Was the Teacher Du Heng we encountered real or fake? Or is Teacher Du Heng’s essence actually an illusion, a manifestation of a portion of some consciousness?”

“I don’t know.” The honest Shang Jianyao chose to shake his head.

“What about the range of your abilities?” Jiang Baimian forced herself not to consider Du Heng’s problem for the time being.

Shang Jianyao shook his head again. “I’m not sure; I’ve never tried. But I feel like I’m being suppressed in the New World. Apart from some of my abilities that are still effective in places where sound can clearly reach, and I can rely on radio stations to expand my range, the others don’t seem to exceed ten meters. It’s like I’m back at Star Cluster Hall.

“I’ll tell you the exact number after I have a target and give it a try. Hmm, if it were in the Ashlands, it would definitely be in units of kilometers.”

Jiang Baimian replied thoughtfully, “The New World should be under the Kalendarium’s control...”

That was why there were all kinds of restrictions.

At this point in the ‘chat,’ Jiang Baimian felt that communicating in such a manner had exhausted her mentally. She could only end the conversation and schedule a communication in the evening.

After retracting her extended consciousness, she exhaled, rubbed her temples, and leaned back in the driver’s seat.

After recovering a little, Jiang Baimian muttered to herself, “After it turns dark, I shall hide my human consciousness, wear the military exoskeleton, and use the night vision system to explore the New World in reality.”

She wasn’t worried about the high-performance battery consumption for the time being because the Eighth Research Institute still had power.

...

Pangu Biology, underground building, 495th floor, Room 11 Zone C.

After the inspection, Long Yuehong and Bai Chen changed into casual clothes and knocked on their parents’ door with fruits bought from the Supplies Allocation Market.

After getting married, Long Yuehong no longer opened the door and entered like before.

“Who is it?” Gu Hong’s voice sounded. At the same time, she opened the door.

The next second, Gu Hong’s gaze froze.

This only lasted for a short period of time. She raised her right hand, wiped her eyes, and smiled. “You guys finished the mission?”

“That’s right,” Long Yuehong replied with a smile.

Upon hearing his voice, Long Dayong, Long Zhigu, and Long Aihong—who happened to be at home—stood up and walked to the door.

“Brother, Sister-in-law, where did you go this time?” Long Aihong asked with great interest.

After sizing up her eldest son, Gu Hong glanced at her daughter and said angrily, “Ask after they enter the house. Why are you blocking the door?”

Long Aihong ignored her and took two steps forward with a smile before grabbing Bai Chen’s hand. “Sister-in-law, sit beside me!”

After they took their seats, Gu Hong signaled Long Dayong with her eyes.

Long Dayong immediately cleared his throat and looked at his son. “You don’t need to go out into the field anymore, right?”

Upon seeing his parents’ expectant expressions, Long Yuehong smiled and said, “More or less. It’s considered semi-internal duty now. We only need to patrol the area outside the company at fixed intervals.”

Phew.

Gu Hong immediately heaved a sigh of relief. She had also heard of such missions—they basically weren’t dangerous, just mundane.

She couldn’t help but smile. “That’s good, that’s good.”

Long Aihong took the opportunity to ask, “Brother, Sister-in-law, will you be promoted again? How many contribution points can you get?”

“They just returned. How can the company give out the rewards so quickly?” Gu Hong replied on her son’s behalf.

The atmosphere became lively as the Long family discussed this problem.

Long Yuehong listened quietly with a smile. He didn't interrupt and only felt peace and joy in his heart.

He turned his head to glance at Bai Chen and realized that his wife was in a similar state.

If only those things didn't exist...?Long Yuehong couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

...

New World, under the street lamps.

Shang Jianyao tried to enter his mind room. With a whoosh, his figure disappeared from the dark street that only had one street lamp and appeared in a modified Room 131.

I can return directly...?Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up as he walked to the door.

He stretched out his right palm, grabbed the handle, and tried to open the door, but the door didn't budge.

It's sealed? Only by returning to reality and entering the room can it be opened??Shang Jianyao stroked his chin.

He didn't waste any time. He returned to the New World and continued walking along the dark and silent street.

After arriving at an intersection, he saw a beam of light ahead.

Chapter 897: Bar

The beam of light was located in an alley. From afar, it looked like a lonely shop waiting for customers.

It was a shop. It had a thick door embedded with a glass window with frosted glass and carvings.

Shang Jianyao walked over step by step and only sensed human consciousness when he was close.

Ten meters...?He stroked his chin.

This was the distance he estimated. He believed that the person in the shop had already discovered his existence.

Shang Jianyao didn't stop and came to the thick brown wooden door.

A yellowish and warm glow quietly flowed out of the glass embedded at the top of the wooden door.

