

Ad Infinitum 671

Chapter 671: He Still Has to Thank Us

Green Olive Zone, Antanna Street, a shop converted from an old warehouse.

Draped in a long cloak, Genava followed Jiang Baimian and the others in.

This place was filled with various electronic components, making it look like a city ruin had been bombed.

The boss was of Red River ethnicity. He was sitting behind a tattered table and using different tools to repair a walkie-talkie.

Sensing shadows looming over him, he looked up at the door and quickly landed his gaze on Bai Chen's face.

"What components do you want this time?" asked the yellow-bearded boss. "It's been two years since we last met, right?"

"Longer than that," Bai Chen replied simply before going straight to the point. "Are there any damaged or unrepairable robots?"

The boss's eyes lit up. "You found an expert and want to make a killing by repairing robots?"

Robots that were completely damaged and unrepairable could only be dismantled and sold as electronic components. Those in better condition could be sold for 1,000 to 2,000 Oray. Seriously damaged robots might not even warrant 200 Oray. There was a high chance that they could be sold as scrap metal, which would make them rather cheap.

A repaired combat robot was a priceless product in First City's sphere of influence. It was much more expensive than the Old Task Force's purchase of the military exoskeletons.

A companion that was absolutely reliable, had great combat strength, and was immune to many influences was the 'dream lover' of all Ruin Hunters. Anyone who had the means to obtain one wanted one, and the more, the better.

Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong didn't interject and handed the stage to Bai Chen—who was most familiar with the area.

Bai Chen calmly replied, "Sort of. A gentleman is buying damaged robots; he wants to develop a new model by dismantling and studying their components. His bid is higher than most people on the market. I wanted to try my luck with you."

"Which large faction is he from?" The boss put down the walkie-talkie and tools in his hand.

If the person wasn't from a large faction, he wouldn't be able to mass-produce them for profit even if he produced a new type of combat robot. If one wanted to stock up all kinds of electronic components to install one himself, it might take two to three years.

"I don't care which large faction it is. I only care about the price he offers." Bai Chen's expression didn't change.

The boss stood up and muttered, "This reminds me of a saying from the Old World: arms dealers who don't sell their weapons to hostile factions aren't good arms dealers. I've seen several people killed by their customers on Antanna Street. I hope you aren't the next example."

He picked up a greasy cloth, wiped his greasy hands, and walked to the door that led to the back—this was the shop's storeroom.

Jiang Baimian and the others followed closely behind.

Compared to the mess outside, the storeroom was surprisingly neat. Different electronic components and Old World appliances were categorized and placed in different areas.

At a glance, Long Yuehong saw two robot bodies.

One of the bodies was almost in pieces, and there were many missing parts. The other had a hole in its chest. The rest was relatively intact, but the metal skeleton appeared slender. Its entire body was rather 'slim.'

“You guys are pretty lucky.” The boss pointed at the two robot bodies and said, “Some Ruin Hunters recently returned from the Blood Wastelands and sold them to me. One is a robot that specializes in repairing electric grids. It can be modified into an all-rounder—uh, I mean an all-rounder in the field of repairs...”

“Can it fix humans?” Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

The boss thought about it seriously. “Probably. How can a 1.9-meter-tall robot with a wrench and iron body not be able to beat up an ordinary human?”

“At least five.” Shang Jianyao helped calculate.

“Besides, its main module doesn’t restrict its use of submachine guns, assault rifles, or grenade launchers. As long as it can be repaired, it will still be a very popular companion.” As a businessman, the boss first praised it before saying, “Its current problem is that the damage is too serious. There are too many components that need to be replaced or repaired, including the main chip.”

Isn’t this just junk...?Jiang Baimian muttered inwardly.

The boss then introduced the other body. “This is a maid-type robot. Its artificial intelligence is very high, but it doesn’t have an attack module. It’s said that before the Old World was destroyed, they would be covered in a layer of artificial skin when they left the factory, making them look very similar to us humans. The damage to this one is still fine, but the core chip was destroyed...”

The boss’s voice gradually softened as if it hurt his conscience by saying that.

For a robot, the core chip was the most technologically advanced, irreplaceable, and hardest-to-repair item.

After a pause, the boss said confidently, “In any case, you guys are selling them to others for research. These two models can broaden his horizons and enrich his knowledge bank.”

“That makes sense.”?Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Jianyao applauded.

Bai Chen nodded. “Name a price.”

The boss smiled. “That repair robot will be 1,500 Oray. It’s very popular, and many electronic components can be used on other robots. That maid robot costs 800 Oray. Seriously, that’s very cheap. Just dismantling it into electronic components for sale would get you at least 700 Oray. With the Kalendaria’s blessing, it might even reach 1,000.”

Touching her thin ‘wallet,’ Jiang Baimian muttered, “The level of artificial intelligence is very high...”

She muttered to the cloaked Geneva.

Geneva slowly nodded.

Although the maid robot didn’t have any functions, all it lacked was the core chip. When the time came, they could simply install the backup chip that contained Source Brain’s avatar, repair the surrounding circuitry, and modify the battery compartment. They could then attempt to activate it.

Bai Chen—who understood her team leader’s hint and saw Geneva’s actions—began to bargain.

Finally, the Old Task Force bought the maid robot for 720 Oray.

As Jiang Baimian stuffed the notes to Bai Chen, she muttered to herself, “It’s time to apply for new funding...”

The exploration of Wasteland Ruin 13 could be reported to the higher-ups while indicating that the previous funding had been depleted. The only thing Jiang Baimian needed to consider was how to inform the company about the secret laboratory without involving Geneva.

...

In the Old Task Force’s rented apartment in the Red Wolf Zone.

Shang Jianyao solemnly pressed the switch. He then took two steps back and stared at the silver-gray maid robot with Jiang Baimian and the others.

Red light quickly emitted from the maid robot's eyes. After a flicker, it moved its head from side to side.

"This..." A gentle female voice sounded from its mouth.

Jiang Baimian wanted to offer her congratulations, but she finally chose to smile.

The maid robot suddenly spoke faster. "Why aren't there any weapon modules? There aren't many useful modules... There's only sweeping, mopping, cooking, dish-washing, and window-wiping..."

Perhaps it was an illusion, but Long Yuehong felt that the Source Brain avatar in front of him was much more humanized than in the laboratory. It actually showed signs of a breakdown.

He guessed that there were two reasons for this.

The first was that the Source Brain avatar had completely escaped the core system's control, so the corresponding core module gradually humanized. The second was that this maid robot could accommodate artificial intelligence very well.

Jiang Baimian—who had already prepared her explanation—took a deep breath, took a step forward, and smiled. "This was out of expediency."

After the maid robot's red eyes were cast at her, she sincerely explained, "As you know, it's very difficult to obtain good combat robots in First City. It might not be available even after a year or two, perhaps even three to four years. Even if we are willing to keep our promises and actively fulfill them, we can't prevent any accidents from happening during this long period. You know very well what our mission is. Wouldn't you be doomed if we die one day in the ruins before we can find you a suitable body?"

"Pui! Pui! Pui! A child's words carry no harm. Let it be blown away by the wind!" The honest Shang Jianyao had a look of disdain.

Jiang Baimian glared at him and smiled again when she saw that the maid robot had ‘calmed down.’ “Therefore, we quickly found a body that can accommodate your chip. After that, you can upgrade it however you like. You don’t have to rely on others anymore. It’s always best to rely on yourself rather than anything else. Look, we also prepared an additional grenade launcher for you. Genava has already studied it, so you can install it after some modification.”

The maid robot’s eyes flickered red as it stretched out its silver-gray metal palm. “What you said does make sense. Thank you for keeping your promise.”

The Old Task Force members secretly heaved a sigh of relief, including Genava.

Jiang Baimian then stretched out her left hand and shook its hand.

The maid robot retracted its metal palm and said in relief, “I’ll tell Genava the way to eliminate the extraneous information now. Oh right, please call me Alpha from now on. This will be the starting point for everything.”

Chapter 672: Blood Wastelands

The ground was barren and bumpy. The Old Task Force’s jeep drove on it, and it felt as rocky as if they were on a ship.

“I don’t want to die in lonely defeat;

“I don’t want to forever live underground.

“The materialist scams;

“The scurrying ants;

“Uncultured people don’t get?hurt...1”

As the small speaker played the song, Shang Jianyao—who was sitting in the middle of the backseat—hugged Genava’s iron arm with one hand and placed the other on Long Yuehong’s shoulder. He swayed his body from side to side along with the rhythm.

Long Yuehong wore a look of disdain and tried to free himself, but he couldn’t escape the devil’s claws due to the limited space.

Jiang Baimian—who hadn’t driven for a long time and was momentarily tempted—looked at the ‘navigator.’ After confirming that the direction was right, she chuckled and said to Shang Jianyao, “You are quite fond of this song recently. You keep playing it.”

“That’s right,” Shang Jianyao admitted frankly. He then swayed his body and sighed. “But its lyrics are different from the song title. I think it’s better to change it to ‘those without ideals don’t get hurt.’ It’s more suitable for our team. Yes, that’s it—I’ll sing it myself later and record it!”

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “You sure are having fun.”

“Of course. After repeated dangerous missions, I increasingly feel that I should enjoy myself without delay. I should be happy and try my best to satisfy myself.” An unknown Shang Jianyao’s words carried a philosophical tone.

The navigator, Bai Chen, nodded and said, “Most wilderness nomads have similar thoughts.”

Therefore, they either indulged themselves physically or modified cars to wantonly vent their emotions.

Long Yuehong opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but he didn’t say anything in the end.

Shang Jianyao retracted his hand from his friend’s shoulder and patted his thigh. “I realize that modifying the song makes it suit the Salvation Army’s current situation! Isn’t it said that they have degenerated and no longer have their original ideals?”

Jiang Baimian’s expression froze as she quickly reminded him, “Don’t agitate or provoke them when passing through the Salvation Army’s sphere of influence. Our only goal is to reach Icefields Tai City quietly and safely.”

Perhaps afraid that Shang Jianyao didn't take it seriously, she added, "The assassin from before isn't dead yet, and the Doctor behind her probably won't let us off either. We have to keep a low profile and try our best not to expose ourselves."

Shang Jianyao revealed a thoughtful expression. "If we kill Doctor—the darkness-serving traitor and the nightmare's accomplice—will we have any hope of restoring Oudick's lost rationality?"

For a moment, nobody spoke in the jeep. Only the rock song echoed.

They all knew that Oudick's chances of returning to normal were slim after so long. More importantly, the Old Task Force was no match for Doctor even if they combined forces. Even if he had yet to return from the New World completely, his body was still lying in the Eighth Research Institute.

