

Ad Infinitum 721

Chapter 721: Rest Stop

“There’re boats.” As the team sniper and a human who had undergone the corresponding genetic modification, Bai Chen’s ability to carry out long-distance recon was only inferior to Genava’s.

Jiang Baimian removed the binoculars from her belt and brought them in front of her eyes. Shang Jianyao did the same thing.

The two of them quickly saw the black dots Bai Chen was referring to. There were indeed boats—boats made of steel, albeit crudely.

There were many humans on each boat. Some clearly had intact legs, but they could only crawl on the deck and cast their fishing net in different directions. Some had pointy heads, and they wobbled as they carried out simple jobs. Some had additional limbs and were busy steering the boats.

For a team like the Old Task Force—which had seen and experienced much in the Ashlands—the characteristics of those humans were so obvious that they could be recognized at a glance.

Deformers!

They were similar to Subhumans; it was a tragedy caused by all kinds of pollution. Deformers had it worse because the changes in their bodies were basically useless. Furthermore, they were all different, making it difficult for them to form a stable race.

They were like disabled humans. In the Ashlands where many people starved to death every year, it was very difficult to find a place that was willing to accept them. They could only wait to be eliminated by nature like some creatures in the theory of evolution.

The former Salvation Army treated everyone equally and didn’t give up on them. However, they later stopped accepting new ones due to limited food.

To this day, such people were no longer seen other than in some areas with severe radiation pollution.

“I didn’t expect there to be many Deformers living in this lake.” Jiang Baimian sighed with emotion as she observed. “They seem to live off fishing.”

Shang Jianyao held the binoculars in one hand and stroked his chin with the other. “The problem is: where do their boats get their oil?”

It was entirely possible that some of these Deformers could read Old World books and were self-taught, thereby having the skills to repair and maintain those boats. However, humans couldn’t produce gasoline by merely rubbing their bare hands.

“There should be many islands in such a large lake. Maybe one or more islands have an oil depot built and have a lot of reserves,” Jiang Baimian casually said. “It’s also possible that caravans come here regularly and exchange fuel for specialties.”

She lowered the binoculars and latched them back on her belt. She then looked around and said, “Let’s continue forward for a while longer and not disturb these pitiful people.”

This was one reason. The other reason was that the fish in this large lake had succumbed to pollution and had severely mutated. Even if the Old Task Force stayed behind, they wouldn’t dare to taste the local delights to reduce the expenditure of supplies.

Long Yuehong and the others naturally had no objections.

The Old Task Force’s jeep followed the road by the lake that alternated between good and bad. After driving north for nearly an hour, they accidentally discovered a rest spot with a gas station beside a wide Old World road.

The building at this rest stop was well-maintained. Light even shone from the windows, dispelling the evening’s gloom.

In the Old World, such rest stops definitely had a sizable parking lot. This place was no exception. About five cars sparsely filled up the otherwise empty car park.

“Why does it feel like we’re back in the Salvation Army’s hinterlands?” Long Yuehong—whose turn was to drive—said in surprise.

Jiang Baimian—who had always been empathetic—was already sitting in the backseat. She looked out the window and said, “It even resembles some scenes presented in Old World entertainment.”

To encounter a rest spot with a gas station, a parking lot, a rest area, and all kinds of food and merchandise for sale after driving a long stretch of the highway...

Bai Chen pointed to the other side of the passenger seat. “This place seems to belong to the Salvation Army.”

“Is that so?” Jiang Baimian didn’t attempt to cross over Genava and Shang Jianyao to observe the situation on the other side. Instead, she patiently waited for Long Yuehong to turn the steering wheel. She then saw four people in the Salvation Army’s black uniforms in pairs, patrolling the rest stop’s entrance and parking lot.

These people either carried Red Maple assault rifles produced by the Salvation Army or the relatively common Short Neck submachine gun in the Ashlands. From their bearing, they did look like soldiers who had undergone formal military training and not bandits that lorded over an area.

“Isn’t it said that the Salvation Army doesn’t actually control Icefield?” Long Yuehong asked in confusion.

In other words, the Salvation Army only sent people to Icefield every summer to search for supplies and hunt wild animals. They didn’t establish long-term settlements.

Shang Jianyao scoffed. “There are exceptions to everything, just like how you’re only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement...”

“We’ll know when we ask later.” Bai Chen interrupted Shang Jianyao’s recital.

After the Old Task Force parked the jeep, they left Genava behind to guard the vehicle due to their unfamiliarity with this rest stop.

Shang Jianyao went straight to a team of patrolling soldiers and was about to press his hand to his chest and shout, “For all of humanity.” However, one of the targets first pointed at the terrace houses in the rest stop with his elbow.

“Leave the questions for inside.”

He meant: Don’t interfere with my patrol or distract the guards.

“Alright.” Shang Jianyao was still rather polite when facing the Salvation Army.

After entering the house, Jiang Baimian and the others’ eyes lit up.

Amidst the whirring of the fuel generator, the energy-saving lamps emitted a white glow that illuminated the neatly arranged dining tables.

These were all four-person tables, but some were pieced together, with seven to eight people sitting around them.

Near the lobby door was a counter. Behind it stood an ordinary Ashlandic man—who wasn’t tall but relatively wide in stature. He also wore the Salvation Army’s black uniform and had a Ubei 7 at his waist.

“Do you want to see our pass?” Shang Jianyao asked casually.

The man was stunned for a moment. “If you have one.”

Jiang Baimian immediately handed over the pass that Hong Guangming had given them.

The ordinary-looking man reached out to take it and casually glanced at it. “This pass isn’t applicable for smart bots. When the corresponding four people enter settlements, they are prohibited from bringing heavy weapons, high-tech equipment, or crates.”

Uh...?The man looked up and looked at Jiang Baimian and the others in surprise and solemnity.

He interpreted the two lines attached to the pass from another angle: The team opposite them really had smart bots, heavy weapons, and high-tech equipment, not devices.

“We didn’t bring anything, nor are we carrying crates.” Jiang Baimian smiled.

Compared to people of Red River ethnicity, her looks matched the preferences of Ashlandics. The man was stunned for a moment before saying, “If you meet the pass’s requirements, you can enter Beian Lake’s rest stop.”

“Are you really from the Salvation Army?” Long Yuehong asked curiously.

The man nodded, stretched out his right hand, and pressed down on his left chest. “Yes, but it doesn’t mean much to you guys. Does it mean that you guys aren’t allowed to rest here tonight and replenish your fuel and other supplies just because we aren’t from the Salvation Army?”

“There’s also a difference between being civilized and not when it comes to replenishing,” Bai Chen replied simply.

Uncivilized meant entering guns blazing.

The man was speechless. After a few seconds, he smiled and said, “You can give it a try.”

He looked confident.

“Is that so?” Shang Jianyao was eager to give it a try.

Jiang Baimian took a diagonal step forward and blocked him behind her. She smiled and said, “We’re just confused about why there’s a Salvation Army rest stop in Icefield. Oh right, how should I address you?”

The man muttered, “Chang Haijiang.”

He paused and said, “Our Salvation Army has also rebuilt many similar rest stops in Icefield. They are mainly to facilitate the resting and replenishment of our teams that come and go. Don’t tell me you think our Salvation Army only sends people to Icefield during summer?”

That’s indeed what we believed...?Long Yuehong suddenly felt a little embarrassed.

Chang Haijiang pointed north. “Simply put, we established several weather observation and research stations in Icefield. People are stationed there all year round. Icefield’s climate change indirectly affects our harvests in the northern territories of the Salvation Army.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao clapped

Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she took off her tactical backpack, found a photo, and handed it to Chang Haijiang. “Have you seen this person?”

In the photo was Ding Ling’s husband, Ji Qiang.

Although Ding Ling didn’t have any additional photos, the Old Task Force had Geneva. They had completed the scan back then and gathered the electronic data. After returning to Ubei, they relied on negotiables to find a specialized shop to print out the photo.

Chang Haijiang held the photo and examined it for a while. “Never seen him. What does he do?”

“Research. He’s also from your Salvation Army. He came to Icefield two years ago and never returned,” Jiang Baimian explained simply. “We were commissioned by his family to come to Icefield to find him.”

“Two years?” Chang Haijiang’s eyebrows twitched. “His unit didn’t issue a KIA notice?”

“I’m not too sure about that. Maybe the family member isn’t willing to accept it and doesn’t want to give up,” Jiang Baimian said.

Chang Haijiang accepted this explanation and nodded. “Yes, it’s a habit among Ashlandics. We want to see the body whether dead or alive.”

He looked at the photo carefully for a while. “I don’t have any impression of him.”

Just as Shang Jianyao sighed, Chang Haijiang changed the topic. “But two years ago, a strange group of people passed by. They didn’t enter the rest stop; they only sent three people in to

replenish their fuel and supplies and bought a batch of cooked food. They seemed to be very wary of us for some unknown reason.. We're all from the Salvation Army. Was there a need?"

Chapter 722: Win-Win

Shang Jianyao shook his head honestly at Chang Haijiang's question. "I don't know. I'm not them."

Chang Haijiang didn't expect the people opposite him to answer. He only expressed his confusion to prove that their way of doing things was really strange.

He shrugged and said, "Maybe some of their supplies can't be seen by others, or there might be confidentiality regulations. Thus, they have to minimize contact with non-related personnel. In any case, I'm not a curious person. I didn't investigate back then. According to the rules, I checked their pass and received enough negotiables before preparing the cooked food and supplies they needed and handed them to the people they sent."

Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. "Which direction did they go in later?"

Chang Haijiang recalled and pointed northeast. "I remember them heading that way."

Northeast...?Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and the others' hearts palpitated.

Their destination—Tai City—was also in that direction.

"Did you notice anything else?" Jiang Baimian only took out two plastic negotiables and used them as a form of enticement.

Chang Haijiang suddenly laughed. "I'm a middle-ranking Salvation Army officer. I strictly obey the rules and never accept bribes."

Uh...?Jiang Baimian didn't expect to encounter such a pure Salvation Army warrior in Icefield.

There weren't many such people in Ubei!

From his age, Chang Haijiang was only in his thirties. He was definitely not one of the people from the late Chaotic Era or the early years of the New Calendar.

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao clapped

This made Chang Haijiang a little embarrassed. “I usually exchange items and earn a lot of supplies. There’s no need for me to take bribes that go against my conscience.”

“You can exchange items here?” Long Yuehong asked in surprise. He thought that, like the Salvation Army, they mainly traded negotiables with other currencies to make up the rest.