Shang Jianyao raised his right hand, but he didn't knock on the wooden door or push it open directly. Instead, he pulled at the wind chime hanging from the door and listened to it make its crisp chimes.

Over and over again, Shang Jianyao seemed to find new entertainment.

Finally, the person inside said, "This place is open to the public. You can enter as you wish."

It was a slightly hoarse male voice that sounded rather weak.

Shang Jianyao became 'alert' and replied loudly, "Have you not eaten for days? Are you so hungry that you don't have the strength to speak?"

The person inside sighed. "My poor health has nothing to do with hunger."

.....

"Is that so?" Shang Jianyao had a look of disbelief, but as he spoke, he excitedly pushed open the heavy brown wooden door.

Behind the door was a small bar.

At the bar counter opposite the entrance, someone in a white shirt and black vest stood behind the bar counter, skillfully mixing a cocktail.

Behind the person was a row of wine racks with all kinds of bottled alcohol. They were clearly leaning toward the Red River style.

In front of the bar counter was a row of bar stools. Above them was a chandelier with yellow lights.

Apart from the bar counter area, there were only two sets of sofas elsewhere.

“One, two...” Shang Jianyao counted the seats in the small bar.

Even counting the high chairs, this place could accommodate 16 customers at most.

Shang Jianyao walked to the bar counter and asked, “Why don’t you open a larger bar?”

The bartender weakly replied, “There are few New World residents to begin with, and I have limited alcohol.”

At this moment, Shang Jianyao finally saw the bartender’s appearance clearly. He pointed at him in ‘horror’ and said, “You’re a zombie!”

The bartender was truly skin and bones. He was only slightly better than the sleeping Yama Tiger.

His blue eyes were deeply sunken, and his flaxen hair was dull. He exuded the aura of someone who would die on the spot if anything went wrong. As for his age, it was impossible to tell.

“I’m not in good health,” the bartender repeated.

“Oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao revealed a concerned expression. “Is there a way to treat it?”

The bartender fell silent for a moment before saying, “This is my price.”

Shang Jianyao was 'horrified' again. "You told me your price! Could it be that you want to silence me?"

The bartender remained silent for a while. He then took a sip of the emerald-green alcohol and simply said, "My price is too obvious. There's no need to hide it."

"That's right, that's right." Shang Jianyao agreed as he sat on a high chair. "You look like a bamboo pole."

He changed his choice of adjectives.

The bartender wasn't short and wasn't much different from Shang Jianyao. Coupled with him being skin and bones, he really looked like a bamboo pole stuck behind the bar counter.

Shang Jianyao then asked, "How may I address you?"

"Jacob," the bartender replied.

Shang Jianyao casually sighed with emotion. "Why are the names of your Red River people always the same?"

Without waiting for Jacob's response, he looked at the other party's emerald-green cocktail and inquired, "Is this a cocktail?"

"Do you want to give it a try?" Jacob asked weakly.

"No, alcohol sucks." Shang Jianyao expressed his opinion.

Jacob turned around and pointed at a bottle of wine behind him. "Then, I'll recommend one to you. This is dessert wine; it's fermented with sugar syrup. The brewing method is also unique, and it has a rather sweet texture. There's no need to add anything else. Just putting in an ice cube will give you a pleasurable experience."

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up when he heard that it was sweet. He then shook his head. "I'm still too young to drink."

Jacob glanced at the muscular fellow and gave up on persuading him.

Shang Jianyao curiously asked, "Many things in the New World seem to be manifestations of the mind. Your alcohol also comes from your consciousness and is a part of your mind? If I drink it, will it be equivalent to sucking on your mind?"

Jacob calmly listened and replied, "This is a spiritual world to begin with."

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to ask, he weakly added, "The essence of this wine comes from different human consciousnesses, but it doesn't include mine. Their taste comes from the wine I once drank."

Shang Jianyao suddenly sat up straight and asked in a deep voice, "The human consciousness you extracted from the Ashlands?"

Jacob's eyes turned sharp. After a few seconds, he sighed and said, "These were all guys who had been sentenced to death—I was in charge of executing them. I extracted their consciousnesses and turned them into the purest mental food."

"Death row criminals from a certain faction in the Ashlands?" Shang Jianyao asked.

Jacob nodded.

Shang Jianyao's body relaxed, and he was no longer as tense.

"You don't suspect me of lying?" Jacob's voice was very low as if he didn't want to use too much strength to speak.

Shang Jianyao frankly replied, "I've been sensing your thoughts. You have no intention of lying."

This was the effect of Thought Extraction. It wasn't like Mind Reading or Heart Reading, which could directly 'hear' the other party's thoughts. It could only obtain the characteristics of thoughts and determine the other party's thoughts and preferences.