This realization made Jiang Baimian—who was familiar with Oudick—sad. Long Yuehong and Bai Chen also shared the sadness.

Oudick's perfectly fine family had been torn to pieces overnight. He could only rely on Thought Implantation to maintain it.

The honest Genava answered Shang Jianyao's question after a few seconds. "I don't think there's much hope."

The driving Jiang Baimian nearly facepalmed.

Genava then said, "To prevent such tragedies from happening again and again, we have to truly and completely disperse the nightmare and drive away the darkness."

Shang Jianyao turned his body and looked at Genava. "Old Ge, I'm surprised by what you said! You've grown."

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao applauded, feeling gratified.

His sadness seemed to have vanished.

Long Yuehong didn't ask why he had quickly calmed down. He knew that there was only one answer: "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?"

"My humanization level has likely elevated a little." Genava frankly accepted Shang Jianyao's praise.

At this moment, Jiang Baimian thought of something. "Hey, didn't you previously say that you wanted to return to the first day and quickly find Room 522's owner on the cruise ship? It's been days, but you are still coming up with nothing?"

Shang Jianyao's expression turned heavy as he slowly said, "I forgot."

"..." Jiang Baimian knew that it wasn't right to argue with a mental patient. "Then, give it a try tonight."

With that said, she looked at the setting sun that burned red above the horizon and asked, "Little White, how far are we from the settlement you mentioned?"

After receiving a new sum of funds, gathering the corresponding items, and replenishing the canned biscuits and other food, the Old Task Force left First City and headed northeast.

They had already entered the Blood Wastelands, a necessary route to First City's border and the Salvation Army's territory.

The 'blood' in 'Blood Wastelands' didn't refer to the color of the soil here. It originated from the massive number of casualties during the Chaotic Era.

This wasteland had plenty of mineral resources, and there was relatively little arable land. It was very easy for the two to bring about disputes.

Before First City expanded its sphere of influence and monopolized everything, the large and small factions in the Blood Wastelands had dyed the lands of value red with their blood.

Bai Chen identified the terrain ahead. “We’ll be there in half an hour.”

This area could barely be considered as First City territory; they had yet to venture deep into the wilderness. Bai Chen had been here before and knew where a settlement under First City was.

It was relatively lively because of the number of Ruin Hunters passing through it.

When the sun reached the horizon, the settlement appeared in front of Long Yuehong and the others.

This was an Old World shopping mall in the suburbs. All the items inside had long been emptied, but the vast parking lot and the buildings that formed a few shorter streets were preserved. It became a settlement for wilderness nomads.

The buildings weren’t tall; they were only two to three stories tall. All the buildings in the central area were residential buildings. The ones on the periphery had been modified into blockhouses, forming a rather sturdy defense line.

As this place was connected to the various ruins deep in the Blood Wilderness, large amounts of mineral resources, and First City, it became an important trade node. Therefore, a large number of modified vehicles were parked in the vast parking lot.

The empty area without vehicles became a place for Ruin Hunters to communicate and even trade.

The residents in the settlement would come out from time to time to peddle the valuable items they had gathered in exchange for light beer and food.

This area was seriously polluted; even the underground water couldn’t be used for extended periods. Compared to clear water, brewed light beer was more suitable for long-distance transportation.

With so many Ruin Hunters around, the Old Task Force’s arrival was like a rock falling into the sea. It didn’t cause any waves.

Furthermore, many Hunter teams here had robot companions. Genova wasn’t eye-catching at all; it only meant that Jiang Baimian and the others weren’t to be trifled with.

Shang Jianyao had just alighted from the car when he excitedly pointed not far away. “It’s lively over there!”

It was an empty space. A bonfire was lit in the middle, and many people were gathered around it. Some were seducing the opposite sex, some were setting up stalls to sell trinkets, and some seemed to be merchants. They were shuttling between Ruin Hunters, wanting to buy their adventurous gains at a low price. Some gathered together, drank light beer, and laughed loudly.

Jiang Baimian didn’t attempt to stop Shang Jianyao. Instead, she smiled and said, “Let’s go over and take a look. We might be able to obtain useful information and trade for unique food.”

Shang Jianyao eagerly strode forward and led the way.

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others followed closely behind.

Just as they arrived at the bonfire, the crowd suddenly fell silent as if someone had pressed a silencer.

Thanks to her height, Jiang Baimian realized that a few people had walked out of the settlement.

The leader was nearly 1.8 meters tall and wore a black trench coat. His black hair was combed up, and his face was relatively thin with distinct edges and corners. The beard on his chin extended to his ears, and his eyes were brownish-gray.

After a brief silence, one of the Ruin Hunters by the bonfire laughed loudly. “Davis, I heard that you encountered a powerful fellow this time and almost couldn’t return?”

The person called ‘Davis’ was the muscular, bearded man in the black trench coat. He glanced at the Ruin Hunter that spoke and laughed. “They were indeed very powerful; there were two Superior Heartless. However, we still returned. We aren’t like you, who don’t even dare to step foot into Ruin 9!”

Ruin 9 was the most famous ruin in the Blood Wastelands. To this day, many places had yet to be explored by Ruin Hunters, and many dangers were lurking. After First City’s officials organized a few operations and retrieved some things, they seemed to lose interest in the place and left it to others.

Two Superior Heartless??Upon hearing Davis's answer, the Ruin Hunters gasped.

Two Superior Heartless...?Long Yuehong actually felt numb.

If it were in the past, encountering two Superior Heartless was a huge matter for him no matter where he was. It was deserving of shock and to be drenched in sweat. But now, Long Yuehong thought little of anything else after Wasteland Ruin 13.

That's it?

Furthermore, Swamp Ruin 1—which they had previously been to—might be more terrifying than Wasteland Ruin 13. After all, Wu Meng was sealed, but Xiaochong could move freely.

If it weren't for Shang Jianyao befriending him successfully, he couldn't imagine the outcome.

As Long Yuehong's thoughts raced, Shang Jianyao fixed his gaze on Davis as if he were wondering why so many people liked to wear trench coats. Should he get one too?

Chapter 673: Man from the Future, Shang Jianyao

For Davis and company, regardless of whether they had truly encountered two Superior Heartless, just the fact that they had escaped and even counter-attacked, returned from Ruin 9, and obtained a bountiful harvest was enough to draw the attention of the Ruin Hunters present.

Davis led his teammates to a relatively central spot and sat down. He then chatted with his acquaintances around him, mainly about his experience in Ruin 9.

They didn't hide much. They only drank light beer and discussed the corresponding ruins loudly, describing how strange and terrifying the two Superior Heartless's abilities were.

Gradually, Ruin Hunters—who wanted to make the risky attempt in Wasteland Ruin 9—were attracted. From time to time, they would interject and praise them, hoping to obtain more useful information.

When Davis finished explaining how they fought the two Superior Heartless in a battle of wits and courage, escaped the strange influence, and escaped the ruins, applause sounded beside the bonfire.

Long Yuehong focused his eyes and realized that Shang Jianyao had already squeezed forward to listen attentively at some point in time.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

The surrounding Ruin Hunters were stunned for a moment before they clapped.

Davis and company were first stunned before they felt great satisfaction from having their egos stroked.

Although it was a little dangerous to be the focus of attention in such situations, they had sufficient confidence in their strength. Furthermore, this didn't come without benefits. For example, some good-looking female Ruin Hunters now looked at them differently.

Being born in the Ashlands and living in the wilderness, their days were numbered. They definitely had to indulge themselves if there was a chance.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Davis smiled at Shang Jianyao—who was the first to clap—and nodded. He felt that this fellow knew the way to act; he had foresight and intelligence.

Shang Jianyao clapped harder after receiving the encouragement.

This was an evening interlude. After the Old Task Force members finished hearing about the adventure of the people in the area and gained a certain level of understanding of Wasteland Ruin 9, they used canned biscuits to exchange for the light beer—which was very popular in this settlement—that was used to replace potable water and some cured beast meat left over from winter. They then had a dinner that wasn't especially delicious but was sufficiently flavorful.

After having his fill, Shang Jianyao smiled and asked Long Yuehong, “Do you know what animal that piece of meat came from?”

Long Yuehong skillfully replied, “I don't, but you don't have to tell me!”

It would only affect his appetite and be a waste of food if he knew. What was even more despicable was that Shang Jianyao often only cooked up an answer. He would only say that it was a ‘guess’ when one took it for real and felt disgusted.

“Alright, quickly get into the jeep and sleep.” Jiang Baimian urged Shang Jianyao. “Your mission tonight is to find Room 522’s owner on the cruise ship.”

Shang Jianyao had already regained his interest in this matter. He didn’t resist and jogged back to the jeep.

...

Mind Corridor, Room 912, in the psychological trauma with the cruise ship.

After Shang Jianyao exited and entered a few times, he finally switched the timeline back to the day he first boarded the cruise ship. It was almost evening.

He didn’t stay on the deck and went straight to the cabin entrance. This was because the passengers and crew outside had ‘conversed’ with him previously, so he had already confirmed that Room 522’s owner wasn’t among them.

After entering the corridor, Shang Jianyao knocked on the doors in which he sensed human consciousness.

When he encountered the people he remembered asking in the last few days, he would always immediately apologize and say that he got the wrong door. He would never beat around the bush. If he didn’t have a deep impression of the person who opened the door and had a vague memory, he would carefully repeat the process of ‘befriending’ them and asking.

He arrived at the fifth floor’s cabin and knocked on one of the doors.

The person who opened the door was a young man in his twenties. He was about 1.8 meters tall and wore a relatively loose, black graphic T-shirt. His brown hair was messy as if he had just woken up.

The man swept his blue eyes and asked warily, “You are?”

One of his hands quietly reached behind his waist as if he wanted to take out something.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “Since we are all on the same cruise ship, that means it’s destiny according to Ashlandic customs. In your Red River language, this is a result of the machinations of fate. Since fate has led us to meet, we are brothers from different parents.”

Under the unreasonable Thought Guidance, the young man’s expression gradually relaxed. He retracted his right hand from behind his waist and grumbled, “Didn’t I say not to disturb me? I was chased by so many Heartless in the past two days that I didn’t even dare to close my eyes. I can finally have a good sleep now.”

Shang Jianyao revealed an apologetic look. “I have something very important to ask you. Oh right, how should I address you? The entire cruise ship is filled with my brothers of different parents. My memories are a little mixed up.”

The young man was convinced and nodded. “I’m Loannes—John, in the more common and popular Red River dialect. However, I prefer the pronunciation that has my country’s characteristics. What’s your question?”

With one hand in his pocket, Shang Jianyao mimicked Jiang Baimian and casually asked, “Have you been to Iron Mountain City Ruin?”