Chang Haijiang waved his hand. “Of course! Being in Icefield, the higher-ups have given me many additional powers. Under the premise of ensuring that internal personnel get their supplies, the rest stop can be opened to Ruin Hunters, scientific research teams, and wilderness nomads from other places. They are allowed to exchange supplies.”

“Therefore, one can enter without a pass?” Bai Chen recalled Chang Haijiang’s previous behavior.

He wasn’t interested in checking the pass at all.

“That’s right.” Chang Haijiang nodded. “No matter what your goal is in Icefield, it’s not easy for anyone. Resups here are relatively difficult to come by. As the Salvation Army, we will help if we can. After all, it’s not free. There’s still some profit to be made.”

At this point, he steered the topic back on track. “Any further questions?”

Jiang Baimian deliberated and asked, “Do you still remember what the three people sent by that team looked like?”

Chang Haijiang shook his head. “If you had photos, I might be able to recognize them. However, it’s been two years. Who would still remember them? Yes, I didn’t pay attention to other situations either.”

Shang Jianyao sighed without hiding his regret.

Jiang Baimian suspected that this fellow's regret might be in a different direction from what everyone was thinking. It wasn't because Chang Haijiang couldn't remember any clues but because he hadn't obtained items from the Last Man domain or Subhuti domain and couldn't request Chang Haijiang to open up his memories for a 'search.'

"What do you want to eat, and which supplies are needed?" Chang Haijiang pointed at the booklet made of hard paper in front of him.

Shang Jianyao eagerly took the booklet and flipped through it.

Jiang Baimian habitually asked, "Do you have any specialty food here?"

Chang Haijiang suddenly laughed. "Does the fish in Beian Lake count?"

Beian Lake...?Long Yuehong muttered.

Bai Chen directly asked, "The large lake in the south?"

"Yes." Chang Haijiang was very calm.

Jiang Baimian frowned slightly. "The fish mutations in that lake are relatively serious."

She spoke rather tactfully and didn't directly point out the pollution.

Chang Haijiang smiled without minding the topic. "The pollution of the fish in Beian Lake mainly exists in their organs and heads. It won't be a problem after removing these."

Upon seeing the disbelief written all over Long Yuehong's face, Chang Haijiang added, "It's not my word; it was said by a few agricultural experts from our Salvation Army. They came to study it and took many samples back for analysis. Finally, they told me which fish had better meat quality. We can regularly supply fish to cities like Pingnan and Ubei every summer."

The Salvation Army's agricultural experts are pretty good...?Long Yuehong praised sincerely. From his point of view, experts who paid attention to food, researched food, and analyzed food were definitely good experts.

Jiang Baimian recalled something and thoughtfully asked, "Do you organize fishing teams yourselves?"

Chang Haijiang shook his head again. "There are others who do it; we just need to trade for them using fuel, thermal cloth, and other supplies."

"Those Deformers?" Jiang Baimian had a guess.

Chang Haijiang sized her up. "You saw them too? They lack fuel and supplies to resist the cold, and we don't have the manpower to fish. It's a win-win situation."

Chang Haijiang didn't show any condescension or pity.

Shang Jianyao stood up straight, stretched out his right hand, and pressed down on his left chest. "For all of humanity!"

Chang Haijiang was stunned for two seconds before his expression turned serious. He then raised his right hand and pressed it to his left chest. "For all of humanity!"

After ordering cooked fish and some game meat, the Old Task Force randomly found a dining table and sat down.

The other Ruin Hunters in the lobby didn't come over to strike up a conversation. After all, they were in the desolate Icefield, and they might not encounter a single person even if they drove for a few hours. Everyone tacitly chose to be careful and cautious, having no wish to be targeted by people with ulterior motives.

Furthermore, many city ruins were buried in Icefield and hadn't been excavated. They could satisfy all Ruin Hunters who came here as long as they could find them. Therefore, there was no need for them to exchange information since they held information about their corresponding destinations.

As for lusting after men and women, they naturally gave up after seeing the looks of the opposite-sex members on the team.

“I have a feeling.” After sitting down, Jiang Baimian looked around and said, “Chang Haijiang might’ve been exiled here.”

Being stationed in Icefield seemed like a free choice with the ability to profit from the transaction of supplies, but this place was far away from human settlements. It was equivalent to being exiled.

“He doesn’t look like a person who will associate himself with undesirable elements.” Long Yuehong nodded in agreement.

He felt that this was a person who had truly inherited the Salvation Army’s spirit. Furthermore, he wasn’t shouting empty slogans because he still abided by the rules despite being out of the jurisdiction.

Shang Jianyao wasn’t disappointed that Chang Haijiang might have been exiled to Icefield. He said righteously, “As long as one’s spirit remains—as long as the kindle remains, the sun will rise one day.”

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Jiang Baimian clapped expressionlessly.

Upon seeing Long Yuehong and the others look over, she smiled and said, “I did it on Old Ge’s behalf. If he were here and heard that, he would definitely clap. Well, I’m trying to liven up the mood.”

These were her true thoughts.

Shang Jianyao expressed his disbelief. “Don’t explain—an explanation is a cover. A cover means that it’s true.”

“Whoa.” Jiang Baimian couldn’t be bothered with him and only used her tone to end the topic.

She smiled at Bai Chen. “Do the two of you have to do this? You have to hold hands even while waiting for dinner.”

The Old Task Force’s seating situation when eating had changed. Bai Chen and Long Yuehong sat in one row while Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao sat in another.

Long Yuehong immediately coughed as he had taken the initiative to hold her hand. Bai Chen didn’t express any intention of being so clingy.

Bai Chen calmly replied to Jiang Baimian, “Didn’t you previously agree with Ding Ling? There’s only today, no tomorrows in the Ashlands? I think it’s nice to hold hands whenever possible.”

She didn’t push the blame to Long Yuehong.

“...” Jiang Baimian was momentarily at a loss for words.

Shang Jianyao opened his mouth and barked with gusto. “Woof, woof, woof.”

At this moment, even the knowledgeable Bai Chen was stunned, much less Long Yuehong.

The other Ruin Hunters—who were eating in the hall—subconsciously turned their heads and looked over in surprise.

For some reason, Jiang Baimian felt that their gazes at her and Bai Chen gradually turned strange.

At this moment, a few more people entered.

Six of them wore gray, patched clothes. Their hair was shaved very short as if they were originally bald and had just grown out a thin layer of hair.

Upon seeing this, Chang Haijiang—who was at the counter—asked, “Aren’t you guys cold?”

Although it was summer, midsummer in Icefield had evening temperatures that were close to early autumn in Ubei. It was cool with a hint of coldness.

Among the group of people, the leader was a relatively old Red Coaster. There weren't many wrinkles on his face, but they were obvious. The thin hair on his head was white.

Upon hearing Chang Haijiang's question, he pressed his palms together and said in heavily accented Ashlandic, "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Patron, we appreciate your kindness, but we're already used to it."

Buddhists...?Jiang Baimian and the others' eyes flickered as they cast their gazes at the door.

Chapter 723: Asceticism Department

Although Chang Haijiang was stationed in Icefield all year round, he came from the Salvation Army and had been promoted to the middle class. He had a certain level of understanding of various situations. Furthermore, he had seen a few monks and knew how to deal with the person in front of him.

He then asked amiably, "Zen Masters, what would you like to exchange?"

The old Red Coaster calmly replied, "Some rye bread."

"We don't have that." Chang Haijiang shook his head. "There's mixed-grain cornbread that costs the same. Do you want it?"

The old Red Coaster thought for a moment and said, "Fine then."

He then removed a small cloth bag hanging from his waist and took out a gold piece. "Is this enough?"

Chang Haijiang took it and weighed it in his hand in identification. "You can exchange for about 100 loaves with this. Uh, I can't provide that many in a short period of time. There are only about 30 left in the kitchen... Zen Master, do you want to exchange for some other supplies, or are you willing to wait for the kitchen to steam a new batch?"

The old Red Coaster didn't hesitate. "Mixed-grain cornbread it is. We can wait."

"Alright." Chang Haijiang didn't persuade him.

The old Red Coaster then led the monastery of travel-worn, gray-robed monks in patched clothes out of the door and found a place to sit.

Suddenly, a figure appeared in front of them. It was Shang Jianyao, who was holding the Six Senses Beads.

Jiang Baimian couldn't stop him.

Shang Jianyao sat on the ground, his posture a little awkward. He pressed his palms together and said, "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. This Penniless Monk is Redemption. How should you be addressed?"

The old Red Coaster returned the same salute. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. This Penniless Monk is Paranga."

"Are you from the Crystal Consciousness Church?" Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

They were clearly not from the Monks Conclave. They had yet to abandon their bodies by choosing the technological path and ascend through mechanical means.

Paranga shook his head. "We are from the Asceticism Department."

"The Asceticism Department?" Shang Jianyao asked in puzzlement.

He had never heard of it.

"We focus on asceticism to temper our wills, improve ourselves, and ultimately transcend," Paranga explained concisely. He then asked, "Venerable One, where do you hail from?"

"The Monks Conclave," Shang Jianyao replied without hesitation.

Upon seeing the monks' expressions of surprise and disbelief, he added, "But they and I ultimately parted ways due to our different understanding of Zen and true nature."

As he spoke, he sighed and seemed like an accomplished monk.

After explaining, Shang Jianyao answered Paranga's question again. "I'm not a member of any monk group. I chose this path because I had interacted with different monks, read some scriptures, and was called upon by destiny. Namō Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti."

You make it sound like it's real...?Jiang Baimian—who was standing by the door—didn't even want to acknowledge this fellow as her companion.

But in essence, Shang Jianyao wasn't lying. Zen Master Redemption was indeed such a 'person.'

Paranga sized up Shang Jianyao. He swept his gaze across the string of prayer beads in the other party's hand and suddenly froze.

"Namō Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti." Paranga pressed his palms together again and chanted a Buddhist proclamation.

He didn't ask any further.

Shang Jianyao looked at the monks around him curiously. "Why aren't they saying anything?"

That's right. Aren't they a little too polite... Strict precepts??Jiang Baimian felt that something was amiss.

The monastery of monks only listened and didn't say a word. They didn't participate in the conversation between Paranga and Shang Jianyao at all.

Normally speaking, someone among them would more or less voice their doubts when Shang Jianyao mentioned the Monks Conclave.

Paranga didn't lie and frankly replied, "Monks from our Asceticism Department undergo at least 20 years of silent meditation."

"Oh, oh, oh." Shang Jianyao had an enlightened look. "Venerable One, you've finished the 20 years of cultivation?"

Paranga nodded. "I've been cultivating silent meditation for 20 years, and I've also spoken for 20 years. I'm now cultivating the second round of silent meditation."