Jacob didn't ask any further. He took a sip of the emerald-green cocktail and said, "Actually, I don't especially need to absorb other people's consciousness because my body is still alive and well taken care of. My mind can always be replenished.

"I opened this bar for Awakened who have lost their bodies so that they have a fixed place to replenish themselves. There's no need to take risks, give up on themselves, or indiscriminately attack the humans in the Ashlands."

"If the body still exists, there's no need to feed on human consciousness?" Shang Jianyao suddenly leaned forward and stared into Jacob's eyes.

"In theory." Jacob swirled the emerald-green cocktail. "But our bodies will eventually deteriorate. Besides, my body's condition is getting worse. I still need a glass occasionally."

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. "In other words, having a body is better than not having one?"

"If you hope to survive in the New World for a long time and return to the Ashlands from time to time, that's definitely the case." Jacob put down his cup as if carrying such a tiny object for too long would tire him out.

Shang Jianyao excitedly asked, "Then, why do some Awakened abandon their bodies?"

"They were either deceived or didn't want to survive in the New World for long, nor do they want to return to the Ashlands." Jacob seemed to recall some of the past and sighed.

Shang Jianyao's thoughts jumped as he switched to asking, "Then, how do I enter the New World in both body and mind?"

"This is a pure mental world. It's impossible for the body to enter." Jacob was a little surprised. "I don't know where you heard this from. It should've come from the group of people who have no understanding of the New World and fantasized without any evidence to base it on."

Shang Jianyao didn't retort and curiously probed, "The New World is an illusory paradise built by the Kalendarium using their minds?"

"That's what I heard, but I can't guarantee that it's true." Jacob smiled bitterly. "Others say that this is actually a mental prison built by the Kalendarium for all high-level Awakened."

Shang Jianyao clapped. "I knew someone would say that."

He looked at Jacob and clicked his tongue. "Have you entered the tower where the Kalendarium live?"

"No." Jacob shook his head gently. "Only a few people have entered, and most of them never came out again."

"Who came out?" Shang Jianyao asked enviously.

Jacob thought for a moment and said, "I know of only one. He's First City's Cass and also the Anti-intellectualism Church's Pope. However, he seems to have long disappeared from the New World."

Shang Jianyao didn't seem to remember who Cass was and asked in shock, "There are also criminal cases in the New World?"

"Yes, but there's no police station here." Jacob's sunken eyes revealed obvious weakness. "The disappearance might've been a result of someone secretly eating them."

Just as he said that, wind chimes sounded at the door.

The door was pushed open; the street lamps outside had lit up at some point in time.

Chapter 898: A Way to Return

A figure appeared at the door; it was a man of medium height. He wore a black trench coat, and he had brown hair, green eyes, and rough skin. He looked to be in his thirties.

He looked like an ordinary person of Red River ethnicity, but his eyes were squinted as if he had severe myopia and had forgotten his glasses.

As soon as this person entered, the chandelier in the bar lit up significantly. He then saw Shang Jianyao.

After a brief daze, he asked in a deep voice, "Who are you?"

The air in the bar froze as this voice echoed, and there were faint electric sparks flickering.

Shang Jianyao didn't show any weakness. His eyes gradually lit up, becoming brighter and brighter until they finally turned into two balls of lightning.

This action clearly stunned the person who had just entered. He instinctively turned his head and didn't look at this fellow."Read more on newnovel.org"

Jacob finally came to his senses and weakly said, "He has no ill intentions."

The squinting person nodded.

The frozen air returned to normal as it flowed freely, and the flickering electric sparks disappeared.

Jacob turned to Shang Jianyao and said, "My regular customer, Hendrick."

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it, retracted his electric eyes, and introduced himself. "My Red River name is Doug."

Hendrick ignored him, walked to the bar, pulled out a bar stool, and sat on it.

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"A glass of lemon margarita," he said, squinting at Jacob.

Jacob began to mix the drinks skillfully.

Shang Jianyao didn't sense Hendrick's aversion to others and asked in a friendly manner, "Are you a regular customer here? Does this mean that you no longer have a physical body?"

With a whoosh, Hendrick turned his head and looked at the fellow. His narrowed green eyes flickered with a dangerous glint.

Shang Jianyao consoled, "Relax. This is only based on deduction, just like how you can infer that I'm a rookie who just entered the New World."

Such honesty left Hendrick at a loss for words.

Upon seeing this, Shang Jianyao asked with perseverance, "How did you lose your body? Did you naturally die of old age, or did you give up because you were deceived?"

Hendrick's forehead twitched visibly twice.