Loannes’s expression changed slightly. Instead of answering, he asked, “Why are you asking?”

Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited. “Have you been to Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company?”

He unnoticeably switched to Ashlandic.

Loannes clearly understood him. In shock and vigilance, he asked, “How do you know?”

He had never mentioned this to anyone; it was a secret buried deep in his heart.

After visiting Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company and encountering a bizarre incident, he obtained an ability that transcended ordinary people.

Shang Jianyao smiled.

He had finally found Room 522's owner! As long as he followed the latter and endured a few rounds of the chaos at night, he should be able to resolve this psychological trauma.

Shang Jianyao suppressed his voice and said softly, "I'll tell you a secret: I come from the future and have interacted with the old you."

"How is that possible?" Loannes blurted out. He suspected that the other party was treating him as a fool.

Shang Jianyao maintained his volume. "Not only do I know very well what you encountered in Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company, but I also know that you will return there in the near future. You want to resolve the fear in your heart, and this isn't something that can succeed in one try..."

In order to 'prove it,' Shang Jianyao recounted Loannes's first encounter with the psychological trauma in detail.

These were all matters Loannes confirmed that nobody around him had seen, so he was a little convinced. "This fellow in front of me might very well come from the future!"

That's not right...? Loannes quickly thought of a question. "Since you can transmigrate from the future to the present, why are you looking for me?"

With this ability, why not save the world?

Shang Jianyao had a serious expression. "There are restrictions on time travel. If I interfere with history and prevent what should happen from happening or vice-versa, it will have a butterfly effect, changing the very future itself and jeopardizing my existence."

“I returned to this period of history in hopes of learning some secrets. These secrets are very important to future humans. It concerns whether we can completely defeat the Heartless disease and rebuild the glorious human civilization!”

“I see...” Loannes came to a realization.

When the Old World was destroyed, he was already a teenager and had seen many sci-fi films. Hence, he was easily ‘convinced’ by Shang Jianyao.

It turned out that future humans had yet to give up; they were still searching for a way to save themselves. For this reason, they invented a time machine and sent specialized personnel back to the present to gather the secrets of the Heartless disease!

Without waiting for Shang Jianyao to speak, Loannes asked in concern, “What’s the future like? How far has humanity gone? How far are we from dawn?”

“That’s a long story.” Shang Jianyao began to recall the textbooks and roughly explained the process of the various large factions gradually forming and establishing between the Chaotic Era’s end and the early years of the New Calendar.

Upon seeing how detailed he was, it was obvious that it was impossible to fabricate anything under normal circumstances. Loannes no longer had any doubts about him coming from the future.

“What do you want to ask me?” Loannes unconsciously lowered his voice.

Shang Jianyao was stunned for a moment before he quickly tried to smooth things over. “Here’s the thing. Historically, this cruise ship encountered something extremely terrifying, and you are one of the few people who survived. I want to follow you for the next few days and see what you will experience to discover the truth.”

Loannes was rather surprised. “This cruise ship will encounter something extremely terrifying?”

He didn’t expect to encounter such danger after escaping to the Gold Coast after all the difficulties he encountered.

Shang Jianyao nodded solemnly. “What happened to this cruise ship and the hidden anomaly in Iron Mountain City’s Second Food Company involve the cause of the Old World’s destruction and the origins of the Heartless disease. You encountered both, which means that you are the chosen one of the era.”

“Is that so...” Loannes suddenly felt elevated to glory, and his shoulders became a little heavier from the burden.

“Yes.” Shang Jianyao was rather sincere.

Loannes fell silent for a moment. “Come into my room. Let’s wait for night to descend together.”

Chapter 674: Captain

A cold night soon descended.

Loannes could only see a portion of the ship’s railing from his room, so he couldn’t confirm the situation outside. He could only say to Shang Jianyao, “Let’s open the door and take a look. I want to know if the current situation is as you described.”

Although he had already accepted the fact that someone from the future had transmigrated to investigate the truth in a bid to find the reason for the Old World’s destruction, he still wanted further confirmation. After all, this concerned his situation for the next few days.

It had to be known that the man from the future had said it wasn’t that he couldn’t change history but that he didn’t dare to change history. If something really went wrong and resulted in the accidental death of survivors who were supposed to live, it would be too late for regrets.

When the time came, all the futures would be reset. There might not even be a scientist who invented a time machine or have an investigator sent over.

Furthermore, the subsequent investigators would definitely maintain a modified history. It was impossible for them to attempt to correct it because this would cause a new round of resets of the future, wiping out the new investigators’ existence.

Due to this reason, Loannes—who still felt a little groggy despite spending nearly half an hour thinking—decided that it was better to figure out their current situation.

Shang Jianyao thought for a few seconds seriously and nodded solemnly. "Alright, but be careful."

Loannes secretly heaved a sigh of relief and turned around.

Behind him, Shang Jianyao's expression relaxed and gradually became excited. He also showed signs of eagerness regarding the imminent spectacle.

Loannes—who was wearing a long black T-shirt—walked to the door. He was in no rush to leave. Instead, he turned his head, leaned against the wooden plank, and listened carefully to the commotion outside.

There seemed to be some sounds in the distance, but it was silent nearby.

Loannes carefully turned the doorknob and looked out.

The entire carpeted corridor was empty.

Behind Loannes, Shang Jianyao asked casually, "Everyone should be at the restaurant at this time, right?"

Loannes subconsciously shook his head. "It's impossible for everyone to act in such a uniform manner. There will always be people going earlier and later."

Just as he said that, a person walked over from the elevator.

Based on his uniform, this person was a crew member. He ran over in a panic while pushing a food cart, his face revealing horror. From time to time, he would look back as if he were being chased by a terrifying creature.

However, Loannes realized that there was nothing behind this person.

"What happened?" Loannes took a step forward and tried to communicate.

The crew member ignored him and Shang Jianyao as though they didn't exist. He pushed the food cart to the deck of this floor with a terrified expression.

Loannes completely believed Shang Jianyao's recount—apart from a few people, the entire cruise ship entered a chaotic state after night fell.

At this moment, the wooden door opposite him opened slightly.

A half-naked Red River man stuck his head out and happened to see the previous crew member turn around. His face was contorted with horror. He then looked at the normal Loannes and Shang Jianyao.

Loannes saw a woman in revealing clothes shaking her head in the man's room. She was crying and laughing.

Thud!

The man closed the door.

"He's fine too," Loannes said in a slightly disappointed tone.

"Who is he?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Loannes exhaled and said, "His name is Sully. He's also an ability user, the kind that likes to fool with women."

In this era, the nicknames for Awakened weren't uniform. Some people preferred to address these people as ability users.

"Are you jealous of him?" the honest Shang Jianyao blurted out a question.

Loannes's expression darkened. "How is that possible? Is there anything about him that's worth making me jealous?"

The honest Shang Jianyao tersely acknowledged it. “You have quite a jealous tendency.”

When Loannes’s expression warped, Shang Jianyao—who had switched personalities—stroked his chin and said, “However, there’s really nothing about him that’s worth you being jealous of. You’re the chosen one of an era, one who survived two consecutive encounters related to the cause of the Old World’s destruction.”

Loannes’s expression softened. “Your joke wasn’t funny at all. It’s horrible to question if your companion is lying.”

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

Loannes restrained his emotions and thought for a moment before suppressing his voice. “Sully is an ability user, and so am I. We haven’t fallen into the chaotic and crazy state you described. Maybe ability users aren’t affected.”

“You didn’t say that you are hypothesizing,” Shang Jianyao pointed out.

While Loannes wore a look of confusion, Shang Jianyao reminded him, “According to my experience, ability users will also be infected once they use their abilities at night, becoming chaotic or crazy.”

“Experience?” Loannes asked in confusion. However, he quickly expressed his understanding. “This might not be this man’s first attempt at time traveling. It’s very likely that he had previously been infected by the chaotic state due to his rash use of his abilities and was forced to return to the future.”

“Are you still going elsewhere to take a look? The situation in the restaurant should be very exciting,” asked the Shang Jianyao that sought novelty in a slightly egging tone.

Loannes shook his head without hesitation. “I’ve confirmed what you said; there’s no need to verify anything. In the next few days, we will hide in the cabin at night and not go out. We will do our best during the day. We also have to change hiding spots from time to time. If you’re hungry, sneak into the kitchen and get some food. Don’t go to the dining room.”

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao was a little disappointed. He then clapped. “You’re really careful!”

After receiving the praise, Loannes's expression became increasingly normal.

Just like that, he and Loannes arrived at the last night after Shang Jianyao entered and exited a few times.

Upon hearing the chaos and noise outside, the two people hiding in a corner of a dark kitchen tried their best to remain silent.

After a while, Loannes—who seemed to have been in thought all this time—opened his mouth and slowly said, “I don’t think we can continue staying here. Can we really last until this terrifying and strange matter ends and safely arrive at our destination by hiding?”

“I don’t know,” Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

Loannes was surprised. “Didn’t you know me in the future? Didn’t you ask how I ultimately escaped this disaster?”

“You refused to tell me.” Shang Jianyao boldly pushed the problem to the other party.

“I refused?” Loannes fell into deep thought and muttered to himself. He appeared to be trying to reverse-engineer the strategy he should adopt from his future self’s unwillingness to tell Shang Jianyao about his escape.

It was very easy to come to a conclusion: If it was just hiding until the last day and holding out until the cruise ship docked, there was nothing to hide!

Loannes stood up and cast his gaze at the kitchen door. He then deliberated for a moment and said to Shang Jianyao, “You said that only a few people survived to the end. Although the people outside have fallen into a chaotic and crazy state, they will definitely return to normal by dawn. The cruise ship will dock tomorrow. W-what terrifying thing did they encounter in the end that resulted in nobody surviving? Will such a thing happen to us?”

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and sincerely replied, “I don’t know.”

Loannes paced back and forth before saying, “I want to go to the captain’s cabin to take a look. He’s the owner of this cruise ship. If such abnormalities exist to begin with, he should know a little about the situation.”

“It’s your call.” Shang Jianyao controlled the change in his expression and added, “I can’t interfere with history.”

Loannes made up his mind. He tightened his clothes and walked to the kitchen exit.

Perhaps because it was winter, so it was still freezing at night even though they were in relatively southern waters.

Shang Jianyao followed behind Loannes and randomly grabbed a piece of cloth to drape over his body to resist the evening cold.

With the ability to sense human consciousness, the two of them circled around the passengers and crew that had fallen into a chaotic and deranged state, especially those with aggressive tendencies.

Finally, they arrived at the captain’s cabin.