"Then, why can you speak now?" Shang Jianyao didn't hide his curiosity.

Paranga's expression immediately turned adrift. "I failed. I violated the silent meditation by myself."

"How did this happen?" Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao had a look of concern.

Paranga lowered his head, pressed his palms together, and chanted a Buddhist proclamation. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. The omen has appeared. A great calamity is imminent."

"A great calamity? What's the great calamity?" Shang Jianyao held the Six Senses Beads in one hand and placed the other vertically in front of his chest.

Paranga shut his mouth and didn't say a word as if he had returned to a state of silent meditation.

Zen Master Redemption was calm and benevolent. He didn't go overboard, so he gave up on asking and slowly stood up.

After passing Jiang Baimian and returning inside the rest stop, he placed the Six Senses Beads back into his tactical backpack.

Jiang Baimian didn't say a word. She followed Shang Jianyao—who had switched to an unknown personality—back to his original seat and sat down.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong looked up at them before glancing at the dining table.

Chang Haijiang had already carried a large bowl of dried meat and a large plate of yellow cornbread over.

Why would such a monastery of monks come to Icefield... Could they also be going...? Just as this thought flashed through Long Yuehong's mind, he forcefully turned his attention to the plate of game meat.

He knew that the Subhuti domain had abilities like Mind Reading and Heavenly Ears. With the two parties less than ten meters apart, it was neither convenient for them to discuss nor think about it.

The Old Task Force ate the dried meat and cornbread. Chang Haijiang also served roasted onions and deer meat, smoked Beian Lake fish, pickled cucumbers, mixed vegetables, and steamed meat pancakes one after another.

The soup was a different kind of cabbage soup that had a slightly sweet taste.

"The smell of deer meat is a little strong. Fortunately, it's roasted." Long Yuehong focused his attention on the food as he ate.

Jiang Baimian also commented, "This is clearly not manually bred or reared. It was hunted from the wilderness."

In this season, this area to the south that had later been 'swallowed' by Icefield had plenty of feral animals.

"Hmm." Shang Jianyao stuffed his mouth full with food.

Bai Chen nodded. "The pickled cucumbers are surprisingly good."

It was very refreshing and could neutralize the gamey taste.

Overall, the Old Task Force was rather satisfied with their meal after days of traveling in the wilderness.

Upon seeing that the cups and plates were empty, Jiang Baimian stood up and said, "Let's return to the parking lot. We can't leave Old Ge there alone."

"Alright." Shang Jianyao replied enthusiastically.

Bai Chen and Long Yuehong roughly guessed what Jiang Baimian meant: It was unknown if these monks had Mind Reading, but it was better to stay away from them.

Jiang Baimian had previously said that they were taking the day off and that she would get two rooms here so that they could sleep on spacious beds. Long Yuehong had some anticipation for that.

After returning to her jeep in the parking lot, Jiang Baimian simply instructed, "Night shifts as per normal."

She didn't discuss the ascetic monks with her team members, afraid that they had Heavenly Ears.

Writing didn't work either. Heavenly Eyes also existed in this world.

However, the parking lot was dozens of meters away from the terrace houses at the rest stop. With the characteristics of Mind Reading, it was very unlikely that Paranga and the other monks could hear the thoughts of the humans here, even if there were Mind Corridor-level Awakened among them.

Jingfa from before was considered powerful in the Sea of Origins, but he could only 'hear' some keywords within two to three meters.

Considering the improvement in different aspects, it was already pretty good for an Awakened to be able to 'hear' a person's thoughts from a range of seven to eight meters after entering the Mind Corridor. Even if one explored the depths, it was very difficult for them to undergo a qualitative change.

Of course, this was Shang Jianyao, Jiang Baimian, and the others' empirical inference. Pangu Biology didn't provide precise data.

Due to this, Jiang Baimian's thoughts relaxed a little. A monastery of monks came to Icefield. They should be heading for Tai City...

If it's just an arduous path they are taking for cultivation purposes, they could've chosen to come in winter...

Besides, they also gathered some gold along the way to exchange for supplies. This is clearly because they aren't willing to waste too much time replenishing their food supplies...

For a moment, Jiang Baimian didn't know if she should slow down and wait for the ascetics to finish paying their respects at the Holy Land before reaching Tai City or be ahead of them to prevent any accidents from happening.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava were also immersed in their thoughts.

...

The next day, the Old Task Force replenished their supplies with their remaining negotiables. Bai Chen drove the car away from the rest stop and continued northeast.

Seven to eight minutes later, Shang Jianyao realized that Paranga and the other monks in gray patched clothes were silently walking by the side of the road. He suddenly rolled down the window and asked loudly, "What does 'great calamity' refer to?"

Paranga ignored him. He lowered his head slightly, pressed his palms together, and walked forward step by step..

Chapter 724: 'Wronged'

Shang Jianyao turned around and said to Bai Chen, who was in the driver's seat, "Stop the car, stop the car."

Bai Chen didn't refuse because Jiang Baimian didn't immediately hold back Shang Jianyao.

After the jeep slowed down and stopped by the side of the road, Shang Jianyao pushed open the door and walked straight to Paranga's side. He then asked persistently, "What does 'great calamity' refer to?"

Paranga—who was wearing gray patched clothes—lowered his head and walked forward step by step like before.

Shang Jianyao adjusted his gait and made himself walk alongside the other party. "Venerable One, you and I are both Buddhists. We should be compassionate and responsible for delivering all living beings from suffering. Why don't you be honest and inform us of the great calamity so that everyone can be prepared in advance?"

It's even done in such a genteel manner...?As the jeep drove at an extremely slow speed beside them, Jiang Baimian had already swapped seats with Genava and was beside the window.

Shang Jianyao had already rolled down the window previously.

Paranga finally said, "Our Asceticism Department doesn't care about compassion or the desire to deliver all living beings from suffering. Buddha is a tutor, not a savior."

With Shang Jianyao's ability to spout nonsense, he actually choked a little. However, he quickly composed himself. "Then, can you tell me why you can't tell me the details of the great calamity?"

Paranga lowered his head slightly and pressed his palms together. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti."

"Venerable One, are you testing my comprehension?" Shang Jianyao suddenly became excited.

Jiang Baimian couldn't help but facepalm.

Paranga didn't respond to Shang Jianyao and led the ascetics forward.

Shang Jianyao quickly took a few steps forward and followed. He stroked his chin and said, "Venerable One, since you're unwilling to tell me, I won't force you. I remember you previously saying that an omen has appeared and that a great calamity is imminent. Can you tell me what the omen refers to?"

He didn't feel ashamed or angry that he hadn't obtained an answer despite repeatedly asking.

Paranga's footsteps paused. He finally looked up at Shang Jianyao and said with an extremely complicated tone, "The Holy Lands have begun to collapse."

Shang Jianyao's eyes widened slightly as he asked, "The Buddhist Holy Lands?"

Paranga returned to his previous state. He lowered his head, pressed his palms together, and chanted a Buddhist proclamation. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti."

Shang Jianyao didn't ask any further and changed the topic with piqued interest. "Venerable One, what requirements need to be met before you'll share the matter regarding the great calamity?"

Paranga wasn't angry because of the constant pestering; he simply replied, "I'll naturally say it when it's time."

The muscles on Shang Jianyao's face clearly contorted. "I hate communicating with monks like you the most! You don't speak human!"

Clearly, these monks included Zen Master Redemption.

Paranga turned his head and glanced at the fellow as if he were surprised that he had cursed himself. He then thoughtfully said, "When one no longer thinks in terms of an ego, a personality, a being, and a life, they'll be able to meet Gautama Buddha."

Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao scratched his head, not understanding.

The unaffiliated monk was ashamed of his inferiority. He pressed his palms together and said, "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. This Penniless Monk won't disturb you any further."

He turned around and quickly fled to the jeep before opening the door.

Jiang Baimian signaled for Genava to lean against the window on the other side. She then squeezed in and emptied a seat.

After Shang Jianyao sat firmly in the car, Bai Chen stepped on the accelerator and let the jeep go.

Before long, they left Paranga and the ascetics behind so much that they couldn't even see them with their tail lights.

After driving for another five to six minutes, Shang Jianyao suddenly slapped his thigh. "So we were wronged!"

"Huh?" Not only Long Yuehong and Bai Chen, but Jiang Baimian and Genava also voiced their confusion. Isn't this train of thought too jumpy?

Shang Jianyao explained seriously, "The destruction of those Buddhist Holy Lands is a sign that a great calamity is imminent. Regardless of whether we participate or not, the same outcome will happen.

"One can't say that we destroyed those Buddhist Holy Lands. We only happened to be caught in the fray!"

The more he spoke, the more sincere he became.

That actually makes sense in a warped way...?Jiang Baimian chuckled. "You might as well say that we are only tools arranged to do so—blame the mastermind if you want to. It's like shooting you; you should be blaming me, not the gun."

"That's right, that's right." Long Yuehong also felt that the Old Task Force couldn't take the blame for destroying the Buddhist Holy Lands.

Shang Jianyao instantly became serious. "However, it can be seen from another perspective that certain Buddhist schools of thought had expected the Holy Land to be destroyed. This might really be related to the so-called 'great calamity.'"

Long Yuehong was just about to nod when Shang Jianyao added, "Someone finds the destruction of the Old World insufficient?"

“Uh...” Long Yuehong’s heart sank.

If the Old World was destroyed again, Pangu Biology might not be spared even if it was hidden underground.

It was only till recently that he felt that there was plenty to look forward to in life!

“What will come will come sooner or later.” Jiang Baimian concluded the discussion with this sentence.

Fear didn’t prevent the inevitable.

...

In the evening, the Old Task Force arrived at an extremely beautiful primitive forest.

They found a forest ranger’s cabin left behind from the Old World at the edge of the forest, removed the vines that covered its surface, and simply cleaned up the messy room.

After a simple dinner, Jiang Baimian ordered, “The people not on duty tonight shall sleep inside.”

The honest Geneva volunteered. “You can all sleep in the room; I’ll stay outside. I can’t charge here anyway. In sleep mode, I can still react to the surroundings to a certain extent.”

“No.” Jiang Baimian shook her head. “Inequality rather than want is the cause of trouble.”

She then made further arrangements. “Hey and I will be on night duty tonight. Little White and Little Red will sleep in the room. Old Ge will rest in the car and use the solar charger to recharge.”

“Alright!” Shang Jianyao agreed very quickly.

Long Yuehong naturally had no objections and chose to agree tacitly.

After a meal and an internal discussion, Jiang Baimian slung a Short Neck submachine gun over her shoulder and said to Bai Chen and Long Yuehong, “Get some rest.”