At this moment, Jacob replied for him. "Hendrick was the most unfortunate one. He didn't give up on his body, and it hasn't been 20 years since he entered the New World. He only became a pure mental lifeform because of a disaster."

"Disaster?" Shang Jianyao had always been professional when it came to continuing a discussion.

Perhaps because he knew that Jacob was in poor health and weak, Hendrick didn't rely on him to do it for him and said, "A large earthquake scattered my subjects and buried my body in the ruins."

"How unfortunate." Shang Jianyao had an empathetic expression.

This was a natural disaster. Nobody could do anything about it.

Jacob placed a cup of green lemon margarita in front of Hendrick and sighed. "If Hendrick had been in the Ashlands back then, the problem wouldn't have been that serious. Matter Interference should've been able to save his life when the building collapsed."

“This is fate,” Hendrick and Shang Jianyao said in unison.

The two of them then looked at each other. The former was slightly surprised, and the latter had a look of surprise as if he had found a half-brother.

“I have a question,” Shang Jianyao said in concern. “How do you pay after drinking? With the number of New World residents, there shouldn’t be a mature currency system, right?”

Jacob sighed and said, “You don’t need to pay for the drinks here. It’s just that the number of human consciousnesses I obtain every time is limited. It has to be conserved, so it’s not available all the time.”

Clap! Clap! Clap! Shang Jianyao clapped—

He praised in an aria, “You have a noble sentiment that benefits others without benefiting yourself.”

Jacob chuckled. “There are also benefits for me. If I’m attacked, Hendrick and the others will definitely help me without hesitation. Otherwise, they will lose a stable source of human consciousness.”

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it and honestly said, “Discussing this topic always makes me feel like we’re demons trading human souls.”

“In a sense, that’s right.” Jacob didn’t euphemize it.

Hendrick narrowed his eyes, took a sip of lemon margarita, and expressionlessly said, “We are demons. We abide by order and rules, but there are devils that act wantonly.”

Shang Jianyao’s thoughts had already jumped to another place. “Is the New World very chaotic? Do all kinds of attacks often happen?”

Hendrick looked at the cocktail in front of him and replied in a deep voice, “Unless there’s large-scale chaos, the Kalendarium won’t bother with what we’re doing. This place is like a place of exile for consciousness. Chaos and disorder are the main themes.”

Jacob then said, “Only by finding suitable companions and joining forces can we obtain a stable life. Otherwise, it’s very likely that we will be defeated and imprisoned by others, becoming batteries that are at the mercy of others.”

As he spoke, he glanced at Shang Jianyao as if he were evaluating if this fellow was suitable to join his team.

“Batteries?” Shang Jianyao clapped again. “That’s a very accurate description!”

He laughed for a few seconds before suddenly becoming indignant. “The rumors regarding the New World in the Ashlands are all fake! They say that the land here is fertile, the sun is bright, that children are happy, and that adults are happy. They say that there are no wastelands, monsters, infections, mutations, or all kinds of dangerous things. They are all fake!”

In fact, every antiquarian, Ruin Hunter, and history researcher who had yet to enter the Mind Corridor believed that the New World was illusory and nonexistent—that it was just a beautiful dream.

“I suspect that the rumors of the New World were spread by the Kalendarium, making it a goal for every Awakened who can enter the Mind Corridor to come here.” Hendrick didn’t look too good.

He gulped down the cup of lemon margarita as if he wanted to forget the pain of the past.

“Then, we are exiled and imprisoned.” Shang Jianyao cooperatively helped him finish his sentence. At this point, he exclaimed, “I almost forgot to ask something. How can we return to the Ashlands? I remember that many people from the New World can occasionally return.”

Hendrick’s expression turned increasingly gloomy. He shut his mouth tightly and didn’t answer.

Jacob glanced at him and slowly said, “With your body still intact, you can obtain a door projection by praying to a Kalendaria and temporarily return.”

“Temporarily?” he asked.

Jacob nodded and weakly explained, “In essence, it’s a complete return, but the Kalendaria that responds to your prayers will mark your consciousness. If you don’t return after the application time is up, you will be forcefully dragged into the New World and become food for that Kalendaria.”

“Then, which Kalendaria should I pray to?” Shang Jianyao revealed a troubled expression.

There were too many choices on the Blessings from all Kalendarium!

Jacob was rather honest. “I personally borrow Subhuti’s power. ‘He’ is the most compassionate and benevolent.”

“Oh, oh.” Shang Jianyao suddenly had an idea. “Then, can we apply to return for five days every week?”

Hendrick almost laughed. He took another sip of his lemon margarita and said, “The premise of the Kalendarium responding to you is that your application has sufficient reason.”

“I thought I could exploit some loophole.” Shang Jianyao sighed, not hiding his disappointment.