The door was tightly shut, and loud shouts sounded from inside intermittently.

“The captain has also gone deranged?” Loannes muttered to himself in disappointment.

This meant that he might not be able to gather anything. He might even be attacked.

He didn’t hesitate for long before attempting to turn the doorknob.

The door didn’t budge.

“Let me do it!” Shang Jianyao was eager to kick the door open.

“I thought you can’t interfere with history?” Loannes turned to look at him in surprise.

Shang Jianyao replied confidently, “Are you going to give up if I don’t open the door?”

“That’s true.” Loannes accepted this explanation.

History didn’t change.

Thud!

Shang Jianyao raised his right foot and kicked open the door.

Loannes immediately saw the situation inside.

A man in his forties that was relatively rotund—testimony that he could ensure his basic meals in this Chaotic Era—was kneeling on one knee with a white bedsheet draped over him.

He ignored the door being kicked open and only looked at the ceiling as he then sang, “Oh, my goddess! Please accept my love!”

Another lunatic...?Loannes turned to look at Shang Jianyao and deliberated before saying, “Let’s search around. Maybe there are some clues hidden in this room.”

Shang Jianyao didn’t respond to his suggestion. He looked at the captain and kindly reminded him, “Your goddess isn’t here.”

The captain suddenly turned around, his face filled with obsession and zeal. He replied loudly, “She’s in my body!”

Chapter 675: Unexpected Discovery

“She’s in my body!”

This sentence made Loannes shiver; it was just like how his young self had accidentally watched a horror film back when the Old World hadn’t been destroyed.

However, he quickly realized that this wasn't the point. The point was that the captain had actually replied to Shang Jianyao!

Before this, it was impossible to communicate with the deranged humans that Loannes and Shang Jianyao had encountered. Even if not everyone remained silent, they only spoke to themselves and were almost ravings, unlike the captain, who answered a question.

Of course, as he had been hiding most of the time, Loannes couldn't be sure if the captain's current state was considered special because he had actually encountered very few Chaotic Ones.

This wasn't what he wanted to know. He only cared about one thing: Does this mean that we can still communicate with the captain and that the man from the future—Shang—and I can obtain some information from him?

Loannes composed himself and looked at the captain—who looked like he was begging for love—and probed, “Do you know where the nighttime anomaly stems from?”

Woo~?

The winter night's cold wind blew in through the open window, making Loannes shrink back involuntarily.

The captain remained on one knee and repeated his previous 'aria.' “Oh, my goddess! Please accept my love!”

This...

?Loannes frowned.

Shang Jianyao—who was beside him—laughed. “You're not charming enough.”

“What has this got to do with charm?” Loannes muttered. He preliminarily suspected that only topics related to the Goddess would make the captain respond reflexively in a chaotic, crazy, and subconscious state.

This realization disappointed Loannes. He thought for a moment before saying to Shang Jianyao, “Haven’t you always wanted to figure out the reason behind this matter? Let’s split up and search this room. I hope we can gain something.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao couldn’t wait.

Loannes ignored the captain—who was either kneeling, singing, and begging for love in the middle of the room or standing up and pacing back and forth with tears streaming down his face—and walked to the red desk with books and paper documents.

Those books were popular before the Old World was destroyed. Loannes had read a few of them himself and knew that there was nothing wrong with them, but he still carefully picked up the books and shook them to see if there was anything inside.

He managed to shake some items out. They drifted down and scattered on the table—a few slightly yellowing photos.

The main person in these photos was the same person—a rather beautiful woman. She had long brown hair, and her blue eyes were as charming as a lake. She kept a smile that was both sweet and sunny.

The woman’s age was different in the different photos. The youngest was 17 or 18 years old, and she wore a cheerleading uniform with a rather hot figure. The oldest picture was when she was 25 or 26 years old. She wore a cap and a short skirt as she swung a bat.

“Is this the captain’s goddess?” Shang Jianyao’s voice suddenly sounded behind Loannes.

Startled, Loannes turned around and reprimanded, “How do you walk so silently?”

“Because there’s a carpet here,” Shang Jianyao explained sincerely. He cast his gaze at the photos again and curiously and excitedly said, “His crush for many years?”

Shang Jianyao’s tone reminded Loannes of his female cousin. She acted exactly like this when discussing certain celebrities before the Old Era’s destruction.

Loannes looked at the photos carefully and subconsciously looked at the captain. He then cursed softly, “Beast!”

“What’s the reason?” Shang Jianyao asked with glistening eyes.

Loannes pointed at the photos and said, “This lady is so young, but he actually calls her goddess! Doesn’t he know his age?”

He was at least in his forties!

Shang Jianyao seemed a little disappointed with the reason for the captain being labeled a beast. He then asked, “Are you a little jealous?”

“W-what’s there to be jealous about?” Loannes asked stubbornly.

Frankly speaking, he was a little jealous because the woman in the photo was as beautiful as a celebrity. It was unknown if she had any substantial feelings for the captain. This made Loannes—who lacked female friends before the Old World’s destruction because of his introverted personality—feel bitter.

“That’s true.” Shang Jianyao didn’t care if the other party was being jealous or not. He pointed at the photo and said, “From the yellowish color, it should be quite old.”

Loannes came to a realization.

These photos were likely taken before the Old Era was destroyed. Back then, the captain was only in his twenties. Furthermore, the woman’s age in the photos was progressive—the captain might not have even been 20 years old back when the first photo was taken. There was no such thing as an age gap for the relationship.

At this thought, Loannes unconsciously weaved a story in his heart and said, “The captain had a crush on this lady, but the other party already had a boyfriend. He could only secretly gather photos and fantasize in private. When the Old Era was destroyed, the two of them lost all connections. Therefore, the captain fell into a deranged state and hallucinated, displaying the desire he had suppressed?”

“Then, how do you explain the captain saying ‘she’s in my body?’” Shang Jianyao was rather interested in the topic.

Loannes unconsciously got pulled into the discussion. “Maybe this is a scene in his fantasy. In our culture, we like to use phrases like ‘body and mind are one’ to describe love.”

“I don’t think so.” Shang Jianyao shook his head.

When Loannes looked at him, Shang Jianyao continued, “First, the two of them are indeed not a couple. Otherwise, the captain wouldn’t only have photos of her alone and instead have photos of them sharing the same frame.”

“That’s right!” Loannes came to a realization. The man from the future—Shang—is pretty good at deduction.

Shang Jianyao further recalled. “After the Old World was destroyed, the captain—who had a crush on the other party—tried to save her. However, he realized that she was with another man, who she went through thick and thin together. Under his intense jealousy and disappointment, the angry captain did something irrational in an apocalyptic environment where order was lost. He killed his goddess and her boyfriend.”

At this point, Shang Jianyao revealed a creepy smile. “After a period of time, the captain cast his gaze at his goddess’s corpse because he lacked food... That’s why he said that the goddess is in his body.”

Loannes was dumbfounded and inexplicably felt nauseous.

He was relatively lucky; he had been able to find food since the Old World’s destruction. He didn’t go hungry for more than three days, so he didn’t have to do those cruel and terrifying things.

“W-what’s your basis?” Loannes felt that Shang’s description of the situation was too dramatic and dark.

Shang Jianyao said in a lecturing tone, “This is called making bold assumptions!”

“...” Loannes was speechless, but the captain’s words ‘she’s in my body’ gave him a creepy feeling. It was difficult for him to completely deny Shang Jianyao’s ‘guess.’

He paused and said, “Let’s continue searching for clues.”

The two of them separated again and went their separate ways to flip through the various items in the room.

During this process, Loannes felt a little jealous. This was because there was actually a wine cellar in the room. Inside were many famous wines from the Old Era.

“Damn it. He’d rather waste energy on these things than turn on the damn air-conditioning system!” Loannes grumbled.

This allowed passengers and crew to enjoy the ‘charm’ of the evening combination of the winter and sea breeze.

“Maybe his fat is thick, so he isn’t afraid of the cold.” Shang Jianyao had returned at some point in time.

Loannes looked at the captain’s clearly rotund body and accepted this explanation.

After the Old Era was destroyed, food was scarce. For the captain to have such a figure meant that he had never lacked resources.

“Did you find any clues?” Loannes cared about the topic at hand.

Shang Jianyao asked seriously, “Does the fact that he likes to eat sweets and consumes tissue at a rate higher than normal count?”

“No,” Loannes replied without hesitation.

He couldn’t hide the disappointment on his face because he didn’t find any useful clues. The search of the captain’s room was almost done.

Shang Jianyao's expression turned serious. "I think we should ask him directly."

'He' referred to the captain.

Loannes was infected by the seriousness and slowly nodded. "We can give it a try."

Just as he said that, Shang Jianyao excitedly turned around and asked loudly, "Why do you think she's your goddess?"

Weren't we looking for clues regarding the nighttime anomaly??Loannes couldn't keep up with Shang Jianyao's train of thought.

The captain—who had just completed an aria—smiled. "She's as beautiful as the morning sun and as kind as a pure angel. I was seriously ill once and needed a bone marrow transplant. She—who happened to be a match—came forward."

So this is the correct explanation for the sentence 'she's in my body'...?Loannes realized that he and Shang Jianyao had made a mistake. The matter was far from being that terrifying, nor did it involve body and mind being one.

"What an angel!" Shang Jianyao echoed the captain's words. He had no intention of asking about the origins of the nighttime anomaly.

The captain's eyes were clearly confused as if he was in some state of unconsciousness. He muttered to himself, "She's also captain of the cheerleading squad. She's cheerful, enthusiastic, and good at tennis and dancing..."

"Excellent!" Shang Jianyao praised.

The captain continued, "She's also very smart. She's definitely not one of those women who only have boobs and a pretty face. She published a paper when she was in university. She actually chose to be a researcher in a laboratory after graduation..."

Shang Jianyao's smiling expression changed. He stroked his chin and thoughtfully asked, "Researcher?"

Chapter 676: Docking

The captain draped in a white bedsheet replied to Shang Jianyao's question with an aria. "Her wisdom and beauty makes her an angel and goddess alike. A rose on the track, a crystal in the lab!"

"How many operas have you watched?" the honest Shang Jianyao asked, even though he was clearly mocking him.

The captain ignored him and knelt on one knee again, looking at the ceiling as if he planned on continuing to obtain promises of love.

Shang Jianyao thought for a moment and asked with a smile, "What's your goddess's name?"

Loannes frowned and felt that Shang was very unprofessional. How can asking questions about someone else's feelings help in any way?

However, Loannes knew very well that the deranged captain wouldn't answer any questions unless it involved his goddess. Therefore, he could only patiently listen in silence, hoping that the seemingly useless topic could put forth some clues.