She pushed open the cabin door and walked out into the darkness.

Shang Jianyao and Genava followed closely behind. The former even carefully closed the door.

Suddenly, the cabin became extremely quiet.

Long Yuehong reflexively felt a little nervous. He looked around and said, “Get some rest. We still have to get up at midnight to replace Team Leader and Shang Jianyao.”

“Alright.” Bai Chen sat on the wooden bed that had been sprayed with insect repellent and covered with a military blanket.

Long Yuehong sat by the bed a distance away. He opened his mouth and suddenly didn’t know what to say.

After trying to be in the right mind for more than ten seconds, he finally asked, “Little White, why do you like me?”

Long Yuehong almost slapped himself with his right hand after asking that.

Yes, his right hand.

Bai Chen thought for a moment before saying, “Ever since my parents passed away, nobody has meticulously treated me as you do.”

Long Yuehong was overjoyed, but he didn’t have much confidence. He instinctively wanted to mutter, “I’m only 1.75 meters tall after genetic enhancement...”

At this moment, Bai Chen added, “Besides, you’re a brave person.”

Long Yuehong couldn’t help but smile.

Bai Chen looked at him and asked, “Then, why do you like me?”

Long Yuehong scratched his head with his left hand. “I don’t know when it started either. Maybe it was when we gradually had common topics to talk about, or maybe it was after I felt comfortable with you even without talking. I don’t have to think about how to liven up the atmosphere.”

“You seem uneasy now.” Bai Chen hit the nail on the head.

Long Yuehong smiled embarrassedly before yelping.

“What’s wrong?” Bai Chen asked.

Long Yuehong scratched his head with his right hand. “I specially watched some Old World entertainment previously. It said that when you interact with the girl you like, don’t ask direct and awkward topics such as why you like or don’t like something. I forgot all of that...”

Forgot...? Bai Chen’s eyes flickered slightly. “Then, what did it say about how you should interact and what to chat about?”

Long Yuehong was just about to answer when he suddenly saw Bai Chen’s eyes curl slightly under the light of the fire outside. Her eyes were like stars, and her lips slightly opened.

Swoosh!

Jiang Baimian grabbed the back of Shang Jianyao’s collar and dragged him away from the forest ranger’s cabin window.

This fellow had just sneakily tried to stick his head out from the side to reduce the lighting.

“Focus on patrolling!” Jiang Baimian released her left hand and released Shang Jianyao.

Shang Jianyao straightened his clothes and suppressed his voice. “Aren’t you curious?”

“Uh...” Jiang Baimian hesitated. She then straightened her face and said, “You have to be polite!”

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

He began to patrol seriously.

...

After five to six days, the Old Task Force—which had been heading northeast—realized that the surrounding buildings were gradually becoming dense.

This meant that there might be a city ruin ahead of them.

From the map that had no landmarks for reference, this could either be Tai City or not.

Chapter 725: Strange

“I hope it’s Tai City,” muttered Long Yuehong, whose turn it was to drive.

That way, the Old Task Force could quickly complete the exploration and return to Pangu Biology.

At this moment, Long Yuehong subconsciously wanted to pray, but he couldn’t find a suitable target. He wasn’t a believer of any Kalendaria, nor was he willing to god-hop like Shang Jianyao.

As for the traditional idea of heaven, he felt that there was too much hocus-pocus.

After some careful thought, he decided to turn toward his ancestors for blessings.

Upon hearing Long Yuehong’s words, Shang Jianyao scoffed. “Can’t wait to return to the company?”

Long Yuehong blushed, embarrassed to admit it.

“We’ve been out for months. We do need to return to the company to rest for a period of time.” Bai Chen spoke up for him, frankly without any embarrassment.

The Old Task Force had left Pangu Biology in early spring. It was already midsummer, and there was still a long return trip.

Jiang Baimian smiled. “Our team’s current situation is longing for stability.”

“Peace follows stability, and setting up a family follows peace.” Shang Jianyao began spouting nonsense.

Suddenly, he turned his head to glance at Genava. “Old Ge, won’t you feel a little lonely? When we enter the company’s underground building to participate in Little Red and Little White’s wedding, you can only stay outside and wait for the next adventure.”

Before Bai Chen and the others could speak, Genava moved his metal neck from side to side. “No. You didn’t ostracize me; you only let me stay outside because of the restrictions in reality. Why should I feel left out?”

Truly a man of steel...?Jiang Baimian heaved a sigh of relief.

On the one hand, Long Yuehong was looking forward to the wedding Shang Jianyao mentioned. On the other hand, he was a little shy. He cleared his throat and said to Genava, “Don’t worry. We won’t forget your gift.”

As an employee born and raised in Pangu Biology, he felt that it was only natural to talk about marriage since their relationship had been confirmed.

“What is it?” Shang Jianyao asked curiously.

Ordinary people give sweets and melon seeds. What should we give a robot...?Long Yuehong had an idea and blurted out, “Charger!”

The jeep suddenly fell silent as if someone had told an unfunny joke.

Clap! Clap! Clap!?

Shang Jianyao's support came only a few seconds late.

The honest Genava said, "There shouldn't be a charger that suits me. You can consider a charging device that comes with a high-performance battery."

"No problem!" Long Yuehong quickly agreed to hide his embarrassment.

At this moment, Bai Chen also said, "We can have another ceremony when we return to the ground."

Long Yuehong was first stunned before he beamed. "That's right, that's right!"

When we return to the ground...?Jiang Baimian forcefully controlled her pained expression.

As they spoke, the jeep drove along the Old World road that had been preserved until it reached a disconnected segment.

This place seemed to have been bombed. Many roads had collapsed, and some had even warped.

From the green weeds growing in this area, the destruction seemed to have happened many years ago.

"We have to take a detour." Long Yuehong tapped on the brakes bit by bit, allowing the jeep to stop in the middle of the road.

This was definitely a bad driving habit in the Old World. However, few cars might pass through Icefield throughout an entire morning.

"The detour might take a long time." Bai Chen looked out the window and realized that only the left side had a relatively intact path that led into the distance.

The buildings on both sides of it gradually decreased as if it led to another city. Between it and the Old Task Force's target were large swathes of hills, forests, swamps, and deserted farmlands.

Jiang Baimian pushed open the door and alighted. She observed the terrain for a while and said, "Hey, Little Red, put on the military exoskeleton. Little White, help me put it on."

Bai Chen was a little confused, but she still did as instructed.

Before long, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and Long Yuehong were covered in cold, hard metal skeletons. The corresponding operating system had already been booted up.

"Old Ge, come. Let's each take a corner." Jiang Baimian pointed at the jeep.

Long Yuehong came to a realization. "Team Leader, are you saying that we should lift the car over this broken belt?"

"Otherwise?" Jiang Baimian bent down.

With the help of the military exoskeleton, she almost overturned the jeep alone.

Shang Jianyao had always been eager to try such novel matters. He was the second to choose a spot and also tried to lift the jeep.

Without considering the biological prosthetic limb, his strength was about the same as Jiang Baimian's.

After Long Yuehong and Genava took their positions, Shang Jianyao shouted before Jiang Baimian could. "One, two, three, up!"

The jeep was easily lifted, with each person carrying a corner.

"Listen to my instructions next." Jiang Baimian took back her authority as team leader. She was afraid that Shang Jianyao would suddenly have a brain spasm during the process.

When the time came, although the Old Task Force members and the smart bot, Genava, would most likely be fine while wearing the military exoskeleton, it would be troublesome if they damaged the car.

Under Jiang Baimian's central command, Shang Jianyao and the others occasionally jumped left or jumped high up. With the help of the few solid areas in the broken belt, they successfully carried the jeep to a relatively intact road behind the wreckage.

"That's it?" Shang Jianyao looked like he hadn't had enough after putting down the jeep.

Long Yuehong looked back at the disconnected strip and asked in concern, "What about Little White?"

Jiang Baimian exclaimed, "I should've let Little White sit in the car. She's so light that it wouldn't have affected anything."

After showing her 'frustration,' she smiled at Long Yuehong. "It's time for you to shine. Go over and bring Little White over."

"Uh..." Long Yuehong was stunned. There's such a good thing?

Jiang Baimian and Shang Jianyao urged him in unison.

Long Yuehong quickly jumped back to the other side of the disconnected belt. He hesitated for a moment, turned around, and squatted down. "I'll carry you."

"Alright." Bai Chen didn't refuse.

Jiang Baimian kept smiling as she watched the two of them come over.

Shang Jianyao tried to clap, but he was stopped from doing so.

...

After driving for 20 to 30 minutes along a road that wasn't too flat and had many plants in the way, a city appeared in front of the Old Task Force.

High-rise buildings, green plants that wantonly grew from different places, mottled grayish colors, and steel 'trash' that could be seen everywhere combined to form a scene that Jiang Baimian and the others were familiar yet unfamiliar with.

Long Yuehong couldn't help but sigh with emotion. "Every time I enter such a well-preserved city ruin, I'm shocked by the Old World civilization. How did so many high-rise buildings, bridges that spanned across the sky, countless vehicles, and all kinds of high-tech products be destroyed all of a sudden..."

Jiang Baimian smiled. "If you really say so, the company's underground building might be more shocking than any of these city ruins."

Who would've thought that there could be a building more than 2,000 meters tall underground?

Long Yuehong thought about it and realized that it was indeed so. However, he was born and raised in Pangu Biology. He was already accustomed to this miraculous crystal of civilization and thought nothing of it.

"What we need to confirm now is where this is." Shang Jianyao was surprisingly the one who steered the topic back on track with a serious expression.

"That's right." Genava chose to agree with this behavior after some analysis.

Jiang Baimian pointed ahead. "We'll circle around the abandoned vehicles and search the streets for clues to confirm the city's name."

"Alright." Long Yuehong turned the steering wheel and made the jeep drive onto what was formerly the sidewalk.

As for the roads, they had long become a disorderly parking lot after the Old World was destroyed. White skeletal remains were scattered between them.

After Long Yuehong parked the jeep, the Old Task Force split into two teams. One team had Shang Jianyao and Genava, and the other had Bai Chen, Long Yuehong, and Jiang Baimian. There were Awakened on both sides.

They then took turns guarding the vehicles and searching the houses along the street.

More than ten minutes later, Shang Jianyao and Genava walked back to the jeep. The former said to Jiang Baimian, “We saw a promotional billboard over there. It says...”

Shang Jianyao suddenly paused.

“What’s written on it?” Long Yuehong blurted out a question.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “It says: Let’s build a beautiful Tai City together!”