Without waiting for Jacob and Hendrick’s response, he asked, “Apart from the missing Cass, who else entered that tower and came out alive?”

Jacob had previously said that he didn’t know, but Hendrick revealed a hesitant expression. After a few seconds, he sized up Shang Jianyao for a while with his narrowed eyes. “I heard that the people living near the tower have entered it many times.”

“You mean?” Jacob seemed to recall something.

Hendrick nodded. “Vice President, Charlie, Professor Li, and Doctor.”

“Old friends!” Shang Jianyao clapped excitedly. “I’ll visit them later.”

“They aren’t friendly,” Jacob warned him.

“Then, I’ll make them friendly.” Shang Jianyao was filled with confidence.

Jacob and Hendrick looked at each other and chose to remain silent.

Shang Jianyao didn’t give them a chance to enjoy the silence and asked, “Do you know Wu Meng?”

“This person...” Jacob hesitated.

“What about him?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Hendrick finished his cup of lemon margarita and closed his eyes to enjoy it for a few seconds.
“He’s very dangerous. He’s more dangerous than normal New World residents like us.”

“I suspect that he has discovered the Kalendarium’s secrets, although he probably has never entered that tower,” Jacob added.

Shang Jianyao gave a terse acknowledgment. “What about Truth? Have you heard of it?”

Jacob and Hendrick’s expressions changed at the same time.

Chapter 899: Delay

Shang Jianyao didn’t seem to understand the others’ expressions and asked Jacob and Hendrick, “He seems very powerful. You guys seem to be afraid of him?”

After a few seconds, the relatively good-natured Jacob said weakly, “Truth is also in that tower, but ‘He’ comes out from time to time.”

He used the ‘He’ that represented deities in the Red River language.

“‘He’ is equivalent to a Kalendaria but not a Kalendaria?” Shang Jianyao asked.

Hendrick said with an unhappy expression, “Every time ‘He’ comes out, one to two Awakened will die.”

“But we haven’t personally experienced how great ‘His’ strength is, so we can’t give you an accurate answer,” Jacob added.

Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. “The Kalendarium usually don’t leave the tower?”

“They don’t need to leave the tower to extract the consciousness of every resident here or respond to different prayers.” Jacob’s face revealed reverence, and his voice lowered. “Of course, I’ve never seen or heard of Kalendarium leaving the tower.”

“I see.” Shang Jianyao sighed. “‘They’ don’t have the common touch with the people and don’t know how to enjoy themselves together with the people.”

Hendrick narrowed his eyes at the fellow for a few seconds. “A sheep flock doesn’t want to live with lions either.”

Shang Jianyao didn’t answer as his thoughts jumped. “With our bodies in the Ashlands, will we slowly starve to death if nobody provides us with liquid food, nutrient shots, and nutrient fluids? Or can the human consciousness we extract nourish our bodies and maintain the most basic biological activity?”

This was common knowledge among New World powerhouses. Hendrick glanced at the weak Jacob and said in a deep voice, “Without any replenishment, your body will deteriorate faster. It won’t allow your mind to recover normally, and even your consciousness will weaken. In such a situation, you can only rely on absorbing the consciousness of the surrounding humans to maintain your mental stability. This will indeed give your body a certain level of nourishment, allowing it to maintain the weakest biological activity. It’s like every cell entering hibernation.”

“But what if there are no humans in the vicinity?” Shang Jianyao asked further.

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“Then, you can only attempt to obtain human consciousness here,” Hendrick said coldly. “If that doesn’t work, your body will die first. It won’t be long before your consciousness comes close to dissipation.”

“Only close?” Shang Jianyao was puzzled.

Jacob sighed and smiled. “Kalendaria won’t waste such a consciousness and let it die on its own.”

“Gotcha.” Shang Jianyao clenched his right fist and punched his left palm. “It’s just like how we quickly finish food when we discover that it’s about to expire.”

Without waiting for Jacob and Hendrick’s response, he raised a counter-example. “But I have a friend. There haven’t been any humans in the surrounding area for 30 to 40 years, and he’s also a battery for someone. His body is still alive, but he’s almost a mummy.”

This friend was referring to Yama Tiger.

“Impossible.” Jacob and Hendrick denied it in unison, but one of them had a soft, weak tone while the other had a firm emphasis.

“That’s the truth.” Shang Jianyao shrugged.

Hendrick said coldly, “This can only mean that he isn’t someone’s battery. Someone is providing him with human consciousness regularly. Although the frequency might be very low and there aren’t many of them, it’s enough to maintain his basic survival.”

“Why would that person do that?” Shang Jianyao expressed his confusion.

Hendrick didn’t answer and directly said, “You need to ask him, not us.”