Upon hearing Shang Jianyao's question, the captain retracted his gaze from the ceiling. His face lit up as he replied, "Her name is Dufftiel Osira."

Almost at the same time, Shang Jianyao and Loannes felt the darkness outside the window thicken.

The howling winter sea breeze seemed to come to a temporary standstill, but this seemed to be only a hallucination of theirs or some other form of psychological factor. After they came to their senses, everything was so normal.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and said to Loannes, "Give it a try. I'm out of ideas."

"I can tell." Loannes was a little happy.

After all, it wasn't a pleasant feeling to be out of solutions when another person had one.

Loannes took a step forward and probed with a few questions. But as long as it didn't involve the goddess in his heart, the captain ignored him and continued singing and begging for love or crying as he recalled.

Loannes sighed and said, "It seems like we can't find the root cause of the problem here..."

The compassionate Zen Master Redemption consoled him. "Let's find another place to hide. We'll take another look at dawn. In any case, you've always been normal. Even if something happens in the end, it shouldn't involve you."

"I hope so." Loannes scratched his chest a few times and prayed to the faith he was brought up with in the Old Era.

In the cold, windy night, the two of them left the captain's cabin and found an empty room to hide.

Shang Jianyao exited and entered again. The last day arrived as expected.

The cruise ship's PA system was informing everyone that the ship would dock today and arrive at their destination, Spacey Island. It requested everyone to pack their bags in advance and disembark in an orderly manner.

Loannes—who hadn't slept the entire night—rubbed his eyes and hesitantly said, "Should we go out and take a look?"

He wanted to see if there were any signs of danger on the ship.

"Alright!" Shang Jianyao seemed to have been looking forward to it for a long time.

Loannes boldly opened the door and walked out. Shang Jianyao followed closely behind.

Just as they walked along the corridor, they suddenly saw the rotund captain open the door and walk out.

“Good morning.” The middle-aged man in his forties smiled warmly. His eyes were spirited, completely different from the fanatical expression he had last night.

Not only did Loannes—who had been greeted—not heave a sigh of relief, but he even felt inexplicably horrified to the point of trembling.

He still had a fresh memory of the captain’s aria begging for love and the pacing with tears streaming down his face. He had a deep impression of the captain’s chaotic and subconscious state, but the captain seemed completely fine once the sun rose.

How could this not be terrifying?

Loannes kept having the feeling that he was facing monsters draped in human skin. They mimicked humans under the sun and revealed their true selves at night.

“Good morning.” Shang Jianyao enthusiastically replied to the captain’s greeting.

Loannes deliberated for a moment and probed, “Captain, have you felt anything amiss in the past few days?”

The captain shook his head in confusion. “Everything was normal, and nobody was infected with the Heartless disease.”

Loannes stopped asking questions and quickly bade farewell. He returned to his cabin with Shang Jianyao and prepared to carry his luggage to the deck. He would disembark as soon as the ship docked, distancing himself from this bizarre and terrifying place.

On the way, they encountered several humans they had previously encountered.

The crew member—who had been pushing the food cart and running crazily while turning his head from time to time—smiled politely and nodded at everyone he saw. The originally irritable and aggressive male passenger held a popular Old World novel and sat on the deck under a parasol as he leisurely flipped through it. The lady—who switched between crying and laughing—leaned against the railing and delicately looked at the blue sea as if she were looking forward to the future...

Even the cold that filled the night was expelled by the sunlight, inviting a little warmth in.

The strong contrast made Loannes descend into horror.

The more normal it was now, the more he couldn't help but think about the chaos at night. It increased his suspicion that the scene in front of him was only normal on the surface, but something more dangerous lurked underneath.

It was as if he had clearly seen the captain's goddess, Dufftiel, only to realize that tentacles were hiding in the shadows under her feet and behind her.

"No! We can't just wait for the docking to happen!" Loannes blurted out the moment he returned to his room. He felt that he had to do something to truly reach his destination!

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

He had experienced this last day many times in the past, but before the docking happened, he would always passively jump back to the time when he first boarded the cruise ship.

At this moment, if he just hid with Loannes, it would be very difficult for the outcome to be different from the strategies he had previously adopted.

It had to be a little different!

Loannes thought for a while with a tense expression. "Frankly speaking, I have a strange feeling: It might be more dangerous during the day than at night. Under the night sky, we at least know who's problematic and who's normal. As long as we don't use our abilities, we won't be affected. Now, we have no idea what will happen next or why only a few people will reach the shore alive."

"Actually, this piece of history is vague. As you—the person involved—remained silent in this regard, we aren't sure if most people survived or most people died," Shang Jianyao replied truthfully.

The outcome he had previously told Loannes was his and Jiang Baimian's guess; it wasn't based on reality.

Loannes glanced at Shang Jianyao and nodded in relief. “You’re very honest; you’re not a cheat. But I believe that something definitely happened in the end since I maintained silence on this matter in the future. At the very least, I don’t think my current experience is worth keeping a secret.”

That’s also a lie. I’ve never really seen the future you...?The honest Shang Jianyao tried to answer, but he was pressed to the floor of the Mind Room by his peers.

Without giving them a chance to respond, Loannes continued, “I have a very ridiculous idea. Since the night gives me a greater sense of security, I want to find a place that resembles the environment at night to hide before the cruise ship docks.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao clapped

“Can’t we just draw the curtains?” he immediately suggested.

“It would still be too bright.” Loannes thought for a moment and said, “Besides, you’ve noticed the weather recently. It’s barely tolerable during the day, but it’s relatively cold at night.”

“We have to find a place with cold air but no light.” Shang Jianyao concluded the key point.

Just as he said that, Loannes had an answer. “The kitchen’s freezer room!”

Apart from this area, the stingy captain switched off the air-conditioning in all the rooms.

“Not bad! Remember to bring some thick clothes.” Shang Jianyao looked eager.

Before long, the two of them—wrapped up like bears—sneaked into the kitchen with their weapons and hid in the freezer room.

“It’s really cold. Maybe I need a bottle of hard liquor to divert my attention.” Loannes rubbed his black-gloved hands and looked around.

After a few days of the voyage, much of the food in the freezer had been expended. The place appeared empty.

Shang Jianyao swept the flashlight around and shone it deep into the freezer room. “There’s no need to hide, everyone.”

Loannes also realized that there were a few human consciousnesses in the freezer room.

Soon, four men and three women walked out from different spots.

Their numbers were different from what Loannes had sensed because a few of them were ability users. Among them was Loannes’s acquaintance—the playboy named Sully.

“Why are you here?” Loannes asked first.

Sully shrugged. “My spiritual intuition tells me that a nighttime environment is safer. Besides, there’s food here.”

“Spiritual intuition?” Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited.

“Haha, I’m joking.” Sully felt a little embarrassed. “I was a mysticism enthusiast in the Old Era.”

Neither party was in the mood to chat. They each found a spot and waited for the cruise ship to dock in the dark and cold warehouse.

Shang Jianyao exited again, wanting to see if he would return to the time when he first boarded the cruise ship. This time, he returned to the kitchen’s freezer and heard Sully say, “The cruise ship seems to have docked.”

Loannes looked for his companion. “Shang! Shang, come out quickly!”

“I’m coming! I’m coming!” Shang Jianyao was filled with anticipation.

Wrapped in thick clothes, the nine of them opened the freezer door and returned to the kitchen.

With a whoosh, the kitchen crew turned their heads at the same time and looked over. Their eyes were turbid and bloodshot, and their expressions were hideous as if they wanted to devour someone.

Heartless disease!

They had all contracted the Heartless disease!

Translator Note: Due to the poor results of this book, I'll be reducing the release rate to 1/day.. Please support this book on Webnovel by unlocking chapters with Coins and purchasing Privilege.

Chapter 677: The Source of the Psychological Trauma

Being stared at by such turbid, crazy eyes of irrationality, even Loannes, Sully, and the others—who had fled to sea after being chased by a horde of Heartless, having found a way to board this cruise ship—felt a chill run up their spines and straight to their minds.

Without giving them time to think, the crew members infected with the Heartless disease either picked up knives, flashed their teeth, or ran over.

These were all staff who worked in the kitchen; they didn't have guns.

The group of people at the freezer entrance had managed to survive the Old Era's destruction, albeit rather abjectly, so they could be considered experienced. Although they were trembling from the cold and had frost on their heads while reeling from the shock the kitchen's situation gave them, they quickly reacted and raised their weapons.

"Careful with your abilities!" someone shouted.

Loannes snapped to attention and immediately terminated his intent of using Sloth, instantly understanding what the person who had shouted meant.

The reason for the current Heartless disease outbreak was unknown; it might be related to the chaotic and crazy state from the previous few nights. In such a situation, rashly using one's abilities might cause one to go deranged and even result in Heartless infection!

Bang! Bang! Da! Da! Da!

Shang Jianyao, Sully, and the others pulled their triggers.

A large number of bullets poured out, killing the kitchen crew as they rushed over.

Looking at the splattered blood and the corpses on the ground, Loannes—who didn't want to be overshadowed—took the initiative to say, "Maybe we have to go out and see what happened. If there's a chance, leave this cruise ship as soon as possible and get onto the island!"

He didn't want to stay on this strange and terrifying cruise ship for another moment.

Apart from Shang Jianyao, the others shared the same thoughts as Loannes. They had no objections and rushed out of the kitchen with their weapons.

"You guys can't do this! You don't have any tactical acumen!" Shang Jianyao 'felt pained' as he ran in the back.

He meant that Loannes and the others didn't have any division of labor or cooperation. Although they maintained a certain distance from each other, it was very easy for them to be wiped out all at once. They acted like a motley crew.

This wasn't because Loannes, Sully, and the others were inexperienced; it was purely because they lacked tacit understanding. They fought their own battles and were wary of each other.

Fortunately, there were no Heartless in the corridor outside. It was empty as if it had been abandoned for a long time.

The group of people that rushed out of the kitchen didn't suffer any attacks or interceptions. They arrived at the small deck of the floor they were on relatively smoothly.

Continuous gunshots drilled into their ears, making them subconsciously slow down and observe their surroundings.

Ta! Ta! Ta!

This was the sound of machine guns firing crazily—it came from outside the cruise ship.

Loannes turned his head and looked at Shang Jianyao. He realized that his companion was already on all fours as he crawled to the edge of the small deck.

After hesitating for a second, Loannes chose to do the same.

Sully and the others looked at each other and were infected by this cautious attitude as they lay on the ground.

They shuffled their elbows forward as they quickly arrived at the edge of the small deck. The first thing they saw was a dense crowd attempting to step foot on land through the gangway on the large deck below.