Jiang Baimian immediately frowned. “Is this really Tai City?”

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen also felt a little confused.

They arrived at their destination so easily?

“Other clues also indicate that this is indeed Tai City...” Genava began to report their gains.

After he finished speaking, Shang Jianyao stroked his chin and said, “We also realized that many supplies had been preserved here. The gold accessories on many corpses are also clearly visible.”

His expression gradually turned serious. “It’s relatively easy to find such a city ruin, and it’s not cordoned off by the Salvation Army. Even if it’s in Icefield, it’s impossible for no Ruin Hunters to come here. Whether it’s setting off from the Salvation Army’s north or coming from the White Knights’ territory, it won’t take a month to reach here. There’s no need to endure the harsh coldness of late-autumn and mid-winter.”

Chapter 726: Real and Fake

“You mean that there’s something strange about this city ruin?” Long Yuehong could decipher what the calm and rational Shang Jianyao was trying to express in a relatively easy manner.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “I’m just giving a simple analysis of the city ruin’s current situation and its geographical location.”

“Yes.” Jiang Baimian nodded slightly. “It’s been almost 70 years since the Old World was destroyed. Such unexplored ruins definitely have their own uniqueness. Swamp Ruin 1 is located in the Great Swamp, so it’s very difficult to find it. Wasteland Ruin 13 is being watched by First City’s troops, preventing anyone from entering.

“Relative to them is Ruin 9 of the Blood Wilderness. Although it’s filled with danger and many places are forbidden to humans to this day, a large number of Ruin Hunters still swarm over because it’s easier to find and because it’s not surrounded by any large faction. This resulted in a portion of the city district being ‘developed.’”

What she meant was that Tai City was located in an area that was open to every direction in Icefield. The Old Task Force had arrived at their destination without deviating from the roads left behind by the Old World along the way. The Salvation Army had also not sent an army here to watch over the area. The current situation was indeed worth pondering over; there had to be something strange.

It was still understandable if Tai City was located in an area with semi-permafrost deep in Icefield. Ruin Hunters couldn’t pass through the layers of obstacles and arrive there using the short summer, causing the city ruin to be well-preserved. However, the current situation violated common sense in any way.

Bai Chen deliberated and said, “Maybe it’s because Icefield is relatively short in season for human operations. After so many years, Ruin Hunters haven’t excavated much of the city ruins further south. They lack the motivation to continue north.”

“That’s one reason.” Geneva analyzed the situation and said, “However, the probability is very low. This is because the further north we go, the fewer Heartless there are left in the city ruins. That lowers the danger level, allowing more time for people to spend exploring the north. The benefits are higher, and the risks are within better control.”

Winter was unbearable for humans and Heartless hordes alike. The further north one went in Icefield, the worse the situation became.

Jiang Baimian nodded and looked at Shang Jianyao. “What do you have in mind?”

She had always believed that there was a huge gap between her and Shang Jianyao when it came to imaginative ideas.

She was still considered a normal human.

Shang Jianyao smiled. “With such a large city ruin here and with the surrounding environment not considered nasty, why would so many Ruin Hunters who hunt and explore north pay it no heed?”

Pay it no heed...?Jiang Baimian’s heart palpitated as she suddenly made a connection.

Shang Jianyao revealed a gratified expression. “You do remember.

“Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti. Patron, do you still remember the anomaly in Building 4, Room 302 in the steelworks factory ruins’ Residential Zone 2?”

Not only Jiang Baimian, but even Long Yuehong and Bai Chen reacted instantly.

As Genava had never experienced it himself, he spent some time pulling up the relevant information.

Back then, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian saw an ordinary ruin in Room 302.; they didn’t discover anything valuable. However, Long Yuehong—who was peeping in from the outside—saw two corpses lying on the bed. They were covered by a red blanket with the dragon and phoenix embroidering.

Finally, Shang Jianyao touched the small jade Buddha at the intersection of reality and illusion under Long Yuehong’s instructions and lifted it. This shattered the fake scene he and Jiang Baimian had previously seen and revealed the real situation inside Room 302.

When this matter was connected to Tai City's contradictory phenomena, it naturally gave people a corresponding guess.

Long Yuehong—who was more enthusiastic than before—deliberated and said, “We entered the real Tai City, and Ruin Hunters saw the fake Tai City. There are no valuable items there, or it's in a difficult-to-develop state, one that makes exploration pointless?”

Bai Chen made a guess as well. “We were able to enter the true Tai City because we brought special items that originated from a Buddhist Holy Land?”

As Jiang Baimian nodded slightly, Shang Jianyao smiled and took off his tactical backpack. “I think so too.”

Whoosh!

He found the Six Senses Beads and casually threw them by the roadside. He then picked up the small, lake-green jade Buddha and threw it to the ground.

Jiang Baimian also threw Chaotic Right Hand.

The scene around them didn't change.

“That's a little awkward...” The honest Shang Jianyao mocked himself.

Jiang Baimian looked around and thoughtfully said, “Maybe it's because we've already entered the true Tai City. Even if we throw away the corresponding items, we won't be under the effect of the illusion.”

She wasn't so sure about the word ‘illusion’ because she still couldn't figure out the situation.

“Then, what should we do?” Long Yuehong frowned slightly.

The rash Shang Jianyao immediately replied, “Continue forward and go to No. 1 Senior High School!”

That was the Buddhist Holy Land's main body.

Jiang Baimian shot him a glance. "Retreat and re-enter. Let's confirm the situation first; it's better to be safe than sorry!"

"That's right, that's right." Shang Jianyao didn't realize that Jiang Baimian was refuting him at all.

Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and Genava had no objections to this.

After picking up the items on the ground, the Old Task Force members got back into the car and returned the way they came until they reached the broken belt.

Here, they could no longer see Tai City.

"Old Ge, stay behind with the Six Senses Beads and the small jade Buddha and wait for news." Jiang Baimian's choice didn't allow for any doubts.

Genava was the only person present who wasn't affected by items like the Six Senses Beads.

Not only did Shang Jianyao leave the Six Senses Beads and the small jade Buddha behind, but he also gave the Life Angel necklace and the Blessings from all Kalendarium to Genava for safety reasons.

"You have to take good care of them!" he exhorted sincerely.

The corners of Jiang Baimian's mouth twitched slightly. As she handed Chaotic Right Hand to Genava, she set up the auxiliary chip in the biological prosthetic limb and got it to monitor her condition.

The four of them got into the car again and drove toward Tai City.

On the way, Shang Jianyao and Jiang Baimian maintained a high level of focus and used their respective methods to sense the changes in their surroundings.

More than ten minutes later, the distant scene made them fall silent.

Tai City—which had previously been ‘here’—seemed to have suffered a natural disaster akin to an earthquake. It had already been buried by boulders, soil, and rifts. Only some collapsed buildings were revealed.

Surrounding the ruins that were extremely difficult to excavate were swamps formed by flowing water, bottomless canals, and a dammed lake that could collapse at any moment...

Anyone who saw this scene would give up on advancing without hesitation and stop attempting to explore Tai City.

There were many city ruins in Icefield that were easier to obtain supplies from; there was no need to smash their heads against the wall here. The risks and benefits were completely disproportionate!

After a moment of silence, Long Yuehong said in a nearly raving tone, “There really is a fake Tai City...”

He was shocked to his core.

Room 302 of the steelworks factory ruins was only a building dozens of square meters tall. It was hidden and covered in illusion, so it didn’t feel that exaggerated.

Now, in front of the Old Task Force was a city that once had more than a million people living in the Old World. It had actually been separated into reality and illusion!

Shang Jianyao’s expression gradually turned excited. “What will happen if we don’t stop the car and continue driving toward the gorge ahead?”

“Don’t court death.” Jiang Baimian stopped him concisely. She took a deep breath and said, “Let’s try a few more times and confirm what items can allow us to enter the true Tai City. It might be useful later.”

“Alright.” Bai Chen retracted her gaze with some difficulty. Ever since she joined the Old Task Force, much of her past knowledge had been overturned.

After a few rounds of experiments, the Old Task Force confirmed the effects of the Six Senses Beads and the small jade Buddha. As long as they brought either item with them, the Old Task Force could enter the true Tai City. The premise was that they were less than 50 meters away from these two items.

“How magical...” Long Yuehong ended the attempt today with this sentence.

At this moment, the five Old Task Force members were sitting in the jeep and slowly walking along the carless street of the true Tai City.

Genava’s blinking red eyes looked at Jiang Baimian. “Where are we going next?”

Jiang Baimian had a plan in mind. “Let’s find a city map nearby first. Then, we’ll go to Harbour Homeland, No. 1 Senior High School, and Renhui Hospital one after another.”

She had ranked them according to the danger level. Harbour Homeland was where Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong used to live, so it definitely had the fewest secrets. No. 1 Senior High School was clearly a Buddhist Holy Land, and Renhui Hospital involved the vegetable volunteers.. It was the most dangerous place.

Chapter 727: Harbour Homeland

The Old Task Force was already familiar with the search process for city maps. They quickly obtained a few copies from a suspected newspaper stand.

However, the problem was that these maps were relatively limited in size. They only labeled the main roads, landmark buildings, tourist attractions, reputable restaurants, medical facilities, and other relatively important things. They didn’t specify every estate or building.

In other words, it was impossible to find Harbour Homeland from these maps.

However, this wasn’t a problem for Jiang Baimian. She deliberated for a moment and said, “Find Renhui Hospital. Since Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong were here to accompany their son for treatment, the rented place won’t be too far from the hospital. We’ll search around Renhui Hospital later.”

With a landmark, things would be much easier.

“Alright.”

“Yes.”

“No problem.”

“Alright!”

Long Yuehong and the others replied one after another.

Genava quickly located Renhui Hospital—it was impossible for the carbon-based humans to be faster than him.

“Let’s go!” Shang Jianyao—who was sitting in the driver’s seat—waved his hand in high spirits. The next second, he shamelessly asked, “Old Ge, how do we go?”

“Go straight and turn left at the second intersection...” Genava took on the role of a smart navigation system. Although he was sitting on the right in the backseat, this didn’t stop him from observing the scene ahead.

Upon seeing the jeep begin to advance, Long Yuehong said worriedly, “I wonder what dangers lay hidden in those three places...”

“We might encounter a New World-level powerhouse or monster!” Shang Jianyao spoke in a threatening tone.

It was unknown if Genava was cooperating or being honest. “What if we really encounter them?”

Man, the standard of Tai City’s Buddhist Holy Land is clearly higher than the first three. We might really encounter an enemy related to the New World...?Long Yuehong secretly took a deep breath, but he was unwilling to show his fear in front of Bai Chen. He could only force himself to remain calm, allowing his expression to change only slightly.