“Oh.” Shang Jianyao had an expression that said: “Why didn’t I think of that?”

He then asked, “Back then, I entered the place where my friend’s body was sleeping, but he didn’t eagerly absorb my consciousness immediately. He insisted on trying after 15 minutes—why? Oh, we weren’t friends back then.”

Jacob and Hendrick looked at this fellow again with strange expressions as if the person in front of them was a fool.

Finally, Jacob replied, “Because we are in the New World and are separated from the Ashlands by a barrier. Be it sensing a human consciousness approaching or searching the area to lock on for extraction, it will take some time.”

“I see.” Shang Jianyao seemed enlightened before he gave a counter-example. “But there was no delay when I entered and provided protection for my companions.”

“Provided protection...” Jacob ruminated over this phrase twice and asked in enlightenment, “Someone was extracting your companion’s consciousness back then?”

“Yes, yes, yes.” Shang Jianyao nodded repeatedly.

Jacob gave an answer to his question. “You didn’t feel the delay because someone had already established a passage.”

“Professional.” Shang Jianyao praised. He then continued asking in the spirit of getting to the bottom of the matter. “In addition, what I don’t understand is why we were locked on the moment we entered that area while having our consciousness extracted.”

Jacob—who had been standing for too long—pulled a bar stool over and sat behind the bar counter.

Hendrick helped make a guess. “There’s no delay either because the process of sensing human consciousness, searching, and positioning was completed before, or the Awakened in that area had happened to return to the Ashlands from the New World.”

Shang Jianyao had a lot of discussion experience in the team, so he immediately shook his head. “I don’t think it can be so coincidental with the first suggestion. We had just pushed open the door back then. Why was the lock onto our consciousness and extraction done only when we completed that action?”

“The second possibility is also too much of a coincidence. I think that regardless of the time, we would’ve become Heartless as long as we entered that area. Yes, we can still confirm this later.”

Upon seeing that he was very opinionated, Jacob didn’t persuade him and joked, “There’s another situation that doesn’t need any delay—it was a Kalendaria that extracted your consciousness back then.”

“That’s not right either.” Shang Jianyao denied it again. “If it’s really a Kalendaria, the protection I provide should be easily penetrated. It won’t be effective.”

Jacob didn’t answer him and changed the topic. He asked curiously, “Did you long discover the door to the New World and only push it open when you encountered danger?”

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao didn’t deny it.

“How patient.” Jacob sighed. “I wouldn’t have been able to do it.”

After chatting for a while, Hendrick—who looked very energetic after drinking the lemon margarita—walked to the sofa, took out a saxophone from the corner, and played it by himself.

A soothing piece of music that was deep and calm with a hint of melancholy slowly echoed in the small bar.

Shang Jianyao listened quietly for a while as if he were immersed in such an atmosphere. At the very least, he didn’t suggest that Hendrick play the erhu because of his squinting.

After some time, Shang Jianyao stood up, waved Jacob goodbye, and walked out.

The street lamp by the street lit up again as he went out.

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“So it takes some time to lock onto someone and carry out the extraction... It’s no wonder you could push open the New World’s door in time, and I could last until you provided protection.” In the evening, Jiang Baimian—who had finished listening to Shang Jianyao’s feedback in the jeep outside the Eighth Research Institute—came to a realization.

For certain sensitive words, Shang Jianyao replaced them with secret codes that had been agreed on in advance.

Shang Jianyao echoed as well, “That’s right, that’s right.”

“From the looks of it, it wasn’t a Kalendaria back then.” Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully.

There would be no delay for the Kalendarium.

Jiang Baimian still had something to do that night. She didn’t want to expend too much energy now, so she simply conversed with Shang Jianyao and said, “I’ll inject you with a nutrient shot later. Don’t be in a rush to go to the tower or deal with Vice President and the others. Make contact with friendly people like Jacob and Flora more often, grasp more information, and seek more help. Yes, don’t force yourself when you encounter unfriendly people. Avoid them if you can.”

“I understand. We have to gather a portion of people worth gathering and gain a collective strength.” Shang Jianyao had always used the Salvation Army as a benchmark for his behavior.

Jiang Baimian ended the topic and concluded, “We will have a fixed exchange every morning, noon, and night. We will be brief every time. Oh, if there’s an emergency, I’ll immediately contact your consciousness with my mind.”

“What if there’s an emergency on my side?”

Jiang Baimian smiled. “Although you can’t control your body to do anything, you seem to be able to maintain a certain level of instinct—at least you haven’t suffered from incontinence so far. If there’s an emergency in the future, make yourself pee your pants. I’ll understand what’s going on at a glance.