There were about 1,000 to 2,000 of them. Their hair was of different colors, but their eyes were equally turbid. From time to time, they roared like beasts. The ones with weapons seized the advantageous terrain and fired crazily at the dock.

Heartless disease!

Almost all the passengers and crew had contracted the Heartless disease!

Upon seeing this, the pupils of Loannes, Sully, and the others rapidly dilated. Their bodies stiffened as if they had been struck by lightning.

They were no strangers to such scenes. They had more or less witnessed the Old Era's destruction!

Amidst concentrated gunshots and constantly echoing screams, the entire scene looked like doomsday had once again descended.

Almost at the same time, Shang Jianyao felt the surrounding atmosphere become oppressive, heavy, and seemingly material. He then experienced the feelings of Room 912's owner as if he were there.

On the one hand, they were glad that they had hidden themselves in the freezer and hadn't been infected with the Heartless disease. They felt a little happy from successfully dodging a disaster. On the other hand, they felt lingering fear and terror. They didn't know why they could maintain their rationality, and they weren't sure if they would become members of the Heartless below when they encountered such matters in the future.

Under the fog of the 'unknown,' nobody could guarantee anything.

Sully turned his gaze to the fortifications on the shore and the armed personnel rushing over. He gulped and said in a deep voice, "Let's return to the kitchen and hide. We'll come out when the battle ends."

He was afraid that they would be discovered by the Heartless and be tragically surrounded. When the time came, even if there were several ability users in the team, they would definitely be outnumbered. He was also worried that they would be implicated and be accidentally killed by the residents of Spacey Island, so he didn't want to stay outside.

As far as Shang Jianyao knew, in the era before the New Calendar, the survivors' understanding of the Heartless disease was even more superficial and nonexistent. They often did all kinds of extreme actions due to uncontrollable fear.

Under normal circumstances, since most people on this cruise ship were infected with the Heartless disease, the remaining lucky ones would definitely be deemed to be carrying a virus. They needed to be eliminated, and they would rather be safe than sorry.

If not for the fact that Loannes, Sully, and the others were Awakened and had unique abilities, Shang Jianyao didn't believe that they could step foot on the island alive and be quarantined.

As the survivors carefully returned to the cabin, Shang Jianyao felt his surroundings rapidly fade before becoming clear again.

A deck appeared in front of him. The passengers on the deck were in groups of three to five, chatting about the past.

Once again, he returned to the moment he first boarded the cruise ship.

"This isn't considered a clearing of this psychological trauma?" Shang Jianyao stroked his chin.

His expression quickly turned gloomy. “Definitely not. Since the owners of Room 522 and Room 912 are still alive, it means that they weren’t infected with the Heartless disease back then and successfully landed on Spacey Island. We only activated this hidden ending and figured out what happened in the end, but we didn’t resolve the corresponding fear.

“What’s certain now is that such a terrifying turn of events has become a psychological trauma for two room owners. It makes them constantly worry that they will suddenly be infected with the Heartless disease. It was only later that they slowly overcame this fear. Maybe they won’t dare to board ships again for a long time.”

Shang Jianyao nodded at himself. “If we want to truly clear this psychological trauma, it seems like there are a few directions. The first is to take a few more ships in reality and interact with more Heartless. We can invite the emotions and conditions of not being afraid of a Heartless infection and see if there are any changes. The second is to figure out why the passengers and crew in this psychological trauma can interact with me like I’m real. The third is to investigate the source of the nighttime chaos.”

With that said, he covered his mouth and yawned. “We expended too much energy today. Let’s call it a day; we’ll continue tomorrow.”

...

In the jeep, Shang Jianyao opened his eyes.

He was in no rush to sleep. Instead, he sat up and looked at Jiang Baimian—who was huddled in the front row—under the dim bonfire and starlight outside the window.

In the past few days, Jiang Baimian had used the powerlessness and unease she felt in Wasteland Ruin 13 to stir up her desire to be stronger on the dead silent company mind island in an attempt to escape the fear of losing her family, friends, companions, and current way of life.

She didn’t think she wouldn’t be afraid of losing these. She only tried her best to turn this fear from a stumbling block into motivation to improve.

After repeated adjustments, she gradually got into the groove. She felt like she was about to find the right direction.

Jiang Baimian opened her eyes. She subconsciously looked at the backseat and met Shang Jianyao's eyes.

Jiang Baimian blinked. "It's late at night. Can you not be so terrifying... Just as I left the Sea of Origins and was about to sleep, I felt something watching me in the darkness. How was it? Did you gain anything from this expedition?"

Shang Jianyao nodded and briefly explained the process of him finding Room 522's owner—Loannes—and the sudden change on the last day.

Jiang Baimian listened attentively and gradually frowned.

"In the end, it was actually a Heartless disease that culled the masses..." After Shang Jianyao finished speaking, Jiang Baimian muttered to herself, "Could the chaos from before be a manifestation of the darkness's corruption? When more and more power from the corruptive force accumulates, the Heartless disease will erupt?"

This was a guess based on the Old Task Force's current gains and judgments.

Shang Jianyao's eyes lit up. "Doesn't this mean that there might be a node connected to the New World on the cruise ship? Was it this node's influence that allowed interaction with the humans on the ship?"

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly and said, "Try finding it next time. Get some sleep now!"

She emphasized the last sentence, worried that Shang Jianyao would ignore his fatigue and try it now.

"Alright." Shang Jianyao didn't put on a brave front. He pointed at the door and said, "I'll relieve myself first."

"Didn't you just go before sleeping?" Jiang Baimian was a little surprised. How long has it been?

Shang Jianyao sincerely replied, "I ate and drank a lot on the cruise ship, so it's a physical response."

"..." Jiang Baimian was speechless.

Shang Jianyao pushed open the door, called out to Geneva, and walked to the edge of the parking lot camp.

At this moment, he swept his gaze and saw something strange.

Hunters were constantly swinging their arms, while others were vomiting bubbles...

Chapter 678: Rules

"Wow!" Shang Jianyao tried to exclaim, but what ultimately reflected in reality was him spitting out a saliva bubble.

"What's going on?" Geneva also discovered the anomaly. He seemed completely unaffected and could speak normally.

Shang Jianyao wanted to communicate, but he only produced more bubbles. He was like a fish that had been scooped out from the water and thrown ashore.

Meanwhile, Long Yuehong—who was on night duty—noticed his two companions stop. With the help of the dim bonfire, he realized that Shang Jianyao was blowing bubbles.

Another of his episodes??Long Yuehong thought, unsurprised. This was the first thought that flashed through his mind.

In the blink of an eye, he reflected on the imprecision in his thoughts.?How can I call it 'another' episode? Ever since this fellow joined the Old Task Force, it's been one continuous episode. He has never been normal!

Long Yuehong retracted his gaze and walked to the other side of the bonfire. The next second, he was surprised to discover that he couldn't move his legs.

In contrast, his hands separated from the Berserker assault rifle and swung forward.

“What’s going on?” Long Yuehong blurted out, but this sentence only echoed in his mind. In reality, he ended up spitting bubbles.

Upon seeing this, Long Yuehong knew that something was amiss. He hurriedly wanted to turn to Bai Chen and warn her, but his body didn’t move as he imagined.

He bent his waist and bowed at an empty spot.

Bai Chen also sensed something abnormal a little earlier than Long Yuehong. She—who was on night duty—had been walking back and forth in observation of her surroundings. However, she was frozen in place, with only her hands swinging back and forth.

At this moment, Bai Chen felt like reality had turned into a nightmare.

Similar to them, the Hunters in the parking lot camp maintained their rationality and watched themselves do all kinds of unexpected actions.

Experienced people suspected that they had encountered a paranormal event like what often happened in the ruins with serial numbers. Those who had experienced many things believed that a Mind Corridor-level Awakened or a special Superior Heartless had secretly exerted their influence on them with unknown motives.

These Hunters were abnormally anxious, but an exaggerated smile appeared on their faces.

In the dark night thanks to the little starlight, a few bonfires burned quietly. The people around them were smiling. Some swung their arms, some kicked their legs as if they were dancing, and some blew bubbles. The scene was so strange that it didn’t seem realistic.

Jiang Baimian—who was sitting in the jeep—had mentally exhausted herself from her previous attempt at conquering the island of fear. She was thinking about the scene on the cruise ship that Shang Jianyao had described and slowly calmed down her relatively excited state. She hoped that she could quickly fall asleep the moment Shang Jianyao returned.

It was difficult for her to enter the Sea of Origins now, so she naturally couldn't rely on the corresponding method to sleep.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, Jiang Baimian suddenly felt the silence outside terrifying.

Normally speaking, such a camp wouldn't be this quiet even in the middle of the night. Most of the time, Ruin Hunters would go to remote places in groups to relieve themselves. On the way, they would chat loudly. Most of the time, they would sing and grunt at some spot, producing embarrassing sounds. Most of the time, humans on night duty would chat over light beer to kill time while guarding against any sudden attacks.

That was how it was just moments ago. Now, the entire camp seemed to have been muted by someone.

Jiang Baimian subconsciously wanted to reach out to the central dashboard and pick up the rocket launcher she had placed there. However, she stretched out her left leg.

The corners of Jiang Baimian's mouth twitched, and she confirmed that something was amiss. What she really wanted to move wasn't the corners of her mouth but her eyebrows.

"Something happened! Something happened!" Genova's voice approached from afar and reached Jiang Baimian's ears.

She opened her mouth to ask about the situation, but what she produced was not a sound but bubbles.

She anxiously wanted to prop herself up with her hands and look out the window, but what pressed down was her right foot instead of her palm.

Her right foot stepped on the carpet between the passenger seat and the dashboard, and Jiang Baimian straightened her body in a rather contorted manner.

She leaned her shoulder against the window and looked out with difficulty. She then realized that all the humans she saw had exaggerated smiles and were doing strange actions.

This...?Jiang Baimian's pupils dilated as she instantly thought of something—it was Shang Jianyao's description of the chaotic and crazy scene that the terrifying cruise ship presented after night arrived.

However, there was still a clear difference between the two.

Apart from a few people, the people on the cruise ship were unconscious. Although the Hunters in the camp were smiling, their eyes showed anxiety. They clearly knew that something was amiss.

A similar but not completely identical anomaly??Jiang Baimian guessed inwardly.

What she was most worried about now was: Would the camp's chaos end with most people, if not everyone, being infected with the Heartless disease? When the time came, would anyone from the Old Task Force be spared?

No! I can't just do nothing!Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced as she searched for every possibility of saving herself.If the current situation is really similar to the chaos on the horror cruise ship, can we assume that the power of darkness is corroding reality through a nearby node? There's a node that connects to the New World in this camp? If that's the case, we can find the node and carry out a certain level of destruction. This will allow the effects to subside temporarily and create an opportunity for everyone to leave the camp...