“We definitely can’t beat them. Apart from Old Ge, nobody here can resist the Heartless disease’s infection.” Shang Jianyao sighed exaggeratedly. “Eidolon Nun’s protection is gone as well.”

Without waiting for Long Yuehong to look at Bai Chen, Shang Jianyao switched personalities and added seriously, “We can only implement a strategic deterrence plan. If the New World-related enemy’s main body is in Tai City, we’ll tell him immediately once we encounter him. As long as the four of us become Heartless, Old Ge will use keys to activate the nuclear warhead in the trunk, drag him alongside us to his death, and bury him with Tai City!”

This...?Long Yuehong first felt that this plan was too exaggerated, but he realized that it might really work after careful thought. He began to suspect that the person pulling the strings behind the curtains had spent all their effort to equip his team with a nuclear warhead to deal with such a situation.

Jiang Baimian nodded thoughtfully. “The conditions should be changed to: if any of the four of us are infected with the Heartless disease.”

Her meaning was very clear: tie the Old Task Force carbon-based humans’ lives together to prevent them from being destroyed one by one.

“No problem.” Genova accepted this order. As a smart bot that served humans, it was necessary to carry out an internecine plan when needed.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao sighed again. “The premise is that we can communicate in time and that the other party can communicate as well.”

“No plan is perfect.” Jiang Baimian was relatively open-minded about this. She then looked at the rearview mirror. “Didn’t we report the general situation to the company before we entered the true Tai City? The company is fully confident in us. That long passage was summarized as: ‘Charge forward with the items!’”

Shang Jianyao turned to look at his team leader and smiled. “You sure are open-minded in this regard. Why do you have such a serious fear of death?”

“Because I’m confident that I can survive most of the time.” Jiang Baimian had long considered this problem.

She had yet to make any progress regarding her third island of fear.

Their casual conversation successfully eased the tension in Long Yuehong's heart a little. His left hand—which was holding Bai Chen's—moved. He then felt Bai Chen's grip increase a little.

The Old Task Force's jeep charged through Tai City along the sidewalks. On the way, they didn't alight or gather any supplies.

Time was life!

After more than half an hour, Jiang Baimian and the others saw a building complex with the Renhui Hospital sign after circling around a few completely blocked streets.

The building right in front was labeled as an outpatient building with a total of seven floors. Deep inside the hospital complex was a building with more than 20 floors. Lush trees stood between the two as if there was a small garden.

On the rightmost side of the garden was an unlabeled nine-story building.

At this moment, the building complex didn't look like a garden. Instead, it looked like it had been built in a forest as though nature had swallowed up civilization.

“Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti.” Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao chanted a Buddhist proclamation.

“This isn't a Buddhist Holy Land!” Jiang Baimian mercilessly exposed the fake monk's unprofessionalism.

Zen Master Redemption wore a benevolent expression. “Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong's son might very well be fated with Buddha.”

Jiang Baimian couldn't out-talk him and directly ordered, “Alright, go around Renhui Hospital to check the surrounding residential estates' names, and we'll branch out from there.”

They searched for nearly an hour. Finally, the Old Task Force discovered Harbour Homeland less than a kilometer away from Renhui Hospital.

This was a rather old residential area—old in the sense that it was already an old building in the Old World. This was obvious from the buildings in the estate that were mostly less than ten stories tall and the corresponding architectural style.

As for the outer walls, every building was about the same in the present day—equally dilapidated, mottled, and covered in vegetation.

“Here’s the problem: This estate has about seven to eight buildings. I wonder how long it will take for us to search each building,” Shang Jianyao said with a grin.

Jiang Baimian revealed an ‘are you stupid?’ expression. “First, go to the place that has information on the residents. It’s called... I think it’s called property management. As long as the computer storage data there can still be restored, we can extract the corresponding information.”

Genava moved his metal neck up and down. “The true Tai City hasn’t been damaged, so the storage equipment shouldn’t have suffered any physical damage. I can read the data directly.”

It was ‘reading’ in the literal sense.

It was relatively easy to find Harbour Homeland’s property management; it was in the three-story building on the left of the entrance.

There was a front desk here, and behind it sat two corpses in rotten clothes. Piles of white bones were scattered in different places.

Bai Chen slowly looked around and said with a solemn expression, “I find the deceased in Tai City very strange.”

She organized her words and continued, “Many people seem to have suddenly died while doing their own things. They didn’t struggle, resist, or show signs of being attacked.

“For example...” She pointed at the two corpses at the front desk and added, “There are also corpses sitting quietly in the vehicles on the street. Those that were thrown out of the window or in

different poses have signs of being in a car accident. I suspect that they died while driving. The vehicles lost control and crashed into each other, causing their poses or positions to change.”

Jiang Baimian nodded and pointed at the pile of bones covered in rags. “Same here. They should’ve been walking when they suddenly died and fell to the ground.”

Long Yuehong felt a chill run down his spine and muttered to himself, “This wouldn’t have happened if they were only infected with the Heartless disease...”

Heartless had biological instincts and could even use some tools.

“This means that we’re getting closer and closer to the truth behind the Old World’s destruction,” Shang Jianyao said with a smile.

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “Old Ge, study the computer at the front desk. We’ll examine the corpses.”

After a while, Shang Jianyao and the others didn’t discover any valuable clues. After all, the deceased had been dead for decades, and the Old Task Force lacked the corresponding devices to analyze microscopic traces.

On the other hand, Genova successfully ‘read’ the stored data and found Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong’s names.

“Block 5 Unit 403; it was co-rented. We’ll have to investigate which room they lived in.”

Jiang Baimian glanced at the corpses beside her and sighed. “Let’s go.”

Before long, they found Block 5 in the estate and kicked open the door to Unit 403. The lock was already in bad shape.

After a simple investigation, Jiang Baimian and the others eliminated the other rooms one by one based on the characteristics of the clothes in the closet and the corpses in the room. Only the room that didn’t get sunshine was left.

The bed here was covered in a white dust cover, indicating that the resident had been out of town and wouldn't return for a while. This matched the situation of Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong returning home in disappointment for the Lunar New Year.

The gloved Old Task Force members separately searched the small room.

Jiang Baimian came to the old brown desk by the window and pulled open the drawer. What she saw was a stack of yellowish documents.

At the top seemed to be a voluntary medical agreement.

Chapter 728: Buddhist Fate

Jiang Baimian carefully picked up the top document with her black-gloved right hand and carefully read it under the dim lighting.

This was a medical agreement. The general idea was that the patient's guardian was aware of the risks and agreed to allow the patient to receive an experimental type of treatment. They would waive their rights to pursue the matter in the event of any accidents.

The signatories were Li Jinlong and Fan Wensi. The counter signatory was Renhui Hospital's Vegetative Rehabilitation Center.

In this document, the patient's name was clearly mentioned: Li Hui. His condition was brain damage.

It was a very ordinary name without any characteristics.

Jiang Baimian placed the agreement on the desk and picked up the other documents in the drawer to examine them.

They were made up of a large number of medical records and medical checkups. They clearly outlined a car accident coma victim's fruitless experience of seeking medical treatment.

From this, it was obvious that Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong had spent a lot of effort saving their son.

As Jiang Baimian sighed slightly, she couldn't help but feel a little disappointed. This was because the contents of these documents only confirmed some of the Old Task Force's guesses; there were no new clues.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao's voice sounded in her ears. "Namo Hurlow Danaloyeye. Namo Aliyeh..."

Jiang Baimian's forehead twitched when she heard that. She turned her head and realized that the fellow was facing the right wall and muttering something.

"What are you chanting?" she asked with a frown.

Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao pointed at a piece of paper on the wall and said, "Great Compassion Incantation."

"Great Compassion Incantation?" Jiang Baimian took two steps toward Shang Jianyao and cast her gaze at the spot his finger had touched.

There was a piece of yellow paper stuck to it. The words 'Great Compassion Incantation' were written above it.

Below it was the Great Compassion Dharani Sutra. Further down were the scriptures Shang Jianyao had just recited.

Jiang Baimian felt dizzy from reading them.

"Your recital was wrong. I have the original segmented sentences and pronunciation in my database." Geneva—who had come over at some point in time—pointed out Shang Jianyao's mistake.

Shang Jianyao didn't mind at all. He spread his hands and raised his body slightly. "Everything is but a dream. Why so serious?"

What a versatile saying...?Long Yuehong—who was checking the built-in closet in the room with Bai Chen—muttered inwardly.

Jiang Baimian ignored Shang Jianyao and Genava's friendly exchange. She stared at the Great Compassion Incantation and muttered to herself thoughtfully, "The small jade Buddha was hidden on Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong's corpses. There's also the Great Compassion Incantation stuck here. It means that they had believed in Buddhism for a period of time before the Old World was destroyed.

"Regardless of whether they believed it to begin with or whether they started to seek a crutch after their son—Li Hui—became a vegetable from his car accident, it doesn't damage the fact that they believed in Buddha for a period of time before they died."

"Is that why that small jade Buddha is special, causing something strange to happen in Building 4, Room 302 in the steelworks factory's Residential Zone 2 and making the surrounding area known as a Buddhist Holy Land?" Genava tried to decipher Jiang Baimian's meaning.

Jiang Baimian nodded and said to Shang Jianyao, "Chant the Great Compassion Incantation according to the correct segments and tone provided by Old Ge. Yes, hold the small jade Buddha while chanting it and see if you can trigger any abnormalities."

"No problem." Shang Jianyao couldn't wait. He even chanted a Buddhist proclamation. "Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti."

After Long Yuehong, Bai Chen, and the others entered a vigilant state, Shang Jianyao held the small jade Buddha in one hand and spun the Six Senses Beads with the other. Under Genava's guidance, he read the scriptures on the wall as he seriously recited them. He had the bearing of an accomplished monk.

Nothing happened even after the Great Compassion Incantation recital.

Zen Master Redemption Shang Jianyao sighed regretfully.

The rash Shang Jianyao turned around and said to Long Yuehong, "Little Red, climb out the window and look in from the outside."

This was the method the Old Task Force had used to discover the anomaly in Building 4, Room 302 in the steelworks factory ruins' Residential Zone 2. They were using the same method now.

“But this is the real Tai City that cloaks the fake Tai City...” Long Yuehong subconsciously said.

There shouldn't be any similar abnormalities.

“You have to understand that you can stack multiple layers together.” The cheerful Shang Jianyao that liked to joke spoke sincerely.