“If you happen to have no urine, then you can only try to jolt me by locking onto my consciousness and trying to extract it. However, there will be a considerable delay.”

“No problem.” Shang Jianyao agreed without hesitation. He then smiled and said, “I want to go to the bathroom now—both number one and number two.”

The smile on Jiang Baimian’s face froze for a second. “Wait a minute. I’ll move you outside, get you into position, and take off your pants.”

After she was done with this matter, Jiang Baimian wasn’t in a rush to explore the real New World at night. She planned on waiting a few more hours until it was a little darker.

...

Pangu Biology, underground building.

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen—who had chatted with their parents for a while—returned home.

Just as they sat down and before they could speak, a slightly childish and familiar voice sounded from the radio outside. “Good evening, everyone. I’m Newspoint broadcaster, Hou Yi. It’s 8 p.m. now...”

“This morning, the board of directors reviewed the last quarter’s work report and praised the steady growth in births and the increasing diversity of material production...”

“The results of the new year’s marriage assignments are about to be announced...”

“A new round of border conflicts broke out between First City and the Salvation Army...”

“The Order Supervisory Department announced that no malignant incidents happened last month...”

“The Entertainment Department is preparing to hold a table tennis competition at the Rec Center on all floors...”

Chapter 900: Friendly One?

Hou Yi’s voice echoed in the room, making Long Yuehong feel a sense of familiarity again. This made him feel that today was no different from the past. Most people in Pangu Biology lived a regular, warm, calm, and slow life.

However, he clearly knew that everything was different. They could never return to their original lives.

Bai Chen—who was sitting by the bed—didn’t say a word, but her expression was abnormally gentle as if she were reminiscing about the most stable and warmest period of her life over the years.

...

On the dark and silent streets of the New World.

Shang Jianyao looked up at the street lamps above him and muttered to himself in dissatisfaction, “It’s boring if nothing changes. Why can’t I choose to carry a lantern and walk on a lightless road?”

This was the one who sought novelty.

The honest Shang Jianyao immediately retorted, “It’s impossible for the Kalendarium to change a New World rule for you alone.” “Read more on new n0vel ! org”

“Why not?” The Shang Jianyao that sought novelty spoke eloquently. “There aren’t many people like me who can believe in ten Kalendarium at once!”

Nobody paid attention to his pride, and the scene became a little awkward.

After a while, Shang Jianyao—who sought novelty—tried to change the topic. “Which Kalendaria should we pray to and ask for help when we return to the Ashlands? There are too many choices on the Blessings from all Kalendarium!”

“Of course, it’s Big Boss!” the rash Shang Jianyao blurted out. “As employees born and raised in the company and direct descendants of Big Boss, we might be able to enjoy the treatment of returning five days a week every week.”

The honest Shang Jianyao disdainfully said, “The company’s other New World powerhouses haven’t been able to return often either.”

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“How do you know that they don’t return often? Maybe they return for three meals a day and enjoy real delicacies every day.” The rash Shang Jianyao expressed his dissatisfaction.

“I also hope to receive such treatment...” whispered the Shang Jianyao, who tended to echo others.

“But our next target is Big Boss. Only then can everyone in the company be saved.” At the mention of this topic, Shang Jianyao—who valued relationships the most—had a rather gloomy expression.

Zen Master Redemption sighed and chanted a Buddhist proclamation. “Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.”

Apart from the timid one, the nine Shang Jianyaos didn’t think that dealing with a Kalendaria was an unattainable goal. They always had brimming confidence.

The calm and rational Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “On our journey, Eidolon Nun, Subhuti, and Shattered Mirror have been the ones who have shown us the most obvious kindness. Yes, Master Zhuang barely counts. If we want to pray to a Kalendaria and obtain a chance to return to the Ashlands temporarily, we can only choose one from ‘Them.’”

“Heh.” The ruthless Shang Jianyao sneered. “My opinion is not to make any prayers to prevent anyone’s mark from appearing in our consciousness. It’s fatal at critical moments! In short, it’s not like there’s no other choice. We can stay in the New World and not consider returning.”

The other Shang Jianyaos exchanged a few words and agreed that this was the best choice in the current situation.

The calm Shang Jianyao finally added, “After figuring out the attitudes and goals of the different Kalendarium, we can consider who to pray to.”

“As for how to figure it out, I have no idea for the time being.” The honest Shang Jianyao sighed. At this moment, he suddenly exclaimed, “I forgot to ask a question!”

“What question?” The Shang Jianyao who sought novelty was delighted instead of being shocked.

The honest Shang Jianyao truthfully replied, “I originally wanted to ask Jacob and Hendrick: Since every resident in the New World has a lamp, and extinguishing it means death, how did they raid each other? Could it be that they gather a group of people every time and attack head-on? But wouldn’t I hide when I see so many lights approaching?”