Then, where is the node that connects to the New World? It can't be seen with the naked eye... But we can... Yes, be it with the Six Senses Beads or the Life Angel necklace, we can sense the darkness, just like when we faced Doctor and Future!

Jiang Baimian quickly came up with a plan, but the two items were in Shang Jianyao's tactical backpack.

Shang Jianyao's tactical backpack was undoubtedly on his back.

Jiang Baimian wanted to tell Shang Jianyao her thoughts, but on the one hand, she could only blow bubbles, making it impossible to convey her thoughts. On the other hand, she was trapped in the jeep and didn't know how to push open the door.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Genava ran over, carrying Shang Jianyao on his shoulder. As a smart bot, he was one of the few who weren't affected.

The others were also robots.

The next second, Genava stretched out his palm and opened the door to the jeep's passenger seat.

Clang!

He placed Shang Jianyao in front of Jiang Baimian.

"Hey wants to communicate with you!" Genava said quickly.

Hey can speak??Jiang Baimian's first thought was a little off.

Genava seemed to understand her surprise and quickly added, "Hey pointed here with his foot."

Foot??For a moment, Jiang Baimian's mind was filled with questions. She then saw Shang Jianyao—who was standing there—move his feet. He wrote two words and a punctuation mark on the cement ground that hadn't been cleaned for a long time: "Cruise ship?"

Upon seeing the words on the thick dust, Jiang Baimian's heart palpitated as she stretched out a foot. With this, she confirmed that the actions she wanted to do with her hands were really reflected on her feet!

The current chaos was without any rule or pattern. It was more like a neural connection dislocation!

Jiang Baimian was unaccustomed to it. She slanted her body and wrote two words with her foot: "Node, items."

Her complete meaning was that the current scene was suspected to be related to a New World node they had previously discussed and that they could use items to find the node.

After writing, Jiang Baimian tried her best to stretch her legs and tried to hook the backpack off Shang Jianyao's shoulder.

Without needing her to expend any effort, Genava quickly understood her intention and easily removed Shang Jianyao's tactical backpack before handing it over.

Jiang Baimian then saw Shang Jianyao's feet rub each other as he took off his shoes and socks.

Shang Jianyao used his feet in place of his hands to clamp the zipper, pulling it down to open his tactical backpack.

Beside him, Genava's eyes flickered with a red glow as he quickly analyzed the situation. "Node... Items..."

Coupled with Shang Jianyao's efforts, Genava quickly came to a conclusion. "Do you want me to take out the Six Senses Beads and the Life Angel necklace?"

Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian blinked at the same time.

Genava didn't hesitate to help Shang Jianyao take out the Six Senses Beads and the Life Angel necklace from his tactical backpack. He then followed the team's usual tacit understanding and handed the Six Senses Beads to Shang Jianyao before delivering the Life Angel necklace to Jiang Baimian.

Shang Jianyao refused to use his hand. He raised his right foot and clamped the string of prayer beads.

Jiang Baimian took the necklace awkwardly and hung it around her neck. She wore it with difficulty as if she were wearing a necklace with her feet.

This time, her right foot was paralyzed.

The two of them then sank their consciousness into the items. This didn't involve their nerves, so they met with zero obstruction.

Silently, Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao saw ink-like ‘darkness’ rise from a certain spot amidst the bonfire’s illumination and spread out. This was thicker than the night with dim starlight.

As expected...?Just as this thought flashed through Jiang Baimian’s mind, she realized that Shang Jianyao had done something strange.

After a few ‘adjustments,’ Shang Jianyao found a pattern. He flipped over, propped himself up with his hands, and walked invertedly toward the spot where the ‘darkness’ surged out.

This dumbfounded Jiang Baimian.

Genava moved his metal neck up and down and came to a realization. “It’s no wonder he wanted to hold the Six Senses Beads with his feet...”

As he spoke, Genava looked at Jiang Baimian. “Do you need help?”

Jiang Baimian blinked and nodded.

With Genava’s help, she completed an inverted stand and tied her paralyzed right foot and left leg together. The necklace around her neck almost fell off.

The three of them quickly ‘walked’ toward their destination.

As the distance closed, Jiang Baimian confirmed the source of the darkness—it came from the Ruin Hunter named Davis.

The Ruin Hunter who had returned from an expedition to Ruin 9 in the Blood Wilderness!

Chapter 679: Old Tricks

Beside the bonfire, Davis sat in the front seat of an Old World military vehicle.

The bearded man in the black trench coat had eyes filled with panic and fear, but he wore an exaggerated smile. From time to time, bubbles spewed out of his mouth as his eyes rapidly blinked a few times as if they were cramping.

His hands constantly moved up and down as his body was enveloped by illusory darkness.

The darkness was like a fog that originated from his left pocket. It sometimes shimmered like water, and it sometimes was as deep and dark as the night.

This is the Ruin Hunter who just returned from Ruin 9 in the Blood Wilderness. He and his team even escaped the pursuit of two Superior Heartless... What impressive thing did he bring out from that ruin? An item that can connect to the New World? Any ruin with a number isn't simple...?As Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced, Shang Janyao seemed to be performing the exercise routines from the Old World. As he stood inverted, he spread his legs and pointed one of them at Davis.

Genava 'understood' what he meant and strode over to Davis's side. Although he couldn't see the source of the darkness and didn't know what the problem was, as a smart bot, he had a method he was best at: Elimination by exhaustion!

Genava first pointed at the sunglasses clipped to Davis's trench coat. Upon seeing that Jiang Baimian and Shang Janyao were motionless, he switched to the mechanical watch on the other party's wrist.

After repeated trial and error, he finally reached into the black trench coat's left pocket.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Shang Janyao clapped with his shoeless feet.

Jiang Baimian was extremely glad that she was inverted and couldn't see that warped scene. However, just imagining it made her feel like Shang Janyao was bringing the 'chaos' on the terrifying cruise ship into reality.

What left her most ambivalent was that one of the feet Shang Janyao used to clap had the Six Senses Beads.

Upon receiving positive feedback, the red glow in Genava's eyes flickered as he stretched his skeletal metal palm into the pocket. He quickly took out an item.

It was a silver necklace with a piece of gray hair that was almost black. The necklace was in the shape of a cross, and its surface was embedded with tiny diamonds.

Suddenly, Genava's retracted arm stiffened in midair. The red light in his eyes constantly flickered, but his half-squatting silver-black body remained motionless.

In Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao's 'eyes,' darkness was surging out of the old but exquisite necklace.

It was as quiet as a lake on a windless night.

Upon seeing this, Shang Jianyao blew a few bubbles. He wanted to wake Genava up!

Upon seeing that his speech would be replaced by bubbles, Shang Jianyao worked hard at producing more bubbles, attempting to link them up to the action of speaking.

He couldn't figure out the more complicated corresponding patterns in that short moment. Although he really opened his mouth and made a sound, it was limited to a single syllable. "Pfft! Pfft! Pfft!"

This made Jiang Baimian want to laugh, but she was also on edge.

At this moment, Genava didn't respond to Shang Jianyao's 'shout' at all; it was as if he had been possessed by a malicious spirit or had been frozen by someone. He squatted foolishly beside Davis and became a statue with colorful LED lights 'hanging' from it.

Even a smart bot will be affected when they touch the New World node??Jiang Baimian's thoughts raced as she alternated her hands and quickly approached Davis and Genava in an inverted manner.

Shang Jianyao was unwilling to fall behind. He gave up on the attempt to speak and ran with his hands.

This scene was so comical that it tickled the surrounding Hunters. However, unconcealed panic and fear surfaced on their faces.

After arriving beside Genava, Jiang Baimian made some adjustments before finally using her right hand to support her entire body. She then tried to ‘raise’ her left leg high and let her left palm leave the ground.

Jiang Baimian felt a little hesitant when she aimed her palm at Genava.

What she wanted to do next was mimic Shang Jianyao’s delivery of a large electric current at the New World node in Wasteland Ruin 13’s secret laboratory and temporarily destroy it. She wanted to rely on the high-voltage electric current stored in her electric eel-like biomechanical limb to temporarily suppress the ‘darkness’ that surged out of the cross necklace and buy time to transfer the ‘danger.’

However, there was still a considerable difference between the two matters. At the very least, the New World node in Wasteland Ruin 13’s secret laboratory didn’t plunge the surrounding humans into chaos. It only acted as a passage for Future to control electromagnetism, making it appear relatively harmless.

The current New World node affected the nearby humans on a large scale as if a certain consciousness was hidden within. Therefore, it might not passively suffer the attack like the one in the laboratory when facing a high-voltage electric current. Jiang Baimian’s attempt might bring about a negative outcome.

When the time came, there was a high chance that the entire Old Task Force would die here.

In comparison, driving away from this camp while they could still turn the steering wheel and floor the accelerator with their feet seemed to be a better solution. However, Genava—who had been ‘frozen’—would undoubtedly be abandoned.

In any case, the robot wouldn’t contract the Heartless disease. He could still be saved when the anomaly disappeared.

Of course, there were also certain risks involved in this escape strategy. The Old Task Force members—who had already been affected or corrupted by the darkness—might not be able to escape the subsequent Heartless outbreak even if they ran to the ends of the world.

After thinking for a few seconds, Jiang Baimian gritted her teeth and made a decision. No matter what, I have to try using the high-voltage electric current! Running away can’t really solve the

problem! After the high-voltage electric current's impact worsens the anomaly, there is still a chance to consider leaving the camp.

With this in mind, Jiang Baimian felt the pressure of losing her companions weigh on her. She raised her left hand with difficulty and barely aimed her palm at the cross necklace.

Amidst crackling sounds, silver-white arcs of light jumped out and entangled into the shape of a python before striking at Genava's palm that was holding the strange item.

Davis—who was leaning against the front of the military vehicle beside him—couldn't lower his head to the side. He couldn't see what Jiang Baimian had done and only found his vision instantly filled with silver-white lightning.

The high-voltage electric current struck the cross necklace, and the 'darkness' that spread out shook violently.

Jiang Baimian felt a gaze cast over from an infinite distance and land on her. This made her blood freeze and her thoughts slow.

However, this seemed to be an illusion brought about by the dispelling of the corruptive darkness. Everything quickly returned to normal—this included the Hunters' actions.

Davis—who was blowing bubbles—blurted out, "Quick, throw away that necklace!"

Upon noticing that the darkness had retreated into the cross necklace, Jiang Baimian quickly ordered Genava, "Throw it five kilometers away; it's better to bury it!"