“We can give it a try.” Jiang Baimian felt that this wasn't a big deal. It was rather worth it to spend a minute or two to eliminate the possibility of a mistake.

“Be careful,” Bai Chen advised Long Yuehong.

“Okay.” Long Yuehong quickly nodded.

He circled around the bed and jumped onto the old desk. He then pushed open the window and climbed out.

After stabilizing his body with the mechanical arm, he looked inside.

There was nothing abnormal.

After waiting for a few seconds, Long Yuehong returned to the room and shook his head.
“Everything's normal.”

Sigh...?Shang Jianyao sighed again.

“Actually, Room 302's situation seems rather strange compared to the real Tai City.” Geneva voiced his opinion after his analysis. “We didn't discover anything wrong with the fake Tai City when we were outside. Back then, you could see the real Room 302 from the window.”

Bai Chen thought for a moment and said, “Maybe people didn't find a suitable angle previously. Since it's fake, there must be flaws. It will be exposed from a certain perspective.”

Jiang Baimian first tersely acknowledged these words before making a guess. “The perspective outside the window isn’t too unique. Over the years, a few Ruin Hunters who go to the steelworks factory ruins will always climb to the building’s outer walls in an attempt to remove the window frames and other metal objects. Didn’t they sense Room 302’s strangeness?”

“This possibility is relatively unlikely. If one can use the main door, why climb using the windows? Besides, which Ruin Hunter who goes to the steelworks factory will follow the rules? When they encounter a locked or broken door, won’t they just break it open instead of going to another room and climbing over from the balcony?” Shang Jianyao stroked his chin. “However, there is also a possibility that a great calamity is imminent. The seal has weakened, revealing some of the flaws.”

Have you watched too much Old World entertainment...? Jiang Baimian thought for a moment and waved her hand. “Continue searching.”

After nearly 15 minutes of work, the Old Task Force gained something new: Long Yuehong found a note from a green down jacket hanging in the built-in closet.

The note seemed to contain a phone number, and the number conformed to Tai City’s original country.

“This is a female down jacket, so it should belong to Fan Wensi...” Jiang Baimian observed as she analyzed the situation.” Someone should’ve copied the phone number for her. Otherwise, she could’ve directly recorded it onto the phone. There’s no need to go through so much trouble. Yes, we can’t rule out the possibility that her phone happened to be out of power back then or that she couldn’t carry a phone in the area she was in...”

At this point, Jiang Baimian suddenly paused.

Shang Jianyao smiled coldly. “For example, the place where Li Hui received experimental treatment. Due to confidentiality clauses, you can’t bring a phone when visiting patients.”

Long Yuehong inhaled. “Is this a phone number Fan Wensi obtained from Renhui Hospital’s Vegetative Rehabilitation Center?”

“This points to a certain doctor. Fan Wensi wants to know the details of her son’s recovery from him?” Geneva believed that this was the most likely possibility.

Bai Chen—who had been listening for a while—suddenly interrupted. “Maybe it’s a rental number Fan Wensi copied when she first arrived in Tai City. Do you still remember? We previously speculated that Fan Wensi and Li Jinlong went around seeking medical treatment to no avail. They were disheartened and decided to send their son to Tai City for experimental treatment. It was only then that they were willing to pay a sum of money for a new phone.

“In other words, there’s a high chance that they used an old phone when they first arrived in Tai City—the kind that doesn’t work well and was on the brink of dying.”

Jiang Baimian made a terse grunt. “In that case, the details match.”

“Why are you saying so much? Give it a try by calling it!” The rash Shang Jianyao suggested.

Jiang Baimian chuckled. “The Old World’s communications network has long collapsed. This phone number is different from the random code that Avia gave. It probably can’t be dialed anymore.”

“It would be terrifying if it connects...” Long Yuehong muttered softly.

Jiang Baimian laughed and said to Genava, “Old Ge, try it. The others, be prepared for any accidents.”

Without a doubt, the call wasn’t successfully made.

Jiang Baimian then got Shang Jianyao to attempt reciting the medical record and using the small jade Buddha, but he didn’t find anything abnormal.

Due to this, she had to announce that their exploration of Harbour Homeland had come to an end. She would then go to Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School.

In her heart, the Holm Fertility Center was equivalent to Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School, while Renhui Hospital’s Vegetative Rehabilitation Center was equivalent to the secret laboratory in Wasteland Ruin 13. It was obvious which was more dangerous between the two.

According to the map’s directions, the Old Task Force took about 20 minutes to reach the high school east of the city.

It didn't cover a small area. There were many teaching buildings, two office buildings, two dormitory buildings, a laboratory building, a gymnasium, a soccer field with a running track around its perimeter, and many basketball courts...

Today, this high school was overgrown and abnormally dilapidated.

Chapter 729: School

"It's huge..." Long Yuehong—who was sitting in the passenger seat—looked at Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School and sighed with emotion.

This was in sharp contrast to the high schools on each floor in Pangu Biology.

Shang Jianyao, Long Yuehong, Yang Zhenyuan, and Meng Xia only had about ten people in their year.

Similarly, be it Weed City, First City, or Ubei's schools, they couldn't compare to this.

As for the high schools in other city ruins, the Old Task Force had never been there before, so it was impossible to compare them.

Shang Jianyao exclaimed, "How many students are there in one grade!?"

Jiang Baimian rolled her eyes at him. "Is that the point? The point is that it being so large makes it quite troublesome to find abnormalities!"

Bai Chen nodded. "Indeed."

Their previous three experiences told them that not all places in Buddhist Holy Lands were worth exploring. There was often only one anomaly.

Long River City's United Steel Plant's anomaly was in Building 4, Room 302 in Residential Zone 2. Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company's anomaly was on the floor with an employee introduction board. The anomaly at the Holm Fertility Center was in the fertility cryochamber.

Compared to Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company and the Holm Fertility Center—which only had one building and not many floors—Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School far exceeded them in terms of size and number of buildings. This increased the difficulty of the Old Task Force's investigation of abnormalities exponentially.

Although this couldn't compare to the steelworks factory ruins, the Old Task Force had already obtained important information regarding Fan Wensi's medical record back then. They could head straight to the suspected anomaly.

The red glow in Genava's eyes flickered a few times as he suggested, "We can get Hey to hold the small jade Buddha and use his perception abilities to the greatest extent to screen the area. If we discover anything abnormal midway, we'll lock onto the target. If not, we'll narrow it down and continue investigating."

Jiang Baimian thought for a moment. "That's all we can do."

This was a relatively time-conserving method.

Of course, if things didn't go smoothly, they would spend all the time before it turned dark here.

"Go on in," Jiang Baimian ordered.

Bai Chen quickly drove the car to the entrance of Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School.

An aluminum-white automatic extendable gate was in the way.

"Let me do it!" Shang Jianyao excitedly lifted a rocket launcher.

Jiang Baimian glared at him. "Be polite in a Buddhist Holy Land."

"Yes, Namo Annutara-Samyak-Subhuti." Zen Master Redemption replaced the rash Shang Jianyao.

Long River City's United Steel Plant and Iron Mountain City's Second Food Company strongly protest...?Long Yuehong criticized his team leader and Shang Jianyao's conversation.

The Holm Fertility Center was the only Buddhist Holy Land that the Old Task Force had explored and hadn't been completely destroyed.

Shang Jianyao pushed open the door and alighted before calling out to Genava.

After a round of inspection and experiments, they confirmed that the aluminum-white automatic extendable gate was damaged. Even if the power supply was restored, it couldn't be automatically opened. Therefore, the carbon-based human and the silicon-based human relied on brute force to open the gate to Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School.

The jeep drove in and entered a cemented square surrounded by the teaching building and office building.

Jiang Baimian stuck her head out the window and said to Shang Jianyao and Genava, "Get in first. We'll circle around the square and stick close to the flower beds outside the buildings. Hey, hold the small jade Buddha and use your Awakened perception to do a preliminary screening."

"Alright," Shang Jianyao replied happily.

At this moment, the light suddenly dimmed.

Genava looked up at the sky and realized that a dark cloud had drifted over at some point in time, blocking out the sun.

Do sudden rains often happen in Icefield during the summer??Genava—who lacked the corresponding data and climate models—recalled his experience in Icefield and realized that it wasn't the case.

He retracted his gaze and looked ahead again. Suddenly, the blinking red glow in Genava's eyes froze.

The Old Task Force's jeep—which had been parked not far away—had disappeared!

Jiang Baimian, Long Yuehong, and Bai Chen had disappeared!

In the blink of an eye, Genava looked to the side. Shang Jianyao—who was with him—had also disappeared!

At the same time, due to the dark clouds and the darkening sky, lamps lit up the teaching buildings and office buildings.

Pure white or yellowish light seemed like dazzling stars at night in the dark environment.

Figures appeared in many of the light-emitting windows. They were all wearing ancient school uniforms with blue and white colors. They were either attentively listening to class or were walking down the stairs in groups and entering the cemented square where Genava was.

Warning! Warning!?A series of warnings flashed through Genava’s main module.

He had already analyzed the scene in front of him—it was a scene from the Old World. Furthermore, it was years before the node of destruction. For some reason, it appeared in the Ashlands today.

“An illusion created by distorting the environment?” Genava had a preliminary judgment after some calculations, comparison, and analysis. He then mimicked Shang Jianyao, opened his mouth, and shouted, “Hey! Big White! Little White! Little Red!”

Nobody replied.

According to the plan that the Old Task Force had reserved for the most critical situation, Genava stopped shouting and placed the other two matters in a special queue, prepared to deploy them at any moment.

The two matters were:

Use the key to remotely activate the nuclear warhead in the jeep’s trunk.Call the string of random codes Avia had given and seek the unknown existence’s help.

Genava then strode forward and activated all his detection equipment to walk toward a male student in a blue and white uniform. He slowly stretched out his right hand and tentatively patted the other party’s shoulder.

Whoosh!

He felt as though he had slapped the human on the shoulder, but the male student didn't react at all. He continued chatting and laughing with the classmates beside him as he walked to some area in the square.

Genava retracted his iron palm, and a red glow blinked in his eyes. He then walked to the nearest teaching building and went up against the tide of students.

When he arrived on the fifth floor, Genava saw a middle-aged man—who was suspected to be a teacher and wearing a casual suit—silently walk to the back of a classroom and observe the situation inside through the corresponding window.

Suddenly, the man stroked his hair and shouted into the classroom, “The two of you! What are you doing during morning self-study? Why are you whispering? Stand up and come to the corridor!”

Genava stopped and watched this scene without much confusion. His storage equipment had a large amount of Old World entertainment information that Shang Jianyao had entrusted to him.

The two students—who had been caught talking—quickly walked out of the classroom and came to the corridor.