In the New World, the perception range was suppressed, so one couldn’t see far with their ‘eyes.’

“That’s right, that’s right.” Shang Jianyao echoed himself.

“That’s indeed a problem.” Shang Jianyao—who liked to joke—looked around and said, “Maybe the New World is too small. Sometimes, there’s no place to hide.”

The Shang Jianyao that abhorred evil scoffed. “If left with no choice, I’ll enter that tower and fight for a chance of survival.”

“Then, I’ll arrange for a small team to block the tower’s entrance.” The honest Shang Jianyao quickly gave a solution.

A solution that resolved himself.

The calm and rational Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and said, “There might be a way to hide the lights, but not every resident can do so.”

Otherwise, the timid and vigilant lady wouldn’t have kept the lights bright when someone approached.

“For example?” The ruthless Shang Jianyao hated this peer of his the most.

“For example, the assassin’s Invisibility ability we previously encountered. For example, it needs to reach Wu Meng’s level.” The calm and rational Shang Jianyao had some ideas.

At this moment, the rash and bold Shang Jianyao asked, “Then, how can New World powerhouses improve themselves and in what direction?”

Nobody answered him.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao—who was under a street lamp—suddenly turned around, turned his head slightly, and assumed a listening posture.

There had been a slight commotion in an Ashlandic compound beside the road that didn’t have any light shining out.

...

In a hidden spot on the mountain road outside the Eighth Research Institute.

Jiang Baimian—who had taken a short nap—pushed open the door and alighted. Bathed in the starlight, she stretched her body and slowly woke up.

She was going to explore reality's New World at night.

Phew, the New World is actually a mental prison created by the Kalendarium for high-level Awakened... It's no wonder many people who know about it are unwilling to enter the New World...? Jiang Baimian—who had finished stretching her body—wore the military exoskeleton while pondering the information Shang Jianyao had sent back.

This was done using the secret codes they had agreed on in advance to prevent any interference.

Jiang Baimian honestly believed that it was good for most humans in the Ashlands to have all the New World powerhouses leave reality, only to return occasionally. Otherwise, a large number of Heartless would appear in every conflict.

Furthermore, when the bodies of many New World powerhouses aged to the point where they had to absorb the consciousness of others to barely maintain them, this world would become very terrifying.

But if the New World powerhouses really stay in the Ashlands, they will form another balance sooner or later. Yes, ordinary people and low-level Awakened are their livestock and property. They will definitely receive a certain level of protection and not let others encroach on them... But what will most humans' lives be like this way?? Jiang Baimian shook her head and threw the complicated questions to the back of her mind.

After putting on the military exoskeleton, she cast her gaze at the 'sleeping' Shang Jianyao.

He was still covered in the exoskeleton, no different from his usual sleeping state.

Jiang Baimian was in a dilemma of whether she should bring Shang Jianyao's body with her during her night reconnaissance of the small city and place him at a hidden spot in the tunnel exit.

She now knew that leaving Shang Jianyao's body in the car outside wouldn't put him in too much danger. As long as someone or a beast attacked him, he would react to the stimulus and use Matter Interference and Electromagnetic Interference to protect his body.

Although this wasn't a tenth of his full strength through the New World's barrier, there wouldn't be any delay after establishing a connection. Therefore, unless someone knew in advance that it was the sleeping body of a New World powerhouse, it was very difficult to cause fatal damage to Shang Jianyao unless they launched an attack with a short-range ballistic missile or directly launched an ultra-high-altitude bombardment from a distance.

After thinking for a while, Jiang Baimian suddenly laughed.

She recalled something and realized that she had to bring Shang Jianyao along. Without this fellow, she couldn't obtain a mental barrier to resist the Heartless disease!

This was only effective within a certain range of Shang Jianyao's body. As for how large the range was, the two of them had yet to test it out, so they couldn't be sure.

After settling this matter, Jiang Baimian relied on the military exoskeleton's system and her auxiliary chip to recall the Eighth Research Institute's internal route again and again to reduce the number of times she got lost.

After half an hour, she walked to the jeep's trunk and opened it.

Under the starlight, Jiang Baimian hesitated for a few seconds before stretching her left arm and pulling out the crate containing the nuclear warhead.

This time, not only did she have to bring Shang Jianyao, but she also had to bring the big one.

If there was anything strange about the real New World and there was no other way to resolve it, she would leave the nuclear warhead there and retreat with Shang Jianyao. She would then remotely detonate it and destroy everything.

Jiang Baimian looked up at the night sky dotted with many stars. She carried Shang Jianyao, picked up the crate, and walked toward the Eighth Research Institute's entrance.