Genava—who still had tiny electric currents running through his body—seemed to have had a dream. He was reunited with his wife and daughter in Tarnan.

He was feeling a little melancholic when he heard Jiang Baimian's voice. But without hesitation, Genava jumped from his spot and flew dozens of meters away. He then held the old cross necklace and ran at high speeds reminiscent of a car.

As he ran, he aimed the additional electric shock module at the item in his hand. He would immediately take emergency measures if anything went wrong.

In just over two minutes, Genava ran five kilometers.

Boom!

He fired a grenade, blasting a shallow crater in the heavily polluted wilderness. He then threw the cross necklace in, allowing it to land with a bang.

Once he stopped making contact with the item, Genava no longer felt like he was in a hurry. He seriously found soil and rocks to fill the shallow hole.

At this moment, the Hunters in the camp had long returned to normal. Jiang Baimian also got up, removed the restraints on her right foot and left leg, and threw the Life Angel necklace back into Shang Jianyao's tactical backpack.

Shang Jianyao reluctantly got out of the inverted state.

Upon seeing everyone look over, Jiang Baimian asked the Ruin Hunter—the black trench coat-wearing Davis—and his team, “Was that something you brought out from Ruin 9?”

Davis nodded in fear. “Yes. I saw that it had special abilities, so I brought it out.”

“Has such an anomaly never happened before?” another Ruin Hunter asked in dissatisfaction not far away.

This almost wiped out everyone in the camp! Fortunately, the beauty and her companion seemed to have similar experiences and knew how to respond.

Davis and his companions looked at each other and frowned. “I think so, but it returned to normal in less than five minutes each time.”

“Then, why didn't you throw it away?” Jiang Baimian raised her eyebrows.

Davis's statement made her feel that this was increasingly similar to the anomaly on the terrifying cruise ship. Both situations had such matters repeat many times in a short period of time, but one had an ending, while the other had yet to develop to that stage.

Upon seeing the obvious anger in the gazes directed at them, the originally confident and calm Davis stammered, "We planned on throwing it away, but... but..."

"But what?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Davis and his companions replied in unison, "We forgot!"

"Forgot?" Some Hunters didn't believe him, and some revealed thoughtful expressions.

Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. "The negative effect of that item is forgetfulness?"

Davis revealed a look of enlightenment. "I see..."

Jiang Baimian didn't plan on escalating the conflict. After some thought, she deliberately changed the topic. "Where did you discover that item in Ruin 9?"

Chapter 680: Comprehending By Analogy

Davis didn't want to talk about the danger his group had brought to the entire camp. Although their team was very strong—having dared to explore Ruin 9 in the Blood Wastelands and retreated safely—they couldn't fight off the numerous Hunters around them. In a situation where they were outnumbered, they couldn't withstand the concentrated fire from afar no matter how good they were at fighting.

At this moment, Davis had already escaped the influence of forgetfulness. He recalled and said, "That necklace was found in Ruin 9's upper-east district."

Shang Jianyao suppressed his disappointment and cooperatively asked, "Upper-east district?"

Davis simply replied, "That's what was labeled on the city map found in the ruins. Many people who have explored it believe that it's relatively dangerous."

“But the returns were great as well?” Jiang Baimian smoothly steered the topic back on track.

Davis nodded. “Indeed. We found an apartment in the upper-east district that Hunters had never set foot in. Within it, in the left room on the eleventh floor, were several corpses. They were either sitting on the sofa or lying on a bed in the bedroom. Their flesh had completely rotted and evaporated, leaving only bones. The necklace was in front of the corpse on the sofa.”

“Why are you so sure that the corpses’ flesh rotted and evaporated by itself instead of being eaten by the Heartless?” The honest Shang Jianyao dutifully found flaws.

Davis glanced at him and said in a slightly stiff tone, “As experienced Ruin Hunters, these are two distinct situations that can be determined at a glance. First, the corpses’ clothes only showed tiny signs of rot. They were still relatively intact and showed no signs of being torn. Second, there were no traces of blood splattering in the entire room...”

Suddenly, Jiang Baimian interrupted. “So, what’s the cause of the corpses’ deaths?”

Ruin 9 of the Blood Wastelands had clearly not been bombed; it was well-preserved in all aspects, and there were no serious traces of radiation pollution. In such a situation, there was a high chance that the city residents had died from a Heartless attack. A small number of them would’ve been killed by their own kind during the battle for food.

“I think it was suicide,” Davis replied. He had clearly considered this problem back then and explained clearly, “The door lock of that room wasn’t destroyed, and it was tightly locked. It didn’t seem like an intruder had ever entered. The corpses weren’t in distorted poses either...”

“I suspect that the people in the room wanted to go out and search for food, but they realized that there were Heartless everywhere and could only retreat. After that, the intense hunger and despair made them completely break down and give up on living.”

“Did you check the refrigerator and freezer?” Jiang Baimian asked.

Davis’s expression was a little confused at first, but it clearly changed as he turned to look at his companions.

His companions also revealed horror and panic as if they had recalled something serious.

After hesitating for a few seconds, Davis said with confused eyes, “Many boxes of frozen beef were in the large freezer in the room...”

This meant that the deceased didn’t break down from hunger.

Jiang Baimian said, “If they were family, they would’ve gathered together for companionship when facing the Old World’s destruction while suffering from a complete breakdown in their emotions. They wouldn’t be in the different areas.”

“That’s right.” Shang Jianyao strongly agreed.

“Most importantly, we actually neglected the freezer... We were affected by the necklace the moment we entered the room?” Davis muttered in fear.

They even chose to take away the necklace with the cross as if they were possessed by an evil spirit.

It’s not surprising for anything strange to happen near a New World node...?Jiang Baimian looked around and realized that the Ruin Hunters around her were already attracted by this story, temporarily forgetting their previous abnormality.

On the one hand, they were nervous and vigilant. On the other hand, they were curious about the subsequent developments.

Jiang Baimian didn’t disappoint and asked a question that most people wanted to know. “What else did you find in that room?”

Davis and his companions didn’t dare to answer directly, clearly lacking confidence in their memories.

After seriously thinking about it and considering the details, Davis said, “Like normal explorations, we took away relatively valuable gold, portable electronic items, books with practical knowledge, and clothes that hadn’t suffered serious rot...”

In the current era, although most of the electronic items in city ruins had been damaged and couldn't be used, they could still be dismantled and selected for parts. Some barely intact electronic components could still be found, making them relatively valuable.

Furthermore, some electronic items might still be usable after some repairs. Some had no lack of demand even if all their electronic components were damaged and could only be sold as junk. After all, the products of the Old World's technological advancement contained precious metals, including alloys that few factions could replicate.

As he spoke, Davis jolted. "We also took away a phone on the corpse—the corpse that had the necklace in front of it."

"Do you still have the phone?" Jiang Baimian tried her best not to show the delight in her eyes.

Davis nodded. "We plan on selling it in First City."

"Can you sell it to us?" Jiang Baimian smiled.

She didn't choose to intimidate, deceive, or fool them. After all, she had to pay attention to her image in front of so many people.

Upon seeing Davis hesitate, Shang Jianyao said sincerely, "You should've realized that we have experience dealing with such matters. Frankly speaking, the danger level of such matters far exceeds your imagination. It's not something you can grasp. Forcefully participating will only result in a wipeout."

Davis was just about to say, "alright, no problem. I'll sell it to you" when Shang Jianyao continued, "Do you want to know what the final outcome will be if the necklace wasn't thrown away?"

"What will happen?" Davis instinctively asked.

All the Ruin Hunters around looked at Shang Jianyao.

Jiang Baimian's first reaction was to facepalm—no, to slap that fellow. But after careful thought, she felt that it was a good thing to tell everyone the possible outcome.

As the Old Task Force—which was responsible for saving all of humanity—it was their duty to remind everyone not to randomly touch items related to the New World.

Every tragedy they reduced counted!

Shang Jianyao solemnly replied to Davis's question. "In the beginning, the abnormalities brought about by the necklace will only last for a short while before everything returns to normal. But after such events repeat a few times, the danger will reach a critical point. When the time comes, most of the people present will be infected with the Heartless disease. Only a few will survive, just like when the Old World was first destroyed!"

Upon hearing 'Heartless disease'—words that had traumatized all of humanity for decades—all the Ruin Hunters present gasped. They were extremely glad that they had encountered a team that could deal with such matters. Otherwise, the consequences would be unimaginable!

Davis was terrified. He quickly picked up the cowboy backpack beside him and took out a phone. He then anxiously threw the phone to Shang Jianyao as if he were holding the Heartless virus or a hot potato.

"Take it—it's free!" He tried his best to appear magnanimous.

The champagne-golden phone didn't have any signs of damage, but it looked old. Shang Jianyao played with it and smiled. "Don't worry. It's fine."

With the Six Senses Beads still hanging from his feet, he could confirm the existence of the 'darkness.'

Jiang Baimian took out a few 1-Oray notes and handed them to Davis. She then smiled and said, "No, we advocate fair transactions. We always pay on the delivery of goods."

Upon seeing that Davis wanted to be polite, she added, "If you don't accept it, I'll return the phone to you."

Startled, Davis quickly took the notes.

After asking for a while and finding no clues, Jiang Baimian returned to her jeep with Shang Jianyao and Genava.

As the Six Senses Beads only prevented his legs from walking and didn't stop him from running upside down, Shang Jianyao tried to use his hands in place of his feet again, but he was glared at by Jiang Baimian. He hastily put away the item.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong had also listened in on their teammates' conversation with Davis and roughly understood what had happened. At this moment, the former looked around and suppressed his voice. "Are we going to get Old Ge to restore the data in the phone?"

Jiang Baimian pondered for a moment and replied, "We'll try again in the wilderness when we leave this gathering point after dawn."

"Alright." Genava believed that this was the most reasonable and safest choice after analysis.

Meanwhile, Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and muttered to himself, "From the looks of it, the 'chaos' on the cruise ship might really be related to a New World node. I plan on transferring the aura in the Six Senses Beads or the Life Angel necklace to the Mind Corridor and taking one of them to the cruise ship to find the New World node's exact location."

Having comprehended by analogy, he had new ideas on how to deal with the cruise ship's trauma.

He was no longer aiming to clear the psychological trauma. Instead, he wanted to unveil the veil of chaos and find the truth!

Jiang Baimian nodded. "There's no problem with that train of thought, but I'll still say the same thing: We'll try again in the wilderness when we leave this gathering point after dawn and go somewhere deserted. Besides, you've exhausted a lot of your mental energy. You need sleep to recover."

Shang Jianyao revealed a look of anticipation. "When will dawn come..."