The red light in Genava's eyes blinked rapidly.

These two students were Bai Chen and Long Yuehong! They had both ‘changed’ into blue and white uniforms, and they looked much younger!

“Are the two of you in a relationship?” asked the middle-aged man suspected to be a teacher with a stoic expression.

“No.” Bai Chen was very calm and composed.

“No.” Long Yuehong's eyes darted around, and his face turned red.

Genava no longer hesitated and ran over with large strides. He suppressed his voice and shouted, “Little White! Little Red!”

Long Yuehong and Bai Chen ignored him and listened to the middle-aged man’s reprimand with different expressions. One was apprehensive, and the other was stubborn and indifferent.

Genava carefully stretched out a hand and patted Long Yuehong. “Little Red.”

Long Yuehong didn’t react.

After some analysis, Genava suddenly pushed Long Yuehong.

Long Yuehong staggered and fell into his teacher’s arms.

“What are you doing? What are you doing? What are you doing!?” The teacher was shocked.

Long Yuehong anxiously said, “An earthquake! An earthquake!”

“Earthquake my ass!” The teacher had an expression that said: “can’t you come up with a better lie?”

Bai Chen raised her eyebrows. “There’s indeed an earthquake.”

The teacher began to doubt himself.

Genava was the same. He felt like he had become a ghost that wandered the Old World. He could touch others, but he couldn’t be seen.

The Long Yuehong and Bai Chen in front of him might just be two other people who resembled his companions.

He took two steps back and chose not to escalate the matter for the time being, prepared to make more observations.

After some thought, Genava returned to the square along his original route.

At this moment, many students had already gathered in their respective classes.

Genava planned on waiting and finding flaws in the current illusion.

Before long, almost all the students went down to the square and stood neatly in rows. This included Long Yuehong and Bai Chen.

Two to three minutes later, amidst the brisk music, a bald man in his fifties—who was wearing a suit—walked to a raised cement platform in front of the assembly. He held the receiver and said with gusto, “Students who are to receive commendations this week, please come forward.”

Seven to eight students walked out of their respective lines and walked toward the raised cement platform ahead.

Genava instantly locked onto a figure—the figure belonged to Jiang Baimian.

Jiang Baimian had her hair tied up in a ponytail and was also wearing a blue and white school uniform. Her height was rather eye-catching.

At this moment, the brisk music suddenly changed.. “I’ll blow up the school punctually; the birds greet me good morning, asking me why I’m carrying explosives...”

Chapter 730: “Communication”

The students on the cemented square had yet to learn what it meant to be composed. After hearing the lyrics clearly, the crowd went into an uproar. They either laughed uncontrollably, sang softly with the music, or cast their gazes at the principal in front of them with strange expressions.

The out-of-shape principal on the cemented platform was stunned by the scene in front of him; it took him a while to come to his senses. He tilted his ear slightly and listened carefully to the song on the radio.

A few seconds later, he flew into a rage. “Who did it? Who did it!?”

Genava immediately thought of someone who could do something this creative: Shang Jianyao!

In such a school, it was already a coincidence to have two people who resembled Long Yuehong and Bai Chen appear. The probability was very low, and a girl suspected to be Jiang Baimian had just appeared. Therefore, this was definitely not a coincidence from Genava’s point of view.

According to his analysis, Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, Bai Chen, and Long Yuehong had likely become ‘members’ of this school, which was also Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School. They played different roles according to their respective personalities and had undergone the corresponding changes.

As for why this happened, Genava couldn’t find a logical explanation for the time being.

From this analysis, it was highly likely that Shang Jianyao was the person who switched the music scheduled to play at the school assembly to a comedic song.

The morning assembly ended in chaos. Genava followed Jiang Baimian to the classroom labeled ‘Grade 12, Class 5.’

He felt that this person had the highest intelligence among his four companions, so there was a possibility that he could communicate with her to a certain extent and further develop the problem with the current situation.

After Jiang Baimian took her seat in the second half of the classroom, Genava crept over. He thought for a moment and stretched out his silver-black metal right palm to slap the other party’s back gently.

This time, he didn’t stop with a single smack like he had done to Long Yuehong. Instead, he relied on the length of the intervals and repeated slaps to transmit a string of Morse code. He hoped that Jiang Baimian—who couldn’t see or hear him—could decipher his current predicament and wake up from her ‘act.’

Feeling the slap on her back, Jiang Baimian sat up straight and glared at the classmate behind her.

The male classmate was engrossed in reading and didn't notice anything.

Jiang Baimian clearly frowned. She felt another slap on her back, but there was nobody in the corridor.

After frowning and taking in the feeling for a while, Jiang Baimian straightened her body, pulled out the draft book, and wrote: "I've always felt that I'm special and different from others. So, has a fortuitous encounter come? What will the gift from fate be?"

The red light in Genava's eyes paused for a second before continuing to blink. He persisted in finishing the string of Morse code, but Jiang Baimian didn't even think in the corresponding direction as if she didn't know about Morse code.

After some thought, Genava gave up on communicating with Jiang Baimian and planned on finding Shang Jianyao.

This companion had already split into ten personalities. In Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School—a place that seemed illusory and real—he was considered unconventional. He might be able to use this opportunity to pry open some problems.

After a round of searching, Genava discovered Shang Jianyao on the rooftop of the current teaching building.

Shang Jianyao—who was wearing a blue and white school uniform—slung his school bag diagonally across him as he slovenly leaned against the edge of a parapet and looked at the soccer field to the side. He was humming the song 'I'll blow up the school punctually.'

Genava walked behind Shang Jianyao and controlled his voice to shout, "Hey!"

Shang Jianyao ignored him.

Genava tried patting his back next.

Shang Jianyao's expression turned excited. He flipped over and turned around.

Nothing was reflected in his eyes.

Genava circled around and patted his back.

“Oh!” Shang Jianyao exclaimed in surprise. He looked around for a while before saying, “I’ve always felt that I don’t belong in this high school or am a student who studies hard. There’s a more important mission waiting for me.”

Saving all of humanity??Genava felt that he should’ve grasped the way Shang Jianyao’s brain worked. At the same time, he felt gratified.?As expected, Hey has ten times more self-awareness than a normal person. Even if he is ‘acting’ as a No. 1 Senior High School student in Tai City, he can sense the slight incongruity between his identity and self.

Just as a weak electric current flashed, Shang Jianyao smiled and added, “Therefore, I’m not studying anymore. Teacher, I’m joining the workforce!”

“...” Genava realized that he had underestimated Hey’s condition.

Shang Jianyao maintained his smile and continued speaking to the empty rooftop. “Is fate summoning me now? Let this summoning come strike harder!”

As a smart bot, Genava wasn’t depressed. He decided to replicate the Morse code that he had used on Jiang Baimian to see if Hey could decipher it.

Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap! Tap!

He tapped Shang Jianyao’s back at different intervals.

Shang Jianyao’s expression quickly turned serious. He clasped his hands and rapped the back of his left hand with his right index finger as if he was trying his best to restore the frequency he felt as if he were memorizing a telegram’s characteristics.

Genava slowed down and looked forward to the final outcome.

After he finished tapping, Shang Jianyao suddenly sighed. “It’s too f*cking complicated. I can’t remember.”

Genava felt that if he were a carbon-based human, he might’ve blown a gasket thanks to this fellow. He gradually understood why Jiang Baimian always showed her left hand to Shang Jianyao.

With the carefulness of a smart bot, he chose to repeat the Morse code over and over again.

Shang Jianyao took out pen and paper from his school bag.

A good memory was inferior to a bad pen.

Upon seeing that he had correctly recorded the code he had transmitted using ‘dots’ and ‘lines,’ Genava’s main chip began to build the models that might be used for communication later.

At this moment, Shang Jianyao’s strokes slowly danced. In the end, he even drew a small stick figure.

Looking at the irregular patterns on the paper, Shang Jianyao exclaimed, “Is this some peerless divine art? A peerless divine art that’s taught by the heavens and highly confidential? Once I comprehend its true essence and accomplish something, can I jump over the gates and walls and escape this sea of learning misery?”

Warnings flashed across Genava’s core module. “Give up the attempt; it would be fruitless... Give up the attempt; it would be fruitless...”

Genava retracted his right palm and walked to Shang Jianyao’s side. He mimicked the latter’s previous actions by leaning against the parapet and looking into the distance.

He swept his gaze across the automatic extendable gate at the entrance.

Suddenly, the algorithm used by Genava to simulate his teammates to establish a human database was activated. He recalled Shang Jianyao’s words about ‘jumping over the gates and walls.’

If I leave Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School now and look at this Buddhist Holy Land from the outside, what will I gain??Such an inspired question appeared in Genava's main chip.

After some analysis, Genava propped himself up with his hand against the wall and jumped off the six-story building.

With the help of a protruding spot, he easily returned to the cemented square without activating his shock absorption mechanisms. He then walked to the school entrance at a moderate speed.

After approaching the aluminum-white automatic gate, he suddenly jumped over it.

Thud! Thud! Thud!?

Genava ran until he was 500 to 600 meters away from Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School. After turning around, he realized that the high school was still overgrown and abnormally dilapidated.

There were no lights or students.

Sunlight scattered from the sky and shone on the jeep not far behind the automatic extendable gate—the Old Task Force's grayish-green jeep.

As Genava's gaze moved, he realized that a few figures seemed to flash in the building from before. They were suspected to be Jiang Baimian, Shang Jianyao, and the others.

"It's normal from the outside." Genava recorded this information. He then came up with a countermeasure: If I drag Big White, Hey, Little White, and Little Red out of the school, will they return to normal?

This was a plan worth trying.

For the sake of caution, Genava decided to carry out a trial first to avoid any possible risks or accidents. His target was Shang Jianyao.

He walked to Tai City's No. 1 Senior High School for the second time. The moment he jumped over the automatic extendable gate and entered, the dark clouds covered the sun again.

The lights in the building lit up at the same time, illuminating the figures.

Genava felt like he had transmigrated to the Old World again.

For a smart bot, using the word ‘felt’ wasn’t appropriate. He suspected that it was essentially a capture of anomalous information.

Without any delay, Genava found Shang Jianyao on the rooftop of the teaching building ahead. He seriously analyzed how to transmit information and make Shang Jianyao take the initiative to ‘play truant.’

After some calculations that involved complicated models, Genava stretched out his iron fist, grabbed Shang Jianyao’s back, and picked him up.

“Wow!” Shang Jianyao was delighted instead of being shocked.

Genava then retraced his previous route and began his attempt to escape Tai City’s No. 1 Senior High School by jumping off the building.